How do you sell? You probably have a sales methodology of some kind, whether you know it or not. If you sell, you have a preferred way of selling. It doesn’t matter if you’re a solo entrepreneur, a small business with just one salesperson, a well-oiled team of ten or more, or a sales team that spans the globe. Every business has their own way of selling.

How do you sell?

With inbound sales, the goal of sales is to sell what you create. Sales is not an end in itself. This is often known as the consultative sales process, and it can make all the difference in the world to you, your business, and your customers.

The consultative sales process is primarily focused on the experience that the potential customer (the lead) feels and sees during their interactions with you. It’s about the how you find ways to provide your leads with value and make it all about them. Not your product, your business, your numbers. The consultative sales process is most especially not about you.

Sometimes this is also referred to as solution-based selling.

Solution selling is a sales methodology. Rather than just promoting an existing product, the salesperson focuses on the customer's pain(s) and addresses the issue with his or her offerings (product and services).

- Wikipedia

In a previous article we discussed how to begin the consultative sales process. Generally speaking, the initial conversation with your lead might begin with your sales rep saying something like this:

*Hi Mark, I was notified that you came to our website and recently downloaded (reference the conversion event). Do you remember doing that? Great! What were you looking for help with?*

Notice that the emphasis is on what the potential customer wants and needs, not what you want and need from the potential customer.

There are six principles to the consultative sales process:
1. Research
2. Ask
3. Listen
4. Teach
5. Qualify
6. Close

These six principles should provide the basic outline of the consultative sales methodology that you create for your business. The methodology you create should take into account the thing you’re selling, the typical sales cycle for your business, your industry, and your buyer personas.

**Research**

The research phase of consultative sales involves using the lead intelligence that your business gathered in the process of acquiring each lead. If you’re doing inbound marketing well, then you’ve gathered data on your leads like company size, pages visited on your site, email preferences, and social media behaviors. Even more importantly, you’ve gathered tons of information on exactly what sort of content your lead is most interested in, which tells you what questions they have topmost in their minds.

In HubSpot, all of this lead intelligence can be found in your Contacts tool. The properties you’ve selected as most important to qualifying a lead will be your “starred” properties, and your Contact Timeline will give you a quick and detailed overview of what your lead’s experience has been with your business to date. All of your sales reps would have access to this lead intelligence data via the Sales Rep User role in HubSpot.

Salespeople should also spend some time researching your leads’ recent company news, LinkedIn profile, Twitter stream, personal blogs (if applicable), and of course Google their name to see what else comes up.

You should always research the lead thoroughly before you make any next move.

**Ask**

When you speak with the lead, be sure to ask open-ended questions. Now that you have all this detailed information on them as a result of your research, you may be tempted to assume you know everything there is to know about them. This is a mistake. The point is to allow the lead to volunteer the information themselves, as result of (and contributing to) the trust you are building between sales rep and lead.

Ask questions that start with the words Who, What, Where, How, Why, and When. Avoid starting questions with words like Do, Are, You, and Can. These types of questions tend to lead to yes or no answers, which is exactly the sort of response you most want to avoid.
The goal of asking questions is to slowly discover what the lead’s goals are, the plan they might have to reach those goals, the challenges that are in the way of executing this plan, and the timeline that’s in place for reaching them.

You also need to uncover their budget and the level of authority of the person you’re talking to. Are they an end user, an influencer, or decision maker, or the person who controls the budget? You can find this out if you ask the right questions.

Always be asking questions during the consultative sales process. Questions are one of your greatest sales tools.

**Listen**

Always. Be. Listening. It’s the most important thing a great salesperson can do. And we’re talking here about active listening, not passive listening. You’re focused on the person talking and are ready to respond and repeat what they said. The goal is to make sure that both people understand what the other is saying.

As you practice active listening, you’ll need to be documenting everything that the lead tells you. All of the information you obtain will help you qualify and/or close the lead. You must be very attentive to their tone, pitch, and level of enthusiasm. Those elements will help you decide what your next move should be.

Practice makes perfect. Always. Be. Listening.

**Teach**

As you are actively listening, you need to be responding, and as you respond you should looking for opportunities to teach. But note that this is not about teaching your lead about your product or service. It’s about helping the lead learn to overcome their challenges and build a plan to reach their goals.

This may or may not involve using your product or service. Your focus should be to help the lead, no matter what.

You must be careful not to give away too much knowledge. You must balance the knowledge you give with the questions you ask and the answers you get back.

Always be teaching.

**Qualify**

You’re always going to be qualifying the lead. A qualified lead has goals, might or might not have a plan, definitely has challenges to overcome, a defined timeline, and budget. But keep in mind that an unqualified lead is just as good as a qualified lead during the consultative sales process. Unqualified leads give you a chance to help, be friendly, and move on. Qualified leads,
of course, give you the chance to help, be friendly, and sell. The sooner you can identify a lead that is not a right fit for your product or service, the better.

Don’t continue to try to close unqualified leads; it will just hurt them and you in the long run.

You want to be spending the most amount of time and provide the most attention to the qualified leads.

Close

It should be fairly easy to close your qualified leads. They have budget and have the authority to authorize the purchase.

If pushback does occur during the closing sequence or at any point you can always try to dig in to what the consequences might be for the lead if they fail to buy from you. For example:

“What happens if you aren’t able to reach your goal?”

“What happens if you can’t execute your plan or overcome your challenges?”

The closing sequence should feel natural to both you and the lead. If you’re always striving to close only those leads that are the right fit for your business, then your retention rate on those new customers will also be quite high.

Your Turn

Use these six principles to create your own consultative sales methodology. Salespeople perform at their highest output when there is a process that they can understand and repeat, and when they know they have a process that will help them close business. And your leads will never feel like they were being sold to; even those leads that were never qualified to buy from you in the first place.

The experience will be remarkable. Not ordinary, or disappointing.
How to Sell (For People Who Hate Sales)

Brian Moran  
Founder & CEO, Brian Moran & Associates  
https://www.openforum.com/articles/how-to-sell-for-people-who-hate-sales/

These three tips will help you master the art of getting customers to say yes, even if you're not a born salesperson.

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I hear it all the time from business owners: “We have a great product or service but I just don’t know how to sell it. I hate sales!” Unfortunately for these entrepreneurs, selling is a necessary evil. Unless your product is so revolutionary that people are willing to line up at your door for it, you need to learn how to sell; otherwise, your days as a business owner are numbered.

How can someone who either hates selling or doesn’t know how to sell learn the fine art of getting customers to say yes? It starts with three simple steps:

1. Understand Features vs. Benefits

Look at your business from your customers’ perspective. They don’t initially see the “features” of your product or service; they see the “benefits” of your product or service to them. Theodore Levitt, a Harvard marketing professor, used to tell his students, “People don’t want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole!” If you approach selling to your customers in this manner, then what are the most common benefits of your product or service to them? If you’re not sure, ask some customers why they buy from you. They will be more than happy to tell you.

2. Help Others Help You

Paraphrasing a quote, “There are two types of salespeople that enter a room—the first one walks in and says, ‘Here I am!’ The second one walks in and says, ‘Ah, there you are!’” If you are uncomfortable with sales, the best and easiest approach is to be the second salesperson. Shine the spotlight on your customers and their needs. When you help them solve a problem or find the solution they sought, they will thank you, pay you money and hopefully become an advocate for your brand. If they have questions, answer them. If you don’t know the answer, let them know that you don’t want to give them misinformation and you will make it a priority to get back to them with the correct response. Selling is problem solving. Someone comes to you with a need or a problem; you provide the solution.
3. Deliver Exceptional Customer Service

If you want increased sales without heavy lifting, the simplest and surest way to get there is by delivering the best possible customer service on the planet. Your credo should be “Happy Customers are the Best Customers.”

Problems arise with every product and service. How your company responds to those problems is critical to your sales success. As a customer, I will go out of my way to buy from people I know who put in the extra effort in making me feel like they really appreciate my business. When things go wrong, they make it right—without question. I then become their sales champion. I tell all my friends about their wonderful service or their terrific product. I feel good knowing that I’m delivering new business to a company that makes me feel like family. At that point, you are no longer selling. You’ve become a trusted advisor. I respect your work and your opinion. I trust you!

Selling can be an arduous task. Not everyone possesses the gift of gab and enjoys dealing with all kinds of people. If you struggle with picking up the phone, greeting potential customers or making presentations about your business, address your fears. Don’t worry about rejection—just know that it’s coming. It won’t kill you and it’s not personal. Believe in your product, focus the spotlight on your customers and deliver world-class customer service.
8 Steps to Better Sales with Consultative Selling

By Jessica Davis - See more at: http://www.channelinsider.com/c/a/News/8-Steps-to-Better-Sales-with-Consultative-Selling-349766/#sthash.GDLkbSim.dpuf

The bad economy has created a challenging environment for IT sales. Many sales representatives are complaining that what used to work isn’t working anymore. That's why consultative selling is getting so much attention as a potential antidote to what ails sales today. To help you get started, Channel Insider has compiled the following list.

Consultative selling is getting a lot of buzz in sales circles these days as the answer to what ails sales organizations in this recession. But there can also be some confusion around what exactly the term means. Some people may even find the concept intimidating initially. To help clear the air and help you get started realizing the benefits of consultative selling, Channel Insider spoke with sales consultant Kendra Lee of The KLA Group. Lee's company works with solution providers to develop their sellers consultative selling practices. And before founding her own company, she was in the top 1 percent of sales representatives at IBM and was the top sales rep at Sybase. Here's a primer on getting started with consultative selling, based on Channel Insider's conversation with Lee.

1. First, understand what consultative selling is not.
It's certainly not product selling. Some people may also be surprised to hear that it's not solution selling either. Rather, Lee says, it's a way of connecting with clients by having a conversation with them about broader business issues. "Sometimes you may not even make a recommendation that you'll generate any revenue off of," says Lee. "But your contacts will be coming to you because they just want to talk. They treat you like a peer. You sit down and chat with people and share ideas. You become someone they want to talk to and stay in touch with."

2. Get comfortable with talking to clients rather than selling to them.
Picture yourself sitting at Starbucks having a coffee with one of your best friends, Lee advises. "You don't spend your whole time talking about business and giving them recommendations on what to do. You share ideas and banter back and forth about it. You don't try to worry about whether you will sell them."

3. Start by asking questions about your client's business or organization.
If you don't know the issues in their business, do some research. For example, perhaps you are in the middle of a conversation about an ongoing project with your client. When there's a break in the conversation, say something like: "You know, John, I want to switch gears here for a minute. We've never really focused on your strategy beyond IT. What are some of the issues that your company and CEO are focused on?"
4. Realize that your recommendations to clients won't always be about the things your company can sell them.
Your recommendations won't always relate to your solutions, Lee says. You may actually end up sending your client to another solution provider or another kind of business entirely in search of what will ultimately resolve your client's issues. Or you may end up teaching your client how to solve the problem on their own. While you may not end up with today's sale, you are creating a relationship of trust. Your clients will seek you out to talk about their issues and problems in the future, and you will be the first one there when they do need something you sell.

5. Your biggest obstacle may be your lack of confidence.
You've mastered the technology, and you are a whiz at helping clients with technology problems and processes. But Lee says many technology sales professionals sometimes freeze up on consultative sales because they are afraid of what to say if a client asks a business question. What if a client turns to you and says "I don't know what to do because my credit line has just been cut in half." This, Lee says, is the biggest obstacle for sales representatives and companies looking to make the transition to consultative selling.

6. Don't be afraid of not knowing the answers to your customers' questions.
You may know more than you think, says Lee, or else you will have access to the right places to go to get that information. If you deal with other customers in the same or a similar industry, you can learn from how those other customers solve the same problems. In other words, maybe another one of your clients encountered and resolved the same issue. You might suggest your current client, who is experiencing the issue today, take a similar approach. You can say "I know someone else who was facing a similar issue and here's what worked for them."

7. Prepare for a longer sales cycle, but don't be surprised if the sales cycle stays the same.
The biggest concern sales managers have about transitioning to this approach is that sales will take longer. Indeed, Lee says she used to advise her sales consulting clients that they could expect a longer sales cycle with consultative selling. No more. In her experience, the sales cycle for consultative selling and for other types of sales end up being the same. That's because clients come to you when they have issues, and are ready to take action.

8. Remember that consultative selling is a collaborative process. You figure out the solution together.
Your job is to help the client see what their return will be if they do a certain project or what the productivity gains will be. "That can be very hard in IT." But if your client likes analytical information, this is the approach to take, and focusing on productivity gains may make the most sense. If you are working with a client who takes a strategic focus to a problem, you probably won’t have to provide the same level of analytical information, says Lee.

Remember, Lee says, "It’s not always about you, it’s about them."

Consultative selling is low pressure when compared to other types of sales, she says.

"I know that if I help the client now with his problem, even if I don’t sell him anything today,
that something will happen eventually. That old saying, 'what goes around comes around,' that’s consultative selling."