**The Science of Buying**

What is the #1 reason for a lack of sales results? Answering this question accurately matters because every sales leader knows that sales deficiency is an alarming problem.

Many had hoped that social selling and access to big data would solve the issue. It hasn’t. The statistics show that today just as many sales people fail to make quota as did a decade ago. Now there is no doubt that leveraging social media and big data are essential tools that when used correctly will enhance a sales person’s effectiveness, but they are just tools. The root of the problem goes much deeper.

The central problem within sales cannot be fixed with a new technique or technology, but with a change in philosophy. Put simply, the root of the problem in selling is that the way most sales people are taught to sell is grounded in selling, not buying. It is the opposite of how it should be. Sales people are shown sales activities and behaviors and then taught to try to inspire their prospects to conform to their model of selling.

Though the idea of selling the way prospects’ buy is prevalent, the reality is that it has become just a platitude. Don’t believe me, ask a sales person, manager or trainer, “What are the mental steps that the human brain goes through when formulating a buying decision and what evidence do you have that your answer is accurate?”

This question matters because how can sales people guide prospects through the buying process when they do not know how the buying process occurs. Think about it, if sales people, managers and trainers do not know how prospects formulate buying decisions, how can they know if a sales behavior is aligned with or violates the buying process? The obvious answer is they cannot. This is why sales people often unknowingly employ sales behaviors that obstruct a buying decision. For instance, a research study which analyzed the behavior of sales people and the results those behaviors produce concluded, “CEOs are investing more than ever in their sales forces, but results aren’t improving. To understand this disconnect, we observed 800 sales professionals in live sales meetings… a mere 37% of salespeople — were consistently effective. What’s more, some of the behaviors of the remaining 63% actually drove down performance.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Time For A Change**

In the past, sales people could experience success with a flawed philosophy focused on selling, not buying. However, those days are gone. The current marketplace is more competitive than any that preceded it. Selling like you did in the past does not work anymore.

If you as a sales person or sales leader want to increase your sales, the starting place is to focus on buying, not selling. Just imagine if you had scientific evidence that showed you how prospects mentally construct buying decisions and you then based your sales strategies and tactics upon that evidence. This would mean that you were literally aligning your process of selling with your prospects’ process of buying. How much do you think this would increase your sales?

The good news is that because of numerous scientific breakthroughs, the internal decision making process that determines if a prospect will purchase a product or service is known. Behavioral scientists have verified that human decisions are not based upon a rational, cost-benefit analysis, but upon a set of psychological principles.[[2]](#footnote-2) [[3]](#footnote-3) [[4]](#footnote-4) [[5]](#footnote-5) For instance, the 2002 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences was awarded to Daniel Kahneman “for having integrated insights from psychological research into economic science.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Kahneman’s research demonstrated that human decisions are governed, not by logical thought, but by fixed “psychological principles.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Harvard’s Amy Cuddy affirms that these psychological principles are instinctive and occur naturally through “very unconscious and implicit processes.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Behavioral economist Dan Ariely references these psychological principles as his reason for stating that human beings are “predictably irrational.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Ariely acknowledges that human behaviors “are neither random nor senseless. They are systematic, and since we repeat them again and again, predictable.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

When sales people become literate in the science of buying and then focus on selling in a way that guides their prospects through the buying process, they instantly become more effective. That is why at the Hoffeld Group we insist that every sales behavior be tied to how prospects buy. This harmony between selling and buying significantly enhances the likelihood of the sale.

Now, like every other discipline that has embraced the truth of science, sales can be transformed. I believe that the integration of proven science and sales will equip sales people to more meaningfully serve their prospects, which will fuel sales growth and usher the profession of sales into a new, prosperous era.

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2. On Amir and Dan Ariely. “Decisions by Rules: The Case of Unwillingness to Pay for Beneficial Delays.” *Journal of Marketing Research*, 154, 2007. p. 142 – 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Colin F. Camerer, George Loewenstein. “Behavioral Economics: Past, Present, Future,” In Colin F. Camerer, George Loewenstein and Matthew Rabin(eds.), *Behavioral Economics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Edward Cartwright. *Behavioral Economics*. (New York: Routledge, 2011). p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Peter Diamond and Hannu Vartiainen. *Behavioral Economics and Its Applications*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. "The Prize in Economics 2002 - Press Release." Nobelprize.org. Retrieved 14 Feb 2013. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\_prizes/economics/laureates/2002/press.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. “The framing of decisions and the psychology of choice.” *Science*, 211, 1981. p. 453 – 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Julia Hanna. “Power Posing: Fake It Until Your Make It.” *Working Knowledge: Research and Ideas*. Harvard Business School, September 20, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Dan Ariely. *Predictably Irrational*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2008). p. xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. p. xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)