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CLOSING SALES STARTS WITH BUILDING TRUST

People do business with people they trust. Closing the sale is simply the end result of building relationships and earning the trust of your prospects and eventual customers.

If you're selling a product or service to a business where your sales cycle is long — 12 to 18 months or more — closing the sale means playing the long game. It means being thoughtful, not transactional. It also means investing the time and effort to lay a foundation of trust with your potential customers.

There are no short cuts to building trust, but there are key steps you can take. There's no scientific formula for earning trust in any relationship, including professional ones. Successfully earning the trust of a prospective customer is a culmination of a series of efforts that coalesce into a relationship based on respect.

As you find your own recipe for building trust with your prospects, here are some steps and suggestions to help you along the way.

Listen: Step one in building trust is to stop talking and simply listen to your prospective customers. Demonstrate curiosity in what they do and show interest in helping them solve their challenges. Ask questions about them and their situation rather than jumping into a sales pitch.

Respect Their Time: Demonstrating respect for your customer's or prospect's time is a form of respect that should always be considered. Prepare for meetings in advance and focus your meetings on how you can best serve that customer.

Always Have Their Interests in Mind — Not Yours: Never offer solutions to problems your customers don't have or push them towards a product that doesn't add value to their business. Building trust and closing a sale will only happen if you put your customer's interests and needs above your own and find them the best solution for their business.

Keep Your Promises: When you tell a customer you'll do something, follow through and deliver on that promise. Finishing what you start, meeting deadlines and providing your customers with valuable solutions are some of the fastest ways to build trust.
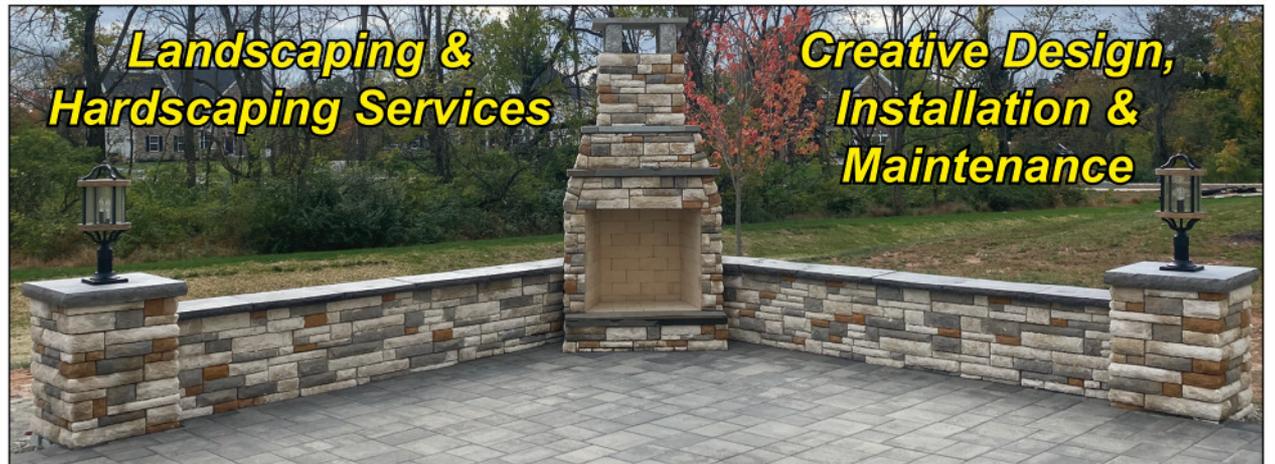
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Respect Your Competition: When you're speaking with your prospective customers, focus on why your solutions are valuable rather than why your competitor's solutions are inferior. Disrespecting your competition can have the opposite effect and cause damage to your reputation. Take the high road and present your business professionally.

Go the Extra Mile: Fulfilling your obligations is a must when building trust. But, going above and beyond is a sure way to expedite the process. Make your customers feel special by investing in their business and their mission. You can take them to lunch just to check in, send them article links that you think will help them with a project or initiative, connect them with your contacts on LinkedIn, or any number of efforts that they may value.

When you boil it all down, closing the sale requires listening, respect and putting the prospective customer's needs first. As you build your client base, remember that sales is not about selling. It's about building trust. If you take these six trust-building actions, you'll provide incredible value to prospective customers and increase your chances of closing the sale.

Closing the sale is no easy feat. Whether you're just getting started or looking to expand your client base, use every resource you have at your fingertips, including your local SCORE chapter. When you work with a SCORE mentor, you'll gain the advice and insight of a seasoned professional with experience in building a client base built on trust. Contact a SCORE mentor today.

Since 1964, SCORE "Mentors to America's Small Business" has helped more than 11 million aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners through mentoring and business workshops. More than 10,000 volunteer business mentors in over 250 chapters serve their communities through entrepreneur education dedicated to the formation, growth and success of small businesses. For more information about starting or operating a small business, call 1.800.634.0245 for the SCORE chapter nearest you. Visit SCORE at www.score.org.

For more information about starting or operating a small business, contact SCORE TriCounty, https://tricounty.score.org/content/find-mentor-183.
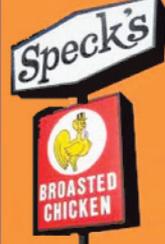
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