



SELL
YOURSELF
FIRST

PEOPLE BUY YOU FIRST! It doesn't matter if you're meeting people for the first time in a social or business situation, you won't get far unless you sell yourself first.

This comes as a surprise to many people who just show up without thinking about the impression they make on others. In the case of sales professionals, they may prepare their presentations well, but not pay as much attention to preparing themselves as to how they, personally, come across to potential clients.

The basic premise of this article is that *it matters*. It matters if you show up 20 minutes early (awkward in social situations), 10 minutes early (usually appropriate for business), on time (okay in social situations, maybe not for business) or 10 minutes late (never acceptable).

It matters if you're dressed and groomed appropriately—including whether or not you're wearing the right shoes (and that they're in good condition).

When you want to capture the attention of others and have them view you as a competent individual, dress and act like one—appropriately for the situation in which you’re meeting them.

- If you’ll be meeting people in a casual situation, dress casually, but not the same level of casual you might wear hanging out at home.
- In business, attire is often dictated by the company you represent. Even so, when you wear khakis and a company polo, be certain they’re in excellent condition if you want to make the best impression.

That first impression goes way beyond the clothing you wear. As experts in the field of selling, we can list many nuances that have killed sales (or relationships) for people. A short list includes:

- ill-fitting or out-of-style clothing
- too much cologne
- noisy or too much jewelry
- having poorly groomed hands, hair or teeth
- carrying briefcases or tablets with covers that are worn or dirty

You might be thinking, “Oh, come on,” but the reality is that people judge you first by your appearance. When meeting new people your goal is to attract the right kind of attention in order to earn the opportunity to sell your idea, your product, or service and in order to do that, you must sell yourself first.

Just as some people are more attracted to blondes, brunettes, or redheads, most have preferences in the people they have business relationships with and make quick judgments when meeting you. Even when you do your best to appear appropriately dressed and groomed, there are some people who just won’t “click” with you. Maybe you remind them of a kid who teased them on their first day of school. You have no control over that. Or maybe, when meeting or selling to a member of the opposite sex, you remind them of someone who rejected them in the past. No matter what “it” is that causes them to back away or raise a wall of resistance to you, the point is that with some people you’ll just have to work harder in order to gain their trust.

As we teach in our book, *When Buyers Say No*, “a confused mind says no.” Even when people who are meeting you for the first time don’t consciously make a connection (good or bad), they’ll err on the side of “maybe not” when it comes to getting to know you further or listening to what you have to say. It’s an instinctive, protective device of the human psyche to shy away from the unfamiliar unless it’s particularly intriguing.

How to Get Past the Initial “No”

You recognize it when people aren’t warming up to you. Even when you give them your brightest smile and warmest greeting, they just don’t engage. Rather than letting it throw you, take that lack of engagement as a challenge. Act the opposite of what you think they might be expecting. What makes you different from the last sales person they met—or the next? Blast away at their pre-conceived notions about sales people in general.

What might be the reason behind their protective postures and walls of defense?

Here are some suggestions:

1. **They don’t have a clear picture of how you can be beneficial to them.** Most people operate with a “what’s in it for me” attitude about everything. We’re so inundated with demands on our time and attention, we’ve become a bit jaded when something new comes into our worlds. The same goes for demands on our money. Some people instinctively protect their wallets or grip their purses more tightly while speaking with sales people. If you think that might be the case, quickly ask a question that introduces a benefit that’s more valuable than keeping their money might be—something they might latch on to, or that would peak their interest, and cause them to want to know more.

2. **Perhaps you've assumed something incorrectly in your approach.** If you're meeting someone in a casual situation, you might have assumed they're as happy to be there as you are. It could be that their spouse or another friend has dragged them along and they just want to lean against the wall until it's time to leave. They may not want to make new acquaintances. Or, if you sell yourself well enough, they could become your best friend for life. You'll only find out after you attempt to sell yourself to them. In business situations, perhaps someone else scheduled your meeting with the decision-maker and didn't relay enough of the information you had shared in in the first place—when the scheduler decided to arrange the meeting—and they're skeptical. Your goal is to find common ground with the other person in order to figure out where to begin your relationship or conversation. Keep the conversation light initially and be ready to move in any of several directions with it—following their lead—until you can get firm footing on where to begin your job as their guide to the benefits of meeting you.

“When meeting new people your goal is to attract the right kind of attention in order to earn the opportunity to sell your idea, your product, or service and in order to do that, you must sell yourself first.”

3. **Your timing might be off.** It just may be that the other person is having a bad day. *It happens.* Or, maybe they made a purchase or commitment between the time you initially contacted them and the time they learn the benefits of a possible relationship with you. With someone like this, mentally set aside your agenda for meeting them and just be pleasant. It could be that they'll suggest a better time to get together. If they don't, you should ask when a better time would be. Or, if there's no opportunity there, they may be willing to introduce you to someone else who might enjoy meeting with you or have a need for your product or service.

In all of those instances, you are selling yourself first. Sell yourself as someone who is competent, flexible, and with an attitude of servitude and you'll go far in business and in life. Get those dollar signs out of your eyes. Even when facing the most important sale of your life, understand that it may not be the most important thing for your buyer to do today or even this month.

When you relax and convey an attitude of “you matter more than the sale does,” the people you're meeting with will feel somewhat obliged to give you their time and attention. In sales, your job is to identify and discover the needs and expectations of others as they relate to your product or service. But they'll never open up to you unless they “buy” you first.

It Matters That They Like You

Your first goal when selling something is to help people to like you, trust you, and want to listen to you. How do you do that? Be likeable, trustworthy, and speak well. You do that with your smile, and the gestures you use as you “speak” with your body language. Your level of courtesy counts here as well. Hopefully, if you’re an adult, you’ve already learned lessons about common courtesies. If you’re not sure you’ve got this down, grab a book on business etiquette and devour it. Losing sales because of having poor manners is unacceptable and preventable.

As we write in *WBSN*, this is a penalty situation as much as a reward situation. In other words, presenting yourself in a likeable manner doesn’t mean that the potential client will buy from you. But if you present yourself in an unlikeable manner, the potential client probably will not buy from you. Think about it. Do you like to buy products and services from unlikeable salespeople? Probably not, unless you are in a situation where that product or service is urgently needed.

Perhaps it is helpful to think in terms of a hierarchy of a potential client’s initial attention. What the major roadblocks must be cleared away before he or she is open to learning about your value proposition?

First, is the potential client ready to have a conversation? Not just with you, with anyone?

What are some reasons that would stop a person from listening to anyone? Here are a few:

- They are feeling physically ill
- They are upset about some other matter
- They are under extreme time pressure
- Someone else is asking for their attention at that moment
- They are feeling financial pressure and any conversation that involves money is emotionally painful
- They hate to make decisions

Do you see how all of those possible factors, and many more like them, are external factors that have nothing to do with you—other than the fact that you are now asking for their attention and time?

“Your first goal when selling something is to help people to like you, trust you, and want to listen to you.”

The next level in their initial hierarchy of attention is if they like you. The formula is simple, if they like you, they will tend to spend more time with you. And during the time they do give you, they will tend to give you more of their undivided attention.

Here is the tricky part: How do you know if the potential client is distracted by unrelated external factors or by something you've done or said—or worn? The answer lies in two parts. When your appearance is professional, you remove that reason from the table long before the sales appointment begins. But as written above, what if you remind them of someone they had a bad past experience with? Or what if they respond negatively to all salespeople? That brings us to the second part of the answer: You'll only find out when you ask quality questions. When you sense that a potential client seems uncomfortable, step back from the sales process and ask a question about the sales environment.

“Mr. Client, we’ll need about ten minutes to discuss the advantages our products and service can bring to your business. Is this still a good time to discuss this?”

A question like this accomplishes two objectives. First, it signals to the potential client that you recognize he or she is distracted. Second, it provides an out for the potential client.

If they can't possibly listen to you at this moment, it is a “no” topped with resentment that is just waiting to unleash itself. If you are in a one-time sales environment and once they leave

your presence you will never see them again, then you must make a judgment about pressing on. If your type of sale allows you to reschedule your sales appointment with reasonable certainty, then providing this option shows that your interest centers around your client's needs rather than your own.

“In order for people to want to listen to you, you have to have something to say that's of value to them. This is where working on your presentation skills...comes into play.”

If the potential client is open to those first two levels of their initial attention hierarchy—they are not distracted by external factors and they are not distracted by an unlikeable aspect of your appearance, the next level in their initial hierarchy of attention is if your value proposition addresses one of their needs or desires. This is when the selling of your product and service begins.

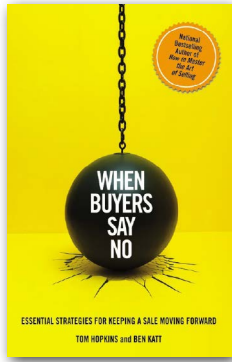
To demonstrate trustworthiness, speak of a situation with another client or someone else in your life where trustworthiness was demonstrated. You don't have to brag. Rather use the problem-solution strategy. It sounds like this: “Another company faced this challenge. I promised to do my best to help them find a solution. Here's what *we* came up with.” It's important that you use as few “I's” as possible. When you use the word “we” instead you come across as being a part

of the team that found the solution — that you were on the same side as the buyer rather than being an opponent on the field of selling.

In order for people to want to listen to you, you have to have something to say that's of value to them. This is where working on your presentation skills—including speaking clearly and concisely—comes into play. Telling isn't selling. Effective selling happens when you ask the right questions, listen to the answers, and then think about solutions.

With some products, the buyers don't just invest in the benefits of the product or service, they are buying future involvement *with you*—perhaps a long-term relationship if it's your responsibility to service your accounts. You might be the key connection between your buyers and your company. If that's the case, they have to feel very comfortable with the knowledge that you can and will take care of them—that you'll have their best interests in mind in all of your conversations with them. **You will have to demonstrate your own competence as well as your product's benefits with every contact.** 📌

Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [When Buyers Say No](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS | **Tom Hopkins** is renowned as The Builder of Sales Champions. He is a sales expert who has trained over five million students on five continents, and authored 17 books on the subjects of selling and success. **Ben Katt** is a sales professional, entrepreneur, and consultant to national and regional corporations. By combining their experiences in selling and training, they've developed a unique approach to the sales process that's proven to eliminate becoming lost in the sale, and helping sales pros get past more no's. For more information, visit www.whenbuyerssayno.com.

→ **SEND THIS** | [Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

→ **SUBSCRIBE** | [Sign up for e-news](#) to learn when our latest manifestos are available.

This document was created on August 20, 2014 and is based on the best information available at that time. The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit [Creative Commons](#) or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA. Cover image from [Veer](#). You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.

About ChangeThis

[ChangeThis](#) is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

800ceoread

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at [800-CEO-READ](#) or at our daily [blog](#).