**TAKING THE IRE OUT OF AN IRATE CUSTOMER**

**Marianne K. Collins, Winona State University**

**SYNOPSIS**

This critical incident is a decision case in which a newly hired sales manager is faced with an angry buyer, anxious to vent his frustration at her company, and in particular her new boss. Potentially exacerbating the angry confrontation, the sales manager is unaware of any incident or action taken by her boss that predicated the buyer’s outburst. She encounters two buyers in the first meeting with her distributor, each with distinct attitudes and personalities. While she had expected to introduce herself, establish new relationships with the key players, and review upcoming orders, she is verbally accosted at the onset of her meeting. The buyers displayed very different demeanors: one is angry, aggressive and accusatory; the other is open and conciliatory. She must decide how to approach this volatile situation in order to salvage her long-term relationship and any future sales.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this case are:

1. Evaluate buyer style utilizing the social style matrix.
2. Apply adaptive selling skills to an emotionally charged conflict.
3. Explore options to resolve this conflict, understand the steps needed to mitigate the conflict and use the opportunity to strengthen the business relationship.
4. Analyze potential issues and conflicts in the salesperson’s role as boundary spanner between the firm and the customer.

**APPLICATION**

This critical incident has been designed for use in undergraduate Professional Selling, Advanced Professional Selling, Organization Buyer Behavior or Sales Management classes. The critical incident is brief enough to be read and discussed in class. The instructor should act as a facilitator in this discussion in order to clarify the issues and conflicts and the ambiguity of the roles of the key characters.

**KEY WORDS**

Professional selling, Adaptive selling behavior, Social style matrix

**CONTACT**

Marianne K. Collins, Winona State University, Department of Marketing, 175 W. Mark Street, Winona, MN 54650, 507-457-5196, [mcollins@winona.edu](mailto:mcollins@winona.edu)