

Fire Protection Selling's Invisible Line

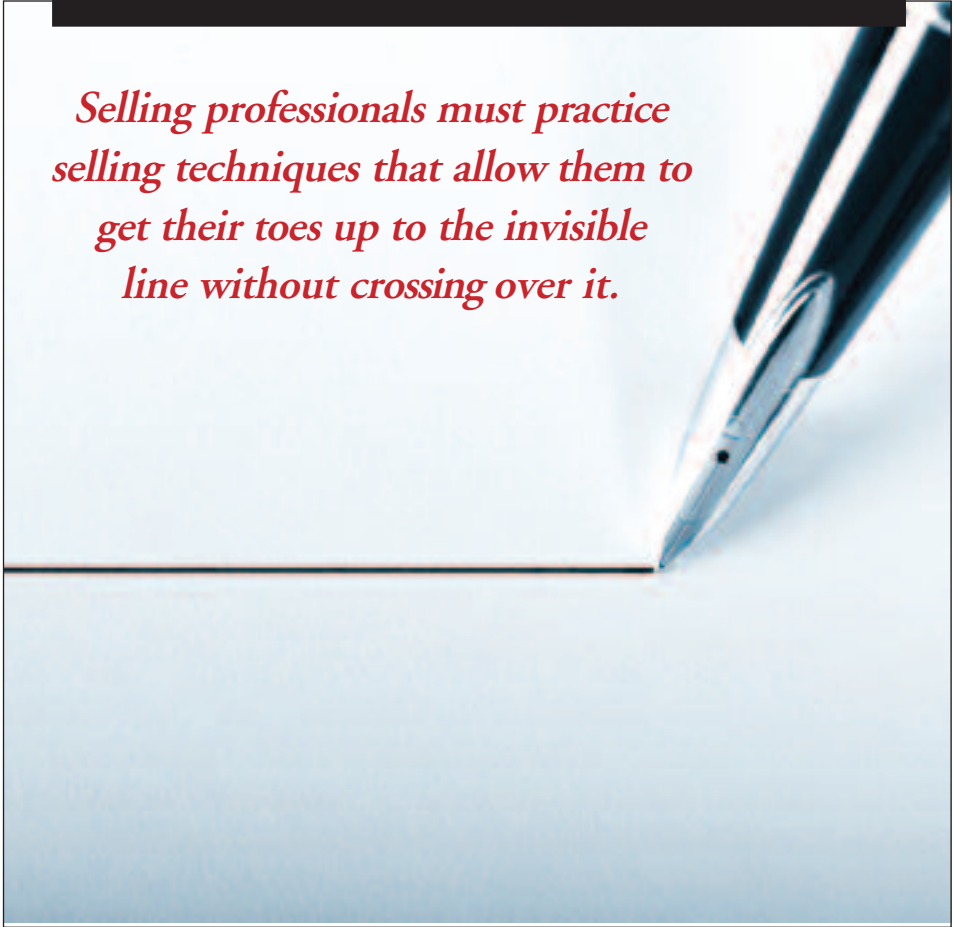
By Bruce Carter

It may be no more than the sale of a two and one-half pound ABC extinguisher for the fork lift roll bar. Perhaps it is the potentially more substantial sale of an entire fire protection service package for the local university or health care institution. Whether selling a product or a service, regardless of the potential account size or dollar amount involved, in every sales situation there exists "the invisible line."

Viewing the Invisible Line

The invisible line is that specific point in the sales process where the customer feels an uncomfortable pressure to buy and does not like it. The invisible line is sometimes conveniently and clearly defined with some buyers who will let you know in no uncertain terms that you are at the line and need to back off immediately. With other buyers, the location of the line may not be as obvious and crystal clear. Regardless of the buyer, the seller, the product, the service, or the price being asked, the invisible line definitely does exist and crossing it results with near certainty in a big NO SALE.

Savvy and experienced sales people are resigned to the fact that many prospective buyers view sales people in rather unfavorable terms. They realize that many buyers see sales people as a necessary evil at best. As kids, our parents told us that sales people were overly pushy, fast-talking, slippery, and downright dishonest. Mom and dad strongly recommended that sales people be dealt with very cautiously and from a safe distance. As a result of this early childhood profiling, today's buyers are keenly aware of the invisible line and will balk at the first signs of any uncomfortable sales pressure.



Selling professionals must practice selling techniques that allow them to get their toes up to the invisible line without crossing over it.

Up-to-the-Line Selling Strategies

Fact: the fire protection industry provides the marketplace with products and services of vital importance to the preservation of property and life safety. In spite of the importance of fire protection, it still is a service that must ultimately be sold. To be most effective, selling professionals must practice selling techniques that allow them to get their toes up to the invisible line without crossing over it. Some basic strategies for "up-to-the-line selling" include the following.

Don't be a sales person. It is the typical extroverted, back-slapping, wide-grinning, joke-telling sales guy that finds he has fast-talked himself up to the invisible line very early in the process. Most of today's prospective buyers see this sort of sales person as annoying and dishonest. These types are escorted out the door in record time. Rock-solid selling techniques delivered by men and women that do not look, sound, or act like stereotypical sales people are not only very effective but are also readily welcomed by today's buyers.

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Be honest. With the scores of modern online resources available to them, today's buyers are more knowledgeable about a seller's products and services than ever before. Armed with this knowledge, customers have their antennae up. They are acutely tuned-in and wary of any overstated claims and unbelievable promises made. When signs of dishonesty are detected and the line has been crossed, the end of the sales process is seconds away. Being totally honest throughout the entire process is as crucial in today's selling environment as it has ever been in the past.

Polish your presentation skills. Recent studies reveal that being unprepared is one of the very best ways for a sales rep to aggravate the prospect and blow the sale. A buyer's time is precious and most have little patience for the rambling, mumbling, bumbling, stumbling sales rep that arrives for the appointment unprepared and staggers aimlessly through a presentation with no obvious structure or substance. A presentation that has been thoughtfully composed in advance and concisely delivered is a welcomed rarity in today's marketplace.

Ask questions. The medical doctor asks a number of pertinent questions prior to offering a prescriptive remedy. The successful attorney interviews his client at length before preparing a legal solution. The business consultant inquires in depth before making recommendations to his client. Top fire protection sellers must also ask questions with a purpose prior to presenting their customers with viable fire protection solutions. Such a method is not only a welcome one, it often results in a sale without the invisible line ever being approached.

Ask for the business. In his best-selling book entitled, *Timid Sales People Have Skinny Kids!*, author Judge Ziglar reminds readers that the ultimate goal in selling is to close the sale. The commission sales people earn on the sales they *almost* make is zero. Understanding that the invisible line exists does not give sellers permission to neglect asking for the business.

Incredible as it may seem, ninety percent of all sales calls result in the prospective buyer *never* being asked to buy anything. Incredible! Sales people like these should not be called sales people at all but rather *professional conversationalists*. Make no mistake about it, a crucial component of any professional sales call is asking the buyer to do just that—buy. It is the "how" and "when" to ask that remains of utmost importance.

Non Line-Crossing Success

Crossing the invisible line will surely result in a NO SALE situation. Worse yet, crossing the line may result in you being asked to leave. Professional sellers do not cross the line but, if necessary, get their toes up to it. Most pros make the sale the majority of the time by practicing effective selling techniques. They are consistently honest individuals who are polished communicators skilled at asking meaningful questions before closing. All of them are far from looking or sounding the part of the stereotypical salesperson. So, fire protection professionals, hone your skills, polish those professional techniques, and enjoy getting more prospects involved in your superior products and services ... just don't cross fire protection selling's invisible line. ♦

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