

About Sales Contact -- Lesson 112:

In the original text, this chapter deals with battle and conflict. Surprisingly, Sun Tzu spends a great deal of that chapter telling us how we must avoid meaningless conflict if we are going to be successful in war. He then goes on to explain how to succeed in these confrontations when they can't be avoided.

Like war, too many people—many of them customers but some of them sales people, see sales contact itself as a form of conflict. In this view of selling, the sales person wants the prospects money while the prospective customer wants to escape from the sales process with his or her wallet intact. This battle continues until one side or the other wins. Needless to say, this perspective on selling is useless for the professional sales person. No amount of cleverness or verbal agility will win any battle with a customer. The only way we win customers is to fight on their side.

If we are going to use Sun Tzu's methods in selling, we must work to eliminate all sources of conflict. We must redefine sales contact so that both we and our customers are freed from this sense of confrontation.

This is a difficult task, probably one of the most difficult jobs that we face as sales warriors. It is especially difficult in initial sales contact when our prospect know nothing about us and our intentions. Like an opposing army, they assume that we are there to attack and that it is their job to defend. How can we start to redefine the sales process in a way that prevents or perhaps even uses this sense of conflict?

Lesson 113:

What is the most difficult situation we face in selling?

- A. Defending against competitive attacks.**
- B. Initializing sales contact.**
- C. Overcoming customer objections.**
- D. Losing a sale.**

Everyone uses the art of sales.

You accept your assignment from the company.

You assemble your leads and prospects.

You happily organize and build them into a territory.

However, the most difficult job is sales contact.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- B. Initializing sales contact.

Successful selling is much more than simply going out and talking to people, convincing them to buy your product. It requires goal-setting, planning and organization. Without these activities, we have no chance to be successful in sales. However, though easily overlooked, all these tasks are relatively easy when compared to sales contact. Contacting prospects and customers is and will always be the most difficult job of a sales person. It requires the most skill, delicacy and, especially, courage. It is the difficulties of customer contact that makes selling such a potentially lucrative career.

In sales terminology, we call the fear of sales contact “call reluctance.” Every sales person has felt it, but it is especially common in cold contacts and among new sales people. Why is this sales contact so difficult? From an emotional point of view, we talk about the pain of rejection. The nature of sales means that the vast majority of our sales contacts result in a “no” rather than a “yes,” but few sales people expect an order from every sales contact, so the real problem is deeper than this. The real reason that sales contact is so difficult is that, despite our best efforts, it is too seen often as a form of conflict where the prospect is defending him or herself against the aggressive “attack” of the sales person.

Lesson 114:

Why should you be uncomfortable with the process of sales contact?

- A. Because you can be rejected.**
- B. Because the customers controls its outcome.**
- C. Because you can not truly plan its course.**
- D. Because you will encounter problems.**

Sales contact is uncomfortable for everyone.

You cannot plan the path it will take.

You must expect problems and turn them into opportunities.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- C. Because you can not completely plan its course.

The unpredictable nature of competition is a continuing theme throughout Sun Tzu. Any competitive situation—including sales contact—is an arena where opposing plans come into conflict. We can and should have a plan going into these situations, but customers and our competition also have their plans. During sales contact, all these plans meet and meld together to create something new and unexpected.

This is why *everyone* is uncomfortable with sales contact. No one knows what exactly is going to happen. They do know that their plans will be disrupted.

This is why we must be opportunistic during all sales contact. Prospects will throw obstacles in our way, trying to keep to their own plan. It is our job to find way to turn those obstacles into openings. If prospects suggest that “now is a bad time,” we should be excited by the fact that there is a good time and want to know when it is and what makes it better. If prospect don’t have any money to invest, they must be interested in ways to save or make more money. If we go in understanding that everyone has needs, we can learn to see every obstacle as simply an expression of the prospect’s special needs.

Lesson 115:

What role does planning play in sales contact?

- A. As a way of taking advantage of opportunity.**
- B. As a way of avoiding conflict.**
- C. As preparation for overcoming objections.**
- D. Planning should be avoided.**

You must plan to take an indirect route to your goal.
You must plan to entice customers with benefits.
When you stumble, you must know how to catch up.
When you get ahead of the customer, you must slow down.
You must know how to plan for both objections and acceptance.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- A. As a way of taking advantage of opportunity.

Though Sun Tzu warns us not to expect sales contact (or any other competitive situation) to go as we plan, this does not mean that we don't plan at all. Instead of planning a linear route to our goal, laying out one step after another—as we would in a constructive process—we must make and rehearse any number of contingency plans.

First, we must expect that we won't march in a straight line, checking off each step in our sales process in the ideal order. We must design our plans so that we are prepared to take steps in a less than ideal order, accomplishing what we can when the prospect let us. In this planning, we must expect that we will make mistakes and have setbacks. Most importantly, we must get in synch with our customers so that they share our plan.

In preparing ourselves to take advantage of opportunities, we must prepare to change our plans not only for objections, but for acceptance. Many sales people have a problem recognizing and dealing with a "yes" when they get it. They have their sales plans and stick to them even when prospects have agreed to buy. We must always be in touch with the moment, moving the sale forward with good news and bad.

Lesson 116:

What should you think that successful contact depends upon?

- A. Ourselves alone.**
- B. The customer alone.**
- C. The competition alone.**
- D. A combination of all three.**

You alone can make the sales contact successful.
All customer contact is inherently difficult.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- A. Ourselves alone.

When we say that sales contact is inherently difficult, we mean that problems with prospects and competitor are a given. We must expect and prepare for these problems as part of the process. We must learn to think of the problems and obstacles that they raise as unimportant to the eventual success of the contact. In the end, the only thing that determines whether or not the contact is successful is our skill as sales people.

It is not the customer's job to make sales contact successful. Customers are interested in addressing their needs. They do this by *testing* the sales people with whom they come into contact. Most of the sales people with whom they come into contact are clearly not going to help them. They must dismiss these useless sales people as quickly as possible. They do this by putting up the obstacles by which the sales person must prove himself or herself. Our competitors may give customers new ideas about how to create these obstacles, but the obstacle always comes from the customer.

If we want to a constructive relationship with a customer, we must earn it. We can never expect the customer to accept our desire to help them with their needs at face value. We must first prove ourselves by overcoming the prospect's natural resistance and addressing thoughtfully the obstacles that they put in our way.

Lesson 117:

How do you win the argument about product benefit?

- A. You must be patient.**
- B. You must move quickly.**
- C. You pressure the customer.**
- D. You can't win arguments about benefits.**

You can offer many arguments about product benefits.
You will then lose the customer.
You can rush through the sales process proposing benefits.
You then fail to learn about the customer.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- D. You can't win arguments about benefits.

Inexperienced sales people too often think that they are winning the sale if the prospect is listening patiently to their sales pitch. If the customer questions the sales pitch, inexperienced sales people think that they have addressed those questions by answering them logically and “proving” their point with evidence. People are masterful at fooling themselves. We want to think that we are in control of the situation. Unfortunately, competitive situations are beyond the control of any sales person.

In a sales process, we can make progress only one place: inside the prospect's mind. Unless we know the customer's mind, nothing we say or do makes any difference. Customer's can let us talk endlessly, but we don't know if they are even listening. We can only know what they are thinking by what they say or do.

Once we understand this, we begin to understand another important aspect of a customer's objections. They give us insight into what the customer is thinking. Our primary job as a sales person is to understand the customer's thinking. Talking about “benefits” is largely an illusion. There is not such thing as a “generic” benefit. Benefits only occur inside of the prospect's mind. We must first learn about the customer and their thinking before we can say anything useful.

Lesson 118:

How can you speed the sales process by hard work?

- A. By putting in more hours than your competitors.**
- B. By proposing many different benefits at the same time.**
- C. By making more contacts.**
- D. You can't speed sales by hard work.**

You can defend your product and rush straight after the order.
You can work day and night.
You can work with many different customer contacts.
You can spend all your time preaching product benefits.
The customer can still reject your product and company.
You think you are winning the sale at first.
Over time your weaknesses will show.
Only a small fraction of your effort is useful.
You can try smaller shortcuts in the sales process.
Your proposals will still fall short.
You are wasting half of your time.
You can rush sales that are almost complete.
You may win two out of three.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- D. You can't speed sales by hard work.

Sun Tzu's point is simple. We can try to speed the sales process in a lot of different ways, but in the end it will cost us. We may think that we are winning sales by working harder, but it is an illusion. We cannot see the sales that we are losing along the way. In looking for shortcuts, we are always wasting time and losing sales that could be won.

In order to accept what really works in sales contact, we must first stop fooling ourselves. Putting in more time with the customer means nothing. Working with a lot of different people means even less. Sales progress can never be measured by the level of our activity. Our behavior determines whether or not we are successful, but it doesn't control the process. The best that we can do is guide the process along in the right direction.

Lesson 119:

What is the risk in shortcutting a sales process?

- A. You will fail completely.**
- B. You will suffer serious setbacks.**
- C. You will fall behind the competition.**
- D. You will not be as successful as you think.**

You can try to shortcut a sales process, but it will cost you sales.

Without the proper information, you lose sales.

Without the proper groundwork, you lose sales.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- A. You will fail completely.

Remember that our first goal as sales people is simple survival. Long term success in sales is a statistical process. Winning a sale here and there is not going to make us successful. We must win a large percentage of sales consistently.

Sales people think that by using shortcuts in the sales process, they are going to increase their sales over time. The logic is that if they can make each sale faster, they will make more sales.

The problem with this logic is that it doesn't take into account all the time that we spend invest in every sales contact. We can save time before contact by only contacting qualified prospects, but one we get involved in a sales process, the only thing that matters is winning the sale. The higher the percentage of our wins, the more successful we will be, period. Saving time within the process is never worth the cost in terms of lost sales. We simply cannot save enough time to make up for the sales we lose by rushing the process.

This isn't to say that sales processes can never go quickly. The problem with "shortcuts" is that they are usually in the area of learning about the customer and his or her real situation.

Lesson 120:

Initially in sales contact, what should you focus on?

- A. Learning about the prospect.**
- B. Spending time with the prospect.**
- C. Getting a fair hearing from the prospect.**
- D. Creating a position in the prospect's mind.**

Instead, you must initially keep quiet about what you are planning to sell.

You must meet with people and talk with them.

You must know the customer's business.

You must know where their problems are.

You must avoid bogging down in politics.

You must be knowledgeable to make the sale.

You must rely on your contacts in the business.

You must take advantage of the customer's thinking.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- A. Learning about the prospect.

The first step in creating successful sales contact is learning about the prospect. No matter what we are selling and who we are selling to, we cannot start until we gain some knowledge about the customer and what their needs and interests are.

If we are going to learn about the customer, we must first keep quiet about what we are selling. This is more difficult than it seems. Customers often want to hear our pitch just to get it done. We have to develop methods that minimally satisfy the prospect's desire to know what we are selling, but which still allow us to learn about the prospect without wasting their time.

In large and complicated sales, we can research the prospect before customer contact. In smaller, quick sales, we must learn how to learn about customer by analyzing their appearance. No matter what we think we know before the contact, our initial direct contact must be dedicated to verifying what we think that we know and learning more.

Lesson 121:

How do disarm the prospect's resistance to sales people?

- A. Confrontation.
- B. Misdirection.
- C. Observation.
- D. Consolidation.

You must disguise your desire to make a sale.

If the customer doesn't fight you, you can make progress.

You uncover their problems, understand them, and use the situation

To make sales, you must think on your feet.

You must eventually stand up and make your point.

You must be aggressive and hungry.

You must be quiet and patient.

You must keep your plans to yourself.

You must be bold and courageous.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

B. Misdirection.

As long as a prospect believes that our only goal is to make a sale, everything that we do and say is suspect, tarnished by our motives. Though we cannot deny our eventual goal, we can and must disguise it and force it into the background. In order to do this, we must create more visible and immediate motivations for our behavior.

Our visible and immediate motivation must be learning about and understanding our prospect's needs and problems. These should be our only visible concern. A prospect cannot fight us if we are truly focused on their needs.

As we study the prospect's needs, we should be quietly formulating and substantiating the connection between their needs and our product and services. We must then patiently wait until the opportunity unfolds that allows us to make that connection clear.

Lesson 122:

How far do you stray from your plan for an opportunity?

- A. You must always stick to your plan.**
- B. You must instantly divert from your plan.**
- C. You can divert from you plan but go slowly.**
- D. You must make new plans.**

When managing your territory, prioritize your activities.
When an opportunity offers itself, come to an agreement.
Don't think about it, just act.
Find better ways to help customers find success in their businesses.
This is the how you are successful at customer contact.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- B. You must instantly divert from your plan.

The point of planning and positioning is to create opportunities. We do not create opportunity. We can only put ourselves in a position to take advantage of them when they come along. When those opportunities arise, we must instantly go after them.

Planning in competitive activities—like selling—is very different from planning constructive activities—like baking a cake. In a constructive activity, we can lay out the steps and simply follow them. In a competitive activity, our plans are always conflicting with someone else's plans. This creates highly dynamic situations which are unpredictable. Success in these environments comes from recognizing opportunities as they unfold.

We must be willing not only to divert from our plans to take advantage of opportunities, we must also be willing to change our policies and procedures. We must be willing to negotiate. Plans and policies are made for “ordinary” business. When an extraordinary opportunity comes along, we must go to extraordinary lengths to secure it. Every business is unique and that uniqueness must be reflected in our business.

Lesson 123:

In convincing prospects, what must be your first consideration?

- A. Amplification.**
- B. Direction.**
- C. Resources.**
- D. Vision.**

Experience in sales teaches us:

“Words alone are not enough.

Use pictures and charts.

Demonstrating is not enough.

Use showmanship and magic.”

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

A. Amplification.

Initial customer contact depends upon our learning and listening. When we see an opportunity, we can only take advantage of it by convincing the prospect of the benefits of our proposal. This is a job for communication.

Sun Tzu teaches that we can never take communication for granted. He teaches that simply speaking is never enough. He trains us to amplify our message using whatever means are available. In the original, he suggests drums, flags, and fires. The suggestion of drums is especially interesting since traveling sales people were once called “drummers,” both because their job was to drum up business. Did early sales people actually use drums as Sun Tzu suggested? Well, snake oil sales people certainly did, and although we don’t want to sell “snake-oil” that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t use the principle.

We have to put ourselves in the prospect’s place. What do they hear all the time? We must say it differently. What do they see all the time? We have to show them something different. Everyone develops a certain deafness toward sales people. We have to develop and use creative ways to break through this barrier.

Lesson 124:

What is the nature of good sales communication?

- A. Creativity.**
- B. Focus.**
- C. Discipline.**
- D. Comfort.**

Use pictures, props, and showmanship to get everyone's attention.

Tie your arguments together.

Don't offer innovative ideas alone.

Tie them with comfortable, familiar ideas.

Every idea must amplify a single, clear message.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- B. Focus.**

In Sun Tzu's system, unity—that is, the uniting and concentration of forces—is a conceptual synonym for focus—the idea of putting all of your resources into one small space. Unity and focus are the source of strength in his system. As sales people, we must use this concept to keep our message clear and simple.

As we said in the previous lesson, we must break through the barriers prospects set up against to filter out a sales person's message. The first way that we break through that barrier is by using various creative methods to amplify it. The second way to penetrate that barrier is to make sure that our message is focused, like a laser.

This means that we must develop an over-arching theme to tie all of our points together. A number of separate point (benefits, features, etc.) defuse our impact. If we first establish an overall message, each of those separate points can support and strengthen it. It is especially important that new, different approaches are tied with traditional ideas so that people are comfortable with them. In the end, we want to leave the prospect with one, clear idea and evidence for it.

Lesson 125:

What is the most important goal in sales contact?

- A. Creating friendships.**
- B. Creating belief.**
- C. Creating logic.**
- D. Creating emotion.**

When unknown, you must create excitement and interest. If you are better known, you still must keep it interesting. You must take a position that everyone can understand and appreciate.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- D. Creating emotion.

In the cycle of sales contact, we get heard by amplifying our message. We make sure that our message is understood by making sure that it is focused. We then must also make sure that it engages people's emotions, that it interests them and inspires excitement.

The purpose of selling is to inspire action. Sun Tzu taught that action arises from only emotion. Motivating a customer or prospect to act requires the careful manipulation of their emotions. Managing the emotions of others is topic for the remainder of this chapter. In the original, this idea was focused on controlling the emotions of armies, but the lessons work just as well in managing sales contact.

The two dominant emotions in Sun Tzu's system are fear and greed. Though other emotional states play into his system as well, fear and greed are good starting points for creating the excitement and involvement that we are looking for in sales contact. In the end, people act for only two reason: the hope of gain or the fear of loss. The beginning of this chapter focuses on learning about the prospect because it is this knowledge that allows us to understand the gains and losses that emotionally impact the prospect. Once we understand the prospects hopes and fears, we must then use that information to get them emotionally involved in the sale.

Lesson 126:

What is the most important element in getting attention?

- A. Amplification.**
- B. Focus.**
- C. Timeliness.**
- D. Emotion.**

You must get your customers' attention.

As a salesperson, you must use emotion.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

D. Emotion.

This stanza introduces an in depth discussion of the factor of emotion introduced in the last stanza. Clearly amplification, focus and even timeliness—though not really discussed in the context of contact—are all important, but the most important element is connecting with the prospect's emotional hot buttons.

We have talked about the filters that people create that block the messages of sales people. The three techniques that Sun Tzu teaches—amplification, focus, and emotional content—are all designed to break through this barrier, but the most important of these is using the right emotional context. People listen with their ears tuned for information that they can identify with, that is, for information that plays to their particular hopes and fears.

This is why we must learn the specific language that prospects use to describe their situation. This is especially the case in business-to-business sales because so many industries and individual organizations develop their own terminology. This terminology is often arcane to those outside of the industry or organization, but for the decision-makers on the inside it is full of emotional content. As sales people, we may be used to the arcane terminology within our own industry or organization. These terms have no emotional content for prospects. Like translator, we must learn their language to connect.

Lesson 127:

When should you plan sales contact?

- A. At first dawn.**
- B. Before midday.**
- C. In the afternoon.**
- D. At the end of the day.**

In the morning, customer resistance is high.
During the day, it fades.
By evening, they want to go home.
You must use your time wisely.
Avoid tough resistance.
Close when resistance fades and they want to go home.
This is how you master energy.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- D. At the end of the day.

Given the emotional nature of sales contact, we must consider our customers and prospects emotional state. We should not only try to control their emotions through communication. We can also address their emotions by timing contact to our advantage.

The general rule of Sun Tzu's system is that we don't want to fight with our customers. We want minimize the sales resistance in our prospects. One way to do this is to time these contacts so that they take place latter in the day when people have less fight in them.

This is difficult for most sales people because Sun Tzu's rule about energy cuts both ways. Our energy is usually highest at the morning as well so this is when we want to undertake the most difficult contacts. Unfortunately, matching our high energy against the prospect's high energy increases the chance of conflict during sales contact. It is better is we manage difficult organization and planning tasks earlier in the day, moving actual contact toward the end of the day. We can or should be able to control our own emotional state for the sales contact. We can only control that of our prospect by using the right timing.

Lesson 128:

What should *your* emotional state be during sales contact?

- A. Relaxed.**
- B. Excited.**
- C. Controlled.**
- D. Aggressive.**

Keep organized when the customer is confused.
Stay quiet while the customer blows off steam.
This is how you master your feelings.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- A. Relaxed.

If we want to meet the customer in a lower energy state, what type of energy do we want to have during the contact? Experience teaches us that in general, it is best if we are relaxed rather than excited. Remember, people distrust sales people. From the viewpoint of a slightly weary prospect, an excited, energetic sales person is at the best hard to identify with and at the worst, suspicious.

Many sales people are fearful of sales contact unless they work themselves into an emotional state. This is counterproductive. We should not have to motivate our own actions with emotion. Our job is motivating the prospect by controlling their emotions.

The way we remain relaxed in a sales situation is to be well-prepared. We must be completely organized and know exactly what we are doing. In a sales contact, the prospect often only has a vague idea of what the process is or should be. If we are relaxed and organized, our prospect will tend to relax as well.

We should be emotionally prepared for the difficulties of sales contact. We must be prepared for them to take difficult turns. If we keep relaxed and confident during a sales presentation, we will be a lot more effective (and a lot more professional) than we would be by simply being excited.

Lesson 129:

What should you do to react when you meet resistance during sales contact?

- A. Work harder.**
- B. Change topics.**
- C. Take it easy.**
- D. Focus on getting the order.**

Stick to your point and wait for others to respond.
Stay friendly as you wear down the customer's resistance.
You will be successful if you serve the needs of others.
This is how you master persuasion.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- C. Take it easy.

In sales contact, it is the emotional edge that makes the difference. We want to time these encounters when our opponents are at their weakest. Conversely, we want to make sure that when they occur, we are prepared and relaxed.

Our sales message should be focused and simple. Every point we make should offer evidence for our central theme. We don't have to defend each point to press the theme forward.

We want to keep the conversation friendly and positive. We want to keep it focused on the prospect's emotional needs and desires. If we are focused on our prospect's desires, they cannot fight us. If we keep the tone friendly and relaxed, they will not want to fight us. We can wear down their natural resistance, penetrate their natural barriers and get our point through to them.

Remember, a sales situation is not a battle. If it feels like a battle, we are doing something wrong. Sun Tzu teaches us how to win in competition by avoiding battles which is why his system works so well for sales. We can succeed in sales only if the customer sides with us. We have to make it easy for them to do that by first siding with them.

Lesson 130:

What should you do if you have reasons to believe that the prospect won't accept certain aspects of your presentation?

- A. Change your approach.**
- B. Change your terminology.**
- C. Ignore prejudice.**
- D. Confuse the situation.**

Do not create organized resistance.
Do not attack firmly held beliefs.
This is how you master adapting.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- A. Change your approach.

There is nothing sacred about anything in our presentations. If we have evidence that some aspect of our presentation is creating or will create resistance, we should drop it quickly. Changing our terminology is not enough. People will always see beyond our words to their meaning. We can get people to accept new ideas, but we can't get them to change their basic world view.

Our presentations should be organized around a central, high-level message. This message should be crafted so that accepting it doesn't violate anyone's basic perceptions about what is important or what works. Ideally, it should be organized around concepts that are broadly accepted.

All of the other points of our presentation are expendable. They are simply evidence to support the central idea. We should be able to eliminate these points and replace them at will. If our central message is strong, we should always have many more points that we can actually use in a given presentation anyway. We should always be looking how we can adapt our presentation to meet the basic prejudices of our prospects. The more our evidence conforms to what they already believe, the more likely we are to sell our central premise.

Lesson 131:

What do you do if your prospect resists the action you desire?

- A. Keep the pressure up.**
- B. Back off the idea.**
- C. Restate your proposal.**
- D. Create alternatives.**

You must follow these sales rules.
Do not take a position against strong feelings.
Do not fight an argument based on a lack of alternatives.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

D. Create alternatives.

We create emotion in the prospect to enable action. We want to get the prospect acting and making decisions to engage them in the process. Their actions shouldn't begin with the last decision—making the sale. The prospect should be offered a series of less costly actions that lead them to the final decision.

In a sales situation, the decision-maker always has a choice. If we limit his or her choices to accept our proposal or not, we are creating an opportunity for conflict. The whole purpose of using Sun Tzu's methods is selling is to find ways to eliminate conflict from the process.

The point of sales contact is to keep the process moving forward to the final sale. We lose the sale if the process gets stalled before the prospect is willing to make a purchase. We cannot push a stalled process forward over the objections of the prospect, but the only reason that the process can stall is if we don't make the choice easy to make. In any situation including the final decision, we want to keep the process moving.

The first rule is positioning. The positions we take are the proposals we offer. These proposals should be crafted to invite action on the part of prospects. The actions should cater to the inclinations of the prospect.

Lesson 132:

During sales contact, what must we *avoid* doing?

- A. Suspecting pretended agreement.**
- B. Believing everything the customer says.**
- C. Attacking weaker competitors.**
- D. None of the above.**

Do not accept those who only pretend to agree.
Do not attack the strongest competition against you.
Do not believe everything the customer tells you.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- B. Believing everything the customer says.

This lesson covers some of the most delicate decisions that we as sales people have to make during sales contact.

The first problem posed here is knowing the difference between real agreement and pretended agreement. Sometimes “agreement” simply means that the prospect isn’t paying any attention or doesn’t care what you are saying. Prospects pretend agreement as part of speeding a brush off. Though we never want to talk past the sale, we have to be sensitive to whether or not agreement on a point is serious or not.

Attacking competitors during sales contact also requires a delicate sensitivity. Attacking a competitor that the prospect believes in can be nearly the same as attacking the prospect directly. This is especially true what the prospect has purchased from that competitor in the past. Attacking these “strong” competitors is the same as attacking the prospect’s past decisions. This is never necessary.

Finally, we have to be sensitive about what to believe or disbelieve from the prospect. Of course, we never tell the prospect directly that we don’t believe them, but this doesn’t mean that we should take everything that we are told at face value. We must be willing to check what we are told to make sure that the prospect isn’t “mistaken” in some part of the information they tell us.

Lesson 133:

Which of the following is desirable during customer contact?

- A. Arguing when the prospect agrees with us.**
- B. Giving prospects an alternative.**
- C. Pressing prospects for a decision .**
- D. None of the above.**

Do not argue with a customer who agrees with you.
Give the customer an agreeable alternative.
Do not press the customer too hard for a decision.
These are the rules of selling.

From The Art of Sales

Answer:

- B. Giving prospects an alternative.

This lesson deals with common situations as sales contact progresses, and, again, all of them require sensitivity on our part as sales people.

In the last stanza, we discussed the need to test agreement to make sure that it isn't "pretended," but here we have the opposite problem. When the customer truly agrees, we don't want to raise any new issues that create new problems. When we test agreement, we don't want to create arguments. We simply want to make sure we can go forward.

Next, in moving the sales forward, we want to continually give the prospect a series of choices to make. By giving the prospect choices to make, we get him or her actively making decisions. We never want these choices to be "against" us. We want to offer agreeable alternatives, all of which work toward the sales. Even at the end of the sale, the choice shouldn't be between our product and nothing. It should be between different flavors of our product.

Finally, we must have the sense to tell when we are pressing "too hard" for a decision. We have to ask for decisions but if we start the prospect making easy decisions, we should never have to press for a decision. Again, prospects are very sensitive toward sales people who use pressure during the process.