

The \$500 Conversation: Holding Sales Meetings Prospects Would Pay For

By Jill Konrath

Would you buy something from yourself? Think about it.

Imagine yourself as your customer. You're busy. Really busy. You've been in meetings all morning and by lunchtime you're already two hours behind schedule.

Grabbing a quick sandwich and chips at the vending machine, you sit down at your desk to try to catch up while you eat. Forty new emails sit in your inbox awaiting your response. A quick scan shows nothing requiring an immediate reply.

Checking voicemail, you discover 23 messages piled up. Since you're expecting an important call, you're forced to listen to each one. But your attention span is short. If the caller doesn't pique your interest right away, they're bleeped.

Right after lunch, you're meeting with a salesperson who somehow managed to get on your calendar. You look at the work piled on your desk. There's enough there to keep you busy for two weeks if you had nothing else to do but finish it.

Your stomach wretches with the dread of another non-productive meeting. You have no patience for sellers who ask trite questions to which they should already know the answer.

You don't want to hear about their products or service. Nor do you want to add any more complexity or change to what you're already doing - even for just a short while. You can't keep up as it is.

That's the reality of most corporate decision makers today. Now think about what you do when you call them or meet with them. If you're like most sellers, your approach is creating your own problems.

If you've been in sales for a long time, you're likely using the same strategies and techniques you learned long ago. As a result, you're fast becoming a dinosaur.

If you're new to sales, you're likely being trained on skills that worked just a few short years ago but are no longer effective.

Sales success today requires you to be distinct or face becoming extinct.

In the "Experience Economy", authors Pine and Gilmore write that future economic growth lies in the value of experiences and transformations.

"Those businesses that relegate themselves to the diminishing world of goods and services will be rendered irrelevant. To avoid this fate, you must learn to stage a rich, compelling experience."

Hmmmm. An interesting thought to ponder. What relevance could it possibly have for people who sell?

The truth is that every interaction you have with prospective customers is either a positive or a negative experience - never neutral. If your prospect feels they received value from your interaction, you get a second chance. If not, you're out.

The big question then becomes, "From a customer's perspective, what constitutes value?" Or, stated another way, "What makes an experience with you rich and compelling?"

Sharing information about your product or service contributes virtually nothing to the value equation. It's assumed that you will say only good things about your offering.

Additionally, customers perceive that what you sell is nearly identical to your competitors - whether you think it is or not. As far as they're concerned, everything is a commodity or soon will be.

Rich and compelling experiences are created by sellers who recognize the shift that's taken place in the market. They study their prospect's business problems and goals. They constantly search for information that their customers would find valuable.

When they meet with prospective buyers, they bring along ideas and insights into what's happening in the marketplace, with their prospect's customers or with their competitors. They challenge their customer's paradigm of what it takes to be successful and get them thinking.

These "experiences" don't just happen serendipitously. You have to immerse yourself in your prospect's business, market segment, industry and more. You need to continually be asking, "How can I help my customers achieve their goals or solve their problems?"

As a person who sells, your job is to orchestrate this rich and compelling experience. You can't leave it up to happenstance.

Authors Pine and Ginsmore further advocate that customers should pay for this "experience." With that in mind, I'll leave you with one final thought:

Would your prospects willingly pay \$500 for an hour of your time?

Think about that each time you meet with a potential customer and make it happen. Your competitors won't stand a chance.

Jill Konrath, author of [Selling to Big Companies](#), is a recognized sales strategist in the highly competitive business-to-business market. A popular speaker at sales meetings, she helps her clients crack into corporate accounts, speed up their sales cycle and generate demand for their offering..

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