
The Essential Steps of an Arborist Sales Interaction

Part I: Building the Foundation

By Nicholas Crawford



When you meet a customer, it may be for only a few minutes, but you are walking in with years of preparation. Your ability to wield that experience in a sensible way will make you a salesperson who can walk out of every interaction with a takeaway, whether it's a sale, a referral, or positive impression that will lead to a future sale or referral. Your time is valuable so use these interactions to make the most of it.

Likeability

This initial interaction seems trivial, but it determines the fate of the rest of the conversation. Good salespeople know this while order-takers either blow it off or screw it up. It's easy when a little old lady thinks you're so cute, or if you and the customer already share a mutual admiration for each other. Perhaps you've worked together many times with great results.

The true challenge is when you start at a disadvantage. Say you've made them wait for an hour because you ran late without telling them. Or they're stressed because dealing with a tree emergency is the last thing they want to think about. Or your colleague has bungled things so badly that it's up to you to salvage the relationship.

How do you do this? First, agree with me that this step is critical. If you couldn't possibly care any less about getting this sale or about the reputation of your business, then spare yourself and stop reading. If sales is what keeps you alive, then know that a sales interaction, all the way to the completion of the work, and the referral of you to all their friends, boils

down to positive momentum. Building that feel-good sense at the outset is essential because there will be bumps and mishaps later, in and out of your control.

We prefer to buy from someone who makes us feel good and prefer to buy things that make us feel good. You are setting this up now. The goal is to establish that you either like each other or at the very least, like the same things. In this scenario, you both want what's best for their property. You smile, you shake hands, you start with a friendly greeting. You say something positive about their home or business. You admire their yard, their neighborhood. You talk first about things that you agree on. Yes, this is a wonderful tree. Yes, this is a horrible tree. This customer's theory about what to do is exactly right. You listen. You nod your head and say mmhmm as they talk. You never make a disingenuous comment. Their confidence is growing.

Let's say things start out on the wrong foot. You should show up on time because that is the first test of whether you will do what you say you will do. If you arrive late, I trust that you called to say you were running late. When you walk in, the reflex is often to apologize profusely as a way of atoning. A better way is to thank them for waiting for you. It helps to put the train of thought back onto a positive track. If you or a colleague did something worthy of an apology, say it. Get it out there then get back into things by saying that you want to make it right. Now on to business.

Trust

Are you just a friend from the neighborhood looking at their trees? Of course not. You are the expert! The time to differentiate yourself is early on. If your company has a professional reputation, vehicles, and advertising, this gives you a head start.

Never lead by telling the customer about your credentials as a Certified Arborist. If they ask, confirm and elaborate. You are better off telling them a brief (one sentence) story about yourself. I tell folks that I grew up in a family tree and landscape business. No one actually cares about the details, but they have a mental checkbox to tick, "Is the person I'm talking to qualified?"

Use language like, "What we found works in these situations is to..." because it reinforces your knowledge and experience.



If they wanted Uncle Harry’s theories on trees, you wouldn’t be standing there. “A couple weeks ago, we had a similar situation down the block where we were able to...” hits on multiple levels: you have experience, you know their area, someone they might know recently trusted you, and you resolved the issue.

The trust step is an intuitive one. Few salespeople skip this one. But some hit it way too hard. One way to really screw it

up is by using jargon or by coming across as overconfident. If you’re a man speaking to a woman, you can be on thin ice. Women are already hyperaware of men overruling their decisions or talking down to them.

If you’re physically taller, take a step back, or even a step down so you’re at eye level. Use every day language. Even if you’re trying to be specific with technical terms, save it for your fellow arborists. The guy you’re talking to just wants to understand your point and has no desire to go through a dictionary later to figure out what the heck you just said. Keep this tone going because things are about to get really serious.

Catch the next issue for “Part 2: Sealing the Deal” as this series continues!

Nicholas Crawford grew up in his family's tree and landscape business in Milwaukee, WI, contributing to the tree care and plant health care operations. Now living in San Francisco, he is The Davey Tree Expert Company's Board Certified Master Arborist Representative for the city, navigating challenges of big trees in small spaces. He meets with customers and oversees crews every day. He earned his Bachelor's Degrees in Urban Forestry at the University of Wisconsin-Steven's Point and MBA at UW-Milwaukee. Currently, he serves as a board member of the Society of Commercial Arboriculture and a volunteer for the Western Chapter ISA and Friends of the Urban Forest.

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