

The Tidal Wave Sale

In a sales interaction with a prospective client, I offered several solutions to his particular situation. I had asked him several questions, and upon determining his needs, presented a variety of different answers. I told him about my corporate programs, recommended one of my public workshops, suggested that he register for my newsletter, and asked him to complete a questionnaire that would help identify where he and his team could improve. When I hung up the phone, it dawned on me that I may have presented too many solutions, too quickly. Sadly, I had fallen prey to using the tidal wave sales approach (please don't chastise me and tell me I'm insensitive – it has nothing to do with recent world events). Unfortunately, I never heard from this person again, even though I tried to contact him by telephone and email.

A tidal wave sale happens when you overwhelm your customer during the sales process. In other words, you bowl them over with too much information or too many ideas in an effort to close the sale. Here is another example:

A homeowner I know met with an interior designer for some consultation on improving the appearance of her home. During their first meeting, the designer suggested several different options and ideas and at the end of the meeting asked for a deposit so she could begin the job. Although the ideas and solutions that were presented sounded good, the homeowner was hesitant to make a commitment to move forward because he needed time to digest and consider the multitude of ideas that had been presented. It was evident that the designer had used the tidal wave sales approach.

Many sales professionals, particularly SME's (Subject Matter Experts) make the mistake of using this approach. They have the best intentions and truly want to help their clients and prospects but tend to get carried away. As a result, they offer all the solutions they can think of believing they are helping their customer. However, in reality, they actually make it more challenging for customers to make a decision.

Most sales people don't realize that they use this particular approach. They become so accustomed to telling people everything about their product or service, forgetting that too much information can actually be detrimental. They forget that most people can only absorb a certain amount of information in any period of time.

I remember looking for a new bed with my wife many years ago. We visited four or five stores and in each store we were told that we should look for something different in a mattress. The sales people told us all about the features of the beds they sold and by the end of the day we were completely confused and didn't know what

factors we should consider in our purchase. We felt overwhelmed and as a result, ended up postponing our decision for several weeks. If the sales people had asked us what was important in our buying decision they could have presented a solution that was more relevant instead of giving us all the information on their particular beds.

Customers look to you for help. They rely on your expertise to help them make a buying decision. However, when you overwhelm them with information or solutions you actually make it more difficult for them to decide. You need to be careful how much information you give people, especially in preliminary conversations and particularly if your product is highly technical in nature. Keep your answers brief and to the point. Avoid giving too much information, too many answers, or too many solutions. Here is a final example;

When my wife and I purchased our house we planned to replace the carpet on the main level. The sales person in one of the stores we visited spent close to ten minutes talking about under-padding. But most of the information he shared with me had little relevance to my situation. And, in several instances, I had no idea what he was talking about. It was obvious he knew a lot about his products but he didn't know how to present this information concisely.

So, how can you avoid this?

The best way to prevent this from happening is to ask your customer or prospect a series of high-quality questions to determine exactly what they need and to learn more about their individual situation. Determine what solution is most appropriate for them. Limit your suggestions to one or two ideas; resist the temptation to offer several alternatives. Remember that telling is not selling. Professional selling means helping people make an educated buying decision. That means you need to focus your attention on your customer's agenda, not on closing the sale.

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