



## **Building lasting relationships**

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Being successful in sales doesn't just mean persuading new clients to use your company's products and services. Existing clients who are satisfied with the company's service are usually a bigger "advertisement" for the company than a new advertising campaign. For every one client lost by a business due to poor service, 10 new ones must be recruited because a dissatisfied client tells others about poor service, and those, in turn, tell others.

By being aware of which products sell well and ensuring they are never out of stock, by quickly and effectively resolving client complaints, by ensuring that sales personnel have superior product knowledge, and by paying specific attention to the telephone skills of client contact personnel, business owners can contribute significantly to sharpening customer service.

Over the past week, I have again become aware of how important it is to use the time that sales personnel are in direct contact with the client correctly and to the "future" benefit of the company.

Suppose a client has decided to visit your company to learn more about a specific product. There is already an expectation and positive attitude towards your company and/or products in the client's mind; otherwise, they would never have come in. How this attitude will be responded to is purely in the hands of the salesperson.

This is where product knowledge, friendliness, honesty, genuine interest in the client's need or problem, and persuasiveness by the salesperson will convince the client to support the company or not.

Aspects such as warranties and features of the product or service can play a role, but what the client wants to hear now is what specific benefits the product holds for him or her. The client must decide and will therefore weigh the benefits and drawbacks of the choices against each other.

If the client decides to purchase the product from your company, the sales process does not end there. The few minutes used to handle the transaction must be fully utilised.

The client is now positive towards the salesperson and the company. He or she is now satisfied with their purchase decision. Future bonds can be forged while the transaction goes through the cash register, invoice book, or credit card machine.

Perhaps this is also an opportunity to sell something else to the client. In English, they talk about "upselling"—selling something complementary to what the client has just

purchased. If the client has purchased a vacuum cleaner, perhaps carpet shampoo can be used with it.

It is also a good time during these last few minutes to find out if the client has supported the company before and if they were happy with the purchase, or if there are other products they might be interested in and if they are aware of the company's special offers.

Before clients leave the premises, they should be reminded of the company's warranty policy to ensure that they are completely satisfied and know that they can rely on the company if any problems arise.

As so often mentioned here, inadequate sales are one of the main reasons why businesses fail. Building a satisfied and happy client base should be the priority of every business!

*\*Prof Du Plessis was the Director of the NWU Business School from 2003 to 2017.*

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