

# SALESMANSHIP

## GUIDELINES TO SUCCESS IN THE EIGHTIES

**I**N THE LAST COLUMN (FEBRUARY 1983, page 103), we discussed some of the ways to cultivate a desirable sales personality. This time we'll take that concept one step further by analyzing the professional image in total.

The image you project to others stems in part from your personality, but there are also more subtle components, some of which come into play before you speak a word and reveal your personality. The best place to begin with an explanation is at the beginning, with the first impression you make on someone else.

### THE STRENGTH OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

**H**OW OFTEN HAVE YOU heard someone say, moments after meeting someone else for the first time: "I like that person!" Or, "I don't like him/her." Perhaps you have made the remark yourself at one time or another.

Everyone forms opinions from the very beginning about someone he meets. These opinions are formed regardless of how much or how little is known about the person.

We all look at one we are about to meet and immediately start classifying the person into rich or poor, polite or rude, attractive or unattractive, neat or disheveled, etc., which serves as the basis for further analysis. We do this by observing the person's dress and manners. We identify a certain style. We study his posture and size up his confidence level before we even say hello.

Are these first impressions important? Are they lasting? Most definitely.

From a salesman's perspective, creating a strong first impression is crucially important. That's because there are two basic reasons why prospects will buy from you: Either they like you, or they like what you can do for them. Ultimately, the second reason carries more weight; but unless you first get them to start liking you, you may never get a chance to demonstrate what you can do for them.

This goes back to the idea we mentioned in an earlier article, that the customer

### Creating The Professional Image

#### CHAPTER 4



### HOW YOU COME ACROSS TO CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS SETS THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN THE OUTSIDE SALES FIELD.

"buys a piece of the salesman." That is as important to the customer as the product or service the salesman is offering. If the proper impression isn't made, the relationship will be lacking. And sometimes if the first impression isn't a good one, the salesman may not get a second chance.

As a first step towards establishing a good first impression, a salesman needs to think and feel that he is in the spotlight every selling minute. Selling then becomes a kind of performance and in order for your

performance to win a standing ovation, a good salesman must look good, feel good, and know in what direction he is headed.

It is this sense of being on stage that has led me over the years to develop a ritual that I perform just before I call on an account. First, I tend to the "looking good" department. I check my appearance: tie and shirt must be straight, shoes clean, hair combed, breath fresh. Prior to the call I always check my appearance in a mirror — or if one is not available, at least improvise by observing my reflection in a window.

Next, I take off my jacket, take a deep breath and put the jacket back on again. It gives me a fresh, crisp, relaxed feeling. Try it sometime.

(I really started becoming so conscious of my appearance when I ran into a competitor once outside a mutual customer's place of business, and for some reason the guy looked like he had just stepped out of a wind tunnel. His hair was astray, his glasses cocked off to one side and his coat collar turned upwards. The encounter struck me as a great opportunity to contrast myself with him, so I took extra care in presenting myself. I concentrated on standing more erect than ever before and made sure my clothes were in impeccable order. I went in with so much confidence, I actually got a compliment from the customer on my presentation — something that doesn't happen too often to a salesman. I knew that I had accomplished my "looking good" requirement.)

Finally, I conclude my ritual by checking my mental state. This consists of a kind of personal pep talk in which I say to myself in my mind: "I've come this far and have only a little way to go," and "I'm prepared and ready to go." It's an exercise that helps shake out the butterflies, and is especially useful before meeting a new account or calling on one where a problem needs to be resolved.

Your mental state is what determines your level of self-confidence. That is something almost all customers or prospects can perceive in a salesman.

Here is some of the behavior a salesperson lacking in confidence will exhibit:

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He/she will be disorganized and insecure, always looking for feedback; the person will appear edgy and impatient; he will be late for many appointments, and avoid a lot of trouble accounts altogether; he will "drag bottom" by being constantly critical rather than constructive, talking negatively about his job and the people he works with; his conversation will be lifeless, sprinkled with a lot of "yeah" and "nah" one-word responses; he will be indecisive.

A confident salesperson will not hesitate to make decisions, will be enthusiastic about his work and his colleagues, will be a good manager and give his presentations in an orderly, efficient manner. He will also be creative and ready to react in original ways to unexpected situations.

These contrasting patterns of behavior can be perceived by customers as readily as they notice a crooked tie. A salesman has to be aware of the image he projects, especially when calling on a new prospect, when he has approximately 30-45 seconds for that first impression to work either for or against him.

## LET'S REGROUP

**N**O MATTER HOW WELL WE plan, from time to time things will go wrong. One's professional image can be damaged by a temporary slip, or by circumstances beyond control.

For instance, what if the first impression you create is a bad one? Often you may be physically and mentally set to approach a prospect, but when the moment of truth comes, something doesn't gel. Maybe your appointment gets cancelled. Maybe you find out the prospect isn't interested in doing business with your firm based on a previous bad experience. Perhaps you freeze up and botch your introduction. What do you do then?

Well, first impressions are important, but so is persistence and creativity. If the account is worth pursuing, you need to analyze your initial approach and make note of the things you did right and wrong. Regroup yourself, mind and body, and approach the prospect again, with more emphasis on those areas where you were strong.

Also, you can turn that first bad call to your advantage by using some added information you may have picked up about the account. If, for example, you were told that they are totally satisfied with their current supplier and aren't interested in switching, you might turn the conversation toward how much strong customer-vendor relationships mean to your company as well.

Don't end here, though. Continue with

a statement to the effect that your firm also believes in "keeping the door open" for new and possibly better programs. That is why you are before the prospect, to discuss the advantages of doing business with you.

At any rate, the first impression is only one aspect of your professional image. What's even more important is how you develop your professional character on an ongoing basis.

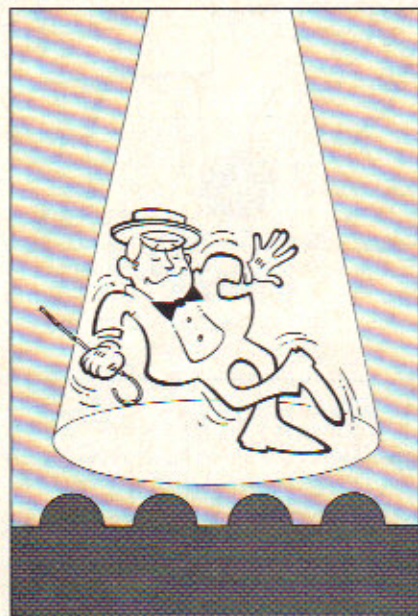
## SETTING GOALS

**A**GAIN, A SALESMAN WOULD do well to think of himself as "in the spotlight" like an actor on a stage. And like an actor, he must prepare for his performance.

Most people think of an actor's preparation as a matter of remembering lines. That's partially true, but there's much more to it. He has to recite his lines in a way that develops the character he is portraying in the context of the play. He must convey the right mood at the right time. He must think of his ultimate purpose or goal.

Likewise, it's not enough for a salesman to simply remember his lines — that amounts to nothing more than a canned pitch. He must keep in sight a longer-range goal, which helps guide him toward the proper actions at the proper times.

I strongly believe that a salesman should



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set for himself goals that entail the following characteristics:

1) It should force a *commitment* from the salesperson.

By a commitment, I mean the same kind of fulfillment of purpose that appears in a formal contract. In fact, you may even want to write out your goals in a contract form, and actually sign it. It will serve as a continuous reminder that you have a binding agreement with yourself. Also, make provisions for rewarding yourself when the goal is accomplished.

2) There should be some provision for *accountability*.

To help reinforce your "contract," involve someone else in the process for both training and feedback. Pick a "coach," someone who will be willing to make you stick to your goals by offering encouragement and constructive criticism. Maybe this could be a fellow salesman within your office who will mark your progress and remind you when you are getting off track.

Without such a person you often will be tempted to wait until mañana to get anything done. Also make sure that your coach is a "performer," or else neither of you will get to the goal.

3) Your goals should be *measurable*.

It's not enough to set a vague goal, such as "doing better" or "working harder." That would be like a race car driver setting a goal of "driving fast." Just as he measures his performance in laps completed or time elapsed, you need to measure your goals in increased sales dollars, number of cold calls made, etc. You should also apply a time frame to the goal. For example, your goal may be to call on two new accounts a week, or increase your sales dollars 10% within the next four months.

4) The goals must be *challenging*.

The goals must challenge your current output and inspire you to your full potential. They may include calling on one new account every week, or increasing your sales volume by a certain amount in a given time period, or selling a customer a product you never sold him before. Whatever they are, they must be challenging to accomplish and rewarding when you get there.

5) At the same time, the goals must be *attainable*.

If the goals are too easy to reach, they will not be challenging. On the other hand, if they are too difficult, they might prove impossible to attain and cause frustration, which defeats the purpose of setting goals in the first place.

To say, for instance, that you will sell a new account 100% of his purchasing requirements in a given month is more than likely unattainable. This new customer probably has other suppliers with whom he is satisfied. A more realistic goal might be to shoot for 10-15% of his purchases within several months. That could be a sizable amount of business that would be a challenge to obtain, and the longer time frame would allow you to organize a coherent

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strategy and gain the customer's trust through professional performance rather than gimmickry.

#### TRAINING YOURSELF

**W**HEN ALL IS SAID AND done, a professional image develops through osmosis from *true* professionalism. In other words, a skilled con artist is capable of conveying a professional image — whether it be of a doctor, lawyer, salesman, etc. — but in his case it is nothing but *image*. True professionalism requires that the image be rooted in actual knowledge and skills.

A truly professional salesman needs to know his field as well as lawyers and doctors know theirs. This means knowledge not only of the case, patient or call at hand, but also an understanding of the background theory, history and new developments of the relevant field.

When I first started selling, there was a competing salesman whom I particularly admired. He always seemed to know who had what jobs, what kind of potential any given account represented, and he seemed to be privy to all of the "skinny" in the industry. Needless to say, this guy was very successful.

Later I got to know him pretty well, and I began to notice some of the things that made him so successful. He attended every industry gathering possible, for instance. He subscribed to, and read, several local contracting and selling publications. I also found out that he had attended numerous selling seminars and training programs, paying his own way to some of them. While I began admiring him because of his proven track record, I ended up realizing that his performance was the result of his

total dedication to his work. Just like a good doctor or lawyer, he was committed to learning as much about his profession as he could, and he never assumed that he knew everything there was to know — even though he knew more than most of his colleagues.

Many people in this industry, when they speak of knowledge and training, think in terms of *product* knowledge. That is certainly indispensable. Yet, it is only a part of what makes up sales professionalism. After all, there are many warehouse and counter employees who know as much as or more about product than a company's salespeople. The sales force needs to know *how* to sell in addition to *what*.

A professional salesman needs to be trained in the techniques of selling. Furthermore, he needs to be a well-rounded individual, capable of "small talk" on a wide range of subjects. This helps him to

establish some common ground with customers or prospects who have varying interests, and to become a full participant in various social gatherings.

Most wholesaler salesmen have access to product training through their vendors and the companies for which they work. Industry associations and other groups generally provide the forum for their industry education. But for the most part, PHCP salesmen have to rely on themselves for training in pure *salesmanship*. In many cases, a salesman's employer will be happy to pick up the costs, in part or full, for magazine subscriptions, books, seminars, professional organizations, etc. However, even if a salesman has to pick up the tab personally, I firmly believe that in the long run it's to his individual benefit to embark on an ongoing training program to enhance professionalism. Here are some of my specific recommendations.

**Reading materials:** Subscribe to all relevant trade publications serving your industry (SUPPLY HOUSE TIMES, above all!), most of which offer free subscriptions as long as you are employed in the industry they serve. In addition, magazines and journals such as *Personal Selling Power*, *Sales & Marketing Management*, and *Specialty Salesman* make good general background reading for a sales professional.

Once you've accumulated all these publications, don't just let them decorate your office desk or home coffee table — read them! Maybe you don't have time to go through each one cover to cover, but make it a point to devote at least 10 minutes a day to browse through them, or perhaps read an article a week, to keep your mind at a peak and be up on the current developments.

I also recommend that you build a personal reference library of books related to

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## CASTING A PROFESSIONAL IMAGE INCLUDES CONVEYING AT LEAST A MINIMAL AWARENESS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE YOUR PARTICULAR LINE OF WORK.

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selling and other relevant topics. You can browse through bookstores for some, and acquire others through industry associations and other sources. These you can read at your leisure as time permits.

**Classes and lectures:** Many colleges and specialty schools offer sales and marketing courses that you can attend on a regular schedule or at your leisure. The more ambitious among you can even gain a degree, eventually, by taking one course at a time.

Also, keep an eye out for seminars and workshops related to the selling profession which are often offered by industry and professional associations. These are frequently the best source for that one good idea or insight that can help you land a particular sale.

**Professional organizations:** Many readers no doubt belong to industry associations such as ASA or its regional affiliates, or NHAW, AIM/R, etc., through their companies' memberships. These organizations offer many fine training programs and opportunities for industry contacts.

In addition, however, I recommend joining one or more professional sales-oriented organizations which can lend a fresh perspective to your work. Some include *Sales & Marketing Executives*, *National Speakers Association*, *American Marketing Association*, and *Toastmasters*. They're listed in your phone directory.

**Cassettes:** There are many outstanding sales and image-building cassette tapes on the market, and they're one of my favorite ways to spend commuting time.

Keep in mind that outside salesmen spend a lot of their time simply driving from one call to another. That means as much as several hours out of every day are essentially wasted. Time is valuable, so why not put it to use by listening to some self-improvement instruction. If you don't have a cassette player built into your car,

take along a portable model.

**Keeping abreast:** Try to keep up with current events by reading a newspaper every day. I've heard many people remark that they just don't have time to read the paper, but I think almost everybody can squeeze in 15 minutes daily to scan the headlines to get a general idea of what's going on in the world, and thoroughly read a few items of special interest.

Instead of or in addition to reading the paper, you can tune into an all-news radio station while commuting. On these programs the news is usually repeated every 10-15 minutes, which should enable you to

catch the important developments no matter what your schedule. To me, casting a professional image includes conveying at least a minimal awareness of the world outside your particular line of work.

### KEEP LEARNING

**A** TRUE PROFESSIONAL HAS to continually develop his skills in light of a changing environment. None of us would like to be treated by a physician who has learned nothing beyond what he was taught in medical school back in the 1940s or '50s, or be defended by a lawyer whose knowledge ended in the same era. By the same token, a salesman using yesterday's skills and techniques is likely to get a poor reception in today's marketplace.

We never stop learning. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't pick up some new information which is valuable to my selling career. You may accomplish your immediate goals in a matter of months, but you should never stop making an effort to cram something new into your head each day, if you take yourself and your future seriously.

When you do come across some new information, you must treat it much like you did in elementary school, when you learned new words by putting them into sentences. You need to focus your attention on the new information, and mentally put it into real life situations. Take a few moments after reading an article, for instance, and imagine how you would adapt its ideas to an actual sales call.

This kind of self-training or learning doesn't require extraordinary intelligence, or even a lot of hard work. It's a matter of working "smart" by planning, scheduling, and implementing your goals. The biggest obstacle is procrastination, putting off until tomorrow what you can do today.

Read that article today, not next week. Establish your goals now, not when you "have more time." Sign up for that seminar at the first opportunity, not near the deadline. Remember, it doesn't take long for the future to become the past. ■



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