

# IDEAS

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THE TECH BEAT | BY JAMES HARDING

## PRACTICE MAKES PROFESSIONAL

“Allow myself to introduce ... myself” has always been one of my favorite Austin Powers quotes.

Who among us hasn't at least once stammered, stuttered or sputtered out a mangled greeting because we were caught off-guard on the sales floor? It's a common enough problem, but it can be fatal to closing a sale — especially if it happens at a critical moment. Luckily, it's easily avoidable. All we have to do is practice.

A recent retail study by DiscoverOrg found that 40% of today's retail shoppers look for sales professionals who will listen to their needs and help them find a customized solution, while 30% look for sales professionals who will challenge their expectations and help them find solutions they may not even know about. The final 30% prefer salespeople who build a relationship with the client that promises to go beyond the date of purchase. In other words, a friendly, sincere sales professional who listens to his or her clients' needs, offers a variety of solutions (including those that challenge the clients' assumptions) and works to develop a long-term relationship with his or her clients will win the sale almost every time.



**One simple way to improve your sales performance is by recording yourself**

Are you a friendly, sincere sales professional? Do you want to make more money? If so, here are a few basic ways you can dramatically improve your clients' perception of you and help you secure more sales:

**Record Yourself.** Do you say “um” all the time? Do you use “retail swear words” like “cheap,” “guys” or “dude” often? You simply can't tell how your presentation looks from within. When you watch yourself, you'll find all kinds of

things you can do to improve — from using different vocabulary to assuming a better posture. Sports professionals have done this for years because they know the human brain can only process so many stimuli at once. Recording yourself allows you to go back and critique the things you weren't able to think about “in the moment.”

**Use Prescribing.** Whether I am recording a video voiceover, updating a phone greeting or responding to an online shopper, I often use prescribing. Taking the time in advance to write out “perfect” responses to common questions helps me have the ideal vocabulary at my immediate disposal when I need it most. I never want to feel like kicking myself after a client interaction because I missed a critical discussion point.

Why not take the time to write up answers to common objections, offerings that add value to your sale price and even some basic product comparisons that you can refer to in an instant?

**Create Role Play Exercises.** You can read every study, watch every training video and even memorize every manual, but none of that will adequately prepare you for “show time.” Don't get me wrong, it's important to have a large “box” of

retail “tools” at your disposal, but in the heat of the moment, you have to ask the right questions and make sure your clients feel like you are listening to their needs.

You have to lead your clients to the best products and demonstrate how buying these products from you will enhance their lives. It's a lot to think about, and there is only one way you can get good at it: Practice with another sales professional. Ask your boss or another member of your sales team to role play sales scenarios with you. One of you can be a parent with two kids looking for a starter instrument. One can be an experienced musician looking for a step-up. Learn how quickly you can identify your “clients” needs and find meaningful solutions that will compel them to buy from you. The more you do this, the more impressive your suggestions will appear on the sales floor.

As retail sales professionals, we know we can't afford to waste leads. Even if we have to step outside our comfort zone and humbly ask for critique, we can't expect to increase sales or improve client satisfaction without practice. Anybody can “clerk” a deal. Practice makes us professional. **MI**

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