

## Edward Petersmarck: “How To Be Great At Sales Without Seeming Salesy”



By: Mitch Russo - April 16, 2020

As a part of my series about how to be great at closing sales without seeming pushy, obnoxious, or salesy, I had the pleasure of interviewing Edward Petersmarck, executive director of practice development at M&O Marketing.

Willing to learn about the needs of those he works with, Edward has invested decades of his life to understanding how to navigate the industry with great impact. He provides resources needed so that financial planners can improve their business models, and he does this with passion. Edward has proven time and again that your goals can be achieved when you put in the work.

**Thank you for doing this with us! Before we dig in, our readers would like to learn a bit more about you. Can you tell us the “backstory” about what brought you to this career path?**

I came to the world of retirement planning from that of Collateralized Loan Obligations. I'm drawn to retirement planning by the notion of shepherding wealth from the many risks that retirees face with their money, sometimes without their knowledge or understanding.

**Can you share with our readers the most interesting or amusing story that occurred to you in your career so far? Can you share the lesson or take away you took out of that story?**

I took a call from a client one day during a market correction, it was obvious that she was crying. She told me that her tears were both of joy and pity — She was so happy with the security we were able to provide her for her money, she hadn't lost a single penny, but she was saddened by the idea that her neighbors, friends and family who must be struggling with the major losses. It helped me realize the true impact of what we do. That call gives me purpose, I remember it every day when I walk into the office.

**Are you working on any exciting new projects**

**now? How do you think that will help people?**

Yes, new projects are consistent here. I am fortunate to work with an organization that is constantly evolving. The first question we ask ourselves when considering a new project is “how will this help our clients” if we cannot clearly define and measure that, we move on to the next idea.

**None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?**

There are so many that it would be impossible to cite all those to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. Without my wife, I likely wouldn't be here at all; she is perhaps the one to whom I owe the most.

My father, who was a successful salesman, gives me regular advice. There are two others that cannot be ignored, Tom Balames, Principle of Accelerated Assets and Dennis Brown, Owner and CEO of M&O Marketing have both provided the types of opportunity, guidance, insight and direction that anyone other than myself might have made much more of. Any successes that I have found here have been as a direct result of my relationships with them.

**For the benefit of our readers, can you tell us a bit why you are an authority on the topic of sales?**

I suppose that, in my short period of time as a sales and practice development coach, I have been fortunate enough to build a substantial book of business together with my clients. I believe that makes my clients more the authority than it makes myself. More likely it is because I am constantly surrounded by the best in the business — Greats David Polus and Roop Raj, to name only a couple of many, whose messaging I am fortunate enough to be able to not only implement but to pass along.

**Let's shift a bit to what is happening today in the broader world. Many people have become anxious from the dramatic jolts of the news cycle. The fears related to the COVID-19 pandemic have understandably heightened a sense of uncertainty and loneliness. From your experience, what are a few ideas that we can use to effectively offer support to our families and loved ones who are feeling anxious? Can you explain?**

I believe that answer lies in Faith. Faith in whatever God you might know, faith in that humanity will ultimately prevail, faith in the love, trust and generosity

of those around you, faith in the knowledge of those you trust as your expert advisors, whichever aspect of your life with which you might trust your advisors to direct you, faith in yourself for having the capacity to withstand circumstances of this nature.

**Ok. Thanks for all that. Let's now jump to the main core of our interview. As you know, nearly any business a person will enter, will involve some form of sales. At the same time, most people have never received any formal education about how to be effective at selling. Why do you think our education system teaches nearly every other arcane subject, but sales, one of the most useful and versatile topics, is totally ignored?**

Salesmanship is a powerful skillset and can be used to enact greatness, good or evil, used to educate or to intentionally deceive. While there may not be much formal college curriculum aimed specifically at the “art” of selling, there are many courses and a ton of literature out there on a multiplicity of different selling techniques. Zig Ziglar's series, among others with similar ideologies, have been particularly significant for me.

**This discussion, entitled, “How To Be Great At Sales Without Seeming Salesy”, is making an assumption that seeming salesy or pushy is something to be avoided. Do you agree with this assumption? Whether yes, or no, can you articulate why you feel the way you do?**

There is a big difference between salesy and pushy. I don't believe in being “salesy,” which I associate with working to convince someone that they need something they might not actually need. I find no shame in being pushy, however. People are bombarded with messaging these days and working to differentiate yourself as someone there to educate, to help, to meet a need can be difficult amid the noise. I've found persistence to be the best weapon to combat that. I believe that there is an art to being persistent and considerate simultaneously, which might be the most valuable skill that I had to learn.

**The seven stages of a sales cycle are usually broken down to versions of Prospecting, Preparation, Approach, Presentation, handling objections, Closing, and Follow-up. Which stage do you feel that you are best at? What is your unique approach, your “secret sauce”, to that particular skill? Can you explain or give a story?**

Easy, preparation. Back to Zig Ziglar, “success occurs when opportunity meets preparation”. Roop Raj would say, “successful selling is where likeabil-

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ity meets credibility,” a similar message. Prospecting is a fairly simple part of the cycle; you do what works and not what doesn't and everything works until it doesn't. I see prospecting as creating the opportunity to approach, and to approach anything unprepared is unlikely to allow the remainder of the cycle. I pride myself on my preparation for any engagement I pursue. To be adequately prepared in sales, you must know what you have to sell and be able to actively listen to your prospect to determine if they need what you have. If there is a secret sauce to selling, it's listening.

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**Lead generation, or prospecting, is one of the basic steps of the sales cycle. Obviously, every industry will be different, but can you share some of the fundamental strategies you use to generate good, qualified leads?**

Know your audience and stay active. You must be fishing where the fish are if you plan to catch fish. Prospecting amongst an audience that does not need what you have to sell will likely not equate to successful selling. Define your audience, know who you're selling to and make it about them. Be active! They say you can't hit a ball you've never swung at.

**In my experience, I think the final stages of Handling Objections, Closing, and Follow-up, are the most difficult parts for many people. Why do you think 'Handling Objections' is so hard for people? What would you recommend for one to do, to be better at 'Handling Objections'?**

Being proficient at objection handling is no secret. If you actively listen to your prospect and know what you're selling, it should be natural to sell those that need what you have. Understand the root of the objection and provide a solution, it's as easy as that. Always remember Zig, “stop selling and start helping.” It can be difficult sometimes to listen, rather than to wait to talk, but the difference in the outcome of either is easy to see.

**'Closing' is of course the proverbial Holy Grail. Can you suggest 5 things one can do to successfully close a sale without being perceived as pushy? If you can, please share a story or example, ideally from your experience, for each.** I believe that keeping your prospect actively engaged throughout your presentation should create a natural close. Ask relevant questions, listen to

the answers. Figure out what matters most to your prospect and clearly articulate how you can meet that need. Help your client completely understand how your solution meets their particular problem. Set your prospects expectations appropriately, determine next steps. Ask for the sale — so many people fail to do that — you must ask for the sale if you expect to make the sale.

I had a closing call this week with an advisor who was “happy” with my competitor when he picked up the phone just three days before. Thankfully, before he hung up on our initial call, I was able to get a question in that piqued his curiosity enough to engage with me. 97 minutes later, he had told me where his successes were, his failures, his goals and his greatest challenges. It was easy to build a plan to address his challenges and exploit his strengths to reach his goals because, together, we have the resources to do that — and my competitors may too — all it took was a series of the right questions, some active listening and succinctly articulating how we might approach an ongoing challenge differently. He agreed that repeating the same behaviors and expecting different results was not a viable plan. He agreed that the plan I presented to him was in his interest to pursue and we set a course of action to do that. One of my colleagues says all the time, “it's not rocket science,” and he's right. It's not.

**Finally, what are your thoughts about 'Follow up'? Many businesses get leads who might be interested but things never seem to close. What are some good tips for a business leader to successfully follow up and bring things to a conclusion, without appearing overly pushy or overeager?**

I've been told that it takes an average of 5 follow ups to close a sale, yet only 1% of salespeople make it to that 5th touch. The first follow up rule I follow is using multiple channels, as different prospects have different communication preferences. The second rule I follow is to always clearly define the next step — when will the prospect hear from me next and with what expectation? When might I hear from them and with what expectation? I learned early on, as a general rule, to never ask someone for time without specific intent and to make sure that

intent has purpose for that someone. Lastly, make sure that each follow up is tailored to your specific audience — no one likes a general sales approach and everyone likes to feel heard.

**As you know there are so many modes of communication today. For example, In-person, phone calls, video calls, emails, and text messages. In your opinion, which of these communication methods should be avoided when attempting to close a sale or follow up? Which are the best ones? Can you explain or give a story?**

All of them are best. Your prospect will tell you how they prefer to be communicated with most often times and, if they haven't, ask. In early stages of prospecting, before you've engaged a specific audience, your results will determine what's most effective in drawing that audience. If it's not working, do not repeat the same behavior and expect a different result.

**Ok, we are nearly done. Here is our final "meaty" question. You are a person of enormous influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the greatest amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger.**

I was taught early in life by my Grandmother, Mary Elizabeth Petersmarck, that a simple act of kindness can change the world. It can be hard to smile sometimes, yet even a simple smile to a stranger might change their day with positive momentum. Contributing an intentional act of kindness each day I believe might bring the most amount of good to the greatest amount of people.

**How can our readers follow you online?**

I stay active on both Facebook and Instagram and contribute frequently to different financial media outlets, most of which published digitally.

You can connect with me on LinkedIn here: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/edwardpetersmarck>

Follow me on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/edwardpetersmarck1/>

**Thank you for the interview. We wish you only continued success!**

Edward Petersmarck, vice president of business development at M&O Marketing. He uses his underwriting, sustainability and complex case design experience to help financial planning professionals successfully manage and develop their practices.

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