10 Great sales tips for more business right now!

I have been an interior designer, sales person, manager and trained sales people and consulted with clients on growth plans and results for almost 25 years. I have turned ailing companies into prosperous ones in pretty short periods of time. These tips come, not only from my experience as an interior designer and sales person, but also as a trainer, manager and business owner. Also as a keen observer of the good (may I say a few GREAT), bad and ugly! I also use life experiences as learning ones. These are tips I learned both as an observer and in the trenches and they really work if you IMPLEMENT them!

**Ask questions and then, Listen!**

I know you have heard this many times before, but it is TRULY my TOP tip for you!

Many times this is one of the most difficult things I have to teach my clients. (and by the way, I work on this all the time, too. I love to talk!) As creative people, we LOVE to give advice and show that we are knowledgeable. Now, that’s not a bad thing, that’s what schooling (whether in college or hard knocks) gives us the right to do, right? We can do that when the time comes! But first you need to hone in on your product or service and your client.

Here’s a tip on how you do this. You ask your questions that the client has to ANSWER! There is no leading, no prompting and NO interrupting! The only thing you should be doing, at this point, is nodding your head and taking great notes!

Always start with “open ended” questions. Questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. These help you gather information, collect data, qualify sales opportunities and establish rapport and trust. “Do you like the weather?” is a good ice breaker, but not very productive for growing your business.

To get you started, here are my 10 best sales tips which, if you apply them (OK try 3 at a time, but the next week, I want three more incorporated) I guarantee that your sales will climb! This is for design professionals and inside and outside sales people. However, ANYONE who has to sell services or product or both can use these. These are universal!
Know your client and what their needs are

People love to buy, but hate to be sold. Ever heard that old saying? It’s true. You need to uncover their needs. And how can you sell to people if you don’t even know what their needs are? May I just tell you (of course, I will NEVER mention names) how many times I have been training a sales person and they just immediately dive into their presentation (oh, OK a little small talk, but no probing questions to see what their needs are). They might say “What are you currently working on”? What does that mean? For instance, if you are selling fabric and they are working on a jail; or as a designer you are presenting to someone downsizing and all you have are the 14 room mansions to show, what value does that bring to the client? And I believe people are, more than ever, looking for value. There is a saying that “If value is a mystery, people don’t open their wallets.” I believe, whole heartedly, that is the truth.

**Sell, don’t present.**

The definitive difference between presenting and selling is that selling makes money. Presenting something does not necessarily do the same. So your ROI or “return on your investment” is now lower! And the selling curve, if any interested is created, is much longer. Time and energy wasted. Does anyone have time for that, in ANY economy?

In this world of noise and more product and services available than anyone can even imagine, selling becomes so important to the success of a design professional or sales person. But here’s the glitch! To sell you have to know your client. How can you sell something if they don’t want it. Would you go to the grocery store only to have someone come up and try to sell you a car? How much success would that car sales person have?

So do your homework, know your client and then you will better equipped to sell and NOT just to present.

Match the **PRODUCT** to the **PROJECT**.

This plays off of tip 2 of knowing what your clients’ needs are.

Be empathetic to your clients or potential clients

Always try to put yourself into your client’s (or perspective client’s) shoes. Only then will you understand how to sell them. If you do not empathize with them, whether they buy at that time or not, I can guarantee you will probably NOT get any repeat business.

On that same note, “mirror” back what your clients say. If they are struggling with a low budget, you can respond by saying, “I understand that you have a lower budget on this project, but we can help you get what you want. Let’s look at it this way.” It shows that you are really listening and empathizing. You’ll get a lot further with this technique.
Stay Competitive

We don’t often hear that in our industry, but it’s almost impossible to succeed without embracing that competitive spirit you have or have to find and nurture. So how do you do that?

Keep an ear to the ground, when talking to people as to what your competitors are doing and just do it better! You talk to people all day long whether it is vendors, showrooms, other sales representatives or designers; just ask. This is not to be confused with gossip. It’s NOT! This is just news about what others are doing. There are some that are great at telling you what is going on.

Another great way to stay competitive is to SET GOALS and set out to achieve them! A hint about setting goals...don’t make them TOO large and in TOO short a period of time. It may not happen and we don’t want to discourage you! Set goals and then BREAK THEM DOWN into DAILY tasks.

Do not ever allow complacency; that is a ticket to failure!

Be Passionate about what you do. Love what you sell or believe in what you do!

This may be another overused phrase that you hear so many people say that are uber-successful at what they do. I thought it was a bunch of hooey until I started to give my workshops and then I realized that I really loved what I did. It wasn’t so much about the product I sold, just what I did.

I am passionate about speaking, motivating and educating. I love doing it and that’s one of the reasons I was a successful sales person. I did not really “sell”. I didn’t need to! You need to find YOUR passion, too. Why? Here are just four reasons why:

1. It’s contagious
2. It makes you believable (people buy from someone they know, like and trust!)
3. It makes your presentation memorable
4. It begins to separate you from the “pack”

Build a rapport with your clients

Be genuinely interested in what your clients are all about. This is part of forming that know, like and trust factor. That’s who people buy from most often. You begin to rise above the noise and have a genuine relationship with them. But beware, people can spot phoniness a mile away..so it has to be genuine.

Show genuine interest in what they do both professionally and personally. Most people LOVE to talk about themselves. This gives us a leg up because we need to learn a lot about them in order to uncover their needs and be able to find SOLUTIONS for them.
Show interest in their business challenges. Be there for them. Make the experience they have with you one they will not easily forget. You will knock the competition right out of the picture.

**Talk about tough issues and objections first**

It’s always better to nip objections in the bud, even if the prospective client has not expressed them. Objections are sometimes scary to some because they are afraid they will not be able to answer them and still keep the client interested.

I am sure you will probably put a lot of time and effort into developing a winning presentation to ensure that your product or service is well received by the potential prospect. Yet no matter how persuasive your presentation may be, and no matter how convincingly you present your product or services, there will be objections and doubts.

I would even suggest pulling them out by saying, “I feel like there might be something that is of concern to you”. Your prospective client may even feel a sense of relief.

Then you must listen intently, “mirror back” or acknowledge their concerns, tell them you understand those concerns and “ally” yourself to their side by pointing out, with solid facts, the solutions you have used for other clients that will put their minds at ease.

**The selling process will be sped up by getting all objections out of the way either by anticipating (based on other objections) or just asking.**

**Know your competition**

I am always shocked when people do not know their competitors. How are you going to position yourself without knowing your competition? How will you articulate your value?

Today’s buyers are much savvier; they have access to services and products in ways we have never before seen before. THEY know your competition, why wouldn’t you. If all of this is not convincing here are 4 other reasons you need to know your competitors.

1. You can answer objections
2. You can expertly position your product or service
3. You will be perceived as an expert
4. You are not selling in a vacuum

Then and only then can you position your differences.
Sell more when you aim for your target market

What do very successful companies like Target, Starbucks, Crate and Barrel and even McDonald’s know? They know their target market like the back of their hands and sell into that strength. These are successful companies that earmark tens of thousands of dollars to research their target market.

They do not feel that they have to be everything to everyone. Even though McDonalds is trying to gain some of that market share of coffee drinkers from Starbucks by introducing the new fancier lattes and mochas, they do not have fancy names for sizes like grande or vente. They know their target market would laugh at those terms! They still use small, medium and large for all those McCafes they sell to their target market. Just as Starbucks has to coin the phrase “frapachinno,” McDonalds calls them frozen drinks. End result...they both sell a ton of drinks!

This is as important in the service industry. Why? Because your services become your product. So whether product or services, the model remains the same.

This is one of the ONLY ways you can position your value to potential clients. Don’t just peddle your wares to everyone.

(Bonus) ANALYZE YOUR RESULTS!

One of the biggest problems I see is when people think there is “THE” group of clients they need to call on. For instance, in design, I hear all the time “I need rich, established clients”. What about first time buyers that may be smaller clients now, but as they grow, so does your repeat business! For sales people, I also hear and observe that there are certain firms that they feel obligated to give all their time to. Why? They are the biggest and they MUST result in the most in sales.

I thought this for quite a while when I was in sales, and the truth is you will not know until you slow down and analyze the RESULTS of your efforts. Are these REALLY your best clients? Do you get the best ROI (return on investments) from them? Some of the smaller firms with a lot of potential have just as good a chance, in some cases better, to be a great account. They sometimes don’t get all the attention that the larger firms get all the time. And I always say two great “b” accounts are better than one mediocre or bad “a” account.

Successful businesses know that they must get at least 2 -3 times the return on their efforts. So add up the hours of phone, in person and even sending out quotations that you have spent on these people. Then look at the RESULTS, because that is the true measurement of your success!
When I was a manager I asked my sales staff do that; guess what?  Who they all THOUGHT were our best accounts because of the amount of activity they had with them, most times were NOT! Busyness does not equal results, even though there are many who think that.  So SLOW DOWN!

About Dialogue Consulting

**Deborah Flate** founded Dialogue Consulting in 2001 with the idea of taking her 20+ years of successful experience in sales, marketing, management and sales training with leaders in the industry of design such as Donghia and Jack Lenor Larsen and applying that to companies in the interior design sector. She uses her knowledge to help businesses achieve their ultimate growth and goals. Some of her clients include Brentano Fabrics, Rodolph Textiles, Maxine Snider, Suzanne Lovell Interior Design and Keleen Leathers.

Dialogue Consulting is multidisciplinary consulting company that is driven by results, and Deborah and her team use all her extensive experience to lay out well thought out plans for their clients. She is committed to working in PARTNERSHIP with every, single client for their ultimate success.

Deborah continues to use her expertise in the industry to do sales training and coaching with major companies and individuals world-wide and she is dedicated to sharing her vast industry knowledge to see companies grow and thrive in any economy.

She offers a blend of experience and enthusiasm, resulting in a professional, knowledgeable, business consultant with whom you actually look forward to working. Deborah has a way of making what you do everyday become fresh and exciting, all the while offering incomparable insight into how to grow your company.

Her knowledge extends past her years involved directly in sales and business development of leading residential and contract interior design companies, into a deeper understanding of how build a strong foundation in businesses and help them see not only the bigger picture, but also a new way of looking at that picture.

Her signature speech, “Selling in any Economy” is given to sold out audiences all over the country. She is currently working on her first book, Selling in any Economy, which will be available on Amazon. She is also launching a coaching group where you will get direct access to her. Log on to: [www.dialogue-consulting.com/sales-success/](http://www.dialogue-consulting.com/sales-success/)