

impression – and for people in sales, the handshake is crucial. But what constitutes a good handshake? According to Carol Kinsey Goman – author of *The Nonverbal Advantage: Secrets and Science of Body Language at Work* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008) – it is all about the skin.

“If your handshake does not have enough skin in it – if it is not really palm to palm and web to web and you do not hold it a little while – you have gone a long way toward diminishing your success in the sale,” she said. “People want to feel – they do not know why touch is so crucial, but they want to feel that skin.”

Goman added that the physical contact with a customer does not have to end with the initial handshake. If you touch your clients lightly on the back or shoulders as you are saying their name, this anchors you with the good feeling that everyone has when they hear their own name. This good feeling can also be transferred to your service or product if you touch the client while talking about key benefits and features.

Even if you are not actually touching a client, you should still pay attention to what your hands are doing, as hand gestures can be an effective way to communicate your points. Making open, outward hand gestures convey confidence, while inward gestures can make you look nervous. It is best to allow your hands to fall open naturally and keep your gestures within your waist and shoulders. Also, be sure not to hide your hands during a sales meeting or point at your customer.

Beware of What You Wear. Everyone in sales wants to dress for success, but really they should dress for their clients’ success and only wear clothes that are comparable to those of the client or, at the most, only one step dressier. For example, avoid accessories such as Rolex watches and expensive necklaces, which certainly do make a statement, but not the one that you want to convey to your client. On the other hand, wearing a wedding ring to a sales call can be advantageous because people like to do business with those who are married.

The Right Lights. Sales representatives can leverage the lighting at a trade show to increase the likelihood of closing a deal. Booths that are brightly lit will catch the attendees’ eyes and attract them to the area. But once prospects are inside the booth, the sales team should speak to them in a dimmer area that is a little more calm and relaxed, because no one wants to feel like they are on display.

Reading Customer Cues

Just like a conversation, nonverbal communication is a two-way proposition. As you are sending cues to your client during a sales meeting, your client is also sending signals to you and if you do not read them you can lose a sale. Generally, there are four kinds of signals that sales people should pay attention to when speaking to customers.

Negative. When a customer displays negative nonverbal signals, no matter what they tell you, they are not going to buy your product or service. Do not try to close a deal when you see behaviors like crossed arms, legs, or ankles; draping arms over a chair as if to pull away from you; or tapping feet.

Uncertain. When you see customers display uncertain signals, you should repeat the information that you covered with them. These cues include putting their fingers, glasses or pencil in their mouth; rubbing their head or neck; and rapidly closing and opening their eyes.

Impatient. When clients are impatient – which can be expressed by behaviors such as tapping their fingers, rolling their eyes, or sighing – the best thing that you can do is offer them a cup of coffee or a brochure to hold. This will break these behaviors and allow you to get back on track with your pitch. When you regain your customers’ attention, be sure to speed up your presentation and get to the bottom line so that the customer will no longer be bored.

Positive. The only time you want to try to close a deal is when a customer is displaying positive signals that indicate that they want to buy your product or service. When customers increase eye contact with you, touch you, or casually lean forward toward you, they like what they heard and they are ready to buy.