

WHY SELLER-FOCUSED THINKING DOES NOT WORK

“The true value of a human being is determined primarily by the measure and sense in which he has attained liberation from the self.” Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It*

From which direction does your definition of value flow? Do you try to see things from the customer’s point of view or do you try to make them see things from your perspective? Customer-focused thinking asks, “Why can’t we sell what they need and want?” Seller-focused thinking asks, “Why can’t they buy what we want to sell them?”

Customer-focused salespeople know that to deliver meaningful value they must step outside of themselves and their narrow view of the world in an attempt to understand the customer’s world. Seller-focused salespeople define value for customers and tell them what they need. I have heard salespeople and managers say this about customers, “We know what they need better than they do.” These quips attributed to Henry Ford embody this type of thinking:

“If I had asked customers what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.”

“You can have any color car you want as long as it is black.”

Seller-focused thinking leads to two major problems. First, seller-focused individuals are guilty of *diagnostic bias*. This means they view every problem through the lens of what they are able to deliver. Needs are shaped to fit solutions versus the other way around. It is the cardiologist who diagnoses every symptom as heart-related or the psychotherapist that views current struggles as the manifestation of unresolved past issues. Seller-focused people view life through the prism of self. Second, seller-focused individuals define value as what they can extract from a customer, not what they deliver. I observe this attitude in companies where leadership obsesses on financial metrics. Customers view this self-serving orientation as arrogant.

How can you deliver the best solution when you consider only your ideas? How much better could your solution be if you did not distort the reality of the customers’ needs to suit your ability to sell them something? Seller-focused thinking is no foundation upon which to build strong relationships or partnerships because it is too one-sided. Buyers want to know that salespeople understand their challenges and needs as they are, not as the salesperson wants them to be.

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