

Learning to Build Sales

What are you doing to build sales? Surely you know that as business owner, manager, sales person, sales manager, designer or all of the above, you have to be working on developing new sales for the future. Referrals are great but they only come if you have been doing quality work and selling. Building new sales for a lot of you is dependent upon finding a way to expand the selling market.

To do so, you will have to take your motivation and the collective expertise of your company into a new environment. Consider an environment where a bunch of nice people are intent on spending a lot of money on a big box and some dirt. It's time for some serious fall planting for spring blossoms.

I've recently done some new home shopping, partially at the request of Mrs. Delano, partly at the request of young Miss Delano, and lastly, for some perspective on our industry. Thank goodness there is no need for me to gratify myself with a new home. Lisa, Madison, custom. That's my life. Not too bad, though! After all, it is fun.

We all know that new homes are chock full of cool ideas, options, upgrades, plotted options (this was a new one to me) and fun. For those wondering, "plotted options" are options you have to buy. Sheesh, Webster is turning in his grave.

The key for you is to be a sales engineer in each. Cool ideas are OK; it sure can't hurt to plant ideas about entertainment and automation. Some buyers like a soft sell and then to go away and think about it. Options involve deeper planting. The builder is committed to speakers, volume controls, and perhaps a surround sound system

in the room with the poorly located fireplace. The problem with options is the length of the options list and the complexity of finding which cabinet upper French marginal fluted light maple non-standard upgrade optional butler's pantry recessed cabinet facing door goes with which level of cabinets on what finish in which floor plan. And it only gets worse as you deal with lighting, windows, flooring, and plumbing fixtures.

This is our problem. We're in a crowded mall of choices, most of which have a high-priority ranking, and they all compete for dollars. Sound, movies, and automation just aren't getting their fair share of attention. And over time, sound, movies, and automation have remained an uncertain option to most sales center staff and design center advisors. Just ask them. They don't usually "get it," so neither do their customers. They don't get it, so they don't fight for the sale. It is much easier to sell the granite and take the homebuyer "up a level," so they get a full splash instead of a six-inch splash.

What do I recommend you do? Very simple, just like your first lesson in sales, get to know the buyer. Be their friend. Talk to them. Listen to their questions. Know the answers. Help them sell themselves.

We do not put ourselves in this position often enough. It requires having sales people working in the sales and design centers with the support of the developer and builder. The sales and design center advisors will all tell you that the best way to sell audio/video is to be there. I have never, ever asked the question and gotten a different answer, except when it was a worse answer.

If you want to expand your target selling audience, you need to work on reaching new homebuyers. They are ready to spend money. They are excited. They are vulnerable. They want to learn. To do this effectively, you must be a personal part of the sales and design center team.

Sure, you can reach out to the homeowners eight to 12 months after they bought the big box on the six- or seven-figure dirt and talk to them about adding music, but they will not be as excited. They are



no longer vulnerable. They are comfortable with their choice and coming to grips with their new mortgage, taxes, and assessments.

Just imagine the strength of the personal relationship that you build when a client comes to you and you meet them at your place, review their plans for a new build or re-model and you work with them like their architect, their builder, and their decorator. You are a close and trusted partner. You just can't be that person if your sales depend on your catalog page in a four-inch binder with "design center professionals" as your sales relationship experts.

The basics of sales psychology cannot exist if you are not there when the sales process begins. Trust is not established early.

Awareness lags. Importance diminishes. So, be there. Set the expectations of your sales team that weekends are now selling time, at least at certain times of the year when new phases are being released with the builders that you have contracts.

Maybe this is the key to effective "builder sales." Not free goods in the ceiling, but sellers with the swimmers. It all comes down to the basics of sales.

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