

SUCCESSFUL SALES FOR MEETING SUPPLIERS

Selling to Women

Have you noticed that women have a story to tell you? I've been asking that question for 13 years to audiences throughout North America, and sometimes men's eyes literally roll back in their heads. Talk about your pained expressions—that question will do it every time, at least where men are concerned. I do not intend to be cruel or carelessly inflict undue pain, but you really do need to hear her story—that is, if you want to grow your sales. Why? Because inside her story is everything you need to know—what she most wants to happen and the nightmares she prays will not happen.

Women and men listen differently, and it's a difference worth understanding if you are serious about growing sales.

What I'm talking about is more than psychology or sociology—it's deeply rooted in neurochemistry. Women and men have powerful chemicals at work in their brains. One of those chemicals is oxytocin, and we now know women have much more of it than men. Oxytocin is a powerful bonding chemical that drives women to connect and to engage with you. As her oxytocin levels rise and she's talking things out, telling you her story, she feels better and better—if it appears you're listening.

The bottom line is that women and men listen differently, and it's a difference worth understanding if you are serious about growing sales. What you misunderstand can cost you plenty. Many men maintain a neutral—some would say blank—facial expression when women are telling their stories. And, "neutral" to her is translated as "not listening," "doesn't care" or "shut up." Many men have told me that their neutral facial expressions are their "listening faces." But it looks like "not listening," and not listening is the worst form of condescension. Sadly, many men acknowledge they don't listen, or only half listen to pick out the important information, choosing to dismiss so-called small talk as meaningless chatter. That's a tactic guaranteed to cost you sales.

Choose to be an active listener, engaged and interested in what matters to her. That will make the pain go away, I promise. Put some expression in your face, look her in the eye and let her know you are listening. How? Ask checking questions to confirm that you understand exactly what she means. Repeat what she said to give her the opportunity to confirm or clarify. Take good notes. The little stuff matters.

On the other side of the table, when men are pitching to women, women will often smile, nod and say "uh-humm." What does all this smiling and nodding mean? Some men have told me they believe a woman's smile means, "She wants me!" She may indeed want you, but there's a greater chance she's simply a polite listener. Go with the polite listener point of view, please.

Many men tell me they think smiling and nodding means, "I like what I'm hearing, tell me more." Others think it means she's clueless and it's going right over her head. Women will often keep smiling and nodding while on the inside saying, "I can't believe this guy. He's talked for 10 minutes and hasn't asked me what I think or how I feel. What a jerk!" He's probably not a jerk; he may sincerely believe she's



BY
SHARON ROBERTS



given him every signal to provide more information.

So, how can you know what she means or what she wants? Ask. Ask her questions and then do the toughest thing—be quiet and listen carefully as she responds. Let her finish her thoughts and resist the urge to jump in and interject a solution for her problem. She values the gift of your attention so you can hear and understand her unique situation. It's not small talk if it matters to her; it's big talk and that translates into big dollars.

Speaking of small talk, she'll e-mail and call her colleagues—talk, talk, talking about how wonderful you are to do business with. And that's advertising money can't buy!

Perhaps you're asking: Do women do a better job when selling to women? Surprisingly, almost every time I speak on the subject of selling to women, saleswomen tell me, "I've been guilty of the things you're talking about, and I should know better!" They acknowledge they themselves would not tolerate this behavior from men or women. Often they blame the men who taught them and then begrudgingly acknowledge that they are ulti-

mately responsible for their own actions.

Does the secret to selling to women boil down to treating women with more respect, or is it simply a matter of treating men and women the same? While these explanations may score high on the "political correctness" scale, they are neither correct nor enlightening. If there are real differences in how women and men react, communicate, shop, socialize and make decisions—and indeed there are—then there are real differences in the art and science of selling to women versus men.

Women actively search throughout their network of colleagues for suppliers who have a track record of engaging in capable, caring and committed business relationships. Now you know why I always leave my audiences with this business-building fact:

Women do not gossip, they advertise!TM

SHARON ROBERTS is owner of Roberts & Roberts Associates and a member of the MPI Dallas/Fort Worth Chapter. She can be contacted at sharon@r2assoc.com.