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Table of Contents

Gratitude in Buyer-Seller Relationships

Stephanie M. Mangus, PhD, Dora E. Bock, PhD, Eli Jones, PhD, and Judith Anne Garretson Folse, PhD

Emotions are contagious. They are experienced by and affect the actions of both parties in buyer-seller exchanges. As a result, one emotion in particular, gratitude, elicits perceptions of an undeserved or unearned positive personal outcome as being due to the actions of someone else, the second most common positive emotion that individuals experience. Gratitude has immense value to firms as customer gratitude is linked to increases in share of wallet, sales revenue, sales growth and customer commitment. Additionally, expressions of gratitude can be beneficial for both buyers and sellers as it creates a boost in interpersonal connection.

Previous research is relatively silent on the role of salesperson gratitude in buyer-seller relationships, focusing, instead, primarily on the benefits of customer gratitude. What is particularly unknown is whether salesperson gratitude motivates behavior that is beneficial to firms. Therefore, to fill these gaps in the sales literature, we construct and test a conceptual model centered on salesperson gratitude and study its effect in the context of buyer-seller relationships, particularly its effects on buyers (who will also be referred to as customers throughout this paper). We aim to understand how salesperson gratitude contributes to customer commitment and customer gratitude. To do so, we focus on two types of customer-directed prosocial behavior: salesperson extra-role behaviors and information sharing.

For our investigation, we define salesperson extra-role behaviors as actions that are considered favorable to customers and outside of the salesperson's role requirements. For example, salespeople may share recommendations for local restaurants or referrals to other service providers outside the scope of their role as a salesperson in order to provide additional resources to customers. We characterize salesperson information sharing as an employee disclosing knowledge related to his or her firm and position to the customer. Consistent with moral affect theory, the seminal theory in the psychology of gratitude, salesperson gratitude is characterized as a salesperson's feeling of thankfulness toward his or her customer. Similarly, customer gratitude is a customer's feeling of thankfulness toward his or her salesperson.

Our results show that salesperson gratitude impacts customer gratitude and customer commitment through the prosocial behaviors—information sharing and extra-role behaviors—

that manifest as a result of the salesperson's gratitude toward the customer. We also find a significant interaction between the length of the buyer-seller relationship and salesperson extra-role behaviors with respect to customer gratitude. This indicates that salesperson extra-role behaviors serve as a catalyst for propelling customer relationships forward and that salesperson information sharing serves as a tool to maintain the relationship over time.

Based on these findings, we recommend that salespeople become more aware of and adept at expressing gratitude by taking advantage of opportunities to foster relationships with buyers that are enhanced by expressions of gratitude. Additionally, something as simple as remembering to control facial expressions that may indicate your frustration or negativity can be very effective in managing the contagious effects of emotions. Lastly, engage in extra-role behaviors with buyers to save time and resources by accelerating relationship-building.

Our Study

We conducted a dyadic investigation by surveying the salespeople and customers of a large B2B transportation logistics firm. We offered an email survey to the firm's active customers and received 258 complete responses. Following customer surveys, salespeople were surveyed about their respective responding customer. We received 117 salespeople responses. We matched salesperson and customer data, yielding 117 buyer-seller dyads. The salesperson survey measured salesperson gratitude, salesperson information sharing, seller dependence, interaction frequency, and experience. Customer surveys measured perceptions of salesperson extra-role behaviors and salesperson information sharing, customer gratitude, customer commitment to the salesperson, and relationship length.

Our Findings

Analysis of the direct effects reveals that salesperson gratitude has a positive effect on salesperson extra-role behaviors and salesperson information sharing. While both of these salesperson prosocial behaviors were found to positively affect customer gratitude, results show that salesperson extra-role behaviors act as a stronger driver. We also see that customer gratitude, in turn, positively impacts customer commitment.

Further analysis offers strong evidence that customer commitment is impacted by salesperson gratitude through salesperson behavior, including information sharing and extra-role behaviors that elicits customer gratitude. However, we find that the effect of salesperson extra-role behaviors on customer gratitude decreases as relationships age. That is, salesperson extra-role behaviors show the largest positive impact early in the buyer-seller relationship. Therefore, salesperson extra-role behaviors are beneficial to both developing and established customers but these behaviors are particularly beneficial to developing relationships as these relationships lack the benefits of established longevity. The effect of salesperson information sharing on customer gratitude, however, did not vary across different relationship lengths, suggesting that information

sharing is continually key to maintaining good customer relations. Collectively, the results support the conclusion that salesperson gratitude encourages salesperson prosocial behaviors, which cultivate the development of customer gratitude and commitment.

Implications

Customers who are committed to a salesperson and feel gratitude toward that salesperson engage in the relationship long term and engage in repeat purchase behaviors and referrals. This research highlights the impact of salesperson gratitude on customer gratitude and customer commitment, and, in light of this, sales professionals should thus raise their awareness of the importance of expressing gratitude. One method to do so is gratitude interventions. Gratitude interventions, whereby participants create diaries detailing what they were grateful for over a certain period, have been demonstrated to not only elicit feelings of gratitude but to also elicit other positive emotions important to sales professionals, such as feeling attentive, determined, energetic, and joyful. Gratitude interventions have also been shown to reduce employee stress and depressive symptoms. Additionally, as a sales professional, you should foster relationships with your customers, relationships for which you can develop gratitude over time. In summary, simply providing opportunities to document, discuss, and develop gratitude in your workplace may play a critical role in realizing the benefits of salesperson gratitude as revealed by our research.

Secondly, an understanding of how your emotions impact your interactions with buyers will aid you in training and coaching others. Due to the contagious nature of emotions, the inability of salespeople to manage their emotions negatively impacts the buyer-seller relationship. It is thus important for salespeople to manage the mood and tone of their interactions with customers. As a result, you should recognize the value in training yourself and other salespeople not only in emotional intelligence related to recognizing their customer's emotions and behaving accordingly, but also in managing personal emotions. One simple but effective strategy to achieve this is to control facial expressions that may indicate frustration or negativity when dealing with any customer. Although sometimes challenging, this is a simple yet effective way to control the contagious effects of emotions.

Additionally, as more millennials enter the workplace, your ability to manage emotions will prove to be even more important. Substantial evidence shows that millennials are emotional

buyers with emotions driving much of their purchase behavior. Sales professionals that are able to control the emotional tone of their buyer-seller relationships are better at managing emotional contagion with their customers and have a clear upper hand in working with this new class of buyers. Therefore, make sure to identify millennial buyers and determine strategies to aid in managing relationships with them.

Lastly, since our research provides evidence that salesperson extra-role behaviors can bridge the gap between developing and established relationships in generating customer gratitude, sales professionals who are new or have less established portfolios, should utilize salesperson extra-role behaviors early in their interpersonal relationships with buyers to generate customer gratitude and its benefits without having to wait for the relationship to mature over time. Accelerating the interpersonal relationship-building period will save time and resources while increasing both customer gratitude and customer commitment.

Conclusion

Significant research and practitioner anecdotes suggest that committed customers lead to higher sales performance. Our research shows how sales professionals can improve their relational outcomes with customers by fostering more committed and grateful customers through their own expressions of gratitude. If a salesperson's goal is to turn first time clients into repeat clients and to increase the likelihood of buyers referring you to others, gratitude and extra-role behaviors are the answer. Take control of the emotional interaction between you and your clients, take the time to express your gratitude for your clients, and take the initiative to go above and beyond for clients, especially new ones. These recommendations may seem simple, but they are powerful in taking advantage of the role gratitude plays in buyer-seller relationships.

Recommended Reading

Mangus, Stephanie M., Dora E. Bock, Eli Jones, and Judith Anne Garretson Folse (2017), "Gratitude in buyer-seller relationships: a dyadic investigation," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 37:3, 250-267.

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Why People Like Where They Live

Robyn Driskell, PhD, Larry Lyon, PhD, and Brittany M. Fitz-Chapman, PhD

Community and individual-level factors affect the satisfaction a person derives from living in his or her community. How do we determine if a community is meeting the needs of the person, and how do we better prepare our communities, moving forward, to appeal to potential homeowners?

Our Study

Our study examined contributors to three domains of community satisfaction—overall satisfaction, social life satisfaction, and infrastructure satisfaction—from data collected across 26 communities in the United States. While terms such as ''quality of life'' or ''attachment'' are conceptually distinct, they are parallel concepts and related, we believe, to the assessment of satisfaction. For clarity, we have defined community as a place where one lives, works, networks, and most prominently identifies. Our research design included a large number of human capital variables and social capital/network variables at both the individual and community level. The focus was to identify individual- and community-level factors that influenced overall community satisfaction.

Findings & Implications

Focusing on both individual and community contributors to satisfaction is important because, ironically, this growing interest in satisfaction with residential place occurs despite a smaller, but influential body of literature arguing that residential place doesn't matter much anymore in an increasingly mobile, virtually networked society (Fischer 1982; Hampton and Wellman 2003; Oldenburg 1999; Wellman 2001). Interestingly enough, variations in measures similar to community satisfaction can be explained more by individual characteristics than by community context (Flaherty and Brown 2010; Guest et al. 2006).

The quality of the community, however, may have little to do with that satisfaction since local community characteristics may not matter when compared to personal characteristics. Residents derive community satisfaction from a number of factors, sometimes simply gratifying an innate need to justify the existing status quo. In examining the results of our study, essential findings can be broken down

into three basic categories used across community-related applications—neutral effect, positive effect, and negative effect.

Homeownership had a neutral impact overall, showing positive and negative associations dependent upon the test group being examined. As the variation in opinion on this factor is related to each associated multi-level model, we find it best to alternatively examine positive and negative effects for implications.

Of the factors promoting a positive impact, bridging social capital and networks seemed to be the most prominent. Those surveyed place high importance on the number of friends and family members living nearby as well has having open communication with their neighbors. Higher median incomes for individuals/communities along with higher levels of volunteer-oriented service also contributed to overall community satisfaction. The traditional idea of community in the technological age may translate better than we think—people continue to seek residency in communities that foster interpersonal and intercommunal growth.

Negative impacts were primarily evident in two community-level factors: communities with insufficient infrastructure and densely populated communities. Insufficient infrastructure, such as lower quality roads, schools, and parks, influence homeowners' perceived value of their homes. Homeowners may be more critical of the local infrastructure and have higher expectations due to their own level of investment (Roskruge et al. 2012). Densely populated communities can often place a strain on this infrastructure, decreasing its quality and thus contributing to negative overall community satisfaction.

Application to Real Estate

When acquiring homes for your agency to sell, look for communities that can foster growth for your potential clientele base. High quality in community life can be seen in thriving communities with well-designed infrastructure and an engaging sense of community. Potential homeowners seek out cultural epicenters that support the arts and the social life that surrounds them. The neutral (or sometimes negative) association with homeownership can be negated by a community that provides social opportunity for its residents. Search for houses in these communities that can incentivize prospective homeowners.

On an individual level, promoting social initiatives in your local community can encourage others to desire entry. Potential homeowners seek communities that make them feel "good." Agents can begin by improving their own communities to draw others in. These actions benefit the overall community satisfaction of prospective homeowners along with the agents themselves. Incentivize potential customers in your market through providing an example of positive community activity.

When segmenting your target market for promotion, there are two human capital/demographic variables that are consistently positive: being female and being an older adult. These segments show higher levels of satisfaction across all three domains of community. Successfully marketing to these segments creates the potential for a smoother sales process. Maintaining these relationships may increase word-of-mouth promotion from these customers, leading to repeat sales in the same community. Why sell a single home when you could sell a community?

Conclusion

While a number of factors contribute to the level of satisfaction residents feel toward their community, the nuances of variation by domain and context make broad generalizations difficult. Indeed, a major finding from this research is the complexity associated with answering the straightforward question of why people like where they live. Community-level measures matter, but they often influence satisfaction in ways quite different from their individual counterparts. Though more research is needed to fully understand why we like where we live, the implications of our study can be used as a guide for understanding how individuals define overall satisfaction in their communities.

Recommended Reading

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Strategic Personal Branding—And How It Pays Off

Deva Rangarajan, PhD, Betsy D. Gelb, PhD, and Amy Vandaveer

If you are hoping to add personal branding to your professional repertoire, the truth is, you already have. You already have a personal brand. Everyone you encounter, in any way, forms an impression of you, whether you are a self-employed real-estate professional or an agent at a firm. It doesn't matter if the interaction is in person, over email, on social media, or a combination, *everyone* has a specific impression of who you are based on their interactions with you. That impression is your current personal brand. A current brand is a starting point—an opportunity to develop an intentional, specific personal brand.

The concept of a personal brand is attributed to consultant and writer Tom Peters, who, in 1997, introduced the basic idea that an individual should want to be perceived as more than a set of skills in the service of an employer. Peters insisted that "You don't 'belong to' any company for life, and your chief affiliation isn't to any particular 'fashion.' You're not defined by your job title and you're not confined by your job description. Starting today, you are a brand." Since then, the idea of a personal brand has been adapted, enriched, and reinterpreted but remains immensely valuable to today's professional. Personal branding offers the chance to create emotional connections with others. Ideally, personal brands evoke favorable emotional responses from coworkers, superiors, professional connections, and, of course, clients. Furthermore, the self-knowledge that begins the personal branding process can offer a useful guide to career development, career rethinking, and career success.

We define a personal brand as the totality of impressions communicated by an individual, and, in this investigation, set out to learn (1) why and how personal branding takes place, (2) how personal brands fit with organizational brands, and (3) how, in practice, professionals measure the effectiveness of a personal brand for themselves and/or their organization. In doing so, our research will (1) help you understand how a personal brand can advance your own career and those with whom you work and (2) outline how to manage those personal brands to bring about career advancement. Overall, we aim to help you move beyond the starting point of your current brand by offering a process for evaluating, modifying, and strategically managing a personal brand in such a way that it complements the brand of an organization for which you work or aspire to work.

Our results indicate roughly equal emphasis on competence and personal qualities in creating personal brands, as well as significant interest in distinctiveness. Based on these findings, our basic recommendation is to follow a strategic self-branding process based on one's values and competencies, similar to the branding methods of companies and products. Match your values and competencies with the priorities of audiences that matter to your career but understand and expect that you will modify your brand over time given different audiences and circumstances as you career advances.

Our Study

To hear illustrative comments on personal branding, our investigation consisted of interviewing sales reps, sales managers and executives, and professionals selling their services in a diverse set of companies in Europe and the U.S. We asked 33 individuals, roughly half from each of those two geographic areas, whether they have a personal brand, and, if so, how they created it and how it fits with the organization that employs them. Also, we asked for results they attribute to personal branding, and how they measure the effect of branding. The 33 respondents we interviewed included seven consultants and one attorney, plus 25 individuals in sales, sales management, or marketing management. All but three respondents said they had personal brands.

Our Findings

Asked to describe their personal brands, respondents gave answers that fell primarily into two categories of focus, showing that personal brands were most often created either to convey competence, to build relationships, or in some cases, both. Fifteen of the 33 respondents articulated a focus on strength, cleverness, and competence in order to evoke respect and trust. Eleven other respondents described their brands as focusing on concepts of warmth, kindness, and good character in order to promote relationship-building. This allows us then to categorize personal brands by whether they focus on competence, relationship building or both. In addition to projecting traits to be respected, liked, or both, four respondents mentioned an aim to be distinctive and memorable.

Social media channels initially appeared likely to be key to personal branding approaches, but about half of U.S. respondents said that face-to-face communication mattered far more. In contrast, nearly all European respondents valued social media greatly, in particular LinkedIn. They emphasized the importance of keeping online information up to date and avoiding mentioning partying, politics, anything "controversial," and thoughtless or irrelevant posts on social media as they can potentially threaten one's brand.

As far as fit between personal and corporate brands, most respondents seemed to take it for granted. In contrast, some individuals thought personal branding offered an opportunity to broaden the corporate brand. For most European and some U.S. respondents, considering the issue of fit, the potential for damage to the corporate brand dominated their consideration. They

worried about harm that could come to the corporate image if postings by employees on social media antagonized customers or other stakeholders. Small firms were mentioned as particularly vulnerable to this and other instances of poor fit between personal and corporate brand.

Furthermore, our interviews suggested that managing a personal brand has at least two dimensions: (1) keeping it up to date given changing circumstances and (2) measuring its effectiveness. In regards to the first dimension, comments on the chameleon nature of a personal brand were common. Several individuals said their brand evolved over time or with shifting circumstances. For the second dimension, several measures of effective personal brands mentioned "how quickly are your calls answered" or "when you lose your job how quickly do you get another one." Others were variations on sales success—referrals, repeat business—or variations on client success to which the respondent's organizations contributed, or intangibles such as praise or endorsements from superiors.

Implications

Working from interviews intended to be only exploratory, we hesitate to generalize from our results. However, with the caution that we interviewed a small, non-random set of individuals, we did learn that strategic personal branding, intentionally matching values and competencies with the priorities of one's organization and one's customers, can pay off. That result leads to four recommendations.

Our first recommendation arises from the fact that those we interviewed created personal brands more often to demonstrate competence than to build relationships, but few set out to do both. We believe that ideally a personal brand should offer both of these pathways to success; therefore, we advise you to consider broadening your personal brand as doing so means broadening your strengths as well. Secondly, beyond the need for individuals to monitor and moderate their own personal brands, companies need to be prepared to address employee personal brands in ways other than defensively. We note that companies may have dress codes, policies concerning behaviors like on-the-job smoking, drinking, talking to the press and/or social media use. However, because these issues are subsets of personal branding, managers might want to use that term, ask employees how they can be helpful, then offer coaching and sensitize employees to the realities of aligning personal and corporate brands. Managers should support employees in developing personal brands that benefit both the individual and the overarching organizational brand.

Third, we recommend flexibility when considering the relationship of personal brands and the corporate brand. While conflict between the two will help neither the individual nor the company, personal brands can enrich and stretch the corporate brand and should be encouraged to do so. Our last recommendation is for individuals to measure effectiveness of their personal brands and modify them when necessary. For salespeople, decreases in order sizes will prompt attention, but a decrease in referrals or even followers on social media may not. If such responses to a personal brand are perceived as valuable, tracking them becomes part of good management.

Conclusion

Does the brand you currently have communicate the right message? How can it be refined? How does it fit with your organization's brand? As a real estate professional, developing your own brand is immensely valuable as, often times, especially if you are a solo agent, your personal identity is the full identity of your business. A well-defined and consistent personal brand can elevate agent recognition, generate leads, and build authority and credibility. It can also help you develop your unique value proposition, identify your target or ideal customers, catalyze word-of-mouth marketing, and humanize your marketing campaigns.

If your answers to the questions above revealed that your current brand is not the most effective, then take some time to evaluate how you can apply the results and recommendations of this study. As our investigation highlights, your brand should be created to establish competence and build relationships. It should be communicated not only through social media but through face-to-face communication as well. Lastly, it should be flexible and well aligned with the values of your customers and values of your overarching organization, if you are not an independent agent. Remember everyone has a personal brand, so it behooves us all to address the status of our own personal brand.

Recommended Reading

Rangarajan, Deva, Betsy D. Gelb, and Amy Vandaveer (2017), "Strategic Personal Branding – And How It Pays Off," *Business Horizons,* 60, 657-666.

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Valuable Virality

Ezgi Akpinar, PhD and Jonah Berger, PhD

Google processes approximately 40,000 search queries every second. Our digitally connected world leverages powerful social media platforms. Many brands are now using these social media platforms to increase their presence, placing emphasis on *viral campaigns* to reach large audiences. Over time, some brands have been successful with this strategy. However, many viral campaigns do not add much value to their brands. While some campaigns are very successful in getting shares, they do not necessarily convert into purchases or boost brand evaluation.

When a brand wants to create an advertising plot, they either demonstrate an informative appeal (focusing on the product's features/benefits) or connect via an emotional appeal (using drama, mood, music and other emotion-eliciting strategies). Research shows that combining the benefits of both approaches will not only boost purchase intentions but also bolster brand-related outcomes. Our research focuses on how firms can generate valuable virality where their ads have both emotional and informative appeals.

Key Factors Driving Valuable Virality

Various advertising appeals have different effects on the way a brand is perceived by consumers. A brand using an emotional appeal might be more likely to be shared as emotional content is often more shared, and consumers might share emotional content (i.e., surprising, funny) in order to look good to others. On the other hand, some ads might use informative appeals, which might help consumers learn about the brand features, and therefore boost brand evaluation and purchase.

While it seems rational that ads involving both emotions and brand information is a best-practice approach, historical viral advertising data do not support this common wisdom. Some advertisers —feeling like integrating the brand in the emotional appeals might prevent getting shares— primarily focus on using emotional appeals. However, this approach does not necessarily show higher shares. In fact, research shows that integrating the brand in an emotional ad appeal does not reduce shares. Consequently, we wanted to explore the tradeoff between creating emotional ads and making the brand integral on getting shares and boosting brand evaluations at the same time.

Research Specific Information

Based on the field data, we found that ads are mostly shared in the first six months after launch. In fact, a major portion of such sharing happens in the first month. To understand the role of ad appeals (informative and emotional) and brand integralness on shares, we controlled for several dimensions such as ad characteristics (e.g., ad length, language, humor, celebrity presence) and brand/product characteristics (brand presence, type of brands) in the ad.

Results of the Research

Using field data of viral ads, we found that ad type and brand integralness were negatively related, in other words, compared to informative ads, emotional ads were making brands less integral part of the ads. Yet, including the brand in an emotional-appeal ad did not harm ad sharing. We also found a positive correlation between ad sharing and several control variables; specifically, ads that included celebrities, brands with large communities on Facebook increased ad sharing. While it is intuitive to think that using the brand as an integral part of the ad narrative will reduce shares of an emotional ad appeal, our results showed that it was not the case. This demonstrates that contrary to the common practice, emotional appeals could make the brands more integral to their content.

To better understand the relationship between ad types, shares and brand-related outcomes, we conducted a series of controlled lab experiments that gave us more insights on causality, ruled out alternative explanations and allowed us to understand underlying reasons behind observed effects. Consistent with the field results, the emotional appeal ads had the maximum number of shares. Brand evaluation was higher for informative appeal ads and emotional-brand-integral ads than emotional-non-brand-integral ads. While emotional-brand-integral ads increased ad sharing, informative ads increased the brand evaluation. Hence, an ad that contains both emotional appeal and integrates the brand into the narrative yielded the best results in terms of ad sharing and brand evaluations.

Implications for the Real Estate Industry

As with any other industry, the real estate industry needs digital platforms to connect with the consumer. Social media helps consumers know more about a company and acts as a channel of communication for the real estate firm. As a result of our research on virality, we suggest the following take-aways for the real estate industry:

1. Design ads or campaigns with an emotional narrative in order to increase shares for your content. The real estate industry might seem like serving utilitarian needs, but including emotions into the narrative increases the chances that consumers will share or talk about your ads.

2. While ads could be informative (e.g., talking about the features of the house), having only information is not a useful practice for going viral. An ad that talks about only the features of the real estate property is not likely to be shared. Try to come up with a narrative where features are communicated as part of the emotional narrative. This will increase both shares and purchases.

3. Create campaigns that are like Trojan horses. From the outside, it should be emotional, which gives consumers incentives to share it with others. But inside, you hide the brand, which is integral part of the emotional content. If your video makes sense and is still sharable, even if we drop content related to the brand, then your brand is not integral enough. Having the brand integral is essential, because that is how consumers will learn about the real estate products and companies while boosting brand evaluations or sales.

Virality of an ad has become a necessity in the digital world. Our research—conducted with both field data and controlled lab environments—shows how the sharing of an ad and brand evaluation of a product are dependent on ad content. Emotional and brand integral ads generate valuable virality.

Recommended Reading

Akpinar, Ezgi and Jonah Berger (2017), "Valuable Virality," *Journal of Marketing Research,* 54 (April), 318-30.

Reference

Brandwatch Blog (2016), "Marketing: 96 Amazing Social Media Statistics and Facts," https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/96-amazing-social-media-statistics-and-facts-for-2016/.

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Dr. Ezgi Akpinar (PhD – Erasmus University) is an expert on word of mouth, viral marketing and social influence. She has received the McKinsey & Company Best Marketing PhD Dissertation award. Her work has appeared in top academic journals like *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Marketing Research*, and been mentioned in popular accounts such as *The New York Time*s. She presents in major academic and industry conferences, consults several international companies, and co-founded startups.

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Judging a Book by Its… Online Reviews?
Pareezad Zarolia, PhD, Max Weisbuch, PhD, and Kateri McRae, PhD

In the simplest of transactions, the exchange of goods and services between a buyer and a seller develops a relationship that is dependent on trust. The trust developed in this relationship implies that buyers are rightfully informing sellers about the goods or services being sold and that the sellers will fairly compensate buyers for their time and expertise. More broadly applied than the buyer-seller relationship, trust is an essential trait that characterizes individuals, organizations, and societies as a whole. It embodies ideas of confidence, honesty, and reliability. Therefore, in order to maximize the trust relationship in a real estate context, the real estate agent must be cognizant of the direct and indirect impressions that a potential client can acquire that can impact the buyer-seller relationship.

Direct vs. Indirect Impressions

Direct and indirect impressions can considerably influence individuals to perceive others in certain ways. People can form these impressions in a variety of ways, including through personal social interactions, as well as through knowledge that is obtained through third parties about other people (secondhand information, which could include rumors and gossip). *Direct impressions* come from knowledge that is acquired through interpersonal interactions that allow the perceiver to create opinions about another's physical, emotional, and mental behavior. *Indirect impressions* are formed by acquiring knowledge about an individual from a third party; thus, the third party has influence over the perceiver's impressions about an individual, regardless of whether the indirect information is accurate. Whether direct or indirect, such impressions can influence whether buyers themselves exhibit trustworthy behavior toward sellers and how trustworthy buyers perceive sellers to be. As a real estate agent, it is important to realize that not only will you develop direct and indirect impressions about your clients, but your clients will develop direct and indirect impressions about you, as well. Ideally, only our direct interactions with others would contribute to the impressions they form, allowing us to be in full control over how trustworthy others deem us. However, it is possible that indirect information also influences these judgements, even when it conflicts with direct experience. How influential is indirect information for clients' impressions of real estate agents compared to first-hand interaction (direct) information?

Our Study

The purpose of our study was to determine how direct and indirect information influence the development of trust in social relationships. We manipulated direct information by making partners more or less trustworthy in the trust game, and participants learned this through repeated interactions in which the partners shared (or didn't) share back money earned in the game. We manipulated indirect information with small stories about the targets in which the targets are engaging in trustworthy behavior (like correcting a mistake despite it benefiting them) or untrustworthy behavior (like stealing money). In addition, we aimed to answer the question of whether direct information or indirect information, while considering what type of information was presented first or most frequently, significantly influenced interpersonal trust, over time. Through the *Trust Game*, which is an economic game that tracks how direct and indirect information influence social behaviors, order (whether direct information was presented before indirect information, or vice versa) and frequency (how often direct information was presented compared to indirect information) were manipulated to examine if trust was influenced by indirect information, even when given a strong disadvantage.

Analysis and Results

What was the extent to which indirect information had an influence over an individual's perception of a target person's trustworthy behavior? As hypothesized, each of the four studies conducted suggested a considerably robust effect of indirect impressions on subjects' assessments of the target person despite the existence of significant direct impressions through sharing behavior during the experiment. This is especially important because in our task, the indirect information didn't help the participants make any more money on the task—the most rational thing to do in all studies would be to ignore the indirect information entirely. Study 1 established that indirect information contributes to the impressions formed, even in the face of powerful first-hand experiences. Study 2 suggested that a single instance of indirect information given about a person's behavior is enough to influence a perceiver's attitude towards the target person. Study 3 found that indirect information still influenced trustworthy behavior even if given following several direct experiences with the partner. That is, indirect information does not need to be part of a *first* impression to alter how a perceiver trusts the target person. Finally, Study 4 replicated the findings of the first three studies by conducting the study with only one target person rather than a series of different target persons, meaning that the indirect information need not be compared to others in order to influence trustworthy behavior.

Real Estate Implications

Trust is essential to the survival of individuals, organizations, and society. Direct information, which is acquired through one-on-one social interactions, and indirect information, which is acquired through third-party communications about a target person, influence the formation of trust. This study demonstrated that while direct information played a strong role in trust-relevant

impressions, as it should, indirect information also had a consistent influence on trust impressions, even when it would have been advantageous to ignore it.

As a real estate agent, you must prioritize and strengthen the positive and meaningful indirect impressions that might be formed of you through third parties. More importantly, and particularly in the age of interconnectivity in which we live, think about ways to leverage resources already at your disposal to disseminate knowledge and information about yourself to influence others' impressions of how trustworthy you are. Some of the most powerful tools to create positive and meaningful indirect impressions about oneself are social media and the internet. What kind of presence do you have on social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube)? What are your clients saying about you online, and what kind of reviews are visible to the public? What reputation might precede you when you sit down with someone for the first time, and what indirect information might follow you after you interact with clients directly? A tangible opportunity to use the findings of this study to your advantage as a real estate agent is to proactively define and refine your image in the public eye through the savvy use of social media and the internet. Ensure that your online presence captures your willingness to serve your clients through previous impressions and experiences that you've formed with past clients. Also, keep in mind that word of mouth can influence your clients' impressions of you, even after you've interacted with them in person. Relationships within the community are critical for an agent's success. Negative gossip can be a highly influential factor for potential buyers who are looking for a trustworthy agent.

Conclusion

In order to create meaningful relationships as a real estate agent, one must be aware of the direct and indirect impressions that are being portrayed about oneself. In the midst of the chaos that surrounds the world of real estate, focus on acquiring and disseminating knowledge that you and others can use to form positive impressions that will lead to trustworthiness being built between you and your clients.

Recommended Reading

Zarolia, Pareezad, Max Weisbuch, and Kateri McRae (2017), "Influence of Indirect Information on Interpersonal Trust Despite Direct Information," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 112(1), 39-57.

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INSIDER: Why Women Buy

Courtney A. Harris, MBA

Research shows that women account for 85 percent of all consumer purchases, comprise 41 percent of employees authorized to make buying decisions, and have $7 trillion in buying power. In the coming decade, women are expected to command two-thirds of consumer wealth. In her new book *Why Women Buy: how to sell to the world's largest market,* renowned international speaker and best-selling author Dawn Jones shares insights from years of professional sales experience along with sound research from colleague Sherry Prindle, a master coach, international speaker, and corporate trainer, to provide sales professionals with a relevant and detailed guidebook for improving results with and meeting the needs of this powerful market.
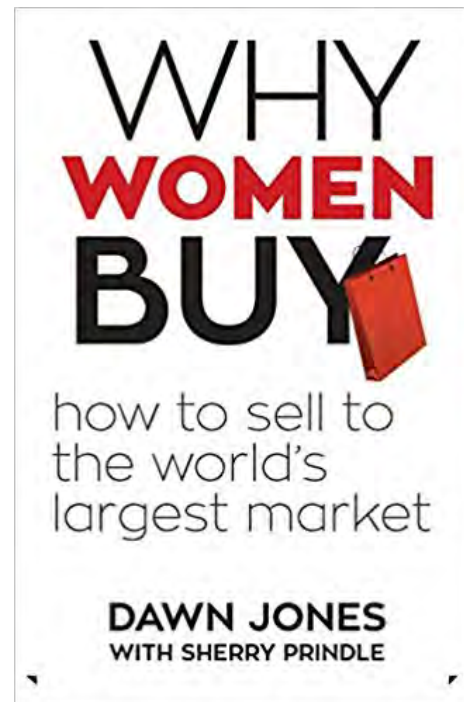
THINK POINT #1: Recognize the Differences and Ask Great Questions

Jones explains key gender-specific differences that influence the varying buying behavior of men and women. She is clear that these are tendencies—*not* stereotypes, and she provides science and research to support her points. Jones points out that men create a linear point from the back to the front of their brains, and new ideas and concepts tend to run directly on that line. In contrast, a woman's thought process is a zig-zag, travelling side-to-side from one hemisphere of the brain to the other. The left side of the brain tends to be logical, sequential and linear, and the right side of the brain tends to be relational, responsive, and random. Therefore, with their zig-zag thought pattern, women are more capable of jumping between logical processing of computations and facts and emotional processing and interpretation of imagery and context. This means women use both sides of their brains to solve problems, while men tend to only use the left side. Therefore, when selling to men, focus just on the facts, and when selling to women, switch between logic and emotion.

Jones also notes that posing great questions is especially important when selling to women. Women tend to ask more questions than men, and, not only do they expect their questions to be answered, they also expect questions to be asked of them in return. So, how do you ask great questions for successful selling? Jones suggests it starts with mastering the three basic types of questions: yes/no, open-ended, and either/or. Jones categorizes yes/no questions as *red questions,* suggesting you stop and reconsider before asking. She warns to only ask yes/no questions when the answer will be "yes." "No" answers can seem argumentative or defensive and can strike you

out of the conversation with a client. Open-ended questions are categorized as *yellow questions* to signal using caution. While open-ended questions can open communication with clients, they can also put clients on the spot, thus shutting down the conversation. People don't like to be wrong, so be cautious not to pose an open-ended question that stumps your client or makes them feel foolish. In contrast, either/or questions are categorized as *blue questions.* Blue signifies the flowing ocean, and blue questions keep the conversation flowing. Jones believes either/or are the best types of questions to ask in order to keep your conversations not only moving but focused. Jones reminds readers to mix up questions, just as you mix primary colors to make new colors. She suggests blending questions together for more colorful, vibrant, and confident conversations with your clients.

THINK POINT #2: Operate with Confidence and Integrity

Jones also focuses on overcoming fear with integrity. First, to overcome any fear of sales or unproductive patterns of behavior, Jones offers three key elements on which to focus:

1. Knowledge: Know how to successfully sell
2. Leverage: Propel yourself beyond fear
3. Vision: Motivate yourself to take action, even if you don't feel like it (or want to)

The first element, knowledge, is all about learning how to sell successfully by copying someone who already sells successfully until it becomes second nature to you.

The second element, leverage, is when the pain of not changing outweighs the pain of changing and propels you to take action. To further explain the element of leverage, Jones draws on an effective technique from famous motivational speaker Tony Robbins. His technique, the Dickens Pattern, is inspired by Charles Dickens' character Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol.* Scrooge is visited by the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future. Similarly, to apply the technique, think of any fear that is holding you back in your sales career and consider the pain it has caused you in the past, the pain it is causing you now, and the pain it could cause you in the future if you fail to overcome it. Create a scenario for yourself in which the pain of not overcoming your fear far exceeds the pain of *what* you fear. Once placed in this scenario, you will feel the desire and finally leap past your fear.

The third and final element of overcoming fear is vision. Vision enables you to look past current circumstances and focus on the destination by transforming roadblocks into building blocks. To develop your vision, determine what your purpose is and what you picture for yourself and your client. These same three elements can be used for your client as well. Is she afraid to commit to the listing? Provide her with knowledge, leverage her past the pain of her fear, and help her scope out her vision.

Jones says the key to operating with integrity is to be the same person publicly, privately, and secretly. If a woman believes that you are disingenuous, she is more likely to stop the sales process and leave without purchasing. When you offer a high level of integrity to a woman, she is more inclined to listen to and believe you. Don't let the perception that you lack integrity hinder you in your sales process.

THINK POINT #3: Integrate Communication Styles and Sell to Different Personalities

Jones also addresses how to work with different communication styles and personalities. Jones explains four communication styles: verbal, visual, tactile (hands-on), and written word. Every person you encounter has a preferred method of communication. Though research from the University of Missouri found that 44% of people need to hear instructions, verbal communication is tricky and can be difficult because it requires repetition to be effective. In fact, you will have to repeat yourself between six to ten times in order for your client to take in the information. Don't want to have to repeat yourself so much? An alternative is visual communication. Visual communication is the quickest way to teach someone a new. If you tell *and* show your client something, you will get your point across much faster. Tactile communication is the best way for people to remember a concept. Allow your client to *experience* your point. Put them in the scene and let them finish painting the picture for themselves. Lastly, Jones suggests using written word sparingly and intentionally. According to the Literacy Company, written word is the most difficult communication style, and most adults today only have a grade-school reading comprehension. Therefore, if you must communicate with your client through written word, make it clear, concise, and easy to read. The true key to utilizing the different communication styles is to integrate all four into your selling process. Be prepared to talk with your clients, show your clients compelling visuals, engage your customer in the experience, and provide your client something in writing such as an outline or quick fact sheet highlighting key selling points.

Once you've mastered integrating the four different communication styles, you can more easily sell to different personality types. Contrary to popular belief, Jones highlights, you do not need to be kind and gentle when selling to women, and it is a mistake to assume that women only want warm and fuzzy. Instead, she instructs, you should sell (conform) to the woman's personality type. The most prominent personality types are the direct driver, the

thinker/analyzer, the social extrovert, and the relational person. When dealing with a client that is a direct driver, be just as assertive and direct back to her. If your client is a thinker-analyzer, then you must be prepared to focus on the facts of the listing. Provide her with data and be well-equipped to answer technical and hypothetical questions. If, instead, she is a social extrovert, Jones suggests being more relaxed and fun. Be engaging and sincere but avoid talking too much about yourself or allowing the conversation to go down a rabbit hole. When it comes to a client that is relational, listen sincerely, pose genuine questions, and show patience and communicate deadlines without being pushy. Jones believes adapting and adjusting your selling style to better fit with your client's personality is an important key to successfully selling to women.

Conclusion

You've just finished a showing with a prospective buyer and feel this is definitely the one for her. You've covered all key highlights, and you are confident the conversation will soon turn toward making an offer and closing. However, you sense that you and the buyer aren't quite in sync and there's a lack of rapport. She begins to bombard you with unexpected questions. You are unsure of how to answer effectively, and, you feel the potential sale slipping away. Or, maybe you have been following up with a potential client for the past few weeks, just to be met by voicemail each time. Is she just busy, or is she no longer interested? You don't know how to get through to her and contemplate giving up entirely. Do these scenarios sound familiar? The thinkpoints above provide a useful starting point, but Jones's book is full of even more helpful, practical tips and step-by-step guides to overcome any difficulties you may be experiencing when selling to women (and even with selling in general). *Why Women Buy: how to sell to the world's largest market* is a must-read as this dynamic market continues to grow.

Recommended Reading

Jones, Dawn and Sherry Prindle (2017), *Why Women Buy: how to sell to the world's largest market,* Made for Success Publishing: Issaquah, WA.

## About the Author

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A native of Valdosta, Georgia, Courtney earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Duke University in 2016 and Master of Business Administration from Baylor University in 2018. Before beginning graduate school, Courtney worked with The Fossil Group, a North Carolina-based marketing and investing firm, as an intern, and later, junior executive, in their brand management division. Courtney currently works for Qualtrics in Provo, Utah.

INSIDER: Sales EQ
Kevin Pettit, MBA Candidate

Was your last purchase a logical one or an emotional one? Even though you want to believe it was logical, it is actually both. In his book *Sales EQ,* Jeb Blount explains that the emotional experience of buying is more important than any product, price, or feature. Contrary to popular opinion, people act on emotion and justify their decisions after the fact with logic. Most salespeople approach the process in the opposite order, beginning their pitch with logical arguments and closing with emotional pulls. Because of this approach and the lack of understanding, the buyer and seller are perpetually out of sync. To be an effective sales person, it is necessary to approach people the way they buy rather than the way you sell. This requires high emotional intelligence and control, as well as an expanded knowledge of how people make decisions.
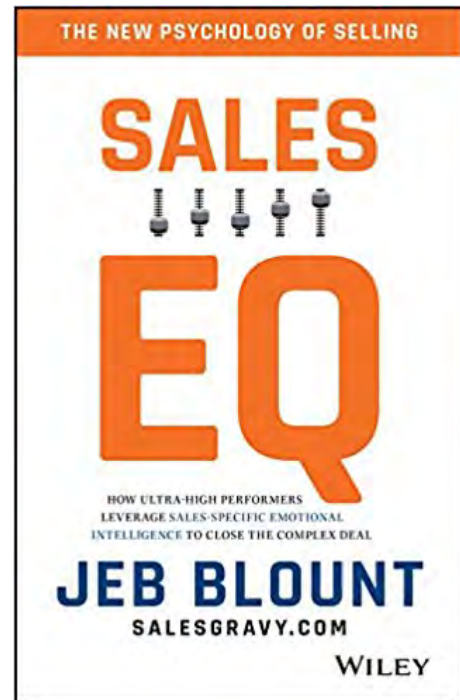
THINK POINT #1: The Four Pillars of Sales Intelligence

When asked what sets ultra-high sales performers apart from the pack, most salespeople would say these individuals have harnessed the ability to influence their clients. While this is true, influence is the end result of a long process. In his book, Blount explains that before you can influence anyone, you must first learn how to connect with them on an emotional level. He argues that in sales, there are four types of intelligence that are tightly intertwined: IQ, AQ, TQ, and EQ. Throughout the book, Blount gives tips on how to leverage emotional intelligence to dominate any sales situation.

The first step to sales fluency is understanding the different levels of sales intelligence. The first level is IQ, which stands for innate intelligence. IQ is an indicator of how smart a person is—an attribute no different than athleticism. You are either born with it or you are not, and while it is an important indicator of future success, it is only a starting point for one's overall intelligence.

Innate intelligence is worthless alone. It must be refined through schooling, reading, and experience to become truly valuable. This level of sales intelligence, AQ, which stands for acquired intelligence, is essentially what makes IQ useful. It unlocks the power of one's IQ via constant development. People who have a high AQ have a thirst for learning and are always taking advantage of opportunities to grow their understanding.

The third level of sales intelligence is technological intelligence, or TQ. Technological intelligence is the ability to effectively use technology in one's daily life. As the sales environment changes, individuals who are resistant to technological changes and refuse to integrate new technologies into their daily operations will fall far behind. Ultra-high sales performers (UHPs) use the "Three As" in their approach to technology. The first A stands for *adopt* and is concerned with how fast one is willing to adopt new technology. UHPs tend to be on the cutting edge of technology and often leverage new technologies to gain a competitive advantage over their competition. The second A stands for *adapt*. UHPs understand and adapt new technology to their unique situation. They also tend to understand the difference between a low-value task, one whose completion adds little actual value to the end result, and a high-value task, one that is critical to the end result. They use this knowledge to leverage technology to automate the low-value tasks so they can spend their limited time focusing on the high-value tasks. The third A is *adept*. UHPs use technology constantly in their day-to-day and become proficient at it by using it, not because they are better at technology in general but rather because they understand its value and are open to experimenting and learning from it.

The fourth and final level of sales intelligence is emotional intelligence, or EQ. It is your acuity for dealing with your own emotions and the emotions of those around you. EQ amplifies the impact of IQ, AQ, and TQ because it allows you to relate, influence, and persuade other human beings. In the modern age where technology dominates, this skill is rarer than ever, which is why it is the key to becoming an ultra-high performer.

THINK POINT #2: Pillars of Sales-Specific Emotional Intelligence

Within sales-specific emotional intelligence there are four main pillars—the first being empathy. Ultra-high performers believe their primary mission is to serve their customers. Their mindset in sales situations is others-focused, and because of this, they view things from the buyer's perspective, both rationally and emotionally. Their more complete understanding of the client enables them to adjust their own behavioral and communication style to make the client more comfortable.

The second pillar of sales-specific emotional intelligence is self-awareness. Ultra-high performers are not perfect and have the same weaknesses as anyone else. What sets them apart from average salespeople is a keen awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. This awareness allows them to more effectively interact with others. They understand when to listen and when to talk, as well as when to be passive and when to be aggressive. Their ability to understand themselves and their environment gives them an advantage when dealing with any type of client.

The third pillar of sales-specific emotional intelligence is sales drive. Sales is a tough work environment—the salesperson's ability to provide for their family is based solely on their ability to deliver results. This is often an emotional rollercoaster for all parties involved. Ultra-high performers master the art of maintaining their high level of performance in an environment of

constant change. Those with a high sales drive are optimistic, competitive, and have a need for achievement.

The final pillar of sales-specific emotional intelligence is self-control. Self-control is the ability to control disruptive emotions such as anger, delusion, desperation, and uncertainty. Disruptive emotions have the power to derail relationships, cloud judgment, and can lead to decision paralysis. The ability to understand and manage disruptive emotions is what sets ultra-high performers apart from their competition.

THINK POINT #3: Adapting to the Buyer's Personality

Research has shown that you are able to build deeper connections when you interact with clients based on who *they* are, not who *you* are. Ultra-high performers understand their own style and are confident enough to adjust when dealing with various personalities. Jeb Blount separates the four primary stakeholder personas based on the DISC behavior assessment personality types. Each style requires a different approach. Adapting to the decision maker's style requires keen awareness of your own style.

The first personality type is the Director, or high dominance in the DISC assessment. Directors make decisions quickly, crave control, and are most comfortable working with salespeople who know how to get things done. When working with Directors, do not try and compete with them. Directors value confidence and have no patience for long-winded pitches. They want to deal with people who cut to the chase. If you do not have an answer to a question, do not try to fake it. Directors will see right through this, lose respect for you, and proceed to steamroll you. Essentially, Directors can smell fear. To succeed, stick to your guns, and you will earn their respect.

The second personality type is the Analyzer, or high compliance in the DISC assessment. Analyzers tend to be more deal funders than signers. As such, they serve as a check and balance for the deal signers, typically Directors and Socializers. Due to their role, they will try and pick your business case apart. Analyzers are very methodical in their thinking. They deflect all hype and other efforts to "pitch" them. When dealing with Analyzers, stay away from personal questions unless prompted, and always review work for accuracy before the presentation. They are sticklers for detail, and if they catch you with information that is not 100% accurate, they will not be able to move past it.

The third personality type is the Socializer, or high influence in the DISC assessment. Socializers are easy to connect with and love building relationships. As opposed to the first two personality types, it is relationships first and business second. Socializers love to feel appreciated, so it is important to listen first and speak last. The nice thing about socializers is that if you listen to them, you will usually get their business because their need to feel important overrides objective, rational decision making. The problem most salespeople have in doing business with socializers is that they, too, are often socializers. This creates tension because both parties want to talk. It is crucial to control your own desire to dominate the conversation and speak only to guide the discussion.

The fourth personality type is the Consensus Builder, or high steadiness in the DISC assessment. Consensus Builders value safety, having their ducks in a row, and pleasing people. They tend to avoid risk or change. Because they avoid conflict, they tend to be passive-aggressive in most situations. If you offend a consensus builder, you will lose the sale and never know why. This personality type tends to frustrate salespeople the most because they need all the details to be just right before making a decision. Just when you think you are about to close, they will ask for more time or more information. The key when dealing with Consensus Builders is to slow down and earn their trust.

Conclusion

None of us have a single dominant style. In reality, we are a combination of multiple styles with a dominant style showing its colors in stressful situations. The ultimate goal is to reduce friction by managing your own style. Self-awareness of your own style is critical to mastering the art of building relationships. Salespeople who invest in and focus on developing sales EQ will dominate the profession. When you choose to develop your emotional intelligence, you will break down the barriers that hold back the average salespeople.

Recommended Reading

Blount, Jeb (2017), *Sales EQ*, Wiley Publishing.

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Kevin Pettit is a graduate student from La Center, Washington. He earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Supply Chain Management from Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business. Kevin is currently seeking an MBA with a concentration in healthcare administration and is currently in his Executive Residency at Mercy Hospital in Oklahoma City.

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