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Coast2Coast Comfort Report



Eastside Report

Dave Yates, Master Plumber and owner/operator of F. W. Behler, Inc., one of the oldest plumbing, heating and air conditioning service companies in the United States (est. 1900).

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The Sales Call Phase 2 of Working with Contractors

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In this ongoing series about how to successfully develop a better-than-average business relationship with a contractor, Dave Yates will be exploring ways for today's multi-tasking woman to quickly separate the dullards from the performers, with tips on how to ensure you will always be at the front of the line for obtaining service.

The Sales Call

Once you've moved beyond the initial phone contact, the next phase of establishing a long-term relationship with a contractor typically involves a face-to-face meeting, or sales call. But – is it really just a sales call?

As a mechanical contractor who delivers goods, much like those traveling butchers and bakers of a by-gone era, I typically need to sell within people's homes. Part of any sales call, or first-contact-call, with a potential customer is as much an interview as it is a sales attempt. The first thing I strive to do is to sell myself. This is akin to applying for a job with the customer(s) now being my potential employer. They, in turn, are interviewing and judging me on my merits as we begin what should be a two-way communication process. Body language and eye contact are both important factors. Does the contractor listen actively and give you qualified feedback indicating (s)he understands what you've said? Do they listen emphatically and mirror back with your wants, desires and

When it comes to audio systems, men buy speakers and women try to hide them.

by David Arnold, Globe Correspondent on Design Continuum, Inc., a consulting firm that studies human behavior in hopes of designing a better consumer product.



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concerns? Does (s)he make sufficient eye contact? As corny as it sounds, the eyes are literally windows to the soul. Do their eyes wander towards inappropriate distractions? If you – the customer – find you're continually interrupted and cut off in conversation by the contractor, you're going to have a miserable co-existence.

Step two of the sales call should center on the company, its policies and caliber of employees. Don't be distracted by sales pitches regarding the products – not yet. How the contractor and the company will respond to your needs is more important than the brand of equipment they're selling. How long have they been in business; what affiliations do they have with community organizations; how much volunteer or charitable work do they perform on an annual basis; how will you identify their employees – do they wear uniforms, clean up after themselves, explain their work in an understandable manner and be polite (discourteous service technicians should never be tolerated); are they drug-free; are the phones answered by a real person 24/7/365; are they available for emergency calls; and any other pertinent question you've thought about. Don't forget that these are the people you'll be inviting into your home or your parent's when you're not home or in the middle of the night – you need to establish a level of comfort.

By the time you've reached this point in the conversation/interview, there should be a broad base of confidence established and a sense that you'll be guided to products the contractor has found to be reliable and easily serviced.

And, while the man of the house might want steak, it's the woman who will ultimately decide how thick and which cut he'll be getting. Women think differently than men. Women can easily multi-task, while men can't seem to walk, talk, and chew gum at the same time (sorry guys). If I hand a man a drawing or a proposal for consideration, I know anything I say while he's examining the document will be lost – in one ear and out the other. On the other hand, a female client can carry on a lucid conversation while studying a document and will find it odd if I stop talking. The same applies to gay and lesbian couples and my first challenge is to establish which one represents the feminine side of their union as that will ultimately be the partner deciding the fate of my sales pitch. Regardless of sexual orientation, if I've done my job well the "man" of the house will be left with the impression "he" was in control, while the "woman" of the home will know I was actively and emphatically listening to "her" concerns.

Next to last on the list of things to discuss during sales calls, is the product

itself. If the contractor will be responsive for servicing the equipment and backs that up with a labor warranty, you won't need to be terribly concerned regarding specific brands. By the time you've reached this point in the conversation/interview, there should be a broad base of confidence established and a sense that you'll be guided to products the contractor has found to be reliable and easily serviced.

By now, pricing should have become a secondary issue although it's still an important area that needs to be openly discussed. A deposit of one-third is not an unusual request if major components (boiler, furnace, etc.) will be ordered and you should be made aware of your right-of-recission (consumer's right to cancel an agreement within three business days), which might apply to your sale. You may encounter a restocking charge for later changes in materials, for which your contractor should be willing to provide proof of from their suppliers. Special-order materials may not be returnable.

Warranty issues have become a potential mine-field following the proliferation of direct consumer-purchases of goods that are subsequently installed by professional contractors. On the surface, it would appear to be a bargain for you to purchase and supply the plumbing fixtures, but if you stop to consider the potential risks you're assuming, that bargain might well become your worst nightmare. If the fixture breaks, leaks or fails to perform – who pays to have it repaired or replaced? If it doesn't fit properly in the space or breaks during installation, you'll be responsible for all costs associated – including, but not limited to, delays caused and other items that may have been utilized in the attempted installation. You may also discover your insurance company won't reimburse you for damages if the product leaks or someone is injured while using the fixture. On the other hand, if your contractor purchases and sells you the installed products, you'll enjoy the benefits of their liability insurance policies that more than adequately protect you and your property.

Dave is a Master Plumber who owns and operates F. W. Behler, Inc., one of the oldest plumbing, heating and air conditioning service companies in the United States (est. 1900) and he's been actively involved in sales for more than three decades. Yates is a columnist for several magazines, a dynamic public speaker and partner in JoDa Film Productions. He can be reached via e-mail at behler@blazenet.net

At Susan Boyle and Benton Brown's Brooklyn loft, radiant floor heating (where hot-water pipes are routed under floors), lowers heating costs, while the plant-covered "green roof" cools the building in the summer so the couple use less air conditioning. The planting also extends the life of the roof and absorbs noise, and the plants clean the air..."It's just got endless benefits," says Boyle, who gets a steady stream of e-mails from homeowners interested in emulating her project.

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Featured Developer: Laurelwood Homes



"Black kitchen appliances, a stacking washer and dryer, garburator, in-floor heating, a blinds package, concrete soundproofing between floors and a titled, underground parking stall with storage locker are also sewn into price tags, starting at \$207,900, plus GST. "Each suite also has its own fresh-air intake system, which ensures residents enjoy cleaner air," Carole Foley.

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To find out more about our featured developer contact:

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