



Winning Ways

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Winning Ways

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Winning Ways NewsBits

Winning at Sales is offering two more classes! Sign up early to reserve your seat: September 5th (Leesburg area), September 15th (Tyson's area)

Hear Betsy Hudson as the keynote speaker at the newest eWomensBizNetwork in Annapolis on September 13th—visit www.winningwaysinc.com for more info!

Terry Nicholetti will be offering two "Making Contacts Count" seminars on August (Rockville location) and September (DC location). Sign up today at www.winningwaysinc.com.

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The Empathetic Salesperson

Most people understand that, in order to make a sale, you must appeal to the customer emotionally as well as logically. But many people make the mistake of assuming that emotional appeal means making the customer like them. Certainly it's important to make a good impression on your customer—which includes appearing sincere, courteous, and professional—but even more important, in winning a prospect's emotions to your side, is getting in touch with what they want.

It's important to distinguish between wants and needs. The organization or person the customer represents (even if it's just themselves) has needs, which you and every other salesperson they encounter are trying to fulfill with your product. But the person you're speaking with also has wants. These are tied in with the needs, but are more personal and often unspoken.

To use a very simple example, imagine a couple buying a car. They need a means of transportation that is reliable, affordable, and an appropriate size for their use. But what do they *want*? Maybe they want to impress the neighbors. Maybe they want to feel that they and their children will be safe in the event of an accident. Maybe they want to save as much money as possible so they can spend it on a remodeling project in their house. Whatever it is, the most effective salesperson will discover what their underlying wants are, and show how he can meet them. There are probably hundreds of cars for sale within a few miles that would meet their needs, but as soon as the salesperson shows how he can give them what they *want*, they will feel a strong emotional draw.

Figuring out what a person wants is both simple and difficult. The essence of it is active listening. Listening to the customer openly and attentively, asking the right questions, and accurately interpreting what you hear are the skills necessary to develop an empathic understanding of what the customer's deepest motives and wishes are.

Empathy is a function of the imagination: you take what you know about the person's situation, and add to it what you observe about them and what they say about themselves, and use it to

project yourself into their point of view—to imagine what the situation looks like from behind their eyes. This skill comes more naturally to some people than to others, but it is fully learnable.

To test your empathic abilities, think about a recent meeting with a customer. Now, instead of picturing the meeting from your own point of view, imagine you're sitting in their seat. What do you suppose was going through their head? What motivated their statements and decisions? How did what you, the salesperson, said and did appear to them?

For some this will be quite difficult. You may have a guess at what they were thinking, but not be at all confident that you're right. Or you may struggle even to imagine what it was. If this is the case, then try, while still in your imagined meeting with them, coming up with questions to ask that will help you understand them better.

The idea, of course, is to develop the ability to project yourself into the customer's point of view while you're still in the room with them, and to ask questions that will help you zoom in on their motivations. Like any skill, it takes practice. Fortunately, opportunities to practice active listening and empathy abound! Try it with friends, family members, people you've just met. It's a skill that will dramatically improve your personal life as well as your career!

When you've learned how to form an empathic understanding of customers, you will find that rapport comes naturally, without either of you even having to think about it. Instead of each of you being concerned about and focused on your own agenda, you will be working together to discover what the customer's wants and needs are, and how you can best meet them. Think back to a time when you were interacting with someone who you felt really understood what you wanted and where you were coming from. Didn't that make you want to spend more time or do more business with that person? Give your customers that same gift... the rewards will be great for you as well.

Tips for active listening:

- Ask open questions
- Listen not only to what they're saying, but what they're not saying
- Repeat back what you understand the other person to be saying
- Ask for clarification when you're not sure what they mean
- Pay attention to non-verbal signals, giving clues to the other person's feelings about what he or she is saying
- Focus on what they're saying and don't get distracted by preparing what you're going to say next