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### Develop a strong value proposition statement: Make every contact count

To sell effectively, you must first establish and demonstrate value. Only then should you begin delineating features and benefits of your product and/or service. Traditionally, sales and marketing practices focused solely on their features and benefits. Organizations and their account executives heavily promoted attributes without first questioning and qualifying.

Features and benefits are, and will continue to be an important part of the selling process; they are the "bread and butter" of what sells. However, to succeed in today's challenging marketplace, organizations realize that their corporate sales philosophy requires a significant culture-changing shift. Instead of focusing on and being satisfied with the sales closed today, they realize that planting the seeds for future sales is essential for long-term success. These future sales are greatly dependent on strong customer loyalty. To develop solid loyalty, sales professionals must be sure to develop effective customer relationships. This is based upon more than just the product or service; it ties into effective communication. Your customers want to know that you understand their needs and how to custom tailor the features and benefits into a business solution that targets their particular needs.

All too often both sales professionals, as well as small business owners wearing the hat of a sales professional, inundate the prospect with the features and benefits of their product and/or service before asking qualifying questions. As a result, they come across as foolish, aggressive, uninformed and unprofessional.

Customers insist on, and deserve, professionalism and expertise. Not only must your product work for them, they need to feel that you understand how it will specifically translate into business value for them. Understanding their needs and how your product or service fits will create a strong differentiation between you and your competition. To determine this and be able to provide convincing advice, you need to take the time to understand your prospective customer.

Providing solutions is key to selling a product or service. Business people today are more demanding. They can easily access information and educate themselves. Sometimes, so much information about so many products and services is available; it takes a concerted effort to differentiate your product and service. Selling actually requires the added element of explaining how benefits and features provide solutions and meet your customers' needs. By asking carefully structured questions and listening to the responses, you will be better able to explain exactly product or service will what value your service will provide.

To sell effectively, show the real value first, and then delineate the features and benefits. Talk about how your customers' needs will be met and how what you are offering is unique. Use value driven words to begin statements. Words such as increase, avoid, reduce, strengthen, and enhance. The words you use must capture the attention of your prospects and inspire them to take action. This should be underscored in all of your ongoing communications, whether face-to-face, by phone, letter, e-mail or voicemail.

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