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Finding new clients

For those of us with a background in financial sales and a career devotion to it, it's always painful to hear our clients talking about "sales" with negative connotations. Often times a firm will tell us that they want to create a "sales culture" but they don't want their employees to be "salesy." It's as if they think that instituting a sales culture means they will suddenly turn into used-car salesmen! This is especially true in the investment industry.

There is a real fear out there that incorporating a sales culture means that employees will start assaulting the firm's prospects and clients and try and sell them all kinds of unnecessary products and services. "We don't want them to be salespeople," our client firm will say. "We just want them to meet client needs more effectively."

We need to spend some time clearly defining the meaning of "sales culture" for each of our client firms. What exactly does it mean to have a sales culture in your company – or to want one for your employees? What is a "sales culture" and how does it manifest?

First, let's look at the semantics involved. Somehow the word "sales" has become associated with very negative ideas. The term "salesperson" automatically brings to mind someone who talks too much, doesn't care what the prospect or client needs, and tries to trick or bully the client into a sale they don't want or need. It's no wonder that when someone suggests training people to be more salesy, it's met with hesitation and concern by both the employees and the firm.

But what is sales? Real sales, as opposed to the stereotype, is the human exchange of ideas where one person is conveying a need and desire and the other person is working to understand what the need is and decide whether or not they are able to meet it. In a real sales situation, the salesperson spends more time listening than talking, and works hard to uncover what the person on the other side of the exchange is trying to accomplish. The best salespeople don't "push" their own product or service at all costs; they simply fill a need expressed by the client.

A "sales culture" in a financial firm means that each client who walks in the door has the experience of being:

- Understood by the firm's employees, personally "known" and valued by them
- Listened to by the firm and its employees
- Informed about the offerings of the firm such that the customer can make decisions about doing additional business with the firm
- Asked, "What matters to you, Mr. or Ms. Client?"
- Associated with employees and advisors who are excited and enthusiastic about serving them
- Taken care of in such a way that all of their needs are understood and considered
- Happy and content to do business with that particular firm



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When a firm is exhibiting a true sales culture, the customer experience will be all of these things, and more. Does this sound so bad? Does it sound like a used car lot full of crocodiles in plaid suits stalking customers and trying to sell them lemons?

We believe it's time to "reframe" opinions about sales and sales culture. Sales are a natural extension of treating your employees well, treating your customers with the utmost respect and really working hard to meet your customers' needs. The best firms understand that. Would you like your customers to have this kind of experience working with your employees and your firm?

What do you think about this? If you're afraid to use the term "sales" or "salesperson," what is it that you're afraid of?