



EVERYONE IS A SALESPERSON

HOW TO CLOSE THE SALES GAP AND CONVERT PROSPECTS INTO BUYERS

BY BRIAN TRACY

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One of the hallmarks of the successful person in every field is that he is influential and persuasive in his interactions with other people. He has the ability to get other people to cooperate with him to achieve his goals and fulfill his aspirations. The truly successful person is the one who can influence the greatest number of people in a common direction to help him get more of the things he wants in life..

Sometimes I ask my public seminar audiences, “How many people here are in sales?” I asked this of a group of accountants not long ago. It’s interesting to watch how people respond to that question. There are always a few people who will raise their hands, and then another and another, and soon perhaps half the room have their hands up, even though they are in fields such as management, administration, finance, and accounting.

I then smile and ask again, “Now, how many people here are really in sales?” At this point, the light goes on and virtually every single person in the room raises their hand. We all smile and laugh a little bit at the realization that each of us is in the business of selling every single day.

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The pivotal question with regard to selling is whether or not you are good at it. Everybody is in sales. From the time you get up in the morning until the time you go to bed at night, you are continually negotiating, communicating, persuading, influencing and trying to get people to cooperate with you to do the things that you want them to do. If you are poor at sales, then you are merely a recipient of influence. This means that you will be continually influenced and persuaded by others. If you are good at sales, it means that you will be an agent of influence and you will be constantly influencing and persuading others in the direction that you want them to go.

All top executives are excellent low-key salespeople. All effective parents are wonderful salespeople. All effective children are very good at selling ideas to their parents. Excellent employees are very effective at getting their bosses to do things, and getting their coworkers to go along with them and cooperate with them in getting the job done. Everyone who is effective in virtually any area of life that involves other people is an excellent salesperson of some kind.

Your job is to become very, very good at selling. Over the years, unfortunately, a stigma has grown up around the selling profession. Many people feel that selling is a low-level type of activity and they don't like to be associated with it. There are virtually no colleges or universities that have a Faculty or Department of Selling, even though 14.7 million Americans make their living from selling something to someone. It is the largest single, identifiable occupational group in the United States. Salespeople are the movers and shakers in every business and industry. They are the key people who create the demand for all the products and services that keep everyone employed at every other occupation.

Virtually every single piece of financial information in the newspapers and on television and radio has to do with selling in some way. The entire stock market and all the

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activities associated with it are simply a series of reports on the prices of stocks, bonds and other financial instruments as they are bought and sold on a daily basis. And their prices and values are largely determined by the sales of the products and services that they represent. Companies rise and fall based on whether or not they are capable of selling sufficient quantities of their products or services at sufficient prices in competitive markets. Everything is sales.

Now I'm going to discuss a fundamental principle of all sales. Whether or not you have clearly defined it, you know about it and you are either using it, or having it used on you, almost every hour of every day. I call it "GAP Analysis." It is the business of clearly defining what it is that your idea, product, service or concept can do for a person and then showing them how they can achieve their goals with what it is you want them to buy.

THE ABC THEORY

There is what you might call an "ABC Theory" of human motivation. It is very simple but also quite powerful. It is essential that you understand it in all your interactions with others.

"A" stands for antecedent, or the things that come before an event, activity or decision. "B" stands for the behavior that an individual engages in as the result of a stimulation of some kind. And "C" stands for the consequences of a particular behavior, based on the antecedent that motivated that behavior.

Here's what I have found out in my research into human motivation. I have discovered that 15% of the reasons that a person engages in a particular behavior are determined by what has happened in the past, the antecedent. But fully 85% of a person's behavior is determined by what they anticipate happening as a result of engaging in that behavior.

Economists call this "Rational Expectations Theory." It is at the heart of modern economic analysis. It simply says that people behave on the basis of their rational expectations, of what they think is going to happen if they buy or sell a particular product or service, or engage in any particular action.

In fact, since everyone is emotional, people tend to buy based on how they anticipate feeling as a result of owning and enjoying a particular product or service. They look forward to the feeling they expect to enjoy, and they make their decision based on whether or not that feeling is more valuable to them than the money they will have to part with, or than something else that they could buy with the same amount of money.

Let me give you a simple example. You sit down to have lunch or dinner and you look at the menu. As your eyes go over the menu, you settle on the item that you think will give you the greatest pleasure in eating out of all of the other items on the menu. This doesn't mean that the other items are not as good tasting as the one you choose. It simply means that, at that moment, you feel, rightly or wrongly, that the items you choose will give you the greatest satisfaction and pleasure of all the items that are available to you.

This is exactly the way you fill your plate when you go to a buffet. This is the way you shop when you go to the grocery store. This is the way you buy clothes, anticipating how you will feel wearing a particular item of clothing, as compared to the other items

that are available at the same time and at the same price. Everything you do is done in anticipation of the emotion or feeling that you experience if your purchase decision is successful.

In selling or persuading anyone to do anything, there is another Theory of motivation that is equally as important and as powerful as the first one I just discussed. In this second theory, "A" represents a state of "Felt Dissatisfaction." This means that the individual is not happy or satisfied in their current situation or condition.

The "C" represents a state of greater satisfaction. If the individual moves to this state of greater satisfaction, he or she will relieve the felt dissatisfaction that he or she has in their current situation.

The "B" of this ABC Theory is the product, service, idea, action, or activity that you are trying to persuade the person to acquire or engage in.

So, to repeat, the "A" is the existing state of dissatisfaction. The "C" is the future anticipated state of greater satisfaction or relieved dissatisfaction. The "B" is what you are offering, in one way or another.

We call the "B" part of this formula the GAP between where the person could be and where the person would ideally like to be. A sale, or an effective act of influence, getting the person to do something that they would not have done in the absence of your influence, is only possible when a GAP exists between the real current situation of the other person and the ideal situation that they would like to enjoy. You can only get a person to act when there is a GAP between their current life and work and their desired life and work.

FOCUS ON THE GAP

The very best persuaders and communicators are those who concentrate all of their attention on identifying the exact GAP that exists. They then focus on that GAP, widening it in every possible way until the prospect begins to feel more and more dissatisfied with their current situation and more and more desirous of enjoying the future, ideal situation which is achievable by the use of your product, service or idea.

Let me give you an example. I was quite happy with my car until very recently. It was a nice car, it was paid off and it was running fine. Then I took it in to the garage for a regular check-up and service. The dealership did an excellent job of analysis and came back to me with the sad fact that the car not only required new tires all around, but a complete new set of brakes, wheel alignment, and a lot of other things. The total service cost was going to be about \$3,000.

You can imagine my reaction. I was shocked. I had no idea that the car required that much service. Well, I thought, what the heck, at least it's cheaper than buying a new car. Then the salesman at the dealership pointed out to me that the car would drop another \$2,000 in value at the turn of the model year, which was coming up in about 60 days. He told me that if I kept the car, and repaired it, I would lose \$5,000 off the total value of the car which I could never recover.

Suddenly I went from complacency about my car to dissatisfaction, and then to great dissatisfaction and an intense desire to improve my condition in some way. The sales-

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man for the dealership then went on to explain that he could take my car in as a down payment on a brand new luxury automobile, with no cash out of my pocket, and he could spread the payments over three, four or five years so that the cost to me would be very reasonable. At that, all my resistance collapsed. I went from being satisfied or complacent to being so dissatisfied with my existing situation that I turned around and bought a brand new, expensive luxury car, committing myself to tens of thousands of dollars of payments over the next three years and surprisingly enough, I drove away happy.

KEY POINTS

Here are some of the key points in GAP Analysis and in persuading people to move from where they are to where you want them to be.

Remember, that people buy solutions to their problems, not products or services. In fact, as a salesperson, you are a problem finder rather than a vendor. The more you focus on the problem or GAP that exists between the real and the ideal in the customer situation, the faster you will find a place where your product or service can plug the GAP.

The bigger the problem that the person has, the bigger the potential sale. One of the most powerful questions you can ask a person is, "How much is that problem costing you?" Help the person to identify not only the obvious and direct costs but the not-so-obvious and indirect costs.

Ask the prospect, "What are the implications, or what is the meaning of that problem to you?" "What other things does it affect in your work or personal life?"

The most astute people are those who are capable of finding a small GAP and then expanding it into a wide GAP. They are capable of finding a small problem or small

dissatisfaction in the mind of the prospect and then, by questioning and commenting, they expand it and increase it until the prospect begins to develop an intense desire for the solution that they are offering.

ASK YOURSELF

If you are selling to companies, you have to ask what the decision makers in the company want to accomplish. What is the GAP between where they are and where they want to be? And the GAP in selling to companies is always determined by the responsibilities of the decision maker. How is the decision maker rewarded, and for what? What is it that the decision maker has to do to earn the respect, esteem and support of his or her superiors and co-workers? On what basis, and for what results, does he or she get paid?

One of the deepest subconscious needs of all people is the need for self-esteem, feeling valuable, important and worthwhile. If you can find out what a person needs to do to increase their self-esteem and their perceived value in their organization, and then show them that by using your product or service, they can earn the approval and appreciation of the people around them and above them, they will often be highly motivated to buy what you are selling.

PINPOINT DISSATISFACTION

When you meet a prospect for the first time, you will find that they are usually unaware that a GAP exists between where they are and where they could be. They will say things like, "I'm not interested," or "I can't afford it," or "We're quite happy with our current situation." These are normal and natural reactions. No one likes to change. But all this means is that the person has not yet learned that there is a GAP between where he or she is and where he or she could be using your product or service.

Your job is to uncover dissatisfaction, or to create one. In fact, you will often find a person who is quite content doing what they are doing. Your job is to describe a

state of even greater satisfaction that they could enjoy if they did something different. Virtually all advertising on television and everywhere else is aimed at showing people how much better off they could be with a product or service that they have not yet acquired. This is your job as well.

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One of the best questions you can ask, in dealing with a complacent prospect, begins with the words, "Were you aware?" Were you aware that it is now possible to, be or have this particular satisfaction? Very often, the prospect is uninterested because he or she is not aware of how much better off he or she could be with what it is you are selling. This is why you must be positive, patient and persistent. Don't let the initial sales resistance or rejection of a customer affect you or get you down.

GAP Analysis is based on asking good questions. Questions focused on problems that the prospect might have hold the prospects attention. This is why there is a direct correlation between good questioning techniques and sales success. The more and better questions you ask aimed at finding a problem or uncovering a dissatisfaction, the more interest the prospect will have and the more sales you will make. The person who asks questions has control. Good salespeople are always thinking about the wording of their questions, rewriting them, and practicing them regularly before they get face-to-face with the prospect. Poor salespeople, on the other hand, get face-to-face with a prospect and then try to make it up as they go along.

GAP ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

Here are a couple of great questions for GAP Analysis. The first is the magic wand technique. You imagine that you have a magic wand that you could wave over the prospect's situation and you ask this question, "Mr. Prospect, if this situation were absolutely perfect in every respect, what would it look like?" Then, remain completely silent. When the prospect begins to describe how his situation would look if it were perfect, he is in fact describing the GAPS that exist between what he is currently doing and where he could be in the future. If you have a product or service that can bridge that GAP, you will create an opportunity to sell with this question.

Another wonderful set of questions begins with the words, "What if?" When you ask a prospect things like, "What if you could do this; what difference would that make to your current situation?" Or you could ask, "What if we could achieve this particular result for you; what effect would that have on your current operations?"

Good questions that point to an ideal and desirable possible future grab the prospects attention and start the prospect visualizing and imagining an ideal future state, exactly the state that your product or service is meant to achieve.

BE "PROBLEM FOCUSED"

The very best salespeople in every field are extremely problem focused. They practice their questions over and over again until their questions are perfect and have a real impact on the thinking of the prospect.

The great insurance salesman Ben Feldman was a master at designing powerful questions. Whenever he was talking to an insurance prospect who was not interested and couldn't afford it, he would ask questions such as, "Mr. Prospect, will your widow be able to dress as well as your wife?"

This kind of a question would really get the attention of a businessman who had no idea that his entire estate could be consumed by taxes if he didn't make provisions to insure for his family while his business was still thriving.

IDENTIFY NEEDS

Your job in selling and persuading is to identify the real and most pressing needs of your prospect. You do this by continuing to ask questions and by encouraging the person to tell you what would have to happen for him or her to be completely happy in a particular situation. Once you have become completely clear regarding your prospects needs, you then show him or her, in what is called the presentation part of the process, how his or her needs can be most ideally satisfied by what it is you are offering.

You don't try to push a person into making a decision. Instead, you lead them gently to the decision by showing them their problem or GAP on the one hand, and by showing them your solution or way of bridging the GAP on the other hand. You then tell them that your solution is exactly what they really want and need to get from where they are to where they want to go.

A final key to effective selling through GAP Analysis is to share some of the experiences of previous people that you have persuaded to purchase your product or service. Use third party references, testimonials and anecdotes. Say things like, "I have a very good customer who had a similar situation to yours not long ago, and this is what he was able to do with our product." You then go on to explain a success story of someone who had a similar GAP and who was able to bridge the GAP in a cost effective way by accepting your recommendation.

Whenever you want to persuade anybody of anything, GAP Analysis is the key. Slow down and instead of trying to overwhelm them with reasons and rationales for doing

what you want them to do, ask questions aimed at uncovering their current problems, needs and dissatisfactions. Listen carefully to the answers they give you and ask questions to help them expand on the answers. Take a few moments to feed their answers back to them to show them that you were really listening and that you really understand their problems.

You then position yourself to influence and persuade the prospect by showing him or her how your product or service just happens to be the ideal way to solve their problem, satisfy their need or achieve the goal that they have. When you take this low-pressure approach to getting people to do what you want them to do, they will buy from you with pleasure and they will recommend you to their friends. They will feel like they are being helped to improve their lives rather than being pressured into buying something that they may not want or need.

SELLING IS A LEARNED SKILL

The wonderful thing about selling is that it is a learned skill. No matter where you are in your level of selling ability today, by continual practice at the business of finding problems that your ideas, products and services can solve, you can become better and better, and more and more persuasive in everything you do and with everyone you meet. And the more effective you are at selling, the more successful you will be in every other part of your life as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Tracy is Chairman and CEO of Brian Tracy International, a company specializing in the training and development of individuals and organizations.

Brian's goal is to help you achieve your personal and business goals faster and easier than you ever imagined.

Brian Tracy has consulted for more than 1,000 companies and addressed more than 5,000,000 people in 5,000 talks and seminars throughout the US, Canada and 56 other countries worldwide. As a Keynote speaker and seminar leader, he addresses more than 250,000 people each year.

He has studied, researched, written and spoken for 30 years in the fields of economics, history, business, philosophy and psychology. He is the top selling author of over 50 books that have been translated into dozens of languages.

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He has traveled and worked in over 90 countries on six continents, and speaks four languages. Brian is happily married and has four children. He is active in community

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