

THE NEW REALITY: EVERYONE IS NOW IN SALES

According to the *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics* sales is the second largest occupation in the United States.¹ This equates to 1 out of every 9 people being employed in the profession of sales. However, there is also compelling evidence that those who have non-sales jobs are also engaging in selling behaviors that shape their level of professional success. In short, there has been a radical shift in the marketplace and as a result everyone is now in sales.

The idea that everyone is in sales is not to imply that everyone is now a professional sales person who sells a product or service for money. Rather, it is to affirm that now everyone performs behaviors traditionally associated with selling. The notion that everyone is in sales is significant because it has the power to enhance one's effectiveness at work.

The Perception of Selling Has Changed

For those who are not professional sales people, the idea that they are now in sales is often unsettling. This is due to the fact that in the past, selling was considered unsavory. When people thought of selling, they frequently conjured up an image of a used car salesman who was manipulative, insincere and focused solely on getting a sale. However, today this stereotype is not only antiquated, it is wrong. In our modern economy selling has evolved. With the influx of easily accessible information via the internet and a hyper-competitive marketplace, sellers have been forced to adapt. Sellers now feel the pressure to be honest, courteous and provide value. Those who do not embrace these standards find their reputation soiled and are driven out of the marketplace.

To understand the very purpose of sales people, it is vital to realize that each of the activities that a sales person executes is done for the purpose of influencing potential customers. Influence is the foundation of selling. Information alone will rarely persuade a person to act. What moves people is not merely information, but how that information is presented. This is supported by hundreds of scientific studies that have conclusively shown that a person's perception and interpretation of a message is shaped by how that message is conveyed. In fact, the necessity of relational influence is the very reason why sales people are needed. If information alone could inspire a positive buying decision then sales people would be unnecessary.

Why Everyone Is Now in Sales

However, in today's economic climate, sales is not the only profession that is spending much of its time influencing others. The new reality is that everyone else is as well. In the workplace, regardless of occupation, people are constantly attempting to influence others. In fact, surveys that analyze how those

in non-sales professions spend their time at work find that over 1/3 of their time is spent persuading. For instance, if you reflect on your last few social interactions at work you will realize that you are continuously putting forth ideas that you want others to comply with. It does not matter whether you are attempting to resolve a conflict between co-workers, convince a colleague why one course of action is better than another or persuade your boss to give you a raise, you are constantly attempting to influence others. The fact that influence is so prevalent in work prompted Temple University's Dr. Herbert W. Simons to write that the professions of "politics, law, social work, counseling, business management, advertising, sales, public relations, the ministry – might as well be called persuasion professions."²

Even business leaders have been forced to adopt leadership strategies that are focused on amplifying positive influence. Dr. Robert Cialdini addresses this when he confirms that "playing the 'Because I'm the boss' card is out. Even if it weren't demeaning and demoralizing for all concerned, it would be out of place in a world where cross-functional teams, joint ventures, and intercompany partnerships have blurred the lines of authority. In such an environment, persuasion skills exert far greater influence over others' behavior than formal power structures do."³

Furthermore, one's ability to influence others in the workplace has been proven to determine the level of professional achievement one will reach. Influence is what guides others to take an idea seriously and act upon it. Hillary Chura wrote about this in one of her *New York Times* articles where she cites numerous examples of how success in business comes down to one's competence in influencing others.⁴ Neuroscientist Gregory Berns aptly summarized this idea when he acknowledged, "A person can have the greatest idea in the world – completely different and novel – but if that person can't convince enough other people, it doesn't matter."⁵

Influence Is an Economic Necessity

One of the primary reasons that influence is now an economic necessity is due to the fact that there has been a radical shift in the basic underpinnings of the economy. At one time, the economy was labor-based. In 1925, nearly 40% of the workforce in the United States was involved in the physical manufacturing of a product.⁶ This type of labor was what sustained economic growth. However, the economy has transitioned from labor-based to knowledge-based. Today, the majority of the workforce in the United States are considered knowledge workers. Knowledge is the fuel that keeps the modern economic engine running. The reality of the current knowledge-based economy can be clearly seen by the fact that innovation is the driving force in the marketplace. Specialized knowledge has become a meaningful competitive advantage and workers are forced to continually acquire new knowledge to remain competitive. Certain levels of education have also become a business requirement and economists confirm that there is now "degree inflation," where the educational prerequisites for even entry level jobs continues to rise.⁷ Renowned management expert Peter Drucker aptly summarized the philosophy of the knowledge-based economy when he affirmed, "Knowledge is the primary resource for individuals and the economy overall. Land, labor and capital – the economist traditional factors of production

– do not disappear, but they become secondary. They can be obtained, and obtained easily provided there is specialized knowledge.”⁸

Though knowledge is the essence of the modern economy, it is also apparent that possessing knowledge is not enough. The way that value is transmitted in today’s economy is through guiding others in responding to knowledge. This is why influence is essential. To be successful in a knowledge based economy, one must have both knowledge and the ability to influence others to listen and respond to this knowledge. As renowned social psychologist Daniel Goleman stated, “No matter how intellectually brilliant we may be, that brilliance will fail to shine if we are not persuasive.”⁹

The obligation to persuasively disburse knowledge does not only fall upon the shoulders of sales people. Now everyone in an organization must effectively communicate the knowledge they possess. This involves both the internal sharing of knowledge between those within an organization and the sharing of knowledge with customers and potential customers. The new reality is that in the knowledge-based, hyper-competitive economy that we are currently experiencing, for an organization to thrive, everyone who belongs to the organization must persuasively promote ideas that provide value.

The debate over whether or not everyone is in sales is no longer valid. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that adopting the belief that every employee is in sales is a business imperative. Now, the relevant question is, “Are you skilled at influencing others?” Your ability to influence others will determine your level of professional success and impact the quality of your life. Therefore, it demands your attention.

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.

Notes

1. C. Brett Lockard and Michael Wolf. “Occupational Employment Projections to 2020.” *Monthly Labor Review*, 135, no. 1, January, 2012. p. 89.
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3. Robert B. Cialdini. “Harnessing the Science of Persuasion.” *Harvard Business Review*, October, 2001.
4. Hillary Chura. “Um, Uh, Like Call in the Speech Coach.” *New York Times*, January 11, 2007.

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9. Daniel Goleman. *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. (New York: Bantam Books, 2006). p. 173.