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A T R A C O M G R O U P W H I T E P A P E R

SOCIAL STYLE[®] and Selling Beyond the Product[™]

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OVERVIEW

Reacting to a customer's stated and pre-defined needs rarely adds value or enables the seller to build a meaningful, "trusted advisor" type of relationship with decision makers. Responding to requests like this is demand fulfillment, not demand creation. Selling Beyond the Product[™] is a model that helps sales people be more successful by giving them the knowledge they need to become credible advisors who inspire customers to think beyond their initial needs, and who create demand for their products and services rather than accepting the status quo, or even worse, losing business to their competitors. SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility enhance the effectiveness of this process by highlighting the importance of customers' and salespeople's unique work Styles.

SOCIAL STYLE Connections

SOCIAL STYLE is the world's most effective interpersonal skills model. The *Connections* Whitepaper Series looks at how SOCIAL STYLE complements and supports other popular workplace programs including SPIN Selling, Situational Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Crucial Conversations and The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.

Selling Beyond the Product[™] is a product of Jack B. Keenan, Inc. To learn more about the *Selling Beyond the Product[™]* Workshop please visit <http://www.jackbkeenan.com/>

A Sea Change in Selling

One of the most pervasive changes of the last decade or so is the move towards selling impact and value, and away from the most common sales approach still in use — product-based selling — which pushes features, functionality, and benefits, usually in a generic manner. With product-based selling, the sales team operates as transporters — carrying marketing messages and product features/benefits information out to the customer, who they hope will decide to purchase the product once they understand these features and compare them to the alternatives.

So, what has led to this change? In short, the internet and other technology platforms. Customers can now acquire information quickly and easily. By the time of the first meeting, the customers often know more about the company and its products than what the salesperson could have ever anticipated.

On average, customers progress nearly 60% of the way through the purchase decision-making process before engaging a sales rep.¹ The implication is that the value of the smart, eager, responsive, order-taking salesperson playing the traditional basic information provider role is diminishing rapidly. Or in some markets, is likely already gone. What is emerging — or perhaps re-emerging — is the value-adding role of the salesperson who understands the customer in ways different than the customer understands themselves, and who can use that insight to deliver value to the customer and generate demand for products and services.

Research by the Sales Executive Council confirms this. They found a 50% reduction in the amount of time for “small talk” that buyers are willing to spend with salespeople. Further research by Forrester Research shows that the majority of decisions are now won or lost based on who helped define the problem. In fact, 65% of executives said they give preference to the seller who sets the buying vision versus talking about product. Furthermore, only 36% of executives felt sales meetings lived up to their expectations and a mere 21% felt the salesperson was focused on their business objectives.²

65% of decisions
based on who
helped establish
the need

Only 35% based
on features and
functionality
superiority



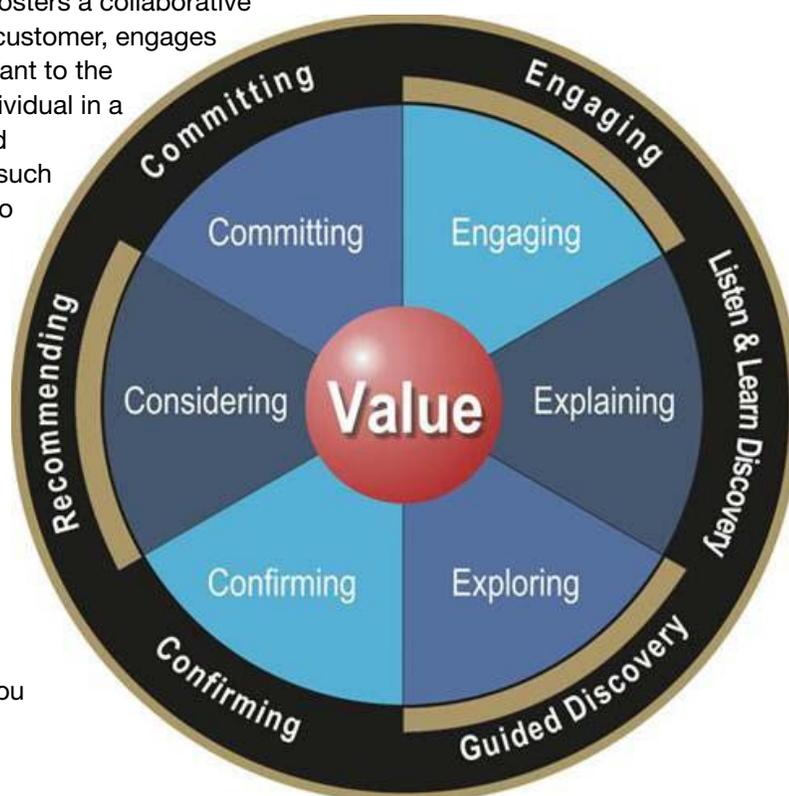
Selling Beyond the Product Overview

Selling value beyond the product can mean different things to different people, but always equates to demand generation. There is a plethora of descriptive terms for this – value selling, consultative selling, solutions selling, socratic selling, challenger selling, strategic selling, and so on. Each approach is an attempt to replace the simple fulfillment of customer demand with a set of skills, processes and disciplines needed for the sales team to become a value-added transformation function – to add value to both the customer and the company by transforming the customer’s view of themselves and their situation, creating demand by the way they do business.

This sales process requires engaging both with the right people and with the right problems and areas of potential. The more credible and trusted the salesperson, the more readily customers will share information, including more closely held information. The insights that this information can provide is an important source of competitive advantage that is above and beyond your product offering or solution.

Selling Beyond the Product utilizes a six-stage process of Engaging, Listen and Learn Discovery, Guided Discovery, Confirming, Recommending and Committing.

Engaging: The purpose of Engaging is to build credibility and trust in you and your ability to rapidly add value to the customer and their challenges. This involves setting the tone and direction of meetings in a way that fosters a collaborative conversation between you and the customer, engages with the issues that are most important to the customer, and engages with the individual in a way that increases their comfort and confidence in you. In order to build such engagement, a salesperson needs to demonstrate credibility, insight and expertise in one or more of four domains: technical/ operational, business, political, and personal. Central to this is your ability to rapidly demonstrate in the first substantive conversation that you are not the “typical” sales person, that you have some understanding of and insight into their plans and priorities as a business, their current challenges, and their potential concerns about you, your company, your solutions and how you do business.



Selling Beyond the Product Overview – cont.

Discovery (Listen & Learn/Guided): Discovery encompasses two elements: Listen and Learn Discovery, and Guided Discovery. The purpose is to thoroughly understand the customer's situation and needs from his or her perspective. This includes determining whether the customer's problem or opportunity is compelling enough to justify making a change, and developing a clear understanding of the technical/operational, business, personal and political nuances affecting the customer's decisions. The salesperson also needs to raise visibility of issues the customer may not have fully considered and help the customer explore the value of those issues. This is accomplished through "deep discovery:" Listening carefully and going deeper by asking questions based on the customer's answers, and recognizing and leveraging clues for important insights.

Confirming: The third phase of the cycle is Confirming. The purpose of Confirming is to ensure that you and the customer have a shared understanding of the customer's situation and needs before you propose a solution, to tell the customer's story from their perspective, and to lay the foundation for your recommendation. Key skills in this phase are summarizing the customer's reality – their situation, consequences and obstacles — and the customer's vision – their preferences and expected results.

Recommending: Once you Confirm, you can then make a Recommendation. Here, as a salesperson, you would describe your solution within the customer's context and show the customer a clear path to solving their problem and achieving their expected results. You would position yourself, your company and your solution as the best alternative for a specific customer situation. Accomplishing this requires describing your approach or solution using evidence, and educating the customer about alternatives.

Committing: Finally, the process moves to Committing. The purpose of Committing is to ensure a comfortable and efficient transition from the customer's consideration of your recommendation to a commitment to take action and move onto implementation. This is accomplished through skillfully reducing tension between you and the customer when the customer raises a concern or objection, uncovering the customer's underlying concerns, and jointly developing a path to a solution.



"SiriusDecisions estimates that the buyer's journey is 70% complete by the time a sales person is contacted."

– Eloqua's Grande Guide to Sales Enablement

How SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility Enhance the Process

Selling Beyond the Product works because it adds value to the sales equation; salespeople become transformative consultants who partner with customers to not only solve problems but to help them see issues in a new way. The critical first phase to this process is Engaging: Salespeople need to be seen as credible and trustworthy. However, customers of different SOCIAL STYLEs have different criteria for determining whether someone is credible and trustworthy. Therefore it is critical that salespeople use Versatility to tailor their approaches to customers' Styles.

For instance, Driving and Amiable Style individuals have very different preferences for interacting with salespeople, and the salesperson's ability to understand and meet these preferences will determine whether she is seen as credible and trustworthy. If the salesperson does not establish credibility early in the relationship, she will not succeed in implementing the full sales process. Examples of how a salesperson should engage during meetings with these Styles are shown below.

Driving Style:

- Plan for less time than allotted
- Be prepared to move rapidly to the bottom line of the meeting
- Use "what results" as a key question
- Know exactly what you want the person to do after the meeting
- Proactively demonstrate an understanding of bottom-line issues
- Single page handouts, if any
- Have backup data available, but lead with conclusions and results
- Conclude with actionable follow-up to ensure return access



Amiable Style:

- Be prepared to spend some time getting to know each other — prepare for the time
- Use "why you" as a key question
- Explain how you got to this meeting — who introduced you
- Proactively demonstrate an appreciation of people issues
- Offer to provide detailed support documentation later
- Present your information verbally; offer to follow up with support and detailed information
- Be seen as a friendly, reasonable resource to simplify and ensure stability and harmony



How SOCIAL STYLE & Versatility Enhance the Process – cont.

As you can see, the strategies for engaging with these two customers are dramatically different. A salesperson who uses a “one-size-fits-all” strategy for interacting with customers will not meet the needs of either customer. An even worse strategy for a salesperson would be to focus on her own Style preferences, without any insight into the customer’s Style. By showing Versatility and adapting the approach to the specific Style of the customer, the salesperson is engaging the person in such a way that will lead to credibility and trust.

Focusing on the customer’s Style does not stop after Engagement. It is important to recognize Style preferences throughout the sales process. For example, during the Discovery phase the salesperson needs to thoroughly understand the customer’s situation and needs from his or her perspective. Again, awareness of the customer’s Style is critical. In this example, we look at the other two Styles, Expressive and Analytical, and strategies for how a salesperson should interact with them.

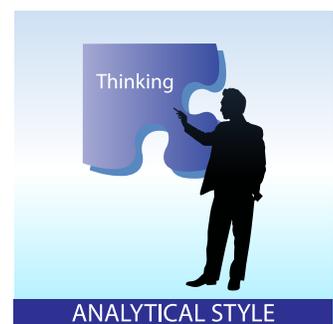
Expressive Style:

- Prepare expansive questions focused on the big picture– avoid over-use of short, fact-oriented, specific questions
- Focus your discovery on them personally – their perspectives, opinions, desires, perceptions
- Use curiosity questions to direct the discussion; let them elaborate
- Demonstrate understanding with non-verbal cues and active listening
- Justify your discovery process with reference to who should be involved
- Ask directly about personal dreams, plans, and ambitions for their career



Analytical Style:

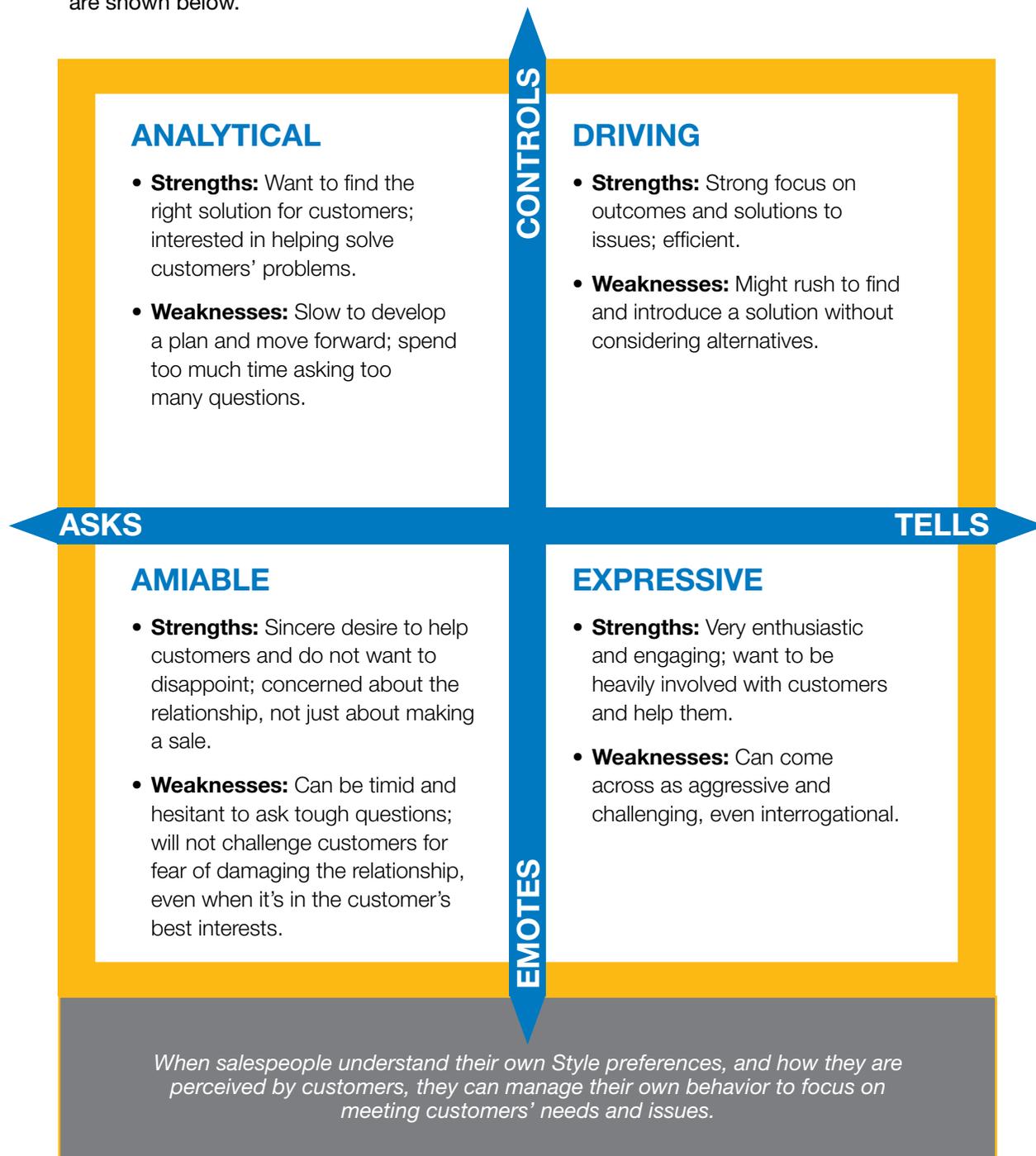
- Prepare detailed, logical, and specific questions — avoid over-use of broad, umbrella questions
- Ask questions about their opinions on the facts
- Use Guided Discovery to focus them on risks of the status quo and competitive alternatives
- Demonstrate understanding with clarifying questions
- Justify your discovery process with the need for accurate and comprehensive information
- Ask for access to more specific information for deeper discovery



Once again, the differences in these two Styles’ preferences are great, and it is imperative to recognize and respond to these differences. Recognizing and responding to Style differences is important throughout the Selling Beyond the Product process.

The Salesperson's Style

So far we've pointed out the importance of recognizing and adapting to the customer's Style. This is critical, but salespeople can be even more effective by understanding their own Styles and how they are perceived by customers. Each Style has strengths and weaknesses, and it is important to be aware of these when working with customers. A few examples for each Style are shown below.



Summary

The days of salespeople operating as order-takers and fulfillers of customer requests are over. Customers now expect salespeople to operate as sophisticated consultants, and even challengers, who partner with them to help them solve problems and identify opportunities. Selling Beyond the Product is a model that recognizes the new role of salespeople and helps them achieve critical insights and breakthroughs with customers. Central to this process is recognizing the unique SOCIAL STYLE of each customer and showing Versatility in order to build credibility and trust. By understanding each customer's preferred way of working and making decisions, salespeople can significantly enhance their effectiveness when practicing the Selling Beyond the Product strategy.





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Founder of Jack B. Keenan, Inc., Jack B. Keenan, Ph.D., offers 30 years of training and development psychology leadership knowledge. Since 1984, Jack and his team have worked with leading training and development organizations such as Executive Conversation, Wilson Learning Worldwide, The TRACOM Group, among others. Jack's interests and expertise are in helping individuals and organizations learn how to learn in developing the skills, processes, and tools for better managing themselves and the business in ever-changing, high velocity business environments. He has a particular interest in the study of the behavior of experts, as a model for skills development. Jack received his B.A. degree in Psychology from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and both his M.A. and his Ph.D. in Psychology from West Virginia University, specializing in Instructional Design and Organizational Development.

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Casey Mulqueen oversees the research and development of TRACOM's various assessment instruments and products. He has experience developing a wide variety of assessments such as personality inventories, 360-degree feedback programs, performance appraisal systems, and employee engagement programs. His expertise in cross-cultural assessment and norming has helped ensure that TRACOM's global surveys are valid and reliable throughout the world. He is a writer who has authored a variety of materials including books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Casey has an M.S. in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology.



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References

- ¹ Corporate Executive Board's whitepaper: The Digital evolution in B2B Marketing <http://www.executiveboard.com/exbd-resources/content/digital-evolution/pdf/Digital-Evolution-in-B2B-Marketing.pdf>. *(To understand the scope of this issue in the B2B context, CEB's Marketing Leadership Council (MLC) surveyed more than 1,500 customer contacts (decision makers and influencers in a recent major business purchase) for 22 large B2B organizations (spanning all major NAICS categories and 10 industries). In a striking finding, the survey revealed that the average customer had completed more than one-half of the purchase decision-making process prior to engaging a supplier sales rep directly. At the upper limit, that number ran as high as 70%.)*
- ² Norbert Kriebel, Principal Analyst, Forrester Research. Webinar: [Conquering the Great Divide Between Sellers and Buyers](#), February 12, 2013

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