

**10 reasons you must buy this book and
stop wrecking sales efforts in your organisation!**

1. Amateurs make 10 fatal selling statements that instantly turn customers off.
2. You can cut objections to your sales pitch by up to 90% (and deal easily with the remaining few) using a proven method.
3. A truly persuasive sales letter doesn't look anything like the attempts that amateurs make.
4. No validated research supports the business folklore that sales objections are "buying signals in disguise" – in fact they have the opposite effect!
5. Unconscious emotional need – that's what you need to generate when your customer is at the point of making a buying decision.
6. There are two key human attributes which you can use to encourage customers to persuade themselves for you.
7. "Telling isn't selling" – what can you do to make a massive change in the outcome of your next meeting with a customer?
8. Prolonging the investigative phase of your sale increases customer desire for the solution your product provides.
9. You don't want to be marooned in "great-presentation-we'll-call-you-soon" limbo.
10. Wake up to the real cause of the commonest objection of all – "You're too expensive" – and discover what you can do to stop it immediately.

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SELLING SKILLS FOR COMPLETE AMATEURS

Marshall Cavendish Business

For Review Only

BOB ETHERINGTON



SELLING SKILLS
FOR COMPLETE
AMATEURS

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Bob Etherington

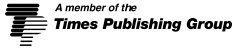
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Introduction

“It’s the hardest thing to do in the entire acting realm. You’ve got 24 seconds to introduce yourself, introduce the product, say something nice about it and get off gracefully.” The words of an American named Dick Wilson. He was an actor not a salesman. But due to the uncertainty of permanent employment in his chosen profession, he started selling and became well known across the USA for his TV salesmanship promoting “Charmin”, one of the most successful brands of toilet paper.

Dick was ninety-one when he died in November 2007 and, well into his old age, was still the face of Charmin and extremely wealthy. Not the most glamorous product in the world but a multimillion dollar market. Not how Dick dreamed of applying his talent but one of the most necessary activities in the world.

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The book you have in your hands shows non-sales people (like you), exactly how to sell brilliantly (just like Dick) whenever the need arises.

I know you probably don't want to spend everyday of your working life selling anything. That's quite OK ... it's nothing unusual. That's why you do the job you do in your company and leave the selling to your trained sales people.

But the basic fact of business is that nothing happens in any commercial organization until somebody sells something. And until it's sold, your business doesn't need what you do every day. It doesn't need accountants, engineers, geologists, doctors, technicians, PAs, traders, dealers, actors, marketers, artists, designers, COOs, CEOs, MDs, CIOs, CTOs or Chairmen. Or, indeed, anybody else. Because the only thing that says you have a viable business is your answer to this question:

Do you have any customers?

You can sell a product or service long before you are actually in a position to deliver it. (I know because I have ... many times and very successfully.) The much worse (and very common) position is to spend a fortune on offices, headed paper, computers, "product" and all the other office paraphernalia, then find you can't sell it. The hard truth is that for most markets in the world there is plenty of "product" out there. There is actually no global shortage of "product".

The area of international shortage is in people who know how to sell. And within that dearth an even bigger shortage of senior management, middle management, technical and support staff and other executives who have bothered to find out what persuades and what dissuades. When these non-sales executives (Amateur Sellers) get in front of customers they make professional sellers cry.

It is why you, as a “senior”, will find this book a godsend. You will know “how” and your other management colleagues won’t. You will be popular with your sales force, they will not. You will be welcome to attend customer meetings, they will not.

What this book gives you:

Insight. Persuasive power. Sales knowledge.

Even though knowledge is power, most managers and senior executives just don’t have it when it comes to “selling”. As a result they talk themselves and their company out of some excellent sales everyday because they don’t know. Indeed “sales technique” is seen as something slightly underhand; even manipulative. An engineer in an entrepreneurial company which had just developed a new type of electronic X-ray “chip” told me so just a few weeks ago. I watched him addressing a room full of customers shortly afterwards.

His “sales spiel” was about co-valent bonding, “rads”, electromagnetic sensitivities, micro-volts and milliamps. Half an hour later, the emerging audience from all over Europe were visibly confused and shaking their heads. “I don’t get it,” said one man. “I just want to know, what’s it all about? What will it do for me?”

The engineer had set out to “impress” with his technical knowledge. He had piled-up all his “technical” stuff in his PowerPoint sales presentation. At the end we, in the audience, had an idea that the product was a sophisticated X-ray chip. But what would it do? What problem did it set out to solve for us?

The answer was incredibly simple and wonderfully useful. Its brilliance was that it would allow X-ray images to be recorded with 1/500 of the radiation power normally required for any X-ray. The uses for both industry and medical use were (and are) huge. But it took me ages to get him to explain this to me.

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In industry the manufacturers of mobile phones could examine 1000 phones an hour for circuit faults compared with the 100 currently possible on each factory line. In the medical world, hospital radiologists could see many more patients each day without the danger of radiation poisoning.

Yet none of this was mentioned during the previous presentation. The engineer left it to the audience to “see” the advantages. And they all failed to see what was under their noses. Millions of dollars disappeared out of that company’s door that day.

And this happens every day in businesses around the world.

Customers are not stupid but their brains are generally lazy.

It is the job of the professional seller (and the re-trained Amateur) to wake up the brains of potential customers as soon as possible. Before somebody (like me) comes in under your radar and steals your business from you.

Kick-start poster

To lead you straight into this I have provided you with a mini poster on the next page. It is a page which you can tear out of this book if you wish (once you’ve purchased it) and pin to the wall in front of you. Everything you need to know about “business persuasion” and selling is encompassed in the few words on that poster.

Understand this concept and you are home and dry. Not only that but your sales staff will think you’re some sort of “Sales God”.

What could be better than that?

I look forward to hearing about your success.

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SECTION 1

Who Sold You This Then?

“What’s the answer, Ben? ... How did you do it?”

WILLY LOMAN (TRAGIC CENTRAL FIGURE IN
ARTHUR MILLER’S *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*)
TO HIS SUCCESSFUL BROTHER BEN

In 1974 the comedian John Cleese made an excellent corporate training video. Its title was “Who Sold You This Then?” It was one of a number of training films released through his company Video Arts Ltd. The training objective of this particular film was to make service engineers and similar support staff, aware of how easy it can be to “unsell” a product or service once it has been sold and installed.

In one memorable scene Cleese (the service engineer) is attending a customer with a broken machine. He examines it for a few minutes and then gives his verdict: “You know what’s wrong with this! You’ve been using it haven’t you?!”

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WHO SOLD YOU THIS THEN? **3**

It makes us laugh mainly because we've all heard the same and similar remarks in real life. Peter Sellers, the comedy actor who used to play the incompetent French Detective Inspector Clouseau in the *Pink Panther* films, said that what made Clouseau funny was that he did stupid things seriously.

The real life problem (and the point of this book) is that real sales are often messed up by well meaning non-sales – and often very senior – executives saying things (seriously) to customers which are best left unsaid and doing things (seriously) which are better left undone. And all this before the sale has actually been closed!



OK let's cut to the chase ... Does anyone here actually know how to sell anything?

Yes ... the thing is ... the awful truth is ... dare I say it? ... OK here goes: these people (YOU?) are obviously very good at their day-to-day job but they simply don't know how to sell! And it's no joke.

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Don't mention "selling" round here

I'm a long-term international salesman with a sales history stretching back into the 1970s. Nowadays I run an international sales training company mainly for the guidance of professional sellers. But I am often asked to provide "a few *pointers*" on effective, persuasive, selling skills to very successful non-sales people (CEOs, MDs, COOs, CIOs, CFOs, CTOs, plus software designers, engineers, geologists doctors, dentists, accountants, etc) who are about to meet prospective customers, clients or patients in their business. Sometimes they don't even mention the word "selling"; in many cases any hint of "selling" is a "big no-no". They prefer to call it, "informed consent" or "business persuasion" or "business development". (Oh dear ... oh dear ... oh dear!)

Sometimes these executives will be accompanying their professional sales staff on a meeting with a customer and sometimes they'll be doing it on their own but they all want to do it right. They are the wise ones. The few. The ones who recognize and seek assistance.

The majority, however, *think* they know ... OH NO!

They spurn the pre-customer-meeting briefing. ("I want to meet a couple of clients next week when I'm in London/New York/Hong Kong/CapeTown, Bob ... fix it up there's a good chap!") They arrange to meet in the customer's foyer. ("Good morning Bob ... let's get this underway then! ... just give me a bit of background as we go up in the lift.") They fail to realize the minefield they are about to enter.

Here are ten unintentional sales killers I've heard uttered at customers by "seniors" in the subsequent customer meetings:

1. So how much more of a financial incentive can we offer you to make a decision *today*?
2. We are making you a very generous offer in this case.
3. Well of course you mention Acme Products who are a competitor of ours and their product is actually very poor quality.
4. You must understand the problem we have with our staff at the moment.
5. If I can be perfectly honest here ...
6. Actually, we are *not* too expensive.
7. First I think you should know some history of our company [10 minutes "blah"] ... and that's how we got where we are today.
8. We'll come back to your point later if we may. But first I want Bob to show you a PowerPoint presentation of all the things our company does.
9. Well that's a very interesting proposal. However let me tell you what **we** were thinking on our way to see you this morning.
10. Yes. If I can just stop you there. I think I know what you're going to say so let me tell you how we can address this type of issue you are experiencing.

These are just ten things. They're not even the top ten ... they are just ten in common use that instantly come to mind.

If you are inclined to say them or blurt them (or anything like them) to your company's customers, you increase your chance of wrecking your sale by about 80%.

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Here's an analysis of the damage these Amateur throwaway lines can cause:

Sales killer “Home Truths”

So how much more of a financial incentive can we offer you to make a decision *today*? The price of your product is rarely the main reason your customer has for buying or not buying your product. And 80% of price problems during a sale are caused by the seller “telling” too much. To quote the old maxim: “Telling isn’t selling”.

We are making you a very generous offer in this case. This is known in the trade as an “irritator”. It is the type of highly dangerous phrase tossed around by well meaning non-sales people. The “good-intention” is to make the customer feel as if they are being treated as “special.” (We are a customer centric organization.) But (oh dear!) in reality it actually has *precisely* the opposite effect; it makes your customer feel that you (the seller) are implying that they are not being equally “generous”, “fair” or “reasonable”.

Well of course you mention Acme Products who are a competitor of ours and their product is actually very poor quality. Never “knock” the opposition. If the customer is already a user of the product or service you are challenging their judgment in purchasing it in the first place. And if you are on record as having said anything negative it invariably gets back to the other company. You are not immune from this whoever you are. As US President Abraham Lincoln said, “It’s not that I can’t keep a secret. It’s the people I tell them to who can’t keep them.”

You must understand the problem we have with our staff at the moment. Why? ... Why should they understand? Whatever they say to you, your customers are actually only interested in

themselves and *their* problems. Your problems are of little or no interest to them. You “the seller” have only one area of value: your ability to solve a problem. If you can’t articulate that for any reason, your value slips towards zero.

If I can be perfectly honest here ... This popular phrase instantly implies to your customer, at a deeply subconscious level, that you haven’t been honest so far in the conversation. You might as well come straight out and say that you have had your fingers crossed up until now. As my old Irish father-in-law used to say, “A liar you can never trust!”

Actually, we are not too expensive. Well your customer thinks you *are* and **Rule Number 1** of business is: “the customer is *always right*”. **Rule Number 2** is: “when the customer is wrong ... see **Rule Number 1**.” You are not there to prove that you are right. You are there to get some business. Who is *right* is immaterial! What the customer thinks is right is the **ONLY** thing that matters.

First I think you should know some history of our company [10 minutes “blah”] ... and that’s how we got where we are today. This is the 21st century. Nobody cares, about your roots, your history, your founder or when you were “established”. It is not interesting to 99% of your customers. And there’s only a 1:100 chance the other 1% are interested (and I bet this customer isn’t in that 1%). The most *un*-persuasive words in the world are “I” and “we”. The most persuasive word is “YOU”... and your only interest (YOU the customer) is what I (the seller) can DO for YOU today, tomorrow and beyond.

We’ll come back to your point later if we may. But first I want Bob to show you a PowerPoint presentation of all the things our company does. Leave the laptop at home ... LEAVE THE LAPTOP AT HOME! A boiler-plate standard PowerPoint presentation is a sales killer. It is “Death by PowerPoint”. An instant sales demolisher. *Ask any customer.* It is a crutch for

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rotten sales people. You cannot begin selling until you know what the customer wants to buy and right now you don't ... all the other stuff about your company is irrelevant.

Well that's a very interesting proposal. However let me tell you what we were thinking on our way to see you this morning. It is a fact of human nature that other people (your customers!) are least open to any of your proposals if they have just presented one of their own. If you respond to any of your customer's ideas (however stupid) with little or no consideration or discussion but with an instant alternative proposal of your own, you might just as well have said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah ... and all that! Now here's *my* really brilliant idea". Like it or not your customers prefer the sound of their own voice just as much as you prefer the sound of yours.

Yes. If I can just stop you there. I think I know what you're going to say so let me tell you how we can address this type of issue you are probably experiencing. You don't know you idiot! You really DON'T know what they are going to say! In my time as a chronic interrupter I have wrongly assumed a customer was about to complain about my product's price, its "ease of use", its weight and its "suitability for purpose". Each time I have interrupted in this way I have answered a question that hadn't even been asked and thereby introduced a big unnecessary question mark in the customer's mind. So many people are prone to this bad habit. Instead of listening most amateur persuaders are just waiting for their turn to talk!

Telling isn't selling

Here's a question for you: You're telling somebody something; it is a very interesting thing (at least you think it is). So how long (on average) is it before the other normal person drifts off, falls asleep or starts thinking about something else? Is it 15 minutes, 10 minutes, 5 minutes, 3 minutes, 1 minute or 30 seconds?

They may be nodding, smiling, looking at you, saying “mmm ... mmm”, but at what “time-point” has this target person (often your customer) usually lost the thread of what you’re saying? Have a think about this for a moment ...

Right and your answer is? ... 3 minutes? ... 1 minute? You will be much closer to the truth, for the vast majority of the human race, if you settle on *30 seconds*! They may drift back to you every so often but they will drift away again in no time at all.

Human brains get bored quickly ... very quickly. If you ask someone to concentrate on one thought or one object and nothing else for as long as they can, they will, generally, find it very difficult. Try it yourself by performing this exercise right now (it’s a pretty standard introductory exercise for people who are learning to meditate). Go and get an egg from your kitchen and place it on a table in front of you ... fix it somehow in a little pile of salt so that it doesn’t roll off.

Make sure you also have a wristwatch or a clock next to you with a second hand.

Sit down, on a chair in front of the egg. Now make sure that there is little chance of anyone interrupting you for the next ten minutes. Start timing. Stare at your egg – remove ALL other thoughts from your mind – notice only its shape ... its colour ... its texture ... its size ... let no other thought enter your mind ... consider only your egg.

Concentrate only on your egg ... the instant any thought (a cup of coffee, dry cleaning, sex, the hardness of the chair you’re sitting on, thinking about the effort of thinking about the egg and so on) other than a thought about your egg enters your mind, STOP ... look at the second hand. Now ... how much time has passed since you started? I will be extremely surprised if more than a few seconds has passed ... you will be very lucky to get to 30 seconds!

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Telling people about all your stuff is a very poor way of persuading them because (as you can see) most of us just can't concentrate for long enough. So most people (your customers) only hear the first three or four words of what you're saying before they start formulating what they are going to say back to you! Awful isn't it? They just don't listen. So what can you do? Actually the answer is "lots" and it's not that difficult.

First you can remember that there is little new under the sun and take advice from the famous 17th century scientist, Isaac Newton (whose work included defining the law of gravity) and his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687). And within that magnum opus his Third Law of Motion which briefly stated that: "every action has an equal and opposite reaction".

Equal and opposite reaction

As my dairy-farming brother-in-law says, "Cows don't give milk. You have to take it from them." And this most definitely applies to selling. No customer on earth just hands you a sale. You (the seller) must go in there and pull it out for yourself. But how you do this is not at all intuitive. The natural tendency of most amateur sellers is to try to push the sale out on a black tide of well intentioned "pitch". And classic "sales pitches" rarely work. The more push felt by the customer the more the customer will push back to maintain the balance. If your customer ever laughs to break the pressure he's feeling and tells you that you are "a great salesperson" you need to get worried! As Newton told us three hundred years ago, the equal and opposite reaction mechanism is going on inside your customer's head and in this case the result will be to shut you out.

Socrates was a man who went around giving people advice
... so they killed him.

*From an essay on the history of the world
by an 11-year-old child*

And just as with “milking a cow” which is an operation requiring a delicate touch, so it is with selling. Your customer won’t (unlike a cow) kick you if you get it wrong. But you are still faced with the fact that the more you push ... the more the ~~ew~~ customer, will push back and you’ll get nothing.

Why is this?

Well, as American President Harry S. Truman said many years ago, “The best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and then advise them to do it.” None of us likes to be told what to do (and where children are concerned this is particularly relevant). I mean, just imagine going to see your doctor who doesn’t listen to your problem but gives you the same diagnosis and treatment he gave to a patient he saw a few weeks ago. The only reason he does this is that the treatment worked for the other patient.

If *you* don’t listen, if *you* are not initially inquisitive, if you do not clarify the explicit problems experienced by THIS customer – the one you are sitting in front of now – you will be perceived as disinterested, self centred and totally idiotic. You, a total innocent Amateur Salesperson (senior executive notwithstanding) are actually perpetuating the stereotype image of an average pushy salesperson.

Breathing your own CO₂

So ... if I am saying that you can't *tell* your prospects and customers all about your products, ideas and services what can you do to *sell* them? You start by understanding how not to "un-sell".

Nature, as we know, "abhors a vacuum", but human beings loathe dead air.

Therefore when there is a silence in a room most untrained sellers become very anxious. They talk about anything to fill the space. And as the thing they know best is their own product, they yap some more about all of its features, elements, advantages and virtues. They cover, over and over again, the material dealt with just a few minutes before. The selling-air becomes re-breathed CO₂ – the leftover product of respiration. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is actually used in hospitals to get patients to breathe again once their lungs have stopped working. Because it is the presence of CO₂ in our lungs that makes us take another breath.

If as a school child you ever tried that highly dangerous experiment of breathing the same air in and out of a plastic bag (NO DON'T DO IT you're too sensible now!) you will have found that after a few cycles your breathing becomes faster and faster as your lungs become desperate for oxygen which is in increasingly short supply in the gas in the bag. You very rapidly start to hyperventilate. The same happens to your persuasive powers when you yap too much in front of your customers.

Stories abound in the bars and cafes of most major cities where sales people "hang-out", about the pure hell of visiting a top client accompanied by the boss or other non-sales colleague. The punch-line is usually the same one and goes something like this: "And having told me, before we went out that they would let *me* do all the talking, when we got there they wouldn't shut-up!"

(Don't believe me? Ask one of your sales people who you can trust for an honest answer.)

Alas, the more a seller talks, the more the un-selling process is taking place. You will see your prospect's eyes losing focus. You will see the occasional flick-gaze over your shoulder. You will notice the momentary interest in a rough fingernail. Subconsciously the heels are digging-in! Your customer doesn't want to be talked at or pushed and neither do YOU when you're a customer. You and your product, service or idea are not a "special case". The laws of persuasion apply just as much when the boot is on the other foot. Just like YOU, your customer wants to be understood.

We have two ears and one tongue so that we would listen more and talk less.

Diogenes, Ancient Greek philosopher

And as very basic as this advice is, **not talking** is usually very hard to do if you're an enthusiastic, passionate but untrained seller.

The great riddle in selling is this: you cannot sell if you don't have a relationship. And you cannot have a relationship unless you have sold and proved the value of your proposition. You might be thinking to yourself that this type of approach only works in individual, one-to-one, simple-selling (cars, refrigerators, cleaning services and so on) and not when endeavouring to close large-scale complex sales with huge corporate accounts. It is my tough duty to tell you that you are wrong.

It actually doesn't matter how complicated the sale is (international software contract, an order for 20 jumbo-jet airliners, a

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global financial information system), you are not dealing with an anonymous grey corporate bulk, you are dealing with people. And these people are making decisions and they are dead-scared of getting it wrong. They have just the same emotions as you do: they are ambitious to do better, they are afraid of failing, they have no idea what is going to happen next and they are really confused with uncertainty.

To cap it all – just like you and most humans – they are playing the same unhelpful record over and over again in their head:

What will they do when they discover I'm only me?

All humans have a great need to feel good about themselves. If you ask most senior executives how they are feeling they'll say, "Oh me? Fine!" But as an American business associate told me recently the word "FINE" actually stands for:

Fked-up**
Insecure
Neurotic and
Emotional

I recently asked a senior executive (who was as usual seeking some persuasive behavioural "pointers" prior to an important client meeting) what his primary goal was whenever he met an important customer and he replied, "I always try to impress them!" Fine!

About 25 years ago I worked for a large company in which the main board directors liked to hold regular key-customer lunches for which we, the members of the sales-force, were required to supply the lunchtime guests. At one of these lunches our "guests" (customers) were four self-made entrepreneurs with a

very successful global business. These men spent several tens of millions of dollars a year with my company. They were not either academics or particularly “well-read” and I doubt they had ever been to university or college. Their main chat was about sport, (football, golf, cricket, etc) a landscape in which the director/host on this occasion was completely lost. Instead of getting the gentlemen to tell him all they knew about sport (their chosen subject), he rapidly turned the conversation round to the current London theatre scene ... an area in which he was an *intellectual* expert and they were at-sea.

“Tell me,” he asked. “What do you think about [George Bernard] Shaw’s play *Arms and the Man* at the National? I’m thinking in particular about the characterizations of the two key players Raina and Catherine?” The lunch terminated rapidly. Afterwards the director came up to me beaming as if the lunch had been a total success, “Huh! You’ve got to *show* those sort of guys haven’t you!” he said.

The next day one of them called me and asked: “Is that director of yours really bright or is he actually an idiot?” Next year we lost the business and didn’t get it back for another fifteen years.

If you think this is all New Age feel-my-pain, emotional nonsense and you’re seeking some down-to-earth brass-tacks, old fashioned guidance in selling and persuading, there’s a yellowing, faded book you might take a glance at which will back-up what you’re reading here. Way back, before the Second World War, a man called Dale Carnegie published a book in the USA entitled *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Actually it is far from “yellowing” and “faded” and is still in print today (30 million copies worldwide) but I’m always amazed at how few people in business have read it. In HTWFAIP, over 70 years on from its original publication date, you will find this same accurate guidance into the quirks of human behaviour. The whole book is set down in rather old-fashioned language but it’s all there.

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Following are just ten headings taken from Dale Carnegie's summary of his own book. My simple definitions are tacked on below. All of these techniques are covered in detail in this little book you are holding in your hand. With the insights provided by modern behavioural psychology you will soon have a powerful understanding of the simple ways your customers can be persuaded to buy from you.

- 1. Ask questions instead of giving direct instructions.**
When a person is talking they feel more in charge of the situation. (Just like you do.)
- 2. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.**
People actually don't care much about YOU ... they care about themselves. (Just like you do.)
- 3. Let the other person do the talking.**
Human beings like the sound of their own voice more than yours. (Just like you do.)
- 4. Talk in the terms of the other man's interest.**
People aren't against you they are for themselves. (Just like you are.)
- 5. Make the other person feel important and do it sincerely.**
People who feel good about themselves produce good results. (This includes giving you more business.)
- 6. Let the other person feel the idea is his/hers.**
You are not there to "impress" you are there to get business. (Who cares whose idea it was? They do ... just like you.)
- 7. Show respect for the other person's opinions. Never tell someone they are wrong.**
Business Rule Number 1: the customer is always right. Business rule Number 2: when the customer is wrong, see Business Rule Number 1.

8. **Talk about your own mistakes first.**
“I’m sorry I was wrong” are amongst the rarest but most powerful words in business. (Everybody finds them difficult to say – just like you.)
9. **Sympathize with the other person.**
Sympathy for problems rates among the top five requirements for customer satisfaction. (Your customers have problems and want to be heard, at length – just like you.)
10. **Start with questions the other person will answer yes to.**
“Yes framing” or the “Law of Consistency” is deeply imbedded in our human psyche. If you can get a customer saying “Yes” to a series of simple questions, then they are 80% more likely to say, “Yes” to your more difficult questions later. (Ask any child ... especially your own.)

To influence: Get the other person talking

There's a famous story of a young woman who dined with William Gladstone one evening, and with Benjamin Disraeli the next. (Gladstone and Disraeli were prominent British statesmen of the 19th century. They were bitter rivals.) Asked her impression of these two powerful men, the young woman replied, "When I left the dining room after sitting next to Mr. Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest man in England. But after sitting next to Mr. Disraeli, I thought I was the cleverest woman in England."

*Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends
and Influence People (1936)*

18 SELLING SKILLS FOR COMPLETE AMATEURS

The one thing I always recall from the HTWFAIP book is what Carnegie said about the word “I”. During the 1920s when there were no automatic telephone exchanges in New York and all calls had to be routed through a human telephone operator, they carried out a survey to find the most often used word in the English language. After several months they discovered that word was, “I”. It was used five times more often than any other word and yet, when tested by university researchers, it was found that this was the most unconvincing word in the world.

Further research revealed that, at the other end of the scale, the most convincing word was no more used than any other word. It was not “sex” or “win” or “free” or “easy” (which all rank quite high on the convincing list). No, the most *convincing* word of all was back then, and still is: “YOU”.

People, (your customers, your staff, your friends and your colleagues) care most of all about themselves. And if they feel that you genuinely care about them and their interests they will give you more business. If you give them your ear and stop talking they will be impressed. If you stop trying to impress them and let them speak they will be charmed. If you stop trying to charm them with your brilliance and make them feel important they will give you more than you ever imagined.

Summary

The simple message of this chapter? *Never miss a good opportunity to SHUT UP.*

For Review Only

SECTION 2

Never Make A Statement When You Could Ask A Question

Quizmaster: Can you complete this well known
children's nursery rhyme: Old MacDonald had a—
Contestant: [thinks] ...farm!
Quizmaster: Correct! And for an extra ten points can
you spell it?
Contestant: Yes! E I E I O!

It's a funny old world. You don't always get the answers you were expecting.

You'd have thought (wouldn't you?) that in order to sell your product service or idea, you have to say lots of things about it? The "gift of the gab", "fast talking" and "smooth tongued rascal" are all epithets used to describe the verbal manner of persuasive rogues and the ubiquitous "used car salesman". The sort of people you might encounter in a sales setting but come away from meeting feeling that you've just been "had".

If that's your view I have bad news and worse news for you. The bad news is that fast-talking does work. The worse news is that

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NEVER MAKE A STATEMENT WHEN YOU COULD ASK A QUESTION **21**

if you ever use it to sell “once”, that customer will never want to buy from you again.

If you have ever witnessed this “yap” method of selling work successfully on unsuspecting “innocents” you will know it is quite an eye-opener!

In 2007 successful fast-talking-persuasion was actually demonstrated, on British TV, by the brilliant young illusionist Derren Brown. He was filmed, shopping in New York, using a specially devised fast-talk script which enabled him to distract shopkeepers whilst he paid for expensive jewellery and classy wristwatches with blank pieces of paper! And not just once.

He did it, brazenly, over and over again, in different shops, using only \$50-bill-sized sheets and (literally) a lot of fast talking! Interestingly, the only person he didn't fool was a humble hot-dog seller. (For the avoidance of any doubt I have to tell you that he returned all the items afterwards.)

The blank sheets were not hidden in a wad with a real note on the top and bottom; they were right there for all to see ... including the shopkeeper.

Using a hidden camera, set up across the street, Brown was filmed entering a typical, up-market Fifth Avenue store, posing as a genuine customer. Having asked the assistant to show him an expensive piece of merchandise he said, after due consideration, that he would like to buy it for cash ... around \$1000. From his wallet he produced the wad of blank paper and peeled each “bill” into the assistant's hand. As he did so he distracted the assistant with a series of simple questions and statements.

“By the way is there a subway station near here?” [50, 100, 150 ... keeps counting the “money” out]

“Yes.”

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“Is it on the next street or is it further?” [250, 300, 350 more sheets of blank paper]

“It’s just over there.”

“I see so I cross over the road and walk a couple of blocks.” [450, 500, 550 ... keeps counting the “notes”]

“Yes.”

“I find it so confusing in this city ... [keeps counting the paper] I’ve never been to New York before I could do with a coffee too ... is there a Starbucks close by? [750, 800 ... looks out of the window] ... ah yes there’s one over there. [900, 950, 1000] Right well thank you very much!”

Brown picked up the merchandise without hesitation and walked out of the store. [The camera cuts back to a stunned shop assistant looking down at his handful of worthless paper and suddenly rushing to the door... Alas the “thief” had long gone.]

It is astonishingly easy to confuse and distract a human brain but such fast talking isn’t what true selling is all about.

True selling is about persuasion. And the fact is we rarely persuade anyone to do anything: people (your customers) persuade themselves. “Statements” and “telling” are very *inefficient* true selling tools.

“Questions”, on the other hand, are the salesperson’s most persuasive weapon. And the good thing about “questions” (chatty conversational questions) is that you can use them time and time again on the same prospective customer and sell more each time.

Why questions are the basic tools of successful selling

Questions and answers combined create a dialogue and a dialogue is much more effective than a classic sales pitch (i.e. You making statements and putting them to sleep).

If you fail to get this dialogue underway, *with the customer doing at least 60% of the talking*, you will rarely secure an order, contract or sale for your business. Your questions (and the way you answer the questions put to you by your customer) are the most important parts of your sales discussion.

As an **Amateur Seller** (I'm not being patronizing but I think that's why you bought this book) you are strongly recommended (by me) to get into the habit of preparing your questions in advance and asking them in the right order. And even if you are only sitting there watching your company's professional sales executive at work then at least you will understand why they're doing what they're doing and keep quiet. (After all, you don't want to be the nightmare colleague they talk about afterwards who wouldn't shut up.)

I once worked for Rank Xerox, the business machine company in the UK, and I still keep an unsigned contract for a large copying machine in my filing cabinet. This piece of paper is now over 35 years old but I hold on to it for nostalgic reasons. And actually it was part of the inspiration for this book.

In the "signature box" of the contract there is no signature but there on the left-hand side is a small blue ink mark about 2 mm long. It was where a prospective customer placed his pen on the paper to sign and my boss's boss (the area manager and not a trained seller) who was with me for the day suddenly said, "Oh ... and there's something else we need to tell you. You will need to get a much larger power supply for this upgraded machine and we will have to bring in a crane to load it in from the road."

About the Author

Bob Etherington has been developing his reputation for sales success since the 1970s, in a career that has spanned many global markets.

Having begun his career in 1970 with Rank Xerox in London, he was quickly headhunted by Grand Metropolitan Hotels and then became a Money Broker in the City. He joined Reuters, the international news and financial information leader in the 1980s, and became a main Board Director for Transaction Services in 1990, moving to New York in 1994 to take control of their major accounts strategy for US banks. Reuters' international sales to these banks grew rapidly and, as a result, Bob was appointed to organise professional sales training for the entire company.

In 2000, Bob left Reuters and became co-founder of SpokenWord Ltd., the UK-based sales training company. He resigned as Managing Director of SpokenWord Ltd. in 2008.

Bob now lives between his homes in London and Kent and is currently working on a variety of business, theatre and charity projects. He can be contacted at robertetherington@yahoo.co.uk or via the website www.bobetheringtongroup.com.