

Psychology of Selling

Steps to Selling that Actually Works

1. Drop the enthusiasm.

This is my biggest passion in the sales training space today. Salespeople need to drop the enthusiasm. It's time to get rid of the excitement when you're in front of prospects.

Your prospects hate enthusiasm because it doesn't seem real. What if I came up to you at a networking event and introduced myself with a huge grin on my face, cheerfully yelling, "Hey there! Marc Wayshak here! How are you doing today?!"

You would immediately want to run the other way. You don't need to be an expert in the psychology of selling to understand why.

But there's actually a psychological reason that you would want to run the other way. The psychological phenomenon of reactance says that anytime we clearly try to forcefully push someone in one direction, they will naturally resist and try to go in the other direction. They'll push back, or pull back—or just drop everything and run.

So stop the enthusiasm, and just be real and genuine instead.

2. Pressure is a no-no.

Grown-ups are always telling kids that bad behavior is a "no-no"—and this is exactly how I feel about pressure in sales. Never, ever apply pressure to your prospects in a selling situation. This is Psychology of Selling 101. It's a huge no-no and here's why: Not only is it supremely unhelpful in gaining a prospect's trust, but it's also likely to kill the sale completely.

We want to remove all pressure from the selling situation. Instead of trying to persuade the prospect to tell us yes, we want to take a step back. Like I said earlier, the concept of reactance means that when we push someone to do something, they'll immediately pull back. So don't push.

This is key to the psychology of selling. Think about trying to get your kids to do something they don't really want to do. If they feel like you're putting too much pressure on them, there's a good chance that they're going to pull back.

3. Step into their shoes.

Some really powerful data has shown that top performers are much more effective at taking the perspectives of their buyers. When's the last time you really thought about the experience your buyers go through when talking to you? What about when they talk to your competitors?

I'm not talking about your value proposition or even your product experience. I'm talking about the psychology of selling from the buyer's experience. What's the buyer's actual experience of buying from you? What does it feel like? What's good about it? What's not good? Step into their shoes. Start to think more like your buyers. What do they care about? What are the challenges that they're facing? What are the reasons that they do business with you? What are the reasons that they do business with your competitors?

When we talk about the psychology of selling, we're really talking about starting to think like our prospects. How can we truly understand what they care about, and craft our conversations around those top concerns?

4. Get deep into their challenges.

This is something I've been saying for years. Salespeople need to start thinking like doctors, and stop thinking like typical salespeople. This is imperative if you're going to leverage the psychology of selling to close more deals.

The key is to get deep into prospects' challenges. Most salespeople just identify a surface-level challenge and then immediately offer a solution.

Let me give you an example of a doctor's mindset at work in sales. Let's say your prospect says, "We've got these operational issues. Do you think you can help us?" You should say, "Well, tell me more about those challenges. Help me understand what's really going on." Dig deeply. Think of it as the tip of the iceberg. Most prospects are willing to discuss what's at the very top of the iceberg to anyone. But you want to dig deeper to discuss what's going on below the surface.

5. Make it a two-way dialogue.

The psychology of selling shows us that when people are actually speaking, they're the most engaged. When they're listening, they may still be engaged in the conversation, but it's less likely. So you want to make sure that you're constantly having a two-way dialogue with your prospects, even when you're presenting. There should always be a back-and-forth dynamic.

There should never be a period where you're going on and on about your service or product. You only ever want to talk for a little bit, and then re-engage the prospect back into the conversation.

Think about how you feel when you're being talked at, versus being engaged in a dynamic conversation, and it's easy to see why this is central to the psychology of selling.

If it truly is a two-way conversation, you're going to close a lot more of your sales, because it means that your prospects are more engaged. Keep that back-and-forth going.

6. Use feedback loops.

I said earlier that it's important to make your presentation a two-way dialogue in order to leverage the psychology of selling. Feedback loops are the most effective way to do this. These are little questions to ask when you're talking to prospects that will pull them back into the conversation.

Feedback loops are something I use all the time with every single person in my life, because they're so effective. If you ever find yourself going on and on, or talking for more than 60 seconds, stop and just say, "So, before I go any further, does this all make sense?" or "Do you see what I'm saying?" or "Does that work for you?"

The data shows that these little questions not only re-engage people in conversation, but they also create little moments of buy-in. Think of them as mini-closes in the conversation. By the end of the presentation, assuming they've been on the same page with you and they like what you're saying, the only question to close is, "What would you like to do next?"

There is no hard close, because you're using these feedback loops all throughout the process. And now, all you have to do is simply establish the next step.

7. Stop pitching.

Recent sales data shows that one of the biggest reasons that prospects and buyers don't ultimately choose to do business with a salesperson is that they felt the salesperson didn't really understand their needs.

This is purely the psychology of selling: prospects are feeling like you don't understand them due to the way you are speaking and behaving around them. And you don't even realize it! This isn't surprising, since most salespeople jump right into a pitch when they first meet a prospect. They haven't even done the proper discovery to understand what's really going on in the prospect's world.

At the end of the day, what your prospects really want is to be engaged in a conversation about what's important to them. What do their challenges look like? What disruptive changes are they facing in their industry?

Once you talk to prospects about the issues they're currently facing, then you can decide if they're a fit for what you sell—but not before that.

Once you decide the prospect is a fit, it's presentation time—not time to pitch your solution. Instead, think of it as a doctor-patient conversation. Dig into the psychology of selling in every situation. Diagnose what's wrong with the prospect and then, once you have a full understanding of their challenges and needs, present only the solution that will solve their problems.

8. It's about them, not you.

I once had a boss that used to say, "Prospects listen to one radio station, and that one radio station is WIIFM." Now, do you know what WIIFM stands for? What's in it for me. All prospects care about is themselves. They don't care about you. They don't care about your offering. And they certainly don't care about how great you think your service is. They only care about themselves. This idea is central to the psychology of selling in any industry.

Prospects ask themselves the same two questions in every situation with a salesperson:

1. Is this conversation going to be worth my time?

2. Is this salesperson's solution going to actually help me solve a problem that I care about?

If they can't answer affirmatively to either or both of those questions, then you're in trouble. We've got to make the conversation about them, understanding their concerns, asking questions about their challenges, and addressing the things they care about.

And then, once they see that it's about them, they're going to get engaged in the conversation, because people like to talk about themselves. This is central to the psychology of selling. People like to talk about their own concerns or goals, or whatever it is that they're looking to accomplish.

By making it about them, and not your offering, you're now taking control of the psychology of selling and you're in a much more powerful position to sell effectively.

9. Create value through questions.

If you've ever watched the show "The Sopranos" then you remember those conversations between Tony Soprano and his psychologist. Did you ever notice how the psychologist never proposes a solution to his problems? When Tony talks about a concern he has, the psychologist only ever asks questions such as, "Can you help me understand why you say that?" or "How does that make you feel?"

These types of questions aren't just critical in therapy, but also in the psychology of selling. When a prospect comes to you and says, "I've got this problem..." you want to respond with thoughtful questions. Most salespeople out there respond with some form of, "Well, you've come to the right place! We've got an awesome new suite of products that can help solve your problem." You want to do the exact opposite

Take a step back and create value through the questions you ask. Here are several powerful questions to add to your repertoire:

"What would you say this challenge is costing you today?"

"Can you help me understand how this problem affects you?"

"What have you done to try to solve this problem in the past?"

“What issues or obstacles are being caused by this problem?”

By asking questions like these, you’ll master the psychology of selling to create more value and start to close more sales.

10. If you feel it, say it.

One of my mentors always used to say this, and it stuck with me because it’s great advice. In today’s selling environment, there’s just no time to waste with tire-kickers or people who aren’t a good fit. If your prospect is talking in a way that’s making your gut say, “You know what, there’s something not right here,” rather than just push through, say what you’re feeling. Get it all out on the table and inspect the psychology of selling at play.

Now, this doesn’t have to be confrontational. But let’s say your prospect seems like he’s not that into your conversation. He’s distracted. Or maybe the timing doesn’t feel right. Say, “George, I really appreciate your meeting with me today, but it seems like you’re pretty distracted right now. Is this maybe not a good time to be talking about this?” And watch him suddenly respond, “Oh, no, no, no. I’m sorry. I was distracted, but no, no. I do want to have this conversation.”

Or, if your prospect seems like she’s just not interested in what you’re talking about, say, “Susan, I get the sense that this doesn’t seem to be of a lot of interest to you. Is that fair to say?” And now, she may say, “Yeah. You know what, no. I’m not interested.” And then you can say, “OK. Well, can you tell me why you say that?” From there, you can determine whether the prospect is qualified or not.

11. Tie their challenges to value.

We’ve talked about going deeper to really understand what’s going on in your prospects’ world. Now you want to make sure you’re tying their challenges to a specific value. If your prospects could solve their challenges, what would it mean to them in upside, revenue, profitability, or savings? These are the key questions to answer here.

Here’s an example. Your prospect is talking about his marketing challenges, saying, “Yeah, our marketing is just not as effective as we’d like. We just feel like we’re not getting the number of leads that we’d like.” First you dig deeper into what his key challenges are. And then you say

something along the lines of, “If you were able to solve these challenges that you’re facing, what would it mean in additional revenue to the organization?”

What you’re doing is giving prospects the opportunity to come back with a number. They might say, “Oh, yeah. Well, geez. We could easily increase revenue by a couple million dollars if we were able to solve these challenges.” Now you’ve tied the challenges to some kind of specific tangible value. And it’s their number. They said it, not you.

Even if you’re on the consumer side, this is key to the psychology of selling. After all, there’s still a value in solving consumers’ challenges. What is that value in solving their challenges, or what is that challenge really costing them right now?

Psychology in Selling

People are highly complex and often mysterious, so we all struggle to understand our fellow humans. However, now that you’ve gotten over being afraid to sell, here are a few basic psychological tidbits that can help you write compelling copy.

1. People make decisions emotionally

They decide based on a feeling, need, or emotion, not through a logical thought process. That’s why intangible benefits are the keys to persuasion.

When you’re writing, you should ask yourself, “What is the emotional hot button here?”

2. People are egocentric

The word “egocentric” means centered around the ego or self. We all see the world in terms of how it relates to us personally. So when your copy asks someone to do something, it must also answer the unspoken question, “What’s in it for me?”

On a deeper level, the question might be “How does this give me feelings of personal worth?”

3. People think in terms of people

The human brain is not a computer, calculator, or information processor. Scientists have shown that its primary function is to deal with social interactions.

Remember how some mathematical questions in high school were stated as real-life situations? They were always easier to understand and solve than abstract problems. Your copy, therefore, should feature people through names, personal pronouns, quotes, testimonials, stories, photos of satisfied customers, etc.

4. People love to buy

Some say people don't like to be "sold." Not true.

People love to be sold. They love to discover wonderful new products and experiences.

What people don't love is to be cheated or tricked. Therefore, it can be helpful to change your analogy of the marketing process.

Instead of "**selling**" to people, try to "**help**" them. Sell good products, make appealing offers, and treat people fairly. That's a surefire formula for success.

5. People are always looking for something

Love. Wealth. Glory. Comfort. Safety. People are naturally dissatisfied and spend their lives searching for intangibles.

At its simplest, writing good copy is a matter of showing people how a particular product, service, or cause fulfills one or more of their needs.

6. People like to see it, hear it, touch it, taste it, or smell it before they buy it

Some people never buy online because they can't examine the merchandise. Some items, such as books and CDs, are tangible and familiar enough to sell easily online because there is little doubt about the physical quality.

Other items, such as clothing or food, may be a harder sell — at least until people have a satisfactory buying experience — because quality may be variable.

Think about how people buy things in stores and ask yourself if there is some element of that sensory experience that is missing from your sales message.

7. Most people follow the crowd

Most of us are imitators.

We look to others for guidance, especially when we are uncertain about something. We ask, “What do others think about this? What do others feel? What do others do?” Then we act accordingly.

This is why testimonials and case histories are so influential.

Of course, this barely scratches the surface. Psychology is a deep and eternally revealing line of study. And while I don’t believe in making things more complicated than they have to be, I think there is great benefit in knowing not only what people do, but also why they do it.

8. People buy “direct” because of convenience and exclusivity

If people could easily find the things you offer at a nearby store, that’s probably where many would buy them. So if they are not buying from you directly for sheer convenience, they’re doing it because they can’t find the item elsewhere (or just don’t know where to look).

That’s why it’s wise to emphasize the convenience and exclusivity of what you wish to sell.

9. People are naturally suspicious

It’s true that there’s a sucker born every minute, but most people are moderately skeptical of any offer. They seek to avoid risk.

You can never predict the level of suspicion any particular person has, so it’s usually best to back up all claims with evidence, such as testimonials, survey results, authoritative endorsements, test results, and scientific data.

10. You can’t force people to do anything

When people buy, it’s not because you wield some magical power over them.

You can urge. You can push. You can entice. But ultimately, people do what they want to do. This means your job is to show how what you're offering meets your prospect's needs.

11. People look for value

Value is not a fixed number. Value is relative to what you're selling, what others charge, what the prospect is used to paying, how badly the prospect wants it, and how the prospect perceives the difference between your offer and others.

You must demonstrate a value that seems to be equal to or greater than the asking price. The greater the value relative to the price, the more likely people are to buy.

12. People justify decisions with facts

Example: a man sees an advertisement with a photo of a sports car and instantly falls in love. However, he can't bring himself to buy the car based on a feeling, so he reads the copy for technical details about the powerful engine, safety features, and low maintenance.

He wants the car because it makes him feel good. But he buys it only when he can justify the purchase rationally.