

Finetuning Selling Techniques

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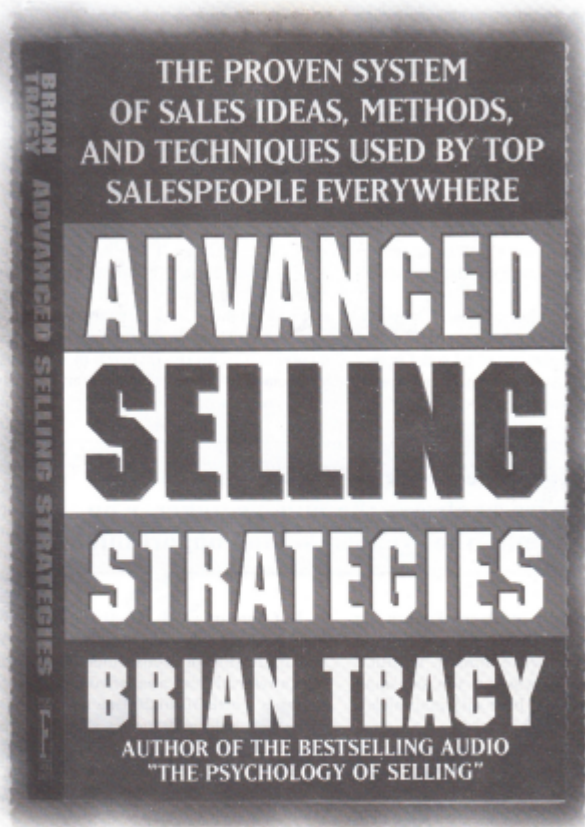
Speak to any businessman today and there is bound to be a moan about the drop in sales. Inflation means people do not have the disposable income to purchase goods other than those for their immediate needs. This month, sales should be better with many companies giving their annual bonus to the staff.

But in an adverse situation, how can one sell goods? This is one of the questions answered by Brian Tracy in his new book, *Advanced Selling Strategies* which has now been published by Fire side with Simon & Schuster of New York. Tracy describes his book as a synthesis and consolidation of the best ideas, techniques and strategies he has learned and practiced over a sales career spanning three decades. The entire spectrum of human behaviour, including psychology, economics, sales and persuasion theory, personality development and every kind of communication comes under the subject of sales.

Experts usually love to talk about themselves. But in this book, Tracy talks about salesmen first. "The more difficult the economy, and the more competitive the market, the tougher it becomes", he says, because selling is hard work and it's the toughest job in the world. Secondly, he says, a salesman is a doer rather than a talker, a creator of circumstances rather than a creature of circumstances. Thirdly, he says, the height to which salesmen will rise will be determined by the depth to which they can develop themselves.

Tracy then talks about himself and from what he says one knows his book has come out of his wide experience. His video program on selling has been translated into 14 languages and is now used in 31 countries. He flunked high school and washed dishes initially. With no high school diploma and no marketable skills, he had to take whatever jobs came his way. He even dug wells, where he started at ground level and went down, not up. He says sarcastically, "when you succeed, you fail because when you find water, they lay you off!"

At 24, when he started selling, he had one shirt which he washed each evening, one clip-on tie and one pair of large shoes too big for him. Since he does not mention the number of trousers and underwear, one assumes he had more than one of each. A year later, he was head of a 95-strong sales force, covering 6 countries and generating millions of dollars in sales, with apartments in 3 cities. What did he learn in one year?



Advanced Selling Strategies, by Brian Tracy
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Sri Lanka special price Rs 840/-

The first lesson was Socrates' law of Causality, now known as the Law of Cause and Effect. He says, if you can clearly define an effect that you desire, such as wealth, health, happiness or sales success, and then trace that effect back to the actions that cause it, and you engage in those actions, you can achieve the same effect for yourself. To him, this meant learning from the success of others.

He once went to the top salesman of the company, Pete, and asked him the reason for his success. Pete in turn, asked him for his sales presentation. An embarrassed Tracy said he had none. He then asked Pete for his. Pete took a blank sheet of paper and began to ask questions from Tracy as if he were a prospective customer, moving from the general to the particular, from the feature to the benefit and from the general interest to desire to take action and then close the sale.

Tracy later came to know that there are books, audio cassettes and training seminars on

selling techniques. To him however, the most important lesson was that you can learn anything you need to learn to achieve any goal you want, by finding out what others have done before you in order to get the results you want to get.

Tracy's book is divided into ten chapters but the latter part is more interesting. This includes how to motivate people to buy, how to influence the buying decision, how to find qualified prospects in the market by analyzing and defining the ideal customer for the specific products, how to make powerful presentations and the end game of selling and the closing of sales.

The people ignored most by salesmen are non-customers. Tracy describes non-customers as those "who can benefit from my product or service but buy neither from me nor my competitors". He says that the largest market for any product or service is always the non-customer, who represents the greatest selling opportunity. He says there is often little or no competition for the non-customers because they are usually ignored. If you can find a way to appeal to them, you can have the market all to yourself.

I remember a person who answered an advertisement I placed for sales personnel to sell English news magazines. One person who applied was from a poor family and

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could hardly speak any English. He pleaded with us to give him a chance to prove himself. Within 3 months he was our top salesman and won the best salesman award for two years running.

His strategy was simple. He tapped a market which I would never have dreamt existed. He sold English news magazines to people who knew no English but wanted their children to learn English. He also told them it would be a prestige to get a English magazine each week. The methods were unorthodox but many of those who bought magazines renewed subscriptions not for 1 year at a time but 3 years to take advantage of the low rates.

When Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniac invented the Apple computer in the late seventies, the leading experts from the huge mainframe computer companies predicted that the total market potential for personal computers in the US was not more than 300 or 400 units and said that the project was not even worth pursuing. But Apple had identified the low tech individual who wanted the benefit of a computer but lacked the skill or patience to use one. The rest is history.

Tracy describes also what to do with difficult people and identifies seven attributes of such people. At the end of it, he offers simple advice. "Remember, all you have to sell is your time", he says and adds, "calling on poor prospects is not the highest and best use of your time. They do not represent a good return on the investment of your energy. They tire you out and wear you down."

But one tip worth practising is Piggybacking on the credibility and friendship of a customer. He says a referral from a satisfied customer is worth 10 to 20 times the value of a cold call and says that when a sale is made, the customer should be asked for the names of 2 or 3 of his friends whom he could call. But he says that in addition, that customer should be kept informed of what happened and to thank him and then ask for more names.

The tips given are worth implementing because there is much we can learn from the competitive field of selling in western countries. For example, the first question one can expect from a customer is, "Why should I listen to you?", because salesmen are always trying to sell things. Tracy says salesmen have to grab customers' interests by saying for example, "I believe I have an ideal that could save your company a great deal of money". If the customer asks, "What is it?", it means he/she is hooked.

Two major factors in a competitive market is price (P) and value (V). Tracy says that these two factors depend on the way you present things to a customer and says its like 2 balloons connected by a thin tube. The first balloon with a P may be big initially while V may be small. If one talks all the time about price, then P becomes bigger because air is withdrawn from V to fill the balloon P and vice-versa. If one has identified the customer's problem or need properly and how one's product can help him, price may not be the issue.

It reminds me of an incident with my mother-in-law. I once asked her why she listens to pirith each morning at home on her tiny portable transistor, when there are good stereo radio sets now available in the market. She replied, "*Eken Ahuvath Ekai. Meken ahuvath Ekai. Ekama wade ne kerenne*" (Whether you hear it from the small or big radio, the same purpose is served!) Wonder how Brian Tracy would have tackled that googly?



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