

Media Selling, 4th Edition

By Charles Warner

Chapter 7 – Effective Communication, Effective Listening, and Understanding People

Following is a review several things we have covered so far.

The three *Golden Rules of Selling* are:

1. Do unto others as they would have others do unto them.
2. People like and trust people exactly like themselves.
3. People don't care what you know until they know you care.

Next, are the *determinants of success* in the AESKOPP system:

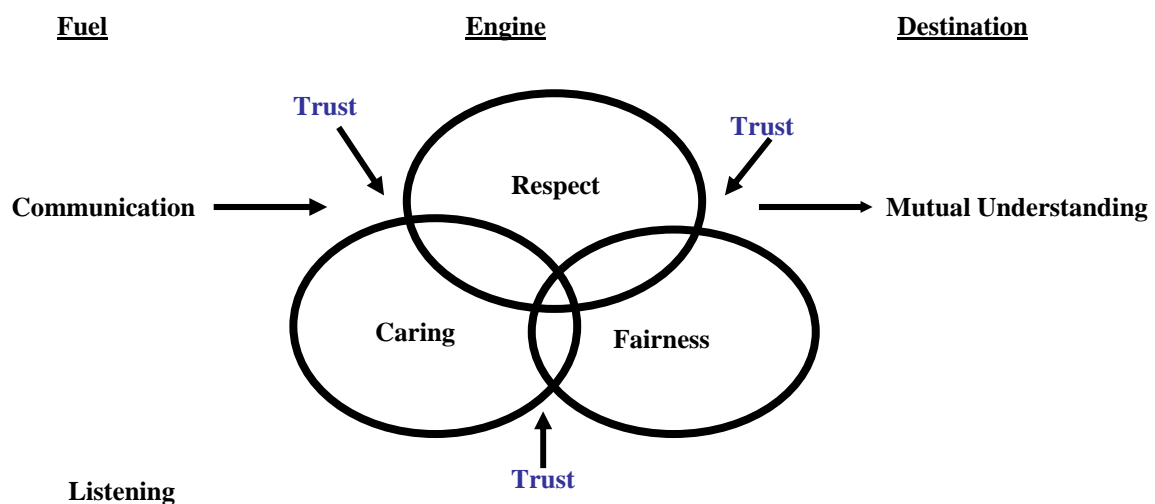
1. Establish and maintain relationships with prospects and customers.
2. Solve advertising and marketing problems for them.
3. Get results for them (as they define results).

The most important skill in selling is dealing with other people, and the most important knowledge you can have is knowledge of people and how to build relationships. Understanding your customers' business, your product, and its capabilities are secondary because if you cannot get people to like and trust you, you will never get to the point of being able to discover what their problems are, let alone solve them.

Exhibit 7.1 shows a schematic conception of what is involved in building and maintaining relationships.

Exhibit 7.1

The Schematic of a Relationship



Communication is the fuel that keeps a relationship going. Without communication, both verbal and non-verbal, a relationship does not go anywhere. The foundation on which the relationship rests, the road on which it travels, is *listening*. Without listening, you do not know where communication is going and there can be no progress in a relationship. The engine that drives the relationship consists of equal parts of *respect*, *caring*, and *fairness* that must constantly mesh and work hard together. It is kept running smoothly, with a minimum of friction, oiled by *trust*, which leads to the final objective of a relationship – that of *mutual understanding*.

How different this approach of mutual understanding is from the old-fashioned “tell-and-sell” school of selling that urged “Always Be Closing!” (exclamation point courtesy of my first sales manager). This new approach to selling says that in order to sell something, you must understand people, you must have respect for them and respect their feelings, you must establish a relationship based on trust and reach mutual understanding before you try to solve problems, you must first listen to the other person’s point of view, you must restate the other person’s viewpoint, and, finally, you must change yourself in a positive direction and meet the other person more than half way. These rules do not include “Always Be Closing,” or “tell and sell.”

Communication

Source: Communication begins with a *source*, the initiating origin of information in the communication process. The credibility of the source of information is its most important characteristic. Source credibility is multidimensional and, therefore, weakness in one dimension, or characteristic, can be offset by strength in another. Communication research has shown there are seven characteristics that enhance source credibility:

1. **Trustworthiness**
2. **Competence**
3. **Objectivity** – Able to see and understand both sides of an issue, position, or argument. Source credibility can be enhanced by the use of a *two-sided argument*, a technique effective with people who are initially opposed to your point of view. The two-sided argument features an *on-the-one-hand this and on-the-other-hand that* approach, always giving the argument counter to your own point of view first. This technique signals that you are objective and candid and have considered the alternative point of view. Recent research indicates that if a sales or advertising message uses a two-sided presentation by beginning with several candid points about a product’s weaknesses, subsequent points about the product’s strengths are much more likely to be believed. Initial candor is a powerful tool for enhancing objectivity. Salespeople should remember this technique.
4. **Dynamism** – The more dynamic, energetic, and enthusiastic sources are, the more credible they are. It follows that if people are enthusiastic others are likely to say to themselves, “Well, if she believes in it so much, it must be a good product.”
5. **Expertise**

6. **Physical attractiveness** – Of course, beauty is always in the eye of the beholder, but communications research has clearly shown that people generally perceive a source of information to be more credible if the source is physically attractive, according to the beholder's standards of beauty. This fact probably explains why we rarely see ugly people delivering the news on television and why network television anchors and reporters are often chosen first for their good looks and cute personalities and second for their journalistic expertise. Salespeople can enhance their physical attractiveness by good grooming. How many customers have scruffy beards, goatees, green hair, dreadlocks, visible tattoos, or body piercing and how many don't? Think about it and go with the numbers.

7. **Similarity** – Recall Golden Rule of Selling number two that "people like and trust people exactly like themselves"? People are simply more comfortable with people like themselves in age, gender, race, cultural background, and tastes and interests.

How do you use the seven characteristics of source credibility to enhance your ability to build a relationship and reach mutual understanding? As mentioned earlier, these characteristics are multidimensional and they work together in an intricate and complicated way. Some characteristics might be more important to some people than others are. You must observe and listen to the prospect or person with whom you want a relationship, understand what characteristics are important to them, and then emphasize your strengths in those areas.

For example, if you are a young female salesperson, you might find similarity between you and an older male customer from a different cultural background. In this situation, you would emphasize your *competence* in how you present your case; your *expertise* in the medium you are selling; your *dynamism/enthusiasm* for your product and how it can solve the customer's problems. Finally, you would demonstrate your *objectivity* by using a two-sided argument and presenting some drawbacks of your medium first before presenting its many strengths. These positive attributes can go a very long way toward overcoming your lack of similarity.

Message: The second element in the communication process is the *message*. After establishing your source credibility, you want to work on the strength of your message. Because it is critical that customers comprehend the information you are communicating, what you communicate should be kept relatively simple and easy to understand. *Repetition* is a key factor in the strength of information and its comprehension, and during a conversation or presentation, you must find ways to repeat your important points. For example, regularly summarizing the three major points you are trying to make in a conversation or in either written or oral presentations is an excellent way to repeat your points and make them more memorable. The notion of repeating *three* points is an important one. Just as repetition is effective in advertising, it is also effective in conversations and presentations.

Ordering effects can have an impact on your message's comprehension and make it more memorable. There are two ordering effects: *primacy and recency*. People tend to remember best those elements they see or hear first (primacy) in a conversation, television newscast, or sales presentation and what they see or hear last (recency). Recency effects

are especially important when people have to consider carefully and weigh all information in a sequence. Thus, arrange your material with your most important points first and repeat them at the end of a presentation in a concise summary.

Channel: *Channel* effects are the third element in the communication process. The most effective channel of communication for simple messages is face-to-face, the second most effective is sight-plus-sound (such as film, television, or videotape), the third is sound only (for instance, radio, audiotape, or telephone), and the last is sight only (newspapers, magazines, and all printed materials). However, exactly the reverse is true when dealing with complex messages and material. Thus, complex presentations that contain a large number of facts, statistics, and complicated logical arguments have a much better chance of being comprehended and remembered when they are in writing. The lesson here is that simple messages and presentations that tend to appeal to the emotions are best remembered when presented on video. Complex sales presentations are best remembered when they are in writing, a PowerPoint presentation or comb-bound booklet or both, supplemented by a face-to-face discussion that engages people emotionally and that reinforces the major points of your sales presentations. Always keep in mind the KISS rule – keep it short and simple – and eliminate extraneous points and material from your presentation.

Receiver: There are two characteristics of a *receiver* in the communication process that are important – intelligence and self-confidence. People who are not very intelligent and suffer from low self-confidence tend to be slower in comprehending the benefits and advantages of your product, but, on the other hand, they have a greater tendency to accept and to yield to your attempts to persuade them. If you have intelligent and self-confident customers, they are likely to understand the material you present, but will require from you a good deal of source credibility, objectivity, expertise, strong evidence, and message strength to get them to accept your proposal. Remember, that while intelligent people might comprehend your points better and faster, they will also come up with a greater number of hard-to-answer counterarguments and objections. Thus, know your customers needs so you can position your presentations effectively.

Listening. Listening is the single most important sales skill, as it is the foundation on which relationships are based and is the road to mutual understanding. Listening is the basis for Golden Rule number three, “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” which requires that you not only listen but also observe. You are listening to gain understanding of what is being communicated verbally, but we know that non-verbal communication and body language contain a great deal of the meaning of any message; therefore, this is why observing is included in listening – you listen for verbal clues and messages and you observe non-verbal messages and body language.

Inevitably, the most effective and successful salespeople are those who have mastered the skills of good listening and observing. Unfortunately, as much as I and other sales trainers and authors such as Larry Wilson, Huthwaite & Company (the firm that teaches SPIN Selling) , and others write and teach about the primacy of listening in the sales process and as many times as I have done sales training seminars over the years, I still see too many salespeople nod their heads when they hear about the importance of effective listening and then go right on talking too much, trying to sell as prospects desperately try to get a word in edgewise. Perhaps this unfortunate situation comes about

because people who like to talk a lot are attracted to selling and are unable or unwilling to change their behavior.

In over 50 years of being a salesperson and managing and training salespeople, the most successful salespeople I have known have been world-class listeners and live by the adage: “Nature has given us one tongue, but two ears so that we hear from others twice as much as we speak.” In Exhibit 7.2 you will see what World-Class listeners do and what they do not do.

Exhibit 7.2

What World-Class Listeners Do

They Adopt the Proper Attitude - They are optimistic; they tell themselves that they are going to like the person they’re calling on and that they are going to have a positive outcome. They are positive, confident, friendly, open, and intensely curious.

They Shut Up and Listen

They Are Conscious of Their Body Language – World-Class listeners are conscious of their posture and how they sit when they listen to someone. They try to make sure their body language indicates they are fascinated and eager to learn more—often leaning forward.

They Respect the Other Person’s Point of View – They listen and are able to put themselves in another person’s shoes. They see both sides and respect others’ views; they don’t denigrate or belittle others’ views.

They Listen and Look for Emotional Cues – World-Class listeners observe how someone says something and look for clues that reveal underlying feelings. People often say things that try to cover up how they are really feeling. World-Class listeners listen and observe carefully and with empathy and understanding for how the person is feeling. World-Class listeners look for nonverbal clues as to how other people feel and what they really mean to say. World-Class listeners listen for the *how* people say something, not so much *what* they say.

They Listen For and Look For Buying Cues - They watch very carefully for any little sign or movement that indicates another person has made a decision to agree with them or to buy—a slight leaning forward, a tiny nod of the head, a sudden tension that signals an intent to buy and a desire to begin negotiating.

They Match Speech, Listening Patterns, and Movements to the Speaker – World-Class listeners let the other person set the pace. They talk and listen at the other person’s pace, not theirs. They do the adapting and speeding up or slowing down; they don’t make other people adjust to them. This type of listening is referred to academically as synchronic listening or listening in synchrony, and it merely means being “in synch” with someone else (not the singing group). By being in synch World-Class listeners show respect for the other person, for their style and even cultural differences.

They Are Patient – They know that if they listen patiently and courteously to everything others have to say, without interrupting, that others will reciprocate and give them a courteous hearing.

They Pause Often – World-Class listeners pause after someone says something to make sure the other person is finished. Like any good interviewer, they know that a pause often prompts others to talk more—often revealing more than they intend to.

They Listen Actively - (See Exhibit 7.8 for details)

They Ask How They Can Help – Once they have gathered information, they don’t start selling immediately; World-Class listeners ask how they can be of help.

They Summarize Well – Periodically through a discussion, they pause and summarize the points of agreement. Brief summaries not only make points memorable through repetition, but they also focus the discussion and get it back on track if it has wandered.

They Listen With Authenticity – World-Class listeners are authentic; they don’t try to emulate someone else, they are themselves. Others can tell when someone is insincere. Being insincere is manipulative and does not build trust.

What World-Class Listeners Don't Do

They Don't Listen Judgmentally - (See Exhibit 7.8 for details)

They Don't Interrupt and Step on Sentences - The biggest giveaway of poor listeners is that they constantly step on other people's sentences—interrupt or finish a statement for others. They cannot wait to be heard. These people spend their time during a conversation thinking of what *they* want to say and are more concerned with their need to express themselves than with listening. Poor listeners don't let the other person finish what they are saying, especially if the other person talks slowly. World-Class listeners don't make these errors.

They Don't Think of a Rebuttal - Allied to stepping on sentences is thinking of what the next comment or a rebuttal is going to be while someone is talking. We often have a tendency to do this while we are listening to a speech or lecture to which we cannot respond; we engage ourselves mentally in the game of forming a reply to a particular point. This is a nonproductive game to play. World-Class listeners pay full attention to the speaker and concentrate on listening carefully to every word without thinking of their comeback or rebuttal.

They Don't Respond Too Soon – World-class listeners let other finish a discussion and make as many points, as many objections as they feel inclined to do. They let people get all the negatives out on the table before responding. By responding too soon, they know they look defensive and may even be interrupting.

They Don't React Emotionally – We learned about the importance of self-management in the previous chapter on Emotional Intelligence and World-Class listeners understand that an excellent place to practice self-control is while they are listening. In Chapter 10 we will go into more detail about negotiating and how sometimes manipulative negotiators will purposely try to get people angry so emotions will kick in and they will make a bad—emotional—decision. World-Class listeners know the best way to counteract an attempt to make them angry or to get a rise out of them is to stay calm and never react emotionally—that is the way they turn the tables on others who try to manipulate them.

They Don't Become Distracted – Too often people do not concentrate on looking at the person who is talking; they allow their attention to be diverted to other things. They doodle, look out the window, glance at some attractive person in the next office, or conduct other discourteous and disconcerting behavior. Some people keep their cell phones and pagers on, and, worse, answer them, which gives the speaker the silent message that they are not interested in the speaker. World-Class leaders focus intently on speakers, look them in the eye, and they turn off their cell phones and pagers.

They Don't Respond to Negatives – World-Class listeners know better than to respond too quickly to negative statements because they understand it makes them look defensive and that they might give some credence to the negatives. They ignore negatives and reinforce positive statements or compliments.

They Don't Ask Leading Questions - They don't try to use manipulative questioning and selling techniques or try to trick people into saying things they don't intend to say.

They Don't Take Notes – In 45 years of selling and watching Hall of Fame media salespeople sell, I've rarely seen any of them take notes. They preferred to focus intently on the other person and do their best to build empathy and rapport, which note-taking makes difficult. Taking notes is a distraction from rapport building. Of course, the Hall of Famers were all very bright and had memories good enough to remember what was said in a conversation. These great salespeople typically made detailed notes on important calls after a call was over. Times when note-taking is a good idea is during the discovery process when you are learning a great deal of facts—more than can be remembered—and during complicated negotiations over schedules, prices, and contract conditions. By the time negotiating starts, though, you should have built sufficient rapport and know your customer well enough to be able to take notes. The rule on taking notes is: Don't take notes unless you have to in order to remember complicated factual details and, even then, keep them as brief as possible.

An article in *Fortune* magazine, “America's Best Salesmen,” describes the sales technique of securities salesperson Richard F Greene when having a meeting with a prospect:

Greene is an instinctive expert on human psychology, the article states. “If you talk, you'll like me,” he explains. “If I talk, I'll like you – but if I do the talking, my business will not be served. Now this fellow is the same as everyone else. His wife

doesn't listen to him – and he doesn't listen to her. When he goes to parties, the person he's talking to is looking over his shoulder to see what else is going on in the room. Then all of a sudden he goes to breakfast with me. He starts to answer a question. *And he doesn't get interrupted.*" Before the eggs have cooled, Greene has won another client.ⁱ

Another type of communication is *nonverbal communication*. Research has shown that as much as 65 percent of communications between people can be nonverbal. In other words, *how* people say something is often more important than *what* they say. Part of the process of listening entails being sensitive to all the nonverbal, often unconscious, hints people give you about how they feel about you and your medium or product. People's posture and body movement, their facial expressions, their eye contact and movement, their tone of voice and pitch, and their pace of talking usually tell more about how they feel than the content of their messages do. Salespeople must not only develop skills in picking up nonverbal messages but also in using nonverbal communication to give messages.

When selling, look for the attributes and postures described below that might indicate how the other person is receiving your message. Keep in mind that these attributes and postures do not give universal messages that have the same meaning for everyone. Body language, tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions are unique to each person and communicate consistent meaning only for them. As you get to know your prospects better, you will learn to understand their nonverbal language as well as you understand their words.

Use gestures, space, enthusiasm, openness, and other body language to help you emphasize your sales points and to show customers that you care about them and are interested in them, but make sure your gestures are in sync with the person with whom you are talking. Of course, you can overdo the use of gestures. You can become too excited and animated with a shy, inhibited, quiet prospect, for instance. One particular gesture to avoid is finger pointing. This gesture implies "I'm telling you what to do" or "Shame on you" or other authoritarian messages that impede open communication.

Feedback. To be an effective listener, you have to close the feedback loop in the communication process. You must listen actively and give *responsive feedback*. You must give both verbal and nonverbal feedback, including gestures and expressions and communicate the appropriate enthusiasm as you actively encourage people to open up. The most important single thing you can do in giving responsive feedback is to *smile*. A smile says, "I like you; I care about you; I'm interested in what you're saying; I'm glad I'm here with you; I approve of you." Nodding your head in agreement is another effective feedback mechanism. Use it often.

Techniques for Effective Listening

All knowledge, all learning about a customer begin with a question such as, "How's business?", or "How can I help you?", "What are your marketing goals?" or "How about those Raiders?" Therefore, all effective listening techniques begin with a question. These techniques work in a business or a personal conversation, but it is a good idea to practice them often at the beginning in personal situations, with family and friends, and become comfortable and adept at these listening techniques before attempting them with customers. Here are guidelines and exercises that will help you become a world-class effective, non-judgmental listener.

Exhibit 7.3

Techniques for Active, Non-Judgmental Listening

1. **Ask a question**
2. **Listen to the answer carefully, actively** – For example, wave your hand toward yourself, which gives the message, “tell me more.” Notice what gestures the people you are listening to use. Are they very expressive and do they motion with their hands a lot? Use their gestures. Are they calm and analytical? Do they lean back and ponder things with their fingers intertwined and their chins resting on their folded hands. Get in synch with them.
3. **Respond non-judgmentally** – Non-judgmental listening is non-defensive listening. Don’t argue or defend your point view. Nod, smile, and encourage them to continue talking.
 - A. **Develop a non-threatening, non-confrontational approach** – You want people to feel *secure* in opening up, revealing personal information.
 - B. **Offer personal information first** – People will reciprocate by giving you personal information.
 - C. **Find something you have in common** – Similar interests such as kids, sports, or pets, for example.
 - D. **Similar interests create common bonds** – Common bonds create openness, honesty, and trust.
 - E. **Vary your responses** – Otherwise your responses become a monotonous and recognizable as technique and not authentic.

Exhibit 7.4

Barriers to Active, Non-Judgmental Listening: Nine “Nevers”

1. **Never ask “why?”** – “Why?” questions are challenging to someone. When you ask “Why?” you sound like you doubt what they are saying or are testing them. “Why?” questions send bad emotional vibes.
2. **Never ask leading questions** – Leading questions like “Have you stopped beating your wife?” or “Are you still paying those outrageously high newspaper rates?” are challenging and produce frustration and anger.
3. **Never minimize a problem** – This response seems natural, as though you are trying to help some feel better, that things are not as bad as they seem. However, you are being judgmental and making an assumption that you know more than the person complaining does. Furthermore, you are there to help solve their problems, so the bigger the problems are, the more you can help, so don’t minimize problems. Finally, some people love to complain, so do them a favor and let them—“feel their pain.”
4. **Never cheer up or reassure** – These responses make you seem happier or more knowledgeable than the person who is speaking. It may be counterintuitive, but telling someone to cheer up maybe unrealistic. It’s better to share their misery; develop empathy and demonstrate your supportive feelings.
5. **Never advise or teach** – These responses make you seem superior and makes the other person feel inferior. You may come across as arrogant. You want to be people’s trusted friend, not their teacher.
6. **Never criticize or moralize** – These responses are highly judgmental and frustrate and anger other people.
7. **Never argue or defend** – These responses are completely counterproductive and move a conversation backward, not forward. The moment you become defensive, you lose control of the agenda of a conversation and lose rapport and credibility—you are seen as not being objective (and you aren’t).
8. **Never be aggressive** – Aggressive responses make you appear competitive instead of cooperative and look as though you are trying to get what you want instead of what the other person wants.
9. **Never respond with “you” statements** – “You” responses are those that begin with “you,” such as “you shouldn’t be paying those high rates on other stations.” “You” statements appear to be accusatory or seem to be telling other people what they “should” do. Never, never use the word “should” in a response, it is completely judgmental.

Source: Many of the “Never” responses are based on suggestions in Carl D. Zaiss and Thomas Gordon. 1993. *Sales Effectiveness Training*. New York. Dutton.

Use all of the techniques for effective listening to achieve the goal of becoming a *trusted advisor* to your clients. Keep the concept of being a trusted advisor in the back of your mind as you progress through conversations with customers and always return to the question, “Am I behaving and listening in a manner that my customer believes I am a trusted advisor and am not merely trying to sell something.”

Exhibit 7.5 provides you with an effective listening exercise that you should practice regularly.

Exhibit 7.5

Effective Listening Exercise

1. Listen carefully, actively to the objections, questions, or statements of your customers.
2. Repeat or rephrase their objection.
 - A. “Let me make sure I understand your position...you feel our rates are too high?” Put the burden of understanding on yourself. By repeating or rephrasing an objection, you let your customers know that you are listening and that you heard what they were saying—they like that.
3. Get their agreement that you understand.
 - A. “Is that correct?” This is a powerful step in the process because by getting their agreement that you understand their objection and that you are on their side. You are encouraging them to say “yes,” a habit you want them to get into. If they say, “no” then you must follow up and clarify their objection, and keep doing so until you get it right and they agree that you understand.
4. Respond with a form of an “I understand” statement (vary your responses).
 - A. “I understand how you *feel*, other advertisers have *felt* the same way, but they have *found* that our rates are based on market demand and the size of our audience. We have the largest audience in town and the largest number of advertisers of any station in the area, and those advertisers are paying our rates and getting great results.” The feel, felt, found responses are incredibly powerful because with the “feel” response you are acknowledging your customers feeling and respecting them. The “felt” response reinforces and legitimizes their objections so they don’t feel silly, out of line, or alone. The “found” response gives you the opportunity to mention the benefits and advantages of what you are offering in the context of the success enjoyed by other advertisers—comforting knowledge for a prospective advertiser.

Practice the effective listening exercise in Exhibit 7.5 as often as you can until you become comfortable with variations on the feel-felt-found technique and are an expert in becoming a trusted advisor. You can download all of the exhibits in this chapter, which appear in one file titled “Effective Listening” from www.mediaselling.us. By downloading these exhibits, you can have them all in one packet to make them easier to study and review. I know of many salespeople who put these files on their PDAs so they can review them before making important calls.

Understanding People

If you are an effective, world-class listener, that is great, but what are you listening for? Are you listening to find out what makes people tick, to understand them as human beings, or are you listening to them as targets in a business game? In order to understand people we must know what makes people behave as they do.

The Personality Type Approach

One way we can try to understand people is with a personality-type approach. There are several well-known personality-type descriptive methods, probably the most recognized is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) which divides people into four classifications and then into two preferences within each classification. The classifications are:

1. How people direct their energy: Extroversion (E) or Introversion (I)
2. How people prefer to process information: Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)
3. How people prefer to make decisions: Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)
4. How people prefer to organize their life: Judgment (J) Perception (P) ⁱⁱ

Myers-Briggs personality types are then defined by a combination of these four preferences, such as an ISTP (perhaps a journalist) or an ENTJ (perhaps a business executive).

Perhaps the personality-type approach most widely used in business today is the Persogenics style approach, which was developed in the 1960s by Dr. Ford Cheney. The current management of Persogenics claims that their personality profiling method produces more accurate results than Myers-Briggs tests do. The Persogenics trains people to identify their own style (by taking a self-administered test) and to identify the style of others using detailed descriptions of the behavior of four types of people. The four types of styles Persogenics identifies are: ⁱⁱⁱ

1. The Dominant – Assertive, outspoken, controlling, task-oriented, driving for results.
2. The Expressive – Assertive, highly responsive, forceful, demonstrative, people-oriented.
3. The Analytical – Not assertive, less responsive, task-oriented, disciplined, more interested in information than people.
4. The Amiable – Not assertive, not forceful, people- and team-oriented, peacemakers.

Persogenics suggests that if you follow their program, you can adjust your behavior to match customers' styles. Persogenics suggests that people have a primary and secondary style. Therefore, you might be Expressive/Dominant and a customer you are meeting with might be a Dominant/Analytical. With this customer, you would tone down your Expressive enthusiasm and focus quietly on a logical, fact-laden presentation with lots of data for the customer to analyze. Persogenics is a good enough system for helping salespeople communicate and build rapport with customers because it builds on the similarity principle. But like any commercial service or system, it requires time, professional training, test taking, and money. The tests and training are not inexpensive, especially for one person.

How can we identify someone's personality type or style without them having them take a test or you going through potentially expensive training? And are personality-type and personal style descriptions the best way to understand people?

While personality type and personal style descriptions are interesting and often fun to talk about, but they are a relatively simplistic description of the way people behave. In fact, they almost sound like stereotypes, and depending on stereotypes to gain deeper understanding of people can be shallow and foolish. Also, describing how people behave

does not give us much insight into why they behave that way, or what their needs and motivations are.

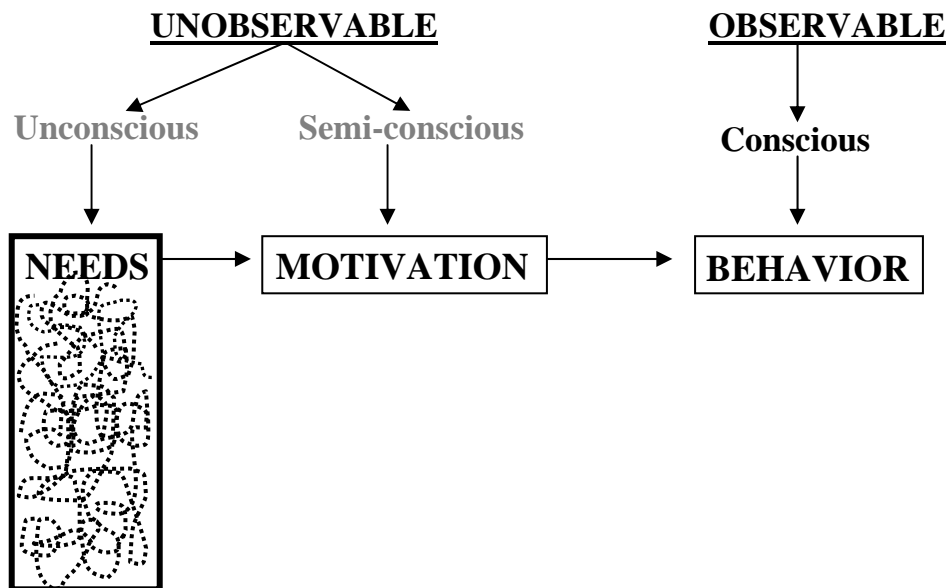
The Needs-Motivation Approach

Why do people behave as they do? What are the underlying reasons for their actions? What drives their personality or style? Psychologists, psychiatrists, and other scientists try to answer these questions in order to understand, predict, and help people change their behavior. Likewise, salespeople must try to understand and predict customers' behavior.

Behavior is the outcome of a process that begins with needs, which impel motives, which lead to behavior. Behavior is the only portion of this process that is observable. We cannot see people's motives or the underlying needs that lead to motives, but we can observe their behavior and try to infer why they act as they do. Needs are not only unobservable but they are also usually unconscious. Even though people act to satisfy their needs, they may not be consciously aware of these needs. Exhibit 7.6 shows the needs-motivation-behavior process.

Exhibit 7.6

The Needs-Motivation-Behavior Process



People have multiple needs that are swirling around in their unconscious psyche trying to get recognized and be satisfied. Some of the stronger needs push and impel, or motivate, behavior. Needs are a vague, indefinable itch in the psyche, motives are the semiconscious desire or semiautomatic reaction to scratch, and behavior is the physical act of scratching. Because we can only see them scratching, we infer people have an itch (whereas it might just be a nervous habit). Needs can be uncovered but they cannot be

created. People either have a need (itch) or they do not; salespeople cannot create needs because those needs have been formulated early in prospects' personality development.

It is much more difficult to make a list of motivations, or motives, than to create a list of needs because motives tend to be impelled by the force of a cluster of complex needs that are unique to every person and to every situation. Some people have a small cluster of needs that drive their behavior; other people have multiple needs that interact in a complex way. After we look at the different needs that people have, we will examine more about motivation later in this chapter.

Human Needs

Psychological research has shown that people are so enormously complex that it is virtually impossible to generalize about any need's hierarchy that fits all people. After the basic existence needs (physiological needs and safety and security needs) are satisfied, one person may feel a strong need for self-fulfillment, another person may feel a strong need for achievement and recognition, and yet another person may sense a huge urge for social acceptance. People tend to take care of the basic, lower-order needs first.

Salespeople must understand that people do not have simple motivations or needs and that understanding people requires a complex analysis of their unique, individual combination of needs.

Henry Murray developed a needs theory in the 1930s and 1940s that he called the *Manifest Needs Theory*, which has been used subsequently as a starting point for many researchers, sales trainers, and authors. Murray thought that people should be classified according to the strengths of various needs and believed people possessed a number of divergent and conflicting needs.

Murray believed that needs are learned, not inherited, and are activated by cues from the external environment (a sales discussion, for example). He did not arrange his list of needs in a hierarchical fashion, but his longer list of specific human needs is useful in describing people and in helping us understand them.

List of Human Needs

Below is a list of human needs I have adapted from a list of Murray's needs and combined with a list of Murray's needs adapted by theorist Douglas N. Jackson, and combined with a list by Joseph Thompson. I have added a few needs to those of Murray, Jackson, and Thompson based on my experience.^{iv} As you read the list of needs, try to visualize a person you know who you think displays behavior that might be driven by one or more of the needs.

Exhibit 7.7

Human Needs

<u>Need</u>	<u>Brief Description</u>
Achievement	Need to overcome obstacles and challenges. To aspire to accomplish difficult tasks; to maintain high standards. To work hard to achieve goals. To respond positively to competition. To put forth extra effort to achieve and maintain excellence.
Affiliation	Need to form friendships and associations. To enjoy being with friends and people in

general, and to accept people readily. To cooperate. To enjoy joining and being with groups.

Aggression	Need to belittle, harm, blame, ridicule, or accuse another. To start arguments. To be willing to hurt others to get one's way. To have a tendency to "get even." To be overly competitive. To be sadistic.
Autonomy	Need to resist influence or coercion. To break away from restraint, confinement, or restrictions of any kind. To enjoy being free, unattached, and not tied to people, places, or obligations. To resist authority. To seek independence.
Competition	Need to be involved in competitive activities. To win. To beat someone else. To do anything to win.
Conservativeness	Need to hold on to what one has. To refrain from losing what has been gained. To avoid change because it is change. To stick with tradition and past values, beliefs, opinions, and practices.
Control	Need to have control over as many things that affect one's life as possible. To avoid delegating responsibility or tasks to others. To keep work, information, and decision-making under one's control. To control all possible variables in an attempt to make life predictable and free of surprises.
Contrariness	Need to act differently from others. To hold unconventional views. To be contrary. To take a stand opposite from others merely for the sake of being different. To argue just for the sake of arguing.
Cooperation	Need to cooperate. To be a team player. To help others. To be fair. To seek win-win agreements. To build consensus.
Creativeness	Need to seek and enjoy aesthetic impressions and experiences. Artistic. Imaginative. To the creative process and building or designing things. To enjoy participating in and experiencing music, dance, theater, or art. Enjoy problem solving.
Defensiveness	Need to defend oneself against any blame or real or imagined belittlement. To justify one's actions. To offer excuses and explanations. To resist probing. To interpret other people's comments, no matter how innocent, in the most personal, negative way possible.
Deference	Need to admire and willingly follow a superior or another person. To cooperate with a leader. To serve gladly. To defer to others in most things.
Dominance	Need to seek power. To attempt to influence and control others. To persuade, prohibit, or dictate. To lead or direct. To express opinions forcefully. To try to organize and lead groups. To be political and gain power through political means.
Entrepreneurism	Need to start something new. To build from the ground up. To take big risks in order to win big.
Endurance	Need to work long hours. Not to give up easily on problems, even in the face of great difficulty. To be patient and unrelenting in one's work habits.
Exhibition	Need to attract attention to one's self. To excite, amuse, shock, or thrill others. To be dramatic or funny.
Impulsiveness	Need to act on the spur of the moment and without deliberation. To make decisions too quickly. To give vent readily to feelings and desires. To speak freely—may be volatile in expressing emotions.

Insecurity	Need to be emotionally insecure. To have low self-esteem. To seek aid, protection, or sympathy. To constantly seek advice, affection, attention, and reassurance. To be dependent and to feel insecure or helpless. To confide difficulties and insecurities to a receptive person.
Novelty	Need to seek new experiences. To change for the sake of change. To seek variety and excitement. To prefer things because they are new and/or different.
Nurturance	Need to nourish, aid, or protect someone else. To give sympathy and comfort. To assist whenever possible. To give a helping hand readily and to perform favors for others.
Order	Need to arrange, organize, and put away objects. To be tidy and clean. To be scrupulously precise and orderly. To be interested in developing methods to keep materials and effects methodically organized.
Play	Need to relax, to amuse oneself. To seek diversion and entertainment. To have fun and love to play games. To laugh and joke.
Recognition	Need to receive praise and commendation. To receive attention and to gain approval. To crave appreciation. To earn praise. To seek and display symbols of status.
Risk-avoidance	Need to avoid failure, shame, or any possibility of loss. To take precautionary measures. To cover up anything that looks like a failure and often to have an unreasonable, obsessive fear of failure.
Risk-Taking	Need to enjoy taking risks for the hope of big rewards. To gamble on long-shot odds with large payoffs. To court danger, live near the edge. To be a daredevil.
Understanding	Need to analyze and understand many areas of knowledge. To be intellectually curious. To be fascinated with ideas. To desire to have all the facts and gain as much knowledge on a subject as possible.

Using the Needs-Motivation Approach

The personality types (ENTJs, for example) and styles (Amiables, for example) discussed previously in this chapter are attempts to describe or paint a word portrait of a person's cluster of needs. For instance, the Dominant style person who is assertive, outspoken, controlling, task-oriented, and results-driven might be a person who has the following needs from the list in Exhibit 7.18: achievement, aggression, control, dominance, endurance, and order.

So, while you do not need to know the personality type, temperament, or style of people to understand them, you can create your own portrait of them using the 27 colors (needs) in the Human Needs list by careful observation.

Guidelines for Identifying Needs

Current research has found that, in general, needs tend to be stable over time. As needs swirl around in the psyche, pushing out into consciousness in an attempt to get satisfied, over time the same cluster of needs tend to appear in people. But the rank order of this cluster of needs changes continually. For example, achievement might be someone's

primary need one day, but if the person wins a marathon race the next day, that need bubbles down and recognition may bubble up to the top.

Keeping the above concepts in mind, here are some guidelines for identifying needs:

1. **Don't try to be a psychiatrist.** Your function is to recognize customers' needs and adjust your behavior accordingly. Your job is not to try to change people or tell them what they should do. For instance, if a customer has a high need for dominance and aggression and terrifies employees, it would not be a good idea to tell the customer that the behavior is destructive.
2. **Deal in the present.** The only thing you can be certain about is that people's needs swirl around and change in priority. What their primary needs were one week ago may not be the same the next week. Deal with the moment during which you are having a discussion and make adjustments accordingly. Always remain flexible.
3. **Recognize situational influences.** When a customer responds unfavorably to you, it may have nothing to do with you or your presentation but with other external, situational influences. You may be the fifth salesperson the customer has seen that morning, and the customer may be thoroughly frustrated, confused, and bored; or you may be making your presentation during a busy season in which the customer is constantly being interrupted by calls and questions. The customer may be reacting to the frustration and confusion of the situation and not to you. Take these situational influences into consideration when you try to identify needs.^v

With practice, careful observation, and concentrated listening, salespeople can learn to infer their customer's needs. With careful observation, salespeople can recognize the few dominant needs that seem to motivate their customers' actions. Make a copy of the list of Human Needs in Exhibit 7.7 and put it in a handy place where you can refer to it easily – download it to your personal digital assistant (PDA). After making a call, review the Human Needs list, create a needs-based portrait (more about this later in this chapter), and put the portrait in your account file. Chapter 24 will cover account files and sales organization systems. As you get to know your customers better, you can review your account file and your needs-based portrait to verify your observations. If you have perceived your customer's needs correctly, you have gained a powerful tool to position yourself and your product to have a competitive advantage.

For example, when calling a customer, scrutinize the customer's office. Is it filled with pictures of them being chummy with famous and powerful people (such as the car dealer shaking hands with a baseball star or the state Governor)? This customer has a need for recognition. Position your product so that it appeals to this recognition need: "You and your dealership will both become well known and credible if you do your own commercials," for example.

Does a customer keep you waiting for twenty minutes for a scheduled appointment and then interrupt your discussion by taking phone calls? This customer has a need for dominance. Show respect for and defer to this customer but do not back down easily or seem to be weak. People who have a need for dominance and power over others do not like wimpy people. Position your product according to the customer's desire to beat the competition, to achieve success, to accomplish marketing and advertising goals.

Does a customer ask intelligent, probing questions and want to learn as much as possible about your business? This customer has a need for understanding. Position yourself, your medium, and your product as offering solutions to advertising problems with detailed presentations containing lots of facts and figures.

Is the customer's desk bare: no reports, no folders, or no piles of papers? This customer has a need for order. Position yourself as a tidy, orderly salesperson who takes care of all the little details involved with getting an advertising campaign up running.

Does a customer talk about goals and challenges? Does the customer use sports analogies or talk in terms of winning or attaining excellence? This customer has a need for achievement. Position your medium and your product as a means for the customer to win, to beat the competition, to achieve success, to accomplish marketing and advertising goals.

A Needs-Based Portrait

Now that we have identified 27 colors/needs, we can now create a needs-based portrait of someone using a mixture of five, six, or seven colors. The chances are pretty good that if we tried to name our portrait, we would come up with a name something like The Achiever, The Expressive, or The Idealist – types used by other descriptive systems. Each portrait will be as unique as each person is and much more complex and informative than just the title. But what about motivation?

If you identify a cluster of five, six, or seven needs that seem to drive a person's behavior, then you have enough information to help you position your medium and your product to align with those needs and you do not have to worry about motivation. It does not matter why someone does something (greed, pride, lust, love, or revenge, for example), what matters is that you have identified several needs that drive that motivation.

Some people will have a relatively small number of primary needs that drive their behavior, others might have multiple needs. Also, people often have a different cluster of needs and motivation in business than in they do in non-business situations. It is important to get to know your customers well enough so that you can paint two needs-based portraits of them because it can be extremely helpful in maintaining relationships.

For example, some people might have needs primarily for achievement, control, and dominance, and those needs drive their behavior. In business situations they might be competitive and stingy. In a non-business, family environment, they might be cooperative, nurturing, and generous. Some people might have needs for achievement, affiliation, cooperation, creativeness, exhibition, recognition, play, and understanding. In business situations they might be friendly, somewhat disorganized, team players who crave being well liked. In a non-business environment they might take acting or painting classes for their own pleasure and growth and not care what people think.

Exhibit 7.8 shows how a personal needs-based portrait of a customer might look.

Exhibit 7.8

Customer Personal Needs-Based Portrait

Customer: Jane Doe, Dewey, Cheatham, and Howe
Advertising Agency

Personal Needs – Personal Needs –

Business Situations Non-Business Situations

Risk-avoidance *	Affiliation *
Defensiveness *	Novelty
Recognition	Recognition
Control	Deference
Competition	Play
Autonomy	Nurturance
Contrariness	

Note in Exhibit 7.8 that Jane Doe’s needs are not arranged in alphabetical order, they are arranged in the order of their perceived (by the salesperson) priority. When you identify needs, you are making an educated guess. You know your perception of Jane’s needs are not precise and are subject to change, but your intuition tells you that she clearly is not a risk-taker and is very defensive – during the last four times you have called on her, she has consistently behaved in ways that would indicated her risk-avoidance and defensiveness. She always asks for cost-per-thousand price guarantees and wants to buy something safe. She reacts very defensively about what she has bought on other websites. You are pretty sure that risk-avoidance and defensiveness are the two needs that tend to be the strongest and motivate her buying behavior.

When you create a needs-based portrait of someone, try to pick out one or two needs that seem to dominate and then try to arrange the rest of the needs you identify in order of priority. This arrangement will help you when it comes to positioning your product.

Personal Needs Versus Business Needs

The needs we have been discussing up to this point have been *personal needs*. There are two types of needs, personal needs and *business needs*. Personal needs are primarily governed by emotions and could just as well be labeled *emotional needs*. Business needs are mainly governed by reasoned, problem-solving behavior and could just as well be labeled *rational needs*. Personal needs, as discussed earlier, include the need for recognition, achievement, or dominance. Business needs are the reasons people give for their purchases – the rational justifications.

Sterling Getchel, who was an enormously successful advertising copywriter, observed that people buy for emotional reasons and then support their purchase decision with rational reasons. He became wealthy writing advertising based on this belief. Sales trainer and author Tom Hopkins writes that “seldom do people buy logically.”^{vi} At the other end of the heart-versus-head spectrum are those who claim that people are basically rational beings whose behavior consists of a series of attempts to solve problems to satisfy their needs. Even though both emotional and logical needs interact in varying degrees of intensity in all customers at all times, you will be substantially more successful if you assume that personal, emotional needs outweigh business, rational needs in people’s decision making by two to one – go with Sterling Getchel.

Positioning Your Product To Align With Personal Needs

As a salesperson, you will be expected to meet and satisfy, for the most part, customers' business needs as a minimum requirement for getting an order. The majority of media salespeople focus on and are adept at satisfying business needs. The big win, the home run, for salespeople is the ability not just to satisfy business needs, but to *position* their medium and their product to appeal to the emotional, personal needs of customers. You want to understand your customers so well that you can position your offers in such a way that your customers will buy because they like you and because your offer meets their personal needs – so they will justify making an emotional decision with logical reasons.

Remember the second core function of a salesperson from Chapter 2 is *managing relationships*. The first step in managing any relationship is getting the other person to like you; the best way to accomplish this, to a large degree, is to understand and then align with their personal needs.

Test Yourself

1. What are the three equal elements that make up the engine that drives a relationship?
2. What is the goal of a relationship?
3. What are seven characteristics that enhance source credibility?
4. Name two ordering effects and what do they mean?
5. What are the four steps in the effective listening exercise?
6. What do people rely on more to make decisions, rationality or emotions?

Project

Get together with three or four friends and each create a Customer Needs-Based Portrait of a person not in the group whom all of you know reasonably well. Then, compare the portraits you have created and discuss them. How many of you had the same dominant needs? How many had similar lists? If there were differences, what were they? Finally, after the discussion, reach consensus on a single list of six or seven needs.

References

- David Maister. 2002. *The Trusted Advisor*. New York: The Free Press.
- Carl D. Zaiss and Thomas Gordon. 1993. *Sales Effectiveness Training*. New York: Random House.

Endnotes

ⁱ Williams, Monaci Jo. 1987. *Fortune*, October 26. pp. 122-134

ⁱⁱ www.teamtechnology.co.uk. January 20, 2003

ⁱⁱⁱ www.persogenics.com. January 20, 2003

^{iv} Henry Murray. 1938. *Explorations in Personality*. New York: Oxford University Press. Used with permission; Douglas N. Jackson. 1974. *Personality Research Form Manual*. Port Huron, Mich.: Research Psychologists Press. Used by permission of Sigma Assessment Systems, Inc.; and Joseph Thompson. 1973. *Selling: A Managerial and Behavioral Science Analysis, 2nd ed.* New York: McGraw Hill.

^v Material in this section is adapted from Gary M. Grikscheit, Harold Cash, and W.J.E. Crissey. 1981. *Handbook of Selling: Psychological, Management, and Marketing Bases. Handbook of Selling: Psychological, Management, and Marketing Bases*. New York: John Wiley. Pp 184-185. Used with permission.

^{vi} Tom Hopkins. 1980. *How to Master the Art of Selling*. Scottsdale, AZ: Champion Press. p. 46.