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Understand the Ten Truths About SOB's!

Let's Start With Straight Talk

This is an information-packed, high-impact chapter. If you haven't yet gotten the pen or highlighter I recommended earlier, get it now. You're going to need it, and you'll be darned glad you got it. Even the toughest customers need the products and services you offer. Someone will sell them. That someone can be you if you can develop a handful of skills and courageously apply them at the right time. I once had an SOB say right after I had introduced myself, "You remind me of the last guy who sold me a car . . . only you're not buried in my backyard." Not all difficult customers are this obnoxious, but the more you understand about them and how to prevent them in the first place the faster and more profitably you'll sell them. Following are 10

truths about SOBs that will help provide the perspective we'll build on throughout the rest of the book.

The Ten Truths

1. Don't judge a customer as "difficult" too quickly based on the first few minutes of your sales encounter. Prospects often put up a tough front early on as a defense mechanism. This can change quickly once they surmise that you are a professional who cares about them and their needs.

2. Understand the three top concerns of difficult customers. While SOBs have many concerns, the top three can be summed up as: Will you waste my time? Do you know what you're doing (are you a professional)? Can I trust you?

3. When you encounter an SOB and he or she says or does something provocative, respond to the customer; don't react to him or her. In other words, slow the SOB down before things spiral out of control. When a customer says something provocative, abusive, sarcastic, and so on, don't take it personally. More than likely it is the buying process itself; it's the thought of spending money or past unpleasant sales experiences the customer is attacking and not you. Here are three tips to help you pull this off:

A. To slow down the momentum an offensive customer gains against you, increase the space between stimulus and response. This is a classic technique and Stephen Covey communication tip that works wonders for maintaining composure and regaining control of potentially volatile or awkward situations. Don't be too quick to answer a provocative, offensive, or sarcastic statement. By increas-

ing the space between a customer's comment and your reply you gain stronger control over your emotions, have a moment to think more clearly about your reply, and increase the integrity of your answer by giving it the appearance of being more thoughtful.

B. To slow the customer down, reply with a question rather than with an answer. This will oftentimes reveal the core issue and soften the customer's next reply. Be sure to diagnose carefully before offering reckless solutions or responding haphazardly with a confrontational tone. Sell with questions, not just answers.

C. Go low and slow with your tone and speech. Drop the tone of your voice a notch and speak more deliberately. This technique settles you down, takes control of the conversation, and reassures the customer as well. This is a strategy that also works well when closing "normal" customers.

4. Listen with the intent to understand the customer, not to reply to or one-up the customer. This is another tried and true Covey strategy. Until you give customers "air" and let them express themselves, they will not be open to what you have to say. This is especially true if they are the Type-A personalities with chips on their shoulders. Customers don't buy when they understand; they buy when they feel understood.

Take a look at the following sample script and learn what to do as well as what not to do when responding to an SOB's provocative statement:

CUSTOMER: "The price you're asking is absolutely ridiculous!"

INEFFECTIVE REPLY, normally spoken defensively and

quickly: “I don’t set the prices. This is what our product is bringing. But we’ll make you a good deal on it.”

EFFECTIVE REPLY, spoken slowly and sincerely: “When you say the price is too high, Mr. Prospect, could you tell me too high as compared to what?”

(This reply slows down the customer and puts you in control by asking a question. It will also help surface the obstacle more precisely.)

CUSTOMER: “Too high compared to what XXX Competitor was selling theirs for across town.”

INEFFECTIVE REPLY: “Well, I guess they know what their product is worth. Their lower price is probably an indication that you’re not going to get very good service after the sale.”

EFFECTIVE REPLY: “I’d be very surprised if someone would beat us on price if their product was exactly the same as ours. Could we take a minute to review the features to be sure we’re comparing apples to apples? Did they by chance give you their price in writing with a features list so we can compare?”

This slows the customer down even more and leads to an opportunity to raise doubt about the deal he or she was getting elsewhere and to build value in your product and in your professionalism since you haven’t had to disparage your competitor or their product. This professional and thoughtful approach will earn the respect of SOBs and normal folks alike.

5. Never say “no” to an SOB. “No” is a fighting word and can be avoided with some practice and skill. The following script will teach you how to say “no” without say-

ing those exact words by offering a way to meet the customer's demands and putting the ball back in his or her court. We'll use an example I'm quite familiar with: selling a car where the customer wants an unrealistic payment. You can apply this same technique to other products and services as well.

CUSTOMER: "I can pay you \$350 per month and no more."

INEFFECTIVE REPLY: "There's no way we can get to that payment on this product. We'll need to look at something cheaper."

EFFECTIVE REPLY: "Mr. Customer, we can reach your payment of \$350 per month as long as you can put \$2,500 down, would be willing to lease rather than purchase the product, would agree to payment terms of 72 months," and so on.

You can always use the "takeaway" technique used in the first response as a last resort, but try to sell difficult customers what they want. Even if they can't meet the terms they will appreciate the fact that you showed them a way they could own it if they wanted to.

If you're selling radio advertising, the conversation should sound something like this:

CUSTOMER: "I don't want to pay \$125 per spot. I only want to pay \$95 per spot."

INEFFECTIVE REPLY: "Mr. Customer, there are radio stations out there with less market share where I'm sure you can get the \$95 per spot, but it's not going to happen on our station."

EFFECTIVE REPLY: "Mr. Customer, the great thing about

our pricing is that you get to vote your own discount based on the quantity of spots you purchase. If you want to pay \$95 per spot, you can get that price by switching to this package right here.”

You can use this “vote your own discount” technique whenever you’re selling a product or service that offers a quantity discount.

6. Let the SOB take a bow. Throughout the sales process, acknowledge your customer’s expertise and great negotiating skills. Don’t be one of those sissified sales wieners who runs the other way when a prospect looks intimidating because he or she comes to your place of business with a clipboard full of notes and printouts from *Consumer Reports*. Use sales skill and sound psychology: *The best way to knock a chip off someone’s shoulder is to let him or her take a bow.* Put your ego aside and tell the SOB, “You’ve really done your homework. That actually makes my job easier because it’s always more pleasant to deal with an educated customer.” You can also penetrate an SOB’s know-it-all demeanor with this humble, but effective phrase: “I wouldn’t be at all surprised if you know more about this product than I do! We’re always looking to hire great people if you ever decide to switch careers.”

You have to admit that it’s hard to be tough on someone who pays you a sincere compliment. Use this law of human nature to your advantage when taking the fight out of an SOB.

7. Choose your battles carefully. Don’t get bogged down in trivial battles with a tough customer just to feed your own ego. Remember, you can win the battle and still lose the war when the customer decides not to buy what

you're selling. It doesn't make much sense to be right and broke! Remember what author and motivator Jim Rohn said, "Don't major in minor things."

8. Remember, difficult customers want to be followed up with if they don't buy from you the first time around. This one takes discipline because your first inclination after an SOB encounter where you don't sell the prospect may be that of "good riddance!" But here's where you must leave your ego behind once again and turn pro in sales by disciplining yourself to call back the customer and make another run at closing the sale.

Tough, hard-to-please customers normally know they are unpleasant to deal with and will respond favorably to a salesperson who calls them back quickly to work for their business if they missed it the first time around. It also shows you aren't intimidated by them and this will place you in a better negotiating position the next time you try to close the sale.

This question often arises: How soon should I call the prospects back if they don't buy from me the first time I visit with them? My answer may make you uncomfortable: the same day or the next morning, depending on what time of the day you had them as your customer. This may sound like a pushy way to sell, but that is only the case if you don't use the proper strategy when calling the customer. After all, the difference between pressure and persistence is technique. Read the following script and ask yourself if you'd be more likely to be offended or impressed if a salesman who was trying to sell you called and said these words.

SALESPERSON: "Mr. Prospect, this is Dave Anderson at Golden Rules Jewelry, and I wanted to call you and thank you for the time you spent with me today. I know

that many times after customers leave me questions pop into their minds that they wish they'd asked when I was with them, so I wanted to follow up to see if any questions or concerns arose for you that I could address at this time?"

At this point, the SOB oftentimes gives you his or her real objection for not buying. After all, it's easier to divulge this information when he or she is not standing in front of you. Quite often these customers do have questions they forgot to ask or wished they had clarified when they were dealing with you, and this gives you a chance to answer them and move them closer to the sale. In the event the prospect responds to you with, "No, I don't have any questions. You did a good job; we're just not ready to buy yet," you can counter with:

SALESPERSON: "Mr. Prospect, I can certainly understand the challenge in trying to find the perfect time to buy. But if there was one thing holding you back from moving forward and getting involved with our product, what is it?"

At this stage you have nothing to lose and have just given the SOB a chance to give you something to work with: a concern or objection, which when handled properly moves you closer to the sale.

I don't know how it works in all businesses, but in the automotive retail business, the closing ratio for a customer you get back in the door the second time goes from around 12% when he or she first walked into the dealership to 66% when he or she comes back.

Incidentally, if this approach fails to move you closer to the sale, you're still not done. Wait until you have new in-

formation (an upcoming sale, a change in financing terms, a special incentive that's ready to disappear, new inventory that just arrived, etc.) and then call the customer back to share it with him or her and try to schedule the second appointment.

9. SOBs don't like to be rushed. So you can forget about skipping any of your sales steps! Because SOBs can seem in a hurry, it's often tempting to skip or shortcut part of the sales process: taking time to build rapport, asking enough questions to diagnose their wants and needs, spending enough time during the presentation and demonstration focusing on the aspects of your product that mean the most to them, and so on. Warning: If you get in a hurry to close the deal and start skipping steps to the sale you are committing sales suicide! Just as with normal customers, the more time you spend on the steps leading to the close, the less time you actually have to spend closing the deal with SOBs. But the reverse is also true: The less time you spend on the steps to the sale, the *more time* it takes to close the deal because the prospect isn't sold on you, the product, or your company and isn't adequately motivated to make the purchase.

Following the sales steps means . . . :

A. You must develop the discipline to do the right thing day in and day out. This means you follow the steps whether you feel like it or not—on the good days and the bad days, when you're on a roll, in a rut, or somewhere in between. Developing discipline means you do the *right thing* not the easy thing.

B. You spend enough time uncovering wants and needs so that you match the prospects with the product or service that works best for them. Re-

member: Diagnose before you prescribe! Your closing efforts are wasted when you try to close the deal on the wrong product or service. Your only closing tool at this stage is to drop your price—not the position you want to be in when trying to close the deal with an SOB. Remember, sell the customer what best fits his or her needs—not what you like or want to sell. It's not about you! It's about the customer!

C. You treat everyone in the buying party with respect and you do not prequalify your customers. Prequalifying means you try and guess who is serious about buying or who can afford your product based on the way they are dressed, what they drive, and the like. In short, prequalifying is for fools! You're not good enough at this profession to guess who can and cannot afford your product or who is a serious buyer—no one is! You'll be wrong far more often than you're right. Prequalifying is a form of arrogance. It's also a form of laziness because you try to find a reason *not* to do your job and spend adequate time with the prospect. To make matters worse, you can transform a nice, normal prospect into an SOB when he or she feels you're prequalifying him or her. Needless to say, if you get in the habit of prequalifying, you'll find yourself with fewer chances to close the deal because you'll never get far enough to make it happen. Treat people like buyers until they prove they aren't. Many of them will pleasantly surprise you.

D. Trigger the SOB's positive emotions. The customer begins to take mental ownership during the presentation and demonstration stage of the sales process. Thus, there is much at stake during the presentation and

demonstration steps. Trigger the prospect's positive emotions favorably and you'll soon find yourself with a closing opportunity. Drop the ball here and you'll soon find yourself waiting for another customer.

Tips for compelling presentations and demonstrations:

(1) Don't overwhelm the prospect with too much product knowledge. Talk about the features you discovered during your investigation that are most important to the customer. Remember the 80/20 Rule application for selling: Find the 20% of the features the prospect is hottest about and spend 80% of your time focusing on those things during your presentation. When you talk about the things that interest him or her the most you raise the value of your product, but when you ramble on about things he or she could not care less about you simply raise the price of the product.

I can recall early in my sales career when I attended a 2-day Jeep seminar put on to teach us sales reps everything possible about the Jeep product. It was a great class, and I learned so much I couldn't wait to get back to the dealership and wait on my first Jeep customer. The result? I didn't sell a Jeep for weeks after returning to the dealership! Why? I talked too much. I tried to tell each customer everything I had learned about the Jeep and totally overwhelmed and confused them. Some of you may know everything about your product but are still selling very little of it. Could you be making the same mistake I did? Do us both a favor and learn from my stupid-

ity. Know everything possible about your product or service but present it selectively!

(2) Don't beat around the bush when you begin your presentation: Start with the features that most interest the prospect. Canned, panned presentations are the kiss of death in sales. Customize your presentation to fit the prospect rather than trying to fit the prospect into your presentation.

(3) Involve the prospect with questions throughout your presentation. Without involving your prospect with questions strategically sprinkled throughout your presentation, your presentation turns into a speech and the prospect turns into an escape artist at the first available opportunity. Regardless of what you may think, you cannot make a six-figure income in sales by attempting to bore people into buying!

(4) Test the waters. Trial closes are essential to setting up the final close. They let you determine where you and the prospect are in the sales process. When you ask a trial close, nothing bad happens: You'll either close the deal or flush out an objection that will get you closer to consummating the deal. The most appropriate time to ask a trial close is during or at the conclusion of the presentation or demonstration. Timing is important. You must make certain you've created enough value in the product before asking a trial close. You must earn the right to ask these questions. If you ask before you're at a stage where the value presented is equal to or greater than the price you're asking, you'll irritate and offend normal customers and turn them into SOBs, and you'll turn an SOB into an even meaner, uglier beast.

When you ask a trial close it is essential that you make it sound natural and keep your tone and delivery casual and matter-of-fact. A sudden change in tone, pitch, or delivery will alert and possibly alarm the prospect that danger lies ahead: He or she is going to be asked to actually buy something! The key to asking any closing question is to make it sound like conversation, and the key to making it sound like conversation is to practice, practice, practice! This brings up a key point: If you want to turn pro in sales and begin selling more SOBs, you'll need to develop a practice ethic. After all, if all you've ever done is run around the block and you endeavor to run a marathon, you'll need to intensify your training regimen. Same goes for sales.

The most effective trial closes offer an alternate choice for the customer to pick from. These questions eliminate the yes-no type questions that often kill sales. Ask an SOB a "yes" or "no" question and you'll hear "no" a lot. SOBs like better choices. They don't like to feel that they're being backed into a corner.

Use trial closes like these depending on where you are in the sales process. Change the words to make them sound like you, but retain the same casual, either-or manner of delivery.

A. "Mr. Prospect, it seems like we've found the perfect car for you and your family. Are you going to want the paperwork in your name or the company name?"

B. "Mr. Prospect, it looks like this package provides all the features you told me were most important to you. Would you prefer we begin the schedule by the end of this week, or would you prefer starting after the holiday?"

If you've followed the other steps leading up to the trial close, this technique will seem like a natural progression in

the sales process. However, if you skipped steps, trial closes can seem inappropriate, high pressure, and out of place.

10. The tenth truth about SOBs is that you'll never learn to sell more of them by reading the previous nine truths only once. Review them often and internalize them into your sales psyche and you can become unstoppable. As coach Vince Lombardi said, "The harder you work, the harder it is to surrender."

The level of your practice will determine the level of your play. In other words, if your performance isn't what it should be, take a look at the quality and quantity of your practice disciplines. That's probably where the problem is, which takes us to the next chapter.

SOB Summary for Chapter 1: The Ten Truths About SOBs

Even though it hits our egos below the belt to make this admission, it is nonetheless true: We turn otherwise normal customers into SOBs more often than not with deficient sales skills or a lousy attitude. Yes, there are the dyed-in-the-wool stubborn, obnoxious, belligerent bullies who seem to want to pick a fight (and we'll learn techniques for selling them as well), but most of the sales we miss during our careers will result from self-inflicted damage. Avoid sales sabotage with SOBs by understanding the following 10 truths:

1. Don't label a prospect as an SOB too quickly. Many greet you with a tough and defensive manner until they're sure whether or not they like, trust, and believe you.
2. Understand the three top concerns of SOBs: (a) Will you waste my time? (b) Do you know what you're doing? (c) Can I trust you?

3. Respond, don't react, to the provocative attitudes or words of SOBs. Slow down their assaults with thoughtful questions and a low, slow tone and demeanor.
4. Listen to SOBs with the intent to understand, not the intent to reply or one-up them. They will not try to understand you until they first feel understood.
5. Never say "no" to an SOB. Always give them options to get what they want.
6. Feed the SOB's ego by letting them take a bow.
7. Choose your battles with SOBs carefully. Don't get so bogged down in the trivial that you lose sight of the ultimate.
8. If you don't sell SOBs the first time out, follow up quickly and with purpose.
9. Don't rush SOBs through the sales process by skipping vital sales steps that backfire on you later. The longest distance between meeting the customer and trying to close the deal is a shortcut.
10. Review these nine truths often until they're woven into your sales psyche and daily disciplines. Repetition is the mother of skill.

