

Making a Difference

By Jill Konrath

"All customers care about today is price. It doesn't matter if your product (service) is better, lasts longer or enables them to do more things. If you don't have the lowest price, you lose."

Sound familiar? I can't tell you how many times I've heard discouraged sellers say various iterations of that quote in the past couple years.

No one likes to feel that they might as well be selling wastebaskets or rubber bands. You hate to think your customers could care less about the quality of your products or services. That leaves you feeling empty, like you're wasting your time and your life away.

If you're like most people, you want to feel good about the products or services you sell. You want to be proud of your services capabilities. It's important to believe your product is top-notch or a great value for its price point.

Virtually every sales book on the market talks about the importance of being able to relate the features, advantages and benefits of your offering. But, in today's market it's just not enough.

To be successful selling these days, it's imperative for you to go deeper - to understand the difference your product or service makes to your customer. And you must understand it from their perspective, not yours.

Finding the Difference

Use these strategies to better understand the difference your product or service makes to your customers.

1. Situational Analysis

Use your critical thinking skills to analyze your customer's world. Ask yourself or brainstorm with colleagues:

- To the best of your knowledge, how are customers doing things without your product/service? (Identify the top 2-3 ways)
- What problems are they likely to be experiencing because of what they're doing/using today? How might their current methods make it difficult for them to achieve their goals and objectives?
- How do these problems affect their business? This part is critical. "Feel-good" terms like lowered morale or upset workers isn't enough. Think in terms of critical business measures such as productivity, operational efficiency, profitability, costs and time-to-market. How does your offering affect these issues?

2. Ask Your Customer(s)

This is one of the most important things you can do - and it's much more effective if you do it after you've completed the situation analysis. Ask your customer:

- About how they did things before they bought your product or used your service.
- To share the problems your offering helped them fix and the goals it helped them achieve.
- About the value they realized from using your products or working with you.

This is an invaluable exercise. Have your questions prepared and take good notes. If you don't understand your customer's response, ask for clarification. You're at this meeting to learn as much as you can.

Quantify the Difference

If at all possible, quantify the value of your offering. This is what catches the interest of today's business decision maker.

How much was turnover reduced? How much faster did the product come to market? What specific cost savings were achieved? How long did it take to get these results? What percent increase/decrease was attained? What profits were gained from faster decision making?

Sound like a lot of work? It is ... but it's worth every ounce of effort you put into it.

- When you know the difference you make, developing a strong value proposition is easy.
- When you know the difference you make, it's much easier to get your foot in the door.
- When you know the difference you make, you can develop great questions that explore customer's needs, issues and concerns in areas where you have a solution.
- When you know the difference you make, it's possible to move a customer from indifference to urgency.
- When you know the difference you make, it's much easier to separate yourself from the competition.
- When you know the difference you make, it's much easier to keep going when the times are rough.

Remember this: Customers could care less about your product or service. They only care about the difference you make!

If you haven't taken time from your busy schedule to find it out - do it right away. Not only will you feel better about yourself and the work you do, but you'll also sell more!

Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, helps sellers get their foot in the door of large corporations, create demand and win profitable contracts. Get a free *Sales Call Planning Guide* (\$19.95 value) when you sign up for the Selling to Big Companies e-newsletter. Just send an email with "subscribe" in the subject line to jill@sellingtobigcompanies.com . For more info, visit <http://www.SellingtoBigCompanies.com> .