

SELLING SOLUTIONS,

NOT PRODUCTS

Great F&I professionals don't jump to conclusions, and they don't try to solve problems for customers. Instead, they solve problems with customers. F&I trainer explains how.

BY RICK MCCORMICK

The two abilities that enable any F&I professional to rise to the top are a high level of creativity and the ability to use that creativity to help customers see problems that may not initially be visible to them. Selling is all about solving problems. I know, easier said than done. But just think about what our products are designed to do: They help solve future problems your customers either can't see or believe don't exist.

If you can't put your finger on your customer's problem, you won't solve it. Worse, you will waste their time and lose credibility. You must describe the problem clearly and from the customer's point of view. And to find out what the really difficult problems are, you need

to ask the right questions and listen before acting. Top-producing professionals know that when you identify customers' pressing problems in such a way that they can see them, they will be willing to pay for a solution.

We focus tremendous amounts of effort to develop skills to overcome customer objections, and that mindset leads many producers to only focus on the needs and problems that float on the surface. When we begin to focus on the customer in a larger and deeper sense than just the immediate problem, we open up the possibility of uncovering larger and more significant opportunities.

F&I professionals who are really good at solving problems go about it systemati-

cally. Their entire focus with every customer is to walk with them through their past experiences and future challenges. Great F&I professionals don't jump to conclusions; they simply follow the three steps that lead to a solution. Let's take a closer look at each one.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE RIGHT PROBLEM

To solve the right problem, you must first identify it. To do that, you need to ask the right questions and then listen. I recently observed a delivery involving a married couple with great credit scores, low levels of debt, and no mortgage. No problems, right? Wrong! Thanks to a great job of needs discovery, the F&I manager knew

this couple had a 16-year-old daughter and a 15-year-old son. That meant the six-year loan term they agreed to would coincide with the most expensive six years of their adult lives: Two additional drivers, cars and auto insurance bills on top of tuition for two kids in college.

Without good needs discovery, the problems of ownership for this couple might be seen as minimal, making a simple “I don’t need any additional products” objection difficult to overcome. However, the *right* (or at least the bigger) problem is the increase in family expenses coming soon. Only good needs discovery would enable you to help this couple make a better decision to protect themselves against future expenses that might take money which could be better used somewhere else. When you identify the *right* problem, the solutions you offer make sense, and your effort to show how critical the products are in their situation motivates them to buy more consistently.

STEP 2: CREATE URGENCY

Selling is about creating a sense of urgency. In the F&I office, that means showing customers they have risks that need to be covered and problems that need to be solved. We’ve all heard how customers are turned off by salespeople who are too pushy. What they are really saying is you are urgent to sell and they don’t see any urgency to buy. When a customer says “No” to a product or a bundle of products, they expect the conversation to end. If you continue to press, they will push back.

The key is to collapse any resistance and get the customer to ask you for more information by utilizing an intentional urgency statement. Here’s a good example:

“That’s fine. These are just options. You can take some, all, or none of them. However, that does surprise me, especially since you are buying a vehicle built since 2010.”

The focus should not be on turning a “No” into a “Yes.” It should be on getting the customer to ask for more information, not subjecting them to an onslaught of information they did not ask for. This continues the effort to have conversations with the customer, not make product presentations directed at them. When a customer has genuine interest in why he or she specifically needs a particular product, an F&I professional

can help the customer see his or her need more clearly, and that creates an urgency to act. That is what the best in this business are great at: creating urgency where little or no interest existed just moments before.

3. PROVIDE CUSTOMIZED SOLUTIONS

The goal of every F&I professional should not be selling the most products to every customer; it should be selling the most products each customer needs. We should not go into our offices every day with the mindset of “How can I sell my

1973. In 1975, he presented them with the prototype of the world’s first digital camera. By 1989, his prototype was ready to be sold to the public. That’s when Sasson’s bosses told him they decided not to bring it to market for fear it would cannibalize film sales.

At the time, Kodak made money off of every step of the photography business. Why give that up? So they made a conscious decision to sell products vs. solving problems. On a deeper level, they decided to sell rather than help their customers, as a digital camera made taking pictures more cost-efficient and saving memories



products to customers today?” Instead, it should be, “I will see customers today and my goal is to find out from each of them how my products can solve a problem they may encounter in the future.”

Rather than attempt to move customers to buy a service contract by simply pointing out the extensive technology on their vehicle, tell them several reasons why, in their particular situation, the product is critical. When you offer specific reasons to buy based on their situation, the customer can see you are trying to help them, not sell them. When you create customized solutions that meet real customer problems, you are three times more likely to end up with products sold to customers who are glad they bought them.

Steven Sasson was a natural problem solver. He started working for Kodak in

more permanent. Well, by the time Kodak realized its mistake, the company was filing for bankruptcy.

The lesson here is you can make money selling products, but you can make a fortune solving problems. The choice is yours. When you solve problems systematically, you save time, achieve better solutions, and increase your credibility with the customer and the perceived value of what you’ve done. If you are ready to take your success in the F&I office to a higher level, then move from selling products to solving problems. Those who don’t just might face bankruptcy in the days ahead. ■

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