

CAN I BE HONEST?

“Most people lie everyday, according to Professor Bella M. De-Paulo and other researchers. The most common lies are told to friends, to spare them from the truth.”

- TONY MAYO

Lying is the toughest part of being a salesman. No, not me lying, but prospects assuming that I -- the salesperson -- am lying. Expecting the worst of salespeople seems to bring out the worst in people.

Years ago, I heard that one of my clients had been put in charge of a major new project. Expecting more business, I went to his office and said, “Congratulations on getting Project X.”

He looked me in the eye -- looked me in the eye! -- and said, “That’s not my project.”

“Who’s got it?” I asked.

“It hasn’t been approved,” he said.

I was in a meeting with him a few days later where he reported on Project X, which he had been running for weeks. Weeks! I was stunned, but he didn’t even react to my glare. Lying to a salesman apparently isn’t worth being embarrassed about.

I got accustomed to being misled by prospects, but recently a purchasing agent still managed to shock me. She told me about a salesman who was extraordinarily arrogant and rude at their first meeting.

“So, I guess that was the last time he got in to see you?”

“Oh, no,” she said with a devilish smile, “I let him keep flying across the country to see me, even set-up a full-day demo with a bunch of his technical people. But he never had a chance.”

“You mean it didn’t even matter if his product was better for your company?”

CAN I BE HONEST?

“He was dead meat.”

Why, I wondered, are nice people such jerks to salespeople? Then, a potential tenant laid it out for me.

He liked the apartment I had for rent, so he immediately signed the lease and wrote a check. Next day, the check bounces. He'd put a stop payment on it! I called him and he said, “There was another place I liked better, but I was afraid I wouldn't get it, so I wanted to hold yours.”

“But you signed a contract. You wrote a check. I got stuck with an empty apartment. How could you do that?”

Always remember this: If you don't attend the funerals of your friends, they will certainly not attend yours.

- H.L. MENCKEN

What he said next explained it all. Many people -- probably even you -- will agree with him, but still it floored me with its bold simplicity.

“Hey, you're a salesman. I figure you're lying to me so its okay to lie to you.”

I figure you're lying to me so its okay to lie to you.

I suppose that's why it's okay to tell salespeople “She's in a meeting.” or “If it were up to me, we'd go with you.” or, my favorite, “Send me a proposal and I'll think about it.” Sure, the only one thinking about it is going to be me, the salesman.

Expecting the worst of salespeople seems to bring out the worst in prospects.

Remove the following phrases from your speech:

“...to be honest...”
“...to tell you the truth...”
“...frankly...”

CAN I BE HONEST?

When you send a signal of “now I am going to start telling you the truth,” your prospect can’t help thinking, “Has he been lying up to now?” That isn’t what you meant, is it? Try these phrases instead,

“My I be blunt with you?”

“This may seem harsh...”

“At the risk of seeming rude...”

“My personal opinion is...”

These do not undermine the credibility of your other statements and probably are closer to what you honestly mean.