



THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

MONTHLY LETTER

HEAD OFFICE, MONTREAL, JULY, 1952

CONSTRUCTIVE SALESMANSHIP

SALESMANSHIP deserves a high place in public esteem. It is the salesman who keeps the factory wheels turning, and all of us are salesmen of something or other.

Salesmanship calls for certain qualities which combine to make the sales effort constructive. Insofar as it is constructive, selling tends to be efficient.

These qualities have no definite number. Indeed, it is unlikely that any two sales managers in a hundred would list precisely the same characteristics they seek in their salesmen, and everyone knows how salesmen themselves disagree about the attributes of a good salesman. But there are basic qualities which it is good to keep in mind.

Salesmanship, which some describe as the art of persuasion, is as ancient as speech itself. Not everyone is a professional salesman, but all of us who come in contact with other people are engaged in selling. It might almost be said that the man living alone on a desert island sells too: he talks or thinks himself into doing things he believes will be for his lonely welfare.

Examples of selling which are not ordinarily classified as salesmanship are: the lawyer who pleads his case in court, the writer who presents a social cause, the politician seeking votes, the clergyman who delivers an exhortation to his congregation: all these are practising the principles of selling. It is paradoxical that even those who for political purposes run down the free enterprise system are using the techniques of salesmanship in promoting their viewpoint.

The presidents of many great corporations and financial institutions owe their positions primarily to their ability as salesmen, although many of them have never been actually engaged in selling goods.

The Need for Selling

Selling is not merely a device for increasing one company's sales over another: it is a contribution of great magnitude in maintaining our standard of living. A recent article in *Fortune* remarked that not even the

most enthusiastic exponent of the art would claim that selling can turn depression into boom, but it plays a preventive role.

One major purpose in business today is to develop markets big enough to keep the bulk of our labour force profitably employed. The progress in technology and production has posed a significant problem. Selling must match large-scale production with effective markets.

A broad statement, which nevertheless fits the facts as economists know them, is made by Percy W. Ward in *Make Selling Your Career*. He says: "Most of the amenities of modern life are ours because of salesmanship. Everything that goes into the building and upkeep of the home and the conduct of modern business is possible because, somewhere in the process, salesmanship has played its part."

Some persons profess to believe in some future wherein salesmen will not be needed, because buying will have reached a saturation point. But human wants will never be satisfied, and there are always new devices being made to create new wants.

Not so long ago we took it for granted that inventors lived lives of penury and ended up as charitable cases. It took many years for the product of an inventor's thought to reach the people who could use it with advantage. Today's salesman takes care of that: he introduces the article, and in a few months or a year he has helped to build up a flourishing industry around the inventor's thought.

Creative selling of that sort is taken for granted as part of our economic system. It is followed by service selling which brings repeat orders and keeps the purchaser satisfied.

To put it in an elementary way, any reduction in selling activity would inevitably result in fewer orders, in consequent lower production and in unemployment.

Selling includes all activities connected with the transfer of goods or services for a price. In his massive Handbook on marketing, Dr. Paul H. Nystrom

draws a distinction between "selling" and "salesmanship". Some selling, he says, requires no salesmanship. "Salesmanship is the skill or art of presentation of goods so as to convert neutral or even negative attitudes towards them into positive wants or demand. Salesmanship," says Nystrom pungently, "is the plus factor in selling that induces more transactions and produces more sales than would otherwise occur."

A Salesman's Qualities

In addition to knowing his product, the salesman of goods or services is faced with the problem of learning how to sell his information in such a way that the prospect will want to buy.

The moral qualities needed in selling are the qualities of any good citizen, qualities which are shortly and completely covered by the Golden Rule. Sincerity is necessary — sincerity which means honesty of mind or intention. Unless a salesman has won the customer's confidence he has not made a complete sale. He has not gained prestige for his company, or honour for himself.

A salesman must have high confidence in his goods and in his company. He needs unbounded patience, based upon good knowledge of human nature. His skill in working with people so as to gain their merited confidence, leading them to agree to his proposals, must be of a high order.

The salesman who wins pre-eminence in his business is one who puts his heart into his work. He analyses every prospective customer to determine his needs, and this preliminary work is evidence of a frank effort to help solve the customer's problems. He takes stock of himself, every once in a while, to find ways in which he can improve his selling methods, his understanding of human qualities, and his service to people.

The good salesman knows that he will be very unhappy if he sells something the customer cannot use to advantage. He knows that his peace of mind and his pride in his job require strong, positive business qualities.

Enthusiasm is needed. It gives the salesman's effort a vital quality, makes him optimistic and forceful, and by creating a bond of sympathy between buyer and salesman it changes prospects' apathy to interest. Customers usually prefer to do business with a salesman who is enthusiastic about his product and his firm, because the salesman's loyalty gives the customer confidence in both product and company.

Personality, so much lauded as an asset of salesmen, is not a uniform put on for the occasion of calls on prospects. It is made up of all the qualities heretofore mentioned and many others arising out of mentality, education, beliefs and experience.

Mere geniality will not do as a substitute for personality. The smile with which a prospect is greeted needs to spring from knowledge of the service the

salesman is in a position to give, confidence in his integrity, and a feeling of happiness that he is meeting the prospect with these in his mind.

Salesmanship demands study as well as experience. The study educates, while experience puts lessons to the test. Ambitious salesmen will read widely, not only in business and technical literature, but in cultural subjects — economics, philosophy, biography and travel, among others. It pays to be well-primed on topics of general significance which prospects will likely take pleasure in discussing.

Knowing Your Product

Among the many qualifications of a well-rounded salesman the most important is knowledge of his goods. And he needs to know in terms of interest of the man who is going to use them.

The more the salesman knows about what he is selling, the better he can shape his sales story. The more the salesman can show his acquaintanceship with the qualities and uses of his goods, the greater will be the confidence of the customer in giving an order. The customer cannot be expected to respect a salesman who has not enough respect for himself to become acquainted with the products he sells.

An ambitious salesman will wish to know more than anyone else about the articles he sells, because he knows that, when he becomes an authority on their make-up and their use, his value to his company merits recognition. The salesman who can give ten good, sound reasons why his product should be purchased is in much better selling position than he who has only five reasons. But his ten reasons must be founded on facts which he knows, so that his confidence becomes infective.

This sort of knowledge does not come from scanning catalogues, manuals or fly-sheets. It demands analysis: what is the article made of? what will it do? what are its particular strengths and weaknesses? how long will it last? can parts be replaced readily? what are the features which make the best selling arguments for this article? is it as good as the best in its field?

This analysis demands more than knowledge of his own article: it means knowledge of competing articles of a similar nature, so that the salesman can make clear why his particular article should appeal to this particular prospect. Perhaps the customer does not know, precisely, as much as he might about what he requires. The salesman who can enlighten him will be welcomed.

What is the Appeal?

There are many things that may serve as the basis of a selling talk. The clever salesman is the one who can light unerringly upon the one best suited to his prospect of the moment.

The customer's interests must be paramount in selecting selling points. From the very beginning, the salesman should be thinking "you" and not "I" or "my company."

He who relies upon argument is leaning on a weak reed. Persuasion is what wins sales. It is easy to win an argument and lose a sale. It is the part of the good salesman to persuade toward a sale and win a customer.

Persuasion is based, among other things, on knowledge of what makes men tick. It requires acquaintanceship with human instincts, which are still, in spite of our advancement in culture, powerful in provoking us to action.

Persuasion may be exercised in words or in direct appeal to one of the buyer's senses. It avoids, courteously, a head-on collision about some doubtful point. It doesn't talk down to the prospect, but keeps itself on the informative plane.

Persuasion means knowing the answers in advance. The salesman will try to anticipate every objection, and be ready with a persuasive reply. Sometimes it may be wise not to wait for an anticipated objection, but to work the answer smoothly into your conversation. Once let a man express his objection or criticism and you have a most difficult task to persuade him to abandon his position.

When your customer feels in his heart that you are genuinely interested in him, and want to help him understandingly, you have progressed a long way toward a sale. He feels important, because you have taken the trouble to study him and his needs. William James, the great psychologist, wrote: "The deepest need in human nature is the craving to be appreciated".

Why Do People Buy?

More sales can be made by the salesman who investigates carefully the reasons why buyers enter the market. Sometimes the prospect does not even know that he wants what the salesman has to sell; at other times he is wavering between wanting and not wanting.

Usually, buying is set in motion by one of these desires: gain, utility, prestige, pleasure. If the product promises to give a new benefit, or to protect a benefit the prospect already has, then the product has high appeal. There still remains the task of enabling the prospect to decide that there is a strong logical reason for his purchase, and that your product will satisfy his desire in a better way than others would.

These convictions must be presented by the salesman in a way to be understood, and the salesman must have put his finger on the compelling motive or much of his sales talk will be wasted or harmful.

A story is told on this point by Robert E. Moore in his book published last year: *The Human Side of Selling*. A salesman was trying to sell a stove to an elderly lady. He described the construction features at great length, talked about B.T.U's, thermostats and automatic damper control. Then the customer interrupted him with this wonderfully human question: "Tell me, mister, will it keep an old lady warm?"

From a long list of selling points, it may be difficult to select those that will best sell a product. It is here that the salesman has the opportunity to use his knowledge of human nature and his intelligent application of what he has learned about his goods. The selection needs to be made anew for each prospect, on the basis of the salesman's observation and his summing up of the prospect's interests at the moment.

The art of creative salesmanship consists largely in showing people how certain goods may satisfy wants. He is a wise salesman who can discern with some degree of accuracy what rates highest in the prospect's mind, and then show how the product or service meets that requirement. When there is a meeting of the mind of the buyer with that of the seller, a sale results.

This is a programme for salesmen which demands hard work and straight thinking. Constructive selling is not the easiest of jobs. The solution of its problems calls for perseverance and courage and initiative and imagination. It is a programme, too, which requires planning. Many otherwise well qualified salesmen are being kept from advancement to more important positions chiefly because they shun system and defy orderliness in the way they go about their work.

On Sales Presentation

The salesman who does not think and plan ahead approaches his sales presentation at a disadvantage. He may be stopped at once by an outright adverse decision to which he has no adequate response, or by failing to look ahead he may lose the sale before making an opportunity to demonstrate the product.

Everything else in selling is either preparation for or follow-up of the sales presentation. Dr. Nystrom says in his *Marketing Handbook* that there are eight steps in creative selling: the pre-approach, finding the real buyer, making appointments, opening the presentation, arousing buyer interest, establishing favourable reactions, meeting and overcoming objections, closing the sale.

Whatever qualities there are in goods offered for sale, they need to be reduced to terms of presentation. The qualities of the goods may be obvious, but the salesman must be able to draw attention to them in dramatic and favourable terms. His presentation should be clear, adequate and convincing.

Many sales executives believe that the first ten words of the presentation are the most important: they are to the presentation what the headline is to a newspaper report. Two of those ten words might well be "you" and "your." The salesman is there to say what the prospect will like to hear, and not what the salesman wants to say.

It is widely accepted that a demonstration should be worked into the presentation whenever the nature of the commodity permits. It usually displays the attractive physical qualities of the product, or the ease and effectiveness of use.

Words are often not so influential as a simple demonstration, particularly when it is possible to develop activity by the prospect. An invitation to test a sample, to note the purity of tone of an instrument, to handle and examine, and to operate: such an invitation rivets the prospect's attention, gives him a feeling of participation, and offers him the chance to show his knowledge.

There is this limitation to be observed: it is unwise to invite the prospect to operate a machine unless the salesman is sure that he is expert enough or adept enough to do the thing well. And there is this qualification needed in the salesman: he should use the equipment to illustrate his sales presentation, and not his talk to explain the equipment.

Important as is the zeal to talk and demonstrate during the presentation, a salesman must learn how and when to keep silent. Many a prospect will sell himself if he is left alone to think things through in his own way. He may even take pleasure in doing so, but will resent any evidence of sales pressure.

Sales presentations all lead up to the point where the salesman sees the customer sign on a dotted line. The only sales that pay are sales that are closed.

Experts in merchandising like Dr. Nystrom believe that the closing begins at the opening of the presentation. The sole aim of the interview is to get the prospect to buy. At what stage that decision should be reached taxes the best understanding of the salesman. This moment may be at hand at the beginning of the sales presentation, or it may occur before the salesman is half way through his standard talk. It may be missed by an undiscerning man who is intent on telling his whole story as laid down in the manual, or the opportunity may be lost if the salesman does not interpret aright certain little signs given by the prospect's questions.

When the closing argument is being worked up to, the salesman's effort should be to introduce into the prospect's mind some picture of himself as the central figure together with the commodity being sold: enjoying it, using it, or being admired for it.

About Avoiding Routine

Creative salesmanship doesn't recognize as salesmen those who spread out, in cafeteria style, what they have to sell, and wait for the customer to decide whether he can use it, how much and when, and give them an order.

Others use the standard form of sales presentation, without deviation. The prepared and tested presentation is useful to the beginning salesman. It provides him with a track on which to run till he sets up his own communications. It is useful, too, on days when, in spite of all his efforts, a salesman can't seem to be original. But as it is sometimes used the set talk sounds very like a schoolboy's rehearsal of a part in a play, something without spontaneity and conviction. The good salesman will modify and add to his standard

talk in keeping with the need of tying his proposition closely to the prospect's interests.

Selling, whether by the representative of a great industrial concern or by a store clerk, is what the individual makes it. The salesman or saleswoman in even the most humble behind-the-counter position can add interest to life by applying, within the limits of the job, the principles that have been mentioned as good for the most exalted salesman: sincerity, courtesy, knowledge, and giving timely thought and advice to customers. They can turn routine wrapping of merchandise into an exciting adventure, good for both them and for their stores.

A Good Policy

Constructive salesmanship recognizes that there must be at least two beneficiaries to every sale: the buyer and the seller. It is not ethical, by today's selling code, to sell a person anything that he cannot use to advantage, any more than it would be to sell goods under false pretense as to their quality.

The average customer is not an expert in the thing he is buying. He doesn't know nearly as much about it as the salesman does. This lays upon the salesman an obligation to protect the customer, and to give him, if possible, something better than he would, according to the strict letter of the contract, expect to receive.

Salesmen, sales managers and firms which pursue such a policy will find that they are making their businesses financially better.

The success of a business, in all but a small proportion of cases, is based upon repeat sales. These depend mainly upon these points: the honest value (*plus* value if possible) given in the original sale; the sincerity of the salesman in thinking of the customer's interests; the integrity of the firm in seeing that the salesman's promises and pledges are lived up to; and the follow-through to make sure that best use is being made of the goods.

The perfect sale is never finished; the end of one sale is the beginning of another.

To quote John G. Jones, from his Alexander Hamilton Institute textbook *Salesmanship and Sales Management*: "The truly honest salesman gives his house the best that is in him, tells nothing but the truth about his goods, never oversells, and can go over his territory again and again, gathering an increasing host of friends for himself and his concern on each trip."

Mr. Jones tells a story about a mild, gray-haired man who was after a large machinery order. He said, very early in his interview with the company's president: "I'm not much of a salesman; you see, I have been on the buying end nearly all my life, and I find myself constantly taking the buyer's point of view." It was not until he had walked out with the order in his pocket, after making the little speech which sums up admirably the principles of constructive selling, that those who had heard him realized just how good a salesman he really was.