

Constructive Salesmanship

Principles and Practices

By

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This Book Is Dedicated
To
SCOTT ALEXANDER McKEOWN

PREFACE

"Is it practical?" is the first question which every salesman asks about a suggested selling method, a new book on selling, or a proposed book on salesmanship. To be able to answer this question in the affirmative, in the case of *Constructive Salesmanship*, has been the idea of the author in planning the book.

To make *Constructive Salesmanship* of practical value to salesmen, the actual difficulties which have proved to be stumbling-blocks in the path of the sale have been analyzed; the methods used by experienced salesmen in meeting these difficulties have been brought together; and the principles on which successful salesmanship is based have been explained, making it possible for the individual salesman to adapt the various selling suggestions to the type of salesmanship in which he is engaged.

This method of taking up the study of salesmanship is the method used in organizing the course on "Practical Salesmanship" given by the author while Director of the first School of Life Insurance Salesmanship in a higher institution of learning. Also, it is the method he has used in planning the training courses for The Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States. In both cases, results have been highly satisfactory.

The plan on which *Constructive Salesmanship* is based makes it obvious that the purpose of the book is not so much to give the ideas of the author on what might be

done in the field of selling, as to show what methods experienced salesmen have found to be successful. As a matter of fact, it is these salesmen—the salesmen whose selling suggestions, selling methods, and selling plans have been pointed out—who have written this book.

To tell what each salesman has contributed would necessitate writing a companion volume to *Constructive Salesmanship*, but the author wishes to express his appreciation to each salesman who has helped to build the book. He is especially grateful to the Alexander Hamilton Institute, to Mr. O. W. Bartlett, of the American Slicing Machine Company; to the Fuller Brush Company, to the Wear-Ever salesmen, to Ruth Leigh, Griffin M. Lovelace, Natalie Kneeland, and W. R. Skillen for the complete sales talks which have been included; to the Burroughs Adding Machine Company, the Dartnell Corporation, the Davey Tree Expert Company, the Diamond Crystal Salt Company, the Elwood Myers Company, the National Cash Register Company, and the Torrington Company for permission to quote material from their publications; and to *Advertising and Selling*, *Administration*, *Printers' Ink*, *Printers' Ink Monthly*, *Sales Management*, *Salesology*, and *System*, for permission to quote from articles which have been published in those magazines.

Special acknowledgment is made of the invaluable help which has been rendered by Mary F. Barber in the organization of this material.

The author wishes to pay a high tribute to the help and inspiration he has received in the technic of the sale from his brother, S. D. Stevenson, who is not only an

exceptionally skillful and artistic salesman, but who has that additional rare gift of being able to analyze and evaluate his procedure.

The fact cannot be overemphasized that the author's aim has not been to assemble in convenient form a variety of clever devices for putting over sales, but to offer plans of selling whereby prospects' needs are studied in order to find the specific uses they may have for the commodities offered. The selling of commodities to meet needs is the underlying idea of *Constructive Salesmanship*.

Although the book was written primarily to point out ways of "selling goods that won't come back to customers that will," the author sincerely hopes that the experiences of successful salesmen will make clear to those less experienced the high standards by which the work of the present-day salesman is measured. Likewise, he hopes that he has made some contribution toward a better understanding of what one of the world's biggest producers has described as "the biggest job in the world, bar none."

JOHN A. STEVENSON.

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CHAPTER I

SALESMANSHIP

THE statement that "if a man makes a better mousetrap than his neighbor, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door," has been repeated so often that it has come to be accepted as true. In reality, under modern business conditions, it is far from the truth. The world would never know about the superior mousetrap except through the medium of salesmanship.

Alexander Graham Bell stands out among great Americans as the inventor of one of the most useful devices that has ever been brought into existence. The dependence of business upon this invention is almost immeasurable. "But great as was Bell's invention," says an editorial in *Printers' Ink*, "it is doubtful if it would have become such a vital part of our social and industrial lives, had it not been for the selling genius of Theodore N. Vail. Potentially useful as the telephone was, it took extraordinary selling and organizing ability to gain world-wide adoption of it."

The great strides in industry and commerce made during recent years in this country are, of course, traceable to no single cause. The growth in the population and the complexity of modern living conditions have created a need for mechanical improvements which has been supplied through inventions such as those of Morse, Edison,

Bell, and Marconi. The efforts of the great "captains of industry" and "barons of finance," Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and many others, have made possible production on a tremendous scale. But probably no group of individuals have contributed more toward industrial progress than those who have been instrumental in developing more efficient methods of marketing.

In general, we may define salesmanship as "*the art of presenting the advantages of an offer in a way which makes a direct appeal and tends to prompt action.*" Obviously, this definition includes those sales which are mere exploitations, such as the sale of an automobile to a man who is compelled to mortgage his home to raise the funds, as well as those in which real service is rendered, such as the selling of a fire insurance policy to protect a home. It may require a greater amount of ability, of course, to sell a man something he does not need than to sell him something which he does need. Nevertheless, as the standards in all types of business are gradually being raised, we are coming to look upon the work of the salesman in the same light as we look upon the work of the lawyer or the physician and to regard as "unprofessional" the work of the salesman who considers his own interests rather than the interests of his clients.

Every salesman naturally wishes to make as large an income as possible; so does every doctor and every lawyer. But more and more we are coming to recognize the fact that under modern business conditions those who are considered high-grade salesmen are those who are interested in rendering high-grade service to their clients and who are adequately equipped to render this service. In other

words, the successful salesman of the present day does not pride himself on the fact that through the art of persuasion he has induced a large number of persons to buy a certain commodity whether they needed it or not, but on the fact that through the service he was able to render in selling a certain commodity he has built up a large clientele.

The modern idea of what constitutes good salesmanship is admirably expressed in a definition given by Walter H. Cottingham, President of the Sherwin-Williams Company:

"Salesmanship is the judgment and ability to sell the right man the right kind and quantity of goods, at established prices and terms; to follow the sale with such assistance as will insure satisfactory and profitable results, that will lead to a permanent and mutually profitable and increasing business."

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Until recent years, far greater emphasis has been placed upon improving methods of production than upon improving methods of distribution. At the present time, most up-to-date organizations will not allow men to act as their representatives in the field until they have a thorough knowledge of their commodities and the uses of those commodities, but the best methods of selling those commodities often receive scant attention.

Much remains to be done in the way of investigation, experimentation, and in the evaluation of the material collected, before we can speak of the science of salesmanship. At the same time, the combined experiences of successful salesmen have provided a body of valuable

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information well worth the study of those who plan to make selling their life work.

The purpose of this book is not so much to point out the ideas of the author as to *what might be done* in the field of selling, as to show *what has been done* by successful salesmen. From the very outset, too, it should be understood that various selling plans and selling methods have been suggested, not with the purpose of giving to the salesman a certain number of tricks with which to ply his trade, but to give him the instruments which have been found to be useful and effective by those who are experienced in the profession of salesmanship. In other words, "Constructive Salesmanship" is not the art of persuading people to buy commodities but the art of selling commodities to meet genuine needs.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR SELLING

In answer to the question, "What qualifications must a person have in order to make a success of selling?" we might, with some reason, use the traditional Indian reply: "Those who know do not tell; those who tell do not know." Much has been written about the so-called "born salesman," the person of attractive appearance and manner, self-confidence, ready wit and fluent speech, who is supposed to be able to put his message over through sheer force of personality. A study of actual facts shows us, however, that in many instances the race for selling success is a case of the hare and the tortoise and that the salesman who lacks a particularly charming personality, but who makes up for this lack through knowledge of the goods he has to sell and a more careful study of his

prospects' interests, is often the one who first reaches the goal.

Scientific research is doing much at the present time and will be able to do much more in the future to furnish us with information regarding the importance of certain qualifications for selling. That is, with the data which has been brought together in regard to the necessary qualifications for certain lines of selling, it is possible for a sales manager to determine whether the chances that a given individual will succeed in selling that commodity, are good or poor as it is possible for the medical examiner of a life insurance company to determine whether or not a person is a "good risk." Of course, the person who is passed by the medical examiner as a first-class risk may die of pneumonia during the month following the issuance of a policy and the person who is rejected may live to a ripe old age. In the same way, the man who is considered to be a "good risk" in the selling line may prove to be an absolute failure and the man who is rejected may become the star salesman of another company. Too many outside factors help to determine the result in both cases to make accurate prediction in the individual case possible. Nevertheless, the mortality rate is much higher among a group of unselected risks than among the policyholders of a company selected according to certain standards, and the turnover is greater among agents who have been selected at random than among those judged by certain standards. The person who is intrusted with the work of selecting salesmen, therefore, should consider the data which have been gathered together as the medical examiner should take into consideration the experiences of his own and

other life insurance companies. The actual result in individual cases, however, may be determined by circumstances over which the individual has no control or by the efforts of the individuals themselves.

Even though scientific research reveals the fact that apparently there is no single trait or group of traits which will guarantee a person's success in selling, there are, nevertheless, certain characteristics, native or acquired, which may be listed as assets if not as essentials. A salesman may lack some of these characteristics and still make a tremendous success of selling, but the chances of success are far greater in the case of a man who is naturally equipped with the following qualifications or who makes a conscious effort to acquire those which can be acquired, as the chances of long life are greater in the case of a man who is in a state of good health or who makes the necessary effort to improve a less perfect physical condition.

Self-confidence.

It was Sir James M. Barrie who said that "unless a man shows courage he has no security for preserving any other virtue." Of course, it is one thing to know that self-confidence is necessary and another to be self-confident. It is not an impossible matter, however, to remedy the lack of self-confidence which retards the work of many inexperienced salesmen. Medical authorities can cite countless instances of the cure of serious nervous ailments through the power of so-called "auto-suggestion." Almost any person may hypnotize himself into the belief that he can't unclasp his hands if, when clasping them firmly, he repeats the suggestive formula, "I can't unclasp

my hands—I can't unclasp my hands." A person who stammers, by repeating, over and over, a formula such as, "I'm not afraid," may hypnotize himself into the belief that he no longer stammers and since the chief cause of his stammering, the nervous fear of stammering, is removed, he is "cured." In the same way, a salesman may often hypnotize himself into the belief that he is not afraid by impressing his mind with the idea that he is not afraid, repeating to himself the statement that he has no fear.

It is a well-known psychological fact, too, that the physical attitude has a distinct influence on the mental attitude. If you force yourself to smile you will feel happy; if you force yourself to frown, you'll feel cross. If you are discouraged and a man slaps you on the back, saying, "Cheer up, old man," you feel better, not so much from the encouragement in his words, but because the slap on the back caused you to throw back your shoulders and to assume the physical attitude of courage, producing a corresponding effect on your mental attitude.

Consciously assume the head-high attitude of the successful salesman, impress on your own mind the idea that there is nothing to fear, and you will do much to produce the self-confidence which almost invariably goes hand in hand with successful selling.

This advice, of course, covers merely those cases in which lack of self-confidence is due to groundless fear. In the larger number of cases, however, this so-called fear may be traced to an incomplete knowledge of the subject which is to be presented. A college student approaches an examination with far less "fear" if he is thoroughly prepared than if he has merely a superficial

knowledge of his subject. Likewise, fear on the part of a salesman is often due to a feeling that the prospect may bring up points which will spoil the effect of the selling talk and will necessitate a hasty retreat from the position originally taken. If the salesman is thoroughly prepared, this situation is impossible. Certainly, a single prospect may offer many reasons for not buying. If you are a professional salesman, however, you have come to offer him something which you consider will be of benefit to him and you are able to show him in what ways it will be of benefit. The fact that he expresses some reason for not buying does not alter your position and should cause you no concern unless, through lack of preparation, you are not able to hold your ground.

Thorough Preparation.

Obviously, a knowledge of your subject is advisable for reasons other than the prevention of the feeling of "fear." You are the representative of your company. As such, if you do not know the important facts regarding the history and policy of your company, are not sufficiently well informed concerning your commodity to answer the questions which are likely to arise, you will be regarded in the same light as the ambassador sent by a country to a foreign nation who is ignorant of his country's history and foreign policy, and who is not sufficiently well informed to handle international questions intelligently. Your company is judged by your knowledge and ability, and the impression made upon the public will be very poor if you betray a state of ignorance exhibited by a salesman in the book department of one of New York's largest stores:

"I am looking for Grant's *Memoirs*," remarked a customer who had been looking over the bookshelves while the salesman delivered a book to another customer.

"Do you happen to know the author?" asked the salesman.

"Yes, it's written by President Grant—Ulysses S. Grant."

"Is it a very recent book?"

"No, I think it was published during Grant's lifetime."

"Could you tell me when that was?"

Naturally, a book salesman could not be expected to know the contents of every book on the shelves, but ignorance, inexcusable on the part of a young schoolboy, would do much to harm the reputation of the store which employed him as a representative.

The advantage of knowing your goods in case of competition need not be pointed out. You know how, in any discussion, the person who is best informed often comes out ahead, whether his position is sound or not, merely because he can choose the line along which the argument shall be directed. If you know the selling points of your product, therefore, and know the selling points of competitive products, there is no question of your advantage over the salesman who is familiar merely with the selling points of his own commodity.

There is a direct financial advantage to you, also, in thorough preparation. The following table shows the records of the agents of one insurance company who took the course in Life Insurance Salesmanship offered at the Carnegie Institute of Technology:

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AVERAGE MONTHLY PREMIUMS

Experience prior to entering Carnegie	No. of Agents	Before Graduation	After Graduation	Increase
Over 1 year	7	\$185	\$353	91%
1-12 months	20	165	242	47%
None	17		211	

The group of men with more than one year of experience were seasoned men, the average for the group being five years, and yet after a thorough course of training their production nearly doubled. The group of seventeen men who took the course shows average monthly premiums of \$211 in their first few months of selling, whereas the average monthly premiums in the case of men without the training was only \$165.

In the past, when the ability to sell was regarded as an innate qualification, there was a tendency to scoff at the idea that training for salesmanship was possible, since each salesman was supposed to develop his own methods. Of course, there is no one best method of selling as there is no one best method of playing golf, but the amateurs can learn much from the experiences of experts. We all know with what poor form may persons play golf. They follow their own inclinations, trying to attain perfection in the way that seems most natural. Finally, they discover that the game can be played only to a limited degree of efficiency by "poor form"; then they discard their original methods and accept the methods which constitute "good form." Of course, every salesman will develop his own methods to a certain degree, but, at the same time, it will pay each salesman at the outset to familiarize himself with the facts which represent the combined experiences of suc-