



MIRROR MORE. SELL MORE.

Proven Science That Will Help You Sell

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Synopsis

In this white paper, sales expert David Hoffeld tackles the controversial and often misunderstood concept of mirroring. David begins by disclosing the scientific basis of mirroring. He then shows evidence that demonstrates how mirroring will enhance a sales person's effectiveness. The white paper concludes with five specific ways that sales people can utilize mirroring to increase their ability to positively influence prospects.

About the Author

David Hoffeld is CEO of the Hoffeld Group, a research based sales training, coaching and consulting firm that is the leader in the integration of proven science and sales. The Hoffeld Group takes the repeatable and predictable principles, which science has proven to create and enable influence, out of the laboratory and academic journals and apply them to selling. For a deeper look at the Hoffeld Group's groundbreaking research and innovative sales strategies visit HoffeldGroup.com.

Mirroring Increases Positive Influence

When you notice someone yawn, why do you also feel the sudden urge to yawn? When you observe someone take a nasty fall, why do you cringe? When you see someone experience tremendous heart-break, you literally feel their pain. Why? What makes visually witnessing the experiences of others evoke similar feelings in you?

These questions are significant because knowing and applying the answers will increase a sales person's ability to sell. This is due to the fact that the answer to each of the previously mentioned questions is a powerful psychological concept called mirroring. Mirroring is also commonly referred to as matching or pacing.¹

Mirroring = when one person subtly emulates aspects of another person's verbal or non-verbal behavior.

Many often confuse mirroring with merely copying the behavior of another. However, mirroring is far more dynamic than that. There is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence that has confirmed that mirroring will increase one's ability to influence another. This is why mirroring, when correctly understood and competently executed, will enhance a sales person's effectiveness.

For instance, a team of behavioral scientists, led by Dr. William Maddux, conducted numerous experiments to identify what effects mirroring has in business situations.² In one of their experiments the scientists arranged for MBA students to participate in negotiation exercises. Some of the students were informed that during the negotiation they should subtly mimic the verbal and non-verbal behaviors of those whom they were negotiating with. The scientists wanted to see what influence mirroring would have on the student's capacity to negotiate an agreement. What occurred next was astonishing. The students who had not mirrored those whom they were in a negotiation with arrived at a negotiated settlement 12% of the time. In contrast, the students who had mirrored the behaviors of those whom they were negotiating with were able to successfully reach an agreement an impressive 67% of the time.

The findings of Maddux's research are not unique. An illuminating study, which was published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, analyzed the effect of mirroring on selling. The findings of the study were that when sales people mirrored their prospects' behavior, it increased the positive perception of both the sales person and the sales person's product or service.³

The power of mirroring in sales situations was also profiled when the *Harvard Business Review* reported the conclusions of a psychological experiment.⁴ Researchers measured the closing rates of retail

1. Richard Bandler and John Grinder. *Frogs into Princes*. (Moab, Utah: Real People Press, 1979).

2. W.W. Maddux, E. Mullen and A.D. Galinsky. "Chameleons bake bigger pies and take bigger pieces: Strategic behavioral mimicry facilitates negotiation outcomes." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44, 2008. p. 461 – 468.

3. R.J. Tanner, R. Ferraro, T. Chartrand, J. Bettman and R. Van Baaren. "Of chameleons and consumption: The impact of mimicry on choice and preferences." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34, 2007. p. 754 – 766.

4. "Idea Watch: Monkey See, Monkey Buy." *Harvard Business Review*, January - February, 2012. p. 28.

sales people who were attempting to sell MP3 players. The sales people were instructed to mirror the verbal and non-verbal behaviors of random prospects. The outcome was that those prospects that were mirrored by the sales person purchased an MP3 player 79% of the time. Whereas, the prospects who had not been mirrored purchased at a rate of only 62%. The experiment revealed that mirroring enhanced the closing rate of these sales people by 17%! What's more, those prospects whose behavior had been mirrored were also more likely to act upon the sales person's recommendations and rate the sales person and the store positively.

Mirroring and the Human Brain

Frequently, when learning about mirroring, sales people complain that the concept sounds too good to be true. The confusion regarding mirroring is due to the fact that in the past, sales people have often been told that they should mirror their prospects. Sometimes they are even told how to mirror their prospects. Yet, never are they told why mirroring works. Subsequently, they are skeptical of mirroring since it is presented in a way that seems almost magical.

In spite of the inept teaching that often surrounds mirroring, there is a rational, scientific basis for it. No longer must sales people settle for the outdated, opinion based nonsense that is so prevalent in sales training. Instead, they deserve to have access to the latest scientific evidence that decisively proves why mirroring works, why it is a necessary sales strategy and how it can be carried out for greatest impact.

The reason that mirroring is so influential is because of how the brain functions. Neuroscientists contend that the human brain contains certain types of neurons that they refer to as "mirror neurons." Mirror neurons are why people instinctively model the behavior of others. These neurons are also why you feel the impulse to yawn when you see someone else yawn, you wince when you observe someone fall and you feel sadness when you witness another person grieve.

Mirror neurons were first detected by a team of Italian researchers, who were led by renowned neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti. The scientists were conducting studies on monkeys when they noticed that the monkeys would routinely mimic the behavior they saw.⁵ For instance, when the human handler would stick out his tongue, the monkey would as well. Rizzolatti and his team were fascinated by this and wondered what brain functions enabled the monkeys to emulate human behavior. Their experiments led them to the realization that monkeys have neurons in their brains that allow them to imitate the behavior they see. Rizzolatti even found that the mirror neurons in the monkey's brain would fire when the monkey grabbed an object and also when the monkey was watching a human grab the object.⁶

Rizzolatti's breakthrough prompted a flurry of research in the field of neuroscience to discern if the human brain also had mirror neurons. After years of analysis, neuroscientists concluded that within the

5. Giacomo Rizzolatti and Michael A. Arbib. "Language within our grasp." Trends in neurosciences, vol. 21, 1998. p. 188 – 194.

6. Sandra Blakeslee. *Cells That Read Minds*. NYTimes.com, January 10th, 2006.

human brain, particularly in the premotor cortex, are certain types of neurons which mirror behavior.⁷
^{8 9} The discovery that the human brain contained mirror neurons is significant, as one neuroscientist even referred to it as one of “the most intriguing scientific discoveries of the past decades.”¹⁰ The detection of mirror neurons also has numerous important implications in the understanding of human social interaction. Mirror neurons are what allow the human brain to recognize the intention of another and to engage in observational learning.

Mirror neurons also explain why people often unconsciously mirror the verbal and non-verbal behavior of others.^{11 12}

- The human brain’s innate aptitude for emulating behavior is made evident through the research of social psychologists Tanya Chartrand and John Bargh.¹³ In one of their most revealing experiments Chartrand and Bargh had a collaborator sit next to random people and sporadically touch his face or shake his foot. Amazingly, the people, without conscious awareness, would copy the nonverbal behavior they witnessed.
- This mirroring reflex was also what Michael B. McCaskey wrote about in his article, “The Hidden Messages Managers Send,” which was published in the *Harvard Business Review*. McCaskey stated, “In moments of great rapport, a remarkable pattern of nonverbal communication can develop. Two people will mirror each other’s movements – dropping a hand, shifting their body at exactly the same time.”¹⁴

Furthermore, what is strikingly consistent about the research on mirroring is that rarely are those whose behavior is being mirrored aware of it. This makes mirroring a highly effective strategy because transparency limits persuasion. For example, often when sales people close a sale they use old, over-used closes that prospects are familiar with. There is nothing less persuasive than using a closing phrase that your prospect can identify by name. The reality is that though mirroring may seem easy to detect, it rarely is and, as a result, it is extremely influential.

Mirroring is not magic or a shallow gimmick. It is a proven, practical and persuasive strategy that is rooted in the workings of the human brain. Therefore, it is in line with and not opposed to how both sales people and prospects instinctively function.

7. Giacomo Rizzolatti, Corrado Sinigaglia and Frances Anderson (trans.). *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions, Emotions and Experience*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
 8. G. Rizzolatti and L. Craighero. “*The mirror-neuron system.*” *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, vol. 27, 2004. p. 169 - 192
 9. Vittorio Gallese, Morton Ann Gernsbacher, Cecilia Heyes, Gregory Hickok and Marco Iacoboni. “Mirror Neuron Forum.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 6, July, 2011. p. 369 – 407.
 10. Derek E. Lyons, ““The Relational Continuum of Human Imitation.” In Jaime A. Pineda (ed.), *Mirror Neuron Systems: The Role of Mirroring Processes in Social Cognition*. (New York: Humana Press, 2008). p. 77.
 11. P.M. Niedenthal, L.W. Barsalou, F. Ric, and S. Krauth-Gruber. “Embodiment in the Acquisition and Use of Emotional Knowledge.” In L.F. Barrett, P.M. Niedenthal, and P. Winkielman (eds.), *Emotion and Consciousness*, (New York: Guilford, 2005).
 12. W.D. Hutchinson and others. “Pain-Related Neurons in the Human Cingulate Cortex.” *Nature-Neuroscience*, 1999, 2, 403-405.
 13. T. Chartrand and J. Bargh. “The chameleon effect: The perception-behavior link and social interaction.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 1999. p. 893 – 910.
 14. Michael B. McCaskey. “The Hidden Messages Managers Send.” *Harvard Business Review*, November – December, 1979).

Two Primary Ways that Mirroring Enhances Influence

Mirroring is a potent strategy that every sales person should utilize because it guides sales people in cultivating two of the essential elements of influence: rapport and empathy.

Rapport: Mirroring the verbal and nonverbal behavior of another has been proven to enhance rapport.¹⁵ As most sales people know, the ability to build rapport with prospects is an essential ingredient of successful selling. The reason this is true is because selling is relational and rapport is one of the factors that fuels the sales person's capacity to positively influence prospects. In fact, a lack of rapport with a prospect will usually derail the sale. As Freud aptly affirmed, "One cannot explain things to unfriendly people."¹⁶

There are two reasons why mirroring improves rapport.

Reason 1: When a person is in deep rapport with another the mirror neurons in the brain naturally fire. This stimulation of the mirror neurons amplifies the feelings of rapport that one has with the other person. For instance, one study that was published in *Social Psychology Quarterly* analyzed the posture of students in the classroom.¹⁷ The research identified that the more similar students' postures were to their teacher's, the deeper their feelings of rapport and the higher their level of participation. Likewise, through mirroring their prospects, sales people can prompt the mirror neurons in their prospects' brains to fire. This will intensify the prospects' feelings of rapport and receptiveness towards the sales person.

Reason 2: Mirroring boosts rapport because creates the perception of similarity. Scientific studies have proven that people naturally feel heightened levels of rapport with those whom they view as similar to themselves.^{18 19} Mirroring prospects' behaviors induces the feelings of sameness, which inspire trust.

- Research published by psychologist Rick van Barren found that when a person's behavior is mirrored by another, that person is more likely to look favorably upon the person mirroring him or her and is also more likely to comply with a request.²⁰
- Social psychologists, Douglas T. Kenrick, Steven L. Neuberg and Robert B. Cialdini summarize this research when they write that mirroring enhances rapport because "people like us more

15. J.L. Lakin and T.L. Chartrand. "Using nonconscious behavioral mimicry to create affiliation and rapport." *Psychological Science*, 14, 2003. p. 334 – 339.

16. Sigmund Freud. "Letter to C.G. Jung, December 6, 1906," In E. Jones, *Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Volume 2: Years of Maturity, 1901 – 1919*. (New York: Basic Books, 1955.) p. 435.

17. M. LaFrance. "Nonverbal Synchrony and Rapport: Analysis of Cross-lag Panel Technique." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 42 (1979), p. 66- 70.

18. J.M. Burger, N. Messian, S. Patel, A. Del Prade and C. Anderson. "What a coincidence! The effects of incidental similarity on compliance." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 35 – 43.

19. R. Garner. "What's in a name? Persuasion perhaps." *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15, 2005. p. 108 – 116.

20. Rick van Barren, R. Holland, K. Kawakami and A. van Knippenberg. "Mimicry and prosocial behavior." *Psychological Science*, 15, 2004. p. 71 – 74.

when we subtly imitate their nonverbal behaviors.”²¹

Empathy: Another vital element of effective influence that mirroring enables is empathy. One of the primary differences between top sales people and mediocre sales people is that top sales people have empathy. In fact, a number of years ago, the *Harvard Business Review* published an article entitled, “*What Makes a Good Salesman.*”²² The conclusion of the article was that there are two primary qualities that a sales person must have to be able to become an elite performer. One of the two qualities was the ability to empathize.

Frequently, when these sales professionals envision empathy, they mistakenly equate it with feeling sorry for someone. Yet, such a definition is terribly shortsighted. Research scientists across a variety of disciplines agree that at its core, empathy has a cognitive component that involves understanding the perspective of another.^{23 24 25 26 27}

Empathy = the ability to recognize the thoughts or feelings of another person.

Empathy is the social radar which allows a sales person to acquire an awareness of the thoughts or feelings that are behind the verbal or non-verbal signals that prospects are displaying. Social scientist Daniel Goleman summarizes the persuasive clout of empathy when he writes that “Empathy is our social radar.”²⁸

Sales people who have heightened levels of empathy not only sell more, but are preferred by prospects. The *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* conducted a survey of buyers regarding the influence that sales people have upon them.²⁹ All of the buyers surveyed had recently purchased a product from a sales person. Some of the sales people showed a high degree of empathy to the buyers, while others demonstrated little empathy. The results of the survey were that the more empathy the sales person showed the more the buyer enjoyed buying from him or her and the more likely they were to purchase again from the sales person.

Empathy has been proven to increase a sales person’s effectiveness. This is because empathy guides a sales person in obtaining an accurate understanding of his or her prospect. Empathy strategically positions the sales person to more accurately address the prospect’s needs.

One of the numerous ways a sales person can enhance their ability to empathize with a prospect is

21. Douglas T. Kenrick, Steven L. Neuberg and Robert B. Cialdini. *Social Psychology: Goals In Interaction* (5th Edition). (Boston: Allyn & Bacon Publishing, 2010). p. 117.

22. David Mayer and Herbert Greenberg. “What Makes a Good Salesman.” *Harvard Business Review*, July – August, 2006.

23. M. Davis, T. Soderlund, J. Cole, E. Gadol, M. Kute, M. Myers and J. Wiehing. “Cognitions associated with attempts to empathize: How do we imagine the perspective of another.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 2004. p. 1625 – 1635.

24. M. Davis. *Empathy: A social psychological approach*. (Madison, WI: Brown and Benchmark: 1994).

25. William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick. *Motivational Interviewing*, 3rd Edition. (New York: Guilford Press, 2013). p. 18.

26. P.J. Eslinger. “Neurological and neuropsychological bases of empathy.” *European Neurology*, 1998. p. 193 – 198.

27. S.D. Preston and F.B.M. de Waal. “Empathy: Its ultimate and proximate bases.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 25, 2002. p. 1-72.

28. Daniel Goldeman. *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. (New York: Bantam Books, 2006). p. 135.

29. Bruce Pilling and Sevo Eroglu. “An Empirical Examination of the Impact of Salesperson Empathy and Professionalism and Merchandise Salability on Retail Buyers’ Evaluations.” *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Winter, 1994.

through mirroring the prospect's behavior. Numerous studies in the field of neuroscience have found that activating the mirror neurons in the brain will aid one in obtaining a better understanding of the viewpoint of another.³⁰ Similarly, research in the field of behavioral science has also revealed that through intentionally mirroring the behavior of another person one will begin to experience what that person is feeling.^{31 32 33}

One fascinating example of the empathic power of mirroring was made evident through a study conducted at *Dartmouth College* where students were told to observe a person who was receiving an electric shock.³⁴ Some of the students were told to merely watch those receiving the shock, while other students were asked to make a pained expression whenever the person received the shock. The researchers believed, as Freud and others had contended, that expressing an emotion would discharge it. So, by making a pained expression whenever the subject received a shock, the student watching the experiment should, in theory, relieve any built up anxiety he or she was feeling and immediately feel better. However, the opposite happened. The students who grimaced when the person was shocked with electricity perspired and had faster heart rates than those students who expressed no visible emotion. The outcome of this experiment demonstrated that mirroring another person actually provides a glimpse into that person's world.

Consequently, mirroring is not a trick to manipulate another person. Rather, it is a way for sales people to adjust their behavior for the purpose of getting in sync with another. This will guide sales people in developing a deeper understanding of their prospects.

Five Prospect Behaviors to Mirror

Since you understand the brain science behind mirroring and the two primary benefits of mirroring, the question now becomes how do you mirror your prospects? The foundational component of productively mirroring your prospect is to develop a deep awareness of your prospect. You must train yourself to be mindful of your prospect's verbal and nonverbal signals. This is imperative because you cannot mirror what you are not aware of. Though obtaining this focused attentiveness will require practice, you will find that the information derived from your observations will help you to sell more effectively.

Though there are many prospect behaviors that you could identify and mirror, the following are five behaviors that are relatively uncomplicated to observe and will produce the maximum impact upon your prospect.

30. Michael S. Gazzaniga, Richard B. Ivry and George R. Mangun. *Cognitive Neuroscience*, 3rd Edition. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009). p. 618 – 620.

31. Elaine Hatfield, John Cacioppo and Richard Rapson. *Emotional Contagion*. (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

32. R. Newman and F. Strack. "Approach and avoidance: The influence of proprioceptive and exteroceptive cues on encoding of affective information." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 2000. p. 39 – 48.

33. Daniel Goleman. *Social Intelligence*. (New York: Bantam Books, 2006). p. 25.

34. K.B. Vaughn and J.T. Lanzetta. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 17, (1981). p. 16-30.

Behavior #1. Mirror Your Prospect's Posture. A prospect's perspective is often revealed through the posture he or she adopts. By mirroring your prospect's posture, you will align yourself with the prospect and convey a similar perspective. For example, if your prospect is leaning back in his or her chair, cautiously listening to your presentation, you should also slightly lean back and mirror his or her body language.

Behavior #2. Mirror Your Prospect's Gestures. Most prospects will favor certain gestures over others. As you notice your prospect's style of gesturing you may want to begin exhibiting similar gestures. This simple act will increase your rapport and your capacity to empathize with your prospect.

For example, one of the most intriguing psychological experiments conducted on the persuasive potency of mirroring was overseen by psychologists Jeremy Bailenson and Nick Yee and was published in the prestigious *Psychological Science*.³⁵ The researchers had college students, one at a time, enter a virtual environment where they were seated across from a virtual, human like character. The character would deliver a persuasive speech on the idea that college students should be required to carry identification cards on them when on campus. In half of the sessions the virtual character would mirror the head movements of the participants at a four second delay. So, if the student listening would nod his or her head forward, four seconds later the virtual character would as well. However, for the other half of the sessions the virtual character would not mirror the student's head movements. At the conclusion of the experiment each student was asked to rate the likeability of the virtual person and the persuasiveness of the speech. In spite of the fact that all of the students heard the exact same speech and encountered the same virtual character, those students whose head movements were mirrored indicated that they found the character more likeable and its message more persuasive.

Behavior #3. Mirror Your Prospect's Rate of Speech. Scientific studies have identified that people are more likely to comply with a request when the one making the request is matching their rate of speech.³⁶ This is due to the fact that people generally like to listen at the same rate of speech that they speak. If a prospect speaks slowly he or she may find it distracting to listen to a sales person who speaks at a rapid rate of speech. By adjusting your rate of speech to match your prospect's you will foster rapport and facilitate effective communication.

Behavior #4. Mirror Your Prospect's Facial Expressions. The facial movements that your prospects make are often a window into your prospect's thoughts. You should mirror those facial expressions, unless the expression is associated with a negative attitude. Research published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* identified that imitating the facial expressions of another enhances persuasion as it subtly aligns the person with the one being mirrored.³⁷

Behavior #5. Mirror Your Prospect's Word Usage. You will find that prospects will have certain

35. Jeremy Bailenson and Nick Yee. "Digital chameleons: Automatic assimilation of nonverbal gestures in immersive virtual environments." *Psychological Science*, 16, 2005. p. 814 – 819.

36. D. Buller, B. LePoire, R. Aune and S. Eloy. "Social perceptions as mediators of the effect of speech rate similarity on compliance." *Human Communication Research*, 19, 1992. p. 282 – 311.

37. K. Likowski, A. Muhlberger, B. Seibt, P. Pauli and P. Weyers. "Modulation of facial mimicry by attitudes." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44, 2008. p. 1065 – 1072.

phrases or words that they favor. You may even notice that some prospects will repeatedly use the same word when describing some aspect of their problem or desired solution. Mirroring prospect's words heightens your ability to communicate in a way that prospects will understand and relate to. When you mirror the specific words your prospect states you are literally speaking your prospect's language.

One prime example of the power of mirroring another's words was demonstrated by some psychological experiments led by behavioral scientist Rick van Baaren. The research analyzed the impact that verbal mirroring had on the tips servers earned. The findings were that when servers mirrored their guests' words, their tips rose by over 68%.³⁸

Summary

Mirroring is a powerful sales strategy that is based on how the human brain functions. It has also been proven to guide sales people in developing rapport and empathy. Therefore, mirroring prospect's behaviors is a skill that sales people must become proficient in because it will increase their overall effectiveness. In short, the research overwhelmingly shows that if sales people mirror their prospects more, they will sell more.

38. R. B. van Baaren, R. W. Holland, B. Steenaert and A. van Knippenberg. "Mimicry for money: Behavioral consequences of imitation." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 39, 2003. p. 393 – 398.