

What's your Hello

Never stop practicing your people skills



By Jodie Carr

Once read that having people skills is the single most important skill in business, more so than professional skill or knowledge. I'm inclined to agree. The ability to be liked by your customer will win you the sale more times than how good you are at what you do. This powerful concept has stuck with me year after year throughout my career. But it

wasn't until I took a stroll along the beach with my mother a few years back that it really *clicked*.

Allow me to reflect and explain from the beginning. Once upon a time, when I was a bratty and unruly teenager, I remember standing in line at the supermarket checkout with my mom as she struck up a conversation with

the man behind us in line. She started talking to him about the food he was putting on the conveyor belt, and at the time I was just mortified that she was invading his privacy by commenting on his groceries. I just wanted to crawl into a hole. I remember my exact words (mainly because she still pokes fun at me for them today), "Mom, why do you have to talk to *everyone*, strangers don't want to talk to you!" But the truth was, and still is, that strangers love talking to her. The man in the line chuckled at her comments and the cashier even joined in. My mother has the ability to be liked by people within seconds of speaking to them.



ratio?



She brightens people's day by acting like they're long lost friends; by having something in common or by empathizing with the situation in that moment. It's incredible to watch her in action.

Years later, the day we went for that stroll along the beach, mom challenged me to a game of *Hello*. She was sure that she could get more "hellos" back from strangers walking the opposite way than I could. Of course, I accepted her challenge. When we had finished our walk (and she had beat me, by one) I realized that all these years my mom was teaching my sister Hayley and me how to win people over by being genuine and likeable, and how to engage people while having fun with it.

I used to attribute my business sense to my father being a hard-working

entrepreneur (which I'm sure has helped) but today I find myself chatting to strangers in line-ups, while taking public transit, or just saying a quick hello as I pass someone on the sidewalk. There are only a few rules to this game; you can't let one grumpy goat prevent you from saying hello to the next person, you need to be genuine, and you need to smile!

So how is this important in sales? Well, it's everything. Making a connection with people is critical when you want them to buy something from you. If you can spend the first 50% of your consultation talking about nothing dental-related while you simply build rapport, then you have a much higher chance of getting that person's business.

Practice every day, wherever you are, to make an impression on someone. Find a common ground and engage them. It could be a sports team logo they're wearing, a situation you both witnessed, a late bus, a funky smell in the air, the weather, anything. You will be amazed at how the art of talking to strangers will help you to increase your closing ratios.

My mom's closing ratios are still based on how many hellos she can get back while walking along the beach on her winter breaks to Florida. She says her average was about 95% last winter; even mom can't win them all over, but you have to agree, it's not too shabby. ▶

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