

A LOOK INSIDE THE BIGGEST SALES COMPETITION IN THE U.S.



BY **ELLEN ELDRIDGE**, reporter for [Sales Mastery](#)

Following is a peak inside one of the longest running sales competitions in the U.S. Held at Kennesaw State University in Georgia each year, the National Collegiate Sales Competition began in 1999 and is the largest and oldest role-play competition in existence. Participants from university sales programs around the world convened for this year's competition. Let's meet a few of the future sales leaders . . .



By the time the hum of the career fair quiets, the only things the four finalists hear are their thoughts. The National Collegiate Sales Competition students wait from 10:30 a.m. until the awards banquet at noon, to find out who placed first. "I'm very satisfied with my performance," finalist Ted Kirk said shortly after the last round completed. "It was fun."

Kirk, a Haworth College of Business student from Western Michigan University, had the privilege of competing first in the finals round. "I got to see everyone compete after me," he said. "It'll be a close decision and I wouldn't want to be a judge, but overall I'm very happy with my performance." Kirk had never participated in a competition, yet he walked away second overall.



Ted Kirk first runner up



Women finalists NCSC

The other finalists, who were all women, talked about the power of the mind. Moriah Taliaferro, a senior from Florida State University, explained her biggest revelation from NCSC: there are no limits to what she can do, when she sees it happen in her mind. She won third runner up in the NCSC. "I really learned a lot about the power of the mind," Taliaferro said. "I visualized getting through each and every round."

A team from the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) talked about making it to the quarterfinals. Jawwad Bain, a senior, and Abbey Hagin, a junior, arrived at NCSC prepared. They and their alternate teammates had been preparing since February. Though their program is only three years old, Bain said the coach, Dr. Howard Dover, works to build the team up—and then starts throwing curveballs. "There are schools that have been coming here for 17 years; UTD is on its third year" Bain said, adding that he felt a bit "star struck" when he first arrived.

UTD goes to multiple different competitions every year, and Bain competed in the Western Collegiate Sales Competition. "As a team we came second overall and I placed third in two different segments of the competition," he said, adding that his teammate, Hagin, placed second in the

International Collegiate Sales Competition last year, which helped keep her relaxed when she first arrived in Kennesaw, Georgia, where NCSC takes place annually. "I wasn't really nervous until we advanced to the quarterfinals, and then I was a little nervous because everything changed and it was a new case," Hagin said. Though the UTD team has plenty of experience competing, they knew the competition would be fierce.

One of those competitors, Stuart Smith, of Kennesaw State University, made it all the way to the semi-finals. "It was the big leagues; it was fun," Smith said. "High stress but it was a great time."

In 2014, the home team from Kennesaw State University produced the overall winner, who returned to help coach this year's competitors. "At the university we go to, we know our competition," Hagin said. "Here, we just know they are just as good as we are—the top two students from each university."

But sizing up the competition isn't something that could be done by knowing students' grade point averages, Bain said. "I don't think you could judge this competition at all based on a 4.0 and somebody that goes to class," Bain said.

Both he and Hagin work and go to school full-time, and they maintain averages above 3.0, but say students can be more of an asset for the company they represent by working toward a solid balance of practical and academic experience.

"Your GPA is considered to make sure you're in good academic standing, but what they really look for is somebody who's teachable and reachable," Bain said about the process of selecting the NSCS team that will represent UTD.

Teach-ability, reach-ability and follow up are the qualities that help most in a sales career as well as in competitions. Other factors that helped students in the competition included so much rehearsal that the rounds felt like second nature, said Valerie Vaughn, a senior from Baylor University who earned recognition as the second runner-up.

The overall winner of NCSC in 2015, Ashton Carter, said she was "not even a business student, so to be able to show my skills against them is really cool."

Her communication studies degree from University of Georgia was a great asset.

"I think that my communications major may have been just enough to set me apart from my competitors," Carter said. "In order to get 'in the door' with a prospect, I think it's most important to be likeable."

Carter said communications offers the skills to relate to and mirror another person, and her major taught her how to focus more on having a conversation and building a relationship, rather than following a set-in-stone process. "In sales, you have to be flexible and you have to be confident enough in your conversational skills to think on the spot," she said.

An ability to think on the spot is hindered by nerves, which all competitors battled. Strategies for staying calm included everything from role-playing to naps to high-energy drinks. "I work not to overthink it," Hagin said about how she stays calm. "Stick to the sales process, know the rubric, know what needs to be completed and don't overanalyze it too much."

Vaughn, who made it to the finals and placed third overall, said practicing since January has paid off. But the senior also had the experience of attending NCSC last year as an alternate.



Jawwad Baig and Abbey Hagin

"Coming out of the final round, I felt great. I felt I did the best I could do," Vaughn said. "One of the things that I'm proud that I did was getting the appointment for coffee."

During her challenge Vaughn made it a point to confirm a follow-up appointment with the business owners. The male shop owner resisted and kept asking Vaughn to email him, so she turned to the sister and co-owner to set a date for coffee. Walking out of that round, Vaughn knew she had been through some of the best role-playing scenarios of her life. The experience of competing held value for students not only in winning competitions but also in paving a path toward success in a sales career.

"The experience alone will help me succeed in my career," Kirk said. "I can say that without a doubt, and that means more to me than getting the offers in the first place."

Many of the student competitors graduate in May, and most said they have either accepted a job offer or have several to sort through and make educated decisions about. From the perspective of one of the wildcard round judges, the students' strategies make them top talent ripe for recruiting into sales jobs.

Catalina Vasquez, who came to the NCSC to scout talent for her company, said she was impressed. She found the students she met "extremely good communicators" who showed



Finalists ADP sponsors, overall winner Ashton Carter in center

“professional eloquence.” Vasquez called them “fearless in a sense because it’s an extremely competitive environment.” She added that resiliency has to be in a salesperson’s character because the highly competitive sales industry isn’t always the most glamorous.

“We were scouting talent, but our main goal was to see what the competition was all about and have a sense of the dynamics so we can return next year at a higher level and with the right structure,” Vasquez said. She noted that the company she recruits for hopes to return to NCSC as a gold, platinum or possibly executive sponsor in the future. “It’s valuable and you get so many valuable relationships with coaches and students for the future,” Vasquez said.

Dr. Terry Loe, NCSC’s director, closed the awards banquet with what sounded like a commencement speech, which fit with the fact that many top competitors graduate in May. Loe reminded students that “outside forces” would always be a factor in life and an obstacle to success. An

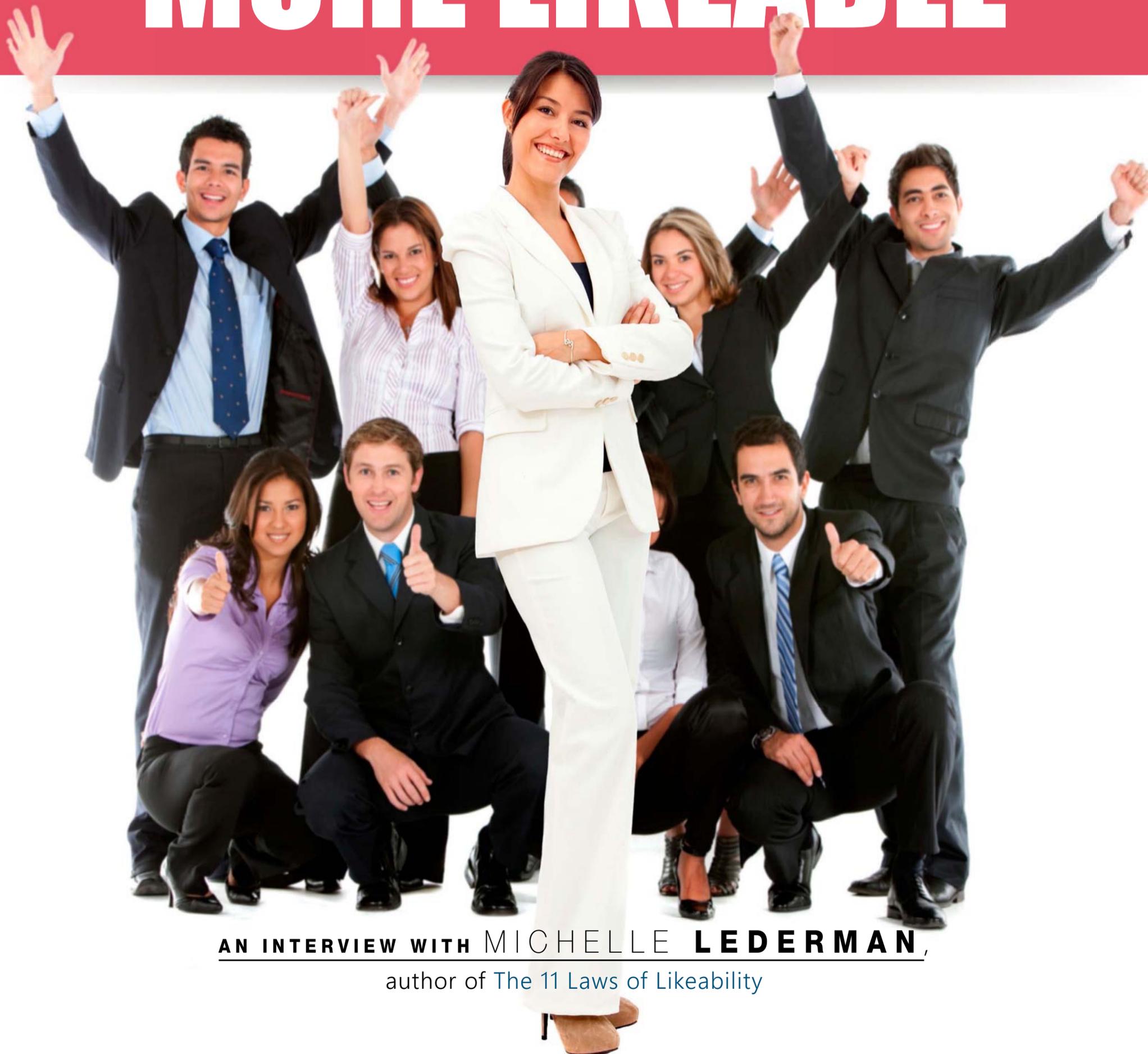
“internal locus of control” combats those forces, he said, recalling the words finalists used about the power of the mind.

“You can’t control everything,” Loe said. “Outside forces do have an effect on us, but with internal locus of control you take responsibility for yourself, your actions. When you stumble, something happens, you get up and you go back at it. That’s how you win. That’s how you win in sales. And that’s how you win in life. Take responsibility for it.”

He then reminded the students that they are in a position to make a difference in the lives of the people around them—especially in the sales area. “Go out there and make a difference in the lives of people around you such as your customers and your prospects. If you do that in a positive way - always keep their interests in mind - we will drive many people to the sales profession.”

[Watch the finalists’ role-play sales calls at the competition.](#)

FOLLOW THESE 3 LAWS TO BE MORE LIKEABLE



AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHELLE LEDERMAN,
author of [The 11 Laws of Likeability](#)

SALESMASTERY

You can't make someone like you. But you can make it easier for them to see what's likeable about you. Research shows time and again that people will choose doing business with someone they like over price and even product quality, because they want to work with someone who is easy to do business with.



Sales Mastery talked with Michelle Tillis Lederman, authentic relationships expert and author of *The 11 Laws of Likeability*. We covered a few of the most important laws you can use to make it easy for anyone to see the likeable you.

The Law of Authenticity

We started with Authenticity. What does it mean to be authentic, and how do you know when you are not? Michelle clarified, "Authenticity is who you are, it isn't what you do." Being authentic means embracing your unique charm and then knowing how to dial it up or down as the situation calls for.

By way of example, Michelle describes herself as a big talker who is drawn to bling. She has MANY conversations about jewelry, purses, kids, dogs She gestures with her hands when she talks. Some people will be turned off by her way, but it is who she is. You can adapt and flex your unique charms and still stay authentic. She practices being a good listener and tones down the talking.

How do you know when you are NOT authentic? When you are uncomfortable in your body and mind, one of two things could be happening:

1. You are being inauthentic. You are faking something and your mind knows it. This is bad.

2. You are out of your comfort zone. You are pushing yourself to do something new. This is great! Keep doing it.

To help cure inauthenticity Michelle teaches people to find their Productive Energy. Say you have a "Have To" event to attend. You are not looking forward to it at all. You could show up with a fake smile and try to cover up that you hate every minute of being there. Or you could call up your Productive Energy.

Think about, "What could be cool about this event? What is one thing I can get excited about if I attend this event?" Maybe the best you can come up with is that the appetizers will be good. Find what makes you feel happy you get to do or want to do when you attend the event. This is good energy you can focus on and connect with. It will help you bring your authentic self to the event.

Another opportunity for inauthenticity is when you are forced to "tow the company line." When you just can't get behind an initiative, you can't say, "I think the company is wrong." And you are inauthentic if you say, "Yay, let's all drink the kool-aid and get behind this." So what can you do to stay true to yourself?

Think about the reason behind why the company is promoting what they are. Is their end goal something you support? If you are in agreement that the results the company wants are a good thing, even if the route to getting there wouldn't be your first choice, you can go forward on the premise, "Imagine if this works. That will be great!" You share the desire for the results and you are willing to suspend your disbelief in the initiative to give it a chance to succeed. Now you don't need to lie. You can be genuine and authentic in your support.

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means authentic
know dial
Authenticity

The Law of Effective Listening

Another law of likeability is being an effective listener. Have you heard that one before? Perhaps a thousand times before? Michelle offered a simple perspective and a tool to help you become a great listener.

As you look at the sea of people who are glued to their cell phones and ignoring whomever is present with them, think about what's their intent. Are they using their phone as a tool to engage and enhance the conversation – taking a quick note for follow up, researching a question that came up? Or are they acting Pavlovian – reacting as soon as their phone beeps to get their attention? If that is the case, then put down the phone and pick up a pen.

The pen is a great tool to keep you engaged as a good listener. When your mind is stuck on what you want to say as a follow up, jot down a note and then refocus your attention fully on the conversation, knowing you won't lose your thought now. In your conversation, focus on

- ◆ Paraphrasing
- ◆ Clarifying
- ◆ Probing

Make listening like a scavenger hunt. Have a goal for what you are looking to find. That will keep you focused on effective listening. Good relationship-centered goals for listening are

How can I help this person?
What do we have in common?

We get lost and distracted when listening without a purpose. When you have a point to your listening, you can stay tuned in much better.

Make listening like a scavenger hunt. Have a goal for what you are looking to find.

The Law of Giving

I believe in this law so much, I give away this whole chapter. Go to my website to download it. When you go to your network, think give, give, give, give, then ask. Giving doesn't just have to be work related. You can give a recommendation for a plumber or a great restaurant. You can give credit for a success. Your network should all know that you welcome being considered a resource. Whether or not your business is a good fit for what they need, your network can still come to you for recommendations anytime.



Don't network for need, and don't network for now. Network for LIFE.



Michelle Tillis Lederman is an accomplished speaker, trainer, coach, and author of two books including *The 11 Laws of Likability* and *Heroes Get Hired* and recently named by Forbes as one of the 25 Professional Networking Experts to Watch in 2015. She recently partnered with Rutgers Executive & Professional Education on the launch of *The 11 Laws of Likability*, a live and online Business Impact Accelerator program.

FLEX YOUR STYLE TO BE LIKEABLE IN ANY SITUATION

BY COACH STEPHANIE **CHUNG**

1
Direct,
Strong-Willed,
Ambitious

2
Friendly and
Enthusiastic

3
Predictable,
Steady, and
Relaxed

4
Perfectionist,
Conservative



As a sales professional, you understand the importance of building personal rapport with your clients. It's the first thing you're taught, and it's the one skill that can always use more improvement.

Webster's Dictionary defines rapport as "a friendly relationship," one that is crucial in maintaining and increasing sales. However, building rapport isn't as easy as it sounds. You must be able to understand how to effectively communicate with people. It's about not only knowing and understanding your preferred communication style, but being able to know and understand the receiver's communication style as well.

Analyze Your Communication Style

Ask yourself a series of questions to get a feel for how you are most comfortable communicating with others.

- ◆ How do I influence others?
- ◆ How do I handle challenging situations?
- ◆ How do I change my approach when dealing with different behavior styles?
- ◆ Am I able to recognize different behavior styles?

Once you've given the answers thought, consider the different styles of communication you deal with on a daily basis. Think of your clients and co-workers, since a large part of your sales job depends on the rapport you build with them.

Modify Communication for Different People

More times than not, people conduct sales calls or pitches with a one-size-fits-all approach. If you want the best opportunity to win the business, it's imperative your communication style is adaptive to the person with which you are communicating. Meaning: If you enjoy details and analytical data and you're communicating with someone who likes to get straight to the point, it's important to adjust your tactics and provide them with the bottom line. Drop the abundance of details unless they request more information. This rule not only applies to sales pitches or calls, but to emails as well. Adapt accordingly to the people around you, and success will be realized sooner than later.

Here are a few suggestions for dealing with the following behavior styles:

- ◆ **Direct, Strong-Willed, Ambitious:** Be clear, specific, brief, and to the point
- ◆ **Friendly and Enthusiastic:** Provide a warm environment, and refrain from drowning them in details, unless they ask for them
- ◆ **Predictable, Steady, and Relaxed:** Present yourself softly, non-threateningly, and logically
- ◆ **Perfectionist, Conservative:** Prepare your presentation in advance, stick to business, and don't exaggerate.



Ultimately people buy from people they feel are competent, genuine, and trustworthy. You establish this through effective listening.

Maintain Your Relationship

Rapport needs to be established throughout the entire sales process, not just the beginning. This also allows the seller/buyer relationship to grow and positions you for referrals down the line. The key to maintaining these relationships is often small things that make a big difference. Channel your energy into delighting and serving your buyer. The question that should constantly be on your mind should be “How can I help them?” When communicating with your client, hone in on ideas or ways that could benefit them. This makes your prospect feel considered, and it makes you seem trustworthy, a very rare feat in today’s world.

Being considerate is pivotal; it’s very often the key in growing relationships that blossom into a profitable sale. People don’t often remember you—but they will remember how you made them feel. Ask as many questions as are needed to understand your prospect, what they value, what they do, and why they do it. This will make you a smarter salesperson, and make it much easier when it comes to focusing in on things that matter most to them.

Listen intently at all times. This shows that you sincerely care and are appreciative of what your client says. Being “heard” is very important in a buyer/seller relationship. Ultimately people buy from people they feel are competent, genuine, and trustworthy. You establish this through effective listening.

Think about the kind of people you choose to do business with or the people you enjoy working with in your field. Ask yourself why they

appeal to you. Is it their work ethic? Is it their attention to detail? Is it their incredible listening skills? Whatever it is that makes them pleasant to work with, try to channel these qualities into your own work habits. Building off of peers that inspire you to be a better salesperson will only benefit you as you work on perfecting your communication skills.



By the same token, take note of the things you don’t enjoy in your work environment or in other sellers. Being pushy, aggressive, or bossy rarely ends in a profitable sale, or a strong rapport with a client. The sooner you are able to determine what works for you and your client, the closer you are to becoming a well-rounded and successful salesperson.



Coach Stephanie Chung is an award-winning executive coach, sales mentor, and business advisor backed by more than 25 years of team management, business development, and sales leadership experience. She assists clients with DISC assessments for a more in-depth look at exploring and mastering different behavior styles and communication techniques.