

# WIN THE WAR, LOSE THE CUSTOMER

BY IVEN FRANGI

*"I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this any more."  
Peter Finch screamed this to his neighborhood as he leaned  
out of his window in the film 'Network'.*

When it comes to some sales training today I agree with Mr Finch\*.

**Why?** I have just reviewed some of the 'latest' sales training material and my blood is boiling. A quote appeared in a major organisation's sales training manual I examined that set their philosophy of the sales interaction. I took the quote to a number of sales people I respect and asked them what they thought. The quote is:

"Every buyer/seller relationship contains aggressive and defensive roles. When you make a proposal you assume the role of aggressor. As the buyer listens to your presentation their natural instincts are as the defender. You must handle sales resistance to minimise the defensive feelings already within the prospect." Responses were similar. They agreed that they didn't like it but that was the way they were taught to sell.

That's why I'm as mad as hell. Aggression and defense have no part in the majority of sales transactions that take place today, and sales training need not perpetuate these behaviours.

Most sales interactions are responding to existing demand or requests. A potential customer asks for information or makes an inquiry – in person, over the phone or now electronically. The job of the salesperson is anything but that of an aggressor. Helper, guide, information provider or as we discussed in a previous issue become an "Assistant Buyer".

### **Any Potential Customer has a Need to be Helped Not Attacked**

Even in car sales (the usual place we expect the "war" to take place) this scenario holds true. A customer walks onto a lot or into a showroom and is met by a salesperson.

What is the logic or sense of training sales people to be controlled aggressors? To me this is the absolute opposite of what we need or want sales people to be doing. Yet this is still trained today. Some sales classes spend large amounts of time on potential attack /defend strategies – building out objections, handling objections, and closing the sale.

### **Even the Good Sales People Don't Like It**

I know. I was one of them. I went to the training schools, learned the techniques and was very successful using them. I have a track record to prove it. The combative techniques work. I also became confused. For me the conventional wisdom was not really comfortable. Part of that realisation came when I started actually training the 'old' method and observing that the

participants (including experienced, successful sales people) display the same confusion and discomfort.

I finally worked out what my discomfort stemmed from. **It is against most people's nature to seek confrontation.** (Which is of course, the basis of the initial quote.) So what do you do if you don't want to war with customers?

### **Here are some guiding principles...**

1. No matter the size of the sale or the value of the transaction anyone can learn to build trust.
2. Customers want help and advice. Not a fight.
3. Even sales where price is a key component can move from adversarial to advisory. This builds real value and can diminish price as an issue.
4. As a business owner or sales manager you can set the culture by showing you want to help before you want to argue.
5. Ensure that you match whatever sales training you implement with your values.

Enough crusading? I feel better now. Thank you.

My blood does boil and I rise to the challenge when a method is endorsed as a way to sell that is fundamentally contrary to the way we want to communicate as humans.

Selling and people effectively and cooperatively reaching a common outcome can be complimentary activities.

When sales people understand that the ultimate prize is not the buyers' money but their trust, Peter Finch and I will be able to stop the crusade.

\* For the trivia buffs. Australian actor Peter Finch died soon after the completion of 'Network' and was the first actor to be given an Academy award posthumously.



### **Iven Frangi**

*is booked and re-booked by his clients because of his ability to create results. Presentations are researched, customised and use humour to weave in relevant day-to-day examples.*

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