

The Art of the Sale

Frank Schipani knows a thing or two about selling menswear.

By Karen Alberg Grossman



Photo courtesy of Indigo 6

Why do so many stores fail to properly train their associates?

Often managers/owners don't recognize how many of their employees lack selling skills; many believe that having nice merchandise and providing good service is doing the job. Service is not enough to grow a business!

Selling is the craft of establishing a seller to client relationship; this requires knowledge, preparation and a commitment to excellence.

Many large companies have 'training programs' in place, but from my experience, these teach servicing rather than the kind of professional selling that can attract new customers and retain old ones. Many retailers rely on vendor seminars: these are helpful, but are generally more about the benefits of specific products than about selling skills.

How might better trained sellers impact the bottom line?

The professionally trained seller creates multiple sales and authentic, memorable experiences. A pro always develops the relationship first; sales and client retention will follow.

The biggest complaints I hear are, "My UPTs need to increase" and, "How do I get my sellers to develop new clients?" My response is simple: The days of "working the door" are over! One must learn to network outside the store, in the community, and develop the confidence and ability to bring in business from the many opportunities that exist out there.

How important is it for sellers to dress well?

If one looks the part, one becomes the part. I like to say that "you must look like an authority before saying a word."

Studies indicate we're all attracted to people who dress well—not over the top, but stylishly and with distinction. In simple terms, one should be wearing what they are selling that season and one should wear it with flair, every day! If a seller is wearing dated apparel, the customer might assume his products and services are dated. After all, we are in the image building business, aren't we?

How might retailers put the fun back in dressing?

Too many sellers go back to the same safe styles and colors their clients have been buying forever, thereby provide 'service' but no fun and, more importantly, no new shopping habits. For example, you're working with sportswear and you bring over a bright orange pullover sweater and the customer says: "Whoa, I can't wear that." And you say, "Take it home, wear it to a party or the club and if you don't feel great in it and get a million compliments, bring it back..." Almost every time, the guy comes back and says: "You know that orange sweater you sold me; do you have another bright color like that?" So now you've accomplished three things: another sale, a happy guy, and a greater likelihood that he'll shop with you more frequently, just for fun!

How can sellers achieve a higher percentage of multiple sales?

Every day in every store, some guy comes in to buy a new suit and leaves with only a new suit. When a man decides he needs a new suit, it's generally because he wants to look better. His current wardrobe of suits probably looks dated so he thinks, "I'll go buy a new one" without realizing that this one suit will now be his 'go to' garment whenever he needs to look great. But why look great only once a week?

If a man comes in for a new suit, we should have him buy at least three, along with appropriate furnishings. You explain that with three new garments, he can alternate them with his 'dated' ones and still appear to look

current (heeding your advice on mixing new furnishings, etc.). Maybe a new flat knit merino vest in pearl gray or camel would update one of the older suits. Certainly a new shirt and tie or pocket square would make a world of difference! In this way, the new suits don't get over-used and will last a lot longer. This concept applies to the sportswear and jeans customer as well. It's called investment dressing: In addition to buying quality clothing, the customer is investing in the most important person in his life—himself.

Any other hot tips for menswear sellers?

1) Know your merchandise backwards and forward. Understand your assortment better by trying everything on—what does the garment say?

2) Look busy or be busy at all times. There's no greater turnoff to a customer than a sales associate who seems bored. Look productive when someone comes in to your store.

3) Calendar-ize your contact activities, follow ups, etc.

4) Always smile—it's contagious and engaging, plus it brings a sense of joy to your work. Take your job seriously but have fun with it!

5) Dress with style (but never let your cologne precede your presence...)

6) Always ask a shirt client: "When was the last time you were measured?" Then measure him. You should know that for every 8 pounds a man gains, his neck size increases, on average, a full half inch. Also, inform customers that new shirts are about half an inch larger in the neck to allow for shrinkage; advise them to launder shirts before wearing.

7) K. I. S. S. Keep Improving Sales Skills

8) If you're new, learn from the best and seek out mentors. And try to make friends with tailors—they know so much about clothing!

9) Record-keeping tip: For suit and trouser clients, have your tailor cut a swatch from the cuff after marking the bottom so you'll have a record of your client's purchases. For sportcoats and sportswear, take digital photos. This way, you'll be able to call him when something new comes in that works with his existing wardrobe.

10) Network, Network, Network! Always have your business cards with you and don't be shy about handing them out. And remember: ours is a noble and honorable profession. By making a man look better, you are improving his image, boosting his self esteem, and maybe changing his life! How many professionals can say as much? ■

Frank A. Schipani is a sales training specialist who has worked with the finest stores in the country. His book, *Frank's Rules: How to Sell Menswear (and Practically Anything Else) Extremely Well* is fast becoming the industry Bible. It is available through his website: TheSchipaniGroup.com