



Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

Selling — something you do for a customer

The telephone rings at suppertime. I answer, and the first thing I hear is a syrupy voice saying, “Mr. Evans? How are you today?”

Like anyone who has ever been on the receiving end of a telemarketing call, I know immediately that the only interest this caller has is to separate me from some of my money. I mutter “no thanks,” or something less polite, and slam down the telephone.

A true salesman

It does help relieve my tension if I am using the telephone that disconnects when the receiver is placed in a cradle or holder. The physical slam provides considerable satisfaction, and, I assume, transmits the intended message to the caller. Then I mutter, “Lousy salesman!” But that’s a big mistake. I don’t know the correct word for telemarketers, maybe hustlers, but they shouldn’t be dignified with the term “salesperson.”

Selling in its highest and best form is something salespeople do for a client, not something they do to a client. The best professional salespeople are listeners, advisors, strategists and, maybe most important, problem solvers. A survey of some 1,300 companies by a national business magazine showed that high achievers in sales have a thorough knowledge of the client’s business and can offer sound ways to improve it. Success, the survey revealed, comes from the ability to listen and to ask the right questions.

It is about service

Simply put, selling is a service — the art of persuading clients to buy something that they need. It’s not trying to talk people into buying something that they don’t need. My son Doug is the top salesperson at the health club where he works, and he has been for many years. He loves the health club business and knows that he potentially improves the life, if not the life span, of every person he signs up for a membership. Selling, for him, provides great satisfaction.

James Evered, author of the book *The Disciplines of Selling: A Motivational Approach*, contends that unless a salesperson sincerely believes that the customer will be better off with the product or service, he or she has no moral right to sell it. This puts selling on a very high plane.

I know for a fact that many producers of registered beef cattle don’t see themselves as salespeople. They prefer to classify themselves as breeders, practitioners of the science of beef cattle selection and improvement. And they most certainly are; they take pride in their cattle. But it is difficult to move a good product at profitable prices without good selling.

It is easy to see the service aspect of selling when you stop and think about it. Who could deny, for example, the value of selling parents the merits of buying a high-quality registered heifer for their child. How can one even put a price on the value of a registered heifer project that will provide the youngster and his or her family with hours of pleasure, while it teaches the child responsibility, self-reliance, pride of ownership and much more. The sale obviously involves much more than the animal involved.

Providing herd-improving bulls to a commercial customer is a great service, too. The sale involves more than bulls, it involves the future of the buyer’s cattle operation. Making sales that can improve a producer’s future requires more than believing in and understanding your product. You must also understand the cattle producer and what his or her needs are — more milk, more pounds, more marbling, more calving ease, etc. Future sales depend heavily upon how

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much the bulls improve the herd, which many correlate with calf sale prices.

Don’t be a hard-sell marketer

Although some breeders might like to believe it, there isn’t a single set of bulls that will be right for every commercial herd. Business owners who promote seedstock they know or suspect won’t prove satisfactory for the buyer are not far removed from hard-sell telemarketers who never intend to get you to buy but once.

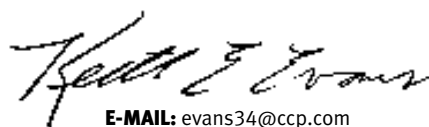
Understanding a client’s wants and needs takes herd visits and long conversations combined with the ability to ask the right questions and correctly interpret the answers. Marketing surveys show that when farmers and ranchers make a purchase of equipment or cattle, their first concern is the product’s quality, performance and effectiveness. The second most important concern is the service that the seller provides. Price, which many believe is the overriding issue, is No. 3 on their buying considerations list. As one farmer responded to a survey, “I am inclined to give my business to a supplier [who is] sincerely interested in my operation and respects our time when we are especially busy.”

Personal connection

Selling person-to-person, one-on-one can be learned. Hundreds of books have been written on the subject, and there is something to be gained from most of them. Breeders can also study the kind of salespeople to whom they give their business. Their techniques will likely help sell cattle, too. Particularly notice the attitude of successful salespeople. It is highly unlikely that they look upon selling as a disagreeable chore.

My years in the beef cattle association business have shown me that livestock people are good listeners. They are eager to learn about anything that will improve their lot. They are curious, appreciate good advice and welcome ideas on how to solve problems. Plus, most of them are enjoyable people to get to know and spend time with. People like these make wonderful clients — receptive to good salespeople who market high-quality genetics.

Unfortunately, there may be more outstanding herds in the registered cattle business than there are outstanding salespeople. So hone your skills and keep in mind that selling is something you do for people, not to them.


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