

How important is selling anyway?

John Magar © 2012

If I had a dollar for every time someone came up to me and said, “I don’t really need to learn about all this selling stuff because I don’t have a selling job,” then I would be a rich man indeed! Too often, selling is seen as a specific skill that only salespeople have to learn.

It probably came to me really early-the notion that people sell ALL THE TIME without realising it.

I must have been about eleven years old-to my mother’s horror, it probably seemed eleven going on twenty! My mother wanted me to visit my grandmother with her on a Sunday afternoon. I’ve got to say, my grandmother was a great person. I still think of her and her funny ways to this day. But on that Sunday, I just didn’t want to know about parents or grandparents. I just wanted to have fun.

“Mum, I was really hoping to spend the afternoon with my mate, Murray. How about I come with you to see Granny next week?” I asked plaintively. The answer of course was all too swift. “Forget it John, you see Murray all the time, Granny really misses you.”

At that point, it hit me. I wasn’t sure what hit me, but it was a profound little thought for an eleven-year-old. I thought to myself, if I just continue this so-called *negotiation* by bullying my wishes onto my mother with a stream of “But I want to see my mate.” my mother would surely wear me down.

After all the odds were stacked well and truly against me:

1. My mother was considerable older than me (now that’s not a bad understatement!)
2. She was more patient
3. She was more powerful
4. She drove the car- the only thing I could drive, is her-to despair.

No, if I were going to make any headway here, I’d have to change my tactics. I would need to have mum *want* me to visit my mate, Murray. But how? Out of nowhere, I stammered to her, “Mum, I forgot to tell you, but my Zoo project has to be handed in this week and Murray and I have been working on it together.”

“Mrs. Rogers (our teacher at the time) told us last week, that our project was going great and that we have a great chance to win the Project of the Class award, if we keep up with it.” I went on, thinking I was on a roll. “Murray and I are pretty sure we can finish it today, hand it in early and impress Mrs. Rogers even more.”

My mother, ever wily, wise and street-smart immediately countered with, “That’s great about the project, but what about Gran?”

“Mum, you know how Gran’s always telling me how proud she is of me at school. It would be great if I could win that award so that maybe we could see her next week and tell her the good news. Wouldn’t that be great, mum?” I asked as breezily as I could.

Well, I’m sure you’ve guessed the outcome: I did visit my mate, Murray that day, had a lot of fun there, spent some time on the project, handed in the project and did well. (Unfortunately though, Murray and I didn’t win the award!-oh well nobody’s perfect)

I remember thinking to myself that day, after my mother gave me the green light to visit my mate Murray, that I must have engaged in some kind of process and that this process was capable of achieving powerful outcomes. Now, I didn’t define it in my mind at the time as processes and outcomes-I was only eleven years old!

But I knew that I had learnt a technique which could and would serve me well throughout my life-I had learnt the process of *Selling*.

The example above demonstrates seven key characteristics of selling:

1. Selling covers almost every aspect of life
2. Selling is about listening, not just talking skills
3. Selling is about meeting mutual needs
4. Selling is about achieving win-win outcomes, not win-lose ones.
5. Selling success can occur even when the buyer has more power than the seller
6. Selling is about understanding the differences between rational and emotional motives.

And, perhaps most importantly:

7. Selling is fun!

I will discuss these seven points briefly now and then expand on them in greater detail throughout the book:

Selling covers almost every aspect of life

I really can’t think of an occupation, hobby or family interaction with kids, spouses and parents, in which being able to sell competently does not greatly add to a person’s

success and well being-not just economic well being, but emotional well being as well. Remember, we are after win-win outcomes.

There is of course, a close relationship between selling skills and negotiation skills, particularly in the area of developing win-win transactions. The old fashioned approach to selling was based very much on the concept of “win-lose”. So, If I am the seller I win, if you are the buyer, you lose.

In this outmoded selling system (unfortunately still used by badly trained or untrained sales people today), both the buyer and seller “fight” over the existing pie, each one wanting a bigger slice.

With a win-win approach though, the buyer and seller try to *expand* the pie before negotiating slices rather than squabbling over the existing one. Let me give a famous example about two sisters fighting over sharing an orange:

There are two sisters who are negotiating (fighting would be a more appropriate word in this case!) over sharing an orange. Each one tries to convince the other that they are entitled to a bigger slice. Ideally of course, each sister would like to have the whole orange to herself.

They both try various strategies to no avail such as:

The younger of the two says that as she is younger she’s growing faster and therefore needs more of the orange.

The older one says that she deserves more of it because she does more housework than he younger sister. And on and on they go-getting absolutely nowhere.

And then, in a blinding light of inspiration, one sister asks the other, “What do you want to use the orange for?” Her sister responds, “I’d like to bake an orange cake and I need the peel,”- to which the answer came, “Oh well, I don’t need the peel, I just want the juice to drink.”

The two of them looked at each other and burst into laughter. They were arguing about nothing. By having one of them take the peel and the other the juice, they in effect *made the orange bigger* and of course both enjoyed a win-win outcome.

You will notice that this outcome would have been impossible unless one of the sisters had decided that maybe it was time she should ask questions, listen and respond to her sister’s needs. This kind of approach is absolutely basic to today’s way to sell.

Handy Tip

Next time that you are arguing over any issue with a family member, try to increase the pay-off for both of you, as a result of the negotiation.

Let me give some examples of how commonly we all need to sell.

We're selling when we are:

Business Examples

Negotiating pay rises or promotions with our boss

Leading and managing subordinates

Interacting with peers and colleagues

Negotiating with potential new job applicants

Applying for a new job or contract

Obtaining an order from a client

Gaining the confidence from suppliers and alliance partners

Negotiating with banks and other financial institutions

Personal Examples

We're selling when we are:

Negotiating a myriad of things with our spouse, such as holidays and house renovations

Negotiating an even bigger myriad of things with our children such as homework, careers, sports and music lessons.

Even proposing to our would-be spouses; if that isn't selling, what is!

Interacting with our friends with choices of various activities such as restaurants.

Interacting and negotiating with people in sport, hobbies and various committees.

As you can see, the list is pretty endless.

Selling is about listening, not just talking skills

The example I recounted as an eleven-year-old, shows how important it was that I listened and acknowledged my mother's comments-particularly, when she began to talk about my grandmother's needs.

To often, sales people make the mistake of trying to "out talk" their customers. In effect, all they manage to do is to make their customers angry. Rather than out talking them, they would be better off "out listening" them.

Without listening skills, discussed further into the book, it is impossible for a sales person to figure just what is in a person's mind. Inevitably then, sales people try to second-guess a customer, misjudging them in the process and sabotaging any selling success that they may have had.

Selling is about meeting mutual needs and achieving win-win, not win-lose, outcomes

Once again, it was obvious that both my mother and I "won" from the result of my selling efforts. I won because I managed to visit my mate Murray and my mother "won" because in allowing me to "have my way" she had the benefit of realising that I was going to do some useful schoolwork at Murray's house for some of the time, instead of just playing around.

And importantly, that there was a good chance that her decision to "buy" my wishes could lead to an impressive result at school which reflects very well on her parenting skills. This is a classic win-win outcome.

Selling success can occur even when the buyer has more power than the seller

The example above demonstrates very well that a sales person can succeed even when the buyer seemingly has more power. After all, mums have more power than kids, right!?!

The important thing about uneven power balances is to dissipate that power-make it useless. That's what I did with my mother. By showing her that it was in her interests for her to let me go and see my mate, her power ceased to offer her any advantage. And of course, I could not have done that if I had not been keenly tuned into her needs as a mother-here's that win-win outcome again.

One of the most famous examples of securing an order seemingly against all odds, is the success that Microsoft founder Bill Gates had more than twenty years ago in his negotiations with IBM.

Bill Gates had managed to develop the DOS disc operating system for personal computers but, as a tiny start-up company, had little means to sell his product. IBM, on the other hand, was the largest computer company in the world, with tremendous market power but no disc operating system.

That power imbalance didn't faze Bill Gates at all. That he is now one of the wealthiest people in the world, is proof that you don't need absolute power to win an order. The reason that this alliance was so successful and lasted for so many years, is that both parties *needed each other* and benefited from cooperation.

Selling is about understanding the differences between rational and emotional motives

It's easy to see from the above example with my mother, that *emotion* played a major part in the outcome:

- Emotions that relate to my mother wanting to be proud of me at school.
- Emotions that relate to both my mother and I wanting to do the right thing for my grandmother.

What takes many people by surprise though, is that *emotions* are behind almost every purchasing decision that we make-from paper clips to expensive cars to cheap holidays to software for a home computer to an entire computer system for a major organisation, emotions are crucial.

Selling is fun

Let's face it, a lot of people think that selling:

- Is difficult and a drudge
- Is somehow evil, false and forces people to buy things that they should not buy
- Is below them- not something that you do unless you have to.

Given that there are so many incredibly bad sales people around today, in all fields of endeavour, it's not surprising that selling has such a bad image. Well, here's the good news.....

Selling doesn't have to be any of these things. Practiced proficiently, in light of the seven characteristics discussed above, selling is not only a lot of fun, but highly beneficial to maintaining and enhancing relationships with everyone that we interact with, every day of our lives.