



“Hold Up That Mirror!”

By Daniel H. Chinitz

Picture this: One of your better salespeople (let’s call her “Clair”) spends many hours helping a very nice lady select what will work best in her home. As Clair’s Manager, you have noticed how well she has done her job. She has developed a very nice relationship with the customer (“Mrs. Client”) and gained her trust while writing up some upscale and rather profitable products. They’ve had some good laughs along the way and Mrs. Client appreciates Clair’s easy attitude yet professional manner. She made the job so much easier!

To add icing to this nice cake, Clair has truly enjoyed working with Mrs. Client. She appreciates that her knowledge was being put to good use and that Mrs. Client agrees with most of her suggestions. Clair likes what she does and loves working at your showroom. It’s the perfect scenario, happy customers, profitable material being sold and a contented sales staff.

Of course Mrs. Client must first bring her husband in to see what was selected but that won’t be a problem. He really doesn’t care about this type of thing. Well, not all that much, so she says. Clair looks forward to meeting Mr. Client and wrapping up this order. It was a fair amount of work but the fast math she does in her head tells her that she will earn some decent commissions on this job. Then disaster hits.

It turns out that Mr. Client isn’t always so agreeable and likes to put his foot down once in a while. He reasons to himself that his wife really doesn’t always know how to get the best deal. Sure, she works and makes good money. But when she finds a store she likes, he thinks she is usually too busy making friends with everyone. He will have to be the bad guy in order to get the good deal. Meanwhile, our poor unsuspecting salesperson Clair, who worked so well with Mrs. Client, has no idea about the freight train heading her way.

And by the way, Mr. Client likes to do his internet research. So, of course, he has looked up a few of the products Clair is recommending on various websites and has a pretty good idea of what things are “worth.”

So how should Clair handle Mr. Client? He just walked in with Mrs. Client on a busy Saturday and started raising objections in every direction. Clair is starting to see all her hard work going down the drain of that lovely free-standing tub she recommended! He is looking at her as only an uptight husband can when confronting a major expenditure that he is not too thrilled about in the first place.

Let’s take a fast look at the options. One way Clair can handle this is to throw an equal amount of grief back at him and defend her pricing to the death. After all, she has a lot of time invested here and the guy’s wife did all the work with her. Who is he, “Mr. Testosterone” coming in at the last minute to ruin everything? The selections are right,

the prices are value oriented and she needs to get it all ordered now to have it delivered on time.

Or Clair can give in a little to Mr. Client; perhaps just enough to make him happy. “So what if we lose 5% or so on the order,” she might think. “That’s better than losing it all.” She can further rationalize that Mr. Client has a right to be a part of something that is going to extract some serious dollars from their bank account, even if he is acting a little crazy. Besides, Clair is a nice person and nice people like to avoid conflict at all costs.

But wait. Mr. Client isn’t done yet. He’s the type of personality that, when he feels he is gaining the upper hand, enjoys playing it for all it’s worth. He’s now waving his arms and raising his voice. He’s playing the “let’s make these silly little salespeople squirm” game. This is his way of having them earn their money and saving some of his. And look, a bonus! Other customers in the showroom are watching, and learning.

Now Clair, a super salesperson, might not like dealing with this type of behavior. She’s a professional. She solves problems, overcomes challenges in the field, substitutes the best alternatives when backorders hit. She knows the business. But she might not be the type to want to deal with husbands of clients having mini tirades. “I hate this job,” she may later on tell a fellow salesperson. “Who needs to put up with this nonsense?” And in five short minutes, Mr. Client has managed to swing that pendulum from the “I love my job” feeling over to the “I’m not getting paid enough for this” side of the showroom.

Whether your sales staff are easy-going and tend to give in or tougher minded and don’t back away from a good fight, you need to teach them how to “hold up the mirror” to this type of customer. Salespeople need to learn how to *show* that difficult client how they are behaving. The playing field needs to be leveled before the process can continue.

You do this by continuing to ask questions, much like Clair did in the beginning of the sales process, when she was qualifying the customer. After all, Clair didn’t decide to invest her valuable time because someone walked in off the street saying that they needed help creating a new bathroom. She first found out how the client heard of them, who is going to be purchasing the product, what the budget was, when it will be needed, where it is going, etc. So now it’s time to ask some more questions! When objections are raised, ask for more information. Remember, when the client says “No,” they really mean “Know” as in they need to *know* more in order to say “Yes!” You overcome objections by asking more questions.

So Clair, our professional Salesperson, steps a little closer to Mr. Client, who is busy showing his wife and everyone else in the showroom exactly how one gets a good deal in this place, looks him in the eye and calmly asks the following all-important question: “Mr. Client, you seem upset. Did I say something to upset you?”

Clair has learned over the years how to handle this type of situation. She asks a rather simple question. She knows when to “hold up the mirror” and *show* people how they are behaving. She doesn’t get defensive or try to match their belligerence. She just inquires

about what the problem might be with a simple question and waits for the answer. Besides, asking a question gives you a little more time to think.

Mr. Client, however, instinctively knows how to recover, even if he brings it down a notch. He responds by saying “No, I’m not upset, it’s just that your prices are high. I checked them out online you know.” But Clair has been trained well. She knows that the first thing she needs to accomplish is to get Mr. Client calm, on her side and ready to knock down those sales barriers he just put up. So she reinforces her counter attack with a follow up question. “It’s just that you seem so upset. I was wondering if I had said something to upset you?” Clair then stops talking and waits for her answer. She’s not putting that mirror down so fast.

Now Mr. Client senses that he is in trouble. This salesperson is good. She’s not letting him walk all over her. And his wife is looking at him with those eyes that can kill. All of a sudden he realizes that he is messing with her new best friend.

“No, I was just wondering why this faucet is so much more than that one over there,” he asks in a somewhat calmer voice. Clair smiles to herself; she knows victory is right around the corner. The once agitated Mr. Client is now behaving more like a gentleman and actually asking a pretty good question. And it is one that she has answered many times in her career. But Clair is still the professional. She first compliments the question before proceeding to explain the difference. After all, Mr. Client is now her new best friend and it’s time to close the sale.

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