



Advice

# Psychology

of Selling

## How to overcome the “I’m just looking” defense

Change your customer’s behavior by changing your behavior

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HOW MANY TIMES have you welcomed a customer with a pleasant, “Good morning” only to be greeted by a snarly, “Just looking”? Unfortunately exchanges like this are becoming more prevalent as consumers get more stressed out.

Time-stressed customers are responding to your greetings in the same vein as Pavlov’s dog responded to the bell in the famous psychology experiment. Pavlov, a

Russian experimental physiologist, observed that a dog will begin to produce saliva when presented with food. Pavlov added the sound of a bell when he presented the dog with food, and eventually the dog began to salivate at the sound of the bell alone – no food needed. Pavlov called this a conditioned reflex, an automatic form of learning which sometimes isn’t planned or even expected.

I’m not suggesting your customers are dogs, but they have been conditioned to equate entering a store with a clerk approaching them and asking, “May I help you?” As a result, they’ve learned to say, “No, I’m just looking,” when a sales associate approaches them.

To break this conditioned reflex, change your behavior. Do not physically approach customers when they enter the store as this is often the trigger for the conditioned response. Take a step back and say, “Good morning,” “Good evening” or “Welcome to our store.” Don’t ask questions, not even, “How are you?”

Test different greetings and approaches to see which ones elicit the, “I’m just looking” response. Walk towards customers while saying, “Good morning” and note their response. Then take a step back while saying, “Good morning” and note the change in response.

Break the conditioning customers have experienced by greeting them with a completely different experience when they enter your store. In many cases you can elicit a smile or nod, instead of that snarly “I’m just looking” response simply by changing your behavior. ■

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