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Evaluation of the Effect of Sales Force Behavior in Using Marketing Strategies for New Products

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Abstract: Companies need to attract and satisfy the customers with various methods. Hence, importance of sales force increases with intensified competition. Determining and identifying the factors influencing the performance of sales force improve their planning and management. While different factors affect the sales performance, researchers have classified these factors into five classes: motivation, intrinsic capability of sales, sales skills, role clarity, and individual, organizational and environmental variables. The research results revealed that sales skills are the important variables among these five variables influencing the sales performance. The objective of this research was to evaluate the effect of sales force behavior in using marketing strategies for new products and services on the success of the strategies. The present study is applied in terms of research objective and descriptive in terms of research method. Based on the results derived from literature of research, the sales force behavior was examined and the results revealed that sales force behavior in using new marketing strategies for new products and services plays major role in the success of the strategies.

Keywords: Sales Force Behavior, Strategy, Marketing Strategies for New Products and Services, Strategy Success

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important factors involved in successful and proper implementation of marketing strategies for company products and services is the sales force behavior of companies. The profitability through product selling is the main reason for the formation of a business companies and having a capable and creative sales force in creating and maintaining long-term relationships with customers and introducing and selling of the products in these companies play major role in profitability, growth, and survival of them. The main element of competition among the companies is their sales force. Sales force performance is a critical indicator and the key for company's performance in a competitive market (Pour Salimi et al., 2014; 2).

Development of proper strategies alone is not adequate to achieve the goals of organizations, but their proper implementation is also crucial. Companies might face problems in using the strategies (Johnson & Sohi, 2017: 137). Sales force plays major role in using strategies in the organization (Terho et al., 2015; 12), since it is directly concerned with customers. In addition, the success rate of an organization can be determined by the level of sales force agreement or resistance in implementing the strategies (Zablah et al., 2012; 74).

Sales force is considered as the executive branch of organizations in attracting customers and selling goods or services. All efforts of different units in organization are summarized on outcome and performance of the sales

force. The sales force, operating usually in the sales organization or sales unit, is the main task of selling the organization outputs. Along with intensified competition in markets, the importance of sales force performance has increased. The importance of sales force and its examining backs to the early 1900s. Hundreds of studies have been carried out since that time in this regard, and the attractiveness of sales and sales force performance is still increasing (Azizi et al., 2008; 253).

The sales force includes two dimensions. A) behavioral performance: behaviors in the construct of behavioral performance including activities related to providing and performing of sales force tasks, having knowledge of the characteristics and functions of the goods, recognizing the causes of failures and the success of the goods in the market and being update on different information of company and market. Behavioral performance of sales affects the objective performance of sales. If the sales force has adequate information on the goods and the company, its sales performance would be successful. B) Sale behavior performance: all sales force attempts through its performance during sales lead to objective performance of the sales. The behaviors shown by seller during the sale has a significant effect on the purchase of goods and services by the customer. Recognizing and understanding the main concerns of customers, the ability to provide sales transparently, and providing solutions to answer the customer questions and complaints are some of the sales behaviors (Azizi et al., 2008, 255-256).

The success of some business units in the world depends on the use sales force to introduce new products and services of company. Given the research literature, the main objective of this research is evaluating the sales force behavior in using marketing strategies for new products and services on the success of strategies?

Research Background

Sales strategy

Companies are under constant pressure to develop new products and services in order to meet the various needs of their customers in the current competitive environment. Some studies report that market-oriented companies are creating new products and services, which transform the customers' needs. Researchers argue that a powerful market orientation results in superior performance in innovation and new products lead to success. Market-oriented companies decrease the risk of failure in the new products by better recognizing of their customers' needs as well as having knowledge on their competitors' activities and market trends. Market orientation can enhance the probability of the success of innovation as much as it increases the compatibility between new products and customers' needs and demands. Various empirical and theoretical studies support this claim that market orientation improves the performance of companies through innovation (Vega et al., 2012: 1446). Based on Friedman's research, the manager of company and time and space strategies are the main factors of marketing for business success, product sales, attracting new customers, and company reputation.

Thus, business success depends on all or at least one of the factors of increasing the sales share of company products, attracting new customers, increasing the information of competitors about competitors, customers and new products. Marketing, implemented principally, results in increased sales of companies and economic earnings and benefits for any dynamic and active organization (Pour Salimi et al., 2014: 57).

The present attitude of sales strategy is that this concept goes beyond the management of sales forces and it relates to general management of sales special work. This perspective allows us to conceptualize the sales strategy at the level of special work of sales rather than operating levels of the company. The sales strategy is the area, in which a company is involved in a set of activities and decisions related to the allocation of scarce resources of sales (such as human resource, sales efforts, money) in order to be able to manage relationships with customers based on value of each of them (Dosi et al., 2009).

Sales force behavior

The companies argue that competition and obtaining competitive advantages in global trade arena would be feasible with having well-developed strategy and through strategic organizational planning. Accurately recognizing of the strengths and deep understanding of the strategic areas of the organization will be a great help for company's managers to achieve their goals. Despite having competitive advantages and high sales rate in the country, this company has not have good share of the exports to global markets due to reasons such as lack of appropriate marketing, lack of using modern technology of international trade, weakness in establishing customer database to identify target customers and their needs, and finally, production based on their needs and interests. Hence, applying marketing strategies for new products and services would result in improved market share, customer satisfaction, and increased profitability of companies (Rostamian and Iman Khan, 2015).

Moreover, researchers argue that the efficiency of sales units would be improved if sellers are trained well or collect more accurate information. Customer-oriented sellers and counseling sellers, responsible for establishing and maintaining long-term relationships with customers, should have a greater understanding of the goals of the strategies and performance of the customers, compared to traditional sellers. Sellers' misunderstanding of their customers directly influences the efficiency of the sales unit. These misunderstandings can lead into inappropriate results, inappropriate strategies for customers, or inappropriate solutions to customers' needs and demands. Counseling-oriented sales training programs aim to decrease this misunderstanding and enhance the efficiency of sellers by improving their listening, recognition, and problem-solving skills. Counseling sales management programs improve the 1) listening skills; 2) visual and analytic skills; 3) and problem-solving skills. These skills would result in understanding the customer position, and maintaining customers and their loyalty and increased earnings (Sharma et al., 2016: 58).

In addition, counseling-oriented sales training enhances the ability of sellers to offer superior value compared to competitors. Providing superior value continuously increases satisfaction and loyalty of purchasers and reduces sensitivity to price by purchasers, increases customer retention rate by reducing the cost of substitution of customer lost, and improve the profitability of the sales unit. In contrast to traditional sales, focusing on short-term goals, counseling-oriented sale management programs seek to pave the way for organization learning. In order to have an efficient and effective sales program, organizations need to provide primary trainings of sales and counseling-oriented sales programs for sellers by sales and marketing professors, supervisors, or well-trained and experienced sellers, but such sellers themselves should be trained by sales managers in order to be skilled in counseling and establishing relationships (Pour Salimi et al., 2014: 58-59).

Classification of sales force behavior

As the leader of the exchange process, seller would have a great impact on the success of the various units such as the marketing unit through the use of selling behavioral styles. The seller leadership is defined by interactive behavior with customers. The interactive behavior with customers provided by sellers is considered as a factor influencing the seller performance. Thus, it can be stated that the seller interactive behavior affects the sales performance. The significant role of the seller is to establish a relationship between the purchaser and the company. High level of customer trust in evaluation of the product or service of customers influences the company during the relationship with the company and increases the value of the customer. The behaviors shown by customer in dealing with customers can be justified in the form of leader-member interaction theory and transitional leadership theory (Tajzadeh et al., 2010: 28-29).

By combining these two factors, the views and concepts of both seller behavior theories are obtained as follows: Idealized influential behavior: The idealized effect refers to the charismatic behavioral characteristics of the seller and includes characteristics such as high levels of trust, volition, talent, and being free from internal conflicts, and belief in goals. In addition, the characteristics, advantages, and benefits of the product provided by the seller can affect the effectiveness of these behaviors. Using these characteristics, fundamental changes can be made in our customers' attitudes and increase the level of knowledge of customers to company's goals and prospects.

Rational simulating behavior: Sellers are responsible for rational stimulation of the ideas and values of their customers. Sellers challenge customers to show innovative and creative behavior with their choice and purchases. This occurs when sellers encourage customers to keep their minds open and use the imagination power for discovering the new ways to solve old problems. This is performed by helping the customers develop solutions to solve future challenges.

Inspirational motivation behavior: Customers become committed and loyal for their purchase through motivational incentives and appropriate options inspired for them by the seller. The real seller is the one who has adequate art and the knowledge to achieve success in today's complex competitive markets.

Selling is the beginning of a long relationship with the customer and successful sellers do not forget customers after sales. The effect of the level of seller's expertise in sales operations is also the point considered widely in studies. The seller's expertise includes a number of influential elements such as his measurable technical knowledge, his ability in describing and presenting this knowledge, proving the expertise in the relevant area, and the ability and capacity to serve customers. In this regard, credibility, reliability, accountability, and ability to respond are among the most important elements to compete among the sales employees.

Individual considerations behavior: The seller acts as a supporter. As educator and guider, he helps customers meet their needs actively and accurately. Sellers increase customer relationships to create a personal relationship with each of them and they try to understand the customer's concerns and resolve them. Thus, individual considerations are sellers' attempt to identify and meet the individual customer needs in order to improve the ability to solve problems.

Intelligent sales behavior: The seller shows this behavior through changing and replacing sales views during contact with customer. Accordingly, he tries for selling using the obtained opportunity and evaluating the appropriateness of selling behaviors. Thus, he shows the appropriate behaviors based on the current conditions and tries to adapt to the conditions (Weitz et al., 1988: 115-118).

Market orientation behavior of sales force

Market orientation is one of the aspects of organizational culture, in which the highest value of company profitability and customer retention is achieved through creation of superior value. Market orientation is a type of behavioral norm, extending throughout the organization and responding to the current and future needs of the market and customer through innovation. Market-oriented companies have a competitive advantage in responding to market and customer needs quickly. The concept of marketing usually considers the following three elements:

Customer philosophy, identifying and satisfying customers' needs and wants, achieving the goal, an organization's achievement to its goals, while meeting the needs of its customers, integrated marketing organization, integrating all functional areas of the organization to achieve goals matched with satisfying the needs and wants of the customers.

The market orientation creates norms with regard to collection of information and organizational responsiveness to customer information (actual and potential), so that companies take the lead compared to their competitors in analyzing the market and meeting their needs. They can do this action by innovation in the products and services and creating the ability to create more value for the customer. It seems that market-oriented companies have a competitive advantage in both areas of their speed and effective respond to opportunities and threats (Feiz et al., 2012). In an article entitled market orientation at the beginning of the new millennium, Slater refers to two types of market orientation behavior, including (Selater, 2001):

A) **Traditional market orientation behaviors** - first generation of market orientation: Companies, which have traditional market orientation behaviors, focus on identifying the needs stated by customers in the market and they are producing products and providing services, which can meet the needs. Examining the needs and demands of the customers, market-oriented companies increase their knowledge of them and can provide new goods and services in accordance with the market and the customer. The operation of market oriented companies seems to be useful at surface level, but these behaviors focus mainly on meeting the current needs

of customers, act passively, and seek for unexpected learning. The shortcoming of this type of market orientation behavior is that it destroys the company ability to participate in innovation and it is considered as a threat for company. Traditional market-oriented companies use market studies to recognize the customer's objective needs and customer satisfaction assessment to recognize their issues and problems. These behaviors cannot lead to the development of new product processes, innovation, organizational learning, and the success in the sale of new product.

B) Modern market orientation behaviors - the second generation of market orientation: The second generation of market-oriented companies is committed to recognize the stated and non-stated needs of the customers, abilities and programs of competitors and evaluation of market information. These companies are constantly creating superior value for customers through informing the organization and coordinating the activities of different units of the organization with each other. The second generation market-oriented companies are exploring the market extensively, have a long-term horizon, and have high penetration in market. The second generation research techniques of market-oriented companies are similar to the first-generation research techniques of market-oriented companies. However, the second generation market-oriented companies use other techniques to recognize the unrevealed needs of the customers; for example, they are closely observing consumption of the goods and services in order to gain the required information from the customers' needs and wants. This type of information is not obtained by traditional studies. In the new market orientation, market-oriented companies have close relationship with actual and potential consumers and consider the consumers as potential or actual customers who have unfulfilled needs. They compare the way of meeting the needs and expect desirable solution to meet those needs (Dolat Abadi and Khaef Elahi, 2006).

Sales force expertise

A research conducted by Sharma and Lambert in 1994 shows the low accuracy of sellers in understanding their customers. They stated that the efficiency of sales units could be improved if the sellers are trained well or collect more accurate information. Customer-oriented sellers and consulting sellers, who are responsible for establishing and maintaining long-term relationships with customer, need to have a higher understanding of the goals, strategies and performance of their customers compared to traditional sellers. The sellers' misunderstanding of their customers directly affects the unit's sales efficiency and these misunderstandings can result in inappropriate results, providing inappropriate strategies for customers, or inappropriate solutions to needs and demands of the customers (Pour Salimi et al, 2014). Counseling-oriented sales training programs aim to decrease the misunderstanding and increase the efficiency of sellers by improving their listening, recognition and problem-solving skills (compared to traditional methods). Counseling sales management programs improve the following skills:

- 1) Improving listening skills
- 2) Improving visual and analytical skills
- 3) Skill of recognizing the skills, leading to increased understanding of the customer's position, maintaining customer loyalty, increasing earnings (Ramzi & Sohi, 1997).

Moreover, Pelham (2002) reported that counseling sales trainings improve the ability of the sellers to provide superior value to competitors. Continuous providing of superior value increases the satisfaction and loyalty of the purchasers, and decreases sensitivity to price by purchasers, and increased customer retention rate improves the profitability of sales unit by reducing costs of substituting the customer lost. In contrast to traditional sales emphasizing on the short-term goals, we seek to provide the conditions for organizational learning in counseling sales management programs. In order to have an efficient and effective sales program, organizations need to provide primary trainings of sales and counseling-oriented sales programs for sellers by sales and marketing professors, supervisors, or well-trained and experienced sellers, but such sellers themselves should be trained by sales managers in order to be skillful in counseling and establishing relationships (Pour Salimi et al., 2014).

Sales forces performance

Sales force performance includes two dimensions:

- A. Behavioral performance: Behaviors in the construct of behavioral performance include the activities related to providing and performing the sales force responsibilities, including: having information on characteristics and functions of the goods, understanding the causes of failure and the success of the goods on the market, and having updated information on company and market. The sales behavioral performance affects objective performance and rate of sales. If the sales force has adequate information on goods and the company, the selling procedure would be completed successfully.
- B. Sales behavior performance: All sales force attempts would finally lead into objective performance of sales through its performance during sales. The behaviors shown by seller during the sale has a significant impact on the purchase of goods and services by the customer. Recognizing the main concerns of customers, the ability to provide sales transparently, and providing solutions to answer the customer questions and complaints are among the sales behaviors (Azizi et al., 2008).

Review of literature

Domestic research

Pour Salim et al. (2014) conducted a research entitled "evaluation of the effect of sales orientation and sales force expertise on sales force performance with regard to mediating role of customer trust (case study: sales representatives of imported automobiles in Mashhad). The research data were collected through a survey of 70 sales forces in representatives of imported automobiles in Mashhad. The construct validity was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha coefficient higher than 0.7 for all variables confirmed its reliability. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling and "SmartPLS" software. The analysis of the collected data revealed a significant and positive relationship between the sales orientation and the sales force expertise and sales force performance and between the sales orientation and the sales force expertise. Such relationship was also found between customer trust in sales force and performance of sales force.

Karizenoei et al. (2014) carried out a study to identify and prioritize the factors affecting the selection of optimal marketing strategy in economic recession conditions using fuzzy and group hierarchical analysis techniques. The research results suggest that price, product, distribution networks and employees were the most important factors affecting the selection of type of the appropriate marketing strategy.

Mehrafrouz et al. (2013) conducted a study entitled "the mediating role of sales skills in the impact of sales orientation and customer orientation on the performance of the sales force of the insurance company's representatives with regard to wide relationship and consumer and seller in service industries, such as the insurance industry as well as high impact of seller behavior on purchaser decision. This research was conducted to determine the intensity of relationship between sales orientation and customer orientation and sales force performance with an emphasis on mediating role of sales skills.

In this regard, 118 sellers operating in the Asia Insurance Company representatives were selected as sample. A questionnaire was used to collect data in three sections, including sales orientation / customer orientation, sales skills and performance evaluation. The adjusted correlation and regression analysis method was used to evaluate the intensity of the relationship between customer orientation, sales skills and sellers' performance and the mediating effect of sales skills. According to the results of the hypotheses testing, customer orientation, sales orientation and sales skills had a positive and significant effect on the seller's performance. In addition, sales skills positively and significantly mediated the relationship between customer orientation and performance. However, so significant relationship was found with regard to the mediating effect of sales skills on the relationship between sales orientation and performance.

Hosseini et al. (2011) carried out a study entitled "analyzing the marketing strategies of service companies during the recession". The research population included managers of successful crane rental companies in Tehran province. Accordingly, the relationship between the seven well-known factors of the service (product, price, place, distribution, personnel, facilities and physical and process properties) and sales rate of companies

was examined in terms of indicators and by using T-Student tests and Friedman variance analysis. Finally, the relationship of other factors, except for factors promoting sales and distribution, with company's sales rate was examined. In addition, activities of successful companies and their cost were not reduced during the recession, but the recession was used as an opportunity and used the development and differentiation strategy.

Azizi et al. (2008) carried out a study entitled "factors affecting sales force performance. They argued that the sales force performance is one of the issues taken into account by companies in today's competitive environment. In this research, researchers developed a model to recognize the factors affecting three aspects of sales force behavior (behavioral, sales, and objective) and structural equations and the Lisrel 8.5 software were used to test them. To test the research hypotheses, 165 people of sales forces in food industries were used.

To test the research hypotheses, a sample of 165 salesmen in the food industry was used. The findings revealed that among job perceptions of sales force, job excitement has the highest impact on objective sales performance and hardworking has the highest impact on sales and behavioral performance. It was also revealed that objective sales performance is a function of sales provision and behavioral performances. This research indicated that in order to explain the effect of conflict, enthusiasm and job satisfaction, the hardworking mediating variable should be taken into account. Karizenoei et al. (2014) carried out a study to identify and prioritize the factors affecting the selection of optimal marketing strategy in economic recession conditions using fuzzy and group hierarchical analysis techniques. The research results suggest that price, product, distribution networks and employees were the most important factors affecting the selection of type of the appropriate marketing strategy.

Samadi and Fakher (2009) carried out a study entitled "strategic marketing planning and selection of appropriate strategies using AHP (Ahwaz Pipe Manufacturing Company)". In this study, an appropriate strategy was selected for pipe manufacturing company with an emphasis on the concept of strategic management and using the AHP technique, which is one of the operational research techniques. First, various variables of the external environment were examined and the opportunities and threats were identified. Then, the internal environment of the company was analyzed in order to determine the internal strengths and weaknesses with emphasis on the financial and human dimension. Based on the obtained information and the use of the main strategy matrix, the position of the company was determined in the market and the appropriate strategies were identified. Then, questionnaires with 115 questions were distributed among decision makers in order to select the best strategy. The findings revealed three most important strategies, including product development, horizontal integration, and homogeneous diversity, respectively.

Foreign studies

Johnson & Sohi (2017) conducted a study entitled sales force behavior in using the strategies for introducing new products and services. Accordingly, 277 sales forces were examined as a research sample. The findings revealed that the behavior of using strategies including accountability, effort and coordination and motivation had a significant relationship with the success of strategies.

Huang et al. (2013) carried out a study entitled "factors affecting the formation of marketing strategies for Chinese companies in Jordan". Their studies, carried out on 90 managers of these companies, revealed that the factors related to the board, the task factors, and marketing mix elements affect the marketing performance of these companies.

In a research conducted by Gonzai and Gorges (2010), PLS model was used to examine a sample of 150 customers in the Italian banking industry and results showed a positive and significant relationship between the factors causing customer trust in sales force and the impact of customer trust in sales force's performance. In this study, multiple models were used to examine the mediating role of customer trust. The research findings show that seller's customer orientation and his expertise have positive impacts on the customer's trust in the seller, but sales orientation has negative impact on it. In addition, the seller's job pleasure does not affect the customer's trust. Finally, trust in the seller positively affects customer intention to re-purchase.

In a study conducted by Bridson (2009) showed that selling additional equipment, purchasing the latest model of machines at reasonable price, increased activity and the number of representatives, and improvement in system of distribution affect the selection of optimal marketing strategy for companies.

Roth (2009) concluded that non-cash sales, low pricing, force moderation, and development, and paying attention to new markets affect the marketing strategies of the companies.

Methodology

The present study is applied in terms of objective and descriptive in terms of research method.

Applied research

Researcher uses knowledge obtained from fundamental research in the applied method to meet the human needs and to improve the tools, methods and objects and models in order to develop welfare and comfort and enhance the living quality of human. The main objective of this type of studies is to achieve scientific achievements, find solution to real problems, develop applied knowledge in a particular area, and invent the devices and methods for performing the scientific works. Hence, this study is performed using field method, in which the researcher, unlike laboratory studies, carry outs his research in real situations with large samples (Soraei and Mehraei, 2013, 29- 43).

Descriptive research

Given what was stated above, most of the studies conducted in the human sciences are descriptive. Descriptive research includes a set of methods, which their goal is to describe the conditions or phenomena studied. This method evaluates the current status and describes the current state of the phenomena orderly (Multi, 2017).

Conclusion and recommendations

One of the issues for business owners and many industries and services in Iran is the sales and sales force behavior. This issue sometimes prevents organizations to achieve the strategic goals in the long term. Identifying the sales force behaviors and its effect on the implementation of strategies can help many organizations in successfully implementation of the strategies, more sales and better financial performance of the companies. It also affects the factors such as behavioral intentions of customers and results in satisfaction and loyalty of customers and reduced possible complaints.

Sales force is the executive branch of organizations in attracting customers and selling goods or services. All efforts of the different organization units are summarized in the outcome and performance of the sales force. The sales forces, operating usually in the sales organization or sales unit, undertake the main responsibility of selling the organization outputs. With intensifying the competition and reducing the top markets, the importance of sales force performance has increased. The importance of sales force performance and examining it backs to the early 1900s. Hundreds of studies have been carried out in this area since that time and the attractiveness of sales and sales force performance is increasing (Azizi et al., 2008).

In this regard, ethical behavior of sales force plays major role in the brand image. Hunt and Vittel state that the organizational environment forms the ethical behavior through adjusting ethical standards and norms. Ethics is a branch of ethical philosophy concerning with the judgments, standards and ethical behavioral rules, and it includes ethical codes of behavior governing individuals and communities in making distinction between good and bad. The seller's ethical sales behavior is a behavior improving the customer's welfare. Sellers who behave based on the ethics are honest in their communications and only sell the products or services, which are beneficial for customer. They also keep the customer's information confidential (Vorhies et al, 2009).

The research carried out by Pour Salim et al. (2014) showed a significant and positive relationship between sales orientation and sales force expertise and sales force performance and between sales orientation and sales force expertise and customer trust in sales force. A relationship was also observed between customer trust in sales force and sales force performance. Research conducted by Mehferroz et al. (2013) revealed that customer orientation, sales orientation and sales skills had a positive and significant impact on the seller's performance.

In addition, sales skills also positively and significantly mediated the relationship between customer orientation and performance. However, no significant relationship was found with regard to the mediating effect of sales skills on the relationship between sales orientation and sales performance.

Azizi et al. (2008) indicated that among job perceptions of sales force, job excitement had the highest impact on objective sales performance and hardworking had the highest impact on sales performance and behavioral performance. It was also revealed that objective sales performance is a function of behavioral and sales provision performance. This research revealed that to explain the conflict effect, job excitement and satisfaction, the mediating variable of hardworking should be taken into account. Johnson and Sohi (2017) revealed that the behavior of using strategies, including accountability, effort and coordination and motivation had significant relationship with the success of strategies. Hence, it was concluded that sales force performance in using new product and service marketing strategies has a major role in the success of the strategies. In this regard, it is recommended that sales forces should be selected in a way that they can improve the organization. The sales force should be effective in encouraging people to purchase. The sales force is representative of the company and plays major role in increasing the products sale. Thus, using well-trained sales force can be an important factor. Sellers should be trained and skilled in establishing the desired relationship with customer, leading to desired action by the customer. The presence of sales force should be in a way that ensures the customer satisfaction and direct relationship with customer gives valuable information from them.

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