

## 8.1: Follow-Up is the Lasting Impression

### Follow-Up: The Power of Providing Service That Sells

#### Learning Objectives

- Understand what follow-up entails and why it is so important.
- Discuss the ongoing nature of follow-up.

#### What Is Follow-Up?

Follow-up entails everything that takes place after the sale is closed from getting signatures on all contracts and paperwork to scheduling delivery. It also includes your ongoing relationship with your customer. Relationship is the key word here. If you were involved in transactional selling, only focused on making the short-term sale, you would not be worried about follow-up because someone else in your company would take care of it. You would move on to the next customer. In many retail selling environments, this may be the case. You would not expect to receive a thank-you note from the checker at the grocery store or the cashier at a fast-food restaurant. However, you would expect to hear from a real estate agent who sold you a new home, or from a financial services consultant who is managing your money or a physiotherapist when you have injured yourself.

It's the attention to detail that makes you feel like a valuable customer. Chances are, when you need something else (another house or more money to invest), the first person you will call will be the salesperson who continues to follow up with you. When one of your friends wants to buy a house or invest some money, you will be very likely to go out of your way to recommend your salesperson.

Many companies have a checklist or best practices that are used as guidelines to ensure that all details are covered. This can include dates and timing on delivery of the product or service, scheduling training, generating invoices, sending a welcome package, or all the methods used for a thank you. In the case of complex sales, follow-up may include a transition team with members from both the company and the customer. The transition team may work closely together, including weekly or in some cases daily status calls, to ensure that the transition to the new product or service goes smoothly. For example, the implementation of a new logistics system or software program may require that the old system runs parallel with the new system until all aspects are completely set up and appropriate training is conducted. This is especially true for products or services like these that have a direct impact on the operation of the customer's business.

#### Why Follow Up?

No matter what product or service you are selling, the sales process can be challenging. The selling process starts with prospecting and qualifying (that was five chapters ago!). Depending on the complexity and buying cycle of the product or service, it could take weeks, months, or even years until you close the sale. In fact, "80% of sales require 5 follow-up calls after the meeting. 44% of sales reps give up after 1 follow-up." Brian Williams, "21 Mind-Blowing Sales Stats", <https://blog.thebrevetgroup.com/21-mind-blowing-sales-stats/>, (accessed May 24, 2024). It takes time, energy, and commitment to get to the point where the deal is done.

Relationship selling doesn't work that way. The relationship really begins with the close of the sale; follow-up is what makes a relationship grow and prosper. Follow-up is how most customers evaluate the performance of the product or service they just bought. How you proactively handle follow-ups will make all the difference in your relationships and your sales. In other words, the best way to make the sale is by the way you handle things *after* the sale. By follow up with your customers, you communicate to them that you're actively interested and involved in ensuring that their needs have been met and that you have solved their problem." And, customers will be more open to future suggestions, will trust you with more business, and may offer referral business! "Why Follow-Up is Important After a Successful Sale", <https://salesethics.net/blog/why-follow-up-is-important-after-a-successful-sale/>, (accessed May 24, 2024).

Here's the not-so-subtle point here. Even though the sale is closed, you should never assume the sale is closed. This is especially important when there is a gap in time between the closing of the sale and the delivery of the product or service (as in the delivery of a major software package, installation of new equipment, or bringing on board a new product or service vendor). A customer can have second thoughts, sometimes called buyer's remorse or cognitive dissonance. This is when a customer may think that the decision she made is not the right one. She may be in contact with a competitor, receive additional information, or be concerned

that she made the wrong decision, paid too much, or didn't consider some alternatives properly. You can help avoid letting your customers be vulnerable to alternatives. "

## Plan Your Follow-Up

It may seem more exciting to be working on a new proposal rather than doing follow-up for a sale that has already closed. Think about your follow-up plan with the following five elements in mind:

1. *Demonstrate your personal commitment and connection to the customer.* Start by saying thank you to your customer for their business. A heart of gratitude is the foundation to your follow-up making your customer feel valued and assured in their decision to choose your product or service. How you follow up after the sale is a good indication of how you will respond throughout the relationship. Start off on the right foot by sending a thank-you letter. Everyone likes to feel appreciated, especially right after they have made a commitment to spend money. Your letter should be professional, yet personal, and sincere. This is the perfect opportunity to reinforce to the customer that they have made a wise decision.
2. *Deliver as promised.* While you are the person on the front line with the customer, you have a team of people who are responsible for delivering the product or service as specified. "Don't just check the box," says executive coach and author Marshall Goldsmith, "Don't just check the box", <https://www.fastcompany.com/52305/dont-just-check-box>, (accessed May 24, 2024). Take the time to follow up internally to be sure all the i's are dotted and t's are crossed so that your customer's delivery is flawless. That means taking the time to share details and insights about the customer's business and preferences with your entire team (whether your team is large or small). There are most likely internal processes for communication and delivery, contracts to be signed, schedules to be communicated, and other operational activities that require the entire team to be working in harmony. You'll also be surprised to see that everyone involved will add value when each has a connection to the customer. And don't forget to say thank you to your team. You couldn't do it without them; share the positive feedback from your customer with the team. Call the customer to be sure the delivery was made as promised and everything is to the customer's liking. Why Follow-Up is Important After a Successful Sale", <https://salesethics.net/blog/why-follow-up-is-important-after-a-successful-sale/>, (accessed May 24, 2024).
3. *Keep the lines of communication open.* Follow-up isn't a one-time event. Rather, it is an ongoing process that takes place after the sale is closed. Just like when you researched, asked questions, and listened to your customer to learn as much as possible about you might solve their business challenges before they made the commitment to buy, you want to continue to do the same thing as part of your ongoing follow-up. Ask your clients for permission to communicate with them by their preferred method of communication (email, phone, social media, etc.) Regular contact helps you understand their needs—focus on high value content such as educational material, guides, articles and information that is useful (Boost your revenues with effective after sales follow-up, 2020). Think about what is important to your customer, and make that important to you so that they feel truly values and heard, thus, building trust (Sales ethics, 2018).
4. *Get feedback.* You have the opportunity to get feedback directly from someone who has engaged with you and the company—ask for feedback. How can a product be improved or features changes or services enhanced? You can do this through email, feedback cards, social media surveys, interviews, or analyzing your sales call. Knowing how to improve will increase the opportunity to build the relationship.
5. *Make your customers into fans.* Focusing on your customers' businesses as if they were yours, adding value, and showing your customers that you appreciate their business makes them more than customers—it makes them fans. Fans share stories of their great experiences. Your customers can help you sell with testimonials, referrals, and references. One of the most effective ways to handle objections from prospects is to call on excited and energized customers who are more than satisfied with your product and service. Delighted customers make the best advocates and carry the most wait. "Boost your revenues with effective after sales follow-up", <https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/marketing-sales-export/sales/effective-sales-follow-up-5-simple-steps>, (accessed May 24, 2024). Use customer testimonials as part of your selling presentation, on your company's website, or in customer communications. You can also ask customers to write a recommendation for you on LinkedIn.

Reward your best customers with special offers and added value such as additional training, additional advertising space or time, or other additional service (Schmitt, 2019). While you may extend a special pricing offer, focus on delivering value and giving your best customers the opportunity to experience the other services you have to offer. This lets your best customers know you appreciate their business and gives you an opportunity to move your relationship to the next level by becoming an even more important business partner to them. It is these loyal customers who build your business in two ways. First, they buy more from you because they feel that you are bringing them value in more ways than simply selling a product. Second, when they are loyal customers, they become fans or advocates of your product or service, and they tell their friends about you.

## Key Takeaways

- Follow-up is what builds a relationship after the sale. You should never assume the sale is closed.
- Follow-up should take place regularly so your customer knows he can count on hearing from you.
- A personal thank-you note or letter is appropriate after the close of the sale. The letter can also include some operational information such as contact information and receipts.
- Follow up to be sure everything is delivered as promised. Do your follow-up inside the company and touch base with the customer to be sure everything is to her satisfaction.
- Add value to your customer's business with industry information, white papers, blogs, and newsletters. These bring value to your customer and keep your name in front of him.
- Feedback is an important part of follow-up.
- Customers can become your best-selling tool with testimonials and referrals.

### ? Exercise 8.1.1

1. Identify a company with whom you have a relationship (you purchase its products or services on an ongoing basis). What makes the relationship work? What role does follow-up play in the relationship?
2. Identify a company from which you have purchased products or services that doesn't follow up with you. Why do you continue to purchase the products or services? If another alternative comes along, will you be open to trying the new alternative? Why or why not?
3. Assume you work for a video game manufacturer and you sell video games to bricks-and-mortar and online retailers. Identify three things you would do as part of your follow-up plan after you close the sale to Best Buy.
4. Assume you are selling security systems to businesses, how would you use a news article about recent security issues as part of your follow-up with your customers?
5. Assume you sell landscaping to businesses. Once you have arranged for the landscaping to be installed, are there any other opportunities for follow-up?
  - If so, what would you do to follow up during the spring and summer?
  - What would you do to follow up during the fall and winter?
6. Imagine that you are a sales rep for a major insurance company. How can you gather customer feedback to improve your service? How can you use customer feedback that you receive about products and services for which you are not responsible?

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