

Selling To Buyers Who Are Cold & Reserved

How To Engage With Buyers Who Are Immune To Traditional Seller Rapport Building



Increasingly salespeople are reporting the demise of small talk and other social niceties in the buyer encounter. But, what does it mean for the relationship sale?

In this article we will discover that there are more effective way of connecting with the buyer than through small talk and chit-chat.

“Few salespeople would describe the modern buyer as being warm and inviting...”

Is This The Age Of The Unsociable Buyer?

Many sellers complain that meetings with procurement are as little fun as a trip to the accountant, or even the tax office! Gone are the days when sellers were shown into plush offices, offered coffee and made feel welcome.

The reality is that few salespeople would describe the modern procurement professional as being warm and inviting. Indeed, in what appears to be a definite trend, buyers can seem cold and unfriendly. Many buyers are now slow to engage in 'small talk' and, in their desire to get right down to business, can even appear to be rude.

Have You Noticed That Today's Buyers Are More Reserved?

In many buyer encounters the seller's attempts at chit-chat are being greeted with a stony resistance. In the words of one salesperson: *'it is like bear-hugging a stranger'*. For many it would appear that procurement is deliberately trying to avoid getting close to the salesperson.

But is the reserve of the professional buyer a legitimate negotiating stance, a defense mechanism, or perhaps even a dirty trick?

Have You Adjusted to Selling In A Colder Climate?

We have all experienced meetings where professional buyers are distinctively cold and formal. For an initial meeting that may not be such a surprise, however when it happens to a supplier who has a long standing relationship with the company it can be quite a shock.

From the sellers point of view chit-chat or small talk is a valid sales technique in early stage meetings. It can help to gauge, or read the buyer, to ease the buyer into the sale, to establish an emotional connection with the hope of influencing the purchase and so on.



However, it takes two to chit-chat and today's buyer in general seems to want to get down to business faster.

For sellers buyer coldness can be unsettling. The new reserve of the professional buyer threatens to rob the salesperson of one of his/her primary sales skills – the ability to develop rapport. It is a fundamental shift in the very nature of traditional selling.

It used to be said that *'people buy people first and products and services second'*. However trends in modern buying mean that is no longer true – at least not in the professional procurement arena. For many it is further evidence that the relationship dimension of selling is being marginalized by professional buying.

Is This The End Of The Road For Relationship Selling?

How much importance do you place on building buyer rapport in the context of winning the sale? Well, see if you agree with the following statements:

'Developing rapport is key to winning the sale.'

'All things being equal the buyer will buy from the sales person with whom he/she gets on best.'

'It is easier to sell to people that you 'get-on' with.'

Like most salespeople, you probably pretty much agree with all of the above statements. They help in traditional relationship selling. But what if the relationship only comes after the sale? What if the buyer isn't interested in 'building rapport' (at least where the newly met salesperson is concerned)? The problem is that it takes two to relationship sell.

Buyers – 'Why So Cold?'

What is perhaps most surprising about seller reactions to buyer stiffness and formality, is that it comes as a surprise at all. Take this scenario for example:

A procurement manager arrives home to be greeted by their partner, or spouse who asks; *'How was your day at work dear?'* He/she enthusiastically responds: *'I had a great day – I met with 3 new salespeople and I had a nice chat with all of them... it was all very pleasant'*.

Can't quite imagine it? Well, sellers know very well that it rarely happens that way! However, when we ourselves are the salesperson we hope that it might be different.

As part of our research for our next book, 'Tidalwave Selling', we talked to some buyers about this topic.

“From the sellers point of view chit-chat or small talk is a valid sales technique...”

6 Reasons Why Buyers Won't Get Up Close & Personal With Sellers

Six key reasons emerged for the new chill between buyer and seller. They will help you to understand what is really going on and how you can best deal with it.

1. Befriending Sellers Is Not The Buyer's Job!

While it is clear that today's buyers are increasingly hard-nosed, they will quickly point out that creating a warm fuzzy feeling is not in the buyer's job description. Indeed, in organizations where procurement is charged with breaking up cozy buyer-supplier relationships, the opposite is often true.

Buyers are trained to be analytical and logical in their decision making. In this era of cost-consciousness there is little room for 'soft' subjective factors in their decisions. As one buyer pointed out: *'Chit-chat has never been a decision making criterion for the professional buyer... It won't be found in any requirements definition or RFX document either.'*

The professional buyer is targeted and measured in terms of cost savings achieved. Little wonder that's where they are focused. For many buyers it is *'let's skip the chit-chat and get straight down to numbers'*.

2. Buyers Must Maintain Professional Distance

Buyers are increasingly aware of the need to maintain (and to be seen to maintain) a level of professional distance when it comes to their engagement with salespeople. This distance is key to making the right decision and to avoid undue influence, or favoritism.

Compliance to the organization's buying process may also require some level of distance be maintained. Here is a sample of buyer comments that explain this motivation:

'I want to keep the relationship on a business/professional level, there will be plenty of time later for the social stuff, that is if we buy.'

'We may not end up doing business together, so there is little point in developing a personal rapport at this stage.'

'I have rules and procedures to follow and must avoid the appearance of favoritism. What I say to one seller I must say to them all. So in many ways the less said the better.'

'My job is to break up cozy seller relationships, not to build upon them...'



3. Buyers Don't Want To Be Seen As Soft

Some buyers are motivated to stay aloof by the fear of being seen as a 'soft touch' by the salesperson. The following are some insights into this thinking:

'If I am too nice then the salesperson will get the wrong idea – they may think I am their friend, that the deal is in the bag, or that I am available to them at any time.'

'If I am too nice then the salesperson will begin to follow me... I don't want to be too approachable.'

'My job is to focus on getting the best deal... don't sellers realize that!'

'I don't want to lead them on as it were. The process is going to be rigid and demanding too. It is not about being nice.'

“Professional buyers can be cautious of the 'fast-talking' salesperson.”

4. Buyers Are Often Weary Of Salespeople

Professional buyers deal with salespeople every day. That means they have heard and seen it all before. The result is that they can be somewhat cautious, perhaps even cynical of the 'fast-talking' salesperson. Here is a sample of related buyer comments:

'I can see through the small talk, the chit-chat. At the end of the day the seller's primary motivation is to get the sale.'

'I don't want to come under 'the spell of the salesperson' so to speak... Salespeople in making chit-chat are effectively trying to soften the buyer up... hoping that they can develop a relationship which will cloud the buyer's decision.'

'I don't want to be the salesperson's new best friend.'

'I don't have much need for the typical salesperson. The seller should send in somebody else – somebody who can relate to us on our level about our particular needs – an expert, or specialist.'

'Like a lot of people I will run a mile from typical salespeople and anything that is 'salesy'. I don't want the hard sell, or the soft sell for that matter.'

'Sellers have a habit of remembering and repeating back what you say to them. But we want to avoid writing their proposal for them...'

'The salesperson who is overly friendly is a negative from the buyer's point of view.'

5. Buyers Don't Have The Time!

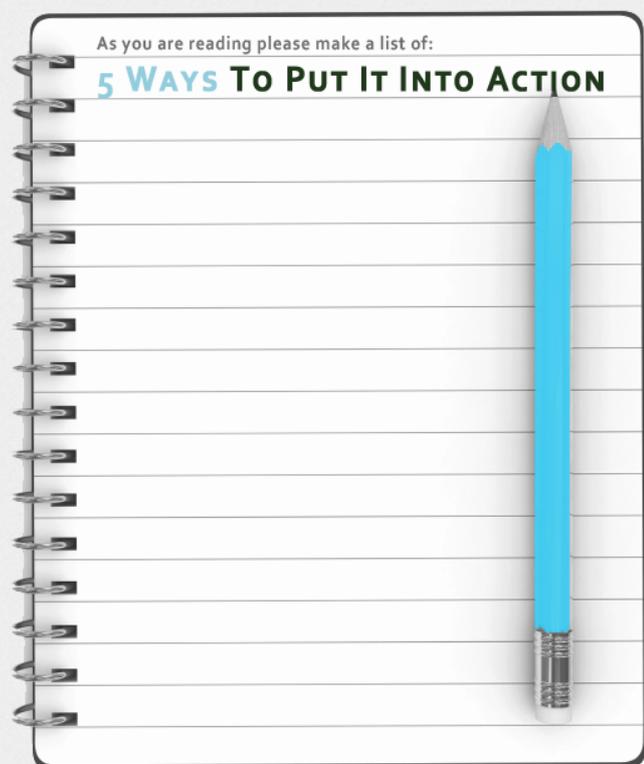
Buyers like everybody else are under increasing time pressure. With growing to-do lists and looming deadlines to be met, they may view meetings as being a chief time thief. The following comments are a clear example of this:

'I don't have time for chit-chat – it's a waste of time. Anyhow it is not my style when it comes to dealing with new salespeople.'

'...supplier meetings will inevitably run over if they don't get straight down to business.'

'I am too busy to be engaging in much off-topic conversation with salespeople.'

'You have to keep the meeting focused, or otherwise the salesperson will drag the meeting out. You have to keep to the agenda – to requirements, specifications, terms and the other information that is needed.'



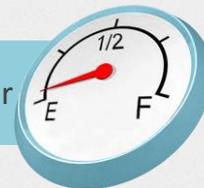
6. Buyers Are Different!

Few would argue that buyers and sellers are different. Indeed many would argue that they are a breed apart.

'Salespeople are social animals, buyers well they are just animals!' joked one sales manager. However, joking aside the salesperson typically likes to be your buddy, to chit-chat and to build rapport. Although stereotypes can be dangerous the typical buyer is generally seen as more reserved, more distant – preferring to engage with numbers and specifications rather than sales people.

Added to this there are, of course, different cultures, in markets/regions, as well as between different organizations.

Your Sales Gauge: Selling To The Cold & Reserved Buyer



How To Sell To Reserved Buyers

Here are six strategies to help you to sell more effectively to buyers who appear to be cold and reserved.

Tick the ones for which you can answer 'Yes' – that is those that are presently being addressed, or covered by your sales approach. Pay particular attention to those that you cannot tick – they could be limiting your success.

1. Get Straight Down To Business!

While other sellers are wasting time on chit-chat, get straight into the buying zone. Focus immediately on what it is that the buyer is trying to achieve, explaining how you can help and backing it up with examples of how you've helped others in the same situation.

Here are some tips in doing this:

- Read the situation better and be ready to adapt your style accordingly. Be ready to get straight in if that is what is required.
- Ensure that both parties have the same expectation, or objectives for the meeting. For this reason clarifying objectives, or the agenda for the meeting is important.
- Show the buyer that you respect his her time, clarifying at the start what they want to achieve and what time they have available.
- Demonstrate that the buyer will be well rewarded for his time – that he/she will gain some useful information, or insights from the engagement.
- Take the pressure, risk and selling out of the situation. Demonstrate that you are not a stereotypical salesperson. Present yourself as an expert, or consultant.

“Buyers prefer to engage with numbers and specifications rather than sales people.”

Tick If 'Yes'

- Do you get straight down to business and avoid wasting the buyers time?

2. Be More Business Like!

- It is getting more difficult to make a social/emotional connection with the professional buyer. However there is one means still available – connecting with the buyer through his/her numbers. Ironically sellers can warm up the meeting by focusing on the cold stuff.
- Don't bother reaching for your copy of how to win friends and influence people! Focus on what the buyer wants, the results, don't get distracted by the petty stuff. Zoom in on the

information, numbers, metrics, etc. that are important to the buyer.

- Set all your notes and materials ready immediately so that you can start straight away.
- Leave the chit-chat to the end, that is when:
 - The buyer has achieved what he she wants.
 - The pressure is off and you have demonstrated your trustworthiness and intent.
 - You have shown that you can help them, earn the right to get closer.

Tick If 'Yes'

Just how professional or business like do you come across as being?

3. Let The Other Person Do A Great Deal Of The Talking!

- Show you are a good listener.
- Use questions instead of statements.
- Let other people feel that the idea is theirs.
- Show you are genuinely interested in the buyer and his/her needs.
- Show that you respect the buyer (make him/her feel important).

Tick If 'Yes'

Are you comfortable with silence and with letting the buyer do most of the talking?



4. Smile, Relax & Don't Be Blown Off Course!

If you are getting irked by the buyer's apparent rudeness, take a deep breath and sit back in your chair. Then smile, it can be quite disarming. Make sure you avoid the appearance of any ego, aggression, or defensiveness.

Tick If 'Yes'

- Do you stay calm and keep smiling even when a meeting isn't going the way you want?

“Buyers often hide behind formality and process...”

5. Don't Take It Personally!

Do you want to make the buyer your friend, do you need him/her to like you? Well, perhaps you are taking it too personally!

While procurement is often accused of adopting an impersonal approach, that does not stop salespeople taking their apparent coldness personally. But in a mixture of surprise and feeling slighted personally can easily blow the salesperson off course. Here are some examples of this reaction:

'It was rude... I would have expected them to be civil!'

'I made the effort to travel all the way there, the least they could do is be a little friendly.'

'They think they know it all, I've been selling this for 25 years, that has to count for something. But they did not seem interested in anything other than their standard questions.'

'I cannot get a handle on them... what it is that they really want?'

'If they are like that now, then what will it be like when we are in negotiation?'

'I am not sure if these are the type of people that i want to deal with...'

'It felt like a doctor's examination – all the questions and probing.'

'Typical faceless bureaucrats... do they even know what it is they are buying... or about our company?'

Tick If 'Yes'

- Do you avoid taking it personally and recognize that the buyer has a job to do?**

6. Know & Respect The Buyer's Process!

Buyers often hide behind formality and process – in their view it makes them less vulnerable to wily sellers. It is important to understand the buyer's process and to show your willingness to support it. For this reason don't give the appearance of trying to close the buyer, rather understand what information the buyer needs and what steps he, or she plans to follow.

Tick If 'Yes'

- Do you put the time into finding out how the buying decision will be made and play by the buyers rules?**

The Science Behind This Paper

These insights and tools are based on:

1. **Buyer Research** – our ground-breaking research into how modern buying decisions are made and the implications for sellers.
2. **Best Practice Research** – Over 1 million pages of best practice sales case studies, books and research.
3. **Common Practice Research** – Our peer comparison benchmark of 1,000s of your competitors and peers.

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