

Building Trust

Building trust involves more than saying: “Trust me.” While politicians and CEOs can do this and get away with it (occasionally), sales people always have to demonstrate that they can be trusted by their actions, not just their words.

Customers want to know you sincerely want to do the best thing for them. Of course, they know that sales people work for salaries, commissions, bonuses, trips to Hawaii and so on. They know that this isn't a hobby or a charity mission. Nevertheless they need to know that your desire for commission payments will not take precedence over your desire to do the right thing.

As a sales manager, I make it my business to be very clear with my team: I expect trustworthy behavior at all times. There are four ‘rules of trust’ we can use to discuss this; each one of these presents an opportunity to behave well, or badly, in the eyes of the customer. These rules of trust are:

- Telling the truth, always.
- Honoring commitments.
- Handling problems.
- Giving trust to get trust.

Telling the truth, always, sounds to some people like an impossibility. To others it doesn't seem to be a problem. Why is this? The answer is that it is impossible to tell just one lie. Tell one, and you have to tell another to cover up the first one. Then you've got to spin the same story to other people to appear to be consistent. Then you have to remember who you told what story too. One lie breeds plenty more.

It follows that the golden rule of truthfulness is simple: avoid telling the first lie. This is easier than it sounds. I'm often amazed at how easy it is for some people to fall into a chain of unnecessary deception.

The customer asks, “Do you have a box that does x, y and z?” The sales rep knows that there is a box available that does x and y, but only some of z.

“Sure thing” the rep says, “in fact our model AB4321 was designed especially for people like you who need x, y and z all in one box.” Internally a voice is screaming at him: “How am I going to cover up the fact it does only part of z? Maybe they don't really need it all and we can bluff our way to a sale. Perhaps I can get the development guys to write a quick mod. I'm going to get in trouble again. Why am I always getting in trouble?”