

Windsurfing Salesmanship

In selling, as in windsurfing, you will be more successful if you use proper technique. A trial and error approach may get the job done, but you will spend lots of time floundering. With the right system you can "plane" through sales instead. The key is to be methodical. There are certain steps that must take place in every retail sale. No two sales are exactly the same of course, but they all incorporate the same elements. If you are conscious of making all the steps your chance of closing the sale is high and you will make more money. Best of all, you eliminate guesswork from your sales presentation. By knowing where you are going when start talking, you will never "pitch yourself into a corner".

Step one - greeting - take control of the sale from the start Use an effective greeting. An effective greeting is one that gets the customer's attention and makes him or her want to talk to you. A question that can't be answered with "yes" or "no" is the best bet. You want to get the customer into a conversation. NEVER ask "may I help you". This is the most lame, useless, predictable opening statement in the world! The customer will (predictably) answer "no, just looking".

Of course you can help him! You are a highly trained, professional salesperson, and total windsurfing guru. He is an under informed wind junkie with yucky equipment. But he came to your shop for a reason - he needs to buy something. Your mission is to find out what it is. Start with an opening statement that isn't too formula. "How's it going today?" will do. "Hi. What brings you into the shop today?" or "What can I show you?" is better than "can I help you". Something more individual is better still. If you know the customer is a windsurfer try "did you get out (last windy day)? If the customer has a T-Shirt from a resort or regatta, ask "Wow! Where'd you get that cool T-Shirt?" or "Wow! When were you in Maui?" or "Do you go there often? I hear it's great". If the customer has been in the shop before, ask how the last purchase is working out. Be creative. Remember to smile. Your goal at this stage is to make friends with the customers and get them talking. Don't worry about selling anything - yet.

Step two - qualify - get information. At this point you've determined that the customer really does want to buy something. It's time to qualify. Qualifying is nothing more than getting information about the customer so you can make a good recommendation. This information is the "ammunition" for your sales presentation. Don't rush into a sales pitch. The more you qualify, the better your chance of selling the right thing and satisfying the customer. Don't assume that the item that someone comes in asking for is the right choice. People often get interested in a particular product for the wrong reasons. Remember - YOU are the expert. Don't be arrogant or cocky about it, but take control of the sale. It helps to make the customer aware of the selling process, as in " Let me ask you some questions about where and how you sail, than I'll show you the gear that's most appropriate."

By telling the customers what to expect, YOU are in the driver's seat, and you assure them that you have their best interest in mind. Now find out everything you can about them. Try to make it a conversation, not an interrogation. The more you know the better, but the bare minimum is: Where does your customer windsurf? How well? In what conditions? How often and how enthusiastically? With what equipment? What are his or her priorities? (ie - speed junkie, wants to learn new moves, wants to pass friends, wants to look cool, etc.) Does he or she plan to race or compete? Is this new item to add to a quiver, or replace something? What happened to the old one? What did he or she like about the old item? Hate? Have they shopped for this stuff before? Where? What have they seen? You must be a bit of a detective to figure some of this out.

Customers will tell you where they sail, but may not be honest or reliable about other things. Many people will over or under state their ability. NO one will tell you what they are really willing or able to spend. NEVER EVER ask "how much do you want to spend?". Everyone wants to spend as little as possible. If you leave it up to them they'll ask \$10,000 worth of performance for \$199. YOU are the expert, remember? Use clues from their other equipment, travel habits, etc. to figure how dedicated they are and how much they will spend. By fully "arming yourself" with information, you can make a recommendation with confidence, and overcome objections later on. If you know the customer's likes and dislikes, you know what "buttons to push" in your presentation.

Step three - establish credibility for yourself, your store, your products. This leads into the actual product presentation, but begins as soon as the customer walks in the door. People need a reason to buy. A reason to buy your product, from you, today. If the store looks good - neat, with effective displays, you have a head start. If you look and sound professional, you seem more believable. Back up your points with examples. Tell stories that reinforce your point. NEVER LIE - people can smell b.s., but don't hide your light under a bushel either. If you know that your shop has the best selection in town, or that the sail you are recommending is used by the world champion, or that your board survived hitting that barge - do tell! These are all reasons to believe.

You must be able to tell them why they should buy a particular product, why they should buy it today, why they should buy it from you. What you tell them must be true, and you must be able to back it up. Another good tool is the "guru" technique. Make predictions that come true. This isn't as hard as it sounds. No doubt there are many things you've experienced windsurfing that your customers are just discovering. Since the learning curve is pretty much the same for most people, you can guess the problems beginners and intermediates are having, and recommend solutions via gear, technique, or both. Once you do this successfully you have established some awesome credibility with this customer. They will now come to you first. You are their guru! They BELIEVE in you.

It's important that YOU believe. Know your stock inside-out. Know why it's better than anything else out there. If you aren't sure, FIND OUT! If you are 100% behind what you are selling, customers will be too. If you are hesitant, or damn with faint praise, customers will be ambivalent. If you don't believe in what you are doing, adjust your attitude, or do something else. YOU MUST BE STOKED!!! Excitement and enthusiasm are contagious. So are negativity and doubt. If you love to windsurf, spread the word. If you know that your products are the best, be excited and tell everybody. If you are unhappy, shut up before you bring everybody else down. Nobody likes whiners. If customers are always hearing about what's wrong with equipment, the windsurfing industry, or the shop down the street, they will tune you out. You will turn them off to you and your shop, and maybe give a bad impression of windsurfing in general. If you think it isn't worthwhile being in the windsurfing business - get out.

Windsurfing is fun. Windsurfing equipment is better than it has ever been. This is the message to send. Whatever problems the industry has must stay within the industry. Coming into a windsurfing shop should always be a positive experience. You are the "ambassador of excitement". Your shop is the best. Your gear is the best. You are the best, in fact it's darn lucky for that customer that he came in. BELIEVE IT! Which brings us in a round-about way to ...

STEP FOUR - GIVE A KILLER PRESENTATION a- PLAY TO THE EMOTIONS. People will spend more from the heart than from the head. A big technical discussion about spec's is very boring unless you are a geek and/or engineer. A long talk about price policy, payment terms, or business issues is about as much fun as doing one's taxes. WINDSURFING IS SUPPOSED TO BE FUN, REMEMBER? Talk about WINDSURFING. Get the customer EXCITED about using the new gear. Describe how fun it will be out there. Use lots of images and description. You don't want the customer thinking "is a stiffness to weight ratio of 37.3 for \$ 997 a better value than a volume to weight coefficient of 14.9 for \$1133? You want the customer thinking "Wow, I can't wait to get this new stick on the water. I'll rip for sure with this! And it looks so hot all my friends will be jealous. Maybe I'll even smoke that guy who always passes me. It's only a hundred bucks more than those ordinary boards. For \$1249 I'd be nuts not to get it. I've got to have it." Now is the time to use the information you got during all that qualifying. If you know what's really important to the customer, you can make your presentation in a way that tells them what they want to hear. You must recommend the right product with confidence. Tell them why it is appropriate. Give them a reason to buy. The key is to USE BENEFIT STATEMENTS IN YOUR PITCH.

Products have Features. Features on their own are not a reason to buy. A feature may offer an Advantage in performance or ease of use. Advantages may be a reason to buy, but the customer may not see the reason. Point out the Benefit to him or her. For instance: "This board is blow molded. (feature) That makes it more durable. (advantage) So you can jump it hard. (benefit) You can "customize" your benefit statements to the customers needs. For example a mast that features carbon / Kevlar construction has an advantage of light weight. For a beginner the benefit might be easier

uphauling. For an intermediate it might be easier waterstarting. For an expert it might be easier looping. Use the "intelligence" from your qualifying questions to "aim" your benefits. You can use the "guru" method here too - predict all the good things that will happen when they get this new gizmo out on the water. Be sure to watch for reactions. You want to keep "scoring points" - getting them excited. c- Overcome Objections as needed. You may not need to. If everything in your qualifying and presentation is right on track, you might close the sale here. On the other hand, the customer may have problems, real or imagined with your recommendation. Your qualifying ammo helps here too. Try to connect something the customer wants to the BENEFIT provided. Most objections are based on price, on a conflict of information, or just lack of commitment. All of these can be overcome. -Lack of commitment means the customer wasn't completely convinced by your presentation, or just isn't emotionally ready to buy. Go for the emotions. Give a brief recap of the most amazing points of the pitch. Be descriptive. If you get the adrenaline flowing, the cash may flow too. -Conflict of information means your pitch ran against something else the customer heard or thinks, and now he or she is unsure what to believe. This often happens when you don't get quite enough information about past experiences or brand loyalties. For instance maybe the board you are recommending is the one the customer broke in half last year. Maybe the sail you just said was junk is the one his friend smoked him on yesterday. You can avoid these problems by being thorough in qualifying. More difficult conflicts come up from things people read or are told. We all know there is some total b.s. being spread on the beach and even in the magazines. Unfortunately the poor consumers may take it for true. As a trained professional, you may be tempted to just tell the customer that "those idiots don't know what they are talking about". A much better tactic is to prove that You do. Reinforce your credibility. You must come across as the most reliable source. Back up your benefit statements with facts and examples. Don't bad mouth others - that just makes you look like a jerk, but point out the advantages in what you are selling. Reinforce the integrity and service of your shop.

This is a great way to overcome price objections. Maybe the customer can get something cheaper from the mail order catalog or some guy on the beach, but who's going to exchange it if it's defective? Who's going to show him how to set it up properly? Who's going to repair it if it breaks? Be sure to mention the terrific service and warranties you provide. Rather than lowering price, add value. ADD VALUE

The more your products and service is worth, the more money you can get for it. So how does customers know what it's worth? Simple ... YOU tell them. If you point out all the good things about the brand, the benefits of the product, and the quality of service you can get through your shop, you've added value to the purchase. On the other hand, if you start out showing the item that is on close-out, on sale, or plain cheap, YOU are sending the message that it isn't worth paying full price.

Salespeople often complain about how hard it is to maintain margin, or make a profit. Yet often it's because they started off talking price. Sure, there are some consumers out there who are too damn cheap to buy anything good. They are going to go for the lowest price. Period. If this is the case, there is nothing you can do to save them. They'll end up with junk. They'll get ripped off by some sleaze-ball scam artist and learn the hard way that "you get what you pay for". Maybe after they get burned they will be more willing to pay for better service. Fortunately these customers are the minority (although they may all seem like this sometimes). What most people want is a quality product that does what they want. They want good service. They want a fair price. They don't want to feel that they overpaid. To feel like they got the best price they'll want to negotiate. We'll get to that, but for now just believe that they are willing to pay MORE for certain things IF you prove it's worthwhile. VALUE ADDED products are "the good stuff". Maybe these are the items you covet yourself. Would you pay a little more for a board that made you sail better, a sail that made you faster, or a wetsuit that kept you warmer? Sure you would! You probably already have. So why are you starting off your sales pitch with something cheap? AIM HIGH. If you are sure that a higher priced item is the best for your customer's needs - go for it. If it's too expensive they'll tell you, but if you really believe, they might go for it too. You've got to believe! You can always step down. It's harder to step up, so start with your best recommendation. Be honest. Don't blatantly oversell. A novice windsurfer doesn't need a \$2000 custom carbon race board. Starting at the top doesn't necessarily mean the most expensive thing in the store. Sell what will work best for the buyer, but really sell it.

STEP 5 - CLOSE THE DAMN SALE !!! Pardon me for getting so excited, but what I'm trying to say is CLOSE THE SALE OR DIE !!!!!!! You've greeted. You've qualified. You know this customer inside out. You've made a brilliant presentation, using benefit statements to build a case. You have explained why this particular item is perfect. Why only this product, from this manufacturer, purchased from your shop, from you, right now can provide lasting happiness. You've worked your butt off to do this. The customer is panting, drooling, trembling with excitement because you have shown them how great life can be if they have it. Now! Right NOW! CLOSE the sale. It's as simple as asking... "Would you like that one?" or "Want to take it home?" For a little more finesse, get a commitment to the product, then ching 'em. "... that's exactly what you need isn't it?" "Isn't this perfect?" "That's the one, isn't it?" When they admit that the product is right, they have told you they want it. "Great, how do you want to pay for it today?" "Cash or charge?" "Cool, that'll be 837 with tax". After you ask your closing question SHUT UP. No ifs, ands, ors, or buts. Don't leave any outs. An even more confident salesperson may use an "assumed close". You've handled this sale so well that there is no question of the customer not buying. "I'll bring it right out" "Where are you parked? I'll help you load it." "Great, let's get you going with this." A nice variation of the assumed close is the "A or B". They are going to buy something. Don't give them a "buy or not buy" option, give them a choice of "A or B" "Do want the demo or the new one?" "Would you like that in one piece or two?" "What color would you like that in?" Remember - you have worked hard for this sale. You deserve it. Price negotiations are a necessary part of doing business. Few people are going to buy anything for list price. Do you? If you think windsurfing is competitive, look at things like cameras or cars. The dreaded "talking turkey" is less frightening if you keep a couple of things in mind. -Negotiation works both ways. If you are giving someone a better deal, get something in return. Make them work for it a little. "Well Bill, I can give you a special price on the sail if you buy the mast too." -If the customer is negotiating price, you have already won! They want to buy the product - from you - now. You just have to agree on the terms. It is very important to know the difference between shopping and negotiating. If someone asks "How much is this?" they are shopping. There has been no qualification, no presentation, no credibility established. You can answer the question, but you are NOT in control of the sale. To give a discount at this point is a waste of time. The customer hasn't agreed to buy anything. You don't even know what they need. The goal is to send the customer home with the product, not send them home with a low price. To quote or advertize a low price too early in the sale just takes value away from the product. You must get the commitment to the sale first. The price is the final step to the close. you've just pointed out all the benefits of a new fin, addressing all the points the customer brought up in qualifying. "... so this one will do everything you need. Would you like one?" (test close) "well it looks great, but it's a little more than I want to spend." (objection) At this point you have two options - back down to a cheaper product, or negotiate a lower price. You must decide which, based on your work with the customer up to this point. Usually you will seem more credible if you stick to your guns and stand behind the product you've recommended. You BELIEVE, remember? If you offer a lesser alternative, make it clearly lesser. Point out the BENEFITS the customer will give up by spending less. Lower price = lower performance. "Of course there are some lower priced models, but they aren't as fast up wind as this one, and you told me that was very important for you". "Yes, that's true. So what's the best you can do for me on this one?" Bingo!! You've got him now. He just said he wants it. Now THIS is a real price negotiation. At this point you may ask how they will be paying. The answer doesn't mater, the point is to get the customer to commit to taking it today. Asking the payment type also implies that you are close to a rock bottom price (even if you aren't). "149" (a price lower than list, which says you are willing to make a deal, but still fairly high.) "How about 120?" (price the customer wants to pay, but doesn't expect to get) "I can't do that, remember how well these are made, but I'll let you have it today for 135" (price that is about what you expected to get). "OK" Ching him! Every sale is different, but most go something like this. If you get a "laydown" who will pay full price - take it. If you get a "biter" who wants to haggle - haggle, but make him work for the discount. Get a commitment to the product before you discount. If you are threatened with "I can get this for less from Joe Blow's Windsurfing ", remind him of all the nifty service you can provide. He can't get that from Joe Blow. Don't say "Joe Blow is a scumbag". Just be better! If you give somebody a great deal make sure you send them home with gear, not shopping with a low price. If you have to give a discount to close a sale, do it but only if it closes the sale! Start high, you can always go down. Your store price tags should be at full price. If you are advertizing low prices all the time, you have no room to negotiate. Everybody wants to feel like they are getting a special deal.

You must be prepared to negotiate. After the sale - follow up Once the deal is made, be sure to say thanks. Be sure the customers know what to expect from new items. Show them the right set up. Tell them what they are going to experience when they use it (the guru again). Be very positive overall, but be sure they are prepared for anything that may be more difficult. If they get an unpleasant surprise the first time they use it, the gear seems like a mistake and you lose credibility. "Jane, you are going to love this board! Now for someone your size, it's best to start with the footstraps about here. Try the mastfoot about 140 cm for your 6.0. At first it may seem harder to control than what you are used to, but that is because it turns so much quicker. Once you get used to it you can really slash." Don't Leave Money on the Table After you have closed the sale, there is more you can do to increase your profit. Accessorize, follow-up, and prospect to keep your business growing. Accessories are a big part of windsurfing. A board and rig are going nowhere without a U.J. and a fin. These aren't even accessories, they are more like "necessaries" since they are a must to make it all work. Who windsurfs with out a harness or lines? A wetsuit? What ever you think about uphulls, booties, helmets, gloves, mast pads, etc. there sure are lots of 'em in use. That customer just traded her life savings for the board of her dreams. Does she have a board bag to keep it safe? A good rack and pads to get it home? Hey, those tie down straps look a little ratty, don't take a chance. Ever break an hourglass? A downhaul? A harness line? Sucks doesn't it? Remind your customers to replace theirs. You are doing them a favor by keeping them safe, as well as making a couple bucks for the shop. Accessories are more profitable than big ticket items. They may not be as sexy, but don't overlook them. While you're writing up that ticket, get the customer's name and address. Keep a mailing list, and some notes. Often a little thing leads to a big thing. If you sell Kevin Kook a fin screw and he asks when the new Death Stick 259 is going to come in, get his name and number and call him when you get one. If you don't call him, you can't bitch when he buys it somewhere else can you? It's up to you to keep your customers loyal. Make your shop a fun place to hang out. Put on events. Always have some exciting new thing to show everyone who comes in to hang out. This is one exception to the "Qualify First" rule. There are always "regulars" who come in just to look around and enjoy the shop "vibes". This a very good thing! Your store is the place to be! For these people pick something, almost anything, that you are excited about and just go off. Maybe they'll buy one, maybe not, but it keeps them wanting to see what's new. Smile, windsurfing is cool. One of the classiest things you can do for your customers is to follow up a purchase with a phone call. Give them a week or two with the product, than call and ask how they like it, and if they have any questions. Right after a windy day is a great time to do this! If they are stoked, super! Let them go off about how fun it is. This reinforces the purchase and shows what a nice, caring salesperson you are. If they have problems, doubts, or complaints that's OK too. It's better to find out now than have them suffer for another two weeks, then come to the shop wanting a refund. Don't panic! You are a professional. Most of the time a little advice will solve the problem. Who knows, who might even make another sale, although that is NOT the purpose of your call. That's it! Simple selling made even more simple. Greet - qualify. Qualify some more. Be happy. Turn features into BENEFITS and make predictions that come true. CLOSE. Follow up so they'll come back for more. Now go kick ass and take names! Brett Landry 1996

The windsurfing industry needs to attract new people to the sport. This premise, while sounding like an obvious understatement, serves as the basis for everything the AWIA does. The path a prospective windsurfer must take before they become hooked is similar to climbing a slippery flight of stairs. There are many steps, and it only takes one slip to fall off the staircase. Step 1 DEMAND Consumer decides he wants to learn how to windsurf. Step 2 ACCESSIBILITY Consumer takes action to seek out windsurfing. Step 3 CLOSE THE SALE Consumer buy a board. Step 4 PROVIDE VALUE Consumer sticks with it and becomes a regular customer who introduces his friends to windsurfing. Note that Step 4 completes a virtuous cycle whereby satisfied customers introduce their friends to the sport and create more demand. The retailers are an important part of this process. The AWIA and the industry can marketing the sport and increase demand (Step 1), and we can steer consumers to your retail shop (Step 2), but we can't be everywhere to close the sale (Step 3). That's up to you. But we can help. The preceding is a step-by-step formula to help you close the sale. There are two parts to this. First, you must have the information and buy into it. Second, you must pass on this information to your staff. For this reason, part of this kit is information on how to conduct a staff meeting. If you're not accustomed to holding staff meeting's, just follow our guidelines. Salesmanship: It is important to understand the process that goes on in any buying decision, and train your salespeople to be

methodical. Certainly it is important to have a thorough knowledge of windsurfing to be a successful salesperson, but it's at least as important to have a good sales technique. Review the "how to sell" section and you'll have a format for a meeting. You can customize the examples given to your particular shop. A good exercise for the salespeople is to go through the products you carry, coming up with feature, advantage, benefit statements for them. Have them qualify each other too. Role playing (you play the customer & let them sell you something) feels dorky, but is a powerful training method. Be deliberate about taking them through each step - greet, qualify, establish credibility, present product with f.a.b. statements, overcome objections, close, and follow up. In short, most windsurfing salespeople are long on technical information and short on communications skills. If you teach them to better relate to your customers, the customer, the salesperson, and your shop will all benefit. As goofy as it will feel while they are practicing, they will use this experience to sell more!

How to conduct a staff meeting:

1. Announce that the AWIA has provided you with sales training information and that you want to hold a staff meeting to review it.
2. Hold the staff meeting before hours. Plan on it lasting 3/4 hour.
3. Have coffee, OJ, and bagels/pastries for all. (Don't count this toward the 3/4 hour)
4. Follow the guidelines listed in the above section.
5. Schedule a follow-up staff meeting.
6. Track your results.