

Sellin' With Stanislavski

If you've ever been to a movie or a play, the chances are good that you've watched a "method" actor. The term refers to a style of training and rehearsal that is very popular, especially among American actors. The basic idea is that you don't "play" a role, you "live" a role, by fully understanding the character's motivations and emotions. Lee Strasburg is generally considered the father of method acting in America, but he'd be the first to tell you that his method was based on the "system" developed by Konstantin Stanislavski in the early 1900's. Stanislavski taught that great acting was more about "the art of experiencing" than "the art of representation."

What's My Motivation?

Despite the fact that salespeople are often called "sales representatives," I think great selling is all about "the art of experiencing" too. There's a cliché in method acting where the actor asks the director: "What's my motivation here?" I think a salesperson should always ask the same question. But as you might have guessed, I'm looking for a deeper answer than: "I want to make the sale."

Not that that shouldn't be part of your motivation! If you don't want to make the sale, you probably don't belong in sales! But there's a downside to being too much of a "pusher" in selling, and by that I mean acting on your own motivation. The simple fact of the matter is that buyers buy for their own reasons, not the seller's reasons. And the better a salesperson understands those reasons, the more likely it is that he or she will make the sale. In other words, it's not what motivates *you*, it's what motivates *them*.

Multiple Tracks

What's interesting is that buyers' motivations often run on multiple tracks. For example: I have a problem I need to solve **but** I have a budget I need to consider **and** I have a million other things on my plate right now. Or else **I** want to do A but **my boss** wants to do B or **the home office** wants me to do C. There are a lot of moving parts to many buying decisions, especially the ones that involves a change to the *status quo* — like, for example, when you're trying to get the business someone else has been getting, or when you're trying to introduce a new way of doing things to an established customer.

The greatest obstacle in many of these situations is when the salesperson makes assumptions on what motivates the buyer, and those assumptions are wrong. How to you avoid that? It's really pretty simple. Don't rely on assumptions. Ask!

By the way, the most dangerous assumption of all is that most print buyers are mostly motivated by low prices. That assumption leads printers to sell at lower prices than they have to. Sometimes the motivation to solve — or prevent! — a problem is much greater than the motivation to "save" money. If you're operating on the wrong assumption, you're leaving money on the table!

Motivation To Prospect

I had an interesting conversation with one of my sales coaching clients recently. He told me that he can only get motivated to prospect after a big order comes in. "That charges my battery," he said, "but it usually doesn't last very long." This is a salesperson, by the way, who isn't getting that many big orders, and who really needs to prospect for some new business.

My advice was to channel Stanislavski. "Next time it happens," I told him, "I want you to stop and really experience that sensation that charges your battery. I want you to learn it, not just react to it." The goal is to be able to duplicate the feeling without requiring the stimulus of a big order.

"It's acting," I told him, "and if you can train yourself to 'live' that role, you'll have a lot more success as a salesperson."