

What is a True Relationship in Sales

I have read a lot of blogs, forum pieces, and articles covering sales that all seem to say the same thing hogwash on relationship driven sales efforts. It also appears that these pieces of paper all assume one thing and that is the sales person is only relying on the relationship to receive the sale. If that is their belief then I hope they are my competition. They will lose the sale to me.

There is more to the sale than maintaining a relationship it is a portion of the overall sales effort. It is not a singular effort and it is more than hey buddy, authorize here and we can get started. It is not about getting a date for Saturday night; my wife would not appreciate that kind of thing nor is it about being a best bud sharing pictures and a drink talking about the good ole days. Get this there is leg work that must be accompanied and accomplished. What makes this an interesting story the home owner is a well know highly respected sales advocate that has a very different approach to helping clients move into a sale.

I read a blog from her about a plumber who told the customer; hey I have an idea why don't you get another plumber. The plumber lost interest in helping the client and fired the client with neither the customer nor client understanding one another. Often companies fire a client without understanding the client's frustration. This happens when neither the client nor the company understands relationship driven efforts.

I was not involved in this specific call nor do I have all the formation however it is easily determined how things went down with the information given. Here it is; Customer has a green second home a summer home, a second home to escape and enjoy the simple freedoms of being human. Customer talks to a Good Samaritan neighbor that offers to get the home ready for her arrival. The neighbor made some mistakes that caused plumbing issues one of which burned out a water cooled pump that supplies the unit with rain water from a barrel or aerator tank. The receptor is not relevant at this time. The issue is no water to use the plumbing appliances in the home.

Next is a phone call to a plumbing company. The frustration of having the neighbor do the work is passed onto the plumbing company. Of course the caller is upset and frustrated that she cannot use her second home. It was a planned get away to relax and enjoy the simple life. The anger the customer has with their neighbor is passed onto the plumbing company. The plumbing company automatically feels this is a case where the home owner tried to get away as cheap as she could by allowing the neighbor to do plumbing work that he is trained, licensed and insured to perform legally by the government. There is

no respect of the trade by the home owner and that is proven by the fact that a neighbor who was not qualified to do the work was allowed to perform the work and now the expectation is to get here and fix this mess as soon as possible.

To me the customer's action and reaction is not out of line and in many ways expected. There are plenty of reasons that a customer act this way towards the plumbing industry or any service industry trade one of which is my profession has allowed over time this type of thinking to perpetuate our industry. We have allowed others outside our industry to perform simple tasks especially when the economy was booming and the smaller jobs were neglected and given to those who think they are handy. When the economy was booming the jobs were given to the companies simply because they would show up and could do the job. Today the economy is different and that means the industry must approach each potential client differently.

With the little information given it appears that the customer did not do their homework. The homework is simple to complete such as is this a one man shop? Can a guaranteed time for arrival be assured? What obstacles will prevent the arrival time? Who do my neighbors use and why do they use the company? The worst mistake is thinking that the plumber is just a plumber and any idiot can perform these duties. We already discovered that is not the case. No respect given and none taken by the plumber.

The plumber forgot to ask questions to determine the urgency and level of pain. Business to consumer is different and the plumber did not explain to the customer how they operate and what the potential client can expect. They overpromised and under delivered. This built to more frustration than what each party was experiencing. During the original conversation the plumber discovered his profession was not respected and he automatically had that burning in the back of his mind with his urgency to arrive and do the job. This is a common mistake that companies make thinking that the company is more important than the client. This however does not mean to take a back seat or become a doormat to any customer.

The phone call booking the call was not properly handled. The phone call into the company determines how the customer will react. Imagine a different approach with the phone call. Listening to the client on the phone and taking notes will assure the client that you are there to help and solve the issues. When the client is done it is time to ask their name, address, and contact information. Once this information is given asking the customer how they heard about you is the next step. Once this information is gathered another question should follow. If it is a referral ask the referral source's name and then ask what did he

or she tell the customer. If it is the web site ask what part of the web site influenced her to call. This informs the company to what is important to the customer. Once it is determined whether the customer is new or existing customer information explaining how the company operates is next. All of this is asking and receiving cooperation from the customer and the customer receiving cooperation from you the company. This will give the customer relief that you are there to help them solve this issue that is larger than it should be and that it will be taken care of shortly. Next, to confirm the notes taken about the customers issues allowing the customer to know and understand that the company understand the issues. This is part of building a relationship with the client. Calling the client and keeping her informed to the progress of the day and arrival time is necessary to keep the promises of the company.

If the above was covered and followed chances are greatly increased the job and tasks would have been completed to satisfaction of the client. The steps outlined above are intended to secure the relationship that is strictly a professional relationship and garners respect between the client and company.

Once the service technician arrives the relationship takes a different shape. The first thing that will happen with the client is the decision to listen to you, have you do the work because you are there or send you away. This is determined by emotion by the client based on appearance, attitude and a belief on the client's part that you can help him or her.

Where I stand out from others in my industry are the questions I ask at this time. Our initial communication will consist of the knowledge that has been passed from the client to our office staff. I must confirm with the home owner that the information that I have is correct. Both the client and I will take a look at the problems and confirm in the clients mind that I can fix that or I can take care of that. I may even compliment the home owner for having the neighbor try to help and taking a positive initiative to get the home ready. Nothing is for certain or taken for granted concerning the communication efforts until more information is gathered.

While I am gaining the information I already know and understand I am receiving more information. The information I want to know is how often you visit the second home. Do you shut down the home during the away times and how do you open the home when you visit. During this information gathering time the vast majority of times the home owner divulges more information about themselves. Frequently it is personal information concerning their lives creating more trust and respect between the homeowner and me. I am also discovering what their perceived value is.

I am willing to bet the homeowner would love to have knowledge about a safety device that would stop the pump from burning out when there is no water. A question I must ask is has this ever happened to you before and what did you do to fix the problem. I could be like the rest in my industry and price a new pump, install it and leave collecting my money while brushing the dirt off my hands while putting their money in my pocket. Wouldn't this have been nice to have on the old pump now?

Understanding the water collector receptor is filled with rain water wouldn't it be nice to have a program that allows me to come out before your arrival and turn the fixtures on and give your home an inspection to insure in all likelihood that will prevent premature fixture failure. Wouldn't you like to have a full receptor when you arrive? Would that kind of program interest you? Asking questions gives me insight to how receptive you would be towards these kinds of issues. Building a relationship that helps you that help me at the same time. Surprise we are not asking for a date night however I am asking for a specific date to make sure you will have a very enjoyable time when you are staying at your second home.

Strictly having a business relationship allows you to maintain the status quo of service and quality. You have a problem get it fixed and wait till the next problem arises before addressing the problem. However having prior knowledge of any issue that can arise in the next 12 months is to your benefit and taking care of it today is my concern. Without knowing, understanding and caring about my client I cannot serve you as best as you deserve. Without a relationship the above cannot be attained. With that being said isn't it better to work with someone you like, trust and respect? If I do not like you I am not going to allow you to enter my inner circle.

Please keep in mind when people in sales talk about sales being a relationship driven occupation it is only a portion of what is given to a client. It is apparent to discredit the relationship aspect in sales often the ones who try to riddle the fallacies throw the ridiculous into the equation and do not fully understand what a true business relationship is and how to develop the relationship. Imagine if the person in the story above had a relationship with a plumbing company the ease of satisfaction would have quadrupled and she would have known who to call, that is working safely, and that it is working properly.

Sure a relationship will not override a decision when a company is merging with another company. Depending on which company is taking determines who is still buying and who is no longer buying. Typically the company that is being taken over prohibits purchases until after the takeover. However having a solid relationship with said company chances are increased to be given information that a takeover is in the works and guide you to the proper decision maker.

Start today developing a solid foundation and relationship with your clients and vendors that has trust, respect, and holds redeeming value to both parties.