

What is relationship selling?

Relationship sellers prioritize their connection with the customer over all other aspects of the sale. They develop trust -- usually by adding value and spending a lot of time with prospects -- before attempting to close.

“Relationship selling is essential if you have a high average selling price. Your customers need to know they can depend on you -- that if something goes wrong, you’ll be there.

Without this faith, prospects are unlikely to take the leap on an expensive product.

What is transactional and relationship selling?

A transactional sale is quick and unpersonalized. This approach works well for low-cost, commoditized products, where it doesn’t make sense for the rep to invest in getting to know the buyers. ***Relationship selling, on the other hand, is effort- and research-intensive. It’s a good fit for high-cost solutions and/or customized solutions.***

Relationship selling examples

You might think of relationship selling as an enterprise B2B strategy, and that’s certainly not wrong. Any sales rep working a \$50,000+ deal is probably using relationship selling techniques.

Relationship selling process

There are six steps to the relationship-based sales process:

1. Add value
2. Learn about the customer’s situation
3. Give personalized recommendations
4. Resolve objections
5. Find a win-win solution
6. Continue to provide value

Let's dive into each in detail.

Step 1: Add value

To quickly gain credibility and establish yourself as a trusted advisor, the very first thing you should do is add value to your prospect's life. That might mean reaching out with some helpful suggestions, sending them links to relevant content, making a valuable introduction, or anything else that benefits them.

Step 2: Learn about their situation

Once you've gotten their attention and proved you're worth their time, dig into their business challenges, objectives, metrics, and qualifying characteristics, along with their personal and professional goals. This information helps you answer two critical questions:

- Can your product help the prospect?
- Do they have the ability to buy it (authority, budget, timeline, etc.)?

Don't force the sale with anyone who's not a good fit. You might be able to convince them to buy, but remember: Relationship selling is about the long term. Your customers will be unhappy once they learn they've been misled, and you'll face cancellations and/or returns rather than glowing reviews, referrals, and renewals and cross-sales.

Step 3: Give tailored advice

Combine your new knowledge of the buyer with your subject-matter expertise to deliver your suggestions. For example, you might prescribe a strategy that'll address one of their core pain points (and happens to align with our product).

Back up your recommendations with examples of customers who have been in similar situations. To give you an idea, you might say, *"Customer Y, another company with around [number] of employees in [X space], was facing a similar problem. I advised them to do [such and such]. In [period of time], they saw [quantified results]."*

Step 4: Resolve objections

Surfacing and solving your prospect's blocking points is a necessary part of any sales process. But relationship selling calls for a careful approach. You never want to steamroll your client -- that's guaranteed to turn them against you. Instead, give them ample time to explain themselves. Be patient. And above all, answer honestly. If they have a genuine reason to be concerned,

don't ignore that. Your truthfulness will be more reassuring than a glib response (and will hold up after they get their hands on the product).

To identify the buyer's worries, ask questions like:

- *"Is there anything stopping you from buying?"*
- *"What are you anxious about?"*
- *"What do you wish was different about the product?"*

Once they've answered, say:

"To make sure we're on the same page, here's what I got from that: [Paraphrase their objection.] Is that right? Did I miss anything?"

This proves you're paying attention and truly care. Then show empathy with something along the lines of, *"I hear what you're saying, and that completely makes sense. Can I ask a few follow-up questions?"*

Dig into the prospect's objection to make sure you fully understand.

Finally, it's time to respond. Don't be combative -- you and your prospect are on the same team.

Step 5: Find a win-win solution

Many salespeople treat the negotiation like a zero-sum game. In other words, if the buyer wins, they lose, and vice versa. This mentality erodes trust and forces your negotiation partner to act selfishly. Plus, if they walk away feeling like you've taken advantage of them, your long-term relationship is doomed.

The solution? Act like a win for your prospect is a win for you. Together, you're trying to find the best possible outcome. Come prepared with several concessions you're willing to make (like extra implementation help, better payment terms, the option to call you at any time for help, and so on). Proactively extending these compromises will show your prospect you're on their side and make them likelier to extend concessions of their own.

Step 6: Keep adding value

Don't disappear from the customer's life as soon as they sign the contract -- unless you want them to assume you're only interested in their checkbook and not their success.

Look for reasons to reach out every few months or quarter, such as:

- A company event you'd like to invite them to
- Follow up on the product and if they have any questions or concerns

Staying on their radar deepens the relationship and increases the likelihood they'll stay a customer. And if they're a big account, you may want to go even further:

- Take them out to dinner or a fun outing
- Schedule a yearly, biannual, or quarterly account review
- Send them tickets to a local performance
- Invite them to tour your office
- Coordinate a meeting between one of their executives and yours

Relationship selling techniques

The main principle underpinning relationship selling is simple: Always think about the long-term impact of your actions.

1. Be honest
2. Consistently check in
3. Do more than what's expected
4. Keep your word
5. Provide exclusive perks

Honesty

Dishonesty is kryptonite to business relationships. Make sure you're never misleading your customers, either by giving them false information or withholding crucial details. You'll earn their respect by telling them something isn't right before they find out for themselves.

Consistency

Be a continued presence for your clients. Interact with them on social media, send them value-added emails, and pay attention to the details of their personal lives so you can ask about their kids, past-times, goals, etc.

Go above and beyond

If you want to secure someone's loyalty, blow past their expectations. To give you an idea, perhaps you told your contact you'd get them tickets to your annual industry event. And you do -- but in addition to the tickets, you also arrange a private meet-and-greet with a speaker you know they look up to.

Keep your word

Do your best to meet every due date and commitment. Maybe you said you'd send an email connecting them to your contact by Friday. It's 6 p.m. and you know they're not checking their inbox until Sunday morning -- but that doesn't mean you can wait. Every time you keep your word, you bolster your trustworthiness.

Provide exclusive perks

Make your customers feel good. Tell them you're grateful for their business, ask what you can do to make them happy, give them discounts, and if possible, send them swag. Everyone loves being treated like they're special.

A sale is a one-time event, but a relationship lasts and lasts. Use these techniques to build relationships with your customers that'll bring in revenue.