



Using Your Personal Power to Sell

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There's no such thing as rejection, somebody saying "no" is just like somebody saying "yes". "No" is just a word, like "yes" is a word, except we put all these connotations on certain words: "No" is bad and "yes" is wonderful. Here's the key — if I don't give "no" any power, then it doesn't stick to me — I can keep getting "no's" and it doesn't matter. Eventually, the more I keep going the more "yeses" I will get.

My first sales manager was a guy called Jack Kemp. He had thirteen children and was very brisk and down to earth. He smoked like a chimney, called a spade a spade, and taught me that I was the one who had to do it. So instead of helping me out in the middle of a sale, he let me flounder. It was horrendous because the customers were hard core engineers and construction workers who didn't have time for a sales presentation, let alone one from a sixteen year old kid who was still wet behind the ears.

Looking back, I see that it was some of the best training I ever had because I learned by doing. Jack never interrupted or took over, then after the call when we were sitting in his car, he would ask me, "What do you think? What did you do right?" And so I got to realize what worked and what didn't work just by doing it. In sales you just have to throw yourself in and go for it. Even if it is the wrong thing to do or say, you are learning your trade — if you don't do anything — nothing happens. No learning, no sales, no nothing!

Feel What is Going on for the Customer

On my first sales calls I had verbal diarrhea and didn't listen at all to the customer. Jack told me to stop talking and start listening. I'm still learning that one. To listen is the most difficult thing because you have to step outside of yourself and not listen to your worries, issues or the babble that goes on in your head. You have to actually listen and get a feeling for what is really going on with the customer — some people call it empathy.

The problem with the word empathy is that it means understanding another person so well that you identify with them and feel the same way that they do. Native Americans express it as, 'Walking a mile in another person's moccasins'. In a sales call where you only have sometimes a few minutes to get to know this 'stranger' it's impossible to 'know' them so well, plus, it's not your job to identify with them in that way. Your job is to quickly get a feeling about them and then be flexible enough to get into sync with the type of personality they are.



For a sales person all you really need to do is observe and listen and then become the kind of person they can communicate with. For example, if they are sitting in an office with lots of photographs of their family it's a clue – just a clue that they are involved with their family. It doesn't mean that you start talking about your family, or asking questions about their family – it's just a hint that people are important to them so you might leverage that aspect in your sales presentation.

Of course, you may be meeting in a somewhat sterile conference room which shows nothing of their personality – that's when your observation skills again come into play. How are they dressed? Suit, casual, expensive, neat, or untidy? It's not maybe going to give you the key to their personality – it will allow you however to get out of your head and into theirs. For example, one lady I called on in a large corporation had a small statue of Buddha on her desk and was dressed in loose 'robe' type clothes. She had a very serene personality and so we ended up talking about meditation – which I do from time to time, and by the end of the call, she had committed to my giving a sales presentation to the rest of her team. We rolled out a \$350,000 training program with them the following month.

People Like to do Business with Like-Minded People

Same company, a couple of years later and my champion was replaced by a guy who wore a suit, and military style haircut and a fierce demeanor. He had a way of almost shouting when he spoke and literally terrified most of his staff. Almost immediately he asked me how come my company had come up with the name McNeil & Johnson, I told him it was a family name and that we 'hailed' from Inverness. He then smiled and spent the next half hour telling me all about his Scottish heritage. Do you call that empathy? Well, I did actually get to know this customer very well over the many years of doing business with him and his company – so I guess you could call it empathy. For a sales person it's about finding the connection that makes the other person feel comfortable and at ease about buying your product.

By the way, never be put off when a customer says, "I only have five or ten minutes." My experience is that's just a ploy. Most people, once they start talking about themselves go on for much longer. I've had some sales calls go on for over an hour after they told me at the beginning, "I only have a few minutes."

Selling is all about making the calls and being authentic. I sell because I like people – I like to find out about them and make a connection – I also like to have fun so I bring a lot of humor into my sales calls whenever I can. I have a business relationship with all my long term customers that goes beyond just selling them a product. I want them to feel great about their decision – that's why I sell my own training products – I believe in them. I believe they make a difference. I believe they actually change people's lives and help them to enjoy their work which in turn helps the company increase their bottom line through increased productivity, reduced attrition and enhanced customer service.

When I walk into a call I'm not thinking of anything except wanting to connect with the customer: I make eye contact, smile, shake hands and am completely at ease with myself. I could not do that if I was pretending to be someone else – being yourself is very important in sales. So is learning the skill of sales, so learn objection handling and how to close and then wrap yourself around those skills. Make them uniquely yours because when you are truly yourself, customers sense it and they will give you their trust and ultimately their loyalty.

Wanting to be Good at the Job

To communicate effectively you have to be "no thing to be everything" that means emptying your head of everything and being with the customer. It's not just looking into their eyes; it's the entire physical and mental sense that we are on the same wave length. Even though I don't know their business – I know their business!

People are in business to make a profit-selling is about perspiration and that means making calls, knocking on doors and being on the phone. It's about making appointments, following up and getting a commitment to "yes." It's about understanding what works and what doesn't work – leveraging what works and minimizing what doesn't

That's what every company is doing from Fortune 500 corporations to small businesses to sole proprietorships – everyone wants to sell more products and services – so how is it done? It's all done through sales and being knowledgeable, confident, able to close, and willing to perspire. It's about being in the right place at the right time and that requires a lot of work and effort. And for you at the sharp end – the sales person closing the deals – the work and effort has to be enjoyable because that's your job.

For me, sales is about coming home at the end of the day and knowing I've done a great job and three weeks later getting a "YES" – that's the icing on top of the cake.

Sales is about having confidence in yourself that you can sell anything. And if you find something that you enjoy selling and have the confidence in yourself to sell, oh boy are you going to sell. After I got into selling non-ferrous metals I wanted to understand all the different alloys. That goes for whatever I'm selling. I'm always gaining knowledge, whether its non ferrous metal, yellow pages, encyclopedia's, training, Xerox print machines or computer software, it doesn't matter. I think that's why I know a lot – I just like to get involved in everything that's going on.

Selling door to door was interesting, because when I knocked on a door I often got told to "shove it", or just had the door slammed in my face – yet there was always the one who said, "Okay!" So for me it was about never feeling rejected. It was this wonderful game: If I knocked on fifty doors and was told to "get lost" at each one, maybe the sixtieth door I would get a "yes" so I just kept knocking.

Today I still get told to go away – usually it is more difficult for people to do that because people don't actually close the door in my face. Usually they say, "Call me next month." And, "call me next month." And, "call me next month." And sometimes they actually do mean it and are ready to talk to me next month or six months later, and sometimes they just hope I will go away. Unfortunately for them, the one thing I never do is 'go away.' Not until I am told to do so. I will keep calling until the person tells me, "no thank you." I don't care – I just don't want them to lose the opportunity of doing business with me – so until they say "no" I am keeping going until they say, "YES!"

Going from door to door wasn't hard work because it was what I had to do. Yes, physically, it was hard because I had samples to carry; some streets were long and I went up and down every one of them. What made me successful was the willingness to step outside myself. So I didn't think, 'what a disgusting menial job selling door to door.' I actually thought I was doing great.



It's about having the passion to want to do something well, no matter what it is. I wanted to knock on as many doors as possible to show myself that I could actually sell product – so it was a game for me. Sometimes I would push it and say to myself, 'I've done fifty, and I'll just do another ten!' And if I didn't get a sale, then I would say, 'I'll just do another ten!' It was usually in those last 'tens' that I would get a sale. It's interesting, because although I was knocking on doors for seven or eight hours a day I really enjoyed it.

After that I sold Yellow Pages. That was a tough sale, selling advertising in a yellow pages book. To start with I did the selling over the phone. There were lots of us in a room each at our little desk with a phone and a small divider to keep the noise down – it didn't stop us all from yelling over each other. Sometimes to keep from going completely crazy we'd start this game of trying to make people laugh – we pulled some crazy stunts. I heard of a similar type place just the other day. Lots of people crowded in a room, all on the phones. Cursing and swearing going on in the background-hi-fives and screams of delight when someone gets an order – if you are winning its great – if you are not it's hell.

I always determined to meet and exceed my quota – I have a very competitive spirit and I couldn't stand the thought of being one of the people who wasn't making it – I couldn't deal with that kind of stress. Besides, I had a wife and two small children to take care of – so that gave me a little extra push. I always remember one sales manager telling me, "Get your sales people to commit to a mortgage, or buy a fancy car, anything to keep them hungry for sales."

It was trickier over the phone because I couldn't see or react to them in person so I had to instantly build a relationship and these were people who didn't normally buy advertising – they weren't the cab drivers or businesses you normally associate with Yellow Pages – these were the true definition of cold calls.

So I learned to use my tone of voice, and get out of my head, even when I knew I had to do eighty to one hundred calls a day. That's where I learned about persistence and perseverance, never doubting, and never giving up.

There is No Such Thing as Rejection

There's no such thing as rejection, somebody saying "no" is just like somebody saying "yes." "No" is just a word, like "yes" is a word, except we put all these connotations on certain words: "No" is bad and "yes" is wonderful. Here's the key – if I don't give "no" any power, then it doesn't stick to me – I can keep getting no'd and it doesn't matter. Eventually, the more I keep going the more "yeses" I will get.

Sometimes I get asked by sales people if sales is something you're born with or something you can learn. That's a hard one to answer. I think it's unquestionable that some people are born with the skill to communicate more effectively than others – it's in their DNA. Can you teach someone how to sell? Yes, you can give them all the skills sets and eventually they still have to do it.

In all these years that I've been selling, nothing has changed. I'm constantly looking at how I am doing it. What should I say? What should I not say? I can come out of a sale knowing I did all the right things and still not get an order, and still, I will feel great because they weren't ready to buy at that time.



There's no point in beating myself up, if I take it personally, or feel rejected everything stops: I'll never get out of bed. That's why "no's" don't matter, being told "drop dead and go away" doesn't mean anything – it's just their opinion – it has nothing to do with me or with you.

So if I do get fed up, I just make a choice: how long do I want to be fed up for? Answer: I only want to do it for seconds. I have got my life ahead of me and if I take it personally and get upset nothing is going to happen except I'm going to blame someone else, and then it's a spiral into the abyss – the downward elevator to despair doesn't make for sales. So keep your chin up and spirits high-set your sights on winning the sale and you will always succeed.

Jeff Gee is President and CEO of McNeil & Johnson Learning Company. He is recognized as an outstanding speaker, motivator, instructor and consultant. Jeff has spent the last 20 years helping corporations reach and sustain excellence. A member of the National Speakers Association, consultant and author, he has co-authored books like "The Winner's Attitude", "The Customer Service Training Tool Kit", "Mission Possible", and "Investing Time". For article feedback, contact Jeff at jeff@mjlearning.com