

Changing the Language of Selling

By TONY ALESSANDRA and JIM CATHCART

There's more to the opposition of "traditional" and "progressive" sales than mere semantics. For instance, one approach is far more effective than the other.

Do you think it's true that a sales call by any other name would accomplish the same goals? We think not. Certainly every sales call has similarities to others, but the way the salesperson approaches the call distinguishes progressive sales from traditional sales.

Do you often hear traditional sales language being used, such as "the pitch," "the pre-approach," "closing" or "overcoming objections"? Do your trainers and salespeople revive these tired old bromides: "buyers are liars," "buyer's remorse," "call reluctance," "creating needs," "the half-nelson close," "the sharp-angle close," "the mother-in-law close," "the hat in hand close"? If this sounds uncomfortably familiar, perhaps you should revise your training programs and create a team of progressive salespeople.

Reexamine your training programs and materials. Where is the emphasis placed—on relationship building or closing techniques? Does information gathering receive more attention in the training process, or is the sales

presentation the center of attention?

Both schools of sales thought have four basic steps in the sales process: information gathering, proposal, confirmation and follow-through. Progressive sales emphasizes the information-gathering stage whereas traditional sales focuses on the sales close. In addition, there are differences in terms that each sales school uses. In traditional sales, the vernacular implies manipulation or superficiality (e.g., pre-approach, the pitch and closing). Progressive sales terms show concern, preparedness, cooperation and the intent to continue the relationship after the sale (e.g., planning, proposing, confirming and assuring).

The amount of time spent on each phase of the sale is represented in Figure 1 by the width of the area surrounding it. The traditional salesperson spends an inordinate amount of time trying to convince the client to buy. The progressive salesperson, however, takes more time to study the customer's problems and needs in order to be of service. Is it any wonder that progressive salespeople are more successful than their high-pressure, manipulative peers?

Information gathering

The information-gathering phase for the traditional salesper-

son is much less involved than for progressive salespeople. The traditional salesperson spends some time in small talk and then launches into a planned presentation regardless of what the client's needs are. The assumption that the client needs the product or service is not only ridiculous, but also insulting in many cases.

The progressive salesperson operates differently. He or she breaks the information-gathering process into three stages: planning, meeting and studying. These beginning steps plant the seeds from which a continual, mutual business relationship can grow.

Planning involves territory, time and account management, promotion, market planning and analysis, prospect planning and call preparation. All are necessary to entering the sales call with the air of confidence and knowledge that is crucial to the establishment of trust. Without planning, your call ratio will be much lower because you may be pursuing the wrong prospects.

The purpose of meeting with your client is to establish a rapport and begin a business friendship. Traditional salespeople, at best, establish only a casual acquaintance with their customers. The characteristics of these two approaches are compared in

Tony Alessandra is chairman and Jim Cathcart is president of Cathcart, Alessandra & Associates, La Jolla, California.

Table 1. The business friendship is a more valid relationship; there is flexibility, cooperation and trust. The casual acquaintance is a limited relationship; it fulfills the needs of only one person—the salesperson. Buyers today are less tolerant of the one-sided traditional sales approach.

The meeting phase is a time for the progressive salesperson to prove his or her credibility and sincere desire to be of service. To do so, the salesperson must convey the proper physical and verbal image. This leads to the development of trust and opportunities to gather more sensitive or less obvious information.

One of the major differences between traditional and progressive sales is the amount of study that takes place. The traditional salesperson spends little time studying. He or she assumes a need exists based on cursory external observations. The professional salesperson, however, is truly concerned with the prospect's situation and studies it exhaustively. This studying encompasses the prospect's personal style, business needs and objectives, financial status and so on. This is done by encouraging the prospect to become involved in the sales process. By asking open-ended questions and other probing methods, the salesperson invites the client to provide information that otherwise would remain unknown. In this way, the prospect is able to feel that the sale was a mutual agreement rather than a compromise due to a crafty salesperson.

The proposal

After meeting with the client and studying the problem, the progressive salesperson proposes a solution to the client's problem. Both traditional and progressive sales allocate approximately the same amount of time to the presentation. Beyond the time factor, however, the similarities between the two approaches disappear.

The traditional salesperson gives an identical presentation to all clients, regardless of their needs. The salesperson may use a canned presentation or some other inflexible technique in order to cover all the product's benefits. When all the benefits are recited by the salesperson in shotgun fashion, the presentation becomes ineffective and boring. The client tends to tune out irrelevant selling points and may even miss the relevant ones. The salesperson comes across as being totally insensitive to the client's needs.

The progressive sales approach is one in which the proposal is custom-tailored to the client's needs, personal style and situa-

tion. Benefits are discussed as they apply to specific problems. This allows the presentation to be more meaningful to the client because more time can be spent on pertinent details. Each sales proposal is different because no two clients' problems are alike.

The progressive sales proposal is more *know* than *show*. The salesperson knows what the client's needs are and seeks to satisfy them rather than putting on a show to dazzle and win the client over. This is not to say that showmanship is not appropriate to progressive sales. It is valuable; however, it is not the top priority. Showmanship in moderation and where appropriate can hold interest and create memorable presentations.

Figure 1.
Time Spent in the Selling Process

	Traditional Sales	Progressive Sales
Information Gathering	Small Talk	Plan Meet Study
Proposal	Pitch	Propose
Confirmation	Close Overcome Objections	Confirm
Follow-through	Resell	Assure Customer Satisfaction

Table 1.
Traditional vs. Progressive Sales Relationships

Casual Acquaintance	Business Friendship
Topics are social or general.	Business topics are appropriate.
Dialogue is limited.	Dialogue is open.
Little is known about each other.	Mutual professional respect is shown.
Attitude is often I win/you lose.	Attitude is I win/you win.
Personal courtesies are shown.	Professional courtesy is shown.
Additional meetings are not expected.	Follow-through is expected.
Interest is sporadic and spontaneous.	Interest is shown in needs and goals.
Meetings could last any length of time.	Meetings are usually brief and businesslike.
Meetings happen at any time.	Appointments are made.
Disagreements are a threat.	Disagreements are opportunities for mutual problem solving.

Confirming the sale

As is shown in Figure 1, the confirmation phase of the sale is inversely proportional to the amount of time spent in the information-gathering stage. In traditional sales, the majority of time is spent overcoming objections and trying to close the sale. The progressive salesperson, because he or she took an interest from the start, does not need to hustle for the close or spend much time gaining commitment.

The problem with traditional sales is that the information-gathering stage is put in the wrong place. The client's raising of objections is a source of information. If the salesperson had been concerned with the client's real needs, he or she would have uncovered those objections

earlier. It is unfortunate that the traditional salesperson believes that he or she can overcome objections with superficial, standard answers so late in the sales process. The popularity of this practice is evident in sales of the book *The Sale Begins When The Customer Says No!* This thinking makes it a challenge for salespeople to sell products to customers even if they don't want or need them. This sales approach can only raise tension between customer and salesperson—the opposite of what progressive salespeople seek.

The commitment in the progressive sales process occurs much more smoothly because agreement on the problem's solution has already been reached. There is no tension, and a trusting relationship exists. The sale does not have to be closed,

because the entire sales process was an open discussion every step of the way. The confirming of the sale becomes a question of "when" and not "if."

If objections occur when the sale is being confirmed, it simply means that there is a need for more information gathering or an elucidation of some details. This is not a problem in progressive sales because the salesperson is willing to spend time with the client until everything is understood.

Assuring customer satisfaction

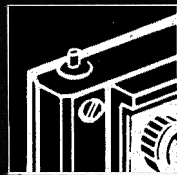
Another major difference between the two approaches to sales is the follow-through process. The progressive salesperson believes that the business relationship truly begins after the client says "yes." The salesper-

Safety Training From The Safety Professionals



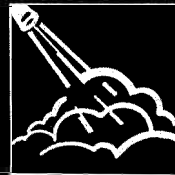
Accident Investigation Techniques

- The Investigative Process
- The Five Step Interviewing Method
- Key Points To Witness Interviewing
- Determination of Unsafe Conditions



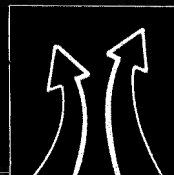
Photographic Techniques For Accident Investigations

- Selection of Camera
- Lense & Film Use
- Exposure Techniques
- Procedures for Documenting Exhibits
- Methods of Preserving Evidence



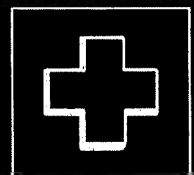
Low-Cost Fire Extinguisher Training

- Cost Effectiveness
- Choosing of Correct System for Environment
- Training of Employees in Equipment Usage



Industrial Ventilation: Basic Theory & Application

- Principals of Air Flow
- Air Flows Relation to Industrial Ventilation
- Ventilation Systems Design
- Systems and Their Relation to Dilution and Local Ventilation for Airborne Hazard Control



Instructional Techniques For Safety Training

- The Four Step Method
- The Lecture
- Group Discussion
- Visual Aids
- References for Additional Study

ASSE is currently offering five distinctive programs for safety training.

Each of the programs consists of 50 to 80 slides. A synchronous tape allows a thorough, yet concise examination of each topic. The presentations give a modern look at the fundamentals and techniques associated with each. They serve as excellent time savers for those instructing while also providing a refresher for experienced safety personnel. Designed as a common sense solution to the problems of management and personnel training, these programs are an asset to anyone who is building a safety program.

All five presentations include:

- A. Cued script for program leaders use
- B. Pulsed cassette tape - inaudible pulse side one; audible pulse side two
- C. Professional narration
- D. Slides
- E. Attractive storage binder

Price: \$110.00 per program, \$85.00 for ASSE members

For brochure and order information on the Safety Training Programs, please call or write:



American Society of Safety Engineers
ASSE Education Department
850 Busse Highway, Park Ridge, IL 60068
Phone (312) 692-4121

Circle No. 107 on Reader Service Card

son and the client have made a commitment to continue in a mutually beneficial relationship.

Naturally, all salespeople call on their accounts after they make the initial sale. Traditional salespeople, however, tend to minimize the concept of continuing service. They don't share responsibility for the success of the product or help the client track the results. The casual acquaintance with the client seems to fade so that the salesperson has to reestablish rapport when he or she wants to make more sales. The progressive salesperson never lets the relationship fade in the first place.

Progressive salespeople thrive on satisfied customers because they see them for what they are: assets. Assuring customer satisfaction after the sale means changing hats from salesperson to quality control person: making sure that the customer receives

The assumption that the client needs the product or service is not only ridiculous, but also insulting.

the proper order on the right delivery date, helping the client track results and analyze the effectiveness of the product for the problem(s) originally discussed. By assuring the satisfaction of each customer, the progressive salesperson builds a clientele that will guarantee future sales and new prospects for the prospect pipeline.

There is an old story of a man watching his son try to lift a

fallen tree from his bicycle. The boy struggled until the father asked, "Why can't you lift it, son?" The boy replied, "I'm using all my strength, but it won't move." His father then said wisely, "Son, you're not using all your strength. You haven't asked me to help."

Our strength lies not only within us, but also within all of those we care about and who care about us. Draw upon the strength of others and you multiply your own strength. Each of your clients multiplies your strength and sphere of influence. If you nurture your professional relationships, you will find they give back more than you ever contributed in time, effort and concern. This is the progressive way of selling.



NEM Quality Speaks for Itself.

NEM Means Quality Audio-Visual Training Worldwide.

For nearly 20 years, 20,000 clients in 110 countries have benefited from NEM's unique, concise style • 140 exciting programs • 16 complete courses in
• Management • Business • Sales • Courtesy • Foodservice • Hotels

NEM®
NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL MEDIA

SEND FOR A FREE CATALOG TODAY!

21601 Devonshire Street • Chatsworth, California 91311 U.S.A. • (213) 709-6009

Circle No. 138 on Reader Service Card