



Make Your Cross Sales Training Dollars Count

Dr. Kurt G. Helm
Helm and Associates Inc.

First, the bad news: about 20 percent of your cross-sales training dollars may be wasted. A survey conducted by our firm of more than 500 bank employees engaged in explaining bank products and services (e.g., personal bankers, tellers and telebankers) found that one-fifth were not temperamentally suited to be effective at cross-selling, no matter how good their training was.

Spending training dollars on people who are not wired up to be able to cross-sell is not only a waste of your training budget, but also it wastes the employee's time that could be put to more profitable use in other positions

in your organization. Furthermore it was found that attempts to train these individuals to cross-sell the bank's products and services usually had about the same outcome as the old joke about why it's a bad idea to try to teach a pig to sing: First, it doesn't work and, second, it annoys the pig.

THE BASIS OF CROSS-SELLING

The essence of cross-selling is the ability to recognize opportunities, or needs, of the customers, and to match bank products or services with those needs. People who are suited for cross-selling see the entire process as an opportunity to be helpful, to assist the customer in solving a problem. By contrast the segment of bank employees *not* temperamentally suited to be effective at cross-selling tends to see the process as pushing unwanted

bank services and products on vulnerable customers.

The good news is that 80 percent of your employees can be trained to effectively cross-sell using a simple, logical four-step process. (See sidebar.)

FOUR STEPS TO CROSS-SELLING

The first step is to identify the customer's needs. The most valuable bank product or service in the world is of no value to the customer who doesn't need it. And, like the pig, customers will be annoyed if you try to sell them something they don't need.

Identifying the customer's needs involves the ability to:

1. Listen actively to the customer — what is said, what is not said, and what is implied or hinted.
2. Ask probing, focused, but non-intrusive questions. Tact and diplomacy dictate how the personal banker asks about potentially sensitive personal finance issues. The goal is to determine whether the customer has any needs that the bank's products or services could meet.

The second step is for the personal banker to search through his or her knowledge of the bank's products and services for one that fits the customer's need. When an appropriate

The Cross-Selling Process

1. Identify the customer's authentic needs;
2. Identify the bank product or service that meets the customer's needs;
3. Present the bank's product or service as the fulfillment of the customer's needs; and
4. Help the customer make the buying decision.

product or service is discovered, it should be evaluated in terms of how well it will satisfy the customer's need. To do this, the personal banking representative (or teller or telebanker) needs to have been thoroughly trained in the bank's products and services.

The third step is that the personal banker must present the product or service in terms of benefits to the customer, starting with the benefit that goes the furthest to satisfy the customer's need. It is not always obvious to the customer how a product or service will meet needs. The benefits should not be confused with the product's or service's features, which should be presented only with respect to how they support one or more of the product's or service's benefits. The personal banker should take care to present benefits as they appear from the customer's point of view.

The fourth step is to help the customer make the buying decision. In some cases the customer will say, "I'll take it." Most often, however, the customer will need help in making that decision. Most of us are reluctant buyers, even when we realize the need for what we are buying. We are grateful for a person who can help us see that making the purchase is in our best interest, and who can do so without appearing to be pushy or to be focused on "selling." Personal bankers who are effective at closing sales often take this last step by suggesting, "Let's set you up to try this service today. Would that be okay?"

Effective cross-selling matches authentic customer needs with the bank product or service that will satisfy those needs, and it does so in a way that leaves the customer grateful to the personal banker for having solved a problem.

As simple as the four-step cross-selling process sounds, some people are either unable or unwilling to listen actively, and others don't feel comfortable asking questions to determine the

customer's needs. Many people are uncomfortable about closing sales by asking for them. These simple facts have significant consequences for your hiring, training and placement decisions.

If a person is not comfortable with the cross-selling process, then he or she may be described as the proverbial "round" peg which simply will not fit into the "square" hole of cross sales. Attempts to train such people will be futile and will waste time, effort and training dollars.

THERE IS A SOLUTION

As you hire personal bankers and tellers, bear in mind that regardless of the size of the applicant pool you have to draw from, some percentage of them are not suited for cross-selling. Identify those who are least suited for cross-selling, and consider them for other positions in the bank.

Then organize personal banker and teller training based on the cross-selling process, and present cross-selling as a problem-solving approach to meeting customers' needs. Effective training can help those who are borderline to

not being predisposed to cross-selling become productive, especially when the training helps them see cross-selling as a helpful activity. ❖

About the Author



Dr. Kurt G. Helm

is founder and president of Helm and Associates Inc., Helmsburg, Ind., which provides pre-employment testing and evaluation services to the banking industry.

Helm is a licensed and certified psychologist who has been working with private businesses, industries and public agencies since 1975. A veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps., he has bachelor's and master's degrees from East Carolina University and a Ph.D. from Texas Christian University.

"Make Your Cross Sales Training Dollars Count," by Dr. Kurt G. Helm, appeared in the August 2005 *Hoosier Banker* on pages 16 and 17. This article is reprinted with permission from the Indiana Bankers Association.