



THE SALES PRESENTATION—AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AND BUILDING A CUSTOMIZED SYSTEM FOR SUCCESS

DAVID CRUMP, NSCA-CPT

INTRODUCTION

The roles and responsibilities of the current personal trainer are far-reaching and are often quite variable from day to day. Building and maintaining exercise programs, instilling motivation, and coaching training sessions are all common daily duties. However, none of these are possible without first acquiring clients and performing what is often reported as being the least enjoyable aspect of being a personal trainer, selling the service.

Many personal trainers cringe at simply hearing the word “sales.” While they have spent years studying anatomy, exercise programming, and perhaps even the psychology of coaching, the vast majority of fitness professionals have spent less than a handful of hours learning the fundamentals of selling. This lack of education on the subject, combined with the complicated relationship many personal trainers have with money, due partially to their own financial struggles, creates a mental aversion that leads to a personal roadblock on the path to professional success. This aversion can be overcome, however, by reframing the purpose of the sales presentation in the proper light and creating a customized system that will allow a fitness professional to sell their services with integrity; thereby allowing them to help more clients in the process.

REFRAME THE SITUATION

There is a flawed perception that many personal trainers maintain: to sell someone something is to force it upon them or use manipulation to enact a purchase. This is evident in the terms individuals use to describe bad transaction experiences such as a salesperson being referenced as a “used-car salesman” or being called “too salesy,” yet this is not the case when the transaction results in a pleasant purchase. This concept is beautifully illustrated in the famous quote by the late master salesman, Zig Ziglar, that states “people love to buy, but they hate to be sold,” (1). It stands to reason then, that a salesperson can be best rated by how well they align the product with the customer’s need or desire.

Once it is understood that selling is not inherently “bad” or “sleazy,” but rather a way of helping a potential client buy that

which they want and potentially need, a personal trainer can feel more comfortable participating in the process. Therefore, the best way for a personal trainer to proceed is to simply reframe the situation in their mind to accept that their role in the transaction is not to force personal training onto someone, but rather to determine if personal training is right for the potential client, if they are the right personal trainer for the job, and if so, which program fits their needs from an exercise and financial standpoint.

In the case of fitness, customers already know what they want—to look, feel, or move better. The personal trainer then becomes more of an “assistant buyer” than a salesperson. Their role is simply to help the client follow through on their conviction to make a change and ease their concerns of potential failure. When carried out properly, this is the best type of sale because the buyer and seller both win; the client gets the coaching they need to reach their goals and the personal trainer adds a new client to their roster, which also bumps their paycheck and increases their impact in the community.

HOW TO BUILD A CUSTOMIZED SALES SYSTEM BASED ON PROVEN PRINCIPLES

Like most other business-related tasks, a fitness professional must take on in the development of their career, the key to becoming a better salesperson is to develop a process; one that not only includes proven steps, but also reflects their personality and values. Without the combination of the former and latter, it will be impossible for the personal trainer to deliver a winning sales presentation with confidence, a quality that is imperative to a smooth transaction.

While a personal trainer should customize their sales presentation, this cannot be done without first understanding the critical stages of what makes a strong presentation. After comparing many of the “tried and true” methods that have gained popularity, it is quite evident that there are three distinct phases that must be completed on the path to a sale: gathering information, providing an expert recommendation, and asking for the sale. By breaking down each of these phases to understand the purpose as it relates to the whole process as well as opportunities to individualize the

approach, a fitness professional will be able to develop their ideal sales presentation.

GATHER INFORMATION

Anyone that has ever visited a retail store has almost certainly had an employee on the floor ask them “what can I help you with today?,” “can I help you find something?,” or a variance of the two. That is because every potential sale must begin with gathering information or what sales professionals call a “needs assessment.” While it may seem somewhat obvious what a customer or client wants (what you are selling), what is not so obvious are the specific details of those needs, such as the exact type, quantity, and most importantly, why. Drawing out and understanding these fine details takes patience and practice, but can mean the difference between making a big sale or losing a great potential customer.

In fitness, there are two main types of information that must be obtained from a potential customer: psychological and physical. The psychological component of the needs assessment is based on asking great questions so that a personal trainer may understand specifically what a client wants, why that is important to them, and limitations or previous experiences that may hold them back from being successful. This will be of great assistance when it comes to providing a recommendation on what plan may be best for the client. The physical component, on the other hand, is where personal trainers usually shine. This is comprised of health history questions, a body composition assessment, and some type of movement or exercise testing to determine potential current fitness level.

Both of these areas are equally important since a fitness professional cannot deliver the best program without having a complete understanding of the client’s needs. Additionally, once this information has been gathered, it will allow the personal trainer to set the appropriate expectations for the client. This is a practice that is crucial to ensuring the sale and ultimately a good personal trainer/client relationship. For example, if a potential client wants to lose 60 lb or be a world record holder in the deadlift in the next 12 weeks, then it is probably a good idea to let them know how realistic those goals are. Otherwise, they may be quite upset after three months of working together.

The following are a list of the best questions for a psychological needs assessment that will be of great benefit when it comes to recommending a plan of action, which is the next step of the sales presentation:

1. *Have you ever worked with a personal trainer before, and if not, why do you feel that now is the right time to do so?* Hiring a personal trainer is often a big decision for many. Often, there is a key reason that someone is taking their health/fitness more seriously now and it is often a key motivation driver for them.
2. *If you have worked with a personal trainer previously, what were some of the things you liked and disliked and did you see positive results? If you have not worked with a personal trainer before, what has held you back from doing so?* If a client worked with a personal trainer before, these questions

will help determine their previous experiences which will allow the new personal trainer to deliver a better service or match a previous good experience by understanding what they like. If the client has never worked with a personal trainer before, finding out why not can create context as to potential fears and limitations.

3. *What do you think will be your biggest obstacle(s) to reaching your health and fitness goals and as your personal trainer, what do you think you need from me to overcome them?* Having the client discuss their potential challenges will allow them to be more conscious of their situation as well help the personal trainer to identify what to look out for and to proactively develop a plan that will help them side-step potential pitfalls.
4. *When would you say that you felt like you were in the best shape of your adult life? What were you doing then that you are not doing now?* This question challenges the potential client to remember a time when they felt good (or better) about their health/fitness and think critically about the behaviors that produced that outcome. This also helps the personal trainer to identify behaviors that were successful for the client previously and could potentially assist in helping them reach their goals this time around.
5. *If we were to work together for the next 3 – 6 months, what would the ideal outcome for you look like? How would you look and feel?* As possibly the most important question for the personal trainer, the answer to this one perfectly illustrates what the client desires the most and what their level of expectation is. This creates an appropriate opening to discuss how realistic those expectations are and make sure the personal trainer and client are on the same page, so they can move forward as a team.

THE CUSTOMIZED SOLUTION TO THE INFORMATION GATHERING PROCESS

To customize the information gathering process successfully a personal trainer must simply do two things:

1. Ask probing questions that reflect their personality during the psychological assessment so that they may not only understand the potential client’s motivation, but also begin building a bond.
2. Perform a movement assessment that will give them all the information they need to build a solid initial training program for the potential client. This may mean using a formalized system such as the Functional Movement Screen (FMS) or using a self-designed sequence. The method used is not that important, however, it is critical that the personal trainer is very competent in whichever assessment is utilized to formulate a training direction.

PROVIDE AN EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

After conducting a thorough needs analysis, the second phase of a winning sales process is for a personal trainer to use their experience and expertise to make a recommendation on how the potential client should proceed. This recommendation should

THE SALES PRESENTATION—AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AND BUILDING A CUSTOMIZED SYSTEM FOR SUCCESS

clearly articulate what was discovered in the needs assessment while also giving logical reasoning to help the buyer understand why that specific recommendation was made. For example:

“Mrs. Jones, I know that you want to lose about 20 lb, gain strength in your lower body, and decrease your nagging lower back pain. With that in mind, I think we need to work together three times per week in person while also putting together a plan that will incorporate some light activity 1 – 2 days per week on your own.

“During the days that we work together, we will focus on strength training to target your whole body while giving a little extra attention on your lower body and core. This strategy will help reduce your back pain by strengthening your core and hips as well as allow us to teach you how to move well and avoid putting yourself in positions that could exacerbate your back pain. Remember how much better your plank felt just a moment ago when I taught you how to squeeze your glutes?”

“Additionally, by working with you towards healthier nutrition habits and having you perform some cardiovascular exercise on your own, we can expedite your weight loss. Does that sound like a program/plan that might work for you?”

The above example illustrates the purpose of this phase of the sales process by demonstrating the personal trainer’s knowledge and expertise, his/her ability to create a detailed and tangible plan that makes sense to the client, and ultimately create the comfort and buy-in needed for the client to feel comfortable moving forward in working together. This is often the part of the process where fitness professionals make the key mistake of not actually assuming the role of expert and let the client choose their own solution by not taking charge and making a good case for their recommendation. Much like a doctor would not expect their patient to self-diagnose and create their own treatment plan, a skilled personal trainer should not leave the client to determine their own fitness plan.

THE CUSTOMIZED SOLUTION TO PROVIDING AN EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

The key to customizing this phase of the sales process for a personal trainer is for them to have confidence in their skills and clarity on their training philosophy. They must be able to communicate both appropriately to the potential client in order to recommend a course of action that is focused on needs, not just the ticket price.

A fitness professional may start to feel anxiety while making a recommendation on which program is right for the client, knowing that they will soon have to tie a cost to the program. It is imperative, however, that they not let this deter them from presenting the best possible program in lieu of a program that they feel may be too pricey for the client. Instead, a personal trainer should remember that in order to truly help the person in front of them, they must prescribe with integrity while knowing they can always offer other options should the client find the

suggestion beyond their ability. Not to mention, that it is the client’s job to determine what is affordable for them, not the personal trainer’s.

The following are three steps to provide the best recommendation:

- 1. Recall and Explain the Findings from the Assessment(s)**
By recalling the areas of the physical and psychological assessments where the client performed well and the areas where they may have struggled (or potentially will), it creates an opportunity to educate and get both parties on the same page. This will create context when it comes time to provide a solution.
- 2. Suggest a Plan of Action Based on the Findings**
By aggregating all the data from the assessments and getting a read on the client’s needs and personality, it is time to make a recommendation based on what the personal trainer offers as far as programs/plans are concerned. It is important to connect the plan with the reasoning behind it for the client to fully understand. Also, if it is decided at this point that the personal trainer is not properly skilled to handle the client or does not offer a program that works well for their needs, then they must indicate so and possibly refer them to another professional.
- 3. Obtain Client Feedback and Buy-In**
After making the recommendation, it is important to get feedback from the client as to what they think about the plan laid out before them. This will allow the personal trainer to answer questions or concerns as well as get the client excited about getting started. Once the client confirms that the program is the right fit, then it is time to present price and ask for the sale.

ASK FOR THE SALE

After gathering the appropriate information and presenting a program recommendation, the final piece of creating a sale is actually asking for it with the “ask” simply referring to two critical questions being answered: is the potential client willing to pay for personal training and when will they be starting. While that may seem rather intuitive, this is the part of the process where most fitness professionals struggle and many may end up concluding a sales presentation without having asked. Admittedly, there are few things more frightful for personal trainers than having to look someone directly in the eye and ask for hundreds or thousands of dollars.

More often than not, asking for the sale will likely be met with some resistance. This resistance could be anything from the client asking some additional questions about payment options to a flat-out “no.” Knowing that very few sales will feature an instant “yes,” a fitness professional should have a plan ready in case the client is unable or unwilling to commit to the ideal program laid out in the recommendation. Many sales experts might suggest learning or practicing different methods of overcoming objections, but most personal trainers would probably be better suited to instead

sell the client a lesser training option initially. This will allow them the opportunity to build more value in their service over time and provide an opportunity to have the client upgrade to a more expensive program at a later time.

One pitfall that should be avoided for an experienced personal trainer is offering a discount or price reduction as a sale-closing strategy. This will send the wrong message to potential clients and indicate that a discount is always available should that client present resistance again. Not all sales presentations will end with a “yes,” and that is okay. Missed sales are a learning opportunity and likely an indication that the fitness professional did not build enough value in their service or that the client was not the right fit for the service. No matter how a personal trainer decides to proceed when presenting pricing and trying to close a sale, full transparency should be non-negotiable.

THE CUSTOMIZED SOLUTION TO ASKING FOR THE SALE

Identify and use strengths—there is a famous saying that, “people don’t buy training, they buy trainers.” This statement highlights the fact that people have many options when it comes to personal training, the biggest differentiator is the way a personal trainer delivers that experience. With that in mind, each personal trainer should identify which areas they excel at in comparison to their peers and make that a focal point of their presentation. Often by explaining to potential clients why they are uniquely qualified to help them reach their goals, a fitness professional can reduce the biggest fear most new exercisers have: that they will likely fail in the pursuit of their goals.

1. Restate and Highlight Relevant Solutions

For many, joining a fitness facility or purchasing personal training is a large commitment. While a potential client may certainly want to do it and see the value in the service, making a large purchase can seem intimidating. One of the best ways to work through this challenge is simply to talk through it. A coach should remind the client of their own words during the needs assessment and restate how working together will ensure success and reconfirm that the client does indeed believe that the plan presented is the correct one for them. This is not meant to manipulate, but rather to strengthen confidence in the plan and display commitment on the personal trainer’s part as well.

2. Have a Back-Up Plan

A sales presentation can take a lot of twists and turns, making it important for a personal trainer to be adaptable. Should a potential client not be able to purchase the best plan for them, the personal trainer should be able to offer them an alternative that may be easier for them to act on. Whether that means less training frequency, a lower level offering, or even a less expensive personal trainer, a true professional realizes that the best interaction always results in the client finding the best solution to their problem(s).

CONCLUSION

Many personal trainers struggle to achieve their ideal level of career success due to having lacking knowledge, interest, or confidence in performing sales presentations. However, an integral part of coaching people to greatness is helping them get out of their own way or putting them at ease with making an investment in their health that will pay dividends. Armed with improved and practiced sales presentation skills, personal trainers will be more adequately prepared to help more clients and therefore create a bigger impact in their community. By reframing their perception of being a salesperson, learning the critical components of a sale, and ultimately customizing the process to fit their unique personality and strengths, this all becomes possible.

REFERENCES

1. Ziglar, Z. *Ziglar On Selling*. Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, TN; 1991.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Crump is an entrepreneur, fitness business consultant, and personal trainer. Since entering the fitness industry in 2006, he has climbed the ranks of corporate management, opened multiple fitness facilities, and helped hundreds of clients improve their lives. Crump has been featured in PFP Magazine, Personal Training Quarterly, and is a regular contributor to The Personal Trainer Development Center. Additionally, he currently owns and operates Spark Fitness, a personal training studio in Orlando, FL, and works with trainers around the country to help them achieve their dream of opening their own gym.