

Sales In A Thinking Environment - by Shirley Wardell

What is the most effective way to sell? Mostly it is a process of having a real relationship with your client. A satisfying relationship that can be as good as friendship, but that has a very different purpose. I sometimes call it, client-centred selling, which puts the client's needs and feelings at the centre of the picture. I have taken many ideas from my knowledge of client-centred counselling, for which I give thanks to the genius of Carl Rogers. I have then combined those ideas with the ideas from Nancy Kline's Thinking Environment. Her ideas are elegantly distilled into a fine book called Time to Think. It is a valuable classic that is well thumbed on my desk. The Thinking Environment is an earth-shatteringly simple model of conditions, easy systems, and questions that provide the space for good thinking to occur. These conditions are relevant to selling because I believe thinking sells.

Thinking sells because if your client has thought through all the ramifications of a decision, they will feel confident. When the decision is challenged internally, amongst ambitious colleagues, it will be justifiable. Neil Rackham's excellent research with the Huthwaite Institute that led to the invention of a selling technique called SPIN shows how much a customer needs to work things through in their minds. "Thinking Selling" helps the client come to a clear understanding of similar issues, but in a less structured way.

To some extent "Thinking Selling" lets go of structure, and allows the client to think things through their own way. I think of it as "letting the client tell it their way." Sometimes with structured questioning the customer can feel that they are telling their story to fit the sales person's frame of reference. It is easier for the customer if they can say things as they come to mind and then complete the picture naturally from their own perspective.

Specific questioning fired too fast can mean that the sales person gleans less of the vital information they are trying so hard to get. Also, when you as the seller are worrying about your structure and your next question, you aren't really listening to the customer

Listening! It is the opposite of waiting for your turn to speak. It is the opposite of counting the financial potential of this account. It is a process of being really present. It is really noticing what is happening in front of your eyes with this unique person, your prospect. It is letting go of all your wishes here and staying attentive and focused on the client until they are clear what they want to do and why.

What are all the benefits of selling this way? For one thing, decisions your client makes are more stable. For another, they are likely to enjoy the process because thinking things through with good attention can be enjoyable and sometimes very stimulating. And for another, a lot of your customers spend a lot of time at work, and if you are the sales person that helps your customer think, you are making working life easier and more interesting for them. You are also adding value before you have made the sale, so even if you don't win it, you are likely to get recommendations and have an easier time trying to sell to this person in the future.

"Thinking Selling" is effective both at making the sale and at making a difference.