

## The First Annual Home Performance Conference of Oregon Speaking About Home Performance

Whenever you speak to your customers, one thing is constant: you must translate the language of home performance into human terms. And talking about your amazing tools is not the path to making sales. The home performance industry has come a long way in the last generation. But none of us has seen the market acceptance of home performance that we'd hoped for. What we need now is a shift in perception.

**Why Should They Care?** The truth is few people outside the industry really care about the technologies that we in the industry have invented and love. You can be assured that when electricians swept across North America selling the benefits of home electrical wiring during the 1920s and 30s that they didn't lecture homeowners on the beauty of Ohm's Law and other principles of home electrical wiring! Yet that is what many sales people in the home performance industry do when they elaborate to homeowners on the value of things like pressure diagnostics.

**What Do They Buy?** The truth is that most people will only buy a few things in this life: comfort, security, and social status among them. If you bundle these personal values into home performance, and market the whole package to people who can afford it, you'll have a home performance business.

**How Do They View You?** Your customers will evaluate and make decisions about your services in different ways during each stage of the sales process. They'll make some *scientific* decisions. They make *emotional* decisions. And they'll make purely *financial* decisions. You'll be more successful in communicating with them, and closing the sale, if you recognize these different stages of evaluation and decision-making.

### Stages of the Sales Process

**The Initial Contact.** Whether you first contact the customer by phone, email, or in a face-to-face meeting, you can be sure that you and your organization are under scrutiny. Right away they'll ask themselves, "Do I like him or her?" and, "Do they know what they're talking about?" This might be a good time to mention some scientific ideas about home performance as time

allows. They've reached out to you, they've put themselves out in the world of commerce, and they're probably able to make a rational and scientific evaluation of what you say.

**The Sales Call and Home Evaluation.** Once you've entered someone's home, you had best recognize that you're on their territory. They know a lot about their home, even if it's wrong, and they run their household the way they want. The primary question at this stage may be, "*Do I want him or her in my home?*". Be sure that your salespeople can pass this test, and that they have the personal and cultural sensitivity to put people at ease. This visit is also one time to show a little expertise, but don't overdo it by standing in someone's bedroom and playing scientist. They're at home, after all, where they make a lot of emotional decisions.

**Delivering and Negotiating the Proposal.** Now this is where the tough sales people put the pressure on. But you should beware of the hard sell, especially if your conversion rate is low. You are not selling disposable widgets – you're asking them to let you alter the place they call home. You can explain some hard-and-fast facts about the proposed work to satisfy their need to believe that their money will be well spent. But the questions they're really asking at this stage are, "*Can I even afford this?*" and, "*Do I really want their crews in my home?*". Don't botch this process by ignoring their concerns, because in expressing some doubts they're just trying to protect their family by saving some money and avoiding the uproar of having their home turned into a construction site. Be patient and sensitive, but do not give up.

**Implementing the Work.** Once you're on the job, the skills of communication among everyone in your organization will be important. Most home performance work is dirty, smelly, and noisy, and all you can do is try to minimize those hazards and play damage control. But remember that the questions in the front of their minds are probably along the lines of, "*Are they wrecking my house?*" and, "*Is my money being well spent?*". Just stick with it, solve the problems, and be sure your crews are properly trained to avoid crisis on the job.

It's at this stage that you'll hear questions from your customers that reflect all their needs at once: rational, emotional, and financial responses all mixed together. That's why you hear contractors say that their client "went crazy" once they started the job. But you should be able to address your clients mixed needs effectively because by this time you've been paying close attention to them throughout the sales cycle, and you've established a relationship that allows you to communicate with them as needed on a rational, emotional, or financial level. Right?

-- Chris Dorsi, December 2012