

# Matching Your Selling Style to the Customer's Buying Style

By Tony Alessandra, Ph.D.

Contrary to what passes for age-old wisdom, customers don't buy because they're made to understand the product or service. They buy when *they feel understood*. They buy when they get what they expect—and *more*.

But more what? That's where the salesperson's knowledge of the personality, or behavioral, styles comes in (*see sidebar*.) The savvy salesperson knows the DIRECTOR customer, for example, wants more *control*. But the SOCIALIZER cries out for more recognition and *excitement*. The RELATER wants more *support*, and the THINKER more *logic*. The most successful salespeople customize their approach and follow-through for each type.

In addition, the best salespeople also reject the traditional concept of a sale. Yesterday's selling systems won't work today because they were designed for an adversarial environment. When your customers are your partners--and you want them as *lifetime* partners--you can't sell using commando tactics.

## ***A Cooperative Triumph***

A case in point is a guy I know who started selling Toyotas in the early 1980s. He was so laid back, so people-oriented, so lacking in the customary intensity that his peers in the showroom actually made fun of him. For one thing, they thought he was off the wall with his emphasis on getting customers whatever fact they wanted, no matter how long it took or how difficult it was to get. Secondly, he absolutely refused to pressure people. "The coconut will drop from the tree when, and if, it's ready," he sometimes said. The others tittered.

But, before long, unusual things started happening in that showroom. Some of his customers began coming by just to chat and say how they were enjoying their car. New

prospects would ask for him by name because of referrals. He was named "Best Salesperson of the Month" so many times that he ran out of wall space to hold all his plaques. As his more competitive colleagues looked on in amazement, he was named sales manager of the dealership.

Then one day he was gone. Recruited by corporate headquarters to teach others about effective selling. Not bad for the guy the others used to poke fun at!

The point is the modern, collaborative salesperson helps the customer solve a problem, fill a need, or reach a goal. He or she doesn't see the sale as just a one-time event in which persuasiveness triumphs over resistance. Rather, he views it as a cooperative triumph, which paves the way for a long-term partnership.

Because today's customers are looking for just such long-term relationships, your ability to collaborate with your customers will make or break your career. So the question becomes: How can you best cement that relationship, regardless of the customer's style?

## **A Matching Process**

A sale is a matching process. You match the right product or service to your customer's needs...and your selling style with the customer's buying style. To do so, you must learn to adapt your style to that of your customer.

Of the four styles, the two most outgoing ones—the DIRECTORS and SOCIALIZERS—are often grouped together because they're both fast-paced and assertive. THINKERS and RELATERS, by contrast, are generally quieter, slower to decide, and less assertive.

But it's not quite that simple. For example, DIRECTORS and THINKERS also are alike in that they both tend to emphasize the need to accomplish tasks and get results. SOCIALIZERS and RELATERS put a higher priority on personal relationships.

So, where's that leave you as a salesperson? Well, first try to determine which type your dealing with, then adjust your *pace* and your *priority*. You'll find can get rid of much tension in

a relationship if you start by simply altering your *speed* of doing things. Then adjust if need be, your priority--that is, whether you emphasize *task or relationship*.

### ***Adjusting Pace and Priority***

If you are a DIRECTOR or SOCIALIZER salesperson, and you want to deal better with RELATER or THINKER customers or clients, remember that they make decisions more slowly and more privately. So, first, try to be more relaxed. Ask their opinions and find ways to acknowledge and incorporate their opinion in the dialogue. Follow their lead rather than try to take control.

Make it a point to listen more than you speak, and when you do speak, don't interrupt, challenge, or push the process along faster than they want it to go. Be tactful about any disagreement.

If you're a RELATER or THINKER selling to a DIRECTOR or SOCIALIZER, you need to pick up the pace. Initiate conversations, give recommendations, and avoid beating-around-the-bush. Maintain eye contact, use your firmest handshake, and speak strongly and confidently.

As for priority, if you're a RELATER or SOCIALIZER, you naturally emphasize relationships and feelings in your sales pitches. But to deal best with DIRECTORS or THINKERS, you'll want to stress more the task. So get right to it: talk about the bottom line, use lots of facts, and logic. If possible, prepare an agenda and stick to it. Keep your meeting focused and short.

Downplay your natural ebullience; DIRECTORS and THINKERS view excessive enthusiasm as "hype." They also don't like to be touched by strangers or have their physical space invaded. So don't make further physical contact—beyond a handshake—until you're sure it's likely to be well received. Dress conservatively.

Conversely, if you're a DIRECTOR or THINKER salesperson, put the relationship first when dealing with SOCIALIZERS or RELATERS. Share your feelings, and let them know who

are you. Show an interest in them: their job, family, hobbies, for example. And then use that knowledge in the future to personalize your dealings with them.

Slow down and talk more. Try to speak in a friendly, informal way. Be flexible with your time, tolerating digressions, such as stories and anecdotes.

SOCIALIZERS and RELATERS are more comfortable with closer proximity. So stand closer than you normally would. Try to use a few relaxed gestures, such as leaning back, smiling, or gently patting the customer on the back or shoulder.

The point is: *Everybody is easy to please, if you know how.*

With DIRECTORS, be efficient and competent. With SOCIALIZERS, listen and support their ideas or dreams and flatter them. With RELATERS, stress your warmth and sincerity, and for THINKERS, take care to be especially thorough and well prepared.

### ***Working Toward a Win-Win***

Treating your customers or clients the way *they* want to be treated, selling to them in the way they want to buy is a strategy that can change your life. Thousands of salespeople have successfully applied these techniques. They've experienced dramatic increases in sales as well as greater awareness of their own personal strengths and weaknesses.

What I've described may be a fundamental change in the way you've been selling. If you start paying attention to your customers' personality styles and you begin viewing sales as a collaboration, not a conquest, you may, in effect, be changing jobs. You may be changing from a person who "sells" things, who sees a sale as a one-shot event, who sees your customers merely as people who can help your career...to a person who "consults" and "solves problems" based on your knowledge of your customer's personal needs and desires.

As you work at developing a win-win solution with everyone, you'll find there's a side benefit. Not only will your business improve, but you'll also find you'll make many new friends

along the way. You'll be building lifetime loyalty to your product or service...and to yourself as well.

### **ARTICLE TAGLINE FOR DR. TONY ALESSANDRA**

Dr. Tony Alessandra has authored 13 books, recorded over 50 audio and video programs, and delivered over 2,000 keynote speeches since 1976. This article has been adapted from Dr. Alessandra's book, *The Platinum Rule* (Warner Books, 1996). If you would like more information about Dr. Alessandra's books, audio tapesets and video programs, or about Dr. Alessandra as a keynote speaker, call his office at 1-800-222-4383 or visit his Website at <http://www.platinumrule.com>