

Sugar and Spice and All Things Nice

Do you remember the nursery rhyme? *Sugar and spice, and all things nice, that's what little girls are made of.* It follows, then, that any little girl who grows up to be a salesperson will still possess those attributes.

OK, what other attributes should you be looking for in a salesperson? It's probably obvious that neither sugar and spice—nor “snips and snails and puppy dog tails”—is enough to insure success.

One Way To Look At This

I have written before that the three most important things to look for in a salesperson are intelligence, a competitive nature, and an appreciation of the finer things in life. I want intelligence because smart people learn faster than not-so-smart people, and printing salespeople face two significant learning challenges. The first is to master the product knowledge. The second is to master the selling skills.

I want a competitive nature because new business development is all about changing people's minds. Think about it. Just about everyone you'd like to have as a new customer is someone else's customer right now. The decision to start buying from you usually has to be accompanied by—or preceded by—the decision to stop buying from someone else.

Even with current customers, the decision to continue to buy from you has to be defended. So we need someone who's driven to win, and who knows what to do when you lose—which is to think about *why* you lost, work on the skills required to win the next time, and go looking for another opportunity to compete!

As for an appreciation of the finer things in life, it's a common misconception that the best salespeople are motivated by money. The truth is that it's not the money, it's what they can *do with* the money. People with well-defined *wants* are more likely to work hard to earn the money they require. Having said that, beware of people with never-ending *needs*. The sales world has more than its share of people who know how to spend, but not how to earn.

Another Way

Here's another way to look at the attributes that lead to success in sales. A person is not likely to have good convincing *skills* without a strong convincing *attitude*. I have written before about the Caliper Profile, and one of the things it measures is *ego drive* (the degree of satisfaction gained from convincing others). This is comparable to the “top half” of a competitive nature, being driven to win. Caliper also measures *ego strength* (the capacity to handle rejection and criticism), which is comparable to the “bottom half” of a competitive nature: thinking about *why* you lost, working on the skills required to win the next time, and looking for another opportunity to compete.

The point here is that you can actually test to make sure that an individual has these attributes. Here are some more of the things Caliper measures: *aggressiveness* (the inclination to push forcefully); *assertiveness* (the potential to communicate information and ideas in a direct manner); *energy* (the potential to sustain a high level of activity); *empathy* (the ability to identify with another person's feelings); *accommodation* (the inclination to do what other people want you to do); *gregariousness* (comfort with meeting new people and initiating conversations); *sociability* (enjoyment of being around people and working with others); abstract reasoning ability (the potential to solve problems and understand the logical relationships between concepts); and *idea orientation* (preference for thinking creatively and generating new ways to solve problems).

I'm sure you'll agree that these are all important attributes, but are some more important than others? I think the best way to answer that would be to share my own recipe for the ideal printing salesperson:

- 6 parts Ego Drive
- 6 parts Assertiveness
- 4 parts Empathy
- 4 parts Idea Orientation
- 4 parts Abstract Reasoning Ability
- 3 parts Ego Strength
- 2 parts Energy
- 2 parts Aggressiveness
- 2 parts Accommodation
- 1 part Sociability
- 1 part Gregariousness

As you see, I don't place a lot of importance on an outgoing personality. That means two things: (1) having one isn't any guarantee of success, and (2) not having one won't prevent you from being an effective salesperson. I'm also a far bigger believer in assertiveness than aggressiveness — to me, that's the difference between intelligently and creatively presenting your side of the story and blindly pushing your agenda. I love the combination of assertiveness and ego drive. Those two attributes, along with empathy, idea orientation and abstract reasoning ability—the *intelligence* factors—are by far the most important part of this recipe. And again, you can test to see if an individual has these attributes.

Yes, No and Maybe

The good news is that Caliper can help you to avoid obvious hiring mistakes—although I should amend that to say it makes obvious what you wouldn't have known otherwise. You can be fooled in an interview by a person who can talk all the talk. You're a lot less likely to be fooled if you use Caliper as the final stage of the hiring process. (Key point: The Caliper Profile costs \$295. It's not something you use on every applicant, like the Wonderlic Cognitive Ability Test. It's also far more comprehensive and accurate than any of the "sales tests" you can buy online for \$14.95!)

Some more good news is that Caliper can also help you in a "maybe" situation; for example, a candidate who doesn't quite match up with my recipe, or a current salesperson who isn't quite meeting your expectations. In either case, Caliper can show you exactly what's missing, and with that knowledge, you can often build a sales/sales management plan to compensate.

I'm working with a young man right now who has too much aggressiveness and not enough empathy—he's also the son of the owner! We spend most of our coaching time talking about what he's hearing from the people he's talking to, trying to improve his listening skills as a first step toward building his empathy. We're also working on his aggressiveness by limiting his goals on each individual sales contact. In other words, I'm not pushing him to "close the sale" every time he talks with someone, just to make a little progress toward that goal. I don't expect this young man to become a great salesperson, but I do think he can become an *effective* salesperson, and perhaps more importantly, an effective sales manager when it's his turn to run the family business.

You can learn more about Caliper at www.caliperonline.com. Alternately, you can just get in touch with me. I can set up a Caliper Profile for you, and I can help you to understand the results, all for the same \$295 you'd pay Caliper directly.