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The Call

SHOP: A florist in Wilmington, Del.
SCENARIO: Customer calls to order flowers for his wife

EMPLOYEE: Hello, XYZ Flower Shop. Jennifer speaking. How may I help you?
TIM: Hi, Jennifer. I need to order some flowers.
EMPLOYEE: Sure. Have you sent flowers from us before?
TIM: No, it's my first time.
EMPLOYEE: OK. Let's start with some delivery information...
TIM: The flowers are for my wife, Cheryl Canfield, and I would like to send them to her at work.

After taking the delivery date and address, Jennifer asked:

EMPLOYEE: What would you like to say on the card message?
TIM: Just put, "Love, Bob."
EMPLOYEE: Got it. And do you know what you want to send?
TIM: Some pretty flowers.
EMPLOYEE: We have real pretty arrangements starting at \$39.99.

Jennifer sold me a \$39.99 basket of flowers (but no finishing touches such as balloons or add-ons) and thanked me for calling.

The Analysis

👍 Jennifer followed *some* of my rules: identified herself, started with delivery information and took the card message before talking about flowers.

👎 Jennifer neglected important points I regularly mention: She did not delve into details on why I was ordering flowers when the card message did not make that obvious, and she started with the lowest possible price point (though I never asked where their arrangements start).

The Fix

When I hear the "Love, Bob" message, I stop dead in my tracks because I know that I cannot make a suggestion or offer price points until I learn what is being left unsaid. Most of the people I train in flower shops tell me that they don't like to sell and are reluctant to really engage customers for fear of being perceived as pushy or intrusive. I don't like to "sell" either, but I love to listen. I want to turn you into one giant ear who's not afraid to ask some important questions.

Break the Ice, Then Melt It

For customers like Bob, I use this phrase: "In order for me to give you the best suggestion (or advice) can you give me some insight into what you're celebrating today? Is it her birthday or your anniversary?" I guarantee that question will get him talking. Make sure you listen and are prepared to offer an appropriate design.

For instance, once asked that question, Bob may have divulged that it's his wife's 40th birthday — a day she's been dreading for months. Bingo: You now know Bob needs to "go big or go home" and can confidently suggest 40 roses, at \$250 (or whatever that would be in your market) as the perfect gift. Let's say Bob says that he really "goofed up on the home front." Suggest a large design in her favorite color, at \$100. For the "cheer her up for a tough week at work," suggest a colorful desk arrangement with a few happy face balloons, at \$75.

Once you learn the real reason for sending flowers, you can easily (and appropriately) offer a design at two, three or five times your starting price. Don't feel that you're being pushy or intrusive; it's your job to guide customers to the best item. How do you think Jennifer, the sales clerk, would have felt if she learned that it was my wife's 40th birthday at the end of the call after she sold me a \$39.99 generic basket design?

Bottom line: Don't be afraid to engage a customer when the message is vague. It's your job to ask questions! 🙋

Tim Huckabee, an international flower shop sales and customer service trainer, is founder and president of Floral Strategies LLC and the American Institute of Floral Sales Experts (AIFSE), a retail floral sales certification program. If you would like Tim to test-call your shop for this column, contact him at (800) 983-6184 or tim@floralstrategies.com.

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