

I need to be loud and extroverted to be good at selling, right...?

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Common folklore suggests that the ideal personality of an accomplished salesperson revolves around their being:

- Loud
- Brash
- Extroverted
- Overly friendly
- A great talker
- A born sales person

In all the years that I've been around the selling game, I think that there is nothing that I have found which damages potential selling success more, than these outmoded thoughts and assumptions.

There is actually a very poor correlation between personality type and selling success. This may come as a great surprise to some readers but it should also come as a great relief to others.

After all, many people would think that they could never possibly succeed in sales because their personality profile doesn't fit this mythical ideal.

In reality, in my experience as a sales manager and as an every-day consumer, some of the worst sales people I have encountered have these characteristics listed above!

Let's look at them, starting with:

Loud, brash, extroverted, a great talker

Let's face it. All of us have squirmed at loud, "try hard" and extroverted sales people who drive us insane. These people have a nasty habit of selling "at you" rather than to you, almost as if you were not there at all.

They are in effect, cardboard caricatures of themselves; the result of evangelical sales training programs gone wrong.

A few weeks ago, I was in the market for a motorcar and had the dubious pleasure of needing to negotiate and discuss a potential new car for myself with a number of dealers. Now, I certainly don't wish to engage in "car sales person bashing" because I happen to think that some of them do an excellent job.

But some of the sales people that I had just dealt with were almost comical in their incompetence and annoying manners.

For instance, in one case, upon meeting one such car sales person, I told him that I had an appointment later that afternoon and that my time with him would be limited. He politely acknowledged what I had said and then promptly proceeded to bore me endlessly with a series of witty little stories about himself, his wife and his boss, not to mention all the cars that he had bought over the years.

I was getting angrier by the minute and no attempt at reminding him about my time commitments had any effect on him. Frankly, I thought that he was such a skilful "talker" that he would make a great Master of Ceremonies speaker, but as a sales person, the word "hopeless" quickly came to mind.

Essentially, he committed the greatest sin in selling: He didn't listen to me or care about my problems. Now, he had no problem hearing me-he nodded when I mentioned my time constraints-but he was incapable or unwilling to truly understand what he heard.

The extraordinary thing is, that as he continued this so-called dialogue with me (which consisted of his talking 90% of the time and my talking 10% of the time), he mentioned that all sales people at his dealership had just undergone a sales training program and how more confident he felt about the job and his dealership as a result!

At that point, I thought if he were the result of sales training, we've all got severe problems! That sales person actually "encouraged" me much more to write this book rather than buying a car from his dealership!

Handy Tip

When selling to a customer, never bore them with endless stories of yourself. Instead, get the customer talking about themselves.

Overly friendly

It might be tempting to think that one can never be too friendly. Who can possibly mind friendliness? Well, it is all a matter of timing, relevance, quantity and quality. You can have too much of anything, at the wrong time.

For instance, I put a call through to my bank's call center a little while ago and was connected to an amazingly cheery person. She was like a breath of fresh air in the breezy way in which she answered my call. After introducing myself, she asked the, by now usual question, "Do you mind if I call you, John?"

Well I said that was fine and she answered "Oh, and did you have a good weekend, John?"

I was absolutely flabbergasted. Here was a lady who probably speaks on the phone to perhaps a hundred people a day, none of whom she knows from a "bar of soap" including me, and she asks me if I had a good weekend!?!

Does she really care?

Do I really care about answering?

As I said, friendliness is all in the timing and relevance.

A great talker and a born sales person

These are probably my favourite pieces of folklore to destroy. That car sales person who drove me insane was a great talker, but he was a hopeless salesman.

Now, I am not saying that a degree of fluency doesn't help. It certainly does. A sales person who is uncertain of their words, "ums and ahs", is hesitant and has poor vocabulary and pronunciation is certainly going to struggle in a sales career.

But frankly, a person with these kinds of problems will struggle in almost any activity that requires communication skills, not just selling activities.

My point is, that whilst verbal fluency is important, "over the top" verbal performances are neither important nor necessary.

In fact, it is vastly better for a sales person to be a *great listener rather than a great talker* and to be able to mirror the speaking style of the buyer.

Handy Tip

Selling is 80% listening and 20% talking
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To exemplify, a few months ago, I had met for the first time, a potential new client, George who was there with his colleague, Steven. The two of them were almost opposite

in their communication styles: George spoke literally at a million miles an hour, thirteen words to the dozen.

Steve on the other hand, drawled his words out slowly, methodically and carefully. Unconsciously, I found myself mirroring their speaking styles.

When directing my conversation to George, I substantially quickened my speaking style and when addressing Steve, I made a conscious effort to slow my speed down. That's *Mirroring*.

In effect, I was varying my speaking style to suit the style of the people that I was addressing, thereby relating to them much more effectively and on their level, NOT MINE.

I have underlined the words, NOT MINE to emphasise how important it is for a sales person to interact on the same level as their customers.

Please note, I am not suggesting that sales people act in a "false way" but simply to adjust their tone, speed and vocabulary to suit the buyer.

As for being "A born sales person", I don't think I have been privileged enough to actually see a baby born and immediately turn to its mother and say, "Mum, I'm going to be a great sales person."

Selling skills are learnt; they are not skills that "we are born with".

So far, we have discussed some folklore skills and characteristics that don't really help. What about the skills and characteristics that do help?

To be a good sales person you need:

- tact
- diplomacy
- patience
- persistence
- planning skills
- strategic thinking skills

Added to this list, is something that is so basic, that I'm amazed that it is rarely explored in an interview situation with the potential hire of a new sales person:

If you want to succeed in selling, you need to like people.

Selling is not high pressure, fast talk!

It is about identifying and satisfying buyers' needs. And needs can't be identified unless a sales person places a value on the outcome of the sales process, in terms of the well being of the customer.

Sales people need to want to, and look forward to, asking these four questions:

1. Has my product or service actually helped the customer?
2. Has it solved the customer's real problem?
3. Has it resulted in reducing some of the customer's daily stresses and hassles?
4. Has it resulted in a level of customer satisfaction that encourages a repeat purchase?

High achieving sales people ask these questions all the time. And when they get their orders, they get "a kick", not only from the satisfaction of receiving the order, but from the even more significant satisfaction of *turning a customer into a friend*.

Some sales trainers call this, *Relationship Selling*. I call it common sense.

Handy Tip

No one will buy anything from a sales person that they do not trust. So sales people should sell themselves first, before their product.

I mentioned **Tact and Diplomacy** above. All too often, sales people lose their cool at customers, with "throw- away" accusations such as:

"Customers are often really dumb, rude, painful, demanding, obnoxious and basically a total pain!"

Perhaps, some customers do exhibit these characteristics- so what?

A sales person does not need to fall in love with them. They simply need to turn them into viable customers without stressing themselves out too much and without belittling these customers. I'll examine techniques for doing this in Chapter 13 on meeting objections.

I also mentioned **Patience and Persistence**.

It is well known that Pareto's Law, the 80/20 rule, is very relevant to selling:

80% of orders from sales people are won from only 20% of the sales people in any given industry.

Also, in business to business (B2B) selling, it can take an average of four visits before a buyer commits to an order. Yet, 80% of sales people give up after the first “knock-back”.

Clearly, there is a challenge here for us:

Do we wish to be in the successful 20% of high achieving sales people or in the 80% “also ran” category?

Last of all, in the list above, I mentioned **Strategic Thinking skills**.

This is one of the hardest skills of all in selling.

Curiously, it does not revolve around getting orders, but rather on the ability for a sales person to say, “No” to an order.

Particularly, but not limited to B2B selling, a competent sales person soon develops the skill and courage to “walk away” from opportunities which are NQR-not quite right-for that sales person’s organisation.

Reasons that may make a sales person walk away from an order or sales opportunity include a myriad of factors such as:

- The customer’s demographic does not relate to the selling organisation’s *positioning*.
- The customer is unable or unwilling to pay the prices that are sought by the organization.
- The customer’s servicing costs are too great relative to the margin obtained.
- The customer places unrealistic demands on the organisation, not commensurate with the profit potential.
- The customer is strategically irrelevant to the organisation’s direction.
- The customer has little opportunity for growth in comparison to alternative customers.
- The customer is in an industry which has little growth opportunities in comparison to alternative industries.

In all these cases, sales people “walking away” results in reduced organisational opportunity costs, through saving the wasted resources that would have been used in chasing this “wrong” business.

I can give an excellent example from one of my clients, a Management Education Provider in Melbourne, who has a strong presence in the SME (small to medium sized businesses) market and practically no presence or competitive advantages in serving the Blue Chip “Top five hundred” company market.

Since my client has limited marketing and promotional funds, it would be foolish to have them design and send a brochure to these Top 500 companies. They would be more judicious to walk away from them, and concentrate on attacking the SME market in which they have the skills, positioning and competitive advantages needed to succeed.

The following saying can help us to remember this crucial skill:

Sales people need to choose those customers that suit their organisations, not let “any old customer” choose them.