

Expert Advice

Positioning your company ahead of the pack will make customers think of you first.

BY DANIELLE KENNEDY

RECENTLY I WAS thinking about all the buying decisions our family has made during the past year. After 20 years of living and doing business in one location, we moved our company and our residence 1,000 miles away to another state. All this relocating meant finding new service providers to make our business and personal lives run smoothly.

When we moved into our new town, we knew no one. But our needs were great: butchers, bakers, printers, insurance agents, bankers, computer whizzes, audio and video duplicators, doctors, lawyers, dentists . . . the list was endless. How did we go about choosing the right people to perform all the services required?

The answer is *positioning*.

We chose a banker, a printer, a cleaning service, our builder and just about every other provider based on their positioning within the community. What do I mean by positioning? To clarify, I sought out the king of market positioning himself—Nido R. Qubein.

"Positioning means presenting yourself as an expert in the field," says Qubein, CEO and founder of Creative Services Inc., an international management consulting firm in High Point, North Carolina. His client list reads like the *Who's Who* of international business. He has also written dozens of business books, including *Stairway to Success* (Executive Books).

"You position yourself as a valuable resource—a person your prospects wouldn't dare pass up an opportunity to see," says Qubein. He believes the way great salespeople

position themselves is the single biggest factor in their ability to get appointments with key decision makers.

He should know. Positioning was his goal when he came to America from Lebanon at age 17. "I could

Today Qubein is recognized as one of the foremost authorities on achieving peak performance and serves on the boards of 17 universities, companies and communication organizations. Last year, he became the recipient of the prestigious Ellis Island Medal of Honor, which is given to individuals and groups who have made contributions to the United States. Qubein says from the moment his feet touched American soil, he knew he needed to position himself as a competent pro, no matter what the undertaking.

Entrepreneurs can learn from Qubein's strategy. Positioning yourself the right way can have clients



First place: *The key to good positioning is presenting yourself to customers as an authority in your field, says Nido R. Qubein.*

not speak English, and I had no connections," recalls Qubein. "My father died when I was 6 years old, and my mother was left to raise us five kids. The advice she gave me molded my life: 'Walk hand in hand, side by side, with people who are great.'"

When Qubein arrived here, he was on a mission—to find those great people and to become one himself. "You don't travel 7,000 miles to this country to fail," he says. "I knew I had to work hard and work smart."

knocking down your door for your product or service.

■ BE DELIBERATE

Positioning is no accident. It is the result of planning, preparation and hard work. Here are 10 effective strategies for positioning recommended by Qubein:

1. Position yourself first in your own mind. "People will see you the way you perceive yourself," says Qubein. "Positioning starts first in your own mind. It is only when you

are convinced that you are a valuable and capable person that you can even begin to consider positioning yourself with your customers." Obviously, your expertise will be in whatever field your business is in. Are you confident of your value and knowledge in your area? If not, you may have a hard time convincing potential clients. Now's the time to

build your expertise and value.

2. Position yourself with your attitude toward your customers. According to Qubein, some people walk into a room and say "Here I am." But the savvy salesperson walks into a room and says "Ah, there you are!"

For example, if you make yourself the center of attention in a sales interview with a prospect, "your pros-

pect will resist all your efforts to move forward with the selling process," warns Qubein. "But if you make the prospect the center of attention, the barriers will come down quickly."

3. Position yourself with your appearance. "The key is to always dress well enough to fit in with the top people you're calling on, yet never to blend in with the wallpaper. Think of your clothes as the way you package yourself," says Qubein.

4. Position yourself with your actions. Qubein warns not to pop in unannounced at your prospect's office. "What message does that convey to your prospect?" he asks. "It's like wearing a label that says 'Pest.'"

Always think through everything you do and the way you do it to make sure it creates precisely the impression you want to make.

5. Position yourself with words. "Suppose you say to your prospect 'You can't pass up a deal like this.' Your prospect will see that as a presumptuous challenge and will be on guard immediately," says Qubein. "You're saying, in effect, 'Just try to stop me from making this sale,' and the prospect, properly challenged, will instinctively try to stop you."

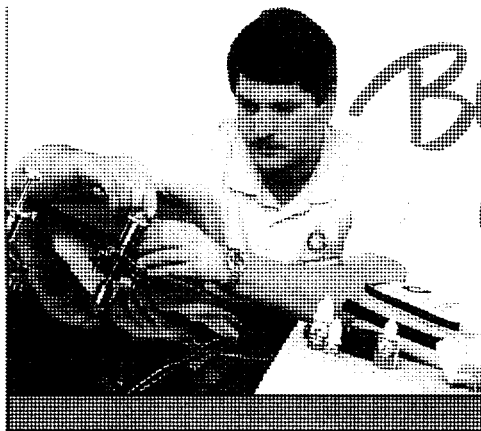
A better course of action is to ask plenty of questions to understand what the client needs. Then use words to convey that you're trying your best to solve their problem—not grandstanding about your product or service. Sincerity and a desire to help solve a problem will get you much farther than trite catch phrases.

6. Position yourself with your focus. Never forget that the most pressing question on your prospect's mind is "What's in this for me?"

"The real selling pros position themselves as consultants and business partners to their clients," says Qubein. "They always keep the focus precisely where it belongs—on the customer, not on themselves or their products."

7. Position yourself with your presentation. "If your presentation is too slick and relies too much on memorized phrases, it comes across as canned; it sounds insincere. The key is to practice it enough so you can give a structured presentation in

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SALES SUCCESS

a spontaneous way," advises Qubein.

Know your material well enough that you can customize it to fit each new prospect's needs and concerns. I've found that the more I customize my presentations, even for large audiences, the better the response and the more referrals I receive to speak to new audiences.

8. Position yourself by the way you handle objections. Do you challenge your prospects when they raise objections? Or do you handle their concerns in a friendly manner, by precisely identifying the main issue that is keeping the person from buying? This could make the difference between a sale and a "No, thanks."

9. Position yourself by the way you close the sale. How do you ask for the order? Are you giving the customer the idea he is doing you a favor by buying your product? Or do you let him know by your words and actions that your offer provides value for the money spent? "Tailor each close to fit your customer's personality," says Qubein. Then your positioning as an expert will be a given.

10. Position yourself by the way you follow up. "Professional selling involves developing a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship with every customer you sell to," says Qubein. "It's turning one-time customers into clients who view you as a valuable resource in your area of expertise."

Doesn't positioning boil down to walking the walk? If you practice what you preach, you'll reap the rewards of decent behavior. Those rewards put you in a class all by yourself, and that's the essence of positioning. The good news is anyone—even a flat-broke 17-year-old boy who couldn't speak English—can position themselves for future greatness. E

Danielle Kennedy presents sales and marketing seminars and keynote addresses worldwide and is the author of seven sales books as well as audio and video sales training programs. Check local bookstores for her book, Seven Figure Selling (Berkley Press). Write to her in care of Entrepreneur, 2392 Morse Ave., Irvine, CA 92614.

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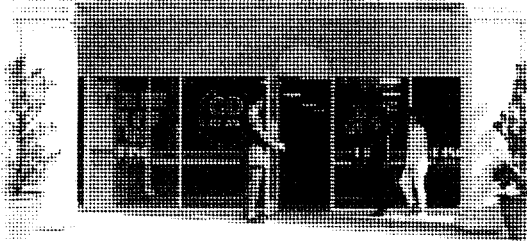
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