

I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

There are many different places where your customers can buy pet supplies and related products. Today's customers have many options for their companion animal needs, including big box stores, mass merchandisers, grocery stores and online sites. The major reason consumers shop at your pet center is because of the customer service you provide.

You are selling service, something independent pet supply stores can provide better than the big boxes. But what exactly does service mean?

Service can mean different things to different customers. To some it means saving time and money. To others, it means getting the help they need and being able to buy everything for their pets at one store.

Learning Objectives

This chapter will give you a better understanding of customer service and sales techniques. After completing this module, you should be able to:

- Demonstrate effective sales techniques.
- Explain the four types of customers and

how best to serve them.

- Define elements of customer satisfaction.
- Engage different types of customers.
- Handle complaints and returns.
- Describe important components of telephone sales.

Customer Needs

Today's consumers are hungry for information. They are better educated and, therefore, are more demanding of the service they receive. They have many choices to purchase products for their pets, and they won't continue to shop at a store that doesn't provide the customer service they seek.

What makes it even more complex is that your customers' needs are constantly changing.

Think of your own shopping experiences. At times, you want to get in and out of the store quickly. Sometimes you need more help in deciding what products you need. Other times, you want to find the very best price.

Your customers are the same way. They want companion pet products that will fill their needs. Just as customers are responsible for their pets, you are responsible for educating them and selling the products that will best service their pet supply needs. Customers

want to deal with knowledgeable and courteous sales associates who can show them how to care for their pets correctly.

Customer Satisfaction

To deliver effective customer service you need to understand:

- Your customers' expectations.
- What they like or dislike about their shopping experiences.
- Information about the products you sell to help customers make well-informed buying decisions.

Providing this type of customer service requires effective communication and proper selling skills. Once mastered, the skills illustrated in this chapter will make your job easier and more fun. They also will help you become a more valuable employee.

II. ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE SALES

Whether you realize it or not, every time you interact with customers you are selling. While many retail sales associates might have a negative impression of the selling process, selling is a natural activity that involves using good listening skills, asking the right questions and pro-

viding simple and honest answers. In other words—good selling is about effectively communicating with customers.

It's All About Helping Customers

Some store associates are resistant to the actual selling process because they have a negative, preconceived attitude about overly aggressive or "hard" sales.

Perhaps it's best to think of selling as educating the customer. Keep in mind that customers come to your store because they want to purchase products for their pets or they have a problem they need your help solving.

Don't think of it as trying to sell them something they don't want. Good selling requires the confidence that you are helping customers, as well as the right attitude and level of interest.

Product Knowledge—The most important thing you need to know to sell effectively is information about the pets and pet products you sell. With new products coming out almost daily, you must work to stay current with available new products, including how they are made, what they can do and how they will help your customers.

While this might seem like a daunting task, remember that you are not alone. You have tremendous resources available through your PIDA distributor, their reps or manufacturer's reps that service our industry.

Service —You must be eager and willing to answer questions and help customers solve their problems, whether it is finding something in the store or with a special order.

First, help customers decide what it is they really need. Then help them figure out the best products or the best way to get the results they want.

Listening —When you are working with your customers, listen carefully to what they say. If you are not sure you understand, state in your own words what you think they said and ask if that is correct. Listen to their entire question. Provide the best possible answer based on what you know. If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to tell them so. Then ask a store employee or manager who does know the answer.

Common Courtesy—Show every customer your appreciation for choosing your store. Always say “please” and “thank you.” Don't forget to hold the door for customers and offer to carry large

packages or bags of pet food to their car.

Empathy—Always remember to treat customers how you would like to be treated if you were in their place.

Develop Relationships —Over time, you will start to develop relationships with your regular customers. You will become someone that they rely on for information about their pets and product recommendations, and because of this respect, they will loyally return to you and your store.

III. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Always remember that the experience the customer has in your store is greatly influenced by two experiences—their first impression and their last.

Good first impressions help set a positive tone for the entire store visit. A good first impression starts with the proper greeting. Even if you are busy with a customer, you must acknowledge the customer that just entered the store and tell them you will be right with them. This will show the customer you are aware of them.

Most customers want you to make them feel both welcome and important when they enter the store. Many also want to establish a friendly rapport with a repre-

sentative of the store before the sales process begins. Instead of starting the process by asking the customers what they need, make an opening friendly comment instead, such as “Hello, welcome to (insert store name),” or “It's good to see you today.”

Smile—Your smile tells customers they are your top concern and that you are eager to help them with their needs.

Eye Contact—The best way to show customers that they have your full attention is through direct eye contact. When you are looking around the store while talking to a customer, it sends the message that you probably are not listening to or thinking about what they are saying. Making eye contact with customers helps build trust and establish your credibility.

Courteous Attitude—Everyone wants to be treated with common courtesy and respect. Courtesy is more than saying “Please” and “Thank You.” It also includes opening doors, allowing others to go first, and picking up and carrying products for the customer.

Your willingness to stop what you are doing and solve customers' problems is demonstrated by the expression on your face, how you stand and how you move. All these things tell your customer that

you are truly glad they came into your pet center and that you are eager to help them.

Proper Dress—Many pet centers require employees to wear some type of uniform. This helps customers easily identify who is a store employee. Uniforms may range from a shirt with the store's logo on it to a vest or apron.

No matter what your store's dress code, it is important that your appearance be clean and neat. Your name badge should be clearly visible at all times.

Acknowledge Regulars—Over time, you will get to know customers who shop frequently at your store. Let them know you appreciate their repeat business by welcoming them back by name.

IV. CUSTOMER TYPES

There are several different types of customers you will encounter when working at a pet center. Understanding the differences can help you determine what is most important to each customer.

Needs Change Constantly

The most important thing to remember is that customers' needs may change depending on the reason why they came into the store. Sometimes customers may need a lot

of help with a problem their pet is having. Other times, the same customer may just be purchasing food or everyday pet supplies and be in a hurry to get back home.

What makes working with customers so interesting is that every time the door opens, you need to figure out what types of shoppers are entering the store. Only then can you meet their needs and exceed their expectations.

Hobbyists

These customers spend more time in pet stores and are usually not in a hurry. They enjoy looking at new products, or the animals you stock, and they like to ask questions.

How to Serve Them—These customers usually will not need assistance in finding products. However, when they do have questions, they expect you to know the answer. They also want information on new products.

High-Convenience Customers—These customers want a hassle-free shopping experience. They do not want to wait in lines and will be frustrated if they can't find a particular product. If they do need help finding something, they expect immediate assistance.

This type of customer will stop coming to your store if you do not have what they want when they want it.

How to Serve Them—Help these customers find what they need as quickly as possible. Also, if you see these customers waiting in a long line, open another register (if possible) to accommodate them. It's also a good idea to offer help with heavy or bulky packages, such as large bags of pet food, pet cages, cat scratch posts, aquariums, etc.

Price-Driven Shoppers

These customers do almost anything in order to get the best price. Price-driven shoppers may come into your store, get all the information they need and go somewhere else to make the purchase because of a lower price. They frequently ask about prices and special deals.

How to Serve Them—These customers may be your biggest challenge. It is important to remind them that your store's prices may not be the cheapest, but they are competitive.

If the customer says they saw a product somewhere else for much less, ask them if they are sure it was the exact same products (same size, same weight/quantity,

same formulation, etc.). Also be aware if your store has a price-matching policy to meet competitors' advertised pricing. If you store does have a price-matching policy in place, know the details of the policy or ask your store manager.

High-Touch Customers

These people usually need more help than other customers, especially with potential high-ticket purchases, such as aquariums, animal purchases with accessories, etc. They need help with product selection and information on the pet they are purchasing or details on how to use the products they are considering.

How to Serve Them—This is where you can put the knowledge you learn from this training course into action. These customers will ask a lot of questions. If you can answer them effectively, high-touch customers will return to your pet center repeatedly.

Time-Pressed Customers

This customer group wants to get in, find what they want and get back out again quickly. Time-pressed customers expect you to have the products they want and the quantities they need immediately on hand. Time-pressed customers often have a spe-

cific problem to solve.

How to Serve Them—Like the high-convenience customer, these customers want you to do everything possible to solve their specific problem and get them in and out of the store as quickly as possible.

V. DELIVER CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer service is a sometimes overused term that can be vague and hard to fully understand. What more accurately pinpoints what customers want is a satisfying shopping experience.

Customer Expectations

While different types of customers will place different levels of importance on the various elements that make up their shopping experience, all of them have basic expectations that determine customer satisfaction.

A basic understanding of the elements of customer satisfaction will help you deliver them. Remember, selling is nothing more than helping customers get what they want—a satisfying shopping experience that will educate them, exceed their expectations and keep them coming back.

Save Money

For many customers, saving money is the primary factor in choosing where they shop.

Since you have direct contact with customers, you are the one most likely to hear if customers think a price seems unfair. If you regularly hear comments from different customers about a particular product or product category, be sure to pass this information along to your supervisor.

Be careful never to agree with a customer that a price is too high. The first response is to be sure that you both are talking about the same exact product. In many cases, the customer is not comparing “apples to apples,” so to speak. If the products are not identical, handle the situation professionally by calmly explaining the differences in size, formula or manufacturer.

If the product is more expensive than the exact same product, let the customer know you will relay this information to your supervisor immediately. Then thank the customer for bringing this to your attention to help diffuse the situation.

Easy Returns

Be sure you fully understand your store’s return policy. If a customer wants to return or exchange merchandise and you don’t have authority to take returns, quickly find someone who can help.

Customers returning merchandise may be angry and uncomfortable. Telling them you will make the situation right will put them at ease and alleviate their anxiety. Remember, solving a customer’s problem—even by returning merchandise—creates loyalty and long-term customers.

Save Time

Today’s time-pressed customers are always looking to save time. This doesn’t mean they want to be rushed while in the store. Instead they want to get everything they need at one store and avoid repeat trips for things they may have forgotten.

Get Answers

When customers have a question, they will look for the closest employee. Ideally, you will be able to answer any customer’s question on the spot.

However, if you don’t know the answer, don’t guess. Be honest and let the cus-

tomers know that you will get the answer immediately. Enlist help from another sales associate or your manager. Be sure to stick around and listen to the answer so the next time the question comes up, you will know the answer.

Find Products

While the store’s layout, design and signage are important elements in saving customers’ time and making it easy to find products, don’t underestimate your role. You can help by:

- Stocking merchandise in its proper location.
- Fronting the merchandise (pulling products to the front of the shelf) to make it easier for customers to see all the options.
- Turning products so the labels face the front.
- Returning products that are out of place to their proper location.
- Knowing the departments, aisles and the categories within each aisle so you can escort customers quickly to the products they need.

Understand My Pet

Customers want the latest information related to their companion pets. Knowing what resources your store has available is essential.

Common resources include books and videos, manufacturer web sites, vendor product demonstrations, product displays, brochures, product literature, magazines and, of course, your product knowledge.

One-Stop Shopping

Customers want to be able to make just one stop when shopping for their companion pet needs.

Since you are in direct contact with customers every day, you know when someone comes in and asks for something that you don’t have. You also know when customers have bought up your entire stock of a particular product. Passing this information on to your supervisor can help your store deliver better customer satisfaction.

Easy Check Out

Customers hate waiting in line to check out. Facilitate a speedy checkout process by making sure the correct bin tags are placed on products and replacing bin tags or sale signage that has fallen or been removed.

Knowing that you are doing everything you can to facilitate a quick and accurate checkout process will leave a lasting impression on customers.

Enjoyable Shopping

Customers want a clean, comfortable and relaxing shopping environment. Keep aisles clear and free of clutter and make sure displays are stocked, clean and organized.

Special Services

Customers want to be able to talk to knowledgeable employees who can provide special services quickly. These services might include delivery, installation of special items such as aquarium or ponds, pet cleaning and grooming, special orders, product assembly and even rental.

Be sure to know what special services your store offers and how to help customers take advantage of them.

VI. ENGAGE THE CUSTOMER

Good selling requires effectively communicating with customers. And before you can provide the answers your customers are looking for, you first must ask the right questions.

It's important to ask questions that solicit more than just a "yes" or "no" answer to obtain useful information and get the con-

versation started. For example, instead of asking "May I help you?" ask "How may I help you?" or "What can I do for you today?" Asking what type of animal the customer is shopping for also can help create a good dialogue.

When you ask the customer how you might help, you are likely to hear three common responses: "I know what I want," "I'm just looking," and "I'm not really sure." Each one will require different actions on your part.

"I Know What I Want"

These customers will probably require three things from you:

- **Product Location**—If your store has aisle markers, focus on memorizing the aisles, the numbers and what products are on the aisles. These customers probably will ask you the aisle where the product they are looking for is located. Whenever possible, go with the customer to where the product is located to make sure they find the product and answer any questions.

- **Help Carrying Large Items**—If this customer is buying many items or bulky products, he will expect you to help him carry them to the register and maybe even to his car. Offer to help before being asked.

- **Product Recommendations**—The customer may want your input on whether a particular product will solve her problem or is the best fit for her needs. Ask questions to discover the underlying problem and ensure the customer has a positive outcome. For example, if a customer asks for your opinion on a specific flea remedy, let him know that he may need to use multiple products (shampoo, sprays, fog) to eliminate the problem.

"I'm Just Looking"

These customers generally expect one thing from you—just enough attention. They want to be left alone to look at the products, read labels or try to figure something out. However, if they have a question, they expect you to be available with an answer.

You can best serve this customer by asking, "Is there something in particular you're looking for?" If she says "Yes," you can take her to the correct area and let her browse. Or ask the customer if she is shopping for a dog, cat, small animal or other pet. This often opens the door for further conversation and a chance to recommend new products or sale items.

"I'm Not Really Sure"

These customers require the most help from you. These customers expect you to suggest solutions and make product recommendations. They may be looking more for information and ideas than for specific products.

The best way to help this customer is to ask questions and listen carefully to the responses. First, find out how much the customer already knows. A good question is, "Have you used this product before?" If so, the customer probably has a specific question or problem in mind. If not, then you know your explanation will need to be more detailed.

Another good question to use is: "Have you looked at other products like this?" If the customer answers yes, follow this question with: "What did you like or dislike about the other products?" His answer will tell you if the problem is one of price or product features. Again, if the customer answers no, you will need to explain what your product will do for them. Be sure to summarize the customer's points before making your final recommendation.

VII. CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Eventually, you are going to encounter upset customers. They may be upset because the product they bought did not do their job they wanted or they did not receive the service they expected.

A Golden Opportunity

As you encounter these customers, you need to remember that how you handle the situation is extremely important.

When you meet or exceed the customer's expectation, it represents a golden opportunity to turn these people into long-term, loyal customers. If you don't resolve the situation to their satisfaction, you might not only lose these customers for good, but more than likely they will tell others about their bad experience, which could cost you potential customers.

Don't take it personally. Also keep in mind that most manufacturers have liberal return policies, which will enable you to take care of your customers so they are satisfied with the outcome.

Returns

The majority of customer complaints will

involve a return. Many times customers will be unhappy with a product they purchased and will want to return or exchange it.

First and foremost, you must know your store's return policy—in side and out. Return policies can range from a no-has-sle return on all products to an absolute no return policy. Your store's policy probably is based on past returns. It is designed to satisfy as many customers as possible while protecting the store.

The store policy should be posted where employees and customers can read it if there is a question. If your customers have a problem, you want to be able to follow the policy with confidence. If you have any questions, ask your supervisor.

Keep in mind that your puppy return policy will be very different than your fish return policy, which will be different from your reptile return policy. Make sure you know them all.

Complaints

The critical thing to remember about complaints is that they represent an opportunity to turn an upset customer into a long-term, loyal customer.

While almost every store has a product

return policy, not as many have a customer complaint policy. Customer complaints can be very useful in helping your store deliver customer satisfaction. If your store has a complaint policy, be sure you know it and understand it thoroughly.

When a customer has a complaint, you must first know how much authority you have to address the issue. For example, you might be expected to handle the situation on your own or to have the customer fill out a complaint form and take that to a supervisor.

Whatever your level of authority, be sure you know your store's policy and stick to it. Never promise customers more than you can deliver.

What To Do

Whether you are handling a customer complaint or a return, follow these basic guidelines.

- **Thank the Customer and Apologize**—To help diffuse the situation, the first thing you should do is thank the customer for bringing it to your attention. You also want to apologize for the fact that the customer had a problem.
- **Avoid Embarrassment**—Remember that customers are just as uncomfortable

in this situation as you are. Treat them with courtesy and respect.

Politely ask the customer to move with you to an area away from other customers to discuss the situation. This is particularly important if the customer is visibly or audibly upset and will help avoid the negative impression this could have on other shoppers. If the complaint is about a specific product, go to where the item is located or to a work area where you can lay the product down to look at it together. If there are forms to fill out, you might ask the customer to go to the service area to complete them.

• **Listen to the Customer's Problem**—Next, ask the customer to thoroughly explain the problem. Do not interrupt while the customer is talking. As you listen, take notes on the important points of the complaint. These might include:

- o What the customer was expecting or trying to do.
- o What product or service they were using.
- o Why they were disappointed.

Taking notes serve two useful purposes. First, it makes it less likely that you will have to ask the customer to repeat any part of the complaint. Second, it tells the customer that you are interested and pay-

ing careful attention to the problem.

• **Use Understanding Comments** —

When listening to the customer’s complaint or explanation, use phrases like “I see” and “I understand.” These phrases do not say the customer is right or wrong.

They simply let the customer know that you are listening.

• **Examine the Product**—If the customer has brought the product to the store, look at it together. Let the customer know that you see the issue(s) he identified. At the same time, point out anything that may be out of the ordinary.

As you look at the product together, the problem may become less serious to the customer. Most customers are reasonable people. If they see that they may have caused the problem themselves, their expectations for resolving the problem are likely to change.

If your customers did not bring the product with them, then you need to arrange to bring it to the store, if possible. If the customer has already installed the product and it can’t be brought in (such as a large aquarium), someone may need to go to his home to see the problem and resolve it. Be sure to talk to your supervisor and follow established store procedures.

• **Summarize the Situation**—After the customer has explained the problem, summarize the important points of the complaint in your own words. This allows you and the customer to be sure you understand each other.

• **Ask the Customer’s Opinion**—The last thing you should do before taking action to correct the problem is to ask the customer what she thinks should be done to resolve the issue. In many cases, customers expect less than you are prepared to offer.

If the customer recognizes that she caused the problem, she often will decide to pay for another product. If possible, a discount for the customer’s time and effort to come in and share their problem would be a nice gesture.

Whatever solution you offer, follow store policy. If there is a question, ask your supervisor.

VIII. PROVIDE PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

As the employee of a pet center, you have a unique opportunity to provide information and help educate customers on something that is very personal to them—their companion pets.

You have the opportunity to help them

care for their pets properly and make the time they spend with their animals more enjoyable. No other type of retail trade can deliver the satisfaction you can provide to your customers, and the satisfaction you receive by helping them.

Help Customers Solve Problems

This training program is designed to provide you with extensive product knowledge information in regards to companion pets. Even if your store does not sell a particular companion animal, your customers expect you to be able to discuss their pets’ care knowledgeably. They want detailed product information, including features and benefits, how it is used and/or how it needs to be installed. Most importantly, they want your help solving their particular problem.

Know Your Products

Knowing the products your store sells is critical to provide exceptional customer service. There are many ways to learn this information:

• **Other Employees**—One of the best ways to learn is by listening to people who already know about the product. If a customer asks a question and you don’t know the answer, ask someone else for

help. Then stick around for the complete explanation.

Ask questions if there is something you don’t understand. The next time that question comes up, you will be able to handle it on your own.

• **Customers**—Another way to learn more about products sold in your store is to talk to customers. They may know from personal experience how well a particular product works. If you see customers with a product you are not familiar with, ask them if they have used it before. If they have, they probably will be happy to share their success stories with you.

Customers generally are eager to share what they liked and disliked about a product, as well as any problems they may have experienced. All of this is valuable information for your own knowledge and to share with other customers considering the same product.

• **Manufacturer Representatives** — Vendor sales representatives are industry professionals who have a wealth of knowledge about the products they sell. Many of them frequently visit stores to conduct clinics or to maintain their displays.

They can tell you if a product sells well,

how it is made and what this means to your customers. Watching their product demonstrations can help you learn valuable information and effective techniques to communicate what you have learned to customers.

• **Product Packaging**—Many product packages now contain information that can be useful to you and your customers. By studying the packaging carefully, you can learn a great deal about how the product is made and how it should be used.

Manufacturers often provide videos, catalogs and specification sheets on their products. In some cases, sharing these materials with your customers may be appropriate.

• **How-To Resources**—Many stores now carry how-to pamphlets, books and videos to help customers care for their pets. Some stores even have reference areas for customer convenience. You should know where these resources are located and the general information they contain.

These resources can contain valuable information. Take every opportunity to study them to increase your own knowledge.

Explain Features and Benefits

The key to effective selling is to give customers the information they need to make an informed buying decision. At the same time, you don't want to confuse customers by giving them more information than they want or need. That's why it's best to concentrate on a product's features and benefits.

The features of a product are things like how it is made or what it is made from. The benefit is what the product will do for your customers (or their pet) or what it will help them accomplish.

One of the best sources for feature and benefit information is manufacturer literature, product packaging and the product itself. Study these carefully to discover as much as you can about the product. For pet food products, for example, look for information on nutritional values and ingredients. When customers ask the difference between the pet shampoos you carry, they expect you to be able to give them information that will help them decide which one is best suited for their needs. Look for words like oily skin, dry skin, allergy free, etc.

Knowing about product features and benefits also will help you establish your cred-

ibility as an expert in your field. Providing clear and complete answers will encourage customers to rely on you whenever they have a question or need advice on caring for their companion pet. How you respond will vary with every customer, problem and product.

Show and Tell

Customers remember only about 10 percent of what they hear, but about 80 percent of what they see. Therefore you need to show them what they need to remember when they are considering purchasing a product.

1. **Take It Off the Shelf**—If you are helping customers with small products, take two from the shelf. Hand one to the customer and keep the other to refer to as you talk. Give the customer a moment to look at the product or packaging before you answer any specific questions.

2. **Point It Out**—If possible, point to the part of the product or the packaging that answers the customer's question. If he doesn't have any questions, begin by talking about the product's benefits.

Questions such as, "What is it made of?" indicates that the customer wants more information about the product, providing the opportunity to go into detail about the

product's features and benefits. Whenever possible, refer your customer back to the product or packaging.

3. **Touching Leads to Buying**—Besides helping the customer remember key features and benefits, placing the product in her hands creates a sense of ownership and makes the customer more likely to buy the product.

4. **Remove It From the Packaging** (if absolutely necessary and within reason)—On occasion, a customer may ask to remove a product from the package. He may be trying to figure out whether it will fit, or determine if it is made well.

Generally, if your store policy allows it, this is okay if you can remove the product without damaging the packaging. Never allow a customer to take the product out of the package; do it for him instead. Don't be surprised if the customer asks you to take a product out of the package, but then wants to buy the same product in an unopened package. She may be shipping the product or giving it as a present.

If removing the product from the packaging is not an option, customers usually understand if you explain.

5. **Write It Down**—If you are talking

with customers about a product that is too large to hold, use resources such as a product brochure to help your selling efforts. Don't hand the brochure to the customer immediately or you will shift attention from you to the literature. Instead, hold the resource in your hand. If you plan to give the brochure to the customer, use a pen or pencil to highlight important facts first.

Always write your name and the store's telephone number on the literature before handing it the customer. This will help him remember that he saw the product at your store, even if he doesn't purchase the item on this trip.

IX. OVERCOME OBJECTIONS

It is important to understand that objections are usually buying signals. If a customer expresses an objection to making a purchase, it often means they are very close to actually purchasing the product. But customers often fear making the wrong decision or even buyer's remorse. Instead of asking more questions, they make objections you must overcome to close the sale.

Acknowledge the Objection

Simply stating that you understand the

concern or objection, without agreeing may help you save the sale.

Get to the Real Problem

If you allow the customer to give an objection and then simply leave the store, you will not have helped solve the problem. You also will have lost a sale, which doesn't benefit you or your store.

Take the initiative by asking several final questions before the customer leaves. Focus your questions on the features or benefits your customer liked about the product, and be as specific as possible.

For example, you might say: "It's the right color," "It has the features you asked for" and "It's the right size." If the customer gives you anything but positive responses, you know that you have found the real objection and can focus your efforts.

Give your customer enough time to respond and never interrupt. Listen to the complete problem.

Solve the Problem

You can do this by finding a product that more closely meets their needs, explaining the features differently or matching the color better—whatever it takes to satisfy

your customer. If you truly are trying to help your customer, it is worth the effort.

Remember, it is not critical to sell every customer a product today. You are establishing your credibility as a pet expert, so they will return to your store to purchase needed supplies in the future.

Overcome Price Objections

If asking questions about the product's features and benefits doesn't get to the root of the customer's purchasing objection, the problem may be price. There are two types of price objection:

- **Affordability**—No matter how well you explain the features and benefits, how much the customer has to spend will not change.

However, many products come in good, better or best options. If you have been talking about the better or best grade of a particular product, take one step down.

Explain the differences between the two products. Your customer then can consider which product best meets his needs.

If the customer still wants the more expensive product, perhaps your store has a lay-away or payment plan.

- **Value**—When a customer doesn't feel the product is worth the price, this is a question of value.

Customers see products advertised in the newspaper, on television, radio or even on the Internet. They will come into your store with a price in mind for a particular product. If your price is higher, they will want to know why.

This is where knowing what the competition is offering, especially sale items, can help you help your customers. This allows you to match the product you have to offer with the competition's product as closely as possible, then explain the features that make your product worth a higher price.

Be sure to make the comparison in positive terms whenever possible by emphasizing what your product offers. Customers may lose trust in you if you only try to discredit the competition's products.

At times, the customer may feel the price is just too high. In this instance, you may not have fully established the value of the product. Restate the features, functions and most importantly the benefits. Ask your customer if there is something she wanted that your product does not do. If so, solve their problem by recommending alternatives or offering additional

information. If there are any benefits you have not already mentioned, explain them at this time.

Other Ways to Save the Sale

- **Utilize Store Services**—At times, a customer's purchasing objection is related to something that may not be an issue at all. Perhaps the customer is considering purchasing a large item such as a large aquarium or pet cage, and doesn't have a way to get it home. Or they may not want to perform necessary service, such as cleaning the tank or assembling the cage. If your store doesn't provide these services, it's a good idea to have references for other people or businesses that can help.

- **Make Customers Comfortable**—The right buying decision is determined by your customers' needs:

- o Will the product do the job they need it to do?
- o Can they afford it?
- o Is it what they want?

If the answer to these questions is yes, then you have helped your customers find the right product. However, unless they feel comfortable with the purchase, you may not be able to make the sale. Put yourself in their position. Try to realize

how they feel, then address their concerns. Helping customers overcome their hesitations or objections to making a purchase helps them and your store.

X. CLOSING THE SALE

The last and most important aspect of the sales process is closing the sale.

Many times employees go through the entire sales presentation—presenting the product, answering questions and overcome objections—but forget to ask the customer to take action to purchase the product.

Studies show that nearly half of all salespeople never ask the customer to buy. While customers don't want to be pressured, nearly 8 out of 10 customers expect to be asked to make a purchase.

Here's how to properly close the sale.

- **Listen and Look for Buying**

Signs—Many times the customer will let you know when he is ready for you to close the sale. He might say something like, "This is what I need," or his body language might suggest he is ready by nodding in agreement during your presentation of the product.

- **Ask Closing Questions**—After the

product presentation and overcoming any objections, the right closing question can wrap everything up. This can be as simple as asking the customer, "Can you think of anything else you need to know before you make your final decision?" or "Can I carry the product to the cashier for you?" (for smaller items), or "Do you need any help getting this to your car?" (for large and bulky items). This will either conclude the sales presentation or allow the customer to ask any final questions before making the purchase.

- **Overcome Final Objections**—If the customer asks more questions after you ask the closing question, re-summarize and review the reasons why you think this product is right for the customer. If she is still hesitant, consider mentioning your store's return policy if she isn't satisfied with the product after purchasing it.

XI. INTRODUCTION

After customers have decided to make a purchase, it's time to see if they have everything they need. Whether customers are purchasing a companion animal that will need food, housing, toys and more, or a product for a current pet, there are plenty of opportunities to sell them related products to help them better care for and more fully enjoy their pets. While this is called

add-on or up-selling, it's also an important step to improve customer satisfaction by helping them leave the store with everything they need.

Product Knowledge is Key

To successfully recommend additional products, you must know as much as possible about the various pets and any care challenges. Other chapters in this training course can be a good resource.

Establish Credibility—Sometimes your recommendations lead to educational opportunities that can help give you more credibility as an expert in your field.

For example, if a customer is purchasing a chameleon, recommend necessary equipment to keep the animal healthy, such as a heat lamp for the housing unit. Customers may not understand that reptiles are cold blooded and need to obtain heat from their environment.

Once your credibility is established, customers will be receptive to other product suggestions that will help them keep their companion animals healthy and enjoy their pets more.

Know When to Stop—When recommending additional products that will

complement your customers' purchases, listen and watch closely. They will tell you by their words or actions when you have crossed the line from being helpful to being annoying. With practice, you will learn how to stop before you have gone too far.

Focus on Total Savings—Some products like pet food may be more affordable on a cost per unit basis in larger sizes. For example, most dog and cat food costs less per unit of weight when purchased in larger bags.

Provide Solutions—Most customers come to your store to purchase products to solve a problem. Only the customer can decide whether you are really trying to help or are selling products they really don't need. If you are effective at helping your customers meet their needs, they will come back to your store and ask for your help again and again.

XII. TELEPHONE SALES

There are a number of reasons why customer call your store. They may call ahead to ask if you have a particular product or service, or check if a special order is ready. Even though you are not standing face to face with the customer, you still are engaged in the selling process.

General Guidelines

Telephone sales requires that you do many of the same things you do face to face, such as making a good first impression, speaking professionally and being courteous. How you deal with customers on the phone determines whether they decide to shop at your store and lays the groundwork for a successful sale.

Be sure you completely understand your store's phone policy and procedures for dealing with customers on the phone.

Answer the Phone Quickly—The general rule is to answer the phone by the third ring. Otherwise, customers may become irritated and assume they won't receive good service if they do come to the store. Even worse, they may hang up and decide to go to a different store without even giving you a chance. This call may be the customer's first experience with you and your store, and it will be remembered.

Answer the Phone Courteously—When you do answer the phone, always give the store's name first, followed by your name and "How may I help you?" This gives the caller the immediate impression that you are ready to help.

Write Everything Down—Callers tend to get down to business quickly on the phone and give most of their information in the first few seconds of the call. Don't be caught off guard. Have a pen and paper ready and write down their questions or concerns.

Don't Leave Them Hanging—If you need to put a caller on hold to find an answer or another employee or a manager, let him know it might take a few minutes. Ask if this is acceptable. If not take down the customer's name and phone number and either call him back with an answer or have the appropriate person return the call as soon as possible.

If you page someone using the store's intercom, monitor how long the call is on hold. After several paging attempts, let the caller know that person is unavailable and will return the call as soon as possible.

Thank Them for Calling—This is another example of common courtesy. Before hanging up, thank the customer for calling the store and encourage the caller to call or visit the store for help with any other questions or concerns.