

Sales Coach Series

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Developing a professional communication style

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The Dilemma

I read in last month's Infomatics that customers don't like salespeople to be too 'matey'. How can I tell if I'm overstepping the mark?

The Coaching

There's no hard and fast rule - every prospect is different - but if you try to build rapport primarily through being friendly and find it isn't reciprocated then you may be. Ultimately, successful working relationships are typically those which respect professional boundaries and with which both parties feel most comfortable, whether that be keeping strictly to business or sharing dirty jokes in the pub.

However, it's early in the relationship that salespeople can mistake being matey with building rapport.

- Asking 'how are you?' to a prospect you barely know sounds insincere. It's also a great opportunity for the prospect to respond 'very busy' and end the call.
- Using the prospect's first name too early in a cold call
- Asking about their personal life, from whether they watched the football last night to their weekend plans, can seem over-familiar unless you've established the working relationship or they ask you first.
- Sharing too much information about yourself can also jar with prospects - why would they want to know where you're going on holiday?
- Using casual language or tone of voice, as if talking to someone you know, can suggest that you are in a junior position.

Building rapport is about demonstrating that you can understand a prospect's needs and build a business alliance as distinct from a social friendship - try to do the latter before the former and you may actually hinder your sales campaign!