THE SCIENCE OF SELLING (PART V):  
THE PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND IT ALL

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You can spend billions of dollars screaming your lungs out to try and get your products sold, or you can spend a lot less if you use psychology. Selling is knowledge combined with experience.1

“Yes, I sell people things they don’t need.
I can’t, however, sell them something they don’t want.”
John O’Toole

THE WINDOW TO THE WALLET

Each person has different self-concepts (or self-images):
• The real you – This is how you present yourself to yourself (almost no one see this image in its full state).
• How you would like to be – This is how you see yourself in an “ideal world” (for example, I would like to be thinner, taller, better looking, healthier, smarter or richer).
• How you believe others see you – This is how you think other people see you (for example, as overweight, stressed, successful or poor).

There is also a fourth component – that neither you nor others are not aware of (you can read more about the Johari Window if you are interested in this).

This self-concept or self-image affects our buying decisions. A large part of the world economy is based on image. Just think how powerful some brand names are (for example, Billabong®, Rolls Royce®, Nike® and Coke®). Many households own two cars, not because they HAVE to but because they think they are expected to, people live in certain suburbs and travel to certain exotic holiday destinations because it looks good to others. Image affects buying decisions a lot more than we generally are aware of.

The “window to the wallet” therefore looks through the glass of image and perception (and not always reality). It is important to be aware of this if you are a salesperson.

WHY DO CUSTOMERS BUY?

“The human being is a wanting animal and rarely reaches a state of complete satisfaction except for a short time. As one desire is satisfied, another pops up to take its place. When this is satisfied, still another comes into the foreground and so on. It is characteristic of human beings throughout their whole lives that they are practically always desiring something.”
Abraham Maslow

Have you ever thought why people actually buy? Since the beginning of time, sellers have agonised over this question.

The following is a list of some of the reasons why shoppers spend their money1,2:
• They are tempted (just observe how many people taste free samples in a store when given the opportunity, and you will understand the power of temptation).
• They buy because it is tradition (a habit).
• They see it as a solution (a product or service solves a problem).
• Features, benefits or increased performance (if the product or service can improve on, or adds to, what is currently available).
• They need it.
• They think they need it.
• They want to get a competitive edge (especially if it is a new or innovative product or service).
• They want to solidify a relationship (by just buying from certain businesses or salespersons).
• They were talked into it.
• It sounded too good to refuse.
• They got a great deal (or they thought they did).
• They love sales (price any one of your products as a “sale” item, mark it clearly as such, make it visible to customers and see what happens).
Customers buy various things:

- They “comfort shop”.
- They are lazy (people generally tend to buy what is readily available).
- They just love convenience (is this not also the most important reason why people buy from community pharmacies?)
- They buy because of location (the pharmacy is closer than the local supermarket – this is related to convenience as well).
- They are bored or unhappy (they buy for emotional reasons and buying makes them feel good).
- They like what they see (sometimes people are just too lazy to shop around so they buy what they see and what looks acceptable to them, therefore assist them by making the products in your store visible and easy to buy).
- They buy because of the after sales-service (such as guarantees, warranties, return policies and turnaround time).
- They buy for self-improvement (for their spiritual development, hunger for knowledge or intellectual stimulation).

It is interesting that many of the reasons listed above are based on emotion and not on logic. People therefore buy in many instances not because there is a genuine need, but because it makes them feel good.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF CUSTOMERS**
The following characteristics may apply to the buyers or customers that you face – remember your buyer is typically a combination of several of these (plus other) traits¹:

- The tire kicker
- The liar
- The logical
- The indecisive
- The unfriendly
- The impulsive
- The know-it-all
- The faithful
- The unqualified
- The talker
- The hidden objection
- The procrastinator
- The friendly who will not commit
- The impolite
- The ounce of power
- The price-only buyer
- The bragger
- The arguer
- The no-talker
- The emotional
- The “I will think it over”
- The rude
- The cheapskate
- The corpse

**WHAT DO CUSTOMERS BUY?**

Customers buy various things²:

- They buy value, which is not the same as price.
- They buy selection and often the best of your selection.
- They buy freedom from risk, granted by your guarantee.
- They buy acceptance by others of their goods or services.
- They buy certainty.
- They buy convenience in buying, paying, delivery, variety, and many other aspects.
- They buy respect for their own ideas and personality.
- They buy identity as conveyed by your marketing.
- They buy style — just the kind that fits their own style.
- They buy neatness and assume that is how you do business.
- They buy easy access to information about you, offered by your website.
- They buy honesty for one dishonest word means no sale.
- They buy comfort, that is, offerings that fit their comfort zone.
- They buy success, since your success can fit with theirs.
- They buy good taste and know it from bad taste.
- They buy instant gratification and do not want to wait.
- They buy the confidence you display in your own business.
- They buy the person first and then the product.

**YOU ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF SELLING AND SICKNESS**

Problems and health have some things in common (remember that one of the reasons why people buy is because they want to solve a problem). The more a problem hurts now, the more the need for an immediate solution. Similarly, the worse the pain, the more the urgency to get immediate pain relief. And the more it hurts, the more customers will be prepared to pay for a quick solution.

The operation of resolving the pain is in itself a painful process, so if the pain is below a certain threshold, the patient will prefer to continue to suffer rather than to accept any treatment. If we relate this to buying and selling, it means that customers will not buy if the need for the product or service is not strong enough. Buying is for most customers an uncomfortable process because they must make a decision to buy or not to buy (most people resist making definite decisions) and they will have to part with their money (and this painful for most of us who have to work to earn a living). If customers therefore can go without a product or service, it is the default position.

Furthermore, sales used to be about selling products and services. But an exclusive focus on products and services only lead to objections, therefore sales moved to selling benefits. Or, even better, the focus has turned to understanding the underlying problem to be solved. Remember, most decisions that people make is an emotional process. They may logically process all the information available and rationally make the decision to buy or not, but at the exact point of making the buying decision, there is always an emotional component involved, even if only on a subconscious level. This is important to remember when selling a product or service.

“In the factory we make cosmetics; in the drugstore we sell hope.”

Charles Revson
CUSTOMER (BUYER) PERSONALITIES

There are a number of ways that you can view your customers. Some experts say it is a myth that one can put buyers into characteristic categories (pigeonholes), since each buyer is an individual who will react uniquely. It is nonetheless interesting to be aware of this in the journey to try and understand buyers better.

The Child

A few customers are naïve, trusting and open, similar to a young child. They will believe everything that you tell them. They are highly gullible and are staple food for salespeople whose values permit them to take advantage of their naiveté.

The Child is playing a parent-child game and is seeking a Nurturing Parent to look after him or her and tell them what to do, so the salesperson does just that. Principled and ethical salespeople know that a duty of care is required with a Child, and they will therefore only sell something to this person if they truly believe that it will help him or her. Most of the sales closing techniques that were discussed in a previous article, will work with the Child.

The Judge

The Judge is suspicious of everyone, believing that all people are inherently selfish. They will never believe what you say. After all, you are trying to sell to them (you are a salesperson!) and therefore will deceive them without the blink of an eye. They will judge you by their own values and high standards. The Judge will tell you what he or she thinks and may prefer “telling” to “listening”.

The Judge possibly has “read up on the case beforehand” and arrives having already made their decision. They will make their buying decision based on what independent facts they can find, for example through magazine reviews (therefore make sure you have also read these magazines so that you are informed and prepared).

The Judge may play the parent-child game, but they are the Controlling Parent to the salesperson’s naughty Adaptive Child. A way to handle the Judge is therefore to play the Child and aim to switch them over from the Controlling to the Nurturing Parent. Different closing techniques work with Judges, such as the balance sheet close, the testimonial close and even the puppy close.

The Negotiator

The Negotiator seeks to beat you down, no matter how good the deal. The Negotiator will keep asking for more until they are certain that they will not get more. A good Negotiator will ask lots of questions and will listen very carefully before they get anywhere close to discussing price issues. They may surprise you by how well they understand you and may even have read up on the subject beforehand. A Negotiator is a joy to behold but may play you like a fish (which is interesting because that is probably what you are trying to do with them!).

The Negotiator gets a significant thrill of the chase and may not reach closure if they are just playing a “catch me” game with you. The best strategy is to play the game with the Negotiator, allowing them to beat you down very slowly to your chosen position, and then you make it absolutely clear that you cannot lower the price any further and move on to close the sale. A concession close can work in this case.

The Bargain-hunter

This type of customer is driven by value. They are similar to the Negotiator, but in this case they want to reach closure and they may make impulsive decisions. Bargain-hunters should be handled in a similar way to Negotiators. The golden rule here is to remember that the Bargain-hunter must believe they have bought a bargain. A closing technique that may work is the quality close.

The Adult

The Adult customer knows exactly what he or she wants. The Adult does not want to play any games. The Adult will not negotiate, and will tell you what they want and expect you to give them your best price, and product or service. They may start off appearing to be a Negotiator since they will also ask detailed questions, but they will not attempt to negotiate. They will listen, ask what your price is and then decide. If they think you are playing games with them or “using sales tricks” on them, they will leave and ignore any apologies or pleads from your side.

Be careful with the closing technique that you use with the Adult. Treat them politely, give them concise facts and answer their questions completely. Do not add a lot of detail, since you will irritate them and lose the sale.

CUSTOMER TYPES

Following on customer personalities, it is also possible to identify different customer types, namely the financier, the expert and the user.

The Financier

This is the person who holds the strings to the purse. This person gives the go-ahead to buy the product and effectively “sign the cheque”. Their main concern is cost, therefore they are typically interested in price lists of competitors and any evidence pointing to what is considered to be “best value”. Sell to the financier by showing how your price compares to those of others and how your product or service will save them money.

The Expert

When a person buys something that they do not fully understand, they will often ask an expert to give them an opinion. They may bring an expert with them to your store. In this case, give as many technical details and information as you can. Since the customer is insecure in making the buying decision, give them all the relevant information, because they want reassurance. If they cannot find an Expert to bring along, they may ask you as their expert, for advice. Use this opportunity to its fullest, because it shows they have confidence in you.
The User
In many cases, the person you are selling to is the person who is actually going to use the product or service. When selling to a User, focus on how the product or service can solve their real-world problems. Understand their situation and use standard selling techniques. Users are often busy people, but because they are buying and using the product or service themselves, they will be interested in innovations or product enhancements. Make the buying process as hassle free as possible for them.

CONCLUSION
The science of selling has a lot of psychology in it. People play games all the time, whether it is the salesperson or the customer. The customer may have different “personalities”, depending on the situation he or she is in, and the role that he or she is playing in the buying process.

If this sounds like a lot of nonsense, be aware of the fact that you are subconsciously categorising customers when they enter the pharmacy and without being aware of it, you are probably using these or similar selling skills that you know from your experience will be appropriate for each specific customer. If you are interested, read the book entitled, “Games People Play“4, by psychiatrist Dr Eric Berne, a book in which he introduced games and transactive analysis to the world (the book is about games people play in general, and not in sales specifically but it is applicable to sales as well). His research dates back to the 1950s and 1960s and is still relevant today if measured by the popularity of his work. According to Berne, games are ritualistic transactions or behaviour patterns between individuals that can indicate hidden feelings or emotions. In summary, the better you know yourself and your customers, the better and more successful you will be in the science of selling.

References:
2. Jovanovski T. 2006. No one can climb … the ladder of success … with their hands in their pockets. Cape Town: Tanya Jovanovski.