

## The One Most Important Thing To Know About Selling Furniture

Here it is, right up front:

**The Retail Furniture Business is not about furniture. It's about rooms.**

The reason this is the most important thing you can know about selling furniture is because it is rooms (and homes) that dominates your customer's thinking when shopping in your store. Whether your customer is doing a room over completely, or adding one piece, the room is the thing for her. Your furniture is only part of the process of putting their room together.

The problem for furniture retailers and salespeople with this idea is that they tend to think that the furniture business is about furniture, so that's what they market, advertise and talk about. The assumption is that the reason more things don't sell well is because the design is wrong, or the color, or the wood, the price and on and on. So, the search goes on and on, through market after market for the right things in the right style, color, size, wood, fabric, and on and on. A lot of money, time, and management effort and profit dollars are spent in search of the right merchandise.

Now, you could argue that the search continues with such to help customers solve those room problems we're talking about. The truth is, however, that at the point of contact, where a salesperson meets a customer, the talk is always about products – not about rooms. “Are you looking for anything in particular?” is an all too typical question asked by salespeople of wary customers. “What room is this going in?” is about as close as most salespeople get to talking about rooms with their customers.

How many prospective sales candidates have said to you: “If I know about the product, I can sell it”? Well, while it's really important to know all you can about the products you sell, that knowledge alone will not make you a successful salesperson. Personal engagement skills are critical too, and the most important skill of all is the ability to learn about customers and their rooms. What's going on in there? What is the customer trying to achieve as the outcome for the room? What's in there that's staying? What's leaving? What are we working around? What does the room look like?

The highest performing salespeople I've known ask all these questions and more before they show any furniture to any customer. They do one more thing as well: they sketch their customer's rooms. They know that the best place to be to understand a customer's room is *in the room* and while many salespeople make house calls to better understand their customer's rooms, it all begins with a lot of questions and a sketch. If you can't be in the customer's room, bring the room to you by sketching.

There are many benefits to salespeople and customer who work together this way. Stronger relationships are one important, long-lasting result. Customers feel more at ease when they know the salesperson is truly attempting to understand their needs and issues and not just trying to close a quick sale. Customers are required to make an investment in time and lots of personal information by answering all those questions and become even more involved in the problem solving process through sketching their room. Customers like to deal with stores who take the time to understand their personal needs. Particularly when buying big-ticket items like ours. This is how customer loyalty is built.

Salespeople who use this method of selling have more be-back customers and personal customers than those who don't. Because of this, they have much higher close ratios – sometimes as much as 50% higher than product sellers. Another benefit to salespeople and retailers is that the average amount purchased by customers as the result of this problem-solving selling strategy, is far higher than for other salespeople. These salespeople will rank at the top of their store's range of performance in average sale.

Every store has at least one salesperson that writes a ton of business without doing any of these things. Just like Michael Jordan in basketball, there are superstars in every field. The problem is that everyone follows these leaders, but doesn't possess their level of selling skill. Most of the furniture sold by your store right now is sold under the old assumptions. That's why close ratios in our business are so dismally low – usually around 20% to 25%. Think of what might happen to your close rates, and therefore you sales volume, if you could get all your salespeople to deal with the right things – rooms, instead of furniture.

To do it you have to make selling this way part of your store's selling strategy. You've got to train everyone to work this way and develop sales management systems to ensure that the things you train people to do actually get done. You've also got to make sure you measure everything, and know the effects the new strategy is having on the performance of your individual salespeople. This information will help you provide help and training to those who need it.

### ***Follow UP Is Critical***

In working with customer's rooms, stronger relationships are developed because customers like people who do the right things to help them solve their decorating problems. Trust is higher and customers want to buy from people they like and trust. When customers can't make the final decision today and leave your store without buying bringing them back should be the total responsibility of the salespeople. The kind of professional follow up required to be a top performer is made a lot easier when the relationship is stronger. Every salesperson should treat his or her time with great respect so that customers will too. Making be-back appointments is another critical professional selling skill your salespeople need to develop.



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Consider using a common appointment book for logging all be-back appointments and house calls and make it part of your sales manager's responsibilities to get everyone using it. Making be-back appointments after developing the kind of deep understanding discussed above will be much easier. Customers are far more likely to make a timed appointment with a person they consider being a professional, and with whom they've shared a lot of personal information. Customers who return a second time on a project are 3 times more likely to buy than a new customer on a new project.