

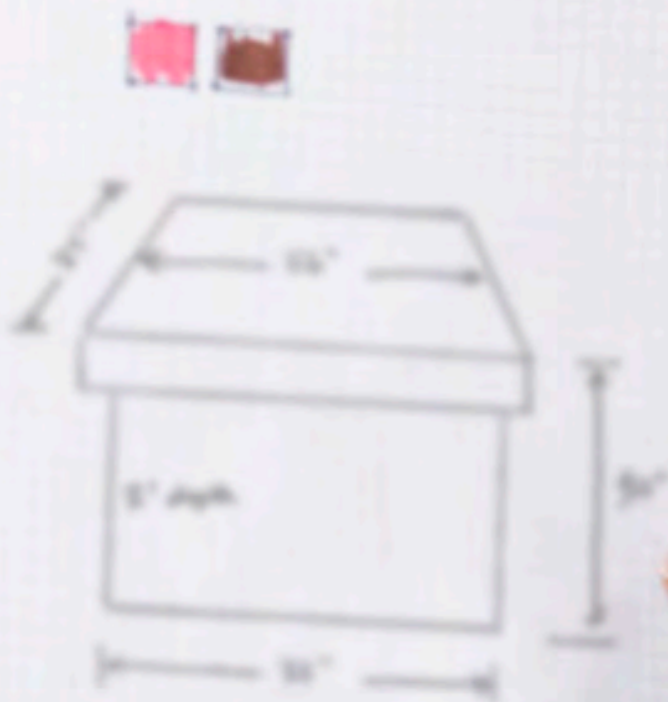


EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

THE KEY
to
SELLING

When it comes to sales, it's not just what you know that counts, it's also what you feel. Increase sales by assessing and improving your emotional intelligence.

By Matt Alderton



BOB, A KITCHEN AND BATH DEALER, WAKES UP 30 MINUTES LATE ON A TYPICAL MONDAY MORNING.

He blames the alarm clock for not working properly and his wife for not waking him up. After a hurried cup of coffee—which he insists is too hot—he jumps in the car and drives to work, honking at those who aren’t moving as quickly as he thinks they should. He arrives 20 minutes late for a scheduled staff meeting, which he opens not with, “Good morning,” but rather a reminder that his staff hasn’t yet met its monthly sales goals.

When most people look at Bob, they see a grumpy curmudgeon. But when executive coach Judy Bell looks at Bob, she sees someone with low emotional intelligence.

“The common denominator to success isn’t education, skill set or background; it’s emotional intelligence,” says Bell, senior business advisor at InnerActive Consulting Group in Cordova, Tenn.

Bob can’t easily control his emotions, but the K&B dealer down the street can. That same Monday morning, dealer Jim leaves 10 minutes early, well aware that he gets easily frustrated in rush-hour traffic. And because he becomes irritable when he’s hungry, he grabs a bagel and some fruit on his way out. When he gets to work, he uses the extra time before the staff meeting to review a list of personal and professional goals, and sneak in some quick inspirational reading.

Because Jim is in control of his emotions, clients are more comfortable with him and, therefore, more willing to buy.

“Everyone’s experienced it: You walk into a store and encounter some kind of mood that makes you want to turn around and walk out,” says leadership and business psychologist Anne Perschel, president of Germane Consulting in Worcester, Mass. “Your emotional state affects the way you interact with people and how they feel in your presence—and that affects sales. If you’re aware that your mood is affecting customers, you can do something about it.”

Emotional Intelligence vs. IQ

The term “emotional intelligence” gained widespread popularity as a result of Dr. Daniel Goleman’s 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. While IQ measures one’s cognitive abilities, emotional intelligence measures one’s empathic abilities, Goleman suggests.

“Emotional intelligence is basically a measurement of someone’s emotional maturity, including his or her ability to connect with others on an emotional level,” says Deborah Brown, Ph.D., a business coach in Deerfield Beach, Fla.

Emotional intelligence can help kitchen and bath dealers increase their emotional awareness and their bottom line. “When you understand yourself, and understand why other people do what they do, you can tap into that [in sales situations],” Bell says. “Sales training has really changed over the last several years based on this idea. You’re not selling anymore; you’re looking at what the buyer needs and offering solutions.”

There’s no shortage of evidence favoring emotional intelligence in sales. For instance, a 1999 Rutgers study found that the U.S. Air Force increased its ability to predict successful recruiters by nearly three-fold when it used an emotional intelligence assessment to select them. Similarly, a 1997 study of a national insurance company showed sales agents with strong emotional intelligence skills sold policies worth 111 percent more than policies sold by those with weak emotional intelligence skills.

It’s no different in the kitchen and bath business. “When people buy kitchens and bathrooms, they think they’re doing it on a rational basis—that it comes down to money and technical specifications,” says Harvey Deutschendorf, author of *The Other Kind of Smart: Simple Ways to Boost Your Emotional Intelligence for Greater Personal Effectiveness and Success*. “But there’s so much underlying emotional stuff that’s going on, too.”



“When you understand yourself, and understand why other people do what they do, you can tap into that [in sales situations].”

—Judy Bell, senior business advisor, InnerActive Consulting Group

For instance, many customers ask about price, size and materials when they’re buying cabinetry. Meanwhile, they’re having emotional reactions—often without realizing it—based on the way products look and the way the salesperson describes them. For example, a young woman may be drawn to natural cabinet finishes because they remind her aesthetically of her childhood years spent at her family’s country home. On the other hand, if a salesperson describes cabinets as “upgrades,” a budget-conscious couple might have a negative visceral reaction. “If dealers can understand this and tap into it, they’re going to be in a much better position to give customers what they want and make the sale,” Deutschendorf says.

Can You Feel It?

Giving customers what they want is what emotional intelligence is all about, says K&B dealer Rick Sorci, CKD. Owner of Stockdale Cabinetry in Bakersfield, Calif., he likens himself to a waiter who has a distaste for snails but won’t let that sway his customers. If customers order escargot, he carefully explains exactly what they’re getting. “It’s about an open line of communication,” he says. If a client wants, say, lavender countertops—which one of Sorci’s did—a good dealer can control his or her own reactions in order to cater to the request.

“To do this job well, you have to be friends with your clients so you can understand what they want,” Sorci says. “Customers don’t want the 1-2-3 spiel. They want someone who’s going to stop and listen to what they really want, then execute that. And that requires building a relationship.”

Of course, successful relationships demand high emotional intelligence. Luckily, Goleman says emotional intelligence can be improved by as much as 40 percent. To raise their emotional intelligence, K&B professionals must first learn to understand what a high one looks like.

According to the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, individuals with high emotional intelligence have the following personal and social competencies:

SELF-AWARENESS: Self-aware people recognize what they’re feeling and why, know their strengths and limits, and are confident in their self-worth and capabilities. A salesperson, for example, knows he performs poorly when he doesn’t get enough sleep and therefore goes to bed early the night before a big sales event.

SELF-REGULATION: Self-regulating people demonstrate self-control, and are innovative, conscientious, trustworthy and adaptive. A self-regulating dealer, for example, knows she can be aggressive when she’s dealing with hesitant buyers and therefore politely excuses herself from customer interactions when she feels her temper flaring.

SELF-MOTIVATION: Self-motivated people are achievement-driven, committed, optimistic and action-oriented. A self-motivated dealer, for example, isn’t discouraged by the economy; instead, he’s excited about new challenges and sees them as an opportunity to sharpen his sales skills.

SOCIAL AWARENESS: Socially aware people are empathetic and service-oriented, and able to read people’s relationships, emotions and positions.

“TO DO THIS JOB WELL, YOU HAVE TO BE FRIENDS WITH YOUR CLIENTS SO YOU CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY WANT.”

—RICK SORCI, CKD, STOCKDALE CABINETRY



READING YOUR CLIENTS’ BODY LANGUAGE

Customers may not always tell the whole truth with their words. Their bodies, however, never lie. Here’s a quick guide to what your customers could really be saying:

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS	Genuine smiles use two muscle groups. One makes the cheeks rise and the eye sockets crinkle; the other makes the mouth move. Fake smiles typically involve only the latter.
POSTURE	When someone likes what you’re saying and feels generally friendly toward you, he or she will tend to unconsciously mirror your posture and body language.
GESTURES	When customers cross their arms, it often means they’re “closed” to you, or unwilling to hear what you have to say. If they’re “open” to you, they may nod in agreement and maintain an open stance.
EYE CONTACT	When customers are receptive to you, they maintain eye contact. When they’re not, they avoid it, choosing instead to look around the room or glance at their watch.
VOICE	When customers’ voices become high-pitched, they usually are excited. When customers’ voices become lower, they’re often trying to establish authority and dominance. Similarly, voice inflections indicate interest, while monotones indicate detachment.

A socially aware dealer, for example, can meet a couple and tell—just by observing their interactions—which one is ultimately making the purchase decision.

SOCIAL SKILLS: Socially skilled people demonstrate influence, communication and leadership, and are able to catalyze change, manage conflicts, build bonds and facilitate teamwork. A socially skilled salesperson, for example, doesn’t rely on rehearsed sales scripts; instead, she’s able to customize her pitches on the fly based on individual needs, which endears her to customers.

To boost emotional intelligence, professionals must gain greater insight into their own emotions. Brown recommends meditating, journaling or working with a coach. “Once you have that level of self-awareness, you can take emotional intelligence to the next level by understanding the causes and effects of your emotions,” she says. For example, “What time of the day am I most energetic and enthusiastic?” “How can I improve my clarity in communication?” “What topics of conversation do I get most excited about?”

Once K&B professionals understand themselves, Bell says, they can work to understand customers:

- What is the customer’s communication style?
- Is he or she internally or externally driven?
- Is he or she motivated by knowledge, riches, friendship, status, quality or family?
- What are his or her “hot” buttons?
- Can you determine if he or she is stressed, tired or afraid?
- What is he or she looking for?
- What will cause him or her to buy?
- What will cause resistance?

To boost emotional intelligence, professionals must gain greater insight into their own emotions.

Answering these questions without actually asking them requires a heightened sense of empathy, the ability to understand another person's feelings.

Emotional Intelligence in Practice

Emotional intelligence sounds like a very noble ambition, but let's be honest: If it can't help convert sales, it's little more than nice rhetoric. Put your emotional intelligence to good use by:

OFFERING SOLUTIONS, NOT PRODUCTS:

"Sure, customers are interested in materials, prices and different product features, but what's ultimately going to make the sale is how [a product] fits their lifestyle," says Deutschendorf, who suggests appealing to customers based on experiences, not product specs. For instance, if customers mention their childhood, they may be trying to recreate their mother's kitchen. Use words like "warm," "cozy" and "family" to engage them.

ASKING QUESTIONS AND LISTENING FOR ANSWERS:

Dealers with high emotional intelligence don't talk, they listen. "First and foremost, emotional intelligence is about dialogue and conversation," Bell says. "It's asking the customer a question, then closing your mouth and letting the person respond."

SHOWING, NOT TELLING: A picture really is worth 1,000 words. With that in mind, Sorci has found that visual designs help him establish more powerful emotional connections with customers. "I design in front of my clients," he says. "I literally book a two-hour design appointment and sit there with my client, my computer and a big flat-screen TV behind me [with the 3-D design on it]. What that does is take the design from verbal to visual. And nothing starts conversations better than saying, 'Here's your kitchen; let's have some fun.'"

CUSTOMIZING YOUR SALES STRATEGY: Emotionally intelligent dealers can change their sales strategy on the fly. "If a dealer is showing me cabinets by way of a catalog, and I'm bored, disinterested and turning pages really quickly, he or she should pick up immediately that I'm not that kind of buyer," Perschel says. "The dealer should be able to read all of my signals correctly and shift to another way of selling."

LISTENING TO MORE THAN WORDS: Customers constantly send signals, sometimes subliminally. "An emotionally intelligent salesperson is particularly skilled at listening to a customer's tone of voice," Brown says. "A customer can have a completely flat, disinterested tone when he or she says, 'I think that might work. Let me get back to you,' simply because he or she is trying to end the conversation." *What* is said is sometimes less critical than *how* it is said. "An emotionally intelligent dealer knows the difference," Brown says.

QUICK TAKE

- Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand your own and others' emotions.
- Self-awareness is key. When you have high emotional intelligence, you know how you feel, why you feel that way and how to separate actions from emotions.
- Moods are contagious. If you don't regulate your emotions, customers will feel them—and, if they're negative, flee from them.
- K&B dealers can close more sales when they appeal to customers' emotions—selling solutions, for instance, instead of product specs or features.
- Customers send signals. If you want to gauge your sales performance, listen to customers' tone of voice, watch their facial expressions and interpret their body language.

READING BODY LANGUAGE: What you can't hear, you often can see. "If people like what you're saying, they tend to lean toward you, nod, maintain their attention despite distractions, open their eyes a little wider and have steady eye contact. They also tend to naturally mirror your posture and body language," Brown says. "If someone suddenly leans away and drops eye contact—glancing at their watch, eyeing the door, shuffling through papers in their hand, etc.—then they've most likely lost interest."

CHOOSING YOUR CUSTOMERS: Emotionally intelligent dealers know what kind of customers upset them—and avoid working with them. "When you meet with customers, it's an interview on both sides of the table," Sorci says. "When you work for someone, you're going to have a relationship with them for roughly six to eight weeks. You've got to like that person. When you do a job for someone who's a miserable person, it hurts your soul."

Finally, remember: Be Jim, not Bob. "Being emotionally intelligent isn't being emotional," Bell says. "It's being intelligent with your emotions. Understand the difference." WP

