

10 ethical questions to ask yourself before closing the sale

by LuAnne Speeter

I was asked to bid on a marketing project recently. While preparing the bid, I found that I needed to clarify my stance on certain business practices. Specifically, I stated to my prospect that a form of partnership he was seeking was not permissible within my ethics and posed a conflict of interests.

In other words, I knew that type of partnership would make me feel disingenuous and possibly cause me to lose sleep down the road.

In our day-to-day business dealings, most ethics-based decisions are cut-and-dried. Companies often have codes that specify what's acceptable and what isn't. But in the sales field, when deals are often made on-the-fly, requiring flexibility and innovation, we're tempted to push the ethical boundaries. So it's especially important to not only know your company's code of ethics (the "letter of the law"), but also apply moral standards (the "spirit of the law") to situations that aren't so black-and-white.

Sometimes being ethical means you sacrifice a sale. But clarifying your position upfront helps you avoid an uncomfortable situation or damaging legal ramifications.

Temptations and traps to avoid

- Misrepresenting your product or service
- Price fixing
- Bait-and-switch practices
- Surprise charges and add-ons after the sale
- Misuse of proprietary data and customer lists
- Padding an expense account
- Badmouthing a competitor
- Kickbacks to the buyer
- Unauthorized signing of agreements

Whether or not your company has a defined code of ethics, defining and following certain guidelines are not only common sense, but good business.

Ethically responsible questions to keep in mind

1. Do I know these claims to be true or am I just saying them because it guarantees a sale?
2. Am I doing my best to educate the customer about the product before the sale?
3. Do I understand the terms of the sales policies and what's legally binding?
4. Can this data be divulged or is meant to be proprietary?
5. When quoting statistics, do I know the primary source and if it's reliable?
6. Do I know federal and state laws that apply to the company's products and warranties?
7. Am I making clear what triggers any claims to a money-back guarantee?
8. Do I always think twice before saying anything negative about a competitor, another customer or a fellow employee?
9. Do I ask permission before using a testimonial from a satisfied customer?
10. Am I focusing on solving my client's problem or am I just intent on making the sale?

From your personal experience, what would you add as #11?

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