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Thirty Seconds that Count

There's a lot more going on during the first 30 seconds of any buyer-seller exchange than you may realize. Sure, there are a lot of words and formalities, but did you ever stop to ask yourself what's really going on? If you're in retail sales, your prospect is probably already expecting an encounter with a salesperson. If you're in direct sales, you may be the last person your prospect was planning on communicating with today.

These two sales environments differ in many areas, but they both contain similar elements of human interaction. Almost immediately, your prospect begins formulating ideas about you. Because opinions are based on perceptions alone, their conclusions may have nothing to do with you. It's usually the other guy or gal that makes them uneasy, uncomfortable, or just plain standoffish. That other guy or gal is your alter ego, the salesperson.

Salespeople actually tend to change who they are and how they act when they jump into their sales role. Odd; you spent your entire life developing skills designed to get people like you, but you trade that person in for someone that nobody wants to deal with; a salesperson.

Some of the most successful salespeople I have known didn't think they were in sales at all. They just helped customers the same way they'd help a friend or neighbor. But in sales it's not as easy as helping your neighbor, because your prospect is looking at you with a much more critical eye.

You must polish your human relations skills without losing who you are. In other words, if you're not funny, don't try to be funny. If you're not the most happy-go-lucky person, you don't need to be. If you're a drag on the other hand, leave that person at the door and key in on these next few critical pieces they never taught you in school.

You've heard the saying, "it's not what you say, it's how you say it." You won't be surprised to know people form opinions about you based less on "what" you say, and more so on "how" you say it. Although a good sales technique with the right voice tone and inflection is better than a bad one, you may be surprised to know that physiology has more to do with it than anything else.

Physiology encompasses the way you stand, sit, walk and look. Observe the way you are sitting right now. Are you slouching in your chair? If so, sit up straight! Don't you feel more engaged and ready? While visually a strong posture commands respect, over the phone a strong posture projects your voice tone and inflections appropriately. The way you stand implies something about you. Do you look confident, friendly and inviting, or do you look like you can't wait to go home for the day? In a retail setting, this could be the difference between a customer feeling like an invited guest and an unwelcome intruder. In telephone or direct sales, your posture projects your confidence and conviction in your product or service.

Verbal communication does have something to do with it but, every prospect is like blind date where both parties a bit uncomfortable. For those of you prospecting, keep in mind, your prospect was not expecting you. Be confident but use humility. Remember in retail, "How can I help you?" begs for the "I'm just looking" response. Don't jump right into your sales agenda. You shouldn't be afraid to show your prospects that you're not much different than they are, even if that means poking some fun at yourself. Remember to speak at the same speed as your prospect during the first few verbal exchanges to put them at ease. Don't rush out and extend your hand. Don't you hate it when salespeople come out and immediately introduce themselves and offer to shake your hand? You respond by shaking their hand out of courtesy, but doesn't this give you a negative feeling? Don't make the same mistake. In a corporate environment where the handshake is inevitable, be patient. Your prospects will extend their hands. This makes you appear less eager, forceful, controlling, and less like a salesperson.