

# THE ART OF SELLING A Scientific Approach

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*To the memory of*  
Dr. Abraham Martin Binder



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# Introduction

My background is in real estate sales, but this is not just a real estate sales book — the principles apply to selling any product, service or idea.

For more than 20 years I have been the co-owner of the Bellmarc Companies, one of the largest residential real estate brokerage firms in New York City, and in this capacity I dedicate a significant portion of my time to teaching new sales associates. Initially, I believed that selling meant communicating knowledge, that if trainees knew the fundamentals of real estate they would be able to sell it, but I was wrong. Some well-trained salespeople did poorly, while others with less knowledge became successful. What was the key?

I searched for answers through reading, workshops and my own experience. Then I tested strategies on trainees during my weekly seminars in order to see which were effective. In time, successful techniques emerged, forming the foundation for future lessons. The format for this book is that of a training session. I suggest that you envision yourself being a student in a class and that you participate in the experience.

I have discerned some overall truths that I think apply to any kind of selling:

- **YOU ARE NOT IN A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CUSTOMER; YOU ARE IN A BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP.** Don't ever rely on a personal relationship to substitute for good service. A customer has the right to go where he will be best served for the least amount of money. You have the right to make a profit and further your own goals.
- **YOU DO NOT BUILD A BUSINESS BY MAKING ANY ONE SALE.** The customer must want to do business with you again and recommend you to

others. The initial sale is the beginning, not the end, of the relationship.

- **GOOD SALESPeOPLE LOVE TO SELL.** If you don't, pretend with all your heart that you do. If you love your work, customers will respond to your enthusiasm. If you don't, they will know that too.

- **HUNGRY SALESPeOPLE STARVE.** Always remain in control. Don't ski straight down the mountain because it's the shortest way — take stock of the terrain and adjust your course accordingly. Be observant and flexible and keep building momentum as you move toward a deal.

- **DON'T LIVE FOR YOUR BUSINESS.** Talking about a product is not enough to make a lasting relationship with a customer. If you want to succeed in sales, have a life beyond selling.

- **YOU NEED AN INNER PARTNER.** Whether it's God or a person in your mind, you must talk to someone who will really hear the truth. Your inner partner will comfort you, believe in you and protect you from yourself.

You won't see these principles mentioned again in this book because they form the departure point for our journey.

A great salesperson looks at selling as merely another aspect of a full life. The joy of helping people find what they need and the satisfaction that comes from being an integral part of that decision is the essence of greatness for a salesperson. Thus, economic gain is merely a byproduct of the whole process.

When I talk to my personnel director about hiring new applicants, I generally set up a number of simple criteria for her to evaluate. First, the salesperson must be intellectually capable. Second, the salesperson must make a full-time commitment. And third, you must like him. We never look at a résumé, and prior knowledge of the industry is meaningless. What's really important is, Would I like to buy something from you?

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *The use of the masculine form throughout this book is intended to apply to both males and females.*

## CHAPTER I

# Growing Through Confusion

*The first step in selling is understanding your customer. You must open your mind fully to what he says and how he says it. To do this, you must go beyond your own experience. You must become confused.*

### PERCEPTIONS OF REALITY

We all have preconceived ideas about other people that affect our dealings with them. We judge them on the basis of our own experience. Based on that, we predict how things will work and what people will do.

Donna, what kind of home do you think Joan wants to buy?

**DONNA:** "I'd have to ask her."

You would? Why? Don't you have a sense of what you would want if you were her?

**DONNA:** "Yes, I could look at her and draw conclusions. I'd say she would want a two-bedroom on the Upper East Side in a doorman building. Something very classy."

See, with no frame of reference except her own experience and observation, Donna determined what Joan would want. She has made a lot of

assumptions, hasn't she? But we all do it. The problem is, these are often false conclusions.

### FILTERING INFORMATION

To compound the problem, even when Donna gets information about Joan, she filters it. She may generalize, distort or delete part of it to make it fit neatly within her map of the world. You do this as well.

If I tell you, "Black doesn't look good on you — you shouldn't wear it," you may generalize and say, "Neil has no taste," or even, "Men have no taste." You may distort my statement to fit your preconceptions and say: "Neil doesn't mean that black doesn't look good on me. He must have a problem, and he's taking it out on me!" You may even delete the entire thing, regard it as unimportant and say, "Oh, how are you today?" without even thinking about what I said. We all filter what we hear in some way to make it conform to our preconceptions.

### DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR LEARNING

When you are meeting a new customer and want to understand his needs, your mind immediately begins its filtering routine. Your first challenge is to minimize this and maximize the amount of clear data coming in. You must go beyond your own experience to understand your customer. Think of new information as white light, and you are wearing a blue filter over your eyes. The incoming light will seem blue until the filter is removed. To remove the filter, you must take in and process the new information and then integrate it into your thinking without regard to your own beliefs and assumptions.

If you receive new data without filtering it through your preconceptions, you create a new block to add to the wall of blocks built from

your experience. If you filter the new information, you solidify your beliefs at the expense of learning something new.

### CONFUSION AS AN OBJECTIVE

The key to removing the filter is to create a starting place where there are no preconceived notions, not even of right and wrong or good and bad. You do this by getting confused. When you are confused, you ask questions. You might ask: "What does that mean? Why is he doing that? What's going on?" That's confusion!

You get confused in order to learn without preconceptions — to see new information clearly and become open to new ideas. If you take in new information in a state of confusion, you can integrate it as growth.

### LEARNING HOW TO BE CONFUSED

Confusion is a state of learning. If you think you already know the answer, you are not open to learning. If you are confused, you will seek knowledge.

This exercise should help you understand how to get confused. Write down what you would say in the following situations:

First, say I knock on your front door and you open it and see me.

Second, you are sitting at your desk and I come up to you.

What were your responses?

MAUREEN: "What do you want?" and "How can I help you?"

DAVE: "Hi, what are you doing here?" and "Hi, how are you?"

SUSAN: "Hi, I'm surprised to see you" and "Good morning, Neil. How are you?"

STEVE: "Hi, what can I do for you?" and "Hi, how are you doing?"

I didn't say you couldn't respond the same way in both situations, but in every case the words you chose were different. I have done this exercise many times, and each time a different visual cue elicits a different response.

Now let's say I stop by your desk, and you tell me what you would have said had I appeared at your home. In other words, mix up the responses and the situations. As I arrive at your desk, what are you going to say?

[Neil gets each person to envision the response to the second experience with his or her first statement.]

This response was appropriate, but how did it feel?

SUSAN: "It just wasn't right. I don't know, it was...."

MAUREEN: "I don't understand. I'm confused about it."

DAVE: "It doesn't sound right to me. I would use the other words."

Something is out of kilter. You can't take words out of one context and put them in another — you are violating clear lines of order in your brain when you do. When you try to mesh the two scenarios, your mind doesn't understand the resulting combination. It wants to re-sort and restore internal consistency.

Confusion is as much a state of mind as happiness or sadness is. If I tell a joke, and you laugh, the joke has stimulated the state of happiness. I want you to stimulate the state of confusion, so that you can learn how to access it when you need to. Your disorientation is a means to reorientation and growth.

## HOW THE MIND CLASSIFIES AND CATEGORIZES

Let's talk more about the mind's tendency to classify and categorize.

Donna, is there something you know very well?

DONNA: "Yes, I used to be an English teacher. I know teaching."

Is there anything that confuses you?

DONNA: "I've always had trouble with math."

Okay, now picture yourself teaching an English class. Make the picture clear and vivid.

DONNA: "Okay."

What are you wearing?

DONNA: "A blue suit."

What else do you see?

DONNA: "I see myself at the blackboard talking to the class."

Now I want you to locate that picture. Is it high or low? Left or right?

DONNA: "Right here, in front of my face."

[Neil records Donna's responses on the blackboard.]

Would you call that close or far?

DONNA: "Close."

Is it big or small?

DONNA: "Small."

Is it in color or black and white?

DONNA: "Black and white."

What shape is it?

DONNA: "It's square and kind of fuzzy around the edges."

Okay, this list is *Something You Know*:

### Something You Know

- Front — face high
- Close
- Small
- Black and white
- Square
- Fuzzy

Does that describe the picture, or is something missing?

DONNA: "That's it."

Good. Now erase it from your mind and concentrate on a new picture. Picture yourself doing math. That picture will be *Something Confusing*. Can you tell me about it?

DONNA: "I am studying the training material and doing one of the math problems. I am wearing the same suit I have on today." Where is the picture located?

DONNA: "It's way over on the left."

Is it near or far?

DONNA: "Very far."

Is it large or small?

DONNA: "Pretty small."

Smaller or larger than the picture you looked at before?

DONNA: "Smaller."

Is it in color or black and white?

DONNA: "Black and white."

Can you tell me its shape?

DONNA: "It's round and fuzzy."

Okay, this list is *Something Confusing*:

#### **Something Confusing**

- Left
- Very far
- Smaller
- Black and white
- Round
- Fuzzy

You mentally locate Something You Know in one area and Something Confusing in a different place. Each concept has a different shape, size and quality. Now, let's take this a step further.

Donna, take that picture of Something You Know — the one of you teaching the English class — and shrink it down to the size of a dot.

Now, flip the dot around. On the back of the dot, put the picture of you doing math, Something Confusing, and start making it bigger. However, make it stay in front of your face, and give it all the other features associated with Something You Know. How do you feel about it now?

DONNA: "Better."

What is better about it?

DONNA: "I don't know, it just feels better. I feel like I understand it and I am more sure about what to do."

Isn't that weird? Change the location and other contextual features of the picture, and bingo! New feelings. New clarity. New results.

#### CONFUSION AS A MENTAL CATEGORY

An experience is confusing because it has been categorized that way by your brain. It is as if your mind were a library in which experiences are registered in different mental states that are located in distinct sections of the room. You could reposition an experience to the area where you keep things you understand, the area of Something You Know. The result would be different feelings and a greater sense of clarity and comprehension. However, this is not the section for learning. To learn more, you must enter another area: Confusion.

In Confusion, your mind is a sponge, searching for more information in order to give you new awareness. To learn what your customer wants, you must do more than listen — you must get confused. What your customer says must not go into the section of Something You Know, but into the section *What You Don't Know but Want to Find Out*:

Confusion. This does not come naturally; you must make it a conscious undertaking. It will come more easily once you know what to do.

With Confusion as your objective, you have the power to stop judging information and enjoy its possibilities. Confusion can be an amazing tool for learning and personal growth. Once you get confused and gather information, you can choose to reconsider it as something you know — learn then confirm.

### THE SALESPERSON JUDGMENT TRAP

Imagine entering a dark room. Your mind gropes for information. Is there a wall? Are there discernable features? As you touch everything, you learn about your surroundings. After you find a light switch, you can see where you are, and the light confirms the knowledge gained from groping in the darkness.

When you enter the next dark room, will you feel your way to explore what is there, or will you panic at the lack of clarity? You could reach for a light switch where you found one before, but what if it isn't there? How will you figure out the best way to move forward?

Some salespeople get angry and insist that the switch should be there even if it's not. They have it all figured out before they even begin and accept only information that affirms what they think they already know. They generalize, distort and delete new information until it confirms their preconceptions. These people reject the darkness that surrounds them instead of searching for light.

Customers reject such salespeople because, by their actions, they reject their customers. When I ask them: "What's going on? Why haven't you made a deal?" they never say: "It's my fault. I don't know something I need to know." They always say, "It's the market," "It's the company," "Buyers are idiots," "Sellers are jerks." When I ask if they should consider changing their approach, they get angry. They say I

don't understand their situation. This is true, yet I also see that they are not confused enough. Their lack of confusion limits their ability to learn about their customers and see new avenues of opportunity.

Some very successful salespeople have it all figured out. They are not confused. They put all their chips on one clear strategy, and they win. They are so intense that they feel if they do not succeed they will die. They do well because their very lives are at stake.

When I talk to these people about Confusion, they love it! However, they are so connected to what they know that they can't get out of their own world to learn about alternatives. They talk about Confusion, but they aren't open enough to use it. While they are successful salespeople, they don't reach their full potential in business or in life.

The best salespeople are always confused and seeking knowledge. They view everyone they talk to as a source of information and integrate what they learn. They get all the information they can from the customer before making a proposal based on what the customer reveals. These people don't waste time judging or getting depressed. They realize that there is no bad news, only a confusing situation that must be analyzed and explored until new information opens up new choices. The best salespeople work very hard to stay confused — and profit greatly.

Socrates once said, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." He understood that wisdom comes from starting with nothing and permitting everything to enter.

### REMAINING ISSUES

**ANDREW:** "*Confusion*" has a negative connotation. Wouldn't it be better to use another word?"

I prefer the term Confusion because it is an active state — you are actively searching for meaning from disparate

parts. Words like “open” or “unbiased” are too passive.

The quest for unfiltered information must be an active one.

**BRIAN:** “*When you meet a new customer, isn’t confidence and clarity more important than Confusion?*”

Becoming confused is a technique to maximize learning so you can better understand your customer’s needs. If you were in your customer’s position, would you prefer a salesperson who was open to everything you said and sought to fully understand what you wanted or one who thought he knew what you should do based on what he would do?

**RICK:** “*Don’t you think that customers often don’t know what they want, so that asking about their needs only affirms their ignorance about what they should do?*”

Taking what you know and adding to it what you learned can create a direction on what to teach. That is one of your primary roles as a salesperson.

## SUMMARY

This chapter introduces *Confusion* as a part of the learning process and explores going beyond your previous experience to gather relevant new information about a customer.

**DONNA:** “*What does it mean to have Confusion as an objective?*”

Confusion is a state of learning. It is the state of mind in which you are most open to receiving new information and evaluating it for what it is, without tainting it with your biases or assumptions.

**RENE:** “*What does it mean to receive information beyond your experience?*”

Information is often filtered (generalized, distorted or

deleted) to agree with your assumptions. Information received beyond your experience is received in a confused state — when you are open to new knowledge. Then it is processed into new learning. This new information may fit your assumptions, or it may cause you to revise them. The goal is to receive the information undistorted so that it can be evaluated for what it is.

**MICHAEL:** “*Explain how to become confused.*”

Try this exercise: First, imagine what you would say if someone you know appeared at the door to your home. Then imagine what you would say if the same person appeared at your desk at your office.

Take your first response and imagine applying it to the second experience.

You will become confused because you are mixing mental categories in your mind.

**SYLVIA:** “*What is the Salesperson Judgment Trap?*”

Salespeople fall into a trap when they look to confirm their assumptions rather than use *Confusion* to gather new information and learn. Because they label customers and situations, they fail to be open to receiving new information that might reveal new opportunities or alternatives.



### **Are Your Memories Resources or Restrictions?**

A RECENT NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO PROGRAM, "THE INFINITE MIND," ADDRESSED A LEARNING COMPULSION DISORDER CALLED "HOARDING." HOARDERS NEVER THROW ANYTHING AWAY — THEY ACCUMULATE THINGS UNTIL THEIR LIVES BECOME SO CLUTTERED WITH STUFF THAT IT LIMITS THEIR ABILITY TO FUNCTION.

WHILE HOARDERS ARE AFRAID TO THROW ANYTHING AWAY, THEY ALSO FEEL THE CLUTTER'S WEIGHT. IT CONTROLS THEIR LIVES. BUT REMOVING IT IS HARD AND PAINFUL. MOST HOARDERS WHO FINALLY REMOVE THE CLUTTER ARE SHOCKED AT THE FREEDOM THEY FEEL. THEY KNOW THEY HAVE LOST SOMETHING, BUT THEY ARE EUPHORIC ABOUT CONQUERING THEIR FEAR.

HOW MANY OF YOU ARE MENTAL HOARDERS, ACCUMULATING EXPERIENCES IN YOUR MIND THAT CLUTTER YOUR THINKING AND LIMIT YOUR CHOICES? MENTAL HOARDERS LIVE IN A ROOM SO FILLED WITH OLD BELIEFS THAT, FINALLY, NEW INFORMATION BECOMES LOST. THERE IS NO ROOM FOR IT TO ENTER.

HOW DO WE KEEP OLD IDEAS FROM PILING UP SO OVERWHELMINGLY THAT NEW INFORMATION CAN'T GET IN? BEGIN BY ACCEPTING THAT DOING THINGS AS YOU'VE ALWAYS DONE THEM CAN LIMIT YOU. WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU THREW YOUR OLD ASSUMPTIONS AWAY? WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE? WHAT NEW OPPORTUNITIES WOULD BECOME POSSIBLE FOR YOU?

