

A NORMATIVE MODEL FOR TEACHING PRINCIPLES OF SELLING

Robert J. Zimmer, California State University, Fullerton
MaryAnn Oberhaus, Orange Coast College

In the past decade, the demand for sales-oriented graduates with formal college instruction in selling has been insatiable. With the advent of the information revolution and the concomitant explosion of high-technology products in such fields as computers, communications, health care and robotics, industries' appetite for well-educated, highly professional salespeople will continue to grow. Compounding the situation is the increasing technological complexity of these products which is requiring firms to devote an inordinate amount of time to training new sales personnel in product knowledge. Consequently, firms have less time available to spend formally developing and refining the selling skills of their salespeople.

In response to this need, college-level courses in sales have become increasingly more popular. The growth of college instruction in selling is documented in a recent study by Johnson (1982). A survey of 207 business schools and departments taken from the Membership Directory of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) highlighted several important findings. A sales course is being offered in the undergraduate marketing programs of 53.1% of the schools responding to the survey. Approximately one-third of those institutions currently not offering a sales course are planning to offer a course in selling within the next two years.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROBLEMS IN UNDERGRADUATE SALES COURSES

While the apparent response of academia to the marketplace is quite encouraging, there remains some inherently serious problems in teaching Principles of Selling. One such problem is the lack of agreement among academicians as to what subject areas should be covered, and which areas should be emphasized most heavily in the course. Some instructors emphasize the behavioral side by spending considerable time in explaining the practical application to selling of such theories as self-concept, personality, motivation, communication and buyer behavior. If they favor the behavioral approach, they may also devote their efforts to developing students' interpersonal skills in listening, body language (kinesics) and vocal qualities (metacommunication). Conversely, other instructors may emphasize the technical side of selling by concentrating on teaching the selling process from prospecting to closing and customer follow-up. Skill development in each phase of the selling process should always be a major part of Principles of Selling.

Divergent approaches to teaching any course, especially a sales course, are inevitable and quite healthy for both students and instructors. However, they can become dysfunctional and hamper student learning when the differences become extreme. For example, instructors who spend 80-90% of the course teaching the behavioral material and who almost completely ignore the technical side of selling or vice versa are doing a tremendous disservice to their students. It seems that instructors' gravitation to either the behavioral or technical selling side is a function of their educational background, work experience, and their own personal attitudes and perceptions of providing college level instruction in selling and the whole selling profession.

The problem of instructors' different proclivities to teaching a sales course manifests itself in the use of part-time faculty. Because of department heads' decreased control over part-time instructors, a sales course can take on unusual dimensions. Although most evaluations of part-time instructors are very high, the variability in their approaches to teaching a sales course can create some unique problems. Negative student feedback includes complaints such as the sales course was more like Psychology 101 or that the students were never given the opportunity to do oral sales presentations in class before the camera. While the complaints tend to be more about instructors who overkill the behavioral aspects of selling, students have complained also about instructors' failure to help them develop a rich understanding and appreciation of buyers roles, needs and motives.

In addition to the lack of consensus among marketing instructors on the best mix of subject areas for a sales course, profound disagreement exists between academicians and practitioners as to the relevant importance of those subject areas. In a recent study, 331 sales managers ranked the five most important subject areas for a sales course to be: time management, self motivation, communications, planning sales calls and handling objections. A similar survey of 207 professors and instructors had these same topics ranked ninth, tenth, sixth, fifth and second respectively. The complete results of both surveys are presented in Table I (Johnson 1982).

The purpose of this paper is to proffer a normative model which serves as a conceptual framework for teaching Principles of Selling. The model attempts to prescribe the optimal mix of subject areas, the depth of coverage, and a number of teaching tools and techniques for providing students with the necessary level of knowledge and skill development in each area.

COURSE CONTENT BY SUBJECT AREAS

In designing an optimal course outline, the underlying premise is that students need to be given a proper balance of interpersonal/communication skills and technical selling skills. Using Dr. Anthony Alessandra's analogy of a bicycle, the primary function of the rear wheel is to push or to propel the bicycle forward while the front wheel is designed to steer or to guide it. In selling, the technical skills of prospecting, precall planning, etc., provide the impetus while the interpersonal skills provide the direction in buyer-seller interactions. Salespeople with strong technical selling skills are often unsuccessful if they are incapable of communicating effectively with prospects, or if they are insensitive to their clients' needs and preferences. Interpersonal skills are vital but without expertise in the technical side of selling, even the most articulate and sensitive salesperson will enjoy little success.

Because knowledge and skill development in each area is critical for professional salespeople, both need to be covered extensively in Principles of Selling. The proper balance between the two areas seems to be approximately two-thirds technical selling process and one-third interpersonal-communication process.

Figure 1 presents a complete outline of 22 subject areas which should be covered ideally in Principles of Selling. The topics are presented in a logical order around which instructors could organize their courses. Sub-headings highlighting key points of certain subject areas are provided in order to clarify the domain of these areas. For example, the first subject is Demands on the Contemporary Salesperson. For this topic, instructors should discuss salespeople's roles as profit managers of their territories, and their problem-solving roles as client-oriented change agents. In addition, the importance of professionalism in selling should be stressed along with the increasing skill and knowledge demands placed on salespeople.

The second topic, Selling and Its Role in the Marketing Mix, is covered typically in virtually all sales textbooks in a similar fashion. Consequently, the domain and topical material of this traditional subject area is relatively self-explanatory. The same decision rule was used throughout Figure 1. In Figure 2, the 22 subject area outline has been expanded to show both the prescribed number of classes which should be devoted to each subject area and a set of time-tested instructional tools. The class-allocation guidelines provide a coverage-weighting plan developed from Johnson's research, and the authors' subjective evaluation based on their teaching experiences, sales managerial experiences and interviews with sales executives. Subject areas three through ten, which have fourteen classes allocated to them, comprise the behavioral portion of the course. The technical selling side, which has twenty-three classes allotted to it, consists of the first and second subject areas plus eleven through twenty. The remaining eight class meetings would be spent on testing and oral sales presentations.

The instructional tools prescribed in Figure 2 for each subject area were developed from years of pretesting, using them in both the classroom and sales training programs, and annual pruning and updating of all course materials. Research shows that sales instructors ranked lecture/discussion first and role playing second as their preferred instructional techniques. Films, videotapes, records and audiotapes were rated at the bottom of most instructors' rankings of instructional techniques (Johnson 1982). Given the adage that "a picture is worth a thousand words," and the strong enduring impact of the visual message, it appears that many instructors are missing an excellent opportunity to increase student learning.

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE MODEL

The guidelines presented for teaching Principles of Selling were based on several assumptions. These include:

1. The introductory sales course is a 300 level full semester course which has 45 meetings of 50 minutes duration.
2. Students are being groomed for industrial sales positions as opposed to over-the-counter and door-to-door sales careers.
3. Maximum student enrollment is 25 in the class.
4. Audio-visual equipment is available and an appropriately designed classroom is close to the equipment center.
5. Instructor is willing and able to tape oral sales presentations outside of the scheduled classroom time.

CONCLUSION

In response to the needs of industry, college-level instruction of personal selling has become quite popular in the last few years. However, the lack of consistency in both the content and the instructional techniques used in the course has created a number of problems in the way in which introductory sales courses are being taught. To help alleviate the problems, a normative model for teaching Principles of Selling was presented. The model attempted to outline the major subject areas and the appropriate length of coverage, and to suggest teaching tools which have worked effectively in the classroom. If the model helps make the instruction of personal selling more enlightening and entertaining for students, it has served a useful purpose.

REFERENCES

- Johnson, Eugene M. (1982), "College Instruction in Sales—A Status Report," *Collegiate News and Views*, (Fall), 5.

TABLE I
CONTENT OF SALES COURSE

Topic	Sales Managers' Ranking	College Professors' Ranking
Time Management	1	9
Self-motivation	2	10
Communications	3	6
Planning sales calls	4	5
Handling objections	5	2
Professionalism in selling	6	11
Closing techniques	7	4
Understanding buyer behavior	8	1
Sales presentations and demonstrations	9	3
Routing and territory management	10	14
Prospecting	11	8
Sales training	12	12
Career opportunities in selling	13	13
Environment of selling	14	15
Approach	15	7
Rewards of selling	16	16

FIGURE I
CONTENT OUTLINE OF SUBJECT AREAS

- I. The Role of Personal Selling in the Firm
 - A. Demands on the Contemporary Salesperson
 1. Territorial profit manager.
 2. Salesperson as a problem solver and change agent.
 3. Professionalism.
 4. Skills and knowledge needed for success.
 5. "Uniqueness" of the position.
 - B. Selling and Its Role in the Marketing Mix
- II. The Interpersonal-Communication Process: Contributions to Selling From the Behavioral Sciences
 - A. The Dynamics of Buyer-Seller Interactions
 1. Dyadic-interaction theory.
 2. Interpersonal-attraction theory.
 3. Expectation levels and role consensus.

- 4. Attending to visual, vocal and verbal messages.
 - B. A Model of the Interpersonal Communication Process
 - C. Models of Buyer Behavior
 - D. Buyer-Seller Interactive Approaches
 - 1. Stimulus-response model.
 - 2. Formula approach.
 - 3. Brewster's formula.
 - 4. Need Satisfaction model.
 - E. A Model of Behavioral Styles
 - 1. Assertiveness and responsiveness.
 - 2. Driver, expressive, analytical, amiable-needs, pace and priority preferences.
 - 3. Behavioral versatility.
- III. Interpersonal-Communication Skills Development
- A. Increasing Listening Efficiency
 - B. Reading Body Language and Proxemics
 - C. Understanding Vocal Qualities and Changes in Vocal Patterns
- IV. The Technical Selling Process
- A. Using Product Knowledge Effectively
 - 1. Features, benefits and competitive differential advantages.
 - 2. Developing buyer-tailored sales proposals.
 - B. The Pre-call Planning Strategy
 - 1. The planning process.
 - 2. Planning account-influencing strategies.
 - 3. Planning interpersonal-influencing strategies.
 - C. Prospecting
 - D. The Approach and Opening the Sales Call
 - 1. Methods of gaining entree to prospects.
 - 2. First Impressions.
 - 3. Rapport building.
 - 4. Probing.
 - E. Oral Sales Presentations and Demonstrations to Individual Buyers and Buying Committees
 - 1. Criteria for effective presentations.
 - 2. Visual aids.
 - 3. Selling buying committees.
 - F. Handling Objections (Managing Sales Resistance)
 - G. Closing the Sale
 - H. Effective Follow-up
- V. Additional Skill Requirements for Successful Sales-people
- A. Telephone Selling
 - B. Time Management
- VI. Miscellaneous Subject Areas
- A. Professionalism and Ethics in Sales Careers
 - B. Sales Force Management

FIGURE II
DEPTH OF COVERAGE AND INSTRUCTIONAL TOOLS

<u>Subject Areas</u>	<u># of Classes</u>	<u>Instructional Tool</u>
I. ROLE OF PERSONAL SELLING		
A. Demands on Salesperson	2	Handout Film: "The Competitive Edge" McGraw-Hill
B. Selling in Mktg Mix	1	Overheads
II. INTERPERSONAL-COMMUNICATION PROCESS		
A. Dynamics Buyer/Seller Interactions	1	Overhead
B. Model of Interpersonal Communication Process	1	Overhead
C. Models of Buyer Behavior	1	Handout Film: "Why Do People Buy" McGraw-Hill
D. Buyer/Seller Interactive Approaches	2	Handout Roleplaying
E. Model of Behavioral Styles	2	Overhead Handout Analysis of TV show characters: M.A.S.H.

III. INTERPERSONAL-COMMUNICATION SKILLS		
A. Listening	3	Handout Films: A) "The Power of Listening" McGraw-Hill, B) "Listen to Communicate" (complete lis- tening package with visual & audio components plus exper- iental exercises).
B. Body Language	2	Handout Films: A) "The Nonverbal Agenda," B) "Listen to Communicate," (video and experiential exer- iences). Analysis of TV characters.
C. Vocal Qualities	2	Handout Analysis of TV Characters
VI. TECHNICAL SELLING PROCESS		
A. Product Knowledge	3	Pencil Exercise; Overhead presenta- tion of 3 or 4 real-world sales proposals Film: "Custom Oriented Selling" Tratec Inc.
B. Precall Planning	3	Experiential exercises Film Handout
C. Prospecting	2	Secondary data research
D. The Approach & Opening	1	Roleplaying & video tape Film: "Probing for the Sale" McGraw-Hill
E. Oral Sales Presentation and Demonstrations	2	Film: "Speaking Effectively to 1 or 1000" Toastmasters Roleplaying
F. Handling Objections	2	Roleplaying Handout
G. Closing	1	Handout Roleplaying Film: "Selling to Tough Customers" McGraw-Hill
H. Follow-up	1	Handout
V. ADDITIONAL SKILLS		
A. Telephone Selling	1	Handout
B. Time Management	2	Time log exercise Film: "The Time of Your Life" Alan Laekin
VI. MISCELLANEOUS TOPICS		
A. Professionalism & Ethics	1	Handout
B. Sales Force Management	1	Handout
VII. TESTING AND TWO ORAL SALES PRESENTATIONS	8	Audio-visual critiquing