



CHAPTER 1

**THE STUFF YOU
HATE . . . SELLING**

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Wherever you are right now, stop, put the book down and look around. Everything you see is there because someone sold it. Everything!

The chair you are sitting on, the lights and ceiling panels above you, the desks, the coffee, the sticky bun, the cups, the air-conditioning units, your pen, your clothes, shoes, make-up, briefcase, the aircraft, bus, train or car you travelled on to get here – someone, somewhere sold it. There's a man or woman earning a living, paying their mortgage, feeding their kids, who knocked on some purchasing manager's door and persuaded them to buy that chair, that aircraft (yes, Boeing and Airbus have a sales team), that pen, those shoes, that coffee cup.

Selling is vital to our society. Organizations only make a profit if they sell something for a price greater than its cost. Out of that profit they pay corporation tax along with wages to employees, who in turn pay tax. No sales = no profit = no tax.

Doctors, nurses, teachers, firefighters and police officers don't generate profit, which means they have to be paid out of tax money – which is only generated if someone, somewhere is selling stuff. So we should be happy there are people who can sell. No one sold anything in communist countries because the state planned it all. That's why people had no money or food or medicine and were poorer than dirt.

What Is Selling?

Selling is about making it easy for people to buy. There you are: 24 years of sales experience and that's the whole lot summed up in one sentence.

I suppose you could put the book back on the shelf now and save yourself a few bob . . . But let me elaborate.

'Selling' Is a Dirty Word

At the start of my business development courses, I always ask delegates to shout out words, phrases and images that come to mind when they hear the word 'sales' or 'sales rep'. Below are some examples of what they say:

- Smooth (but not in a good way)
- Don't listen
- Underhand
- Pushy
- Shiny suits
- Secondhand cars
- Dodgy
- Making you buy something that you don't want.

Not good is it? And it's unsurprising, therefore, that people feel uncomfortable about promoting their goods or services. With those kinds of feelings associated with sales, who would feel comfortable about selling anything?

The factor that really annoys people, however – the one that always comes top and with which everyone else in the room agrees – is the sales person's inability or reluctance to listen to what the customer wants.

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Once I have allowed delegates to vent their spleen and disgorge themselves of all this pent-up anger and frustration, I go on to ask if they can recall a time when they were sold to and it was a good experience.

Thankfully, most can do this and once again, I hear the same positive characteristics repeated. The good sales people:

- Listened
- Were polite
- Were genuinely interested in what I wanted
- Knew their stuff
- Were able to give advice
- Suggested things that I'd not initially thought of
- Were helpful
- Took time with me

We have all experienced these kinds of sales people and quite likely left their company with less cash but very comfortable with the whole experience and our purchase. They exemplify something I said earlier – they made it easy for you to buy.

'People buy from people.' You may be familiar with that phrase and it's true. To be more accurate, one should add 'they like' or perhaps, 'they warm to'.

Why People Buy

You really do need to know why people are buying your product or service. Not just what they want, but what they need.

To explain the difference between wants and needs, I reckon the hackneyed old 'drill' story is worth trotting out. No one wants to own a drill and that includes people walking into B&Q right now and

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about to ask the guy in the orange apron: 'Excuse me, could you tell me where the drills are because I want to buy one?' Yes, they may *want* one, but the reason is that they *need* holes. And they need holes because they need to put Rawlplugs and screws in those holes in order to fix something to a wall. See the difference?

I have a drill; I bet you have a drill. And I bet you, like me, never, ever use it until you have need of a hole.

I don't pretend to be some kind of psychologist, but once you've spent enough time selling, sitting in front of potential customers, whether that be in a shop or out on the road and in their offices, you do begin to get a good feel for why a particular individual is buying something.

The most important thing to realize right from the start is that we purchase very little based solely on logical, practical reasons. We just can't help ourselves: we're creatures filled with emotion and we react emotionally to most purchases.

Not sure? Think about the stuff you have at home. In fact, think about your home. Did you buy that based on logical reasoning?

Or your car. No one buys a car based on logic. Blokes buy a car because of how a particular model makes them feel and based on how men and women will perceive them when they drive it or it's outside their house. Women are no different, but at least they tend to be more honest about their reasons. I asked a woman the other week why she'd opted for a particular motor and she said: 'Because it's got a nice friendly face.' Men will trot out a load of facts, statistics and terribly sensible reasons for choosing a certain model when all along it's because they want to demonstrate to other men how much money they're earning or how successful or outdoors and rugged they are. It's impossible to *not* communicate by the choices you make.

I do a lot of work with people in professional partnerships and, if I ask groups of lawyers or accountants why clients use their services, I normally get the same answer: 'They are buying our technical

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expertise and knowledge.' This is true, but it's not the whole answer. Why should I, as a client, be bothered about how clever you are as a lawyer or an accountant? The answer's simple: because then I don't need to worry about my accounts or legal issues – you'll handle all that. That's what clients are really paying for: comfort, security and peace of mind.

Think about your GP or family doctor for a moment. Mine's excellent. He listens to what I say, he seems to ask me relevant questions and he has a nice, reassuring, friendly manner that makes me feel like I'm an equal rather than beneath him. He never seems to rush the consultation either.

But ask me to rank him in terms of his knowledge of medicine and his clinical expertise compared to his fellow professionals and I haven't a clue whether he'd be top 10, top 50 or bottom 10 out of 100. And do you know what: it doesn't matter, as long as I feel better once I've been to see him and taken the course of treatment he's prescribed.

And so it is with those of you in professional services. It's not your knowledge your clients are after, it's the peace of mind and security that knowledge brings with it.

Similarly, emotion influences our choices about a whole host of products. We buy things because we believe they will:

- confer status
- boost our ego
- give us confidence
- make us like our peers
- make us more manly/feminine
- make us a better parent
- make us appear/feel youthful
- make us appear mature/older

Next time you're watching the television, notice how many ads are using one or several of these eight factors to persuade you to buy their product. Very few adverts attempt to influence our purchasing decisions by giving us logical reasons – they go straight for our emotions.

Justify What We Buy

So we buy with our heart or our gut, but then we justify the decision to ourselves logically.

Most people who live with a partner know that the secret is to get 'approval' to buy the item in question prior to purchase. This can sometimes take days, weeks or even months: a sort of persuasion by attrition. You do this so that come the day you walk in the house with your Manolo Blahnik shoes or 52-inch plasma television, it's not going to result in a full-blown row.

Equally, decisions are so much easier if we know others have made similar ones. We look for confirmation that what we are about to do is the right thing. Ever been asked to sponsor someone for charity? What's the first thing you look at when they hand you the form? That's right, how much others have given. Why? You're a free-thinking individual: you can give as much or as little as you want. But you don't. You give the 'going rate'. This is called 'social proof' and it's very powerful in persuading and influencing others.

How many times have you been out for a meal and been asked: 'What are you having?' or 'Are you having a starter?' Why do people want to know this? They're adults, they're going to pay for their own meal, they can have what they want – and yet they still ask. And they do so because they seek the assurance that what they are doing is not going to make them stand out from the norm.

The people you are selling to are no different: they too seek assurance. You can address that issue by mentioning that other clients, similar to them, are already using your service.

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None of us makes decisions in isolation. We have to justify them to at least two people: ourselves and another person close to us. This other person may be our boss, a close friend or colleague, or our partner or parent.

When you are in a meeting with a prospect, it might be that she loves what you have to offer and imagines that working with you would be worthwhile, but she'll have to justify the decision to use you to someone else within the organization.

The fleet manager is in charge of purchasing the company vehicles, but she has to justify her choice to the finance director and maybe the managing director, and the drivers of the vehicles of course.

The human resources manager has to decide which recruitment agency to have on his preferred supplier list. This will be based on whether he trusts and gets on well with the person dealing with his account (assuming that this person can provide the candidates he seeks), but his boss will want to know that he has chosen wisely.

No one got sacked for choosing BMW or for buying a Canon copier or a Nokia phone or for sourcing lunch from Pret a Manger or Marks & Spencer.

Say I go to see the training and development manager at a large law firm and she likes what I do, feels that the courses are the right fit for her people, and we get on like a house on fire. In her mind she may think 'Yep, I'd like to use Nick', but she has to feel confident about putting me in front of a group of lawyers for a half or full day. If I'm no good it's not me that'll get it in the neck, it's her.

Knowing that's how it works means that when I meet a training and development manager for the first time, I make sure that I tell her things that give her confidence that I'm a pretty safe bet in front of lawyers. So I mention my experience working in law, the hundreds of lawyers I've helped secure new jobs for when in recruitment, and then

I name some of the law firms I now do training for. This builds my credibility and helps them to trust me. Although they still have to make a leap of faith when first using my services, it's only a small one. And provided I do a good job and the feedback reflects that, then they're happy to use me again.

Eventually, the relationship of trust is so strong that your customers will begin to ask for your advice about training issues and get you in to do stuff in front of potentially tricky audiences. And while all this is developing within the relationship, they are chatting to people who do the same job in other firms and recommending you, and from such conversations spring referrals – which is what every sales person wants, because it means they don't have to do as much networking or cold calling.

The Characteristics, Attributes and Qualities of Good Sales People

You're not a sales person – that's why you're reading this book. But you do have to sell and you want to get good at it. In fact, you want to be great at it. That's how you're going to grow your small business, or bring in revenue as a fee earner in your firm.

Some common qualities are shared by all brilliant sales people. So before we get into the techniques, how about we start by looking at the traits you should be emulating? Without exception, great sales people demonstrate the following:

- persistence
- always developing business
- a positive attitude
- an aversion to hard work

- belief in what they sell
- a definite but flexible focus

Persistence

Persistence means following up every lead, contact and referral until it results in business, is put on hold for another time or is ditched indefinitely.

Persistence is about doing something to develop sales and business every day, no matter how small: whether that's an email, a phone call, a coffee with a prospect, attending a networking event or delivering a seminar.

Persistence is about reading books, listening to audio CDs, attending seminars or training sessions that improve your business development skills.

Always Developing Business

You must do at least one business development activity every day.

Never, ever, ever, ever stop developing business. I have seen too many sales people ease back when times are good.

I don't give a monkey's how busy you are, you must be able to look back at your day and know that you did at least one thing that would lead you to more sales. This can be a phone call, an email or a letter, as we saw under persistence. It doesn't matter how small it is: send a brochure, follow up on a lead, ask someone for a referral, speak to someone outside the loo on a Virgin train. I did that once and the guy I got chatting to happened to be involved in the training department of a huge multinational insurance company.

So, whatever you do, don't ever go to bed without being able to answer 'yes' to the question: 'Did I do something to bring in another customer today?'

A Positive Attitude

Guess what: optimists are better at developing business than pessimists.

When a pessimist hears 'No thanks, we are really happy with our current supplier', he or she regards it as:

- Permanent – 'If they won't buy what I have now then they won't ever buy it.'
- Pervasive – 'If they won't buy from me then no one will.'
- Personal – 'It's me! They didn't buy what I had because they didn't like me.'

In contrast, an optimist thinks: 'Oh well, my timing's obviously not right, I'll make a note to get in touch with them in six months' time. Right: on to my next prospect.'

In fact, an optimist goes one step further. Having conceded that the timing is obviously not right, he (or she) tells the prospect that he'll leave them with the information he's been discussing and makes a note in his diary – so the prospect can see him do it – that he'll drop them a line in three or six months' time.

An Aversion to Hard Work

Every sales person I have ever met is lazy at heart (why do you think they're in sales?). As long as you hit your targets, your time is pretty much your own when you're a sales rep. Lunch when you fancy it, start and end the day when you want, and play loads of golf and declare it as 'client entertainment' or 'business development' or 'account management' on your time sheet!

But that does not mean they shy away from hard work or are in some way not 100% dedicated to the cause. Far from it!

Sales people are interested in selling as much stuff with the minimum amount of effort and in the shortest possible time, which means that they don't work hard: they work *smart*.

A Belief in What They Sell

If you are currently working for an organization and are attempting to persuade people to buy what you do or have and don't believe in either the product or organization, then leave now. I'm serious. You're wasting everyone's time.

There have been three times I have attempted to sell things I didn't believe in and things didn't turn out well on any occasion.

A Definite But Flexible Focus

Good developers of business have a target. I don't just mean a figure, I mean a market. They know, before they set out in the morning, before they send the first email, write the first letter, or make the first telephone call, which organizations in which sectors they are going to contact.

They *do not* think they can sell everything they have to offer to just anyone; they have a target to aim for.

However, because their income depends on being successful, they retain the flexibility to change target if it becomes clear that they can hit their monetary goal more quickly.

Having a target is the single most important aspect of developing business, which is why I dedicate an entire chapter to it.

Perhaps this is a good point to let you know that reading this book isn't going to make you even half decent at winning work. In order to do that, you're going to have to get up off your backside and do stuff, so let's start here – but because it's early days, you can stay seated.

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Grab a pen, pencil or other equally convenient writing instrument and jot down the traits and characteristics you already possess that you reckon will be handy when developing business.

Once that's sorted, write down those that you are going to have to address because they aren't terribly conducive to being a business development whizzkid.

Now you can read the next chapter.

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