

SALES STAR



Innovative Selling: Stephen Shapiro

[By Mary Waldron]

Coming from a 15-year career in management consulting at Accenture, Stephen Shapiro has developed a career in helping professionals become more creative in their fields. Throughout his research and studies, Shapiro has discovered some undeniable truths about the world of sales, and he is quickly spreading the word about his invigorated approach to selling and business.

When advising salespeople, Shapiro shares methods by which they can think more creatively about the relationships they have with their customers.

“What you really need to do is understand, from an anthropological perspective, how your customer lives and breathes, how they work, what their motivations are,” said Shapiro. “It’s very difficult to sell to someone unless you have that type of information. It’s partly standing in their shoes and creatively thinking how you can come up with solutions that will help serve their needs.”

Shapiro also emphasizes the benefit of salespeople focusing on customer value rather than numbers.

“If you create value for others, you create value for yourself,” said Shapiro.

Shapiro also found evidence that those who try too hard usually don’t do well, in many aspects of business.

“In one of those areas where we did a study, [it] actually showed that salespeople who were focused on sales targets were less effective than people who were more focused on serving customers,” he said.

Shapiro conducted this study in a women’s clothing store. The objective was to see

which salesperson could sell the most. Four salespeople in the store were told to only focus on selling more than the others; the numbers were the measure of success. One salesperson was told to focus only on creating and cultivating customer relationships by doing whatever it took to

serve the client and to not worry about the numbers.

Sure enough, after two months of this, the one salesperson who focused on the clients’ needs had sold more than all of the other salespeople combined.

Another element in Shapiro’s approach to selling deals with Aristotle’s divisions of rhetoric: ethos, pathos, and logos. According to Shapiro, these essentially translate to credibility, empathy, and logic. Shapiro relates these items to the step-by-step process by which salespeople should be approaching their customers. They first need to establish credibility or trust with the client before anything can happen (that’s the ethos). This helps them form a foundation to work from.

Once sales representatives have secured positions of credibility, they can move in to learn more about their customers and their needs. By engaging in conversation about *their customers’* problems, issues, and concerns and relating to them (this is empathy)—not solving them yet—salespeople invite clients to ask for solutions, which is the last step: logic.

Logic, or the discussion of functions and features of products, will be much more welcome when salespeople take the

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. When I get a chance, I like to go scuba diving in some nice warm water, and I love to listen to live music, especially any band that has a horn section because I’m a sax player.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. The Law: According to Fred Ross, which is a funk band.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. Right now, I have *Scientific American Mind* in front of me and *Skeptical Inquirer* right next to it.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. I love *House*, and I have to admit I’m a bit of a *Simpsons* fan.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. I’ve never met the guy, but I think he’s a great role model. Richard Feynman. He was a physicist who won the Nobel Prize for the Manhattan Project. He wrote the book *Surely You’re Joking, Mr. Feynman! (Adventures of a Curious Character)*.

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previous two steps. Customers will ask for explanations of products instead of suffering through unsolicited pitches. Many salespeople try to skip to step three, which only makes their job more difficult.

Shapiro's primary focus lies in helping individuals sell innovative ideas. In his book *24/7 Innovation: A Blueprint for Surviving and Thriving in an Age of Change*, he discusses the aspects of businesses that you must change in order to tap into the creative abilities of an entire team of professionals. He outlines this by citing three levels of innovation within an organization.

The first level is innovation as an event (for example, a brainstorming session). The second level is innovation as a process. This means transferring innovation into an environment where it can become a concrete and repeatable process where everyone can regularly contribute to ideas and initiatives. The third level of innovation is a capability that steers away from innovations with beginnings and endings. At this level, innovation is already embedded in the organization and can automatically happen in real time based on the actual dynamic of the team.

While he was working on his latest book, *Goal-Free Living: How to Have the Life You Want NOW!*, Shapiro interviewed 150 creative and successful professionals. After interviewing these people, he found that the most passionate and profitable professionals did not relate to their goals the way most people usually do. The book explains how people can stay present in what's going on and open to new options. It's important to not get caught up in the future because it can hold back professionals from excelling. This means that people can have direction, but they might not know exactly where they're going to end up.

Former chief information officer from Intel Corporation Doug Busch has been one of Shapiro's most prized influencers throughout the years. Shapiro's favorite lesson that he learned from Busch had to do with his idea of innovation and how it is born. When Busch tries to do a good job at work, he does a good job. When he's not worried about losing his job, that's when his best work comes out, according to Shapiro.

"When he goes into the CEO's office and says, 'The best thing you can do is fire me,' he says that's when they have their best conversations," said Shapiro.

Shapiro's main piece of advice to salespeople is to always mix things up to evoke new ideas and to never trust an expert.

"There are too many people who go to a seminar, and they listen to a person talk about the '14 Tips on How to Sell,' and the reality is most experts do a poor job at really understanding the true cause of their success," he said.

On The Net

Stephen Shapiro
www.stephenshapiro.com

Goal-Free Living: How to Have the Life You Want NOW!
www.amazon.com/Goal-Free-Living-Have-Life-Want/dp/0471772801

Accenture
www.accenture.com/home/default.htm

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