

Merchandising

by Keith Evans



Improve your salesmanship skills

Advertising and public relations are vital to the success of a registered beef cattle program, but sales put dollars in the bank.

My guess is that no one has ever responded to one of your advertisements by sending you a check and a request to ship a bull. Advertising and promotion don't work that way. Rather they create interest, build desire and make people want to telephone you or come by your place to find out more about your cattle.

Quality advertising and marketing deliver customers to your door. How these potential customers are handled from that point on determines whether a sale will be consummated.

Salesmanship uses the interest and desire that your advertising and promotion have created to turn your cattle into cash. Advertising and sales are two sides of the same marketing coin, and one is just as important as the other.

Since cattle don't sell themselves, every successful seedstock operation must have a skilled salesperson. In your operation, you most likely do the selling. The better you sharpen your sales skills, the more successful your business will be.

■ A new outlook

This fact is a bitter pill for some cattle producers to swallow. Too many look upon a "salesman" as a parasite, when in fact they are, or can be, an asset to both the seller and the buyer.

It's a fact that the good salespeople are not loud and overbearing. They don't try to fast-talk you into buying something you don't want or need. They're not like telemarketers selling vinyl siding who interrupt your dinner with an unsolicited telephone call about a product you neither want nor need.

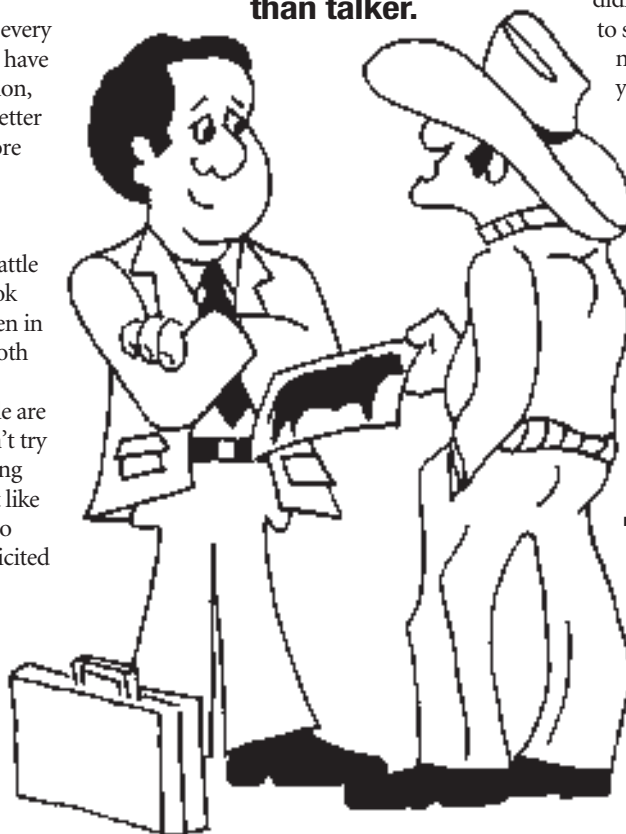
Good salespeople are intelligent, informed businesspeople. So always keep in mind that you are a businessperson selling seedstock to another businessperson. Your success depends upon the success of your customers.

A good salesperson is a better listener than talker. Seedstock salespeople know the cattle business as well as, if not better than, their customers. What's more, they thoroughly understand their own herds and breeding programs.

A successful seedstock salesperson is likable, sincere, honest, positive and straightforward — the kind of person with whom customers like to do business, the kind of person with whom you would like to do business.

Finally, a business-to-business salesperson should be able to identify the problems a buyer faces and know how to offer solutions. That's why listening is so important.

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■ Case in point

For much of my career I dealt with salespeople on one level or another almost every day. Many of them were good and made my job easier and less complicated.

One of the best was Jay Butler, who worked for a medium-sized printing operation in the Kansas City area. Like all printers, he was happy to bid on any project. But he never submitted an artificially low bid just to get the job, then later added charges or cut quality in order to make the job profitable for his company.

You could trust him to provide you with the best quality for the price you were willing to pay.

He always stood behind his work. If the printers made a mistake, Jay would see that the job was reprinted, no questions asked.

Probably most important, Jay knew the printing business from the inside out. He didn't start in sales. He worked his way up to salesman after toiling at and mastering nearly every printing occupation. When you needed help, Jay could come up with a solution. He knew how to cut costs to the minimum and maintain a high-quality appearance.

On the other hand, he could produce meticulously reproduced, high-quality four-color work without wasting money. His goal was not to make a killing on the current job, but to keep you as a customer over the long haul.

And he did it with me. We worked together for some 25 years and remain friends to this day.

■ Take-home lessons

If Jay knew the cattle business, I am sure this is about how he would tell you to sell seedstock.

When a potential customer arrives, your first job is to make a good impression. Be dressed properly and have your place in shape. Dirty work clothes, greasy hands, a dirty pickup and a headquarters that shows neglect is no way to build confidence in

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a first-time visitor, or a repeat customer for that matter.

Smile, shake hands firmly and welcome the visitor as if you mean it. And you should mean it, because at that moment satisfying this person is the most important thing you have to do. Being courteous is the way civil people treat each other the world over, and business relationships should be no different.

Don't rush out to look at cattle. Offer a cup of coffee or a cold drink. This gives you time to visit and find out more about the customer's herd and the kind of bulls needed.

Nearly every bull buyer has a problem. If he were completely satisfied with the bulls he has been using, he probably wouldn't have given you a call and stopped by your place. Find out from the start what problems are involved and how you can solve them.

It is important to discover the potential customer's price range. No need to show a \$5,000 bull if the customer will pay \$2,500 tops. In fact, some people group bulls by price so a particular customer sees only the best bulls within the range he is willing to pay.

Jay Butler would never show samples of work that would boost a job to \$20,000 if the maximum I could pay were \$10,000. Rather, he did everything he could to provide me the best \$10,000 job possible.

Once you have determined all this, it is time to pull out your performance registration certificates. At that point the customer can look at the records of all the bulls that fit the required specifications. From that point on, it is a simple matter of sorting a few bulls into a pen to allow the customer to make the final decision.

This way you place little if any pressure on the customer. None of us like to be "sold." We like to gather the facts and make our own decision. So develop your selling procedures accordingly.

Understand your customers, treat them as important people and help them solve problems. That's being a business-to-business salesperson.

It works for Jay Butler, and it will work for you, too.

