

10 Top Rapport Selling (c) Tips

Dale Carnegie wrote “When dealing with people remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudice and motivated by pride and vanity”

Selling in financial services has gone through enormous changes. In 1986 I vividly recall going for a job interview with an American life assurance company based in the UK. I still remember the language being used by the sales directors. “Punters”, “Close 50% of sales”, “Prospects”, “Don’t leave without a signature”

Nowadays, thankfully, his language and those sharp practises have all but disappeared. But here’s the crux of the matter. We’ve gone too far down the regulatory route and many salespeople are forgetting the most important part of the sale...the customer, becoming bogged down in paperwork and red tape. Now my firm belief is that regulations were brought in to protect the customer and to ensure they received an honest, reliable and worthwhile service.

My crusade is to put the customer back on the pedestal. Somewhere where they deserve to stay and flourish. If your product or service is high transaction then leave it to the internet or telesales. If you don’t then the customer will. However, if your product/service is high relationship then you’ll want to go down the Rapport Selling © route.

This emphasises the customer every time and all the time. The salesperson is constantly putting themselves in the customer’s shoes. It requires an intense ability to build rapport and needs perfect and honed communication skills. Rapport is far more than just talking about the same football club or discussing your client’s children. It is a deeper integration with the client, immersing yourselves into their world and what makes them tick. And then designing a sales process around them, not you.

To introduce you to how you can Rapport Sell © here are 10 random short tips I’ve put together taken from a much larger collection of tips. By the way, they are in no particular order.

1. When making calls to customers, never, never, never hang up your phone before them. Wait for them to hang up first. It’s a small point but very irritating when you’re on the phone, agree to say farewell and immediately you hear their click at their end. Some get the impression that the other person can’t wait to get on to the next call.
2. Record all details of the customer. Use paper or technology to record all you can about the customer that you have so fastidiously collected and refer to it every time you speak or meet with them again. I use a software programme called ACT! Which records all sorts of information about my customers, not just the usual things such as names and addresses. It records spouse details, children, hobbies etc. It shows me every contact I’ve had with them whether this be by phone, letter, email or a meeting. It allows me to constantly

recollect everything about them when they call me. Make your customer data portable so you can recollect it at a moments notice. Handheld computers are fantastic devices to contain this information especially the ones which act as phones as well, instantly bringing up the customer file when they phone you. Very impressive and it shows the customer that you are putting them first not you. When you return to your desk, simply pop the device into the cradle attached to your PC and hey presto, the data is synchronised.

3. When asking questions be careful of your tone. Research has constantly shown that communication is vastly more than just the words we choose to use. Body language comes into it but, increasingly, the tone we use affects how the words are interpreted by the customer. And that's what Rapport Selling © is all about. How the customer sees it. Record your tonality during questions and statements that you make and observe the direction it takes. Questions should have a slight rising of the tone towards the end. Statements should have a relative flat tone, with emphasis on words where needed. Commands should and do have a tone that falls sharply at the end.
4. Listening is more than the words. There's level 1 listening which is listening but with your point of view, constantly relating what you're hearing to our experiences and values. I do this when I go to the airport. I'm listening and looking at everything with the sole purpose of going to the right terminal, at the right time. There is level 2 listening which is hearing what's being said with the customer's experiences. This is very difficult. Relating everything that is being said to them and their situation, constantly bringing it back to their world and their agenda. Then there is level 3 listening. Few people can do this. This is listening as though the information flowing to you is like a radio wave. Coming from all directions. Smells, instincts, opinions, body language, that subtle grin, that tonality, that closing of their eyes when they talk about their holiday.... That's level 3 listening and that's the one we need to strive towards if we are to master Rapport Selling ©
5. Eye contact has to be one of the most important means of gaining rapport and building trust with people. The eyes are said to be the windows of the soul and unless we look at people as we talk and present, many people will not believe you and your actions and words. The key is to give as much eye contact as they give you. No more and no less, just the same. Again the whole emphasis here is to put your habits in the back room and focus on your customer and how best to communicate with them. When faced with eye contact challenge. You'll know when this happens, use the social and business gaze. The business gaze requires your eyes to glance from their forehead to the left eye, onto their right eye and back to the forehead in a triangular motion. The social gaze, which I always prefer, allows you to gaze from eye to eye and onto their mouth, back up to their eyes and so on.
6. Be aware of your customer's requirement for territory. We are all animals deep down and don't ever lose our instincts. I once took my youngest son to a party at his friend's house. His friend's dad was a farmer and had lived on a farm all his life. I went to shake his hands and he stood a clear 5 feet away and

leant his body to shake hands. Immediately he'd finished, he leant back again. You see in the country, people respect the space around them, whereas in the city people are not too fussed about getting closer to you. Everyone has an intimate zone that you should never encroach unless you are their lover. Gauging the size of this zone is the trick.

7. Metaphors and comparisons. Instinctive rapport salespeople use these all the time to help the customer understand and relate to the service or product. Someone told me this one recently. ADSL or broadband internet connections are like TV. You only have to turn on the set and BBC1 or ITV is already there. And if you kept your TV switched on all the time, the BBC or ITV would never go away.
8. Real communicators tell stories. Customers want to hear stories if it helps them understand and relate to what you are saying. Talk to me and I hear, show me and I understand, tell me a story and I'll remember. Don't think adults don't like stories – they do. Children love them, of course, we all know that. Try and relate something you're saying into a story that illustrates your point beautifully. Become a master Rapport Seller©
9. When writing letters to your customer, write in a modern 21st century style. One of the best books on this subject, which I highly recommend is "Write Language" by the excellent Alan Pease. His main push is that we should develop a style of writing that matches the way we talk to people. Little things like writing hello instead of Dear and writing goodbye instead of yours sincerely, makes all the difference. After all when I say farewell to someone I never say "assuring you of my best attentions at all times, yours sincerely" Write me a letter and I'll return the letter in a style that might interest you.
10. Product knowledge is very important but these days customers are beginning to know as much if not more than us. Blame that on the internet. Naturally there are some exceptions. Learn your products, yes, but learn more about the customer's context. In other words study up on their market if they are a business. Find out as much as you can about their company, of course, but their industry. Discover their challenges and problems, read their trade journals, be aware of what their competition is doing. Add value to the sales interview, not just information about your product.