



# Six Skills and Behaviors to Emphasize in Sales Education

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Salesmanship is central to a startup's success, but rather than embracing it, many budding entrepreneurs shy away from sales. Entrepreneurship educators can shift this mindset of apprehension to one of enthusiasm. Entrepreneurs who are willing to field tough questions early on and refine their products accordingly are better able to communicate their value to prospective customers. This gives them an advantage in everything from describing the efficacy of their products and pricing, to articulating their credibility and experience as an entrepreneur. Here are six skills and behaviors entrepreneurship educators should emphasize when teaching sales.



- 1. Start Early.** Getting feedback from prospective buyers before fully developing a product means entrepreneurs have the opportunity to correct for false assumptions early on and pivot accordingly. Educators can equip their students with efficient methodologies for gathering feedback early and often, so they can assess a product's viability through an iterative process.
- 2. Listen to the Customer.** Too often, entrepreneurs allow their passion and ego to cloud their judgment, making them respond negatively to criticism and ideas that could increase their product's marketability. Educators can train their students to practice flexibility and open-mindedness, and truly listen for what customers actually want. This requires allowing the initial idea to be reshaped, setting preconceived notions and passions aside, and focusing on the pain points and potential solutions in the market.
- 3. Avoid Early Discounts.** Faced with pressure to generate early sales, founders often are tempted to offer price discounts in order to close initial deals, which can lead to an unsustainable pricing precedent. Entrepreneurship educators can encourage their students to explore more sustainable ways to incentivize early customers, such as free shipping, free trials, or a discount on orders placed before a certain date.
- 4. Use Caution When Selling to Family and Friends.** Early sales to family members is common, especially in the restaurant, clothing, and wealth management industries. Entrepreneurship educators must caution their students against inferring sales potential from these transactions. Enthusiasm from family and friends does not reflect the true potential of a product, and in some cases can create a false sense of validation.
- 5. Define Differentiators.** Many entrepreneurs have difficulty articulating precisely what makes their product or service different from the competition. This not only harms product marketing and messaging, it also leaves entrepreneurs scrambling when faced with the objections of potential customers. Entrepreneurship educators can teach their students early on to formulate a key value proposition for each of their products—and then differentiate them clearly and concisely from the competition.
- 6. Establish Credibility.** Prospective customers tend to express doubt about a new company on the basis of the founder's age, gender, personal background, or experience level. To overcome this doubt, entrepreneurship educators should help students establish credibility early in the sales process. This can include emphasizing educational credentials or past accomplishments, forming partnerships with more established industry experts, and creating a strong narrative and messaging strategy for the company, product, and pricing.

*Adapted from [What Entrepreneurs Get Wrong](#), originally published in Harvard Business Review »*

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