

## THE NEED FOR A COURSE IN ADVANCED SALESMANSHIP

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Based on a recent survey, the average cost of an industrial sales call exceeded \$137 in 1979 which represents a \$40.23 or 42% increase in just two years. To combat these spiraling costs, companies are making major capital investments in sales training programs. For example, the cost of training an industrial salesperson averaged \$19,025 in 1979.

Sales training costs most likely will continue to outpace the general inflation rate. To compound the problem, forecasts show the demand for salespeople outpacing most major occupational groups. During this decade, a total of 4,800,000 job openings are projected for industrial and retail salespeople.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the content and some of the methods employed in a course entitled Advanced Salesmanship (452 elective) designed primarily to prepare students for positions in industrial sales. The course attempts to refine and supplement students' basic sales skills learned in Principles of Selling with more powerful and sophisticated interpersonal skills.

GOALS, STRUCTURE AND COVERAGE OF TRADITIONAL SALES COURSES - The two major goals of a principles of selling course should be to provide students with both knowledge and skills of the buying process and the selling process. To achieve this, students should have a solid foundation in the behavioral sciences from a theoretical and practical perspective in order to understand the forces influencing buyer behavior. Ideally, discussion of human behavior in the buying process should consume approximately 40% of the course. The second goal is to teach students the selling process i.e., all of the selling tactics from prospecting to customer follow-up. Each step of the process should be covered thoroughly with additional weight placed on the importance of effective prospecting. Discussion of theory should be limited with heavier emphasis placed on application and skill development. Coverage of the selling process should comprise 60% of the course.

THE DYNAMICS OF BUYER-SELLER INTERACTIONS - The application of dyadic interaction to selling suggests that the results of a buyer-seller interaction is a function of how both parties perceive and react to each other's characteristics. In an industrial sales call, there are three critical stages: formal introduction, rapport-building and sales presentation. During these stages, the salesperson and the buyer are perceiving and reacting to the visual, vocal, and verbal signals being transmitted by each other with the more readily observable visual cues being attended to first. The signals take on varying degrees of importance in each stage with the visual signal decreasing in importance upon the formation of first impressions and the vocal and verbal signals becoming increasingly more important as the sales interaction progresses.

By "listening" to the three types of signals and checking their congruence, the buyer and the salesperson begin forming cognitive profiles of the other consciously and/or unconsciously early in the interaction. These "profiles" are used to make decisions about the other person which generally have a dramatic effect on the outcome of their meeting. The dynamics of buyer-seller interactions serve as the conceptual framework for the course.

**TOPICAL COVERAGE AND TEACHING METHODOLOGY** - The underlying premise of the course is that students can be taught to be more astute and accurate observers of human behavior, i.e., classroom training can sensitize them in reading the visual, vocal and verbal signals transmitted by buyers more effectively. By developing skills in perceiving and interpreting the "real" messages being communicated, they become adept at both identifying a buyer's dominant behavioral style and adjusting their selling style to be more compatible with the needs and preferences of the buyer. Approximately 60% of the course is spent developing these interpersonal skills.

In the first class, a test is administered to determine students' self-perceptions of their own behavioral styles which are later validated in their first oral sales presentations. Following this, students are introduced to the concept of behavioral styles and the social acceptance and achievement needs and readily observable characteristics of each of the four styles. The next step involves sensitizing them to the three types of signals. Training students to read visual signals more proficiently means strengthening their perceptual skills with regards to body language and object language. Teaching tools include, training films, interpreting illustrations and pictures, and studying the body language of characters from segments of popular television shows. Object language training or environmental scanning trains students in monitoring a buyer's office for significant objects. Perceptual skill development is realized by having students view tapes of three or four different buyer's offices. Following this they are asked to record their observations and what they feel these objects communicate in terms of each buyer's behavioral style.

The next section of the course goes extensively into reading vocal and verbal signals. Students are trained in "active" listening where they are taught to hear the actual spoken words and the messages carried in the sounds embellishing these words. To improve student's listening skills, a multi-media approach is used which includes analyzing characters from television shows, training films, audio cassettes, recorded speeches, guest lecturers and a wide variety of experiential exercises.

To test students' overall interpersonal skills, the second sales presentation is evaluated on how well they perceive and respond to the buyer's body language, vocal qualities, and the spoken words, and the degree of behavioral flexibility they show in interacting with a buyer whose behavioral style is diametrically opposite of their dominant style. The remainder of the course basically covers four disparate but important topics--time and territory management, professional and ethical selling, developing written sales proposals and selling a buying committee.

**CONCLUSION** - To be effective, salespeople and managers must become more cognizant of and responsive to other peoples' needs, preferences and behavioral styles. The visual, vocal, and verbal signals being transmitted by others do provide this information to the active listener and astute observer of human behavior.