

## c h a p t e r o n e

# The GUEST Approach to Selling

**“Guests are always welcome.”**

In recent years many different businesses have begun to approach their clients differently. They are now calling them *guests*, which has been the norm in the hotel industry for decades. Many restaurant chains as well as other businesses use this term. A gas station around the corner from my house boasts a sign on its door that reads, “Welcome, guests.”

A simple word like “guest” versus “customer” can make a dramatic difference in the way we perceive the people who pay our salaries. A customer is someone who makes a purchase. A guest is someone we welcome with open arms and look forward to interacting with. A guest is more of a friend, someone we will treat with dignity and respect.

I’m not suggesting that you immediately begin calling all of your customers guests. What I would like to introduce to you is the GUEST model of selling. GUEST is an acronym for a five-step sales process.

1. **Greeting your customers.**
2. **Uncovering the customers' needs.**
3. **Explaining the product or service.**
4. **Solving objections.**
5. **Telling them to buy.**

Many sales-based organizations have their own sales model or structure. The GUEST model is designed to fit into most sales cycles. These five steps are the key components to all successful retail selling. The majority of salespeople in retail don't follow any structured process, preferring to allow the sale to flow naturally. I've heard many justifications and rationalizations for this:

"You can't follow a structured process."

"Customers just take control of the sales process."

"It takes too long to go through a process like this."

"My store is too busy."

"I'm too busy."

"I've done it my way for years and I've been successful."

The list could go on and on. In fact, I could probably write another book just listing the excuses I've heard from salespeople. Here is the point. The GUEST process works. Ultimately, *you* need to take control of the sales process. If you don't, the customer will, which is what happens in approximately 80 percent of all sales transactions that take place on the retail floor. I have seen salespeople shadow customers around the store trying desperately to sell them something.

News flash! Consumers will not buy from a salesperson they don't trust, don't like, or who doesn't show confidence. I have known salespeople with a tremendous amount of experience and knowledge who can't close the number of sales they are entitled to because they try too hard.

Here's a typical sales story. The customer is looking at a product. The salesperson launches into a canned pitch about the product. The customer asks some questions and expresses some

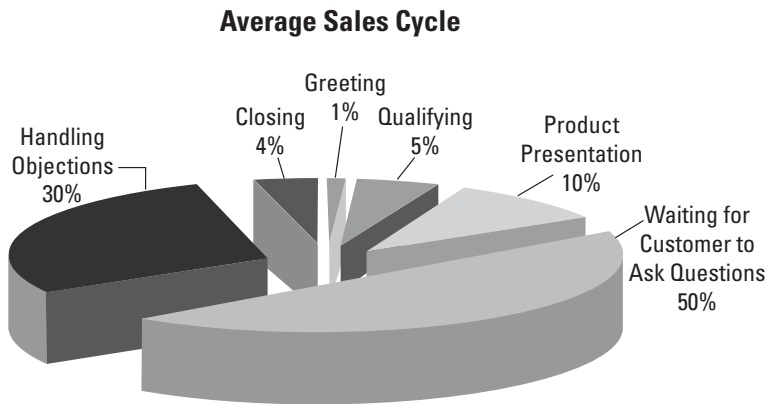
objections. The salesperson tries to overcome or defend the objections. The process ends with the customer saying, “Got a card? I’ll be back.” These words are the kiss of death in retail because few of these customers ever actually return. The reasons are simple.

- The salesperson did not greet the customer properly.
- The salesperson did not ask the customer any questions.
- The salesperson delivered a rehearsed presentation instead of focusing on the customer’s needs.
- The salesperson did not gather sufficient information to overcome the customer’s objection.
- The salesperson did not give the customer a reason to make the purchase!

The GUEST approach to selling addresses each of these issues. If you make a conscious effort to apply the concepts in this book you will notice an immediate improvement in your sales. The key is to concentrate on the process rather the outcome. If you work through each step instead of trying to close the sale, you will increase your closing ratio. Too many salespeople work hard to close a sale because they need to reach a certain level of sales to earn commission, their boss is hounding them to close a deal, or they haven’t reached their sales quota. The result is a desperate attempt to get the customer to part with their hard-earned money. These customers feel threatened, manipulated, coerced and often leave the store without making any purchase at all.

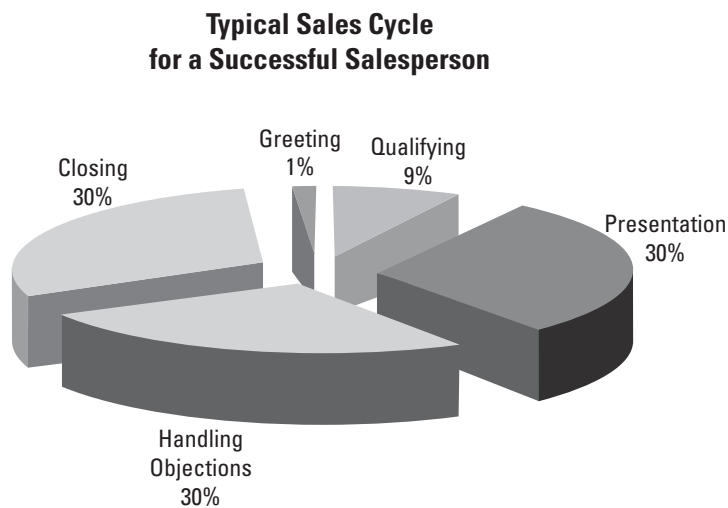
On the other hand if a salesperson concentrates on the sales process the customer will be more relaxed, feel more comfortable, and will be more likely to buy. In my workshops I encourage salespeople to allow the sale to progress naturally. I instruct them to pay attention to their customers instead of focusing on closing the sale. This runs contrary to most sales training where the emphasis is on closing the sale. My philosophy is that the sale will happen when you put all five components together in a relaxed, comfortable manner.

The average salesperson's sales cycle looks something like this:

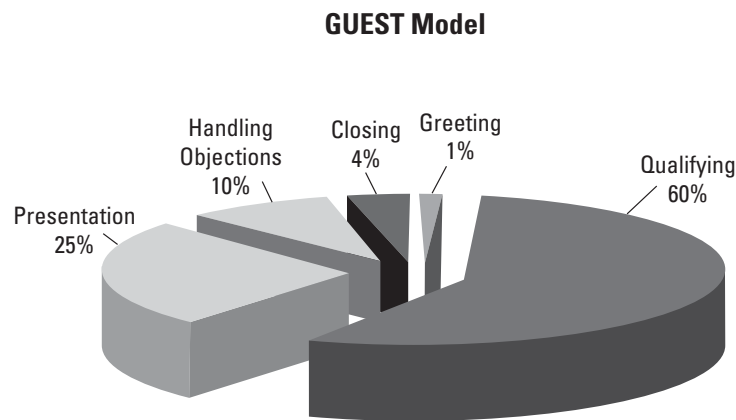


Half the sale is spent in a passive role! It's no wonder consumers aren't anxious to make a purchase.

Here is the sales cycle of a typical successful salesperson:



This individual divides his or her time equally among presenting the product, handling objections, and trying to close the sale. The GUEST model of selling suggests this breakdown:



You will notice that most of the time is invested in uncovering the customer's needs. When done properly, this step will eliminate many objections. Unfortunately, most salespeople either don't understand this or refuse to believe it. Most still feel that they have to skate quickly through the qualifying process to have enough time to deal with objections.

A business acquaintance of mine works in advertising. When I approached him to produce a training video he began asking me questions to fully understand what I needed and wanted in a video. Because he took the time to learn about my business needs, I immediately saw the value in this \$45,000 investment. Not once did I express an objection about the cost because he demonstrated the value while he uncovered my needs and presented a solution. He made sure that he positioned himself and his company as a problem-solver and a solution-provider.

Another friend of mine owns a training company that provides a variety of training programs to retailers. In his sales training he does not discuss how to overcome objections because he believes, and rightly so, that if you qualify your customer's needs you won't hear any objections. My experience in consulting has confirmed this as well.

As you progress through the book you will begin to see how the GUEST model of selling differs from, and is more effective than, the traditional style. It focuses on the customer rather than on closing the sale. It is designed to make people feel important.

Stop treating your customers like a pay cheque and view them as guests in your store. This may sound awkward, particularly if you have been accustomed to using aggressive selling tactics. If you discipline yourself to follow the blueprint provided here, you will soon notice a difference in the way your customers respond to you. In return, they will be more willing to part with their hard-earned money. They will be willing to buy from you—today—at your price!