

5 ways quality can boost sales.

Quality starts with planning. If we accept that quality reflects a certain standard to achieve, what is that standard? Furthermore, if we don't understand what interests or satisfies our customers, how do we know if our product reaches that standard anyway?

Quality planning is defined as

Developing the products/systems and processes needed to meet or exceed customer expectations

It is a two-step process. Gathering information on the what and then proceeding to the how. The link between quality planning and sales is that we need to meet customer expectations in order to carry out a sale. There are examples where we buy something below our expectations, often through necessity. For example, perhaps a vending machine snack at an out of hours airport terminal as all restaurants are closed. But generally, the purchase needs to be in line with our expectations. We need to see some value in the exchange of resources.

We expect that the seller has devised a method on ensuring that they can consistently deliver the standard we associate with the product. There is nothing worse for a seller's reputation than for example a customer driving a car from a garage forecourt only for it to break down on the road outside.

If we are not meeting these expectations, we are unlikely to stay in business. Therefore, quality planning and sales are intrinsically linked. Increase your ability to meet those expectations and sales will increase. So how can you incorporate this into your processes?

The approach incorporates 5 steps, using the fundamental human skills of critical thinking, lateral thinking and problem solving, which are applied to our business objective of quality planning.

1) Confidence in examining and investigating to realise better questioning and information gathering.

Before we can sell anything, we need to know what a customer wants. We need to ask questions of the customer and listen. Seek feedback and gain valuable information. This information tells us their preferences and areas where we can help add value to them. Think of the emergency services arriving on scene at a road traffic collision. What's the first thing they do? They ask questions and they listen. Access to this accurate intelligence about the customer will increase the success of a sales process because the product better reflects their needs.

2) Ability to understand variables, identify the valuable information and communicate it effectively

The information received from the customer needs to be analysed, understood and the value identified. Before being translated and communicated effectively to the wider business and all interested stakeholders to form the basis of the product to be provided. Every customer is different so there will be a variety in the way the information is communicated, expressed and the level. There is a need to examine the variables and highlight the key information from the less important. Understanding what a customer wants and acting on that information is important in maximising sales.

3) Ability to make connections between objectives, value and resource.

We now need to start to play with ideas and try and match customer wants with the capabilities and capacities of the business. Then think about how we are going to

maintain the standards to meet these expectations. Flexibility and agility are required to swap ideas around, think unconventionally and find solutions for customers as we think on our feet. If we don't somebody else will! The trick is knowing the product and capabilities well enough to be able to connect this with what problem a customer is having when it is not always immediately obvious.

The customer's problem is solved and that relief and feeling of being understood is crucial in strengthening the relationship between customer and seller. In simple terms increasing the likelihood that they will buy more. Matching expectations with capabilities, promptly thinking of solutions and being able to maintain the expected standards are vital if we want to keep customers satisfied and continuing to purchase our products.

4) Planning approach and ability to build solutions and make informed decisions.

1 – 3 will count for nothing if we can't deliver. We need a careful plan in place that brings all the information gathering, analysis and innovation together and ensures it is measured, monitored and delivered. The outcome can be greatly informed by accurate and reliable information on the expected standards, allowing decisions to be based upon sound and logical evidence.

So often excellent sales processes are let down by the reality of what is delivered. Sales and operations departments are hindered by silos. In the business as a whole this co-ordination of functions has to be well planned and executed. It is easy to think that once a sale has been made that is it. Again, if we let down the customer in how we deliver then a good sale has much less value. The companies that have got this right keep satisfied customers and increase sales by reputation and actual delivery.

5) Review of objectives to measure success.

Too often we fail to incorporate sufficient reflection and evaluation so we can learn what went well and what did not. This is the key to continuous improvement as well as tracking how close to the original objective did we get. By committing to learning from failure and the desire to build continuous improvement into the product the seller is maximising the value of their relationship with the customer. This provides the best service they often exceeds customer expectations on-going and is the key to securing future sales.

These 5 tips form the basis of a quality planning process, but they provide an important insight into how we can also increase sales as a result. Careful co-ordination needs to be in place between departments by removing silos and collaborating more effectively. All eyes should be on the prize, more satisfied customers. And history tells us satisfied customers continue to buy from us.

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