

# Selling your services

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## Products versus Services

Quickly say, around your table, what you do i.e. what your service is and also write it in here:

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Think of a product you have bought in the last month:

What did it do for you?   
What caused you to buy it?   
Did it meet your need?   
What do you think about it now?   

Now think about how that product was made. Think of its raw materials, the machines that made it, its packaging, how it got to the place where you bought it, how you got it home and how you used it.

Was any of that information part of your buying decision?

All of that information related to how the product was made, and that is what your service is – it's a how, not a what.

Now think about your service. Think about what it does for your customer, what causes them to buy it, why they need it and most importantly, why they can't live without it.

Write down what the end result of your service is for your client. E.g. if you design websites, the end result is NOT a website, it is something like 'more product sales to more customers'

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Here's the shocking thing: your customers do not care about your service. They don't care how clever you are, they don't care how you do it, they don't care that you use the best tools, they don't care how it works.

The only thing they care about is whether it gives them what they need.

## Talking about yourself

Do you ever have trouble selling? In other words convincing someone that they should buy from you?

Do you ever have trouble talking about yourself, about how good you are and why you're the best?

Well, that's fine, because the customer isn't interested in that anyway.

Imagine you're at a party and someone wants to tell you all about themselves – interesting?

Imagine they want to find out all about you – interesting?

Pick someone from your table who has a business service that you understand. Tell them about your PRODUCT i.e. what the end result of your service is for them.

Now you can really try this out. Go and find someone in the room who you haven't talked to yet this evening. Ask them all about their business and find out as much as you can that is relevant to what you do. When you recognise something that 'fits', just make a mental note of it and carry on. When you feel that you have a good 'picture' of their needs, suggest how interesting it is that there is such a good fit between what they need and what you can give them, and how you see that working. Remember they don't need to know how you do it, they only need to know what the end result is for them.

Professional services are often sold by giving the client an easy way to make a first commitment and then building the relationship by delivering the service being sold. International blue chip consultancies and local life coaches both sell in this way, but it's not really 'selling'. Why not?

- Sales people draw information from the client and match the client's needs to their product
- Buyers draw information from sales people and match it to their own needs

In an active sales situation, the sales person controls the process. This requires the sales person to have two key areas of knowledge; how to manage the sales process and what it is they are selling.

Selling a product seems easier – you know exactly what it is and what its benefits are. Is this less clear with a service, with no tangible product? Head-hunters refer to the candidate as the product. They do not sell the recruitment service – they sell the candidate against the client's specific needs.

It's easy to learn a sales process – for many people it is much harder to define what they do.

Many people don't know how to sell their service, so they offer free trial sessions and hope for the best.

The problems with free introductory sessions are:

- You still have to find people who actually need the service
- They get a hundred such offers every day
- The session is not free – it costs their time
- You expose yourself to people who enjoy getting free services
- You don't build an expectation of value
- You don't have to sell, so you don't find out what their specific needs are

When you are ready to sell your services, you need to be clear on these points:

- What the product is
- How that is necessary to the end user
- How that is necessary to the buyer

Remember – up until the point the client buys your service, they have no idea how good you are at what you do. They only have experience of how good a sales person you are.

## Elevator pitches

You may have heard this term, used to describe a short script that you can use to tell people what you do when you meet someone by chance. I still advise you to think more about uncovering needs than about talking at people about your services. In any case, now that you are clearer about what you do and why someone would want it, it's better to create something for the specific person you have met.

## Ensuring referrals

Referrals are one of the most important methods of expanding your business.

Think about the referrals you give yourself. If you find a good plumber, decorator, dentist, furniture shop or whatever, do you spontaneously tell all your friends?

An old sales adage is that we tell 7 people about a bad experience and 2 people about a good one. If your goal is publicity, it's better to give a client a bad experience than a good one!

The best way to guarantee business from referrals is to do it yourself. Firstly, you need to explicitly ask your clients to refer you. You might offer incentives or commission payments, but I have personally found that these make no difference. It seems that we pass on our good experiences for the pleasure of growing our networks, not for any financial gain.

Secondly, do not expect your clients to refer you to their colleagues and friends. Instead, ask them for the names and contact details of people who they would be happy to refer you to, and follow up on those referrals yourself. If you need your client to make an introduction, make your request specific and then follow up yourself.

As a rule of thumb, if you want referrals you need to actively manage the referral process instead of leaving it to chance.