

Shut UP!

(You'll sell more stuff)

"People are more apt to buy when they're talking than when you're talking!"

— Ron Willingham, Integrity Selling



By Ronald J. Reahard

The problem with making an F&I 'presentation' today is that the customer immediately recognizes we are trying to sell them, not help them.

In the past, the primary focus of the F&I process was on selling products, not on helping customers. The old way of selling F&I products required spewing forth benefit after benefit until the customer, presumably overwhelmed by the tremendous value of whatever product was being pitched, could not help but buy.

It also meant that the F&I manager did most of the talking.

Old school F&I training programs focused on getting managers to memorize countless "word tracks" and carefully worded "closes" that supposedly could make almost anybody instantly successful in the F&I office. The belief was that if new F&I managers utilized a proven F&I "presentation," practiced their "pitch" until they had it down pat, and had the perfect comeback for any objection, they could win this verbal battle of wits with a customer. The F&I manager could then manipulate the customer into a situation where they had to say "Yes" and buy every F&I product.

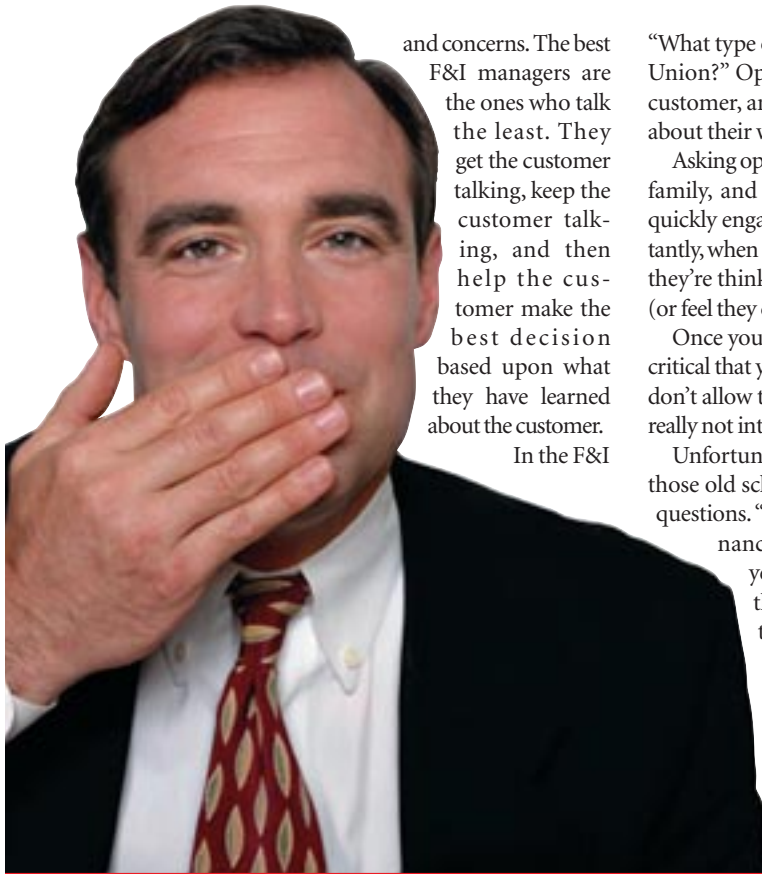
TODAY'S CONSUMER IS DIFFERENT

Well that was then. This is now. The problem with making an F&I "presentation" today is that the customer immediately recognizes we are trying to sell them, not help them. So they turn off, tune out, and stop listening.

Today's consumer doesn't want to be sold anything. They want a knowledgeable professional capable of reviewing the options available in connection with their purchase. They want someone capable of answering their questions, someone who can help them to make informed decisions about those options, based upon their unique needs, with no pressure to buy anything.

In other words, they want someone capable of finding and filling their needs. And that means the customer must do most of the talking.

Today's professional F&I managers know the best way to sell products is to get the customer talking, to enable them to learn the customer's wants, needs,



and concerns. The best F&I managers are the ones who talk the least. They get the customer talking, keep the customer talking, and then help the customer make the best decision based upon what they have learned about the customer.

In the F&I

“What type of relationship do you have with XYZ Credit Union?” Open-ended questions also tend to relax the customer, and enable you to draw out new information about their wants, needs, and concerns.

Asking open-ended questions about the customer’s job, family, and reasons for purchasing a new vehicle will quickly engage the customer in a dialogue. More importantly, when the customer is talking, you can discover what they’re thinking, how they’re feeling, and why they need (or feel they don’t need) the products you have to offer.

Once you ask the customer a question, it is absolutely critical that you shut up and allow them to respond. If you don’t allow them to answer, you send the message you’re really not interested in their response, nor do you care.

Unfortunately, too many F&I managers are still asking those old school, manipulative “If I could, would you?” questions. “If I could get you a better rate, would you finance with me?” “If I could get you the 6-year/100,000-mile plan for the same price as the 5-year/75,000-mile plan, would you want the protection?”

That is not needs discovery. That’s verbal vomit.

REVIEWING THE CUSTOMER’S OPTIONS

The second time it’s important to shut up is when reviewing the customer’s repayment, risk management, and vehicle protection options. A customer can smell

a sales pitch a mile away, and when you provide more than a basic explanation of an option, they realize you’re trying to sell them, not help them.

Simply tell the customer what each product is, and what that product does. “Credit life pays off the loan in the event of your death.”

When the customer doesn’t get the sales pitch they were expecting, they will start asking questions and will volunteer reasons as to why they don’t think they need a particular product. This will open up a dialogue about the product, allowing you to focus on what is important to the customer, and why, in their particular situation, a particular product may be especially important.

RELATING PRODUCT BENEFITS

The third time you have to shut up is after giving the customer a product benefit that applies to their situation. You may know 25 benefits of a particular product, but the only benefits the customer cares about are the ones that apply to them.

If you relate benefits that don’t apply to their situation, the customer quickly loses interest in the product being discussed. Even if the benefits do apply to their situation, after you give them five or six in a row, it becomes a sales pitch, because the customer realizes you’re not trying to help them, you’re trying to sell them. *(continues next page)*

office, the ideal talk to listen ratio is 70/30 — with the customer doing 70 percent of the talking. The more you listen to the customer, the more inclined he or she will be to like you, trust you, and listen to what you have to say. Until and unless a customer likes you — and trusts you! — you can’t sell them anything.

Selling F&I products is like building a house. Just as the most important part of a house is its foundation, the most important part of a sale is the needs discovery process. If we don’t discover any customer needs, we have no foundation on which to build the sale of our products.

We only learn customer needs when they’re talking, not when we’re talking. One of the most important things every F&I manager has to learn is when to talk, and when to shut up. There are five times when it is absolutely essential that you concentrate on talking less and listening more.

THE NEEDS DISCOVERY PROCESS

The first time you have to shut up is during the needs discovery process. Good needs discovery requires engaging the customer in a conversation by asking open-ended questions, and then allowing them to respond.

Closed-end questions can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no,” while open-ended questions encourage the customer to respond in their own words and ways.

Make your point, shut up. Make your point, shut up. “Since you’re not putting cash down, and you’re financing this for 72 months, the GAP protection would be especially important in your case.” Give the customer one or two reasons why in their situation a product would be of benefit to them, and then allow them to respond.

If they give you an affirmative response, you have earned the right to ask a closing question. You can talk yourself out of a sale if the customer is ready to buy, but you’re still relating benefit after benefit after benefit. On the other hand, if the customer is not yet ready to buy, when you shut up, they will provide you with the reason why.

ask it, shut up! We have all heard the old sales expression “The first person who talks... loses.” Actually, that’s only true if you’re the first one to talk, because if the customer talks first, everybody wins. Either they buy the product, or they give you a reason why they don’t think they need it.

Whenever you decide it’s time to ask the customer for a decision, you must allow them to make their decision, because the customer resents your interference at this point. When you attempt to influence the customer’s decision after asking them to buy, it’s because you’re expecting them to say “no.” In sales, you tend to experience what you expect. Anticipate a “no,” but expect a “yes.”



Give the customer one or two reasons why in their situation a product would be of benefit to them, and then allow them to respond.

RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIONS

The fourth time it’s important to shut up is after responding to a customer’s question, objection, or concern. When a customer expresses a concern or raises an objection to a product, you have to relate a benefit that applies to their situation, and then shut up.

The first objection, for example, “I can’t afford it,” is seldom if ever the real objection. You must allow the customer to tell you why they don’t think they need a product. Only then can you respond with the appropriate benefit.

Keep in mind, selling is not a debate. Selling is not an argument. Selling is helping customers make the right decision based upon their unique situation.

When the customer realizes you are trying to help them, not sell them, they are very receptive to hearing what you have to say, because they know it is in their best interest to do so.

ASKING THE CLOSING QUESTION

The fifth time you have to shut up is after asking the customer a closing question. There are many ways to ask a customer to make a decision to buy. Once the customer has given you an affirmative response or indicated they are ready to buy, you must give them an opportunity to do so by asking a closing question.

Certainly, the best closing questions help make it easy for the customer to say yes, such as “What day of the month would you like the payment to fall on?” or “Which plan do you think would work best for you, the gold or the platinum?”

Whatever type of closing question you ask, once you

TALK LESS, LISTEN MORE

Increasing sales and profits in the F&I office requires talking less, and listening more. To discover customer needs, you must first ask open-ended questions, then shut up and allow the customer to respond, in order to engage them in a dialogue.

Next, review the customer’s options, simply tell them what each product is, what it does, and then shut up. Don’t launch into a sales pitch!

As you begin discussing the products, give the customer one or two benefits that apply to their situation, make your point, and shut up. If they ask a question, answer it. If they give you an objection, give them another benefit and shut up.

When you determine it’s time to ask the customer to buy, ask a closing question, shut up and allow them to make their decision.

If you want to help more customers in the F&I office, and help yourself in the process, just remember that if you shut up... you’ll sell more stuff! ■

Editor’s note: Ronald J. Reahard is president of Reahard & Associates, Inc., a national F&I training company providing custom tailored in-dealership F&I training programs, consulting services, and real-world solutions designed to increase both F&I income and customer delight. Reahard is an AFIP Certified Course Instructor, and conducted the F&I Workshop “16.3 Ways To Explode F&I Income... and Delight Customers!” at the 2002 NADA Convention in New Orleans. He can be contacted at ron@go-reahard.com.