

Let Me Speak to the
Manager!

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Selling From the Buyer's Point of View

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Selling From the Buyers Point of View
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The delights and travail of work and family,
The moments of peace and the burdens of uncertainty,
All are made safe, sanctified by the tenacious love
and unwavering fidelity of our Beloved.
Such a woman was Nancy Waite Parke,
My Beloved, my Spouse, my heart's grand center.
To her memory are these words given
In love and ever remembrance.

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Chapter 1

What's the Problem?

It's often said that selling is an art. The artistic component is not simply the salesperson's ability to convince, persuade or manipulate the consumer. The art of selling is truly a human relations skill, its foundation is the manager's service mentality. Oddly enough, the goal of selling is not always a sale. A reputation for superior service is equally valuable for repeat business and referrals. The ultimate criteria are not just profits, but how well the salesperson treats the customer and how regularly the customer returns.

When it comes to sales, nothing happens by accident. A chain of interdependent events begins with the manager's service mentality and culminates in superior customer service. The salesperson is not an independent agent; he or she is a critical link in this service chain. Yet he is the first—often the only—personal representative customers encounter. His attitudes and behavior reflect the values and sensitivities of management. He sends a critical message to the customer: *You're respected or you're not*. Once it's sent, the message is irretrievably etched into the customer's mind.

The manager's influence and concern for service are the keys to selling from the buyer's point of view—and every customer knows it. In the long run, the customer reaps what the manager sows. That's why when things go wrong the customer will rightly proclaim, "Let me speak to the manager!"

Here's a brief example. At one time, my wife and I began each day at a little sidewalk cafe near our home. Hot rolls and freshly-brewed coffee made

up for erratic, often surly, service. Despite the occasional rudeness of the manager and the indifference of his staff, we still returned frequently.

One morning I went inside to pay our bill. The manager was just a few feet away, reading his newspaper. The waiters were joking with the cook. All of them saw me, but none paid any attention. I waited. After several minutes the manager finally folded the newspaper with a sigh, shuffled slowly to the cash register, and casually took my money without a word or a glance.

We haven't returned since. We found another coffee shop just down the street where the coffee, the rolls, and—most of all—the service, are far more satisfying.

Incidents like this are not rare. You've probably had a similar experience as a consumer, but how about as a manager? Have you ever walked in on a heated scene between a distressed customer and one of your employees and heard the customer say in exasperation, "Let me speak to the manager!"?

That statement is the frustrated consumer's last resort, a final plea for service and satisfaction. When one of your customers asks to speak to the manager, your business is on the line and your reputation is at risk. If you don't handle the situation sensitively, it's all downhill from there. Once a dissatisfied customer starts repeating the incident to family and friends—and they always will—you can forget about repeat business and referrals. And there's no telling how badly that customer will embellish the story or how they'll maul your reputation in the telling.

The key to avoiding such unpleasant events is, of course, to make sure they don't occur. Your best resources are competent salespeople whose mission is to serve the customer *from the buyer's point of view*. Sometimes the superior service means no immediate sale in favor of a long-term relationship.

Many salespeople, even experienced ones, make two essential mistakes:

1. They try to *persuade*, instead of *listening*. In order to relate to customers' concerns, it is necessary to understand what those concerns are. When salespeople attempt to *sell a product* rather than *meet a need*, customers can quickly sense the true nature of the sellers' priorities.