

# Hotel Business Review

Best practices, insights & trends

## You Call it Sales, I Call it Service...Let's Call the Whole Thing Off

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Let's imagine that you are a customer at a bank, which, assuming you don't keep all of your money in a mattress, shouldn't be too much of a stretch. One day, you're minding your own business at home, when you get a call from your personal banking representative, Ms. Sally Salesandservice. The conversation goes as follows.

SS: "Sir, I was just reviewing your accounts at Hometown Trust, and I think I can help you both save money and generate additional interest income at the same time."

You: "Uhhh....OK."

SS: "I've noticed you seem to carry excess cash in your checking account – if you moved some to a short-term certificate of deposit you could stay fairly liquid and earn returns. Plus, you qualify for a home equity line of credit, so you could consolidate some of your credit card debt at a lower interest rate and remodel your kitchen. Finally, if you refinance your mortgage, you could

lower your rates and shorten your loan term. What do you say?"

You: "Duh, thanks."

Once you get off the phone, your immediate thought is, "what GREAT service." It felt like someone out there in the cold, cruel world truly had your back, not like those smarmy salespeople who are constantly calling.

Whoa. Wait a second. In a 45-second phone call, Ms. Salesandservice engaged in cross-selling, up-selling and just plain old regular selling. She sold you a CD, a HELOC and god knows what other acronyms.

But it felt good...and it was helpful. And this is the point where the rubber meets the road in all high-performing organizations, where sales and service cease to be separate functions and instead morph into the catch-all activities of building relationships and anticipating needs.

Regardless of your industry, by building a relationship with a client or customer you have seamlessly melded sales and service in a way that is impossible for the competition to duplicate. As Ken Blanchard writes in his famous management missive, *The One Minute Manager*, "...anyone can beat you on price. Many people can imitate your products or services. But one thing people can't do is take away the relationships you build with your...customers."

Whereas a straightforward "sales" interaction comes with at least a minimal dose of wariness, and a clear cut "service" scenario implies a hint of submission, the notion of "relationship" implies a high degree of mutual interest and trust. That one parties' interest is ultimately incremental sales and the others is to be tended to hand and foot is almost immaterial – by recognizing that the two go hand in hand, the traditionally divergent interests become inseparable.

Any company or organization with designs on providing a world class customer experience needs to recognize that whatever generic title (i.e., customer service representative/account executive/ sales associate) that they have "touching" the customer needs to evolve into Sally Salesandservice, quickly. The traditional roles of "sales" being glorified order takers and "service" reacting to customer problems are firmly rooted in the past. Where there has always been a disconnect between those selling a product or service and those fulfilling it, there now must be agreement and

cooperation. The new model – an integrated sales and service function that serves both roles. Just like Sally Salesandservice.

No less an august authority than McKinsey & Company describes a scenario where late adapters to this new model are "stuck in the middle." Unable to compete with low-cost service providers on price and ill-equipped to build a sustainable "relationship" via an elevated level of sales and service, those who fail to adapt are vulnerable to attack from both sides. (McKinsey Quarterly, 2005 Number 5) The McKinsey article continues, advising an approach where companies analytically identify and focus on the "high-touch" interactions that will provide the most perceived value to customers in order to further facilitate this bond. Just like Sally Salesandservice.

This shift can best be described as the move from the "order taking" and "problem solving" roles described above, to one where "anticipating needs" takes precedence. Think about it – anticipating needs is the truest marriage of sales and service, where both the company and the customer have their needs met in a manner that elevates the customer experience and drives incremental revenue growth.

A hotel concierge directs a guest towards a rejuvenating spa treatment for his aching back? That's anticipating a need, joining sales and service to enhance the guest experience and hotel revenues.

The pro shop attendant at a golf course clues in the foursome heading out to the first tee that periodic rain showers are in the forecast; the foursome buys umbrellas and hits the 19th hole at the end of their round dry and content. Once again, anticipating needs blurred the line between sales and service to create a positive guest experience for the golfers and drive the pro shop bottom line.

The model applies across industry, in either a B2B or B2C environment, assuming that what you are selling has some value to begin with. By building the relationship and anticipating the customer needs, you are intrinsically ensuring that you are providing value to that customer, and in most instances that value will be in the form of an additional outlay of cash on the customer's part. And – if the proper foundational relationship is in place – the customer won't mind, because you will be helping the customer help themselves. Again, think of Sally Salesandservice.

Best of all, this approach best serves the customer and generates a measurable ROI, as incremental sales from a traditional "service" scenario fall to the bottom line. Organizations with aspirations to work more efficiently, more profitably and with a keener focus on the customer/guest/patient/client experience are thinking about how to tackle this concept. Our organization recently worked with a professional basketball team where by all traditional measures the business side is working as smoothly as the team on the court. The team is winning, business is booming and the fans are having a great time. Just pop open the gym doors and roll the balls out on the court, right? Not quite.

These forward thinkers realized that there is no better time to build the relationship and provide the greatest level of service (and sales) to your fans than when the good times are rolling. Provide them with every opportunity to bask in the team's success (and spend more), bond with the team and their fellow fans (and spend more) and love every minute of it...despite the fact that they might be spending more. If one can tighten the overall emotional bond via that elevated level of service (and sales) when things are going well, the relationship will remain strong when things are less rosy on the court. The team in question spent several months laying the groundwork for this transformation and then selected 30 members of its sales and service staff to learn the skills to better build fan relationships and anticipate fan needs, all in the hopes of minimizing fan defections when the "fast breaks" turn into "future prospects."

The next time you find yourself thinking, "wow, that was great service – that was just what I needed," stop and think – was I just sold something too? You might very well have encountered a wolf (salesperson) in sheep's (serviceperson) clothing....and loved and appreciated every minute of it!

*Rob Rush is CEO of LRA Worldwide, a leading consulting and research company specializing in Customer Experience Management. LRA offers an integrated suite of services designed to "operationalize the brand" – turn brand promise and customer strategy into operational reality. LRA's services measure and improve service quality, employee performance, customer satisfaction, retention and profitability. Clients include Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc., Hyatt Hotels, the PGA TOUR, Indianapolis Motor Speedway and others. You can visit the LRA website at [www.lraworldwide.com](http://www.lraworldwide.com) or contact Rob directly at [rob.rush@lraworldwide.com](mailto:rob.rush@lraworldwide.com)*