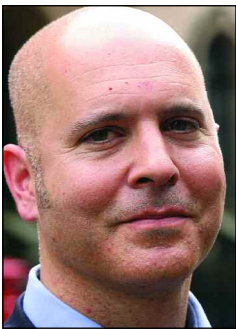


# Stop Selling; Drink Coffee

Bernard Savage looks at the psychology of selling and how this can help the professions.



By Bernard Savage

**H**ave you ever wondered how many transactions are carried out everyday? Start trying and your mind will truly boggle.

The newsagent, the supermarket, train stations, bars, restaurants and that's before you include the escalating number of online sales. Cash is handed over; credit cards are swiped and cheques are signed in exchange for goods. It is a very ordinary process, seemingly nonchalant in its regularity. But for those offering their wares to the consumer audience it is a conundrum posing the tricky challenge: to discover what makes people buy. And in a decidedly competitive market, suffering in the shadow of recession, we are all crunching our credit to the max. We busy ourselves by switching energy suppliers and shifting

our savings funds over the hedge in search of a better return. We are a changed breed of consumer who will jump ship if our custom is not valued or if we feel we are not getting value for money. We want a service provider who will perpetually engage with us to meet our desires and offer solutions to our problems.

For something that occurs with such constancy in our existence it is interesting that 'selling' often has negative overtones. We talk about selling our soul or refer with disdain to somebody having 'sold out'. And as for the door-to-door salesman attempting to cross our threshold I am the first to admit if the doorbell rings at dinnertime I murmur, "I wonder who that is?" immediately answering myself with "It's probably somebody trying to sell me something". And it's here that it becomes interesting with that innocuous little word trying.

Trying perpetuates the languor of the salesman's patter. You almost wish they stood before you with an option to 'skip the intro' like they do on a website. Do you listen politely to see what is on offer or close the door? Miller's infamous play does little to help their image either. The juxtaposition of 'death' and 'salesman' in the title denies any positive promotion of selling and that is before you have read it! In a more positive light there is of course

the stereotyped car salesman; the cheeky rapsallion who'll take you for as much as he can get. And the eager market trader so keen to sell that he shouts it to the rooftops.

So are these the folk who are 'born to sell'? The ones who could be found in the corner of the playground selling their packed lunch or under-cutting the school tuck-shop with a box of wholesale cola-bottles tucked under their parka. If so, what of those who do not fall into this genre but find selling to be part of their profession, a part which they dread.

Whether it's accountancy, engineering or law you might have thought your profession took you safely away from the selling arena. That was until the need for a 'client portfolio' was mentioned. At this point you may have found yourself wondering if perhaps you missed the module on 'How to Pitch Successfully' and where exactly was 'Relationship Management' in the prospectus?

So not quite what you thought you were signing up for but the bottom line is businesses succeed due to what they sell. So if you were told to "stop selling, drink coffee and you will still succeed" would you believe it?

Selling is not difficult if you focus on and

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understand the psychology of selling. Historically psychology hasn't been uppermost in many conversations however, it is emerging from its kaftan shroud of the seventies and engaging minds. From economists to politicians, the importance of psychology in relation to decision-making and policy is on the rise. So whilst the consumer is and always has been the most important part of any transaction, understanding human decision-making and behaviour seems a logical place to try and fathom what makes them tick. And once you start, the selling deconstructs itself.

The power of the mind is mystifying. Whether it be the hypnotist at the student union or Derren Brown offering a Trick or Treat our interest in how it works is increasing. We have all heard about performance enhancing drugs and their use by athletes. In a recent article in *The Times* ([www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk), June 18th 2008) an intriguing situation is reported whereby athletes believe they have been given a performance drug but in fact they have taken a placebo. Despite not actually taking the true drug, their performance was improved thereby illustrating that just by thinking the drug is beneficial they develop a confidence of their own which results in improved performance. It must therefore be concluded that it is confidence in oneself that gives you the advantage over your competitors. When you are psychologically more confident, outwardly you improve.

Selling is all about cause and effect. Where the end sale is the effect, learning how to create the causes of this means you are on the way to success. The system to create the causes is simple. The placebo drugs are definitely working; a positive approach and attitude are the first hurdle to overcome. Believing in yourself will extend the belief in your voice and engage your prospect, they will listen more intently to the way in which you can solve their problems or improve their performance if they believe you believe what you are saying. If they think you are 'trying to sell them something' your sale is doomed. Any ounce of this being a task you are having to endure and force upon another will be evident.

Understanding what makes people buy is

best gained through listening. No one wants to be talked at and the development of client relationships is crucial. It's commonly known that people buy from people they like. A relationship builds over a period of time and a large part of this will be spent listening to your clients. Add to this some psychology and the sale is yours. Behavioural psychologists point to fundamental features that all sellers should

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make themselves aware of.

Humans are very emotional creatures and buying is an emotional process; it is an emotional decision justified later with logical and rational reasoning. People need to feel involved and effective to make a change. They don't just action a change on a whim. They need to feel they are going to be better off once the decision has been taken. They must also realise that there is very little risk involved. Your role here is very important as you rather than the product are seen as the risk. In building a relationship their trust for you increases and with that your association with risk decreases. People are also keen to see their behaviour approved by others. For instance, it is rare that you would encounter a business meeting today where a person behaves in a sexist or racist manner towards a colleague. Their behaviour would be treated with such contempt that being able to maintain a business relationship might not be possible.

Understanding that we are affected and regulated so profoundly by society is significant in how successful we are in building relationships not only amongst our peers but within ourselves. Behaviourally we are influenced by our own self-expectations,

values and ideals. It would not be good for example to be deemed to have sold-out as this negative act shows a weakness we would not want to be associated with.

In some ways it seems slightly unfair that athletes can take what they believe to be a performance-enhancing drug, show an improvement yet avoid a ban despite an intention to cheat. Being able to take a placebo that would reward us with professional brilliance would be a perfect solution. But this is where the power of the mind comes in. By actually telling yourself you are not selling to the client you instantly ease back from the situation.

Understanding and focusing on the relationship you build with them, determining how your service is different, more relevant and beneficial to them and listening in order that you understand their behaviour and gain insight into their self concept will in turn instigate the causes to effect the sale. And doesn't everyone want a cup of coffee nowadays?

Those who have adopted the psychology of selling approach are noticing very positive results. For Lance Sapsford, head of business development at law firm Addleshaw Goddard, there has been a shift in motivation and a new confidence present in their team: "The change in our approach has led us in a totally different direction where new business is concerned. We don't sell as such, we create an experience of our business based on a structured approach to understanding the potential clients issues and we actively demonstrate that we are thinking about how we can help as people and as professionals rather than how we can sell them something. By adding value in this way, the prospect moves a lot further towards trusting us - the key to building a successful and mutually beneficial relationship and the sales that naturally follow."

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