

Permission to Sell More



By Christina Salwitz

How do you know when you're presented with an opportunity to take a seemingly basic sale to the next level? Or make a dull client request rise to the level of dramatic transformation?

It can take some practice to recognize the signs for when to run with it and not hold back when you have a customer make a basic request and truly take it to the next level no matter how big or small the sale.

Let's look at what happened to me recently as an example of taking the opportunity to not only listen to what your customer wants and solve their problem, but also how I listened for the key selling signals that made all the difference.

Hopefully it gives you insight into what to look for when a unique opportunity presents itself.

Ask the Right Questions

In my case, a recent new client needed containers planted for her upcoming July Fourth party.

I was really on the fence about taking this client as her location was about an hour away from me, but I thought that I should at least look and see what I was in for before making any decisions because other than that I knew very little.

I drove out to the home and was pleasantly surprised when I arrived to find a lovely craftsman-style home set deep into the woods on not only a lake, but also an idyllic lake right out of a postcard with an inlet that bordered one side of the entire property.

It turns out that this was the site of a kid's camp long ago. It felt like it, far removed from strip malls, traffic and everyday cares.

When the homeowner took me out to her dock to see her existing containers that she wanted done

for the party, I was a little shocked at not only the volume of pots, but also the condition of them.

They were old, beige, fiberglass, chipped, faded, peeling and frankly just sad. So, it was natural for me to ask, "How do you feel about these containers? Are you attached to them?" (ding ding ding — the first sign).

Notice I didn't ask her if I can supply her with new pots. I want it to be her idea.

I know so many salespeople and designers who may have just done those existing pots without asking for the opportunity to take things a step further for fear of losing the sale or making the client feel nervous about the costs before they have even agreed to the job.

The enthusiastic response was a resounding, "No way! Let's get new ones!" Now we are talking about a lot of pots just on the dock alone. So many in fact that it didn't really make good design sense to have that many small- and medium-sized pots because it felt crowded, when we can have fewer large-scaled pots that are much more dramatic and easy care.

Not to mention that there were no water lines hooked up for them, so keeping these watered had to have been a chore. Naturally, I offered to have my team add water lines as well because for me, this is a must. (Ding ding ding — the second sign, offering to make her life easier was an easy win-win to add on to this sale.)

With that decision, I was on board and excited to get going and make this transition from beige and bland to some real "WOW factor" for summer.

Know the Customer

As we walked and talked about this amazing property, I was more and more enchanted with the



possibilities of what I could bring to this landscape and this new client that she's never experienced.

I offered to bring showy perennials and flowering shrubs to those pots that could go out into the landscape adding long-term value, not just a bunch of annuals that will get thrown away in fall (ding ding ding — the third sign, that I would be involved in the landscape later when the summer pots transition to fall and the garden does too).

I quickly determined that we needed to echo the colors of the lake and focus on blues and greens



for these containers and make them sparkle with the reflection of the water (signaled to me by the existing furniture fabrics and awning on the boat). Then on the way back to dry land, I was offered a tour of the rest of the property.

As we walked and talked, I learned that this client has big dreams of featuring her garden art collection and more containers in various sections of the estate. Some scattered through the forest, near the outdoor shower with amazing carved doors from Thailand and some at the front entry and various other key spots.

"When would you like these pots installed?" I asked, assuming the sale and that I was already

designing those as well. "Oh, we can do those down the road after the dock pots; let's just get those done first. I'd also rather focus on some of the problems in the landscape too, like around the water feature and this long focal point bed on the lawn. But, I think I just need to get the pots done given our short time frame."

Go Above and Beyond

I left with my marching orders coinciding with this new client leaving town to go to her other home in Maui for a week. After which my team of guys came a couple of days later to see the scope of the work and we were on!

We ended up delivering and designing 22 new pots that week all over the property, creating a new space to feature a tiny portion of her amazing garden art collection and redesigning a tired border to show off and feature more new flowering shrubs, perennials, annuals and more things from her amazing travels that were once hidden or buried in an overgrown landscape.

I am simply tickled at how well everything turned out. The homeowner is back and she's thrilled. I went far and above what she thought I was going to do. I took a big chance and it paid off well. I did all the pots she envisioned on the property as well as the landscape updates.

Had I stayed with the original plan and only done what she first said that she wanted, it

would have been nice, but unremarkable. I want to do remarkable.

At her party, I want people to talk about how smashing it all looks and ask who did all this design work on her containers and her landscape. But even more, I wanted this client to say that she was fully and passionately excited about what MORE she could have me do for her property.

Obviously, this client was very unique and not someone where we were penny pinching, and I am incredibly lucky to be in the booming Seattle area to be taking advantage of opportunities like these.

But, no matter the size or value of the client job, whether it's designing a landscape or designing a few containers, I am going to continue to press ahead and give the customer more than they knew they wanted.

I want them to understand that once they get service from me that it will always be above and beyond what they thought they were getting. Because you never know when that same client might just say, "Are you interested in designing at my home on Maui too?" **LGR**

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