

# Biggest Mistakes Salespeople Make

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**1. UNCLEAR THINKING.** If you can't describe the objective of your interaction in one sentence, you may be guilty of fuzzy focus, trying to say too much at once. You'll confuse your listener, and that doesn't make the sale. Decide exactly what you want and need to accomplish in this contact. What would be a positive outcome? For example, imagine that a busy executive says, **"In one sentence, tell me how I should describe the benefits of buying from you when I talk to my husband later."** At any stage of the sales process, you should know in advance why you are interacting, what benefits you are offering your prospect or client, and what you'd like the next step to be.

**2. NO CLEAR STRUCTURE.** Make it easy for your prospect to follow what you are saying, whether in a casual conversation or a formal presentation of information and ideas. They'll remember it better--and you will too. Otherwise, you may forget to make a key point. **If you waffle or ramble, you lose your listeners.** Even for a conversation, mentally outline your objectives. What key "Points of Wisdom" do you want the prospect to remember? How will you illustrate each point? What phrases or slogans do you want to guarantee they will repeat afterwards? You speak to be remembered and repeated.

**3. TALKING TOO MUCH** Salespeople often talk too much about themselves and their service or product. They make a speech rather than having an exchange or interaction, otherwise known as conversation. The key to connecting with a client is conversation; the secret of client conversation is to ask questions; the quality of client information received depends on the quality of the questions--and waiting for, and listening to, the **answers!** In fact, a successful encounter early in the sales process should probably be mostly open-ended questions, the kind that require essay answers rather than just "yes" and "no." And don't rush on with preprogrammed questions that pay no attention to the answer you've just received. Learn to listen, even pausing to wait for further comments. Silence draws people out.

**4. NO MEMORABLE STORIES.** People rarely remember your exact words. Instead, they remember the mental images your words inspire. Support your key points with vivid, relevant stories. Help them "make the movie" in their minds by using memorable characters, exciting situations, intriguing dialogue, suspense, and humor. **Telling stories of satisfied clients and painting a picture of how this client's condition will be improved with your product or service are appropriate.**

**5. NO THIRD-PERSON ENDORSEMENTS.** There's a limit to how many bold claims you can make about your company and product results, but there is *no* limit to the words of praise you can put in the mouths of your delighted clients. Use case histories of **your clients' success stories about the benefits they received from your service** or product. When you are using their actual dialogue, you can say much more glowing things about yourself and your company than you could if the words were your own. Your endorsement stories should use the same ingredients as a good Hollywood movie: create memorable characters, use vivid dialogue, and provide a dramatic lesson learned.

**6. NO EMOTIONAL CONNECTION.** The most powerful communication combines both intellectual and emotional connections. Intellectual means appealing to educated self-interest with data and reasoned arguments. **Emotion comes from engaging the listeners' imaginations, involving them in your illustrative stories by frequent use of the word "you" and from answering their unspoken question, "What's in this for me?"** Obviously, a customer is going to justify doing business with you for specific analytical reasons. What gives you the edge is creating an emotional connection too. Build this emotional connection by using stories with characters that they can relate to and by providing a high You/I ratio, using the word "you" as often as possible and talking from their point of view.

**7. WRONG LEVEL OF ABSTRACTION.** Are you providing the big picture and generalities when your listeners are hungry for details, facts, and specifics? Or are you drowning them in data when they need to position themselves with an overview and find out why they should care? **Get on the same wavelength with your prospects.** For busy executive types, describe what your company can do for them in broad generalities. With middle manager types, discuss exactly how you can work together, a medium level of abstraction. If you are dealing with people with IT or engineering personalities consider using the lowest level of abstraction, lots of facts and figures.

**8. NO PAUSES.** Few sales presentations have enough pauses. Good music and good communication both contain changes of pace, pauses, and full rests. This is when listeners think about important points you've just made. If you rush on at full speed to crowd in as much information as possible, chances are you've left your prospects back at the station. **Give them enough time to ask a question or even time to think over what has been said.** Pauses allow pondering and understanding.

**9. IRRITATING NON-WORDS.** Hmm--ah--er--you know what I mean--. **One presenter I heard began each new thought with "Now!" as he scanned his notes to figure out what came next.** This might be okay occasionally, but not every 30 seconds. Practice in front of your sales manager or colleagues and give them permission to call out whenever you hem or ah. Or video or audio record yourself, and note any digressions.

**10. STEPPING ON THE PUNCH-WORD.** The most important word in a sentence is the punch-word. Usually, this is the final word: "Take my wife--PLEASE." But if you drop your voice or add, "Right?" or "See?" or "You know?" or "Okay?," you've killed the impact of your message. Another popular punch-line killer is the word "today." Avoid saying, "**Let's look at the recommendations** we have for you today." Obviously, you're talking "today." The punch word in this sentence should be "recommendations."

**11. NOT HAVING A STRONG OPENING AND CLOSING.** Engage your audience immediately with a powerful, relevant opening that includes them. For example, "You have an awesome responsibility." Then fill in what it is... perhaps creating a beautiful and functional home or getting the best home furnishings value, whatever your company can help your prospect do. **Most salespeople start by talking about their company. Talk about your prospect instead.**

When you learn to avoid these 11 common traps, you're on your way to being a "star" of the sales world, ready to accept an award for your dazzling performance.