

## Analyze Customer Needs

Written by Steve Marr

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Most salespeople talk too much. They tend to launch into a sales pitch before understanding what the customer needs. King Solomon understood this when he wrote “To answer before listening-- that is folly and shame.” (Proverbs 18:13, NIV) Making your sales pitch before listening to the customer is the same kind of “folly.”

We need to keep in mind that for almost every product or service there are multiple reasons a customer may buy. When we start with the sales pitch, we may or may not hit the mark. A better tactic is to conduct a needs analysis. This is a process where the salesperson endeavors to understand what is important to the customer.

For example, I have an interest in a damage restoration business and I spend time visiting with insurance agents. I try to entice them to refer customers to our company when one of their clients experiences a house flood, kitchen fire, or some other destructive event. When meeting with an agent, I try to draw out what services the agent believes are important. I may ask directly what's most important or I may ask them to give me an example of when a restoration company did a good job. Then I follow up with this question: Can you tell me a time when a restoration company failed and what happened?

Agents will have different experiences and concerns. One agent was very unhappy because competitors on several occasions lost household contents while cleaning up after a fire. When the agent raised this issue, I responded with information about our process that includes cataloging, labeling, and securing a customer's property. It addressed the issues customers had raised.

Some agents find our ability to review work before they file and validate a claim is helpful. It avoids opening claims only to close them with zero payment. Others value the fast response we give and still others want frequent updates and close communication. Until you understand the needs of the customer, you are not able to respond to what a customer wants.

Also, in the rapport building stage, the more I listen; the more I learn. Does my contact like

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fishing, hunting, dirt biking, coaching soccer or reading? The more I understand about the customer the better and faster I can build bridges.

My experience is that when you listen before presenting your product or service, the prospect engages with you because he or she believes you may have something to offer them. They are not listening because they have nothing else to do.

In most industries the prospective buyer already knows quite a bit about what you're offering. Then, the key is to find out from the customer where others fell short or disappointed them. You learn this by listening, not by launching into a lecture.

Take time to understand the customer's unique problem or concern early. Then, propose an effective solution. Spend at least 70% of your time listening rather than talking. Follow this model and watch your sales increase.