



Mixed Messages Product Selling vs. Consultative Selling

By Jeffrie Story

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Have your reps ever complained that you're sending them mixed messages? Their reasoning goes something like this:

"Will you make up your mind? One minute you send me to consultative selling training and tell me to fact-find about the prospect's business, and the next minute you tell me I need to focus on a specific product! Which do you want?"

Many managers then answer with the following:

"Of course I want you to sell consultatively! But right now we need to meet this deadline for the special section and we don't have enough advertisers yet."

Or you tell them to do both types of selling at the same time.

This short-term dilemma happens so frequently that many reps have never learned to sell effectively from a bigger picture, thus missing a lot of revenue potential. You may think they're doing both at the same time, but chances are they're not. It's a huge problem, in my opinion. It not only affects revenue, but also market share and future growth.

What's the solution? Are these two needs --- short-term goals and longer-term market potential -- - basically incompatible? No, they're not, but there's a secret behind making them work together.

The secret lies in the first words that come out of a rep's mouth in front of the prospect or existing customer. It's in the "setting the stage" or "opening" sales step. Those first words determine the purpose of the call.

The underlying issue is that many reps, regardless of what training they've had, don't know what to do or don't feel comfortable doing it. Therefore they do what they've always done, which is to start talking about the promotion or product itself.

How do we change that? There are four easy steps that will lead to success.

1. Write down five ways a rep can open a product/consultative sales call. Here's an example:

"John, I thought of you for a new promotion we have, but let's save time by first

discussing your business and what you want to accomplish. OK?"

This is the sneaky part, because once the reps start a sales call this way, they're forced to ask consultative questions before they talk about the promotion or product.

2. Have each rep select two mini-scripts they like best, perhaps one for a new prospect and one for an existing customer. They can edit them to match their own selling style, but the message needs to be the same.

3. Have them memorize these two openings and role-play them with you several times. They don't need to be memorized word-for-word, but well enough to flow naturally so they don't have to think about words they're using.

What will happen when you announce the role-playing part of this step? Your reps will all try to talk you out of it! They'll say they don't need it, or that they're already doing it or some other slippery excuse.

But role-play is crucial, because it's the very point in which you begin to change behavior! Don't let a single person off the hook, no matter how successful or seasoned that person may be.

4. Make these opening statements a standard and an expectation in your organization. You do that through observation and reinforcement on every contact you observe. That means, unfortunately, that you are the one responsible producing the change.

This course of action should insure the end of complaints about product selling vs. consultative selling. If it doesn't, go back to role-playing!

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