**Personal Connection in Sales**

Hi everybody, welcome back. I'm Kenny Chapman. I'm your contractor coach and your sales trainer, and this week we're going to talk about making a personal connection with your customers in their homes.

Here's the thing, ladies and gentlemen, and I want you to think about this from a sales perspective, from a customer service perspective, and from a technician perspective of being in the customer's home.

There are a lot of factors going on that we need to be really mindful of and pay attention to in order to *maximize the experience for our customers*, becoming very customer-centric in our sales process.

**The “Game” is Changing**

So, I've been doing tons of ride-alongs lately and I've been in trucks in all kinds of different companies. I've been in my own company’s trucks doing more ride-alongs than ever before to observe the process, to observe what's happening.

Customers are changing. The market has changed. The game is changing. Our industry is changing. The Internet is in play. Customers are more informed and, yet, sometimes that can mean they’re less informed if they’ve done some “research” and some study, right?

So, here’s what I'm seeing: The really good salespeople, the people that really get ultimate results from what I would consider minimal effort, per se, are the ones that have that “knack” for just **connecting with people**, right? We’ve all had people in our lives that we have this experience with, where it just seems like, “Oh, yeah, they’re pretty easy to connect with. I kind of like that person,” or whatever the case is. We call them “people persons” or “people people,” I guess, or however you want to frame that. Basically, they're just good with people and that’s kind of how we say it.

Then other people say, “No, that’s not me. I’m not that way. I can't do it.” I’ve observed some things recently in the field in this industry, watching technicians with basically zero personality still closing deals, and I've seen technicians with phenomenal personalities who are rarely closing deals.

So, here's what I'm after for you today. We're going to talk about four key things that we’ve got to be mindful of and we must pay attention to if we’re going to make a personal connection with our customers.

A couple of the things – I know this for a fact – are going to make you a little uncomfortable.

**The Four Keys to Personal Connection**

Not too long ago I did one of my two-day CSI Technician Success Academies, and I know some of the pushbacks that you’re going to give me in your mind right now as I'm getting ready to share this information with you.

Please understand this isn't something I read in a textbook. This isn't something that I learned in a seminar. This is something I’m doing and seeing on a daily basis in my own business as well as my clients’ businesses all over the country, Canada, and Australia.

**#1: Ask Questions Early and Often**

So, here’s the number one thing (and we’ve talked about this before) but I want you to realize the power of this when you’re making a personal connection: straight out of the gate, **right away, as soon as you can you’ve got to begin asking questions.**  You’ve got to get the customer opening up. I’m tired of going on service calls with technicians and as we walk in the customer says, “Oh, yeah, I’ve got this issue with my HVAC,” or “you know, it’s summertime when I’m recording this video, so I don’t have any cooling.” Okay? That’s an example of one. There’s no cooling.

Well, then the technician just goes and starts looking at things and starts diagnosing. Wait a minute. This isn't about the condensing unit. This isn't about the equipment, ladies and gentlemen. **This is about the people and the interaction.**

I've got other customers that their technicians call me, and we'll debrief their calls and I'll ask them certain questions about how the call went as we move forward. And that’s what I want to share with you here today:

**-You’ve got to connect for success.**

-**You’ve got to connect for sales.**

And what happens?

I have a good example. One of my clients had called and lost a water heater job, over $150.00. It was $1,550.00 that the technician had quoted and the customer said, “I think it should probably be worth about $1,400.00 or so.” Now, really? Did we lose that call over $150.00 on $1,500.00? I’m guaranteeing you right now we did not.

But what happens? The technician loses the call. He calls dispatch and says, “Oh, we’re so expensive. I knew they wouldn’t pay this much.” Blah, blah, blah. So, then, tell me about it. What happened on the call? How many different options did you present to the customer **based on the questions that you began asking right away?**

And guess what I hear?

“Yeah, all I did was quote a price in the garage just verbally in front of the water heater.” **Well, no wonder you lost the call!** That’s not how the process works.

-You’ve got to take the time.

-You’ve got to go to your truck. You’ve got to build a nice option sheet.

-You’ve got to spend time **building value in each one of these options,** and you’ve got to have an opportunity to sell against yourself, right?

So, here’s the example, and I always coach to *sell against yourself.* I’d much rather sell against my own company then sell against a competitor. That means I've got to give a nice list of options. The only way that I can build a nice list of options is if I ask the customer questions to know what kind of options I can offer them:

*-How old is the home?*

*-Has it ever been remodeled?*

*-How long have you lived in it?*

*-How long do you plan to live in it?*

*-How many people live in the home?*

And technicians say, “Wait a minute. That's getting a little pushy and a little personal…”

Really? Come on. **Get out of your own way!** We’ve got to make this connection. And others of you are saying, “Well, yeah, I ask those questions.” We’ll refer back to that here in a little bit as to what you do with those questions.

So, my friends, the first thing you’ve got to do if you’re going to be effective in selling and high-level customer-centric service, (which is what we're all about because we’ve got to have our customers buying today and we’ve got to have our customers coming back) is that you’ve *got to begin asking more questions.*

Often times I'll get asked by technicians, “Okay, yeah, but does it feel like probing? Does it feel like it's too much?”

Guess what? As soon as you're uncomfortable with it, then ask a couple more questions. I can’t seem to get people to ask enough and just begin to focus on the relationship through the questions.

Remember who people buy from? We’ve covered this multiple times.

-People that they know

-People that they like

-People that they trust

So, if you don't ask them questions to get them to open up, to get them to share some things with you, *then they're not going to be able to like you either.* We’ll cover more of that in just a moment.

Now, if you're a little uncomfortable with this at first, just go to the primary reason that they called you. If you do courtesy inspections, talk about that. If you don't or if you’re doing a service agreement situation, you’re covering that. But you’ve got to **start at the primary source**, so if they call me for a kitchen faucet I’ve got to be in front of the kitchen faucet.

This is the point where I begin to ask the questions like: How old is it? Did you like it when it was working? How long has it been leaking? How long have you been in the home? How old is the home? How big is the home? Are there any other fixtures that you've had replaced recently, or are all the fixtures around the same age? When is the last time you had the water pressure tested?”

And they’ll say, “Oh, I had it done.”

“Okay, what was the reading? How much pressure was there?”

See, you can ask all these things and they’re going to respond, “I don't know.” Why? *They probably didn’t have it done.* I mean, it's mandatory in almost all the companies that I work in to test water pressure. I haven't seen it yet on as many calls as I've been riding on. It's just one of these things we forget to do as technicians, and it's a very, very powerful thing.

So, you've got to have the questions to build your options sheet, which we’ll cover again more in a different video. This is about setting the table for you to **make a personal connection.**

So, number one, write that down: Ask questions early and ask questions often. You start out and then, as you continue to build the relationship, you start to work through this process.

**#2: Court Your Customers**

You might be thinking, “Wait a minute. We’re not in a relationship.”

Yes, you are.

You're totally in a relationship and you've got to court them just like if you were in a dating relationship. Now, I’m not saying to go date your clients! That's not what I'm talking about here. But I want you to think about it and frame it and put it in your own mind like: what does that process look like? How does that feel?

I think about the very first date I had with my lovely wife, Christy. We closed a restaurant. We went to dinner at 7:00 at night. This place closed at 11:30 at night. It’s a weeknight. They couldn’t get us out of that restaurant. They literally had to say, “You know, look, we’re all cleaned up. We’ve let you sit here as long as you can. You’ve got to go.” *You don’t have to go home, but you can’t say here, right?* And so, what did we do? We left there and we actually went somewhere else to continue our conversation. Why? Because we were **discovering what was going on in each other's lives** and what's happening.

Now, certainly, those are different levels than what we do with our customers, but I want you to think about it as very similar, because you've got to uncover this information, but we don't look at it that way.

When you very first begin dating somebody– if it’s been a long, long time for you – if you’ve been married a long time or single a long time or whatever, think about friends and how they give you feedback of when they’re just totally into the person in the beginning, in the “courting phase.”

In a relationship that’s a **necessary piece**, right?

You don’t meet somebody at your local bar or your local pub and walk up and say, “Hey, can I buy you a drink? Here’s a ring. Would you like to get married?”

That’s not what you do, is it?

I hope you’re saying that you don’t do that! It’s probably not the best strategy.

So you say, “No, of course not, Kenny. I get it. That’s stupid.” Well, really, is it that stupid?

Because why else would we just get to a call, knock on the door, the customer says, “I’ve got a water heater issue,” you walk into the garage and you say, “Sure, I can take care of that. It’s going to be $1,500.00” or whatever it is?

That’s just like saying, “Hey, can I buy you a drink? And here’s a wedding ring. Would you like to get married?” You don’t know them, and they don’t know you.

That’s the point.

So you see, you’ve got to ask them questions to uncover what's going on in their situation and in their life. Then you figure out how your products and services and company can **enhance any of those areas**, and then put it together on a good options sheet.

But that only comes if you're willing to court your customer a little bit.

Some of the strategies that we use by doing water pressure and water quality testing aren’t even about using that to add on or gain additional sales. It’s about helping give a little time to **invest in the relationship and go above and beyond** the value that the other competition isn't giving.

So, you’ve got to court them very, very much like a relationship.

**#3: Talk About Yourself**

Now, back up here, because many of you are thinking, “Yeah, whatever.” I mean, every time that I talk to technicians about opening up and sharing something about themselves I get this: “I’m cringing. No, I’m here to fix it. I didn’t get into this business to be a public speaker or a motivational speaker. And I don’t want to do all this paperwork and all these kinds of things.”

Well, **get over it**, because you’re choosing to work in an environment where that’s necessary.

The paperwork’s necessary. The “public speaking,” or however you phrase it, is necessary, because the game has changed.

If this doesn’t work for you, if you can’t build a quality human relationship in 30 minutes on the front end of a call then you need to go do something else, because that is **necessary to be successful** in the environment that I see today, and it has changed.

Money’s not flowing the way that it was. It’s beginning to start to turn around while I’m recording this video. And we’re starting to see some certain upticks and indicators definitely in certain parts of the states, and several of my clients had record months last month based on some of the strategies and the things that we’re doing.

Maybe the economy is playing a little bit better, but we’ve got to go above and beyond anything that we ever have to this point; and some of that includes you talking about yourself a little bit, and it can just be in your discovery process of the call.

Maybe you’re looking in the back of the toilet tank and you’re just looking in there: “Oh, how long have you lived in the area? I just need to look at some stuff in here.”

“Oh, yeah, well, we’ve been here ten years.”

“Oh, really? Where’d you come from?”

“Oh, I came from California.”

“Oh, yeah. Well, I’m originally from California, too.”

“Really? What part?”

“I lived in San Diego. My parents moved a lot.”

You’re just looking for a way to connect. **It’s about connecting the dots.**

Remember that old “board game” (or however you would describe it) called *Connect Four*, where you drop the little red and black checkers into this game and you had to connect four of them in a row to win the game? I want you to think about that with your customer.

-You’ve got to connect,

-Then you’ve got to build a little bit,

-Then you’ve got to connect again.

So, that’s why we're **paying attention to the lifestyle** that goes on in the home.

**Observing Your Client’s Environment**

I was on a ride-along not too long ago and there were all these paintings that were clearly painted by the same artist. This art was everywhere.

It was on an electrical call and so we were going through doing an electrical safety inspection, looking at all the different outlets and testing lights, so we walked through the entire house. The technician did a great job of getting us through the entire home, but he was just focused on that. We would go into a room and he's just looking at the outlet.

Now, understand, I get it. I'm just there observing. I'm not minimizing what you have going on, because you're thinking about the technical aspects and you’ve got to build this relationship. But, ladies and gentlemen, just back up and **open up a little bit.**

So, in this particular case, we finally got to a point in the call and the technician was not going to ask anything about it; and I always keep my mouth closed when I'm doing ride-alongs with technicians, but as we’re sitting there I just happened to say to the customer, “Man, I’ve noticed you’ve got a similar artist throughout the home. It’s really cool. Who’s the artist?”

He lights up, and he says, “My wife is the artist. She painted all these.”

I said, “Wow. That’s really cool. My wife’s an artist, too. She does abstracts. She doesn’t do the type of art that your wife does…” Bam! **There was the connection**.

Now, I get down to the part of the call where I’m going to ask him for money. Heck, we came from the same part of the country in this case. Heck, we've got a tie with our wives and painting. And guess what**? It doesn't matter where the connection comes from**, because do you know anybody that has a friend that paints or you’ve ever walked through an art gallery in your life?

Of course you have.

So, you don’t have to have to say, “Well, my wife paints.” That happens to be true, so I can make that connection.

If I didn't or any of you don’t, guess what? I've just told you. You could say, “Oh, yeah, I’ve got a buddy…” I’m your buddy. You could say, “I’ve got a buddy whose wife paints, too. I'm not exactly sure what medium or what kind, but it's always been interesting to me. I just don't really have that creativity. That's why I stick to the electrical thing. That’s what I’m really good at and I really enjoy.”

Bam, credibility. Credibility, connection. Credibility, connection.

Do you see what I'm saying here?

You might minimize it. I know some of you might be a little challenged by this and say, “Yeah, but I'm there to take care of it. They don't want to talk about this crap.”

Yes, they do!

I watch it happen every day. They’re uncomfortable with you in their home. The more that you’ll let them in – and that means you’ve got to talk about yourself a little bit – **the better the relationship gets.**

When you sit down, always provide several good, different options.

In this case we presented all kinds of different things. We changed outlets. We added an electric cooktop that was a customer-supplied situation. That was the original reason for the call. We added all these different things and ended up walking out **with a lot more money and a much happier customer**, because he did go through and he did a thorough job; and he connected a little, but not at the level that we can.

I’m saying **stack the odds in your favor** to the best of your ability, ladies and gentlemen.

So, we’ve got to ask them questions and then, based on what they tell us, we want to share a little bit, open up, and talk about yourself.

Now, don’t just get off on a tangent, okay?

I’ve seen this, too, where you just talk nonstop about stuff that they don’t care about. It’s about just dropping little things, okay?

This can happen any time. I was on a no air-conditioning call last week with a technician, and we got to the door, and I’m sure you’ve had this happen. We come in, we pull up in the truck, we get out, and here comes the customer out of the house. Why? It’s hotter than heck in the house. So, it’s hot outside, too, but they’re ready to get out there, because they want this fixed right away and all this kind of thing.

So, the lady meets us at the door and the technician had done his shoe covers; and at my company we use a red carpet at the front door, so he did that and asked her what was going on and a couple opening questions.

“How long has it been broken?”

Then, “How long have you not had air conditioning?”

She said, “Well, it happened three days ago. And I’m really concerned, because I have these guinea pigs in the house and they’re not very good at getting hot, so I got this little portable unit to try to get through. But, man, I’ve got to get this thing fixed.”

Most technicians in the world will say, “Okay, well, go bring me outside and show me where it’s at,” or “take me to the furnace so I can look at the air handler,” whatever the case might be.

This technician said, “Really? Guinea pigs? I remember I had a guinea pig when I was a kid. He was a cute little thing.”

**She completely opens up.** Now, we’re not even in the house yet, my friends.

She just opens up and says, “Oh, yeah, they’re really great.” Now, I’m picturing that we’re going to walk inside and see a couple guinea pigs. We walk into the living room of this house. She has 13 cages. They’re stacked, this high and way across the room, and don’t you think it stunk in that place?

But *this was her passion*, and because the technician said, “Oh, yeah, I had a guinea pig when I was a kid,” now we’re connected. He sold over $1,000.00 worth of work in that situation.

It’s so important, ladies and gentlemen, that we’ve got to *pay attention to these things.* Okay? So, number three is that you’ve got to talk about yourself.

**#4: Listen on Purpose**

Number four, the last thing that I want you to think about with making a personal connection is this: **listen and listen on purpose.**

You can ask all the questions in the world that you want, but if you’re not paying attention and you’re not listening to what they say, then you have nowhere to go.

This is your ammo.

When you get to the presentation table, when you're sitting down to deliver all the options, you’ve got to have this information that they gave you in your head. And you've got to pay attention so that if you ask a question then you can give them some feedback.

I can't tell you how many calls I debrief with technicians and I say, “You know, you asked a really good question about such and such. And what did they tell you?”

And I get, “Hmm. I don’t remember.”

“Oh, really? Well, it was a good question, but guess what? I guess it doesn’t matter now, because **you weren’t paying attention and you weren’t listening.**” **Focus on them as you listen**, as you're asking a question and they say something back.

**Connection Examples: Table Tennis and Chess**

Here’s a good example: I was on a ride-along where we had to go into the garage. So, we walk into the garage and the technician saw there was a table tennis (ping-pong) table set up that was just kind of leaned up against the wall, and he made a great observation. We're trying to connect with her straight out of the gate.

He said, “Oh, who plays table tennis?”

And she replied, “Oh, I played a lot competitively when I was younger.” (She was probably in her 80’s) That was it. He didn’t say anything else.

I'm not saying you've got to take 20 minutes and talk to her and all these kinds of things.

But how much different does that situation get, when she’s in her 80's, her husband's already gone, and she's living the last years of her life and she knows it, and you say, “Oh, who’s the table tennis player?”

And she literally said, “Well, my grandkids aren't old enough yet.” (Which is odd, with her age, if you think about it.) But she said, “My grandkids aren't old enough yet, but I played a lot competitively back in the day when I was younger.”

“Really? Tell me about that. That sounds really cool.”

You’re still doing your thing and guess what you just did? **You took her back to great time in her life.**

When you think about it, our customers that are older like that, they’re living through their past. That’s why they have all this history and the memories and the pictures. If you can tie her emotionally to something like that and now when you're sitting down at the presentation table she has that connection and she’s not even aware of it.

You’re not doing anything wrong or trying to hoodwink her in any way, but you’ve got good feelings and good energy between you, based on some things that just happened to come up on a plumbing call.

Are you kidding me? My friends, **it’s really that easy**.

-Just slow down.

-Get out of your own way.

-Ask better questions.

-Court them a little bit.

If you had a new girlfriend and she said, “Yeah, I played a lot of table tennis back in the day,” are you just going to move on to the next topic? No. You’re going to say, “Really? Tell me about that. I've played a little bit, but I'm sure not very good at it.”

I’ve seen it happen with chess. One of my best technicians did it a couple weeks ago on a call, where there was a big tabletop chess unit. And he walked by and he said, “Oh, you guys play chess.”

And the old man says, “Yeah, I play. I love to play.”

And my tech just joked and said, “Oh, well, maybe we’ll have to play for a 15 percent discount before I do the work with you here today.” We were just walking through the home and the guy’s like, “Oh, really? Have you played long?”

And he says, “Yeah, I’ve played most of my life. I really enjoy it.”

Well, then he used that, actually, to **tie back to the service agreement program**, because we give a 15 percent discount. He said, “Well, see, when you become one of our service agreement customers on our home maintenance plan – I don’t have you play you in chess for the 15 percent. You get it anyway.”

**Connect. Connect. Connect.**

So, make sure you're asking questions and make sure that you're courting them, make sure that you're talking about yourself within reason, just little snippets here and there. Not nonstop, all about you, you, you, you. No, it’s just a little bit. **Let them get to know you.** Let them get to have a quick relationship in a short period of time.

And you've got to **make sure that you're listening to what they say** both when you ask the question and what their perception is of what you share.

This is where the money is ladies and gentlemen.

Between this and your presentation process, there’s all this talk about how you open the call; and I agree with opening, but it’s about the question.

**When you learn to open effectively you never close again**, because you build a relationship.

People talk about objections and hard closing, and every time I see that kind of stuff we’re missing the point. So, focus on these four things this week and then give your service manager some feedback.

Talk to your peers within your company about how they are connecting. What are they seeing? Talk about your calls as to how you did it, when you did it, how you saw the light go on, etc.

I’m Kenny Chapman. I’m your contractor coach and your sales trainer. I want you to have a better than fantastic week, and I’ll see you next time.