

INTEGRITY IN SALES

“The best part of telling the truth is not having to remember who I lie to,” words spoken by a salesperson.

A 2012 Gallup survey of trust revealed what we all know. Trust in our institutions is at historic lows. This includes financial institutions, government, journalists, and salespeople. Spiritualists argue that when we put our faith in humans we will always disappoint ourselves. I am a bit more optimistic than that. The basis for my faith in humanity is the people I have met on my journey.

People of integrity stand out, and you know what they stand for. Integrity is the soundness of one’s character, which includes uprightness, sincerity, and honesty. Integrity is more than telling the truth. It is doing the right thing, especially when no one is looking. People of integrity are true to themselves. They are anchored to their core values, never abandoning what they believe for the convenience of the moment. With integrity as your compass, you will never get lost on your journey. Integrity separates fact from fiction. A self-image that includes integrity simplifies decisions. For salespeople, integrity must be the quality that best describes you. Integrity in sales means several things.

Tell the truth, especially when it is difficult. Political correctness has stifled honest communications. Everyone has their sensitivity meters tuned so high these days that they cannot communicate honestly with others. Truth has taken a back seat to polite conversation. When people ask for “honest feedback,” more often than not, they want validation, not meaningful feedback. Honest feedback has become an oxymoron. (Hint: Do not ask Tom Reilly for honest feedback unless you want corrective feedback along with some validation.) Honest communication means delivering good and bad news to customers. It means speaking up when your company policy is wrong. It is stepping forward when a teammate is stepping out of line. People may not like the message, but they will respect the messenger.

Sell to the customer’s needs and application, not just what you want to move. I understand what it means to thin inventory levels. I have been in manufacturing and distribution. Your excess inventory is not the customer’s problem. It is your problem. Do not expect the customer to buy something just because you want to empty the shelves. If their needs and your excess stock overlap, awesome. You both benefit from the promotion. Why would you want your business partner to spend their precious resources to bail you out? Sell what they need and want. That way, you always have credibility with the person that really counts—the customer.

Do you have an integrity pricing model? How arbitrary is your pricing policy? Companies that employ integrity in their pricing practices generally have programmed pricing. This means that the customer determines the price they pay by the volume and mix of the products they purchase. Arbitrary and accidental pricing means that you charge what you can get wherever you can get it. Good luck trying to remember all of that. Integrity pricing means customers can talk about your prices, knowing full well that everyone pays the programmed price. With integrity pricing, you never have to apologize for your prices. You simply explain the options. The customer may not like the prices, but they will respect you and your integrity. They will know that no one will have a pricing advantage over them. Your integrity levels the playing field for your customers.

Doing the right thing, telling the truth, and living with integrity are not always the easy path to travel. Once you accept that it is difficult (and simple) to live with integrity, it no longer matters that it is tough. You transcend the challenge. Be true to yourself. You will sleep better at night. People will respect your integrity. They will trust you.

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