

Step 1: Attitude and Self-Understanding

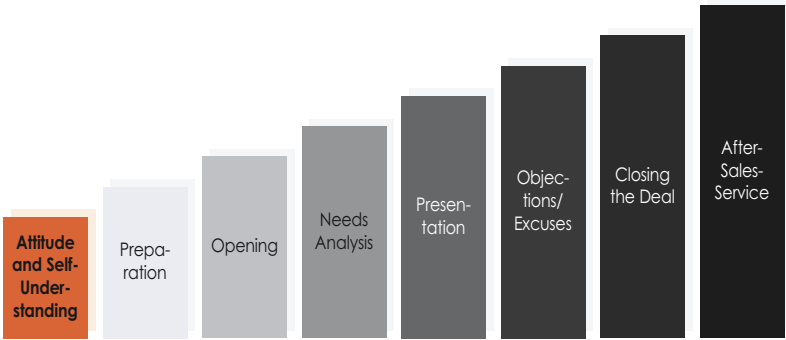


Fig. 2

This 1st Step of our concept is also the foundation for the complete process – you might even say for the entire career of a salesperson. It makes a fundamental difference how we approach the customer in terms of tuning and self-expectation. Here are a few examples of less promising attitudes, which you very often encounter in practice:

“Let’s see if something can be picked up there”.

“I’m still with the customer, and then I’ll call it a day”.

“I will drop by quickly to see whether everything is OK”.

“Telling from how he sounded on the phone, that will be a tedious conversation”.

1. The three roles of the salesperson

We at VBC have summarised the different requirements for salespeople in three roles. As salespeople we ideally meet all three role expectations for our customers equally well. Also refer to Fig. 3.

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Fig. 3

We therefore play the role of the likeable/sympathetic figure, the competent adviser and the strong salesperson.

1.1 The likeable/sympathetic figure (social competence)

Let's begin with the role of the likeable/sympathetic figure. Meeting the expectation in this role requires a certain attitude as well as various skills and competences. It is easiest to explain the basic attitude with the sentence:

You have to like people

I believe this philanthropic attitude is essential, not only to be successful in sales in the long term, but also to be happy. When we believe that we have to deal with crooks, liars and sharks who want to cheat us, we should look for another job in the interest of our own long-term health progress. By a philanthropic attitude, I do not mean a naive blind confidence at all, but rather a positive, trusting attitude and a certain faith in the good of people. Besides this attitude, it is still necessary to develop two areas of competence, namely social competence and emotional intelligence.

Simply put, you could say that it's a matter of social competence, how we deal with other people, and emotional intelligence and specifically

about emotions, thus feelings. It is a question of how we deal with our own feelings and the feelings of others. Can we cope if we are faced with (apparent) rejection, disinterested or ignorance? What are the feelings of our customers? Notice if the other person feels uncertain or overburdened? Are we able to then provide reassurance?

In the role of the likeable/sympathetic figure it is not a matter of – as is often mistakenly believed – pandering and “sucking up” to other people, but exactly the opposite. It’s about juggling or a balancing act, remaining true to our own personality and at the same time accepting how other people are, and facing people without prejudice. It is easy to be good with people who come from the same cultural background as ourselves; who perhaps belong to our generation; who possibly even attended the same school or have similar sport and leisure interests. However, it is far more difficult to work with people who are not from our cultural background, or our generation, etc.

If we, for example, are vegetarians and staunch animal rights activists and our customer is a hunter, then that can trigger internal conflicts. We get to his office and there demonstratively hanging on the wall are the antlers of the hunted deer. A photo of our customer with the hound Waldi and his shot gun in a hand are framed below. Now it’s not a matter of acting as if we find that brilliant and shout out: “That is very interesting, may I come along one time?” It is a matter of one’s own tolerance limit that we should set as far as possible. This means, for instance, we tell ourselves: “I am a vegetarian or an animal rights activist and understand that there are people who take care of the forest and the wildlife. Sick or excess numbers of animals are shot dead and their antlers can be hung on the wall.”

So it’s about tolerance. And it is about a genuine interest in other people and their company or organisation. So this would bring us back to the philanthropic attitude as mentioned in the beginning.

As a likeable/sympathetic figure we sense people who are seriously and honestly interested in us and our world. This means, you can position yourself as a nice sympathetic person, without having to pretend, through an active interest in the person facing you. This also involves above all listening skills. You will rarely or never hear from

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someone: “This guy is getting on my nerves, he can listen so insistently well.” A lot more often we hear the remark or have even perhaps put it ourselves. “He is getting on my nerves, he is talking so much about himself and his interests.”

That means for us as professional salespeople We hear more than we talk. We will go into that in detail in Chapter 4 of the book, where this is about “active listening”.

1.2 The competent advisor (business competence)

The second of the three most important roles which we play as salespeople for our customer, is that of the competent advisor. Mistakenly many people believe that this is the only role that is included in sales. In many heads the equation applies: Salesperson = competent advisor. That is indeed true, but not everything. The competent advisor is, as we have said, only one of three roles. This is about expertise. Depending on which field you are working in, this role can be more or less demanding. For some salespeople in the key account field, this means, for example, that someone needs a university degree in a specialist subject, in order to be able to perform and sell at all in their role as a competent adviser. In this book we do not want to discuss this too much, because what accounts for the competence of an advisor largely depends on the line of business. However, the following basic ideas apply in any case across all the sectors.

Knowledge of their own products and services

This point seems to be self-explanatory and you don't actually have to waste any words on it. In practice, there are salespeople time and time again who know too little about their products and their services. Some salespeople also believe that the expertise is an obligation of the company to allocate. We hold the view: “Expertise is at least to the same extent also an obligation of us as salespeople to accept”. This means, if we do not possess specific information, it is our job to take care of obtaining it. This means, for example, that we get on our supervisor's or a specialist's nerves until we receive the required information. In our modern economy, expertise has an ever shorter half-life. This results in having to remain professionally fit.

Professional salespeople regularly read at least two to three journals within their industry and keep up to date. However, expertise does not end with knowing our own products and services, but goes way beyond this. Real top sellers know their competitors and their offerings. There are good possibilities these days to keep informed, such as, for example, the Internet, but also trade fairs and catalogues. Nevertheless, we do not recommend placing your primary focus on this and wasting too much time on research. Place your energy and your focus instead on your competence and your UPS (Unique Selling Point, or how you stand out from others).

Last but not least, a competent advisor also has a detailed “customer knowledge”. By this we mean more than just a general knowledge; a detailed knowledge about a customer’s structure, organisation and processes. Professional sellers know how customers use their products and services and what effects these have on the customer and their organisation. This in turn requires a strong interest for our customer and their problems.

1.3 The strong salesperson (sales competence)

The third role is that of the strong seller. We understand this to be sales expertise. By this we mean that we are able to prepare and lead sales meetings in a structured way, to present to the customer his advantage in the right way, to handle objections and reservations professionally, to bring about a purchase decision together with the customer and then to ensure that this decision is implemented and carried out professionally. Those who have mastered the 8 Steps of this book and are also able to professionally bring a sales discussion from one step to the next even in difficult situations, are considered to be sales competent.

2. Balance of roles

After we have viewed the three different roles (likeable/sympathetic figure, competent advisor, strong salesperson), it is important to know that we will continue to be successful, if we have managed to develop the three roles to a balanced extent. A widespread fallacy is that it is enough just to be either a likeable/sympathetic figure or a competent advisor, or a strong salesperson. This is the minimum necessity to

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achieve mediocre results. Those who want to be exceptionally successful and satisfied as sellers, develop the three roles highly in equal measure. That is comparable to the three legs of a triangular table: If one of the legs is too short, nothing stays on the table – or in other words: no exceptional sales success takes place. Those who are, for example, only ever a likeable/sympathetic figure and do not develop the other two roles, are sure to have a great deal of customers who are willing to talk with them, host them and share with them their personal concerns and even relationship problems. However, the customers possibly buy from the competitor because you do not fill the other two roles, and that is where the fun stops.

On the other hand, it is also not enough to just be the competent advisor. What happens here is referred to as ‘advice robbery’: Customers – and perhaps even colleagues from their own company – call us about all manners of specialist detailed problems and constantly praise our competence. Ultimately, someone else gets the business – not you. This also applies: If the customers buy from our competitor or colleague, we have done something wrong.

Finally, those who are solely strong salespeople, however, have little or no interest in customers on a human level, and also are professionally weak, will close a maximum of one deal per customer. No later than the first deal, these customers will notice that the professional implementation is inadequate and the seller is no longer taking care of them. Consequently, all three roles need to be developed equally.

Naturally, this book mainly covers the third role, that is sales competence, and touches slightly on the first role, social competence. Usually we ourselves all know best, where we are most likely to be lacking. If you are not entirely sure, ask your supervisor, a trustworthy colleague or a “fan customer”. In doubt, you can consult all three and therefore get a good external image that you can compare with your self-image.

Self-test:

The free salesperson competence check for our readers

As a reader of this book you will get our exclusive salesperson competence check to the value of € 123 as a free download. Simply write us an email to service@vbc.at with the reference “SCC free” We will then promptly send you the download link.

3. Image in sales

The following quote is from US trainer colleague Roy Chitwood:

**“There is nothing wrong in selling! –
There is something wrong with how some people pursue this
profession trying to manipulate people into buying”.**

The image of the salesperson is still not the best, above all, in our Central European region. In other parts of the world it looks quite different, such as for example in Anglo-Saxon countries, where the image of the salesperson is on a whole different level. The sales reps are often highly acclaimed and frequently present their annual sales and their commissions in the media.

But even when you leave Austria southbound, you already notice just after crossing the border that the clocks tick differently. If you go shopping there, then you experience entirely different seller personalities than on our shopping streets: friendly, warm, with self-assured eye contact. For example, if you go to Udine and the Piazza de Matteo, proud and splendid characters attract attention in the small cafeterias along the square at lunchtime. These are salespeople who work in the surrounding shops, which in contrast to many of our native salespeople pushed into corners appearing all grey and mousy, as you would expect show their status, are swollen with pride and well-dressed.

One of the main reasons for the poor image of salespeople in our country is unfortunately the retail trade. Many of the partly untrained staff can neither offer the professional nor the social competence, which a customer expects. This poor image reflects the image picture of the entire profession.

Yet even here with us a change of thinking is slowly beginning, as we can identify after 20 years of VBC and the training of 170,000 salespeople.

In our view, three factors contribute substantially to this:

- Many business universities and colleges have included Sales in their programme: University of Vienna works for example with exactly the training that is available in this book.

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- Quality media deal increasingly often with sales topics in their career sharing. This creates a positive image.
- And last, but not least: The fact that e-commerce (internet trade) has meanwhile taken away up to 25% of sales, forces you 'offline' to develop professionally and in terms of selling, in order to keep up with competition.

It is a pity things had to get to this stage with the image of our craft – still sales is one of the oldest professions and from time immemorial a trader has had a high standing and may be proud of his status – and his wealth.

4. What does selling mean?

A description which we really like is: **Selling is a creative act between at least two people, in which added value is created at the end for both sides.**

With a little more of a business perspective you might also say:

A salesperson is the middleman between a supplier and someone who needs something. He knows both sides well and supports the customer actively in making a purchase decision. The target is to bring about a win/win situation.

In other words: **Good selling means helping the customer to make the right buying decisions with clever questions.**

A market economy, be it free or managed socially, needs this intermediary, so that the system can work. Other economic systems in our Eastern neighbouring countries have tried to manage without sellers. After 40 to 50 years systems like this no longer work.

5. Sales ethics

In every profession there are black sheep – thus it is particularly important for us to have our own personal professional ethics. The question we face is which values and guidelines we prioritise for

our work. Ideally these values are self-determined. Naturally that is only useful when you work in a company or an environment in which the corporate culture does not run contrary to these values. What we are introducing to you is only a suggestion – everyone has to define their own values themselves!

6. The attitude triangle

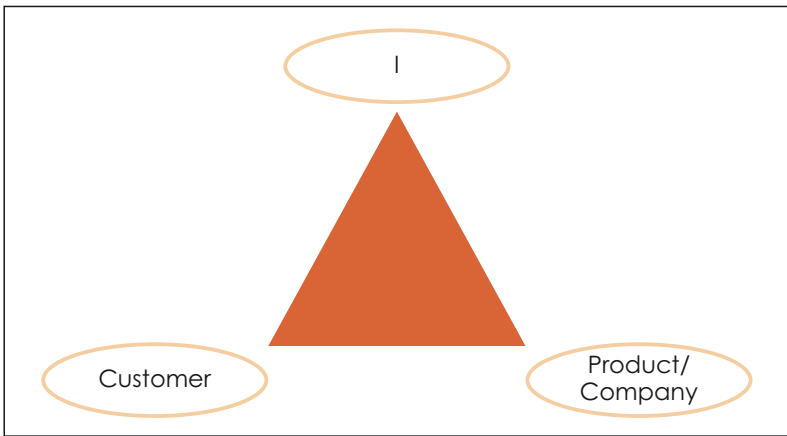


Fig. 4

The attitude triangle covers the three most important key points in the attitude of a salesperson.

6.1 Our attitude to ourselves

At the very top we stand as salespeople. This is about our USP and the value to which we measure ourselves. We should first ask the question: How am I in my profession? Am I proud of what I do? Unfortunately this is not often the case. Often graduates from business universities do not apply to a job offer if the word “sales” appears in the job description, because they do not want to be in sales due to the image. On the other hand, there are countless careers which began in sales. One of the most shining Austrian examples is Dietrich Mateschitz, who sold toothpaste before his career as Red Bull CEO.

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“I am OK, you are OK”.

According to the concept of the transaction analysis, it is crucial to give yourself the same appreciation as you do to others. In the book “I am OK, you are OK.” Thomas E. Harris describes the correlations and meaning of appreciation of yourself and others.

6.2 Our attitude towards the product and the company


The next question to be asked: What is the USP of our company?

How do we stand to our company and the products that it offers? Can we “stand behind”? Does this company conform to our values, our moral standards? Does the product that we are selling correlate with our own notions of quality? Does the customer service and the complaints management of our company correspond to our own values?

6.3 Our attitude towards the customer

Now we get to the third important point: our customer. How do you stand to him? We do not believe that the customer should be king; it is considerably more effective to face him at eye level. However, this only works when we are comfortable about ourselves and our product.

In summary

-  Top performances in sales are only possible when all three corners of the attitude triangle interact. If our attitude to our company, to our customer and above all to ourselves is positive.

A top seller covers all three corners. With two it is still sufficient for a passable salesperson. Should only one corner fit, then you will have to decide sooner or later to exit sales life – or, work on your attitudes.