



## EQ AND THE 'CRAZY' CUSTOMER

By Charlie Lang, Executive Coach & Managing Partner @ Progress-U Limited



To prepare for a sales training & coaching program for a major cosmetics firm, we arranged 'shadow' coaching sessions, meaning that we followed selected sales people during their daily work, visiting hair salons. The exercise was revealing.

To give you a taste of our experience, here are some true stories.

In one occasion, we walked in and the owner of the salon, a well-groomed barber of about 45 years of age, shouted at the sales person, apparently totally ignoring my presence: "You guys are so useless! I placed an order for 10 bottles of shampoo and you delivered only 9. And when I called, people pretended not to know anything. Tell me, why should I ever order anything from you again?"

The sales person responded in a very defensive manner, trying to 'be right' which made the customer even more upset.

In another occasion, the customer – another salon owner - was sitting at a table reading the newspaper. Upon our arrival, he kept reading the newspaper, only interrupting himself by uttering a disinterested 'hello'. The sales person I was shadowing started to chatter her five minutes sales pitch about the latest promotion items, etc. The salon owner didn't put his newspaper down, not even when at the end of her pitch she said 'good-bye'.

You think I'm exaggerating? Can't believe that such 'crazy' customers really exist? Well, I couldn't believe it either – but seeing is believing.

How are these cases connected to Emotional Intelligence (EI)? And why might it matter to you even if you don't have crazy customers like that?

What these two cases have in common with the sales situation you are facing is

that we all deal with people with certain emotions and that we have certain emotions as well. If we can optimize the management of our own emotions and influence positively the emotions of our customers, we tend to be more successful overall.

According to Daniel Goleman's model of EI, people who have high emotional intelligence

1. Have a high level of awareness of their emotions,
2. Have the ability to successfully manage their emotional states,
3. Are sensitive towards other people's emotions and can 'read' them accurately, and
4. Are able to positively influence others' emotional states.

For sales people to improve their success rate, working on these four dimensions has proven to be an effective approach. Consider this piece of research:

*At L'Oreal, sales agents selected on the basis of certain emotional competencies significantly outsold salespeople selected using the company's old selection procedure. On an annual basis, salespeople selected on the basis of emotional competence sold \$91,370 more than other salespeople did, for a net revenue increase of \$2,558,360. Salespeople selected on the basis of emotional competence also had 63% less turnover during the first year than those selected in the typical way (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Spencer, McClelland, & Kelner, 1997).*

So how would a sales person with high emotional intelligence deal with the above two cases?

### **Case I: The Screaming Customer**

Before responding to the customer, it's critical to become aware of one's own emotions in this moment. For example, the sales person may realize that he feels unfairly treated because it was not he who made that mistake. Also, he may feel put down by the customer triggering the feeling of helplessness. Obviously, these emotions aren't very helpful to successfully deal with this situation.

Noting that these emotions don't help, it's critical to now manage these emotions, for example, by telling himself that this customer is not really upset with him but with the company and that he simply needs to release his anger. He may even sympathize with the customer's situation and develop an emotion of compassion instead.

As a result, it will be much easier for him to deal with this customer's emotions. Instead of being defensive, he could show his understanding and focus on how to make up for what the customer experienced and how to regain his confidence in the company.

### **Case II: The Indifferent Customer**

Considering again the four dimensions of EI, the sales person first pays attention to her own emotions in that situation. She might notice that she's fed up with this customer's behavior and as a result simply don't care anymore. That realization could trigger her to reconsider her job mission. And she might regain motivation to make a positive attempt with this customer if she realized that this customer probably has a good reason for acting the way he acts – she just hasn't figured out yet what exactly this is.

As a next step, she could think about what's going on with this customer, why he behaves the way he behaves. By paying more attention, she might realize that this

customer actually does buy from her company despite his even if he ignores her most of the time. She might also realize that this customer expects to be dealt with in a particular way and she just never bothered to find out exactly how.

Walking her through the concepts of EI, she became quite curious and a few weeks later excitedly reported about her experience. Instead of doing what she has always done previously, this time, she didn't rattle down her sales pitch but instead first asked with assertively for the salon owner's attention. This puzzled him and he indeed put down his newspaper. Then she went on to say something along these lines: "I noticed that my sales pitches seem not very interesting to you and that's alright. At the same time, I want to ensure that I don't waste your or my time and therefore, I'd really like to know how I could best serve you so that you see value in my visits."

Eventually, the salon owner shared with her that he actually appreciated the products of her company but that he finds her sales pitches very boring and most of the time irrelevant. They agreed that instead of producing a sales pitch, she would first ask him about any needs he may have and then very shortly update him on any special promotions – and that only if she felt they could be useful for him.

These are just two simple examples, somewhat extreme in how the customers responded, but the principles of EI are universal and can be applied successfully in any interaction with customers or prospects.

Feel free to contact us if you'd like to know more how to build a highly emotionally intelligent sales force.

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In 2005, he published the book "The Groupness Factor" ( see <http://www.progressu.com/groupness-book.php> ). Currently, he's authoring his second book, a business fiction on corporate coaching culture. Charlie's articles got printed in publications like Human Resources, FZ Magazine, Banking Today, SCMP, Effective Executive, A PLUS and CareerTimes. Currently he authors the book "A New Map for a New Age" and co-authors the book "Business Coaching in Asia".

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