

SALES

In Case You Haven't Heard...We're *All* in SALES

by Carol Hartman, M.B.A.

In today's highly competitive business climate, our success often depends on our ability to *sell* our thoughts, ideas, products, and services. So, like it or not, since we are *all* in sales, we could all benefit from learning good professional sales skills. To accept this reality, some of us may have to get beyond the feeling that "salespeople" reside somewhere below thieves and murderers on the business food chain. The rest of us already recognize that the sales process has improved dramatically in the last decade. Indeed, with its consultative or relationship-based approach, selling has finally earned a position of respect in the business world today.

What constitutes a good consultative salesperson? Foremost sales training programs describe consultative salespeople as individuals who focus on their customers. When they go to work, they leave their egos at home. They take the time to understand their customers' overall wants and needs, then recommend solutions that best fit those needs. They keep in touch with their customers to build trust-oriented, long-term relationships. And most importantly, they *listen attentively* to what their customers tell them.

Want to improve your consultative selling skills? You can start immediately by becoming a "power listener." Here are some hints to help you do just that:

- Learn to hear more than the words being spoken—understand the motivation behind the words.
- Concentrate on verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Always seek to understand your customer's viewpoint.
- Avoid making assumptions or jumping to conclusions.
- Avoid being distracted by thinking about what you are going to say next.
- Take notes to capture what you are hearing and to keep your own thoughts on track.
- Strive for clarity by encouraging your customer to tell you more.
- Summarize and paraphrase back what your customer has said to be sure that you thoroughly understand.

I once heard this analogy: "Excellent listening requires the attitude and perseverance of one helping a young child learn to walk. It often requires encouragement, patience and a helping hand." For those of you who are parents, I'm sure you can recall that the experience was quite enjoyable and a rewarding use of your time.



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