

Never Ask an Attendee: “Can I Help You?”

Tips for Engaging Attendees and Opening the Conversation

Increase the Quantity of Attendees that Visit Your Exhibit

You'll generate better results if you non-verbally communicate to attendees that you'd like to speak with them. A study done at UCLA years ago found that people convey more than half of their message non-verbally. That's why it's important to non-verbally communicate to attendees that: 1) you're approachable; 2) you'd like them to enter your exhibit; and 3) you'd like to speak with them. Communicate this message with your facial expression, eyes and body language.

Suggestions to communicate interest to an attendee include:

- ◆ Face outward towards the aisle to engage attendees in the aisle;
- ◆ Look around to engage attendees already in your exhibit;
- ◆ Maintain an open body posture (no folded arms);
- ◆ Smile and communicate interest with your eyes;
- ◆ If an attendee looks away after you've nonverbally engage them, wait for two or three seconds to see if the person looks back at you, which is a nonverbal response that often means he or she will speak with you; and
- ◆ Step forward, shake hands, welcome the person to your exhibit and introduce yourself.

Many interactions verbally start – and end – with “Can I help you?” or “May I help you?” which are closed-ended questions – questions that will generally get a yes or no response. The majority of attendees respond to these questions with “Thanks...just looking.” Closed-ended questions at the beginning of a show floor interaction are counter-productive and actually make it harder for both you and your exhibit visitor to start a conversation.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

After you've introduced yourself, ask an open-ended question or two about the attendee (i.e. company; roles and responsibilities; etc.) which will serve the dual purpose of helping your visitor feel welcome in your exhibit – your “place of business” on the show floor – and helping you to begin to identify (qualify) who you're speaking with.

Next, follow-up with another open-ended question about the person's reason(s) for attending the show or for visiting your exhibit. Questions you might ask include:

- ◆ “Good morning, (name). Welcome to (company name). What's the best thing you've seen at the show so far?”
- ◆ “I see you're with (company). What do you do?”
- ◆ “What motivated you to come to (show name)?”
- ◆ “How can we make your visit to our exhibit of value to you?”

*“If you're going to help a man, you want to know something about him, don't you?”
Joseph, to Clarence the angel, from It's a Wonderful Life*

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Transition

Once you have a preliminary understanding of whom you’re speaking with and their specific area of interest, make one of the following transitions:

- ◆ Transition to the “body” of the interaction with an open-ended question that will help you develop a better understanding of the person’s specific goals, problems or needs:
 - ◆ “Let’s talk a little about your existing situation and how you’re trying to…”
- ◆ Transition to an associate in the exhibit:
 - ◆ “My area of expertise is _____. Let me introduce you to my associate who specializes in your area of interest and can better answer your question.”
- ◆ Transition by professionally disengaging:
 - ◆ “The best way for you to get the detailed information you’re looking for is to visit our Web site, which can be accessed at…”

Diversified Sponsors Online Training for Your Exhibit Workers

Because Diversified is committed to our exhibitors’ success, and because professionally trained exhibit workers generate measurably improved results, we have made arrangements for your exhibit workers to participate in *The Trade Show Advantage® Online* (These tips are excerpts from the course). This highly interactive, Web-based training program is an excellent refresher for your experienced exhibit workers and a great course for people on your staff who are not experienced in proper show etiquette. You and your exhibit staff can access the course with the following information:

Web Site: www.tradeshowadvantage.com

Course ID: Diversified

Available: October 1st –15th and November 4th – 29th

This article was written for Diversified by Keith Reznick (keith@creativetraining.com), whose company created The Trade Show Advantage® Online and has trained more than 30,000 people how to: 1) communicate more effectively; and 2) build mutually beneficial business relationships both on and off the show floor.