

The YEBDC Small Business Information Column

by Sue Gingerich, Business Advisor

"Don't Be Afraid to Get to Know Your Customers!"

Questioning customers is how you get to know your customers needs. Sometimes business owners or salespeople assume they know what the customer needs. But do they really? When benefits of a product or service are presented to the customer and they don't match the customers needs, often a potential sale can be lost.

Take the example of a young lady who was shopping for a new car. She clearly stated to the salesperson she wanted to stay within a specific monthly payment amount. The salesman, thinking he knew his customer's needs, presented a financing option that indeed was under the specified amount. However, the salesman neglected to question long enough and deep enough to also uncover another need. When this young lady realized that there was going to be almost half the original price of the car left to pay after five years of paying on it, she just about walked away from the whole deal. You see this customer also had another need -- to be debt free in five years.

Uncovering all the needs of a customer only comes after thoroughly questioning a customer. Obviously you don't want to be like a drill sergeant. However, you can learn a lot about a customer if you are willing to ask the right questions, in the right way, and then be prepared to listen. Don't have a preconceived notion that you know what is best for the customer, as some customers may surprise you.

To question customers, start with background information gathering. Use general questions that are open ended. Open ended questions are questions customers CAN NOT answer with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Listen for clues in these answers. Once you hear something that you think might be a need, ask more specific questions. These can be closed questions that get right to the point. For example: "Are you concerned about the cost (price)?"

If the answer to this question was 'yes', you could overcome this objection by determining a way they could actually save money with your product or service. For example, maybe your product outlasts other products by several years. Factor the longer life into replacement costs over a longer period of time and you may have actually met the need of the customer. Then present this information to the customer in the form of a question, such as; "If I could show you how our product could actually save you money would you be interested?" If they say 'yes', you now have a chance to make this deal.

Sometimes sales people are hesitant to question a customer too much, for fear they will uncover objections the customer has to the product or service they are selling. You should welcome these objections. You will need to overcome these objections before you can actually close the sale. Realise though, that some objections can never be overcome.

Question your customers to get to know them better. Don't be afraid that it may raise objections, because that is truly how you will be able to fulfill their needs and alleviate their concerns.

If you have a small business and have a question or problem that you think The YEBDC could help you with please call or write to: The Yellowhead East Business Development Corporation, Box 249, Sangudo, Alberta, T0E 2A0

1-800-556-0328 or 1-780-785-2900, e mail: yebdc@yebdc.ab.ca, or access our Website at:
www.yebdc.ab.ca

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