CAN YOU RECALL how various salespeople have greeted you? Some were, no doubt, very pleasant and interested in your shopping needs. Others, however, may have left you with the impression that you were a bother or were unimportant. How can salespeople influence a customer’s willingness to make a purchase?

Objective:

Explain the six steps in the selling process.

Key Terms:

- advantage
- approach
- benefit
- closing
- feature
- objection
- pre-approach
- presentation
- prospecting
- qualifying
- rapport

The Six-Step Selling Process

A business exists to fulfill people’s needs. Nothing happens for a business or for a customer until a sale is completed. Making a sale is all about facilitating a process in which a customer decides to purchase a good or service. Making a sale is not about a salesperson bullying someone into buying something.

The terms marketing and sales are sometimes used interchangeably. When it comes to the actual selling process, though, marketing activities are the things that build the base upon which sales are made. Some marketing activities are advertising, promotions, and public relations.

For a person-to-person sale to take place and for the customer to feel good about the experience, the salesperson should use a six-step selling process. Since each customer is different and each salesperson is different, these six steps will be reached in a unique way for each sale. The
important thing is to understand what the steps are and how they benefit both the buyer and the seller. That way, a salesperson can quickly alter a step to accommodate the personality of a particular customer. The six steps are the pre-approach, the approach, the presentation, the objection, the close, and the follow-up.

THE PRE-APPROACH

Before a salesperson shows a customer a product, he or she must carefully prepare for the interaction with the customer. This preparation, which includes gathering information about a potential customer, learning about the product(s), and preparing to meet the customer, is called the pre-approach.

The pre-approach aims to promote better understanding of both the customer’s needs and the product the salesperson is selling. In a situation in which a salesperson identifies a company to approach about a product or service, the pre-approach entails learning about the business’s history, what the business does, what its mission is, who the business’s competition is, what its concerns are, and what its current needs are. When a salesperson works for a retail store, however, the pre-approach is slightly different. Instead of researching every possible customer who will walk through the door, the salesperson learns about the different target audiences the store reaches. The salesperson studies their buying preferences, their typical needs, and their personality types.

The pre-approach is a tactical step in the selling process. It aims to anticipate customer needs. By learning about potential customers early on, the salesperson can think about what these prospects may say or do in the actual sales presentation. Based on that, the salesperson can prepare how best to respond.

**Prospecting**

A salesperson engages in prospecting during the pre-approach. Prospecting is the process of searching for potential customers who have needs the salesperson’s company can meet with a product or service it offers. A prospect is the potential client a company researches. Not every prospect needs what the company has to offer. It is a waste of time for the salesperson to approach just anyone. Because of this, a salesperson spends time qualifying prospective customers.

**Qualifying**

Qualifying involves determining whether a prospect is worth pursuing based on a defined set of criteria. When adequate pre-approach research is done, the likelihood of closing a qualified sale increases. Basic qualifying centers on three things: available money, the power to make decisions, and the desire to buy. In other words, does the prospect have money available? Does he or she have the power to spend the money? Does the prospect want or need what can be offered right now?
THE APPROACH

The adage that “there’s only one chance to make a first impression” is absolutely true in sales. The approach is the first personal interaction a salesperson has with a prospective customer in the selling process. This step entails making a favorable impression with the prospect, gaining the prospect’s attention, and establishing rapport. Rapport is a trusting relationship or connection between two people. Without these factors in place, the probability of making a sale is low. Salespeople may know and understand their products, but if they can’t relate well to their customers, the customers will most likely not want the products that are for sale. Following are some tips for you as the salesperson to introduce yourself, be professional, get the customer’s attention, and show interest that will help create a successful sales approach.

Introduce Yourself

Take the first step! People are always more at ease when they’re approached by a friendly person. Try using the GNAP technique, combined with a smile and a solid handshake, when you introduce yourself. GNAP stands for greeting, name, affiliation, and purpose.

♦ G: Greeting—“Hi!”
♦ N: Name—“I’m Dave…”
♦ A: Affiliation—“…with ABC Lawnmowers.”
♦ P: Purpose—“I hear you’re looking for a new mower that will make your yardwork go faster.” Or, “What can I help you with today?” Or, “Thanks for your time. When this new mower came on the market, I knew you’d want to see it.”

Be Professional

Customers want to deal with salespeople who look as if they know what they’re doing. That means salespeople should be clean, be well dressed, make good eye contact, smile, appear confident, have a solid handshake, and be on time for appointments.

Get the Customer’s Attention

Right after you’ve introduced yourself, help the prospect understand why he or she should invest time in working with you as a salesperson. You may have already covered this in the “Purpose” step of your introduction, or you may make another statement to grab attention. Example: “I appreciate your meeting me today. I wanted to share how we’re able to cut 30 percent from your store’s current energy consumption.”
**Show Interest**

When you show interest in others and take time to listen to their thoughts, concerns, stories, and questions, you put them at ease, build rapport, and learn more about what their needs are. In sales, this means asking questions about what prospects are looking for and what problems they are trying to overcome with a new product or service. A sale is often lost when a salesperson talks too much about himself or herself and forgets to center the conversation on the customer. At this point, identifying how to help in meeting the prospect’s needs is important. Don’t be shy—ask questions and listen carefully!

**THE PRESENTATION**

Once the prospect’s interest is captured and he or she seems comfortable with the salesperson, the product is presented for sale. The sales presentation or demonstration is the point in the selling process where the salesperson shares the features, advantages, and benefits of the product. The presentation is the “meat” of the sale. It is also the point in the process where it is vitally important that the salesperson fully understand the product and how it relates and applies to the prospect’s needs. This is where all the research done in the pre-approach pays off! The selling process varies a great deal depending on the product, the environment where the sale is taking place, and the personality of the prospect.

**The FAB Selling Method**

The FAB selling method provides a structure for presenting the product to a prospect. FAB stands for features, advantages, and benefits. This method helps a salesperson focus on a product’s benefits, which are the ultimate reasons a customer purchases a product. During the pre-approach, the salesperson lists all the features a product offers. Then, the salesperson writes out what advantages those features provide and, ultimately, what benefits they’ll give the customer.

A **feature** is a characteristic of the product. Features typically aren’t the driving factor in a customer’s choosing to buy a product. Examples of features are size, color, quality, payment terms, packaging, price, and warranty.

An **advantage** describes how a product can be used or will help the buyer. Advantages are what the features provide. Examples include a motor (feature) that requires less fuel to run
(advantage) and a programmable sprinkler system (feature) that senses when it is raining and automatically shuts off (advantage).

A **benefit** helps the customer answer “What’s in it for me?” and persuades him or her to make the purchase. Put another way, benefits help the customer see how the advantages of the product will meet the customer’s needs. For example, a four-wheeler with an extra-long storage rack (feature) will allow the user to carry items that are up to 8 inches longer than could be carried in previous models (advantage). This means fewer trips will have to be made (benefit) and less money will be spent on fuel (benefit).

**Presentation Tips**

Some tips for working through the presentation include:

1. Be excited about the product! Enthusiasm carries a strong message about a salesperson’s personal commitment to the product.
2. Relax while selling. This can be easier said than done. But a relaxed salesperson helps a prospect relax and feel better about the product being viewed.
3. Allow the prospect to interact with the product. Let the customer handle it, ride it, wear it, etc. Ask probing questions that help uncover the customer’s experiences, needs, and wants.
4. Observe body language and facial expressions for clues to the prospect’s feelings toward the product.
5. Do not interrupt a customer while he or she is speaking or taking time to think.
6. Limit the choices a prospect sees. Most experts advise showing only three options in one sitting. Too many options may be overwhelming, resulting in a lost sale.
7. Adapt the sales presentation to the prospect.
8. Look for opportunities for the prospect to agree he or she will benefit from owning the product.
9. Follow through on promises.
THE OBJECTION

After the presentation, and sometimes during the presentation, the customer will ask questions or will make statements about why he or she may not want to purchase the product. A question or statement of this type is called an objection. Objections are a common part of the selling process.

It is important for the salesperson to identify what is holding the customer back and respond to questions or statements with information that will change the customer’s mind or help the person see why the product is a good fit. Often an objection is a sign that the prospect is asking for more information about the product. During the research done in the pre-approach, possible objections should be considered and responses rehearsed. To answer some objections, the salesperson may need to ask more questions of the prospect.

Common Objections

1. Question of value: “I don’t have a need for that,” or “I already have something similar.”
2. Lack of urgency: “I don’t think it’s necessary right now,” or “I need to think about it.”
3. Perception of a lack of quality: “Your competitor has a similar product, and I trust that company more because it’s been around longer,” or “I saw something similar advertised for 15 percent less than you’re asking.”
4. Lack of money to make the purchase: “I’ve already spent my budget,” or “It costs how much?”
5. Conflict with product features: “I don’t like that design,” or “It’s more powerful than I need for my work.”

Tips for Working Through an Objection

1. Handle all objections politely and with interest. The sale is not lost just because the prospect makes an objection!
2. Acknowledge the prospect’s thoughts, and offer new information about the product.
3. Restate the objection so the prospect can hear it aloud. Doing this helps to minimize the objection and allows the prospect to modify the statement to express the objection more accurately.
4. Listen carefully. The objection may actually allow you to see that another product may be a better fit for the customer.

THE CLOSE

A customer generally doesn’t tell a salesperson straight out of the intention to purchase a product. The salesperson must ask for the sale. The process of asking a prospect for a sale is
called **closing**. The salesperson must watch for cues that the customer is ready either to purchase the product or to step away from the sale completely.

Examples of signals that a prospect is ready to purchase the product are:

- Asking about availability, delivery, and add-on services
- Asking about pricing and payment options
- Asking about features or quality
- Asking questions to learn more about the business
- Asking questions to review previous portions of the conversation
- Asking for samples or a repeat of the demonstration
- Asking about other products the business carries
- Asking for referrals of customers

**Seven Techniques to Help Close the Sale**

1. End with a small choice: “Would you like the black or silver model?” or “Can I get the 4-GB or the 8-GB version for you?”
2. End with small “yeses”: “Would you like to see how it handles in packed dirt, too?” or “Wouldn’t this save you several hours every week?”
3. End with a bargain: “This price is in effect for only two more days,” or “This is the last one in our inventory. It’s very possible the item may go on backorder today.”
4. End with a “join the club” invitation: “We’ve sold this model to many people in your current situation,” or “This product has been very popular with people who are running into the same issue you are.”
5. End with a payment method: “Will you be paying by check or credit card today?” or “Whom should I send the invoice to at your office?”
6. End with a test drive: “Why don’t you take it home and test it out?” or “Feel free to test the product out in our demo areas.”
7. End by asking for the sale: “We can get the product shipped to you as soon as you sign the contract,” or “Are you ready to take the product home today?”
THE FOLLOW-UP

For an in-person sale, especially of a high-dollar item, the salesperson should always follow up to ensure that the customer is satisfied with the purchase and not experiencing any problems. Making the effort to follow up with the customer sends the message that the salesperson and the business care about the customer and his or her experience. It also helps establish a long-term relationship with the customer.

Examples of follow-up activities are a telephone call to the customer to check on how the product is performing, a thank-you note to the customer for the purchase, and a small gift sent on behalf of the company to thank the customer for his or her purchase and loyalty to the business.

Summary:

The six steps of a sale are the pre-approach, the approach, the presentation, the objection, the close, and the follow-up.

Gathering information about a potential customer, learning about the product(s), and preparing to meet the customer is called the pre-approach.

The approach is the first personal interaction a salesperson has with a prospective customer. Introducing yourself, being professional, getting the customer’s attention, and showing interest are part of a successful sales approach.

The sales presentation is the point in the selling process where the salesperson shares the features, advantages, and benefits of a product.

The customer will ask questions or will make statements about why he or she may not want to purchase the product. A question or statement of this type is called an objection.

The process of asking a prospect for a sale is called closing.

For an in-person sale, especially of a high-dollar item, the salesperson should always follow up to ensure that the customer is satisfied with the purchase and not experiencing any problems.
Checking Your Knowledge:

1. What are the six steps of a sale?
2. What does the pre-approach involve?
3. What are some presentation tips?
4. What are some common objections and appropriate responses?
5. What are some techniques for closing a sale?

Expanding Your Knowledge:

Practice the six-step selling process in class through role-playing exercises. With the help of your instructor prepare the sales scenario.

Web Links:

The Six Critical Steps to Every Sale
http://www.home-herb-garden.com/adcopy.html

The Sales Presentation
http://www.markencom.com/docs/01mar14.htm

Closing the Sale
http://www.missouribusiness.net/cq/2002/closing_the_sale.asp

Agricultural Career Profiles
http://www.mycaert.com/career-profiles