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## Customer sensitivity- begins with appreciation of ourselves

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**To be effective in a selling profession, whether it be sales or after-sales requires two distinct attributes; the skill or knowledge and the will or willingness.**

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The Almighty once decided that he would bestow on the human being every possible virtue that the Almighty could conjure up. Soon after this was done, the human being became greedy and sought more.

The Almighty called together a conclave of angels and asked for suggestions on what to do. Some angels suggested that the Almighty take away the virtues and stash them in the sky, for Man may never look there. The Almighty reminded them that Man had already traveled to the moon and therefore one day he might discover the virtues hidden in the sky. A few other angels recommended that the almighty bury the virtues under the ocean.

The Almighty once again sought the indulgence of the angels and told them that Man would one day send a submarine and discover the virtues. Not having got satisfactory suggestions the Almighty decided that he would consign all the virtues in Man's heart for he would rarely look within.

Often times we do not look within ourselves to rediscover our own goodness and in so being we do not see the goodness in others.

In a series of 2-day, activity based experiential workshops on reorienting one's belief and attitude towards the customer conducted for an organisation in the Middle East, for their sales and after-sales personnel, participants discovered the magic of self-renewal.

'We are all customers' it is popularly said. We are either buying or selling, influencing, making an impression and / or gaining people's alignment. All customers buy either to escape from 'pain' or to go towards 'gain.'

After-sales personnel were encouraged in the workshops to recognise that they are 'Doctors', ministering to relieve pain for the customer.

Sales personnel were told that they were helping customers gain, not just a product when they, for instance, buy a car but very often status, reputation, mobility of course and pleasure.

Thus, neither the sales person nor the after-sales person is actually working for someone else. He instead is truly an 'intrapreneur' working within an organisation but with entrepreneurial spirit. Therefore, he is indeed self-employed.

To be effective in a selling profession, whether it be sales or after-sales requires two distinct attributes; the skill or knowledge and the will or willingness

	Skill	No skill
Will	Ideal	Can be mentored
No will	dangerous	Beyond redemption

Ideally a person having skill and will is who the organisation wants. Not everyone is skilled, however even if inadequate, in knowledge, yet if he is willing to learn, such a person is a tremendous asset. Lack of will is however most dangerous, for such an individual can vitiate the atmosphere in the organisation. Thus

willingness is an attribute which a sales or an after-sales person must have in large measure.

Selling is an art for we are dealing with human beings, whose disposition and moods vary constantly. To recognise that we are dealing with human beings requires that we recognise that we are human too with the same qualities that describe the customer.

To be vibrant, effective and performing, sales and after-sales personnel require the following qualities.

- 1. The quality of self-appreciation. Unless one is able to appreciate oneself he or she will never be able to appreciate another.*
- 2. The quality of unconditional self-acceptance. We often accept ourselves conditionally, disowning those parts of us which we don't like. In so doing, we do not accept our customer unconditionally. Customers, like us, come as a package of*

*mixed qualities. It therefore behooves us to accept the individual as he or she presents themselves and not the way we choose to accept them.*

*A little girl was once told that the Lord had created all good girls 'green' and all bad girls 'red'. She was then asked what colour she would be. Without batting an eyelid she said 'I am mixed, a little green and a little red.'*

*The child realized that we come as whole packages and cannot be separated into compartments.*

*3. The quality of being patient, chiefly with ourselves first, before being so with the customer. Our restlessness, our impatience often gets the better of us and we communicate this to others in many ways, through body, mind and heart and little realize that we are destabilizing them by our hastiness.*

*4. The quality of compassion for self. While we talk about being compassionate to others, we must realize that if we are not kind to ourselves and constantly judge ourselves we will do the same to others.*

*5. The quality of being positive. Life offers many lessons. Yet every lesson is meant to stretch us. There is learning in every experience and we must accept these lessons as gifts. If we nourish such an attitude we would always find ourselves responding with 'possibility thinking.'*

*6. The quality of having fun. All of us recognise that the ability to have fun, dispels anxiety, renews energy, makes us acceptable and above all creates vibrancy around. Having fun at work is one way of combating boredom and ennui.*

*7. The quality of being present. The ability to bracket our moods and set them aside when in conversation or contact with another is a necessary quality to be available in the moment and 'here and now' to another person, particularly the customer who is seeking us out to assist him.*

When these 7 qualities play out in an individual's actions and are deployed with aplomb, sensitivity to the customer becomes a reality, for each of us is also a customer for someone else and have experienced the demonstration of the above qualities in others at some point in our dealings.

The recognition for both sales and after-sales, that they are not merely selling a product, which is tangible, has a touch and feel, that can be demonstrated in advance, that can be evaluated against engineering standards and that which has a price is important for the sales person is actually in selling or offering a product giving much more to the customer. There are intangibles in the offering, there are assurances that cannot be priced, there are shared moments of joy when the customer makes his purchase and above all there is the actual experience or 'moment of truth' that the customer senses but cannot articulate. Thus, sales and after-sales gift to the customer more than economic value of a product but an experience that he can cherish and savour for a long time. It is therefore self-evident that both sales and after-sales mesh both aspects of product and service in executing a job.

Ten to twenty years ago it was often emphasised that closing a deal constituted a major contribution in selling a product. This was particularly true when customers had fewer choices. Rapport building was important but not urgent. The role has since reversed.

Rapport or relationship building is now considered the chief ingredient for making a



*(Adapted from Shiv Khera)*

sale. Whether it be sales or after-sales, aligning with the customer, going to his side, (*genchi genbutsu*), gaining his acceptance and winning him over is the *sine qua non* of a selling process.

The customer pool is like a bucket with a hole, verily a 'leaky bucket.' They drip into our bucket, stay for a while and leak out. If they are satisfied with the product we sell and the consequent service we offer, they come back. If we do not meet their expectations, they disappear like droplets falling on sand.

Most customers are like the 'creative child'; we are no different ourselves. They are curious, keen, eager, enthusiastic and desirous. It is therefore imperative that sales and after-sales personnel recognise that they are dealing with children who want most if not all they see.

Finally the whole selling business requires the sales and the after-sales person to maintain equanimity, show equipoise, be balanced and be fair. Yet to be all this we must appreciate that we must be gentle with ourselves, kind to ourselves and

above all love ourselves. If we are so, we will unequivocally communicate this to the 'provider of our sustenance'; the customer.

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