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Be Undeniably Good

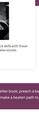
Vintage

Sharpen your comeback skills with these 150-year-old sales stories

Must Read

Does Training Make Your Sales Bulbs Glow?

Focus



Digital Body Language: How to Build Trust and Connection, No Matter the Distance by Erica Dhawan

Ravi's Corner

The Seer

A man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mousetrap than his neighbour, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Vintage

Sharpen your comeback skills with these 150-year-old sales stories

The history of selling, shows that over centuries, sales has always emerged stronger from a crisis. A lot has changed in sales, over time. Yet the core of selling has remained the same adapting to changes in the way trade and commerce take place.

Want proof? Please step on the time machine and let's go back 150 years. This was USA of the 1870s, still recovering from a costly Civil War. And University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School research paper quaintly titled, **'Art of the Canvasser'** takes over the story from **here**

1) Need to renew and learn afresh

Sales hadn't got a professional name as yet. The 1860 Census said USA had 53,500 "hucksters and peddlers." - 10,000 men and 2,500 women (who, by the way, were major/dominant buyers). There was also an abundance of selling jargon - small, inexpensive, and easily manufactured items, like books, atlases, and lightning rod. "Itinerant salesmen from other industries" says the paper "joined these petty goods sellers on the road. Manufacturers of more expensive items, such as weighing scales, sewing machines, and harvesting equipment, had begun to deploy canvassers by the mid-nineteenth century." All had to perfect their techniques. "The canvasser's first efforts must...be directed toward the arrival at that point in time and place, which is the happiest combination of all hours to renew and perfect many of the familiar sales tools and techniques."

2) Time for mastering the new 'customs of human interaction'

The paper points out "Selling was also about the ability to navigate a series of intricate rituals, a sales code of human conduct and behavior and customs of politeness and courtesy. Canvassers had to master and exploit, common customs of human interaction that were part of the contemporary culture." With the pandemic rewriting how people interact and do business, it is time to go back 150 years and master once more, the new 'customs of human interaction'.

3) Lessons on Assertive Selling, Price Presentation and Objection Handling

In 1875, an Ebenezer Hannaford, author of books on Spanish American wars, published a manual (ominously titled Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instructions. Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class. The manual offered old-building ideas that can come off very basic on sales published today. "The key to a good canvass, the manual suggested, was to maintain control. Canvassers...language itself was not to be left to chance. Instead, they should 'commit to memory' and 'study out the assertive selling tone' of a contemporary sales training manual."

The manual's ideas on price selling also haven't changed in over a century. "NEVER mention the price until you have done your best in showing the Prospectus" it suggested to the salesperson selling books "If previously asked, pleasantly evade the question, (or still better, ignore it). Say something like, "Well, most books, you know, of this size and finish sell at $ - to $ - but we don't sell like any such price as that." We would call that a "still later" strategy of price presentation, a lesson salespeople have to learn over and over.

Canvassers were also handling a one more skill that has hardly changed in character. "If the prospect offered any objection during the sales pitch, the manual contained ready answers. The agent was usually advised to handle these complaints by agreeing with the prospect--by stating that the prospect had made a valid observation--but then turning it to advantage. It was not useful to argue with the prospect or to be too eager to dismiss a complaint"

4) Selling doesn't 'affect' how 19th Century sales

The Wharton paper shows a light on how sales scripts of the 1800s, recognized that farmers, and other prospects, were particularly concerned with preserving their property and their status quo. It was a time when dependability, both social and economic, was of much times, the fear of loss seemed to have a stronger appeal than the promise of riches. But that's an insight every present-day sales professional can use in selling. Another advancement effort by salespeople in the nineteenth economics, it refers to the 'economics of over' ownership'. People are generally reluctant to give up something they own already. Giving Customers a taste of owning the product experience is seen to hugely improve conversions.

5) Sales was always about persuasion

The Wharton paper notes that the sales scripts used by businesses in 1800s were heuristic-driven, written to help salesmen solve the "problem" of selling. They also prove that selling was then, as it is now. Mere memorization of answers was not enough. The writer had to have something else--something harder to define: energy, confidence, and enthusiasm. This was at the very heart of selling. Persuasion was a subtle art, and persuasive voice critical. Little has changed on this.

6) Prospecting tips, Power of Influence and Need for Social Proof

Another story is that of Henry B. Hyde, who founded Equitable Life Assurance Company in 1859 and went on to write a book Hints for Agents that had sales pitches to market almost every imaginable sales situation. The book encouraged agents to insure "all their friends, to persuade local clergymen to help insure their flocks, to see all marriages and funerals as possible sales situations" and to "cultivate the habit of always prospecting for"

"Hints" was a recurring word in late nineteenth century sales manuals, says the Wharton paper. It quotes one such manual to demonstrate the importance of influence in selling. "If you should ask the progressive steps of success in canvassing, we should have to answer with similar iteration, influence, influence! INFLUENCE! You can overcome the most obstinate, mollify the most prejudiced, and win the most indolent, if you can only bring to bear enough influence of the right kind." 19th century sales seems to have anticipated Cialdini's ideas!

One can only wish that the Wharton paper suppliers had included a section on 'Sales Lessons to Learn from 19th Century Sales'. The majority of people are afraid to trust their own unaided judgment about buying a book; but show them that Dr. A and Rev. Mr. B. or Judge C and Professor D., or Colonel E. and Squire F--have taken your word, and they will follow their example." The strategy advised was to get sales to grow from prominent townspeople, securing testimonials from them. Today's digital marketing would call it social proof

7) Deep Selling Process and Ability to Help Customer Identify Latent Needs

The Manuals of 1800s also contained a theory, called "the philosophy of canvassing," about the basic steps of selling which conceived of selling as a three-step process, that remains largely unaltered to this day: First—Gaining a Hearing; Second—Creating Desire; Third—Taking the Order. The Wharton paper says that the canvasser's ultimate goal was to "create a need or desire where the need for 'create' demand." The economy, from the perspective of fifth Century sales people, did not follow Say's Law, which states that supply creates its own demand! Clearly, sales can inspire latent needs Customers may not have recognized (See our Snippets Story)

It's renewed time once more, like it was 150 years ago.

On 1857 BSI or 13 years back – as it was soon after the Sepoy/1st of, 1918, the 1929 Great Depression, two World Wars or the financial crisis of 2008. Sales has seen and beaten them all. As Customers exited from markets after days out of the shadows of the pandemic, it's time again to sharpen skills with these 150 year-old stories, for one more comeback. Because sales is resilient and selling is Beautiful. Always.

Focus

Does Training Make Your Sales Bulbs Glow?

What makes sales training work? Frank V. Cespedes, Harvard Business School faculty and frequent contributor to Harvard Business Review on sales focused insights, addresses this all-important question, in a section he dedicates to Training and Development. In his recently published book **Sales Management that Works - How to Sell in a World that Never Stops Changing (HBR Press 2021)**

4 Questions to Check if Training is Making Your Sales Bulbs Glow

Below are 4 questions framed using key ideas from the section on Training and Development in the book. The questions can be used to check if training is making your sales bulbs glow.

1) Does the training program recognize that sales skills are learnable? – Cespedes says, the idea of a born salesperson naturally endowed with a glowing personality is a myth. Learning is a way of succeeding, is a response to the changes. Selling involves the ability to adapt to varied Customers and selling situations. Cespedes points out that learning theorists call this "active retrieval." While responding to a customer's objection is instinctive, learning involves the ability to ask a question that will reveal the customer's point, and the ability to reinforce with each iteration. This can be codified into a structure of steps or a tool or framework which is both learnable and repeatable.

2) Does it offer actionable tools and frameworks? – Many sales training programs focus on a specific methodology that is expected to work in every situation. Cespedes says, this is a mistake. Salespeople need to be trained in a variety of approaches, and to know when to apply the product, there are different Customers and therefore, different sales tools. Cespedes illustrates this with an everyday example. Talking to an existing Customer, buying again from you needs an approach different from the one needed for a new purchaser being prospected for the first time. Even within the same Customer, there are different people with a particular about innovative product features, and there is concerned about just-in-time delivery. Says Prof Cespedes "If all Customers sound the same to you, then you should probably not try to make a living as a sales. Sales Training should go beyond just the methodology and offer a bouquet of tools and frameworks that can be used by the salesperson across selling situations and Customer types

3) Does it focus on the Why? – Training must help salespeople appreciate the context in which the 'how' of sales training can be applied. This is the Why part, what to apply to which specific sales tool, says Cespedes. For example, training to 'sell to health care' is too generic, because selling to a hospital equipment will require closing complex deals, while price negotiation skills may be critical. On the other hand, salespeople in biotech, would be expected to be knowledgeable and stay up to date on new research and results of clinical trials. Also, a strictly product-focused training will not help salespeople to sell to different sales tasks and a new selling skill is needed when sales task happen.

4) Does it make room for practice, leverage feedback and reinforce learning through reflection? – Ideally, sales training should make room for "spaced repetition" and "deliberate practice". Sales can only be learnt by doing. So, trainings must include action learning devices such as role plays and scripts. According to Neuroscience, learning left unused, is forgotten after 90 days. Cespedes suggests the military concept of after-action review (AAR) to reinforce learnings from sales trainings. Case studies, on-call feedback, periodic refreshers and reinforcement are all sales learning path for 'go-forward' conversion of learnings into positive practices at work

Answering these questions can help in making the most of the resources and time invested in building sales capabilities.

Must Read

Digital Body Language: How to Build Trust and Connection, No Matter the Distance by Erica Dhawan

Some select takeaways for the sales fraternity.

(1) Texts, emails, instant messages are crucial forms of communication – Our word choices, response times, email sign-offs, and even our emoji epitaphs create impressions that can impact. We send around 30k billion emails every day, with the average person sending 30 emails daily. According to the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 3 percent of the time this "out of" emails is misinterpreted

(2) It's yes to be mindful in our screen based visual communications – These days, we don't talk the talk or even walk the talk. We get on a screen to write the talk or watch the talk. Sales calls are ultimate visual forms of communication. Our video meeting styles matter a lot. Study roughly 73 percent of all communication among teams is virtual

(3) Appreciate the differences between traditional and digitally languages – A sample of differences in communicating 3 basic responses

a) **Trust Traditional Body Language:** Keep your palms open, uncross your arms and legs, smile and nod

Digital Body Language: Use language that is direct with clear subject lines, and emails with a friendly gesture ("Text me if you need anything! Hope this helps"). Mirror the sender's use of emojis and exclamation points. Smile on screen, Modulate your voice to show earnestness.

b) **Excitement Traditional Body Language:** Speak faster, raise your voice, express yourself physically by moving your body or tapping your fingers on your desk.

Digital Body Language: Use exclamation points and capitalization; prioritize quick response times; use positive emojis (smiley faces, thumbsup, high five); Let excitement show in your voice, such as on screen expression. Raise voice and use inflexions to effect

The 4 Lines of Digital Body Language

The book sweeps across a large of canvas of completely new ideas. It starts with the Digital Elements of Style, covering what is this digital body language thing all about, suggestions to navigate power play and anxiety and tips on how to build resonance the lines. Dhawan then puts forward 4 laws of digital body language –

Value-creating – **Possible Sales application** - Appreciate)

Communicate carefully- **Possible Sales application** - Align it to needs and preferences of recipient),

Collaborate confidently (**Possible Sales application** - Use interactions you co-create solutions with Customers) and

Trust totally - **Possible Sales application** - Create psychological comfort in communication)

She wraps up the book with a brilliant contextualization of digital body language across differences of genders, generations and cultures

Takeaway quote – Brevity can be double-edged in digital communications

"Brevity from the upper echelons of power can't exactly encumber. At Morgan Stanley, there was a running joke that the more senior you were, the fewer characters you needed to express your gratitude in a text or email. You started your career with Thank you so much and after a promotion or two, Yes we can! down to Thanks. Another promotion produced Thx or even TX. One senior leader just wrote T. . . Brevity can make a person appear important, but it can also make them appear curt. Digital shorthand might mean that the recipient has to spend time deciphering what it means, which causes delays and potentially leads to costly mistakes"

Author Bio: Erica Dhawan is an acknowledged authority on the subject of Collaboration and Connectional Intelligence. She is the founder and CEO of Cotential that helps companies and managers leverage 21st century collaboration skills and behaviours. She has degrees from Harvard University, MIT Sloan and the Wharton School.

Ravi's Corner

The Seer

On the bank of a gentle river,
Under a banyan tree,
The Seer and I , at peace

When just like that
The questions tumbled out from me

What did Dalai Lama mean
When he said
'To be good, we must
Appreciate goodness in others'
The Seer said,
To meet is to part.

Nowe mind, if we fail
Is it to do with ,
Trusting others?
Can we be modest
About goodness?

Can something or someone bad
Change our goodness?
Can goodness be
A soothing balm in troubled times?

Does goodness influence
And persuade for a ripple effect?
Does it always win?
Can we actually be good
As much as we want to be?
Is "good success" the only one?

The Seer smiled
"Goodness Gracious Me!
Your questions are my responses
Goodness is still in demand
And shall be so tomorrow, my Child"

A cool gust of wind whispered...
...That is the truth

Quotes

1. "You should n't focus on why you can't do something, which is what most people do. But why can't you do it and be one of the exceptions" - Steve Case, co-founder of AOL.

2. "Be undeniably good. No word of mouth or marketing effort on social media can be a substitute for that." - Anthony Volodkin, founder of HyperPerfect.

3. "The way to start is to stop talking and start acting" - Walt Disney, co-founder of The Walt Disney Company.

4. "Someday" is a disease that will take your dreams to the grave. The price and cons list are just as bad. Pick what's important to you and ..... just do it and correct the course as you go." Timothy Ferris

5. "Fail often so you can be successful soon" - Tom Kelley, IDEO partner

6. "Entrepreneurship is neither science nor art, it's practice." - Peter Drucker

7. "In the modern world of business, it is useless to be a creative and original thinker unless you also set what you create" - David Ogilvy, founder of Ogilvy & Mather.

8. "Success is how high you bounce after you hit bottom" – George Patton, general of the United States Army

9. "You can say anything to people, but how you say it will determine how they react." - John Rampton, entrepreneur and investor

10. "No matter how many times you fail, you only have to be right once. Then everyone will call you a hit overnight and tell you how lucky you are." - Mark Cuban, president of AXS.TV

(This Mercuri Mail's quotes are excerpted from **Entrepreneur India**)

Snippets

Develop X Ray Vision: The Secret Formula to Uncover Customers' Needs

One day I was at the mall waiting for my wife. I had recently bought a new pair of running shoes and was thinking about returning them as I thought I'd find some time in the shoe store. As I walked in, the store associate approached me. She didn't ask how I was doing because I would have said fine. She didn't ask what brought me into the store because I would have said I was just browsing.

Instead, she asked a really smart question, she said, "Have you ever had your gait checked?" I said, "My what? What are you talking about?" Moments later, I was on a treadmill with a camera. She showed me the tape and it turns out my feet are pronated.

She said, "You know if you run that marathon with pronated feet and those sneakers, you're gonna hurt yourself." The last thing I want to do is hurt myself so I bought a $150 pair of sneakers. Her and managers leverage 21st century collaboration skills and behaviours. She has degrees from Harvard University, MIT Sloan and the Wharton School.

Great salespeople don't just ask about problems, they help you find problems that you didn't know about. So, you need to understand your product or service and the problems it solves—not the list of benefits written in marketing brochures.

(From Ali Sales Start with a Problem by Josh Braun in the book **Sales Secrets: The World's Top Salespeople Share Their Secrets to Success**)

Humour

"Did anyone else bring his thinking cap."

"Let's shrink Big Data into Small Data ... and hope it magically becomes Great Data."

Mercuri Mail is a thoughtful compilation of meaningful articles drawn from Mercuri India archives, and from timeless management literature. Edited by Jeshwanth Balasubramanian & Sridhar Srinivasan of Mercuri Goldmann (India) Pvt. Ltd. This publication is for private circulation only.

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