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A MODEL FOR TEACHING SALESMANSHIP
USING PERSONA, MICROSKILLS AND A SALES PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to introduce the academic community oft a new method to teaching salesmanship. The strategy considers teaching salesmanship from a three pronged approach. The first is through an understanding of the psychology of the dyadic relationship. Next, the student is encouraged to internalize new and exiting microskills which are the basic elements of salesmanship communication. Finally, the student is introduced to a sales process which promotes closing the sale before the presentation, rather than after it. To accomplish this, the student must internalize certain microskills through role playing. By effectively learning the microskills, personas, and sales process, young marketing graduates may enter and succeed in the field of sales.

INTRODUCTION

There are at least two reasons why successful salespeople are an organization's most important asset. First, no business can exist without a product or service being sold. Secondly, only the salesperson generates cash, while everyone else in the organization uses cash. Yet, few fields offer so much disappointment to the novice as does selling. It is an easy field to enter, but a difficult one o succeed at, why?

The reasons vary, but a number of myths and misconceptions prevalent in the sales field offer some explanation. One is that, "Selling is Mysterious." Buzzotta (1972) states "…we cannot understand what makes the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful salesman, because the 'secret' of successful selling is mysterious and impenetrable. All we know is that some men succeed at selling, while others do not."

Another myth fosters that salesmanship is natural or innate. This conviction assumes that the "Ideal" salespersona is represented by someone who is naturally confident, outward-going and happy-go-lucky. It is further exaggerates by the archaic opinion that, "Either you can sell or you can't!" Unfortunately, this feeling which is share by both salespeople and non-salespeople alike Inhibits many from entering the sales field.

Because of these misconceptions, many companies spend their resources not on real sales training, bit on product knowledge training disguised as sales training. Fran seven years of experience in the sales training field and working with business school undergraduate students (including Marketing majors). I conclude that those will enter the field of selling after being subjected to traditional sales training methods run a very high chance of failure. This is because these traditional methods just do not teach the student "how" to sell. The question is, "Does this have to continue?" This author thinks not!

My work with salespeople, both young and old, experience and inexperienced, also leads me to the conclusion that selling is a skill that can be taught and learned. However, there is a shortage of skilled people able to teach salesmanship properly. As a result, the average salesperson (especially the recent college graduate) just does not know "how" to sell. Instead, he or she merely go through the motions of selling usually depending more on hope, hard work, and product merits for success than on the mastery of selling skills. Students can be taught effective selling skills through a fundamental understanding of behavioral knowledge, microskills and the elements of the sales process. Through the Counselor Selling approach to sales training, improved selling skills develop which consequently results in greater selling success. The following model (Illustration 1) represents the concept while the text briefly introduces the theory. Later, some approaches for teaching these skills are discussed.
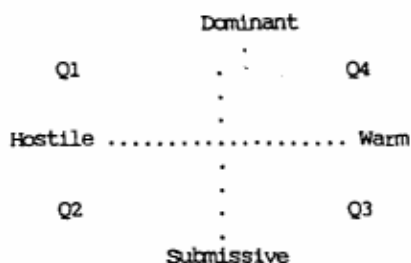

Illustration 1

Counselor Selling Model
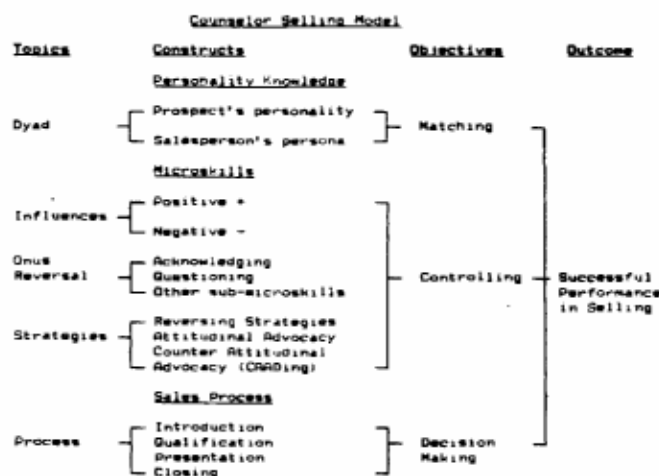
PERSONALITY KNOWLEDGE

Buzzotta's Dimensional Theory

To represent both sides of the dyad, two personality theories are presented. The "Ideal Sales Persona" tetrad, discussed later, represents the salesperson's side of the dyad, while Buzzotta's Dimensional Model (1972) explains the prospect's side of the dyad. Buzzotta's model (illustration 2) suggests that all people, although unique unto themselves, have certain repeating patterns which allow a salesperson to arrive at preconceived generalizations about the prospect's psychogenic needs. These patterns, relating to the dimensions of Dominance and Warmth, form the four quadrants of personality behavior, Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4. A typological description of each of the four types of personality behaviors will follow illustration 2.

Illustration 2

Buzzotta's Dimensional Model

```
                        Dominant
                           .
        Q1          .   :   .        Q4
                           .
   Hostile ...................... Warm
                           .
        Q2                 .        Q3
                           .
                       Submissive
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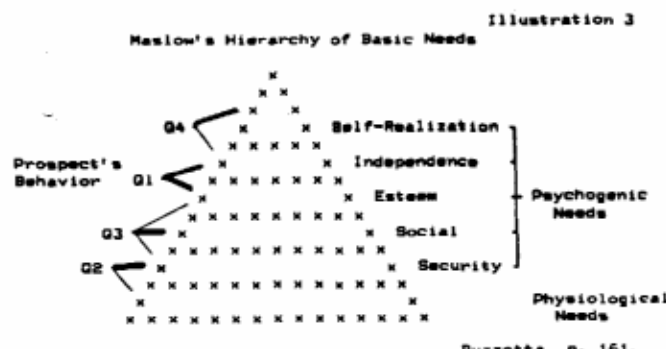
Recognizing the Prospect

Q1 (Dominant-Hostile) personalities are easily recognized by their loud, demanding and forceful behavior. Driven by their need for esteem and independence, they usually try to impress others by attempting to control every aspect of their environment. To effectively work with a Q1, meet him at his higher level of dominance by not yielding to him, yet, appeal to his esteem needs by letting him vent his feelings. Once the Q1 realizes that the salesperson is his psychological equal, a meaningful discussion can ensue.

Q2 (Submissive-Hostile) personalities are generally viewed as cold, aloof and uncommunicative. Q2's are easily recognized by their laconic speech, responding to questions with short terse answers. If pressured, their defense is to become passive, or almost detached during a presentation. As cynics, suffused in pessimism, they believe that their view of the world is realistic while other people's views are naive. To win their confidence, approach them in a soft, humble way while asking wide open-ended questions. Also, move through the sales process slowly and deliberately. Should this prospect care to trust the salesperson and become a customer it is probable that it will develop into a long term client.

Q3 (Submissive-Warm) personalities basically trust people and like their fellow man. Since the Q3 is driven by his social needs, he spends a great amount of time with small talk. His conversations are usually unplanned, almost meandering in nature, and are often centered around people. Although well liked, because they genuinely like and trust others, they are vulnerable to exploitation. However, if a Q3 feels that he is being exploited, he will be as resistant as any other prospect, but in his own disarming way. His defense is to becomes even more likable, getting out of situations by using inoffensive alibis that sound reasonable. A salesperson can waste much time thinking that this is a good prospect when in fact he may not be so.

Q4 (Dominant-Warm) personalities elusively adapt to situations by varying their behavior. Driven by a need for independence and self-actualization, Q4's prefer unstructured, relaxed social settings when meeting with people. They are easily recognized by their collaborative leadership style, they try to assure that the conversation is a two-way interaction by extending mutual respect. Q4's appreciate professionalism, equating it with expertness. To effectively work with a Q4, it is important to gain his respect by first matching his dominance level, maintaining a sense of warmth and respect, and knowing the subject matter well. Thereafter, the sale may be actualized through effective selling skills and the merits of the product.

Connecting the prospect to Needs

The basic premise is that psychogenic needs precede behavior, If this is true, then the salesperson need only observe and analyze the prospect's behavior and deduce the prospect's psychogenic needs by connecting it to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This allows the salesperson to better understand the prospect's basic psychogenic needs in advance of the presentation. This approach has he advantage of allowing the salesperson to adapt his presentation to meet those needs. This is represented in illustration 3.

Illustration 3

Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs

```
                          x
                        x  x
              x       x x  x  x
    Q4           x   x x x x  x  Self-Realization ⌉
              x  x x x  x  x  x                    |
 Prospect's      x   x x x x x     Independence    |
 Behavior  Q1       x x x x  x  x                  | Psychogenic
              x  x x x x x x x x      Esteem        } Needs
    Q3        x x x x x x x x x x x  x  Social      |
              x x x x x x x x x x x x                |
    Q2        x x x x x x x x x x x x x  Security   ⌋
              x x x x x x x x x x x x
              x x x x x x x x x x x x x x  Physiological
                                           Needs
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Buzzotta, p. 161.

The "Ideal" Sales Persona

Equally important to understanding the prospect, the salesperson must understand himself as well. The following four elements comprise the "Ideal" sales persona (according to this author);

1. Empathetic Parent Ego State
2. Multi Ego State
3. Dominance Adjustment Control
4. Tyrodynamic Behavior

The Parent, Adult, and Child are three ego states described by Dr. Eric Berne's (1964) Transactional Analysis Theory. The theory suggests that each individual can determine which ego state controls his person at any specific time. The premise is that the adult ego can control which behavior personifies a message. Generally,, during a sales presentation, the Adult ego should only allow the Empathetic Parent, Which delivers warm messages, and the Adult, which delivers unemotional messages, to manifest themselves. The remaining ego states should be suppressed.

This author contends that Dominance Adjustment Control (simulating the prospect's dominance level) is the third element of the "Ideal sales persona. For respect to occur, a salesperson must "Adjust" his dominance level up or down

Tyrodramatic behavior (acting naïve and in need of more help) is the last element of the "Ideal" sales persona tetrad. Asking question Tyrodramtically appeals to man's basic instinct of helping. Effective use of this persona evokes emotional involvement and compels the prospect to be more explicit with his answers. However, behavioral knowledge alone is insufficient to make a person an effective salesperson. To be truly effective, the salesperson must also internalize various microskills, naturally merging them with the four component personas.

Microskills

A microskill is an identifiable discrete behavioral unit, including verbal and/or bodily gestures, which facilitates interpersonal communication. Although very little is written about microskills for the field of selling, much work has been done by Dr. Alien Ivey (1971), for the help field of counseling. Dr. Ivey explicitly describes twelve separate microskills, however, not all of them are as applicable to selling as they are to counseling. Besides Ivey's microskills, additional microskills (such as Reversing, Reiterating, Acknowledging, etc.), techniques and strategies are thoroughly documented and further explained throughout chapter 4 in the Doctoral Thesis <u>Counselor Selling</u> (DeCormier 1988).

Presently, in addition to the microskills, two major strategies, Attitudinal Advocacy and counter Attitudinal Advocacy - Disturbing (CAADing) are designed to deal with positive and negative influences respectively (Miller 1969; Miller & Burgoon 1973; DeCormier 1988). A strategy is a group of micro-skills, used in a planned way in conjunction with appropriate personas, to achieve a desired end. A <u>positive</u> influence exists when the prospect wants something which is consistant with what the salesperson has to offer. A <u>negative</u> influence exists within the prospect wants something which the salesperson is unable to offer.

Attitudinal Advocacy encourages the prospect to elucidate about a positive influence. Discussing a positive influence In greater detail subtly obliges the prospect to take a position on that issue. Later, if the issue should arise again, the prospect cannot easily renege on his original contentions.

Counter Attitudinal Advocacy - Disturbing (CAADing) should address and reverse a negative influence. Despite numerous theories justifying the existence of CAADing, its major use is to overcome a negative influence and change it to a positive one. Unless a salesperson overcomes an objective (negative influence), the chances for a successful sale are substantially reduced. Therefore, importance of CAADing cannot be overstated

Finally, although not a microskill, the theory of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) (Bandler & Grinder 1975, 1979), a fairly new area of Interpersonal communication is concerned with enhancing trust. The theory suggests that each person has a primary mode of viewing the world. It is possible to recognize that mode by listening to the words a person uses and by watching how his eyes gaze while thinking. If the salesperson adjusts his vocabulary to simulate the prospect's primary mode, communication is improved and trust is enhanced.

Sales Process

As helpful as the combination of microskills and proper personality behaviors are, one more ingredient is needed to successfully master the skill of selling. That important Ingredient is the Sales Process (DeCormier 1988). A Sales Process logically guides the salesperson along a definitive course, offering him a systematic series of steps (stages arid phases), each having specified objectives. The Sales Process has its theoretical underpinnings in the Meta-model developed by Dr. Allen Ivey (1984) for the Counseling Field. Objectively, there are many similarities between the selling and counseling fields. Therefore, it is logical that a counseling process such as the Meta-Model be modified to accommodate the selling function. The Sales Process consists of four (4) stages, each containing numerous objectives (phases). The four stages are:

1. Introduction Stage
2. Qualification Stage
3. Presentation Stage
4. Close and Post Close Stage

Introduction Stage

The Introduction Stage is where the salesperson establishes rapport, respect, trust and control. In this stage, the salesperson states the main topic of the discussion, adjusts his dominance level to that of the prospect and analyzes the prospect's personality. Also, he states the game rules and requests permission to ask questions. Once the prospect grants permission, he, in effect, relinquishes control of the interaction to the salesperson.

When stating the game rules, the salesperson explains how he gets paid, de-emphasizing his monetary payment while stressing the need for referrals to other good potential prospects. Referrals serve two purposes. First, they build a referral business, and secondly, they reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1959).

If the salesperson accomplishes these tasks, he has not only established a psychological contract with the prospect, but by controlling the question, he has also been granted permission to control the interaction. This is psychologically advantageous for the salesperson.

Qualification Stage

In this stage the prospect's needs, financial ability and authority to buy are determined. five phases of the qualification stage are:

1. Determine prospect's authority to decide
2. Determine Needs-Awareness
3. Explore for Alternative Solutions
4. determine prospect's financial ability
5. determine when the prospect is ready to act

Of this stage's five phases, Needs-Awareness (2) and Exploring Alternative Solutions (3) are the two most difficult to actuate, yet are the most important to the selling function. In the Needs-Awareness phase, the salesperson should exchange information to make the prospect aware that he has a problem with his present situation. The salesperson must also help the prospect to discover that his present situation is only one of many available alternatives. If after this discussion, the prospect does not perceive a problem with his present situation, the salesperson should discern that this is not a qualified prospect and should make a friendly departure. However, if the prospect is influenced to perceive himself as having a problem, he will often begin to regard the salesperson as an expert.

In the Exploring for Alternative Solutions, the salesperson should help the prospect develop his problem's "ideal" solution. It should be consistent with what the salesperson has to offer. If executed properly, this greatly enhances the chances of a successful sale. To make this offer, the salesperson should elicit the prospect's involvement

by using questions and other microskills & strategies, while appropriately alternating between the various personas.

Presentation Stage

After the prospect is made aware of his problem, describes exactly what he wants and is qualified in other matters, the salesperson transitions to the Presentation Stage. In this stage, the salesperson presents various alternatives and gives the prospect the opportunity to choose from among them (including his present situation). Each alternative is explained in detail including its advantages and disadvantages. The salesperson then encourages the prospect to express his perceptions about the pros and cons of each option (Including his present situation). If the salesperson executed the strategy correctly during the Qualification Stage, prospect would not consider his status quo as a viable option. Instead, he would select one of the other options that is consistent with what the salesperson has to offer.

Close and Post-Close Stage

Q-ice the prospect has assessed each alternative, the closing question should be, "Of all the available alternatives, which one makes the most sense to you?" Unless the prospect decides to maintain the status quo. his only other option is to select one of the remaining alternatives, With this approach, there is no need to use pre-memorized objection handlers to overcome objections, nor is there a need to pressure the prospect. This approach assures that the prospect knows what is best for himself, and that this self-interest will exert the necessary internal pressure to motivate him to make the correct decision.

If the prospect chooses not to buy, the salesperson should leave after thanking him for the opportunity to present his services. If the prospect does buy. then the salesperson and the customer just fill cut the paperwork together. This step should be followed by a Post-close strategy which allows the new customer an opportunity to renege on the sale. If the customer agrees not to renege on the sale, his decision has the effect of reducing his cognitive dissonance. At this time the salesperson may ask the customer for referrals which also reduces cognitive dissonance by further committing the customer. As the final steps in the Sales Process, the salesperson installs the product, follows-up for repeat business and definitely asks the satisfied customer for additional referrals.

Teaching the Skills

Even more important than knowing the above information is being able to internalize and use it in a natural conversational way. Before starting the training, the student is directed to contact a local industrial organization and gain product knowledge. This means that the student should know the advantages and disadvantages of a product in relations to its competitors. The student is asked to make a formal sales presentation to another student. This presentation is video taped and represents the students skill level "before" training.

Formal training is broken down into three major areas. They are dyadic behaviors, microskills and sales process. Training starts with the student being taught to recognize the various prospect's behavior (Q's). Next, through explanation and demonstration, he is taught the notions that define an ideal" sales persona. Afterwards, each microskill is conveyed by explaining the underlying theory followed by a demonstration of that skill. Then the student is instructed how to integrate the above two skills into the sales process. Following is the method that I employ.

First, I advise each student to choose a partner with whom to practice the skills. The importance of a good partner cannot be over-stated. Later, I break the class into two groups with half of the class representing salespeople and the other half representing prospects. I then have each student role play their newly learned skills with another class member. After each encounter the student switches roles and partners, and continues to practice until they get uses to their newly acquired skills. This switching occurs three or four times. Afterwards, more skills are introduced and the process is repeated.

The student must also learn to personify the microskills by using one or more of the "ideal" personas. Part of the teaching is not only to explain and demonstrate, bit also to coach the student to personify the microskills correctly. As the semester progresses, repeated practice reinforces old skills while new ones are continuously being added. Once the student is able to personify the microskills, he then learns to use them within the sales process. I have the partners role play continuously until they Integrate the microskills and personas within the sales process. Many of these sessions are video tape. Through repeated role playing, coaching and reviewing of video tapes, the student finally learns to internalize these skills so they appear natural.

Conclusion

Although this paper is a very brief review pertaining to the whole topic of Counselor Selling and how it is taught, it presents enough information to help the reader realize the extent to which salesmanship has developed. Before closing, this writer would like to suggest that learning salesmanship is a little like learning to ride a bike. One can read all he wants about bike riding, but unless he actually tries it and internalizes it, the efforts are merely academic exercises. This, the way to truly learn salesmanship, and in turn to teach it, one must actually do it. First, I would like to personally explain and demonstrate some of the techniques followed by having the members role play than until they feel natural. Then, I would like to present a video tape of the students performances before and after training. This should help attendees gain dear insight to this new approach to teaching salesmanship.

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