

A Natural Salesman

I just got off the phone with a printer who's getting ready to hire a new salesperson. "I'm really geeked about this guy," he said. "He's a natural salesman. Very outgoing, obviously a people person, and he's smooth without being oily. I like him a lot!"

"He sounds very likeable," I said. "But is he well organized? Can he sell a complex product? How about his work ethic?"

Obviously, I wasn't as sold on the candidate as the printer was. In fact, there's almost nothing that scares me more than hearing someone described as a "natural" salesperson. That's because selling itself is somewhat of an unnatural act.

An Unnatural Act

Think about that. At the core of every sale is a salesperson asking for money. Sure, it's money in return for a quality product, exceptional service, etcetera, etcetera, but it is fundamentally always about the money. Your good customers have already decided that they're willing to give you the money, but I'm not sure they did that because you're such a nice person. It was probably because you somehow convinced them that you could be trusted to meet or exceed their expectations.

The mechanics are really pretty simple. You convince them that you can be trusted and they give you a try. You live up to their trust and they give you another try, and on, and on. If you let them down, though, well, you better hope they like you enough to give you another chance. You let them down a couple of times—or one BIG time—and it probably doesn't matter how much they like you. They probably stop buying from you.

Please understand, by the way, that I'm not saying that most printing buyers make their decisions based on price, because they don't. They make their decisions based on their expectation of getting what they want in return for the money they spend—we can call that *value*—and they apply that same expectation to the lowest price as well as the highest price.

An Observation

I have coached, trained and managed a lot of salespeople over the last 35 years, and studied even more as they've attempted to sell various things to me. Here's an observation. Many salespeople have failed because they weren't very outgoing, but many more salespeople have failed—or at best, underachieved—even though they were classic extroverts.

Obviously, *outgoing* and *extroverted* are not guarantees of success, but neither is *introverted* a guarantee of failure. Because the rest of my observation is that most of the great salespeople I have known are more *intro* than *extro*. I'm not just talking about *successful* salespeople now, because you don't have to be great to make a good living in sales. I'm talking about people who live to identify and solve problems, which is usually the foundation for success in a complex sale. I'm talking about people who work at their craft, both smart and hard. I'm talking about people who dot I's, cross T's, and manage details. People who can do all that, and who are willing to expend energy if they have to in order to deal with the social part of selling, tend to reach the top of the pyramid. Hopefully you see that it's more about the work stuff than the people-person stuff.

Where Energy Fits In

Another client recently told me that he's looking for someone "with a lot of energy."

"I've had it with salespeople who work a little," he said. "I'm looking for someone who will work a lot."

I'm all for that sort of energy, but I think it's important to understand where energy comes from in the first place. With extroverts, it comes from the interaction with other people. With introverts, it has to come from someplace else, because the true meaning of the word is often misunderstood. *Introvert* doesn't mean *shy*. It simply means that an introvert has to expend energy in social situations, and then probably needs some time alone to recharge the batteries.

So here's what I think you're looking for—a problem-solver who gains his/her energy from the challenges of selling. If there's anything *natural* about salespeople, I think, it's that problem-solving mindset.