

A PEDAGOGIC METHODOLOGY FOR INTEGRATING THE SOCIAL STYLE MODEL INTO A PERSONAL SELLING COURSE

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STYLE MODEL INTO A PERSONAL SELLING COURSE

In 1929 Dr. Carl Jung, a Swiss psychologist, published his behavioral theory on the different types of people in Psychological Types. Forty-five years later it was translated into English, generating several models and training programs which have his work as their theoretical basis. Three popular and basically identical models are: the Social Style Model developed by Wilson Learning Corp., the Communicating Styles Model developed by Paul Mok, and the Social Style Profile developed by Personnel Predictions and Research. According to one source, more than 100,000 people have been trained in applying the last model alone (Brennan 1983). The widespread adoption of these models by industry lends credence to their perceived effectiveness in training people to increase their adaptive interpersonal capabilities.

While adaptive sales behaviors have been integrated into numerous models of the selling process, little empirical research has examined how salespeople adapt their presentations to a client's needs, priorities and preferences (Weitz 1984). However, sales managers have known intuitively for decades that their best salespeople are like a chameleon, which has the unusual ability to change the color of its skin. Highly successful salespeople seem to have the uncanny ability to adapt their sales presentation to the needs of any type of buyer, at any point in the transaction, in any selling situation.

The purpose of this paper is to:

1. present a brief explanation of the social style model,
2. discuss a pedagogic methodology including different techniques and exercises for developing students' skills in applying the model, and
3. review preliminary classroom results from using this methodology.

THE SOCIAL STYLE MODEL

Over time through trial and error, people develop behavioral patterns which they tend to use consistently in their interpersonal transactions. They have found these patterns to be helpful in dealing comfortably and successfully with others. Permeating each pattern is a recurring and predictable theme which is a person's social style. It can be identified by perceiving and interpreting an individual's verbal and nonverbal behavior along two dimensions—responsiveness and assertiveness. Social styles are based on actual observable behavior and not on cognitive or attitudinal measures from which inferences must be made.

Responsiveness and Assertiveness

Responsiveness is the degree to which a person both displays his emotions openly and shares his

feelings readily with others. Highly responsive people place a premium on warm, friendly, honest relationships. People, who are low in responsiveness, are more task/achievement oriented with less concern for social relationships. They attempt to restrain their emotions and to hide their real feelings from others.

Assertiveness is the degree to which a person attempts to exert control over the thoughts and behaviors of others with whom she interacts. Highly assertive people state their ideas and opinions quickly, confidently and forcefully. They make emphatic statements to influence the outcome of a social transaction. People who are low in assertiveness state their ideas in an asking rather than telling manner. They prefer submission to dominance over others in their daily interpersonal interactions.

The Four Social Styles

By combining both dimensions, a matrix composed of four social styles is formed. Figure 1 shows The Social Style Model with each style consisting of a distinct blend of assertiveness and responsiveness. The name of a style describes the most significant general characteristic of a person's inter-personal behavior. Analyticals, drivers, expressives and amiables are simply efficient labels for stereotyping people. Figure 2 highlights some of the behavioral characteristics of each style.

People use behavior from all four styles in varying degrees, depending on their perception of the current situation (Alessandra 1979). But most people have a dominant style emerging from their repertoire of characteristics, which identifies their psychological comfort zone and describes approximately 60% of their interpersonal behavior (Ingrasci 1981). The remaining 40% is generally divided among the other three styles with a secondary style consuming a disproportionate share of the balance. It should be emphasized that there is no one "best" style. Each has its own specific strength and weaknesses for achieving successful results with others (Alessandra and Cathcart 1983).

Behavioral Flexibility

Through monitoring client behavior closely, salespeople are armed with ample information to identify a client's dominant behavioral theme, and to pigeonhole him/her correctly into one of the four social styles. By understanding how clients prefer to be sold, successful salespeople adapt their own style to match the style needs and preferences of each client by increasing/decreasing their assertiveness and/or responsiveness to the appropriate levels. They move out of their own psychological comfort zone and into the client's zone. This behavioral

adaptability or flexibility decreases tension and increases salespeople's attractiveness in client's eyes. The end result is a strengthening of the trust-bond relationship between them and an increase in salespeople's influence over the ultimate outcome of the sales transaction.

A METHODOLOGY FOR TEACHING THE SOCIAL STYLE MODEL

To make the social style model exciting and practical for students, experiential exercises are recommended in addition to straight lectures. The proposed methodology offers a pedagogic framework for incorporating the model into a personal selling course. Any part or all of it can be used to enhance students' understanding and skill development in applying the model across sales situations. Figure 3 provides an overview of the suggested approach for bringing the model to life in the classroom.

Distribute Social Style Tests

Three copies of the social style test developed by the Wilson Learning Corp.¹ are distributed to students during the first or second meeting. This assures that they are unfamiliar with the model. Otherwise, students may provide less than honest answers in order to place themselves into a social style which they perceive as superior to the others.

Students are asked to complete one self-perception test at home by rating themselves on a four point semantic differential scale consisting of thirty items. Each set of fifteen items provides a measure of assertiveness and responsiveness. This self-test provides students with a quick reading on their own social styles. However, caution must be taken because self assessment is incorrect approximately 70% of the time (Ingrasci 1981).

To gain generally more accurate descriptions of students' social styles, the other two copies of the test are given to a student's parents, spouses, friends or other close contacts. They are asked to complete the tests based on their perceptions of the student. The three completed tests are returned within a week. A copy of the social style test is presented as Figure 4.

Introduce Model

The purpose of this phase is to familiarize students with the underlying dimensions of assertiveness and responsiveness and the concept of social style. In preparation for the class, they are assigned outside readings plus the textbook. The model's four styles are presented using a set of overheads and handouts in a lecture-discussion format. The material is covered thoroughly in two fifty-minute sessions.

Experiential Exercises

The series of experiential exercises is designed to reinforce the model's concepts and to help students develop their social style selling skills. It gives students numerous opportunities

to apply the model to progressively more challenging tasks.

Pigeonholing Professors

Students are asked to determine our social styles during the fourth or fifth week of the semester. In addition, they are asked to observe the behavior of their other marketing instructors. The assignment is simply to pigeonhole each instructor into one of the four social styles. Their perceptions are compared to our own personal observations of these instructors. Approximately 50% of the time students are correct at identifying an instructor's social style. Analyzing Television Characters at Home and in the Classroom

Students are assigned the viewing of certain television shows at home in order to determine the social styles of designated characters. They write up their analyses based on the assertive and responsive behavior they observed during the show. The following class is spent reviewing several one to two minute excerpts from the television series and discussing student analyses.

Because social style is a recurring theme in one's behavior, it is not mandatory to watch each show. In the Mash series for example, Alan Alda's characterization of Hawkeye is quintessentially expressive while Larry Hagman portrays J.R. Ewing as the perfect driver. St. Elsewhere, Mary Tyler Moore and Barney Miller are also excellent series for this exercise because they provide rich character development of their stars.

Determining the social styles of television characters can be quite tricky. One solution is the cross-validation of perceptions among instructors or between an instructor's perceptions and student responses.

Two additional exercises for reinforcing the social style model also involve the use of video. Students can view former students roleplaying buyer-seller transactions which were videotaped in previous semesters. Several three or four minute segments provide good practice for identifying the "salesperson's" social style. An alternative vehicle is to use segments from different training films purchased by the school for student reviewing.

Videotaping Student Roleplays

Each students' first buyer-seller roleplaying exercise of eight to ten minutes is videotaped in the classroom. Students are asked to critique the "salesperson's" performance and to identify his/her social style. This input permits instructors to compare student perceptions against both their own first hand observations and the results of the self-perception and other perception tests from phase one.

FOOTNOTE

¹The social style test appears in "Hugh Ingrasci "How to Reach Buyers in Their Psychological Comfort Zones" Industrial Marketing, 10, July 1981, p. 62.

Videotaping of Second Student Roleplays

The second roleplay is scheduled for taping during the last two weeks of the semester. An attempt is made to assign students to "buyers" whose actual social styles are diametrically opposite of their own styles. If this can't be accomplished, students displaying a rich understanding of the model and an innate versatility in the classroom are chosen to play several types of buyers. They have shown the ability to assume any of the four styles and to act out the buying role reasonably well. In other words, amiable "salespeople" are assigned driver "buyers" and analytical "salespeople" sell expressive "buyers" and vice versa. Students are graded by both instructors and peers on how effectively they adapt their sales presentations (flexibility) to the buyer.

CLASSROOM RESULTS

Throughout a semester, a total of three and one-half classroom hours are spent lecturing and discussing all aspects of the social style model plus behavioral flexibility. In addition, ninety minutes are devoted to viewing scenarios from television shows, training films and reviewing the homework assignments. The results can be described best as encouraging but mixed from an attitudinal, learning, and behavioral change perspective.

Attitudinal and Learning Results

Student feedback suggests that they have little difficulty understanding the model because of its relatively simple, straightforward and intuitively appealing concepts. They perceived it to be a very practical and powerful tool which they could use immediately in their daily lives. Students would share with us their experiences using social styles with employment interviewers, fellow employees, other students, and in their personal relationships.

Also, the model increases students' awareness and appreciation of the interpersonal dynamics of buyer-seller transactions. The lectures and exercises seem to open their eyes and to sensitize them to the wealth of information and feelings that are communicated visually, vocally and verbally between people. Students learn to read these signals and to use them in developing more persuasive influence strategies.

Another payoff is that students come to realize that salespeople can't use the same routinized selling approach for all buyers. Canned presentations or stimulus-response selling are ineffectual except for telemarketing, product demos, or in situations where salespeople have only two or three minutes to make their sales pitch. Successful salespeople use a variety of sales strategies in order to adapt their sales presentations to the needs and preferences of each buyer.

Behavioral Change Results

While the attitudinal and learning results are consistently encouraging using various measures,

the same cannot be said for effecting significant changes in students' adaptive selling skills. Based solely on observing each student's second roleplaying exercise, few demonstrate increased behavioral flexibility. Approximately 10-15% of the students are naturally versatile and they can adapt their presentations to any type of buyer. The classroom experience may enhance this innate ability, but they seem capable of selling every social style without formal training.

The majority of students (75%) show no real changes in their behavioral versatility. Usually, they begin the sales interview by adapting their sales presentation to the buyer quite well. However, they start drifting back into their psychological comfort zone early in the presentation. Or they revert back to it quickly if a moderate level of pressure or stress surfaces in the interview. It is very difficult for most people to change their natural style of interacting with people and maintain it throughout a relatively brief sales interview. Social styles are strongly reinforced, deeply ingrained patterns of behavior which have developed over a lifetime.

Each semester roughly 10% of the class overcomes these obstacles and shows tremendous gains in behavioral flexibility. From rapport building to closing, these two or three students defer their own style's needs and preferences to those of the "buyer". For example, an analytical accounting major was assigned to sell a pegboard property management system to an expressive apartment complex owner. In the roleplaying exercise, this student noticeably increased his speaking rate, added more inflection to his voice, used expansive gestures and smiled readily. His presentation was fast paced, upbeat, and supportive of the "buyer's" visions. The student projected a very sincere, trustworthy, and professional image of a salesperson concerned with solving the buyer's problem. While this metamorphosis was clearly an ephemeral phenomenon, the class was amazed at how well he adapted his total sales presentation.

Overall, few students demonstrate adaptive selling skills learned in the classroom despite extensive exposure and practice with the social style model. It would be interesting to compare these informal results with the performance of salespeople run through the social style training programs developed by the different companies. No published studies of these training results have appeared in the literature.

CONCLUSION

A repertoire of adaptive sales strategies is requisite for today's successful salespeople to satisfy the needs and demands placed on them in different sales situations. The social style model provides a useful framework for teaching students how to increase their effectiveness by expanding their adaptive selling capabilities. To date, no empirical evidence of the model's predictive validity or the success of the various training programs based on the model in effecting salespeople's short or long-term adaptive

behaviors has been published. However, industries' overwhelming acceptance of the model and its concomitant training programs lends prima facie validity to both.

Classroom results have been mixed using a fairly sophisticated pedagogic methodology, which culminates with a buyer-seller role playing exercise to measure each student's behavioral versatility. All students have demonstrated at least a marginal increase in their adaptive selling skills. Also, they have become more sensitized and responsive to the needs, preferences and demands of the buyer. Few students have been able to adapt their complete sales presentation effectively to the style needs of the other person. Generally, they start off strongly but fall back into their old, comfortable, and natural style of dealing with people.

One additional payoff of incorporating the social style model into the course was that student enthusiasm for the class, and for selling as a career seemed to increase as the semester progressed. In other words, students were "turned on" by the model.

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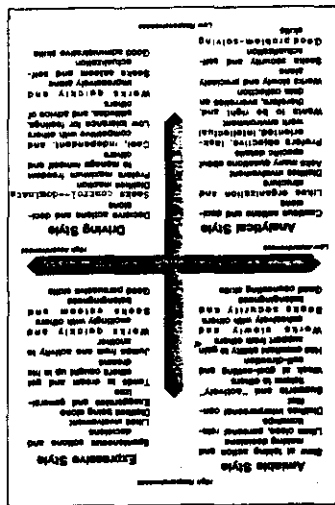


Figure 2: Behavioral Characteristics of Each Style

Adopted from Anthony Alexander Non-Manipulative Selling Conference Faculty, San Diego, Cal., 1979, p. 22, and citation pattern of M. Selling Principles and Methods, Ed. Richard D. Irwin, Inc., Homewood, Illinois, 1964, p. 101.

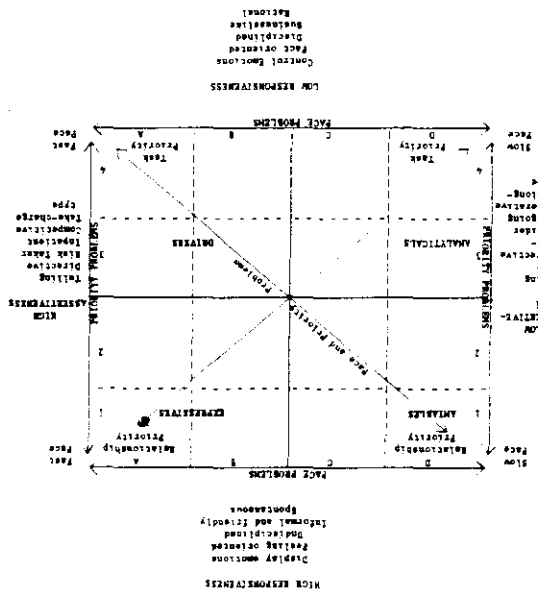


FIGURE 1 - THE SOCIAL STYLE MODEL

Adopted from MBI Interest How to Match Survey to Their Psychological Comfort Zones, INDUSTRIAL MARKETING, July 1981, p. 52.

Question	1	2	3	4	5
1. I am a person who likes to work with others.					
2. I am a person who likes to work on my own.					
3. I am a person who likes to work in a team.					
4. I am a person who likes to work in a group.					
5. I am a person who likes to work in a department.					
6. I am a person who likes to work in a division.					
7. I am a person who likes to work in a company.					
8. I am a person who likes to work in an industry.					
9. I am a person who likes to work in a profession.					
10. I am a person who likes to work in a career.					
11. I am a person who likes to work in a job.					
12. I am a person who likes to work in a task.					
13. I am a person who likes to work in a project.					
14. I am a person who likes to work in a program.					
15. I am a person who likes to work in a system.					
16. I am a person who likes to work in a process.					
17. I am a person who likes to work in a method.					
18. I am a person who likes to work in a technique.					
19. I am a person who likes to work in an approach.					
20. I am a person who likes to work in a strategy.					
21. I am a person who likes to work in a plan.					
22. I am a person who likes to work in a policy.					
23. I am a person who likes to work in a procedure.					
24. I am a person who likes to work in a protocol.					
25. I am a person who likes to work in a regulation.					
26. I am a person who likes to work in a rule.					
27. I am a person who likes to work in a guideline.					
28. I am a person who likes to work in a principle.					
29. I am a person who likes to work in a standard.					
30. I am a person who likes to work in a norm.					
31. I am a person who likes to work in a practice.					
32. I am a person who likes to work in a habit.					
33. I am a person who likes to work in a custom.					
34. I am a person who likes to work in a tradition.					
35. I am a person who likes to work in a convention.					
36. I am a person who likes to work in a usage.					
37. I am a person who likes to work in a habit.					
38. I am a person who likes to work in a practice.					
39. I am a person who likes to work in a procedure.					
40. I am a person who likes to work in a protocol.					
41. I am a person who likes to work in a regulation.					
42. I am a person who likes to work in a rule.					
43. I am a person who likes to work in a guideline.					
44. I am a person who likes to work in a principle.					
45. I am a person who likes to work in a standard.					
46. I am a person who likes to work in a norm.					
47. I am a person who likes to work in a practice.					
48. I am a person who likes to work in a habit.					
49. I am a person who likes to work in a custom.					
50. I am a person who likes to work in a tradition.					

How Do You Measure UP?

Highly motivated individuals are those who are self-starting, take initiative, and are committed to their work. They are also people who are organized, efficient, and who are able to work independently. They are also people who are able to work in a team, who are able to work in a group, and who are able to work in a department. They are also people who are able to work in a division, who are able to work in a company, and who are able to work in an industry. They are also people who are able to work in a profession, who are able to work in a career, and who are able to work in a job. They are also people who are able to work in a task, who are able to work in a project, who are able to work in a program, who are able to work in a system, who are able to work in a process, who are able to work in a method, who are able to work in a technique, who are able to work in an approach, who are able to work in a strategy, who are able to work in a plan, who are able to work in a policy, who are able to work in a procedure, who are able to work in a protocol, who are able to work in a regulation, who are able to work in a rule, who are able to work in a guideline, who are able to work in a principle, who are able to work in a standard, who are able to work in a norm, who are able to work in a practice, who are able to work in a habit, who are able to work in a custom, who are able to work in a tradition, and who are able to work in a convention.

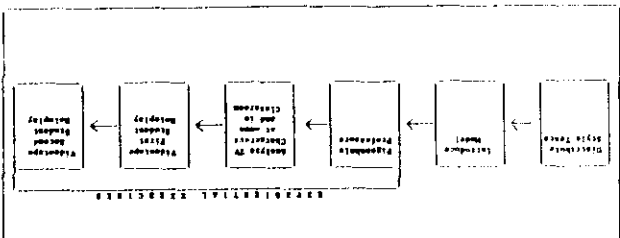


Figure 3: Behavioral Characteristics of Each Style