



# Show Me The Money

The need for professional sales training has never been more apparent.

By Frank A. Schipani

If you were in need of surgery, would you contact a doctor who wasn't professionally trained? If you had a lawsuit to deal with, would you hire an attorney who hadn't been professionally educated? How about a golf lesson? Would you hire your friend who has a 12 handicap?

Then how come we allow our customers to be greeted by so many salespeople who are not professionally trained, especially when our assets are on the selling floor?

In the past decade or so, as a professional sales trainer, I've had the opportunity to travel the country and work with Saks, Bloomingdale's, Nordstrom, Macy's as well as independents such as Mario's, Garys, Andrisen-Morton, etc. And although there are skilled professionals at these stores, I've observed a decline and, in many cases, a total lack of selling skills on the part of sales associates. These associates (whose business cards should read 'Sales Professional' instead of 'Sales Associate') are at best providing what I call transactional

servicing by simply reacting instead of being an inquiring, listening, proactive sales professional. By working for the client and not with him or her, he is leaving money on the table—your table! Let me explain with some examples.

A guy walks into the store and says "I need a gray suit." The clerk says, "What size are you?" and proceeds to walk around looking for a gray suit without any sense of establishing a relationship with the customer. If he's lucky enough to come up with a gray suit in the right size and model so the guy leaves the store happy, great! The clerk sold nothing more than what the client initially asked for (which in my book is not selling but servicing). Forget the shirt and tie he might have added on. If a guy asks for a suit, shame on us if we don't sell him at least another item or even several more, depending on our selling skills.

The professional says many things in different ways but one I often teach (with allowances for the seller's

personal style) goes something like this:

“Sir, we have a wide range of gray suits here and I want to provide the best one for you. In order for me to give you my best service, do you mind if I ask you a few questions about your clothing use? It will just take a moment.” In most, if not all cases, a reasonable person will say yes and now you build a ‘roadmap’ to ‘drive’ your mutual business correctly.

The following questions pertain to his dressing habits and set up the sale:

1. “Do you wear a suit to work every day?”

If he says yes, you have a multiple suit sale potential and if he says “no, I’m just buying one for an occasion,” then we’ll sell him sportswear after the suit.

2. “How many suits do you own?”

This tells you if he’s a replacement buyer, lover of clothing, frugal or extravagant with his usage.

3. “Are they mostly blue and gray?”

If he says yes, and that’s all, then we know he’s either all business or just following the pack and is clearly not a fashion leader. If he says, “Well yes, most are blue and gray but I do have a chocolate brown Boss, a kind of olive Armani...,” then we’ve learned that we have a fashion guy or one that is open to newness.

4. “Could you describe your favorite suit to me?”

If he scratches his head and says, “I think it has a little stripe, um, um...” we just found out he’s not into detail and likely to be just the “classic” suit guy. If he describes in detail his favorite Dolce, Zegna or Hugo Boss, we now have a “fashionista” to work with. (Thank God for those fashionistas!)

5. “Are you loyal to a particular brand or store?”

This provides us with his spending habits. If he mentions an off-price store, you know he’s \$499 or less out-the-door, and if he mentions Neiman Marcus or Zegna, he’s been paying \$1,500 and up.

“Qualifying” the client has obvious benefits, making the selling process both more productive and more fun! This type of inquiring applies to any classification, whether shirts, jeans, leather blazers, even shoes and socks! It takes a minute and yields tenfold.

Here’s another example of leaving money on the table: A new client is choosing four or five \$200 dress shirts and a half dozen new ties. He’s around \$1,500 on the table and he slacks off a bit and the seller (who’s excited) says “Anything else, sir?” and the guy says, “No, I think

that’s it.” The seller asks for payment and the guy leaves. **WRONG ACTION!**

**CORRECT ACTION:** The seller should be asking this new ‘good spender’ lots of qualifying questions regarding the last time he bought a suit, shoes, jeans, etc. A seller could say something like: “You’ve chosen some beautiful shirts and ties and, while you’re here, I must show you some great new clothing and a special velvet sportcoat that everyone seems to want these days. Come on, you’re here! Please just take a moment with me; they’re right this way.” Then place your hand on his arm and escort him to that suit!

The same action applies to a guy coming in for jeans. Qualify him, sell him at least two pairs of jeans (one dark and dressy, and another option). Then of course he’s got to try on a new velvet, leather, corduroy or fine wool blazer and so on. Hey! Men don’t shop frequently, so you’d better maximize his experience in your store or someone from the competition surely will.

I recall Mario Bisio’s (Mario’s, Portland and Seattle) fabulous response to a question posed to him at a recent industry conference. The question: “How do you feel about the store down the block carrying the same merchandise as you?” The reply: “I don’t worry about the store carrying the same suit or dress. I do worry about who’s selling it!” **HELLO!**

Men make 20 percent of their purchases on NEED and 80 percent on WANT! The want is often inspired by a knowledgeable and passionate sales professional who takes charge of the sale, knowing that most men WANT an authority working with them when making wardrobe choices. His subconscious is calling out to you: “Convince me with your appearance, your conviction, your manner and if you do, I’ll buy a lot from you!”

I firmly believe that we’re all inspired to purchase more when in the presence of a thoughtful professional; more importantly, we’re likely to seek out this authority for our next purchase.

I don’t care if your store has five employees or 5,000. If your sales people always stop when the client decides, you’ll never make any gains. ■

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