



# **THE BASICS OF EFFECTIVE SALES**

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## 1. WHAT IS SALES?

The realisation of what sales actually are may be an extremely essential achievement, a significant step on the way to success. They say that each and every one has their own definition of sales.

In Poland it is widely believed that sales and marketing are two different terms that actually mean the same; in other words, to many people these two words are synonyms. This is, however, at least inaccurate. As a matter of fact, sales are just one of the elements of the very broad term that marketing is.

Of all the definitions of sales that can be found while reading the literature or browsing the internet, the most convincing is that by Charles Futrell, the author of many books concerning sales and the relations involved in them, and this is: **Selling is the personal communication of information to unselfishly persuade a prospective customer to buy something that satisfies that individual's needs.**

In other words, to sell means to offer an individual exactly what they need for money that they might needlessly spend on something else. The key is satisfying a customer's need. This statement should be repeated like a mantra. Such a definition implies that selling is in fact the same as helping others.

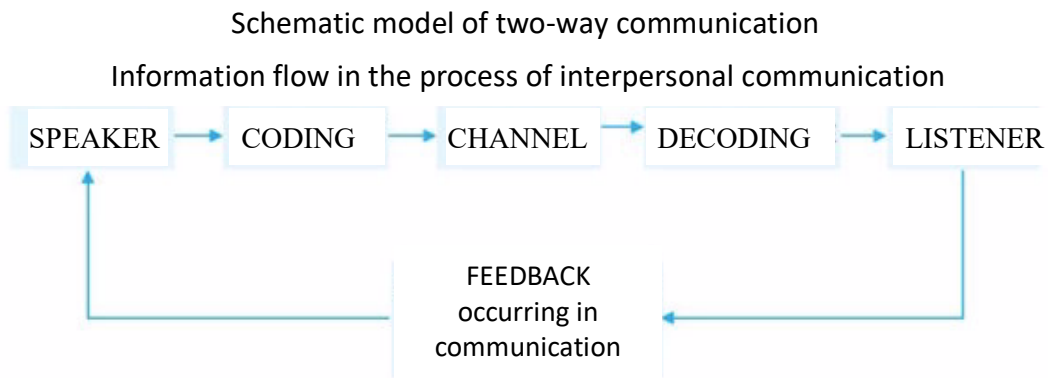
Selling is a complex activity, often referred to as a process. Its essential constituent is the communication between the seller and the customer (interpersonal communication), joint work and striving to discern the needs of the latter one.

As a matter of fact, we are all both sellers and customers at the same time. The ability to sell is very important to all of us. Among other things, our life also consists of smaller and larger transactions; e.g. the 'product' is often ourselves when we apply for our desired position or when we ask for a rise. Similar examples might be multiplied indefinitely. Thus, the definition of selling fits into the broad term denoting so-called interpersonal contacts. Knowledge on selling will be useful regardless of which path of career you take, not necessarily in the sales sector.

## 2. THE CONCEPT AND ESSENCE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Due to the fact that in the particular steps of the sales process we will be repeatedly referring to interpersonal communication and its role in professional customer service focused on building long-term relations, I will devote some time to this issue before providing a description of the individual steps.

**Interpersonal communication** is a psychological process by means of which an individual communicates and receives information during contacts with others. Using speech, facial expressions, body language and voice intonation, we communicate specific information to one another (Augustynek 2008). In Nęcki's (1996) approach, interpersonal communication means undertaking an exchange of verbal, vocal and non-verbal signals (symbols) in a specific situational context in order to achieve a better level of interaction.



**It is worth stressing that communication with a customer takes place on two levels:**

- 1) content-related (rational) – comprises the content of all that we say;
- 2) relational (emotional) – pertains to the relation that exists between the individuals communicating each other, i.e. to emotions, roles, approaches and experiences.

**The relational level is of key importance in customer service** and for customer satisfaction with the contact. It is related to the customer's emotions concerning both the manner of using the procedures and the skills of the person that the customer communicates with.

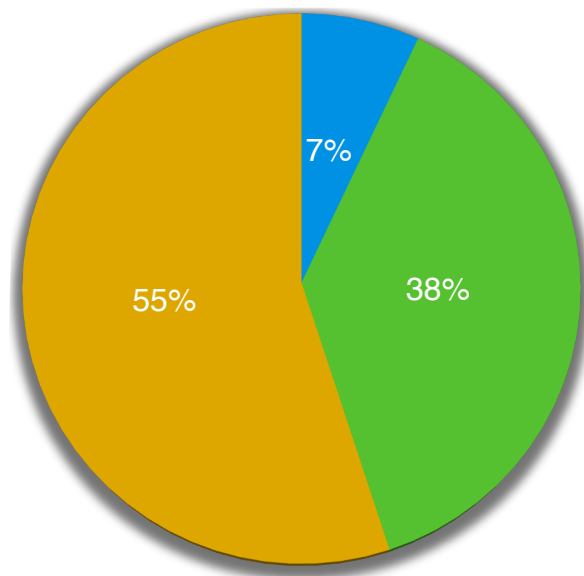
### 3. STAGES OF A SALES CONVERSATION

#### Stage 1 – Building trust

Within the framework of this stage we want to focus on non-verbal communication and the first impression as well as their relevance to building trust and a relation with the customer.

From the very beginning you should be aware of the fact that the welcome greeting is your first and last chance to make contact with the customer. The relation is established already during the first contact. The first contact with the customer and the greeting is the moment that you have no chance to repeat. This has a significant impact on achieving the objective, building credibility and creating a good climate. The first impression is an instinctive reflex, lasting just a few seconds; this is the image that we create while looking at another man. What makes the way we are perceived? According to Albert Mehrabian, a world-class specialist from University of California, Los Angeles, as much as 55% of communication consists of body language, 38% is conveyed by the tone of our voice while only 7% of what we communicate consists of words. So the main source of information is non-verbal communication, i.e. body language.

■ Words      ■ Tone of voice      ■ Body language



**That which is really important we hear and see with our senses.**

Non-verbal communication supplements and enhances the word of mouth; it requires involvement of the senses and is made up of several groups of signals:

- 1) kinesics – body language (facial expressions, gestures and body movements);
- 2) paralanguage:
  - vocal characteristics of the voice (tone, timbre, pitch, modulation and pace);
  - vocal interactions (interactions between the voice characteristics and vocal sounds, such as ‘pew’, ‘ah’, ‘eh’, etc.);
- 3) an individual’s self-presentation (incl. physical appearance, physique, clothing, hairdo and makeup);
- 4) touch (handshake, patting and embracing);
- 5) proxemics (keeping a distance and spatial relations between communicating individuals);
- 6) chronemics (utilisation of time as a communication signal, e.g. waiting, punctuality or duration of an event);
- 7) elements of the environment, such as temperature, lighting or colour (may affect human behaviour, stimulate or deter).

**Some selected forms of non-verbal communication of particular importance in contacts with customers:**

**Your facial expression** is the most telling manner of non-verbal communication. The way we speak moving the lips, the arrangement of lips and eyebrows during a conversation, the face grimace and the expression of the eyes – all of this manifests our emotional state and is usually the first reaction to the message communicated by the customer.

**Eye contact** reveals your attitude to the customer. Occasionally you might want to conceal your dissatisfaction, disappointment or regret, and you force a smile upon your face. Someone observing you from a distance might not notice that it is just a game. But looking into your eyes they will almost always discover the truth. Why is it so? The secret is in the fact that the eyes never lie and are 'a reflection of your soul'.

**Gestures and other body movements** accompany nearly every conversation. When we talk we very often help ourselves by 'drawing' different shapes in the air with the hands, we nod our head, scratch ourselves behind the ear, beat our chest, clench fists, point a threatening finger, etc. Each of these gestures has its meaning. This way they make an inherent element of the process of communicating and an important complement to the verbal communication.

**Outward appearance and personal hygiene** are the characteristics that make a strong impression on people; they will either facilitate the process of communicating or create a barrier. A lot of attention should be attached to your appearance, clothing and neatness. People who are neat and well-dressed have a greater chance to make a success of their contacts with other people.

**Smiling** is also one of the forms of non-verbal conversation. A smile can be nice, encouraging, warm and shy or ironic, malicious, mocking and neglecting. Therefore, it is a good idea to consider how your smile is perceived by others and what effect it can have on establishing, maintaining or closing verbal communication.

From the very beginning you should also be aware of **keeping the so-called distance in contact with another person**.

1. Intimate zone (15-45 cm). This is the most intimate and most guarded zone. Each individual considers it their own property and only admits to it people who are emotionally related to them. This is a strictly intimate zone;
2. Personal zone (46-122 cm). We keep such a distance during social contacts (e.g. in the office or at a party);
3. Social zone (1.22-3.6 m). We keep such a distance towards people we do not know well, including our customers;
4. Public zone (over 3.6 m). This is the distance that we attempt to keep when addressing a larger number of people.

## **Stage 2 – NEEDS ANALYSIS**

An analysis of the customer's needs is the key element in the entire sales process. It is only if you respond to the expectations of the customer that you are able to actually meet their expectations. Their needs are like compass that you should be guided by while conducting the transaction.

A need is the reason why the customer takes an action aimed at purchasing a product or a service. When you are convinced that you are not only trying to sell something but that you are above all satisfying the customer's needs your success is close at hand because it is the customer's actual satisfaction that is more important. Because a satisfied customer is a regular customer, i.e.

someone with whom you build long-lasting relations while hoping for their frequent visits or orders, or support.

Obviously, in order to satisfy the needs, you first need to find out about them. Your task is not to guess what the customer is looking for but to consciously participate in discovering their needs through active listening.

### **Active listening**

The ability to listen effectively is the basic tool for good contacts with the customer and reaching an agreement with them. All too often we forget that communication (dialogue) consists of talking and listening. We usually focus on taking and convincing the interlocutor. Active listening is a sign of interest, acceptance, trust, kindness and consideration for the customer.

**To listen actively means to focus on the interlocutor and on what they have to say to us.**

A distinction must be made between hearing and listening. Hearing is a process that is ultimately beyond our conscious control. Listening, on the other hand, is a process of receiving information that we can consciously control.

To listen actively means to focus on the interlocutor and on what they have to say to us.

### **The listening skill:**

- builds partners' involvement and positive relations between them;
- creates a chance to reach the essential issues and the partners' emotions;
- enables expanding the knowledge on the interlocutor;
- gives more time to prepare your own response;
- enables checking the understanding of the context;
- is an instrument of exercising control over the conversation.

### **Active listening techniques**

Skilful utilisation of the following techniques is helpful in active listening:

#### **1) Reflecting**

The listener can show the speaker both what they understood from their words and the way they perceived their emotions. This is of import especially when talking about essential and touching issues.

#### **2) Paraphrasing**

In this technique you reiterate what the speaker said using your own words. It should not be confused with repetition (quoting speaker's words) – research indicates that the speaker's sense

of being understood is more enhanced when the listener paraphrases the utterance instead of just repeating it. Paraphrasing makes the speaker sure that they are understood.

A paraphrase is usually commenced with expressions like:

- If I understood correctly,...
- From what you said, I understand that...
- So you mean that...

### **3) Clarifying**

It often accompanies paraphrasing. It involves asking questions until you get the fullest possible picture of the situation. Clarifying is at the same time a request for more information, more explanations. It also helps the listener themselves to sharpen their attention so as to be able to focus on the details and not only on the speaker's general remarks.

### **4) Summarising**

It is used to highlight the most important issues that were discussed. During a conversation, a lot of topics are usually raised but not all of them are relevant to the substance of the matter. Summarising is a tool that adds structure to the conversation.

### **5) Asking questions**

Why is worthwhile to ask?

- > to gain information;
- > to save time;
- > to have a minute to think about what you want to say;
- > to show interest;
- > to make sure you understood the speaker;
- > to paraphrase the speaker's statement;
- > to check if the interlocutor is listening to you;
- > to provoke the interlocutor to take a stance;
- > to take control over the conversation;
- > to substantiate the interlocutor's statements.

### **Types of questions**

1) Open questions will enable you to:

- start a conversation in the way the interlocutor wants to;
- provide a wide field of expression;
- collect a large amount of information concerning the desires, feelings, interests, needs and changes, and not just superficial opinions and insignificant motives;
- create an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding.

Technical remarks:

- The questions often begin with 'what', 'how', 'what is the reason why', 'what do you think of...', 'how would you like...?'

Example: What is most important to you with regard to...?

2) Alternative questions will enable you to:

- limit the scope of conversation to the search area;



- obtain particular essential information;
- test the rate of decision making;

Technical remarks:

- These questions should be used after open questions;
- They should not be overused;

Example: Are you planning a purchase for your son or daughter?

3) Questions asking for opinions (probing questions) will enable you to:

- maintain a good atmosphere during the conversation;
- find out about the system of values;
- check the independence of creating judgements and courage in voicing them;
- determine the person's level of individualism;

Example: How do you think, which pattern and colour of the bag will be ideal to match your type of appearance?

4) Reflexive questions will enable you to:

- refer in a delicate manner back to the unclear issues raising doubts;
- persuade the interlocutor to embark on a deeper analysis of the phenomenon concerned;

Example: Please, consider the benefits from the 5-year warranty and make a final decision.

5) Closed-ended questions will enable you to:

- obtain an answer in a quick and unequivocal manner;
- guide the conversation in the desired direction while reducing empty talk and escapes into inessential digressions or other topics.

#### **Technical remarks:**

- these questions usually begin with a verb;
- a series of consecutive closed-ended questions closes down the communication, introduces an air of interrogation and reduced the interlocutor to a passive participant;
- the use of closed questions is most justified in the final phase of the conversation;

Example: Would you like to take advantage of the convenient instalment system?

The answer you get will depend on the question that you ask.

Tip: Do not ask too elaborate, unclear or threatening questions because you run the risk that your interlocutor will fail to comprehend the essence and meaning of your question and will consequently fail to understand what you are asking about and will respond saying 'I don't know' for the sake of peace of mind.

### **Stage 3 – Proposing options and solutions**

If you already know the customer's needs, it is time for a presentation. In order to present a product / offer from the perspective of the customer's needs, it is necessary to learn how to use the language of benefits, i.e. the ability to translate selected features, important for the customer, into potential benefits that they can have from them. You must be able to convince the interlocutor that your product or your service will satisfy the customer's specific need better than anything else that is available in the market at a given time and at a specific price. Remember –

you sell your products or services to people. You always talk to a specific person or group of people. Therefore, you should learn some basic rules governing human behaviour.

People buy because a particular product or service gives them satisfaction, meets their need and provides them with a sense of benefit. People do not make purchases for the features of the goods but because of the BENEFITS that they give them. The benefits that are anchored in the needs are safety, confidence, comfort, prestige; saving of time, money and effort; aesthetics, appearance and attractiveness.

Your product / service and your customer's sense of benefit.

1) **Money.** I have not met anyone who would not want to have money. This is one of the basic needs. It is often said that 'money is not everything but living without it is not easy'. If you are able to relate that which you offer to the customer with earning or saving money, then you will attract their attention. This is the so-called bringing about the effect of the sense of saving or profit.

2) **Safety** is everyone's fundamental need. Regardless whether it is the sense of financial, emotional or physical safety, for it is such a deep and strong need, both for ourselves and our families, that if you bring it up in a conversation, this will certainly result in the customer's interest. Safety is something that hardly anyone has in excess so most want to have more of it. If you can show the customer that if they take advantage of your product or service then they will feel safer, you will have a great chance to stimulate their desire to make a purchase.

3) **Belonging** gives us the feeling that we are more valuable, needed, accepted and respected by the people around us. Each individual has an internal need to function in a specific environment (e.g. family or a peer group). This is often a place where you cherish your values. If your product or service enables the customer to notice a correlation between their social needs (respect, acceptance and sense of community) this will make them more willing to make the purchase decision.

4) **Status and prestige** are some of the most powerful human motivators. We want to feel important and valuable. We want to be perceived as such. We want people to admire us and praise our possessions and our accomplishments. By buying e.g. a watch which does not only fulfil its basic function, i.e. informs you about the time, but is also a piece of jewellery, an expression of elegance, then you actually purchase something that you want to distinguish you in the crowd.

5) **Health and fitness.** We all want to be healthy, fit and full of energy, and we wish the same for our loved ones. For this reason a lot of attention is attracted by products and services that have a beneficial impact on improving health and fitness. If your product or service can improve the customer's physical quality of life at a relatively moderate expense, then they might consider it worth paying attention to.

6) **Personal development.** The desire to gain additional knowledge and skills is the need for continuous development regardless of age. People want to feel competent and be the best at what they do because striving for personal fulfilment and personal success is deeply rooted in each of us. You can evoke the will to buy your product or service if this enables people to reach increasingly higher tiers of personal success and self-fulfilment.

REMEMBER: feature – advantage – benefit

**Features** – elements characterising a product, determining what it is like. This is a description of something.

**Advantages** – are related to the features of each product. Advantages are the positive characteristics of a product shown in general categories. Advantages as such are general and good for everyone. They have nothing to do with a particular customer; they are universal.

**Benefits** – individual profits that the customer is going to gain by having their needs fulfilled. They are the advantages that correspond to the customer's particular needs.

Reasoning in terms of benefits implies matching the features and advantages of the product to the customer's previously recognised needs. Such a model of argumentation has some strengths:

- you make a direct reference to the needs;
- because you know what the customer expects, your arguments are highly accurate;
- the burden and accent of argumentation is proportionally balanced relative to the particular needs expressed by the customer.

#### **Stage four 4 – Confirmation and closing**

Usually, it is the customer themselves that signals whether they are ready to make a decision by giving one or more signals. Therefore, be vigilant. In most cases, it is clearly visible when the customer begins to show interest.

The most common signals are:

- expressing doubts concerning some elements and not the whole product or service; asking about increasingly less important elements in the product or service;
- asking if the price of the particular service or product is not going to change;
- enquiring about methods of payment and possible discounts;
- repeated nodding, leaning forward;
- talking about the product or service using the seller's words and phrases;
- emphasising the advantages of the product or service;
- asking about a promotion.

If you observe such reactions, it is time to close the transaction as soon as possible. Be guided by the principle 'guide and do not push'. If you know the customer's needs, then you also know how you are going to complete the sale. **The closing of the sale is done by summarising the customer's needs and explaining how your product or service can satisfy these needs.**

As a matter of fact, sales is all about analysing the customer's needs, pointing out to them what their needs really are like and proposing a satisfying solution based on these needs. The most important thing you must bear in mind when closing a sale is that the customer must never feel being manipulated. In no circumstances must they have the impression that you are trying to persuade them to make the purchase using deception. **The best technique is one that does not make the customer feel manipulated.**

When you hear **YES**, express your gratitude, thank them for placing the order and encourage to continue the collaboration. Showing the customer that you appreciate the fact that they ordered

the goods or services and thanking them for this is just a simple act of kindness. As a result, the customer will see that they are not merely one of many but that you care for doing business just with them. Each customer is exceptional and should be treated as such.

**Do not give up even if you hear ‘no’.**

Even if you conducted an in-depth analysis of the needs and gave the customer a chance for their needs to be satisfied, and you correctly closed the transaction, you may hear a ‘no’ in response to your offer. If you encounter a refusal, the most important thing for you is not to give up immediately. After the first ‘no’ there is still a chance for completing the transaction. Always make another attempt, ask the simple question, ‘What is the reason why you say no?’ The purpose is for you to obtain information on the reasons for refusal. This is your chance for another conversation and yet another attempt at closing or taking further initiative, e.g. to arrange a new date for a meeting with the customer in order to continue the talks. By receiving feedback, a company or an employee can improve their procedures.

**Stage 5 – POST-SALE CONTACT**

The most common error that is made after the purchase and signing the agreement is failure to continue to keep in touch with customer. It is worthwhile to show the customer further interest and thus have an opportunity to:

- check the customer’s satisfaction;
- enhance the relation previously created.

This is a way to improve the quality of your services and a source of new transactions. By keeping in touch with the customer you can always hope for their recommendations.

**Stage 6 – SUMMARISING**

Here are some universal hints concerning the stage of summarising the selling process:

1. Before you make a handshake or lift the phone – smile
  - an individual’s instinctive reaction is to adjust their own mood their partner’s mood;
  - a smile has a life-saving effect on yourself as well as your partner by making you cheerful, encourage and engaged;
2. Start and finish with a nice gesture
  - at the start because the first impression is crucial;
  - at the end because the last impression remains;
3. Use more often words like ‘you and your’ than ‘I and my’
  - the customer and their benefits are absolutely important here;
  - as far as the circumstances permit, mention often their name but never take initiative to suggest less formal communication;
4. Let them feel important

- people want to feel important, want to be the ‘agents’ of their actions and have a sense of control;
- let them give you advice, do not be all-powerful;

#### 5. Show interest, listen actively

- the customer wants to feel that you are with them, with their situation and with what they are saying – show them signs of interest and understanding;
- explore and endorse their point of view;

#### 6. Ask questions

- he who asks, leads and wins;
- people are mainly interested in themselves and their benefits – let them talk about it; you will learn more about the customer’s needs and ...the unusual advantages of your offer;

#### 7. Speak positively – use key words

- please;
- thank you;
- I see;
- perfect!;

#### 8. Use positive gestures

- over half of the meaning and mutual approach is conveyed by body language;
- positive non-verbal radiance is important in each phase of the conversation;

#### 9. Do not argue with the customer

- do not say that you do not agree unless you have to;
- if you, however, do it, tell them clearly what and why you do not agree with; use phrases like ‘yes and...’ or ‘yes but...’ rather than ‘no because...’;
- reduce definitive ‘no’ to the minimum;

#### 10. Speak vividly

- the interlocutor’s attention must be constantly excited – monotony kills;
- speak figuratively, use comparisons, refer to real life examples, use anecdotes and humour;

#### 11. Admit obvious errors

- show imperfections – this will make you more credible;
- two-sided argumentation is an effective method of persuasion – but do not develop it in excess, do not change into a penitent;

#### 12. Restrain your prejudices and approaches

- both those concerning the customer and yourself, as well as the offer;
- they might act like self-fulfilling prophecies;
- it is better to wait and delay the conversation than to put stumbling blocks in the way;

#### 13. Think positively

- the way you think determines the way you feel and the way you act;
- explore your own convictions that constrain you, and change them – what think depends to a large extent on yourself;

14. Before you say goodbye – smile  
– regardless of the outcome of the conversation – the smile will remain;  
– you will feel better yourself; reduce the tension.

#### 4. DIFFICULT SITUATIONS IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

In your encounters with customers there will also be moments where difficult situations occur despite all your efforts. Therefore, there must be no shortage in this guide of remarks on assertiveness and techniques that will allow you to effectively face the challenge of agitated customers who keep criticising and demand impossible things or are dissatisfied and make complaints.

Assertiveness is a system of interpersonal behaviours expressing an individual's feelings, attitudes, desires, opinions or rights in a direct, firm and honest manner while respecting other people's feelings, attitudes, desires and opinions. Assertive behaviour may include expressing such emotions as fear, anger, involvement, hope, joy, despair, embarrassment, etc., but in each such case these emotions are expressed in a manner that does not infringe other people's rights (Emmos Michael, 2006).

Assertiveness concerns:

- respect and honest dealing with other people;
- improved interpersonal communication and collaboration.

##### 1) **When the customer behaves in a vulgar manner towards you, offends you, pats you on the shoulder;**

You can deal effectively with customers who disregard your boundaries by skilfully adjusting your reactions to the customer's unacceptable behaviour.

- Method – imposing boundaries in an assertive way.

It consists of the following steps:

##### **Request**

Ask the customer not to do things that annoy, embarrass or offend you. 'Please, do not disturb me. Let me finish'.

##### **Feedback**

Tell the customer what sort of emotions their behaviour provokes in you. Talk about your feelings in connection with the customer's behaviour but do not admonish them.

'When you interrupt me, it irritates me and makes it difficult for me to gather my thoughts. Please, let me finish'.

- Setting the boundary (demand, objection).

State firmly, in a firm tone of voice, 'I don't want it'; 'I demand'. You need to state your own boundaries firmly and definitively. Only this way you can demand respect for your matters.

'I don't want you to disturb me'  
'I demand that you listen to me until I finish'

- Announcing sanctions (backup).

Announce a sanction but you must be willing and able to actually perform the action. Sanctions must be feasible and at least to some degree burdensome to the aggressive customer.

'If you go on interrupting me, I will finish this conversation.'

- Execution of the sanction (recalling the backup).

Take the step you announced.

'I am very sorry that you're not listening to me. I can't agree to such treatment. I quit this fruitless conversation'.

## **2) When the customer demands impossible things**

When you have to or want to turn down a customer:

- Method – like a broken record

It contains the following elements:

Maintaining the contact – referring to the partner's arguments by paraphrasing the customer's statements and expressing your own feelings (feedback).

'I understand that you are sorry. I would hate to offend you but...'

Key statement – clear refusal – repeated over and over again, firmly and calmly.

'I will not do it because...'

Discerning the customer's most important interests and offering collaboration. 'Why are you insisting on this? How else can I satisfy your needs?'

(It would be best if the customer themselves come up with an idea on how to give them satisfaction because then they take part of the responsibility for the solution and will certainly not want to question the reasonableness of their own idea).

## **3) When the customer rightly criticises you when you made a mistake or your product turned out to be defective.**

The procedure concerning a customer's justified complaint:

- Listen to the irritated customer carefully, without interrupting them;
- Show them your understanding and respect for their emotions, apologise personally and on behalf of the company, e.g. 'I'm not surprised that you're irritated in such a situation. I do sincerely apologise for your inconvenience and the complications';

- Arrange a remedy together with the customer;
- Ask the customer what sort of compensation he expects, e.g. 'What compensation do you expect?'; 'What can I do so that you consider the affair settled?';
- Thank them for pointing out the mistake, e.g. 'Thank you for bringing our attention to the mistake. Thanks to this we will be able to improve our work and avoid similar mistakes in future'.

#### REMEMBER:

A well-resolved complaint, a rectified mistake – will make each customer your friend. Complaints are some of the best opportunities to win the customer for life.

**4) When the customer uses general criticism** (e.g. your company is hopeless, your dealers don't act professionally).

- Method – refer to particulars instead of general criticism.

Find out what the other person is exactly complaining about, what sort of mistakes you made in the given situation. Simply ask for details:

'What exactly don't you like?', 'Why do you think our company is hopeless and the employees not very professional?'

**5) When the customer finds fault with details and irritates you by pointing out the imperfections.**

Follow the principle 'The customer is always right', i.e. do not challenge opinions.

- Method – blurring.

The essence of this technique is using phrases like 'perhaps', 'it might be so'.

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