

No Pacing Statements! But Need Personal Connection!

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Imagine that the top salespeople in America came to Korea to sell their products to Korean customers. No matter how wonderful their techniques are, they probably wouldn't be as successful in Korea as in the States simply because American sales techniques are not compatible with Korean culture. Korean salespeople's way of getting in sync with their customer is different from the savvy American salespeople due to their personality differences. While good American salespeople use pacing statements, the Korean salespeople succeed in getting in sync by sharing personal backgrounds.

It is believed that skilled American salespeople use pacing statements at the beginning of the conversation to gain the trust of their customer. These pacing statements utilize a customer's observation or experience and consequently, serve the purpose of establishing an unconscious affinity between seller and customer. Unlike the good American salespeople, Korean salespeople don't use the pacing statement because the stereotypical quick-tempered characters of Korean people don't allow them to spend time on those statements. So it is hard to find the Korean salespeople saying such statements as "You are looking at this car, and you can remember the joy of owning a new reliable car," words typically used by the best American salespeople. Most of Korean salespeople would think those are unnecessary and customers also would find these kinds of actions a bit verbose because of their innately hasty personality. This impatient character is in stark contrast to the American's logic-oriented personality; detailed and often repetitive explanations are critical to ensure accurate communication. There is a kind of joke in Korea that the very first word the foreign visitors learn is "Pali, pali!," meaning "Hurry! hurry!" in English. Sociologists say that the impatient character was formed by the frequent invasion of one's country. Since one country or the other was always invading the peninsula, Koreans have been cultured into living for the moment instead of a systematic, well thought out and planned existence. So we could say that this historical background influenced both the sales agents and customers to be anxious to reach their ultimate goal - selling and knowing about the product. Therefore, if the salespeople would try to start a conversation about something as banal as weather or a trivial comment on a customer's behavior, the customer would react negatively and go somewhere else because they would have expected the salesperson to talk about the product as soon as possible. Also salespeople tend to jump into a sales pitch immediately because they want to sell their product to the customers as soon as possible.

Although Koreans have an innately impatient nature in conducting their business, there is an area specifically left for even the hasty Korean salesmen. This space is where salesmen are given the time to establish a rapport with his or her customer. The Korean salespeople succeed in getting in sync by sharing personal backgrounds, such as birthplace and school - which is so called 'Youn-go' in Korean. In 'Youn go-oriented society like Korea, personal con-

nections based on their common experience are very important. In the realm of 'Youn Go', the most widely used personal backgrounds is one's birthplace, called "ji-yeon," and school backgrounds which is called "hak-yeon." This personal connection based on birthplace and scholastic origin has greatly influenced many fields of society from business to political arena. By sharing their personal backgrounds they get to understand each other and sometimes this takes a favorable turn for sales people's business activities. Even the quick-tempered customers wouldn't make haste when they found that they have similar pasts. They would probably start to get interested in the sales agent and would concentrate more on what he is saying as the customer takes the salesperson as a closer entity than just simply a stranger. Here is an example of the timing in which the technique of sharing personal background is done. You will find that Korean salespeople usually try to build a common ground in the middle of their sales pitch. This is quite different from the American salesperson trying to get in sync at the beginning of the conversation. In the midst of the sales pitch, Mr. Soo-kwang, the salesman, asks about the customer's birthplace like, "Wow, by the way where are you from? Your dialect sounds very familiar to me. I'm from Pusan." The customer would either agree or disagree about his comment. If the customer really came from same place, the chance is that they will become much closer from that point. The customer would innately try to find more similarities with the seller by asking more about his or her past. Here is where the school connection, "hak-yeon" comes in! The excited salesperson goes to say, "Oh, my! We both are from Pusan! It's very nice to hear from someone from the South. Then what high school did you graduate there?" This question leads to talk about their school days and finally, the rapport will have been established before Mr. Soo-kwang goes into his last sales pitch.

You may probably be surprised at seeing Korean salespeople who hastily jump into his sales pitch without any pacing statement. However, don't get disappointed about that! If you wait for a while, the salesperson will most likely try to get in sync with you by asking about your home country: "Are you from New York? I've been there last summer!! It was amazing !"