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# Stop Selling!



By Filip Hron , INSEAD Lecturer

**We don't trust salespeople because they are mostly obsessed with satisfying their own interests, not the customer's. This must change.**

“Hi. Are you looking for shoes?”

I've just walked into a shoe store and the sales person switches to high alert. She smells money.

“So what are you looking for today? Perhaps these ones?”

I haven't even had a chance to look around! And this brings me to the topic of today's blog. What do customers really want? Do they want to be “sold” things? When a telemarketer calls, do they respond with “Yay, I wonder what this person will make me buy today. The anticipation is killing me!”

No, *what* we as the customers want is to make the best decision for *us*. *How* we go about making that decision will differ:

- Some customers will want the assistance of someone else in making that decision.

- Others just want quality information so that they can make a decision on their own.
- And some have already made their decision.

Customer: “Hi, how are you. I’m looking to buy a bike. I have my eye on the Ducati 1299 – can I have a look at it?”

Sales person: “You know what would be perfect for you? The Ducati Monster!”

Customer: “Eh... No! I’m just interested in the 1299.”

Sales person: “I see. Well in that case, can I show you the Ducati Streetfighter?”

Customer: “Do you have rocks in your ears? I’m only interested in the 1299!”

Sales person: “Yes, but I don’t have that one in stock at the moment.”

### **Look out for the customer**

And this illustrates the broader problem. As a customer I want the salesperson to look out for *my* interests. Incidentally this is the definition I use for *trust* in our [book](#). But the majority of experiences that I have with sales people, that my clients have with sales people, and that my clients who *are* sales people have, is that the salesperson is *not* looking out for the customer’s interests. Instead the salesperson is completely transfixed by the possibility of satisfying his own interests – i.e. getting your money.

“F--- the clients!” You may recall the line from *Wolf of Wall Street*. In the movie the main character becomes a successful sales person *not* by satisfying customer’s interests, but rather by *lying and pretending* to satisfy their interests. He creates an illusion of being trustworthy. He creates the illusion of providing quality information. Meanwhile he knows full well he will gain, and clients will probably lose.

There are five approaches to influence. One is called *misrepresentation*, and it involves making the other party *believe* that they will get what they want, when in fact they won’t. It is not an approach the authors endorse!

Unfortunately it is very commonly used in business. (For more read [this earlier blog entry](#)).

“But if I’m 100% honest and give the customer my best advice then I would recommend that they buy someone else’s products and services – I *have* to lie/manipulate/sell in order to get them to buy mine!”, is a comment I frequently get. My counter questions are usually along the lines of “Why don’t you choose to work for a company whose products you would *want* to recommend?” or “How can you improve your products and services to better satisfy the customers’ needs?”

Wouldn’t that be better for *everyone*...? Surely the status quo of meeting a sales person for the first time and instantly distrusting him or her is not a sign of things working well.

**Filip Hron** is a Lecturer at INSEAD. He is the author of [Negotiation Evolved](#). You can read about him [here](#).

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#### **About the author(s)**

**Filip Hron** Filip Hron is a Lecturer at INSEAD. He is the author of Negotiation Evolved.