

P William Clarke

Blame it on the Industry

Many people conduct business with a supplier or store just because they always have. If you are in direct sales you may hear things like, “We are happy with our current supplier.” If you are in retail, you may hear nothing at all because, your customers are happy with you.

People are creatures of habit. My research suggests people who are happy with their current suppliers or retailers are really not sure what they are happy with at all. The fact is, they are happy only because they don't feel a deep sense of dissatisfaction.

Cavemen were happy carrying things on their backs for hundreds of years until the invention of the wheel. Once the wheel was invented it was still not an easy sale. Check out the sales pitch. “Hey, there is an easier way to carry that...” said one caveman. “Thanks friend, but we've been doing it this way for hundreds of years.” replied the other.

You may have a better product, price, quality or service but until the customer internalizes a need for one of these things they will feel content and continue to do business as they always have. Your job as a salesperson is to get your prospective customer to identify dissatisfaction with their current method of purchasing within your offering.

Salespeople often attempt to sway the prospect by asking questions about the current vendor. “Do they have this?, Do they provide that?” Once they've exhausted all the comparables they are dead in the water.

Here's the problem. Asking your prospect to compare a vendor they just told you they were happy with can be counter productive. Sharing negative attributes about their current vendor would create an internal conflict. Your prospect will have no choice but to defend the notion they are happy. Once they reinforce this position it will become nearly impossible to get them to change.

Give your prospect an easy victory. Tell them you're happy to hear they are being taken care of. Tell them your company is in a mode of continuous improvement. And, you are looking for ways to increase your value to your own happy customers. Then spring this on them. “Before I go...from an industry stand point, if our industry could improve in just one area to better serve companies like yours, what would it be?” They may say they don't know. Just give them a nudge by saying in a real friendly way, “Well, if you had to pick something.”

Asking a second time will often prompt them to offer up something. The answer they provide will always be the most dissatisfying thing about their current supplier. But, don't jump on it right away. Just look or sound confused and say, “That's the last thing I thought you would say, any reason?” You now have them talking about what's most dissatisfying about their current vendor. Ask them how it affects them, what they have done about it and if it is a big enough problem to address.

You now have them moving in the right direction. Remember, it isn't to get your prospect talking about the negatives of their current suppliers. Your prospect doesn't know you, they are guarded and they feel a sense of obligation to defend their current buying habit. That's just human nature but now you can make it easier for your prospects to share their dissatisfaction with you in the future, by letting them, Blame It On The Industry.