



# Unit 7

# Sales Skills

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Explain and apply concepts of customer focused selling.
- ✓ Use goal-setting techniques as a way to focus on what you want to accomplish and develop strategies for getting there.

## Unit 7

### Sales Skills

#### Selling Skills

##### Essential Skills

Every hotel worker needs to master an extensive range of skills to get the job done properly. One of which being salesmanship - of particular importance to those who work on the front desk. To a degree, each and every individual you encounter represents an invaluable opportunity to close a sale. Or at least, sell your hotel as a 'product' they'll want to invest in, even if not right now.

These days, selling isn't quite the black-and-white issue it used to be. Going straight for the "hard-sell" is no longer the way to get the job done. Attempting to persuade people to buy things - even if it's something they want - isn't the way to go. Instead, it's a case of presenting whatever it is you're selling in such a fantastic light that it sells itself. Aka - the art of 'selling without selling'.

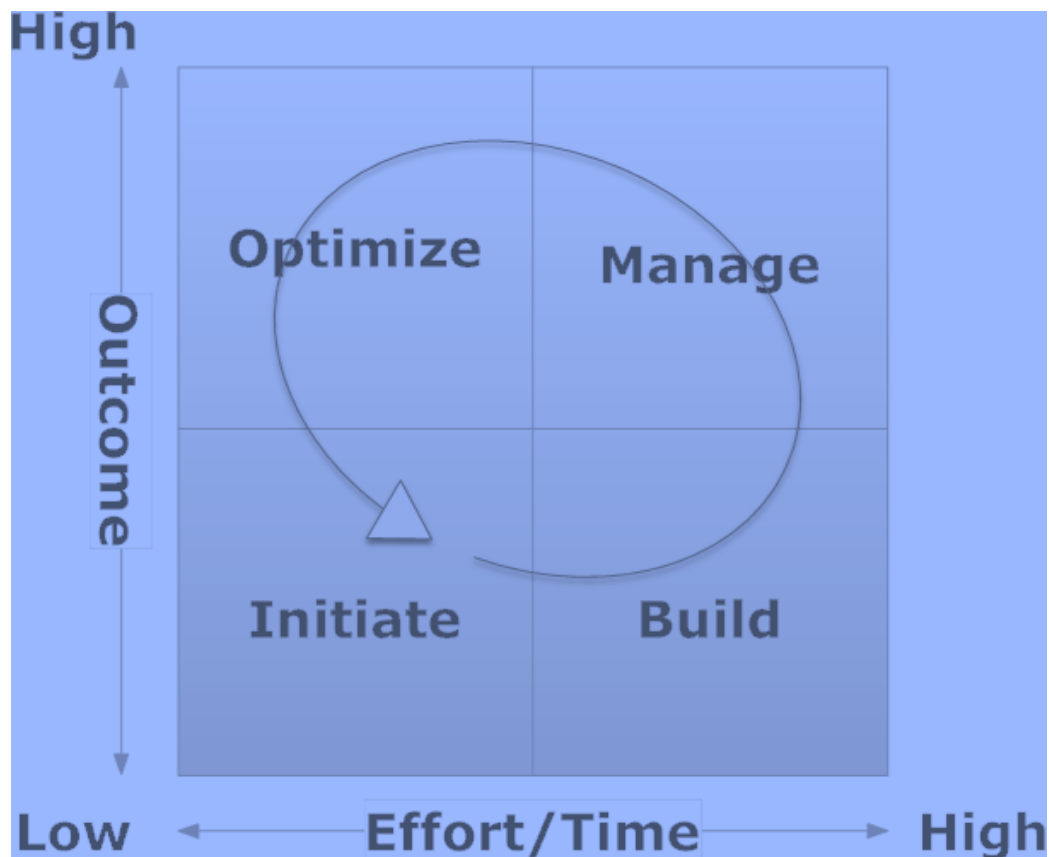
In a typical working example, a sales agent working with a hotel could invest heavily in building good relationships with several local businesses. Rather than hard-selling its products and services, the hotel benefits from the business of these clients naturally. It's the same with everyday guests and customers in general, who are far more likely to do business with hotels they respect. If you present your organisation as a business of high repute and an authority in your niche, you'll never need to resort to the hard-sell.

Best of all, the stronger the relationships you establish and the better your brand's reputation, the less time and effort you need to spend on outdated tasks like cold calling. It takes time to establish relationships and generate positive PR, but the payoff makes the investment more than worthwhile.

##### Consultative Selling

Also referred to as 'customer focused selling', consultative selling is the preferred sales model for most modern businesses. From top-ranking sales executives to entry-level representatives, the customer focused approach to selling is considered the most effective by far.

If you consider the model below as a starting point, you will see that the more effort we make, the better the results we get. What we need to ensure, then, is that our efforts are also efficient so that we get even better results.



The quadrants defined by the matrix correspond to the sales cycle, which we will discuss in the next session.

### Customer Focused Selling

As the name suggests, customer focused selling refers to a sales process that views the transaction or exchange from the customer's perspective. A relatively simple concept on paper, but one that can be difficult to perfect in practice. The entire process from start to finish needs to be viewed from the perspective of somebody you may not be familiar with. Initial outreach, telephone calls, face to face meetings, presentation of your offer and so on - all viewed from the perspective of the customer.

Some say it's a little like playing chess. The basic rules are relatively simple, but it takes time to master the art. In addition, you're only ever one move away from the customer doing something completely unexpected, perhaps calling for an immediate modification to your approach.

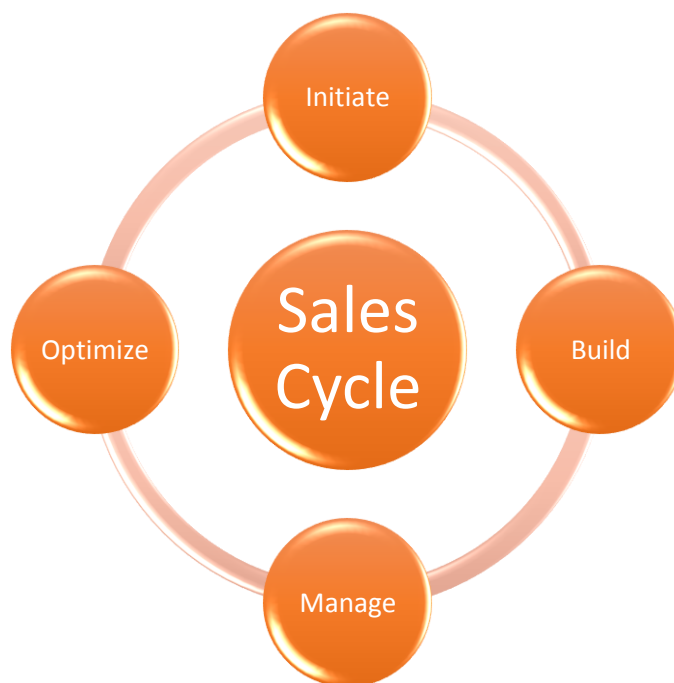
In the earlier stages of relationship development, it's all about establishing rapport and building a sense of trust. Consumers across the board are naturally predisposed to buy products and services from

people they like. Hence, your job is to make sure that the client or customer likes you and likes your business. This can be particularly difficult when working with challenging clients you don't particularly like, but getting them to like you and the business you work for is the main priority.

## The Sales Cycle

### The Sales Cycle

We speak about sales in terms of cycles to help us organize our activities and keep focused. Here's a look at the basic sales cycle:



The basic steps are:

#### **Initiate**

Identify potential business opportunities and begin the process of building relationships, which typically involves considering needs, expectations and preferences from the perspective of the client.

**Build**

Build credibility, trust and rapport, in order to convert these potential business opportunities into paying (or interested) clients for the business.

**Manage**

Take a look at the relationship from the perspective of the customer, working out how you can maintain or enhance the relationship by solving their problems, exceeding their expectations and so on.

**Optimize**

Invest heavily in taking the relationship with the customer to the highest possible level, creating long-term relationships of mutual value over time.

**Initiate**

It's generally pretty easy to sell products and services to customers you are familiar with, or those that already know and trust your business. However, no business can be sustained by focusing *exclusively* on existing customers. In order to remain viable and competitive, you need to focus heavily and continuously on attracting new customers for your business. This way, a sudden slowdown in interest from past and present customers won't adversely affect the performance of your business.

Working as a hotel receptionist, you will primarily find yourself dealing with people who already have an interest in the products and services you offer. They'll contact you by telephone or email, or perhaps walk in with a few questions to ask. In all such instances, it's technically the customer that's initiating the conversation and the relationship.

Nevertheless, it's not uncommon for hotel receptionists and admin workers in general to be handed a variety of low to mid-level sales tasks. Examples of which may include researching new business openings in the area, sending emails to prospective clients and reaching out to previous guests who haven't made a booking for a while. You're unlikely to be involved directly in any major networking activities, but will nonetheless be expected to serve as a polished and professional representation of your hotel, each time you come into contact with a new or current client.

**Build**

Hotel receptionists initiate new customer relationships on an infrequent basis - relationship development is an entirely different story. The relationship development stage begins the moment the

customer meets the business. In the vast majority of hotel settings, the first person almost every customer encounters is the receptionist.

This means that along with ensuring you fulfil their requirements and meet their expectations, you also deliver the best possible first impression. Irrespective of whether it is a guest checking into your hotel or a potential new customer making enquiries, they need to be shown the same priority from start to finish. In addition, the importance of viewing this key relationship development stage from the customer's perspective cannot be overstated.

Every hotel guest you meet will be different and have a *very* different personality. You'll also regularly meet guests who for any given reason walk into your hotel in a terrible mood. Rather than taking it personally, it's better to consider what's happening from their perspective. They've had a terrible day and aren't in the mood for pleasantries - your job being to empathise and keep them happy.

### **Manage**

Managing relationships is all about resolving problems, offering solutions and meeting the needs of the customer. Do this correctly and they will not only buy your product - i.e. use your hotel - but they are more likely to continue doing so in the future. It's a case of considering the benefits of your offer and ensuring they are presented, while working to proactively address any potential objections the customer may have.

This stage of the cycle can also be simplified by considering carefully what it is that makes your hotel (and the services you provide) unique. Every business has a unique selling point (USP) or an extensive list of them. If they didn't, they'd have nothing to offer that the customer cannot already find elsewhere. Your job is to ensure you fully understand your hotel's unique selling points, and to make sure they are presented to the customer in a thoughtful and compelling way.

Not to such an extent as to resort to the hard-sell, but more in the sense of subtle reminders that you're the best at what you do.

### **Optimize**

At this stage, the customer is already on board with whatever it is you do. As such, your job is now to continue developing and optimising the relationship with consistent problem solving and by *always* exceeding their expectations. By successfully optimizing the relationship, you significantly boost the likelihood of the customer continually using your services in future. Better yet, they could also generate positive PR on your behalf, recommending your hotel and the services you provide to others.

It's worth remembering that there will always be instances where clients you've developed the strongest possible relationships with suddenly bail on you. It could be that they no longer need your services, or that they have taken their business elsewhere. Nevertheless, there's every possibility they will come back to you at some point in the future. Or perhaps, recommend your services to others they feel they're better suited to. Hence, the apparent 'loss' of a customer doesn't have to mean the end of the relationship.

Sales managers and agents are routinely requested to contact lapsed customers to attempt to re-build relationships. Or if nothing else, find out why the customer in question no longer uses the services they provide. It's a case of carefully balancing the two equally responsibilities of managing existing relationships and attracting new customers. As a hotel receptionist, there's a strong chance you will be involved primarily in relationship management, with limited initiation responsibilities.

## Framing Success

### The Power of Your Mind

It's natural to view the whole 'power of positive thinking' theory as something of a cliché. Technically, you could argue that our thoughts and mindset have no real influence over our physical actions. In reality, however, the right mindset is just as important in a sales environment as professional-level selling skills. If not, considerably *more* important.

The concept is relatively simple to grasp. If you want to succeed, you have to *picture* yourself succeeding and believe it's going to happen. If you think positively, you're far more likely to breed positive outcomes as a result. Just as if you get up in the morning expecting a terrible day, you'll probably have one.

Good sellers visualise themselves achieving positive results and naturally do what it takes to make them happen. They also see every success as an opportunity to improve. Successful sales can be daunting and takes confidence to pull off, but is as much about the power of the mind as anything else.

### Professionalism

The successful sales agent is also a consummate professional. Professionalism encompasses a variety of things, each coming together to present a picture of pure professionalism. The way you dress, the way you talk, your body language, your punctuality and so on – all measures of professionalism to be taken seriously.

We've already covered the use of appropriate language, tone, emphasis, body language and so on, when conversing with others. As for how you present yourself in the physical sense, appearance counts for a

lot in all business settings. Even if you conduct most conversions by phone, you're more likely to act in a professional way if you're wearing a sharp suit at the time...as opposed to lying on the couch at home in your pyjamas.

Dressing for success can make a big difference – here's what it's all about:

- Always look at yourself from the perspective of someone who doesn't know you
- Don't get so carried away that you end up stiff and uncomfortable
- Overdressing and underdressing are equally inadvisable – strike the right balance
- Pay attention to your personal grooming – hair, nails, beard etc.
- Focus on first impressions and ensure yours is a positive one
- Wear clothes that make you feel confident and empowered
- If in doubt, keep it formal – it's more respectful than turning up too casual

### **Other Tips**

## **Setting Goals with SPIRIT!**

Setting goals is important for professionals at all levels. Whether tasked with selling more rooms at your hotel or simply looking to boost customer satisfaction rates, it's important to have goals to work towards. And it's also important for these goals to have SPIRIT – as detailed below:

### **Specific**

Your goals need to be as specific as possible, avoiding anything too vague. For example, it's better to have the goal of "sell an extra 15 room nights this week" than simply "sell more rooms". Your goals should also be measurable.

### **Prizes**

It's also a good idea to incentivise yourself in some way. Your employer should technically be doing this on your behalf, offering additional rewards for employees who perform above and beyond expectations. If not, don't be afraid to reward yourself for achieving your goals.

### **Individual**

This means goals you actually believe in – something that means something to you. If your boss tells you to sell 20 more rooms this week but you already think you're overworked, you're not going to have the motivation to make it happen.

## Review

As you progress towards reaching your goals, it's worth considering them again from time to time. Are you definitely going to achieve them? Do they need to be adjusted in some way? Maybe you need help to make them happen?

## Inspiring

Again, this is all about selecting the kinds of goals that you genuinely believe in. It's far easier to work towards a goal that inspires you than a goal you find mundane. Concentrate on the positives of the goal, as opposed to the challenges and difficulties you may face along the way.

## Time-Bound

All goals should also be time-bound in some way. This could mean allowing yourself a certain amount of time to see how much you can achieve, or perhaps committing to achieving something specific by a predetermined date.

Some people find it far easier set goals than others. Likewise, it's not always easy to motivate yourself to push for ambitious goals. Nevertheless, it is the *only* way to continue making progress in a professional environment. The importance of setting goals is by no means confined to sales environments – it applies to every aspect of the work you do throughout your career.

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Hospitality Sales: Selling Smarter, Book by Judy A. Siguaw (2004)*
- ✓ *Smarter Selling: How to Grow Sales by Building Trusted Relationships, Book by David Lambert and Keith Dugdale, (2007)*