



by Ronna Caras, President - Caras Training

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# Why Selling Means Better Service

## And How to Get it Done Properly

Five years ago I bought my dream car. At the end of the lease, I was certain the car was as fabulous as I had expected, so I arranged for the buyout. If things go as planned, you will see me in the little white convertible with the pale gray top well past 2015.

I love driving my car. I especially love driving it into the dealer when it instructs me that service is due. And most of all, I love not worrying that I will be charged for unnecessary repairs. That confidence comes with a car whose warranty includes most everything.

So, in order to keep this state of bliss, I planned to invest another \$4000+ on the extended warranty. It's not a lot of money for "bliss". I mentioned this to the financial services representative who helped arrange for the lease buyout (once about a year before the lease ended and then again as we reached the end date). He told me I needed to talk with the dealer. I mentioned this to the dealer who told me I would need to drive the one hundred miles to meet with her in person to discuss it. I called the manufacturer's customer service department to order new cds for the navigation system and asked if they could help me extend the warranty. She did not know and said someone would call me back. No one called.

Finally, after the lease was bought out, I went to my local dealership because I was certain the old warranty was about to expire. I wanted to buy the extended warranty. He was very kind and apologetic when he told me I had missed the deadline. The warranty had just expired and it was too late to buy an extension.

### **Everybody loses when no one is prepared to sell.**

During my three conversations with these call centers, someone should have been able to tell me that the warranty was about to expire and I needed to act quickly. That's the minimum level of service a luxury car manufacturer should provide. Even better would have been for them to take my cue and present the features of the warranty plan along with the pricing. They would have made the sale and everyone would have been happier. The best situation would have been achieved if they had been proactive and called, written or emailed me.

### *As consumers, we see this in most industries.*

- We find out a friend received 20% off because she bought a larger quantity and wish that someone had told us when we were shopping.
- We learn about an upgraded version of the product we just bought and are upset to have missed out on the additional features.
- We realize a vendor we have been doing business with for years offers a product that we have been buying elsewhere and paying more for.
- We discover why the less expensive dining chairs were a mistake and wish someone had explained the differences in construction before the boss fell.

As consumers we may not realize these are missed sales opportunities. We may just think "bad service" or "company too lazy to care about me". As business managers we must see it more clearly. In this day and age, selling and service are linked in the buyer's mind.



## Effective sales presentations make customers feel helped.

The following situations show what often happens when employees are not skilled at conducting a sales conversation and what can happen to get a more satisfactory outcome.

*In a restaurant, we see untrained employees who misunderstand the fact that effective sales presentations make customers feel helped.*

*Ask, "Which do you recommend, the salmon or the lamb chop?" and hear, "I don't eat fish so I haven't tried the salmon. It sells well, though." Where does a server get the idea we care what he eats? The right answers could be to explain "how many customers come back for the salmon because of its crispy sweet glaze". And, "the lamb chops are ideal for someone who likes spicy sauces." This sets up the server as the expert on the restaurant's food and the customer as the expert on his or her preferences – a perfect fit.*

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*On the phone, we receive the great news that the vendor will come and pick up the new fax machine that does not work for our needs. It's a little unsettling though because the agent seems unconcerned about what we will use now that the fax machine was a failure. Doesn't he care about the customer's need for a fax that drove the purchase in the first place? Doesn't he want to know what we mean by "does not work for our needs?" Some service professionals believe their jobs are to react to a customer's request as quickly as possible. Instead, they should understand their primary role is to fill a customer's business needs. "I'm happy to have that picked up for you and am sorry it did not meet your needs. We have many different fax machines and I know it can be challenging to pick the one with exactly the right capabilities for your business. May I ask you a few quick questions to understand your application so I can recommend an option that will work for you?" This makes the customer service professional an expert on how your products help your customers so customers see the value of coming back to you again and again.*

## Old-school sales tactics reduce buy-in from staff and customers.

Once upon a time, salespeople were taught to "present an offer" and "close the sale". For example, "We have a special on raspberry flavored water today. May I add a case to your order?"

Some have been taught a stronger approach that does not give the customer an option. "I'll be sending out our specially priced raspberry flavored water. Will 3 cases be enough or is 4 better?" It is tough to equate this type of selling with good customer service.

If this is the strategy your customer care or customer retention group has been taught, you are probably getting less buy-in than you need from staff and customers. Less buy-in means lower results because agents are not making the connections and doing the selling. When they try to sell, they are pushing away as many customers as they are reeling in.

If this old sales model proliferates, I predict we will see a backlash against selling in the service environment just the way we saw the "do not call" movement arise and change telemarketing.

## A “service-sale” approach makes your staff look confident and competent rather than pushy.

**Selling in the service environment requires training and coaching on three things:**

### ***1. Hearing customers cues and taking action to provide help***

- Teach staff the top 10 problems customers’ experience that can be solved by your products or services. After all, your products and services were each designed to address needs or solve problems.
- Make sure they know the words customers use that indicate they have problems you can solve. Provide a list of the statements customers make and the questions customers ask that identify a sales opportunity.
- Give staff some proactive phrases they can use to show customers they heard the need or concern and would like to offer some suggestions to help.

### ***2. Make effective presentations of products and services that address basic needs for saving money, saving time or being comfortable and safe***

- Break down key products so front line understands top features.
- Connect each feature to the value it brings (money, time, security).
- Provide tools and cheat sheets so staff feels confident they have guidelines to follow.
- Give everyone time to practice engaging in effective sales conversations.

### ***3. Gain opinions rather than agreement.***

If they can’t create interest they won’t create action. So, instead of making a sales pitch and asking for the sale, help front line staff open up a conversation and connect with your valuable customers. This means teaching staff to:

- Acknowledge the customer’s cue and ask a soft question to get the conversation started, “Did you know we have a new way to save you money on this?” If the customer does not show interest in the discussion, at least they know your company cares enough to try to help.
- Present products and services colorfully then see if the customer is sold or not. “I recommend you consider this option because it has... (feature) which means... (value). Can you see how that will be of value to you?” If the answer is positive, then the sale can be assumed. If the answer is negative, then more selling is required.



## Service-people sell when they are sold.

I began this article, sharing a story of service failure and I blamed the vendor for not putting the right tools and behaviors in place. Now here's the funny part. Even when companies do not encourage selling, many customer service people do it anyway. This happens when, and only when, the team member:

- Truly believes the customer is better off after accepting the additional product or service
- Feels completely confident he or she can answer any questions asked about the recommendation

When a high-quality service professional becomes sold on the product or service, you are half way to the outcome you need. When he or she can talk about the product or service without fear of looking foolish, you have everything.

So skip the worry about closing early and hard and focus on the openings customers give you every day.

Your results will include more satisfied customers, more committed employees and increased revenue all at the same time.

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## About the author

Ronna Caras is a consultant, writer and frequent speaker on the subjects of non-intrusive selling and adult learning. For more great ideas on ways to improve the effectiveness of front line employees, go to [www.carastraining.com](http://www.carastraining.com) for free downloads. Or, contact Ms Caras directly at [rcaras@carastraining.com](mailto:rcaras@carastraining.com).

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