

Hard Selling Skills vs. Soft Selling Skills

Customer conversations



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- Hard Selling Skills
- Soft Selling Skills

The differences between hard selling and soft selling comes down to one factor: time.

A hard sell is an attempt to get the buyer to take action now. In contrast, a soft sell is a gradual approach.

When a sales professional embraces soft selling they are taking their time. They are learning about the customer, their needs, concerns, and perceptions of value. Hard selling is rarely concerned with these details. As a result, hard selling is often more

Given the stark contrast between these two methods, it is clear that soft selling is far more effective in the long-term. Therefore, why is it important to differentiate hard selling skills from soft selling skills? The reason: sales professionals need to understand both so that they can be aware of instances when they accidentally resort to a hard sell approach that might risk the sale.

Here we examine these two sales techniques by illustrating the differences between the two and showing why soft selling is the more effective approach.

Hard Selling Skills

Hard selling skills put most of the emphasis on making a sale fast. The hard sell happens in the moment. Therefore the only skills that apply to the hard sale are those that the sales professional believes will address the customer's latest stated need.

Hard selling skills are often seen when a sales rep is aiming for volume, not value. That is, the sales professional is trying to get a commitment from the buyer fast so that they can move to their next sale. The shortcoming of this approach is that it often leaves the buyer feeling pressured and uneasy.

Hard selling is not effective for a solution that has any degree of sophistication or complexity because these details cannot be discussed in one sales conversation. Often a simple, easy-to-understand product or service is better suited for a hard sell.

Moreover, a hard sell often aims to focus the customer on urgency by articulating the potential opportunity cost of not buying. Hard selling often prioritizes mere product knowledge over communication skills. The hard sell approach doesn't attempt to follow a sales process. Instead, a hard sell pushes the customer to buy a product.

In many cases hard selling is something that emerges when an otherwise patient sales professional feels that they are short on time. Few sales managers coach their sales team to use hard selling tactics. Instead, hard selling is the result of looming sales quotas and drifting deals.

Soft Selling Skills

the network of stakeholders involved in the buying decision. Soft selling requires emotional intelligence which allows the sales professional to understand the customer's point of view in regards to both the financial and reputational risks involved in making a purchase.

The strongest benefit of soft selling skills is that they address the customer's entire buying journey. Early in the journey, soft skills help guide the conversation with a set of questions that inform both the sales professional while also helping the customer to better understand their needs. Later, when the sales professional is prepared to begin positioning a solution soft skills again come into play as sales professionals effectively connect the solution capabilities to the customer's specific needs. Finally, during negotiations, soft skills enable the sales professional to overcome customer objections, protect the financial value of the sale, and engage in an effective trading strategy.

Many of the complex needs and solutions increasingly seen today require team members to leverage soft skills. These selling scenarios involve too many factors, people, and changes to be addressed with a hard sell approach. Sales professionals must be able to discover and coalesce an array of information to properly position a sophisticated solution.

Additionally, soft selling skills create a setting where white space opportunities can be explored. If the sales professional pushes the sale with hard sell tactics there is no relationship for growth. There is no opportunity to continue the conversation because no conversation has started. White space is found in the subtext and the detail of the conversation. The speed of a hard sell does not allow that nuance to be heard.

Sales success today requires drawing on a set of skills that can be leveraged in the right places throughout the sales cycle. Doing so requires soft selling skills. These skills build over a career, but a sales professional can put them to work fast by simply asking questions, building rapport, and offering meaningful insights to the customer throughout the sales dialogue.

