

Upgrade Your Emotional Intelligence

Experts offer suggestions that can help improve client interactions



Emotional Intelligence Experts

FROM LEFT: Anita Rowe and Lee Gardenswartz are partners in the nationally renowned training and consulting firm Gardenswartz and Rowe.

Clients often enter the business office with a sense of trepidation, but business managers who understand and use the concepts of emotional intelligence can put them at ease from the outset. As a result, these interactions are a more positive experience for everyone.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand emotions and use their energy constructively, according to Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe, partners in a nationally renowned diversity training and consulting firm. “Emotional intelligence is not just a tool or a technique—it is really a way of being,” Rowe says. “If you are comfortable with yourself and you are comfortable with the other person, they tend to be at ease with you.”

To help business managers build trust with clients and respond to their needs with appropriate product offerings, they offer these suggestions:

1) Realize that emotions are always involved

Emotions are present in every interaction, every communication and every relationship, Gardenswartz says. The foundation of emotional intelligence is seeing interactions through that lens.

She recommends managing your own emotions first, so you can enter a transaction calmly and comfortably. For example, if you’re feeling upset about something that happened earlier, your client may pick up on that negative feeling. Recognizing your own emotional

state and the reasons for it helps you approach a sales situation in a better frame of mind.

Understanding emotions will also help you to not take client behaviors personally and not be reactive to a client’s anger or skepticism. “Emotional intelligence helps us to be able to manage our own reactions so that we don’t respond to their behavior and make it worse,” Gardenswartz says.

2) Make a genuine connection with clients

Approach your clients as people first and look for areas of commonality, Rowe says. Maybe you both have teenagers, or you are both sports fans. “Find a common point that you can build on,”

Rowe says. Rather than immediately launching into the transaction, start a conversation. That way, you can build a genuine relationship with the client.

“The ability to relate at a human level is absolutely critical,” Gardenswartz says. “It goes beyond what you’re buying. It’s whether you’re acknowledged as a human being so you feel comfortable and safe.”

3) Remember the importance of different backgrounds

Culture influences everyone’s behavior; it is essentially behavioral software, Rowe says. It dictates people’s actions and shapes the way they experience the world. This applies not only to clients from other countries—different states or even families can be cultural influences.

Because of that, you cannot assume your interpretation of a client’s behavior is correct. Rowe says, “Ask yourself what else things could mean. What else could it mean that the person isn’t looking me in the eye? What else could it mean that the person isn’t smiling at me? You can then ask another question that gets you more information.”

Gardenswartz suggests scheduling a session with your team to discuss cultural differences. “If you can help people understand that culture is huge and the differences are dramatic, if they have that lens, they’ll be less judgmental and less frustrated.”



4) Prepare for clients’ different languages

First, know what languages people on your team speak so they can be resources when needed, Rowe says. Have key forms already translated into your clients’ most commonly spoken languages.

“If I come in and see something printed in my own language, which is not English, I’m going to have much more confidence and trust in you than if it’s only in English,” Gardenswartz says. Showing a willingness to adapt to a client’s preferred language can lead to customer trust and loyalty.



5) Focus on what the client really needs

Simply asking what a client needs is not enough, since most of us do not know what we need, Rowe says. “You’ve

got to find out more information about the person to help you understand their needs. How are they using this car? How long are they planning to keep it? Who’s going to be driving it?” Ask clarifying questions and tailor the information you’re providing to their specific needs.

This again comes down to a question of attitude. “It’s not just about understanding the car, the finances or even about emotional intelligence,” Gardenswartz says. “I have to really care about who is in front of me and building a connection with that person.”



6) Listen closely

If people feel like they have been heard, they are more likely to be satisfied. “When people feel they’re listened to, their brain releases endorphins and they feel good,” Rowe says. “A lot of times, that’s hard because you’re in a hurry and you want to get to the point, and all cultures don’t communicate as directly as we do.”

Be accepting even if a client says they cannot make the decision right now, Gardenswartz says. “Listen and be nonjudgmental about the way they’re approaching this process.”

Gardenswartz and Lowe have seen many times how using these emotional intelligence concepts help people create more harmonious relationships with both colleagues and clients, Rowe says. “They go away from their workday feeling more fulfilled—and their customers are happy.”

