



Manage Your Sales Style

by Rick Davis

When it comes to sales, you may be affected by social consciousness in more ways than you realize. While it's easy to recognize that job pressures shape your performance — for example, the struggle to meet corporate expectations and uncompromising customer demands at the same time — what's not so apparent is that your behavior is also shaped by social pressures and often is reinforced by movies, literature and television. In turn, these elements of popular culture reinforce archetypal images of salespeople.

Carl Jung, a pre-eminent psychologist of the early 20th century, popularized the term archetype. It defines a group of personal characteristics that create a singular image of a person. For example, the “warrior,” a popular worldwide archetype for centuries, conjures up images of a loyal fighter who perseveres through challenging times and emerges victorious: the knight in shining armor. Literature and movies continue to reinforce this image today, such as Luke Skywalker in the movie “Star Wars.” Some archetypes conjure up positive pictures, while others stir up negative emotions.

Unfortunately, many common “salesman” archetypes often bring to mind visions of an unscrupulous person preying on the vulnerabilities of others. But it doesn't have to be that way. You can overcome the negative archetypes of sales by analyzing your performance and taking defined steps to master the psychology of selling.

Four types of styles that emerge in the sales profession include the “Hard Closer,” “Friend,” “Beggar” and “Leader.” The first three can be classified as “accidental salespeople” because their behavior is the result of social and professional pressure; they succumb to the easiest path of sales behavior. Your goal should be to rise above these roles to become a Leader.

Accidental Salespeople

Hard Closers are adept at creating positive results even if they are failing to communicate thorough product knowledge to customers. The typical Hard Closer is persistently trying to “close the deal” with manipulative questions: “What is it going to take to get your business today?” “If I could do this, would you do business tonight?” This person is seeking fast results and instant commitment from prospects, displaying little concern for the customer's needs, preferring instead to conduct business as a battle after which both sides emerge with whatever spoils they can muster. We can thank movies such as “The Music Man,” “Glengarry Glen



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Ross,” and “Tin Men” for promoting this unfavorable image.

Hard Closers typically believe that a sale will not be made unless it's closed on the first meeting. They typically defend inappropriate behavior even if they know it's wrong because it's easier than making a strenuous commitment to improve their skills. They are able to get away with these harsh tactics because they know that more victims always will cross their paths.

The prevalence of hard-closer tactics still exists in many retail environments. Automobile salespeople are the most notorious for their manipulative tactics. Home improvement salespeople continue to pressure customers for the “one-time close” at the kitchen table. In spite of the common negative perceptions about this form of salesmanship, many people in the roofing industry continue to push for the sale on a first meeting and, worse yet, fail to follow up to give the prospect a second chance if the purchase is not made at the first meeting.

Friends are the salespeople who strive to build strong relationships, but unknowingly do so on a weak foundation. They fail to recognize that business is not personal. Business is business,

and a strong personal relationship is not usually strong enough to solidify long-term business relationships. The Friend discovers that a competing salesperson eventually will come along with a better joke or better tickets to a ball game plus the ability to create value within the business relationship. Willy Loman, the tragic character from the play "The Death of a Salesman," epitomizes the Friend, ultimately exclaim-

ing the words, "They owe me!" Friends display almost no business purpose, commonly socializing with purchasing agents and sales managers to "solidify" relationships. At the same time, Friends bring very little business value to the table.

The Beggar is the most common archetype found in business-to-business sales environments. Beggars might better be termed "victims," not because they truly

are victims, but because they perceive themselves to be victimized by price pressure, unfair employers, demanding customers, economic uncertainty, and numerous other challenges. Beggars also can be appropriately termed the "talkers" because they ramble on incessantly about product features and benefits in a desperate attempt to mask the fear of inevitable price negotiations. They possess strong product knowledge and happily spout the features and benefits of a product, later succumbing to the customer's assertion that all products are so similar that only price matters in the final decision. In the end, a Beggar is ill-equipped to handle the challenges of an adversarial purchasing agent.

The key to overcoming archetypal pressure is to recognize when your values fail to match your behaviors. Our values are stated beliefs that often fail to match our actual behaviors. For example, a person will say that they value time, but then waste it reacting irrationally to customer demands. Or a salesperson states that he sells the value of his product or service, but habitually requests price concessions from the employer. Hard Closers claim to value a "win-win" relationship but still behave in a "win at all costs" manner. Only when you are able to align your behaviors with your values can you begin to emerge as a true Sales Leader.

In the Lead

The archetypal Leader is a good listener who empathizes with customers' needs while protecting his own employer's profitability. Leaders reflect a persistent commitment to personal growth and accountability rather than surrendering to industry pressure that jeopardizes profits and credibility. They utilize highly developed questioning skills to achieve an understanding of customers' goals to determine where (and whether) a fit will occur between a supplier and customer. By comparison, Beggars focus irrationally on the customer's needs to the detriment of the supplier, Hard Closers concentrate only on the supplier's needs, and Friends focus only on their own needs and offer little commitment to the growth of their employers or customers. A Leader uniquely ensures that all parties—the customer, supplier, and salesperson—



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are satisfied.

The most impressive trait that separates Leaders from “accidental salespeople” is an insatiable desire for growth. They recognize that a commitment to personal growth and the development of high-quality sales skills eventually will result in sales success and career security. Leaders build long-term relationships that focus on mutual business benefit, and they develop enough strength

and power in their sales roles that they can “choose” their customers. This is a concept that many salespeople find challenging, but is a common ingredient among the most successful people in the industry.

Extensive prospecting efforts and a clear vision of the ideal customer enable the Leader to select clients that will provide long-term security and happiness. Many leaders are also very focused on managing

data — goals, database information, prospect leads, etc.—and all Leaders possess exceptional administrative skills, which makes them valuable resources for customers and employers alike.

After reading this, you may have surmised that a salesperson, in fact, needs to possess elements of all four sales styles to achieve success. Indeed, there are times when a salesperson needs to be tough with a customer (a Hard Closer); there are times when a salesperson needs to establish strong personal rapport (the Friend); and there are times when the best a salesperson can do is bid and pray for positive results (the Beggar). The Leader is the only archetype that recognizes which behavior to adopt for a given situation, and you can strive to become a leader by adopting three very simple behaviors that will affect your entire approach to selling:

1. Try to understand how your customers’ dreams, aspirations and desires. Don’t assume your customers are alike. You cannot truly help your customers until you understand their unique perspective. Most salespeople limit their sales focus to the products they sell, thus creating limits to the relationship. As an example, you might discover that your customer is highly focused on re-selling their home. Thus, your sales approach may result in advice on increasing value by adding components as opposed to reducing price. While your competitors are busy selling the features and benefits of the product, you are distinguishing yourself as a resource who can help them increase profits through better salesmanship. Ask questions and listen to discover ways your customer faces competitive challenges.

2. Think long-term profitability. Sometimes the best sale is the one you don’t make. If you lose a sale today, you may later discover a better opportunity elsewhere. You may even discover that the lost prospect becomes a customer at a later date, and on favorable terms to you and your employer. Where the Hard Closer is overly focused on the employer and the Beggar is overly focused on the customer, the Leader successfully ensures mutual profitability for his employer as well as the customer. While you are striving to make the sale, remember the implications of your

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actions. The long-term relationship you forge is based upon the short-term activity of today. Build relationships that offer mutual long-term benefits.

3. Prospect more and write down everything. If you are challenged by pressure to reduce your prices (as we all are), prospect more to increase your power. The more sales opportunities you have, the more you will sell and the less reliant you will be on any one situation. There is a law of business that is not applied enough to sales in general: "If you cannot measure it, you cannot control it." So, if you really want to become an effective leader, prospect continually and strive to write down information about every prospect and the value of every sales opportunity. Keep this information with you at all times and update it consistently.

In the end, you will discover that merely raising your awareness of alternative behaviors will help you become more powerful in your sales efforts. Think clearly about your behaviors and evaluate your performance daily. At the end of each meeting, ask yourself what you can do to improve. Recognize that you have many behaviors from which you can choose. Exercise smart choices and you will gain the power of a Sales Leader. **R**

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