

COLUMNS

# Luxury Unfiltered: Training is key to making emotional connections

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By **Daniel Langer**

Coming back from a luxury masterclass with one of the world's leading brands, I am reflecting on a critical success factor between brands and their best clients: the emotional connection.

What divides the best brands in luxury from those lagging behind goes far beyond just product superiority, creativity or market presence. It is, at its core, a profound understanding or lack thereof of the luxury client's psyche during the sales process.

This understanding, or the absence of it, manifests in an organization's ability to clock in one all-time-high quarter after another or, conversely, to watch as their market share, revenue, profitability and desirability decline all at once.

## **Making connections**

The journey to unlocking this emotional key is complex, as I am witnessing in almost every training, even with some of the most senior sales and marketing professionals in every corner of the world.

As humans we have the tendency to describe a product by its features. But what creates desire is not a rational analysis of an item, but the imagination of how a brand and its products fits in the lifestyle of the client.

It's about understanding the client's emotional framework and then delivering a genuine emotional inspiration. And the feedback I get again and again is that "this is hard to do when a client walks into a store." And it is even harder to do during the digital customer journey.

Yet, it is one of the most critical success factors for brands.

It demands more than just training on common sales practices, such as being well-groomed, well-behaved, proactive and friendly. I have seen countless experience audits where brands checkmark on all of the obvious trained markers and still only receive a 60 to 70 percent satisfaction rate.

I always like to remind anyone in luxury that excellent customer service is nothing special for a luxury client it is the minimum expected service level. Even categories such as luxury hospitality are often too complacent in delivering something truly exceptional, again and again, and at all times.

The world is full with a sea of sameness of experiences, mostly underwhelming, and in worst case, arrogant. And as I often state, arrogance never feels luxurious.

To unlock the power of emotional connection in the sales process, brands need to go far beyond the aspiration to excel.

It requires a combination of deep client insights, relentless training and retraining, and an unwavering commitment to crafting an ecosystem that delivers an end-to-end luxury experience at all client touchpoints, always with the emotional world of the client in its center. This ecosystem must be built upon a foundation of strategy, systems, talent, situational awareness and executional excellence.

### **Brand breakups**

Anything less risks the fragile bond between brand and client, potentially leading to a catastrophic collapse in value and desirability.

In a recent quantitative study, we could show that the vast majority of brand breakups 65 percent and above are not driven by a better experience with another brand, but by disappointment with the brand that the clients are already loyal to. Less than two underwhelming client experiences suffice to trigger a breakup.

The same study revealed, that in 100 percent of brand breakups, clients stated that they were disappointed with the human-to-human experience.

And, I like to remind luxury brands that a disappointing experience does not mean that someone was unfriendly. It means that the high client expectations let's remember, in luxury expectations are always high were not met.

Delivering an OK experience means to fail. Anything less than exceptional will eventually lead to a breakup.

This includes the after-sales service, something often overlooked, as most sales associates are only incentivized on sales but not on the after-sales part. This almost automatically triggers a focus on the next transaction instead of the client relationship.

The risk of misunderstanding or underestimating a luxury client's emotional triggers cannot be overstated. One misstep, one moment of disconnect, and the relationship painstakingly built over time can fall apart.

### **Emotional education**

It underscores the critical importance of not just understanding, but acting upon these emotional cues. Every client-facing member of an organization must be adept at identifying and nurturing these emotional keys. And this only works with systematic trainings, something that most brands underinvest in.

In times of crisis and uncertainty, the importance of luxury training increases significantly. It becomes one of the most critical levers in gaining competitive advantage and creating desirability.

My observations from recent training sessions reveal a striking challenge: The difficulty in asking the right questions to not just identify, but truly understand, a client in the real-world situation of an in-store encounter.

Theoretical knowledge of crafting an emotional response is one thing; executing it in the heat of the moment is another beast entirely, highlighting the necessity for continuous, rigorous training.

And it is in my observation, frankly, what sets some of the most successful brands apart from those who aren't.

It's striking to me in how many luxury experience audits I encounter sales people who are unable to inspire and create desire. The economics are also striking: The difference in revenue between a salesperson that can create an emotional connection and someone who can't often exceeds two times, five times or more.

The emotional key to luxury is about selling a specific dream, a feeling, a belonging. It's ultimately what drives loyalty and makes clients literally fall in love with a brand.

But they will only stay in this love relationship if they feel that the relationship is nurtured.

The true cost in luxury is not to train staff sufficiently. Luxury depends on feeling the empathy of a human during every step of the client relationship. When we don't feel valued, there is no value.

The brands that succeed are those that recognize and cherish the emotional triggers of their clients. They are the ones who

understand that the art of selling luxury is the profound and personal connection between brand and client.

This is the emotional key that unlocks true luxury success, and its mastery is what separates the leaders from the followers in the pursuit of desirability. Luxury is, in its essence, pure emotion.

**Luxury Unfiltered** is a weekly column by *Daniel Langer*. He is the CEO of *quit*, a global luxury strategy and brand activation firm. He is recognized as a global top-five luxury key opinion leader. He serves as an executive professor of luxury strategy and pricing at Pepperdine University in Malibu and as a professor of luxury at New York University, New York. Mr. Langer has authored best-selling books on luxury management in English and Chinese, and is a respected global keynote speaker.

Mr. Langer conducts masterclass management training on various luxury topics around the world. As a luxury expert featured on Bloomberg TV, Financial Times, The New York Times, Forbes, The Economist and others, Mr. Langer holds an MBA and a Ph.D. in luxury management, and has received education from Harvard Business School. Follow him on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).

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