

Like It Or Not, *YOU ARE IN SALES*

By Scott Delman



I'm going to get straight to the point. You are in sales. You may not realize it, but like it or not, you and I, and every employee in every organization is in sales.

If you agree and choose to read this article, you will easily appreciate its point of view. For those readers about to have an epiphany, congratulations! However, if the thought of you or your organization being involved in sales bothers you, then you are in denial and this article is for you. Like it or not, you sell.

Simply stated, selling means conveying. It is the transference of tangibles (products), services, influence and concepts. Who among us is exempt from conveying one of the above in our daily professional (and personal) activities? Obviously, no one.

So how can your acceptance of a sales approach become a strong organizational asset, allowing you to accomplish more than you possibly imagined? The answer lies in understanding what selling is, how it integrates into your job and your life, and the downstream effects of a sales job done well and with integrity.

Let's imagine the Motor Vehicle Department (MVD) of your state government, or even the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Both of these organizations have captive audiences who cannot choose to do business with a competitor. Most of the management and staff of the MVD or IRS don't see themselves in sales. In fact, they are administrators – hired to acquire and sort information, enforce rules and regulations, grant and deny permission, balance your "account" by collecting or refunding your money, and so on. You get the idea. Now, if a clerk for one of these organizations, the MVD, for example, saw themselves in sales, what would they be selling, and to whom?

Let's pretend to watch two typical transactions at the MVD. In the first scenario the specialist is courteous, polite, engaging, responsive, and timely with their customer who is registering a vehicle. When the transaction is complete, the customer leaves the counter and goes on her merry way.

In the second scenario, a different specialist is impersonal, cool, distant, and indifferent to the customer. There is no connection on the human scale at all. However, the transaction is accurate so this customer leaves the counter with his renewed license and continues along with his day as well.

So what's being sold and what are the implications – the downstream effects – of what has taken place?

The specialist in the first example made a large sale. The product is the conveyance of the MVD's reputation. This first customer is, at the minimum, satisfied. More likely, she is surprised, perhaps even delighted, but undoubtedly pleased. She will mention her positive experience to other people. Even more subtly, her expectation is that her next transaction with the MVD will be a successful one – she will anticipate things going right. And because she will inherently expect the best, her treatment of the department's staff will reflect that. They will experience a polite, reasonable, and positive customer. If there is an error in a future transaction, she will have confidence that she will be handled in the same professional, pleasant manner as before. The organizational impact of this type of customer is extremely positive, as we all know.

In the second example, a significant sale took place as well. Again, the specialist is selling the reputation of the MVD. His customer is not buying – he feels annoyance at the cool indifference of the clerk. Because he has done nothing to bring about such an unresponsive and impolite attitude, annoyance can easily expand into anger.

In this case, the implications for the MVD are disastrous because this customer's relationship has no durability. He will actively share his experience with others,

pollinating the marketplace with an unsatisfactory reputation for the MVD. Future transactions may be adversarial because he will look for and expect the worst from this organization. When this customer accesses the MVD in the future, the department's staff will bear the brunt of his compromised attitude and will experience an indifferent, unhappy, inflexible customer. The effects on the staff are demoralizing and counterproductive.

In the examples above, neither customer had the option to transact business with an alternate vendor; they don't exist. Imagine if they did...the first customer would continue to do business with this same service provider. It is very likely that the second customer would try a competitor. If you have ever (unhappily) changed your fuel oil company, insurance company, grocery store, or medical practice based on a "sale" that someone has made, it hurt their organization. If your customers leave, it's not good for your's either. A customer who stays has value. One who strays has none.

I'm sure it is becoming clearer by now that you are in sales. Every employee in every organization must understand that they are always conveying, always selling whether they are teaching, retailing burgers or bras, providing license plates or 1040's, collecting tolls or theater tickets, or supplying technical service or natural gas. The conveyance of your reputation is the one intangible product that has ultimate impact on the success, profitability, and longevity of your industry, business, or organization.

In addition to your customers, "sales" are taking place among your co-workers. What kind of personal reputation are you perpetuating? Is it one of "yes I can," or more like "no, can't, won't, and don't?" Do people depend on you or avoid you? Is your work A+, or C-? Are you reliable or is there an office pool wagering on whether you will miss yet another Monday? As you answer these hypothetical questions, keep in mind that your job stability, happiness, wages, and career advancement hinge in part on the sales that you continuously make. By being more successful at "sales" you will undoubtedly be more important to your organization.

Convinced yet? Hopefully you are and it's time to face this opportunity head-on. If you were previously in denial, this is your chance to get in the "sales" game. Regardless of your past performance, you, your organization and your marketplace will improve if you adopt a "sales approach" at work. Naturally if you already are in "sales", please join me in welcoming the just now converted. We will all benefit from your newfound success.

Author's note: In the past, I have experienced both pleasing and objectionable transactions with the MVD and IRS. Over recent years, there has been a great deal of improvement in both organizations. Kudos. I recognize the effort from both the management and staffs who have, in the face of long entrenched bureaucratic history, begun to turn their goliath organizations in a consumer friendly direction.

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