



25 Super Sales Secrets

Linda Richardson: Sales Presentation Success

You can improve your sales success ratio dramatically by learning as much as you can about your prospect and focusing on his needs, says Linda Richardson, president of [The Richardson Company](#), a leadership- and sales-training company in Philadelphia, and author of [Stop Telling, Start Selling: Using Customer Focus Dialogue to Close Sales](#). She offers these secrets for success when making your sales presentation:

1. Build rapport. Before discussing business, build rapport with your prospect. To build rapport, do some homework. Find out if you have a colleague in common. Has the prospect's company been in the news lately? Is he interested in sports? "Get a little insight into the company and the individual so you can make the rapport genuine," says Richardson.

2. Ask a broad range of questions. Ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" response, and that deal with more than just costs, price, procedures and the technical aspects of the prospect's business. Most importantly, says Richardson, ask questions that will reveal the prospect's motivation to purchase, his problems and needs, and his decision-making processes. "Don't be afraid to ask a client why he or she feels a certain way," Richardson explains. "That's how you'll get to understand your customers."

3. Probe deeper. If a prospect tells you, "We're looking for cost-savings and efficiency," will you immediately tell him how your product meets his need for cost-savings and efficiency? A really smart sales person *won't*, says Richardson—he or she will ask more questions and probe deeper: "I understand why that is important. Can you give me a specific example?" Richardson suggests, "Ask for more information so you can better position your product and show you understand the client's needs."

4. Learn to listen. Sales people who do all the talking during a presentation not only bore the prospect, but also generally lose the sale. You should be listening at least 50 percent of the time, notes Richardson. You can improve your listening skills by taking notes, observing your prospect's body language, not jumping to conclusions, and concentrating on what your prospect is saying.

5. Follow up. Write thank-you notes, call the customer after the sale to make sure he or she is satisfied, and maintain a schedule of future communications. "You have to be in front of that client and always show attention and responsiveness," Richardson says. "Follow-up is critical."