

MARCH 2008

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Make the most of one-on-one contacts

By Cheryl Dangel Cullen

WE'VE GOT the experience to sell, the know-how, and we've got the price list memorized, so why should we spend a few days at a training session? The problem lies with a society that has become so technologically proficient that we no longer know how to interact one-on-one.

"Salespeople are notorious for skipping steps. They want to get to the meat of the sale and they don't want to go through the whole process," said Gloria J. Petersen, an



Petersen

author and speaker who is the president and founder of Global Protocol, Inc., a Phoenix-based professional presence, etiquette and protocol training firm. "The reality is, training is not remedial. This is the one area where we differ from foreign countries. Salespeople in foreign countries know there is a process people go through to make a sale. That is why often times, when the United States goes up against a foreign country in a sale, we lose.

"We are ill-prepared with the social intelligence required to interact with people," Petersen continued. "We've become handicapped because we think electronic communication, like our Blackberries and e-mail, will do all the work for us. What we really need is training in one-on-one communication. When salespeople find themselves in a real communication situa-

tion at a lunch, reception or meeting, they will start to fold because while they have a wonderful background and academically, have all the right credentials, socially they fall short."

Fortunately, it is a situation that can be remedied by thorough sales training.

Salespeople need training to not only know how to overcome objections and close a sale, but how to interact with prospects and make each contact memorable.

It all comes down to basic business etiquette, Petersen said. "Etiquette is the one thing that gives a salesperson confidence to interact socially. Etiquette is knowing how to make other people feel comfortable with you."

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"Salespeople need to connect with a prospect or client charismatically. It is a sense of presence that makes other people want to know more about you and what you have to offer," she said. Establishing

presence has everything to do with how you look and what you know to how you present yourself. "Body language is key. Do you look approachable? Are you engaging?"

"Connecting charismatically can be as simple as knowing to speed up when walking to a door with a prospect so that you can get there first and can open it for him or her," Peterson said. "By doing that, you make the prospect feel important. This is not a gender thing. These are the little things we take for granted and they are a small, but crucial missing link in our society. When you connect charismatically with a prospect, establish presence and make a connection, you've set yourself apart from the rest."

Few salespeople are born with these skills. Retailers cannot assume that everyone on their sales force has people skills. Salespeople need to be trained until making memorable contacts becomes second nature.

"Training alone will not give them all these skills, but it will expose a salesperson to the value of making a connection as part of the chain in creating successful sales," Petersen said.

"The biggest failure we have today is jumping ahead to the meat of the sale," she said. "We don't want to mess with people skills. We're too anxious to close the sale. It is not that easy. People skills and training are a must."