

The “Odds Are” Factor

Carew International



Initiating the Customer–Sales Professional Relationship

In order to successfully initiate the customer-sales professional relationship, a very important phenomenon must be taken into consideration, which we refer to as the “Odds Are” Factor.

As a result of surveying over 30,000 sales professionals from a wide range of business disciplines and cultural influences, we have determined that the “Odds Are” 2 to 1 that salespeople will tend to experience a customer’s message in terms of how that message impacts themselves (salespeople), rather than in terms of how that message is perceived by the sender (customer). In other words, the **“Odds Are” 2 to 1 that at any given point in time, the salesperson’s perceptual orientation is inwardly focused, and the information he or she experiences will be received in terms of how that information impacts oneself and one’s own world** (see Figure A).

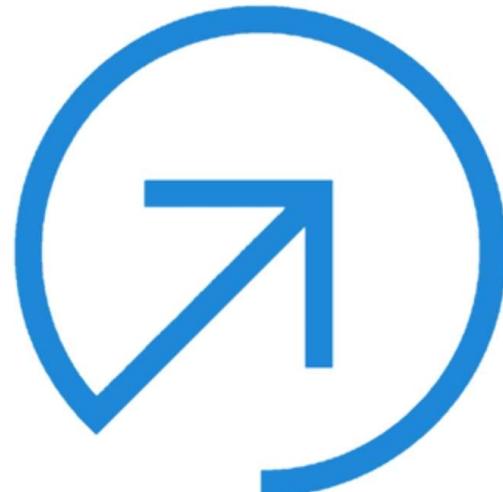
Figure A.

Sales professionals, like all people, have a tendency to filter the customer’s messages through their own psychological reality or “Odds Are” and experience the customer’s messages in terms of how the message impacts **their** goals and needs in the relationship, not the customer’s.

This being the case, the salesperson might just as well say, “How will what the customer is saying affect me?”

Self-Centered Reaction vs Other-Centered Response

Regrettably, this preoccupation with one’s own goals and needs severely limits the salesperson’s ability to experience the customer’s needs, concerns, or problems from the customer’s point-of-view. It triggers another negative, no-win transaction that can have a damaging effect on the relationship. This negative transaction suggests that if the salesperson is so consumed with his or her own reality, or “Odds Are,” or what’s important to the salesperson versus what’s important to the customer, then the “Odds Are,” 2 to 1 that the salesperson’s first behavioral activity will be a self-centered reaction versus an other-centered response (see Figure B).



“Odds Are” 2 to 1
That at any given point in time –
A salesperson’s perception is
Inwardly focused.

Figure B.
“Odds Are” 2 to 1

Self-Centered Reaction

VS

Other-Centered Response

Oftentimes, this insensitivity and lack of understanding for the customer's concerns and problems can be perceived by the customer as a self-centered reaction on the part of the sales professional. In short, this can be perceived as judgmental and/or hostile.

Self-Centered Reactions

Judgmental

Judgmental behavior represents a self-centered reaction to the customer's objection or concern. It manifests itself as insisting, telling, dictating, and directing. It is expressing an opinion, or proposing an answer without all of the facts. Judgmental behavior reflects preoccupation with one's own "Odds Are" and causes the customer to feel ignored and uninvolved.

Examples of judgmental behavior might include:

- **Discounting the validity of the customer's problem because you doubt his or her knowledge of the situation.**
- **Prematurely building a reply before hearing the customer's message in its entirety.**
- **Proposing a solution without understanding the problem.**

ownership in the recommendation and may not be committed to making the solution work.

Another form of judgmental behavior is the leading statement. Leading statements can be disguised as questions and can cause the customer to feel pinned down and trapped. This absence of forthright, clear communication could give the customer feelings of being manipulated. Once this feeling sets in, the transaction deteriorates rapidly.

Some examples might include:

- **I am sure you will agree that our program is superior.**
- **Wouldn't you agree that this idea has solved the problem?**

Hostility

Hostility is a behavior that reflects a degree of impatience and antagonism and may be reflected in overt irritation, anger, or passive-aggressive behaviors.

Hostility can be manifested by speaking in a raised, escalating tone; accusing, blaming, or insinuating; using sarcasm, demeaning criticism, or a vehement expounding of one's concerns and feelings.

Although this kind of behavior might be well intentioned, it could result in the salesperson giving erroneous counsel to the customer in terms of responding to the customer's needs and solving the problem. If the salesperson who is giving advice does not truly understand the problem, the advice given could be inaccurate and may not assist in solving the problem.

In addition, judgmental behavior tends to make the customer feel parented or told what to do. As a result, the customer does not have a very active role in sorting out the problem and coming up with the solution. Thus, the customer has little

Examples of these forms of hostility might include:

- **It seems as though you have closed off any other possibilities!**
- **It looks like you have already made up your mind.**
- **Don't blame me for the problem. I had nothing to do with it.**

Hostile behaviors tend to threaten and/or, turn the customer off, and inhibit the customer's need for self-expression. The customer may feel affronted by these forms of hostility and may be reluctant to continue communicating. Hostility in the forms mentioned above may evoke feelings of defensiveness, confusion, and anger.

Another form of hostility is manifested through punitive and persistent probing. Persistent probing takes place when the salesperson asks questions without pausing to listen to what the customer is saying and by neglecting to let the customer know that he or she has been accurately heard.

Persistent probing, without feedback to the customer on what has been heard previously, can be experienced as interrogating and perceived as presumptuous. It also can make the customer act defensively with a lack of trust, because the customer has shared substantial amounts of information and has received nothing in return. As a result of this imbalance, the customer feels vulnerable, withholds further information, and responds in ways to protect himself or herself.

Punitive probing is another form of hostility, because it confronts the customer and challenges his or her rationale behind a question or a decision.

Together, judgmental and hostile behaviors are reflections of the salesperson's preoccupation with his or her own "Odds Are," rather than the customer's "Odds Are."

These behaviors are external manifestations of the salesperson's uncertainty, insecurity, anger, and impatience. Although these reactions are a natural extension of the salesperson's feelings, they do not favorably affect the relationship. They have a tendency to short-circuit the transaction and reduce the exchange to a confrontation rather than a helpful exchange. Instead of solving problems, problems in the relationship are created.

Problem Solving through Creativity

The core activity in professional selling is the identification of customer problems and the presentation of solutions in a helpful way.

Problem: A problem, by definition, is the **GAP** that exists between **ideal and actual**, what "should be", versus "what is." In the case of the customer-sales professional relationship, a problem is the GAP that exists between what the customer should be experiencing in terms of need satisfaction versus current results.

Creativity: Creativity, by definition, is coming up with whatever it takes to close the **GAP** and solve

Some examples might include:

- **Are you suggesting that my organization does not have the ability to perform?**
- **Are you questioning our integrity as it relates to delivering what we promise?**

Punitive probing is an aggressive, self-centered behavior that turns off customers. By pinning down the customer in an offensive manner, it is very likely that the quality of the transaction will break down rapidly.

problems. In the case of the customer-sales professional relationship, creativity represents whatever plan, program, new idea, or activity the sales professional employs that will substantially close the GAP.

In the customer-sales professional relationship, it is the sales professional's responsibilities to get into the customer's "Odds Are," identify problems, and generate solutions that will substantially close the GAP.

The degree of perceptual clarity with which the salesperson receives the customer's message and perceives the customer's problem is in direct

proportion to how productive the salesperson will be in terms of solving problems.

Regrettably, the “Odds Are” 2 to 1 that the salesperson’s orientation will be inwardly focused. As a result, the “Odds Are” 2 to 1 that the salesperson’s initial behavioral activity will be a self-centered reaction versus another-centered response. These self-centered reactions are oftentimes expressed in the hostile and judgmental behaviors already discussed and do not result in the solution of the problem.

Selective Perception

If the salesperson is severely immersed in selective perception, or is seeing or experiencing what is happening entirely in terms of **how what is happening affects oneself**, then perceptual accuracy of the customer’s problem will be severely distorted. This incomplete and inaccurate understanding of the problem will limit the salesperson’s creative ability to generate a plan or solution that will solve the problem (see Figure C).

Objective Perception

Objective perception is the salesperson seeing or experiencing what is happening not only in terms of how it affects himself or herself but also **how it affects the customer**. If the salesperson is able to reduce his or her “Odds Are” and get in touch with the customer’s “Odds Are” through objective

Figure C.

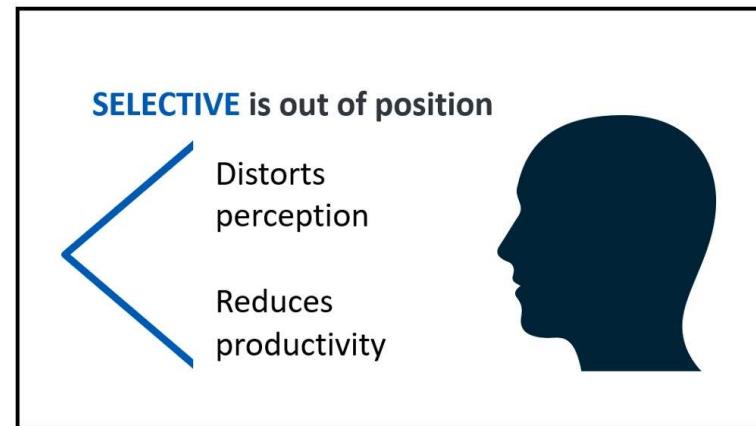


Figure D.



perception, then the degree of perceptual accuracy will be greater. There will be a greater opportunity to develop and present solutions that respond to the customer's needs and concerns.

 Productivity

The degree of accuracy with which the salesperson perceives the customer's problem will depend upon how well the salesperson is able to detach him or herself from the consequences of what is being said (see Figure D).

Overcoming the tendency to be in your own “Odds Are”

Oftentimes, it is very difficult for salespeople to avoid being hooked into their “Odds Are” and respond to customers in a caring and helpful way. This is especially true when the customer, for any number of reasons, confronts the salesperson with hostile and judgmental behavior.

Even though the sales professional cannot always control how his or her feelings are being affected, he or she does have the ability to decide how to act.

Recognizing the existence and consequences of the “Odds Are” factor is the first step toward changing it. This allows the sales professional to consciously alter his or her thought process, and to think in terms of the customer’s concerns.

The second step in overcoming the “Odds Are” factor is assuming the leadership role in the exchange by demonstrating empathy, which is actively reaching out in an attempt to understand the customer and their concerns.

In assuming an empathic role through the pro-growth behaviors of listening, acknowledging, exploring, and responding, instead of resorting to

Notes:

hostile and judgmental behaviors; the sales professional is modeling the behaviors he or she hopes the customer will eventually employ.

If the sales professional chooses to make this kind of investment in the relationship, then the focus of the interaction moves from being salesperson-focused to customer-focused.

Notes:

