

1.1: Selling in Everyday Life

Learning Objective

- Understand the role of selling in everyday life.

What does success look like to you?

For most people, to achieve personal success entails more than just making a lot of money. Many would claim that to be successful in a career means to have fulfilled an ongoing goal—one that has been carefully planned according to their interests and passions. Is it your vision to run your own business? Or would you rather pursue a profession in a service organization? Do you want to excel in the technology field or, perhaps, work in the arts? Can you see yourself as a senior executive? Imagine yourself in the role that defines success for you. Undoubtedly, to assume this role requires more than just an initial desire; those who are most successful take many necessary steps over time to become sufficiently qualified for the job presented to them. Think about your goal: what it will take to get there?

With a good plan and the right information, you can achieve whatever you set out to do. It may seem like a distant dream at the moment, but it can be a reality sooner than you think. Think about successful people who do what you want to do. What do they all have in common? Of course, they have all worked hard to get to their current position, and they all have a passion for their job. There is, additionally, a subtler key ingredient for success that they all share; all successful people effectively engage in personal selling, the process of interacting one-on-one with someone to provide information that will influence a purchase or action. Michael Levens, *Marketing: Defined, Explained, Applied* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2010), 181.

Congratulations, You're in Sales!

If you think personal selling is only for salespeople, think again. Everyone in every walk of life uses personal selling (some more effectively than others!). Selling is what makes people successful. We all have to sell our ideas, our points of view, and ourselves every day to all sorts of people—and not just those related to our jobs. For example, when you work on a team project, you have to sell your ideas about how your team should approach the project (or, sometimes more delicately, you will have to persuade others as to what you should do about a lazy team member). When you are with your friends, you have to sell your point of view about which movie you want to see or where you want to go to eat. When you pitch in for a friend's gift, you have to sell your ideas about what gift to give. You are selling every day whether you realize it or not.

Think about the products and services that you buy (and concepts and causes that you believe in) and how selling plays a role in your purchase decision. If you rented an apartment or bought a car, someone sold you on the one you chose. If you read a product review for a new computer online then went into the store to buy it, someone reinforced your decision and sold you the brand and model you bought. If you ran in a 5K race to raise money for a charity, someone sold you on why you should invest your time and your money in that particular cause. A professor, an advisor, or another student may have even sold you on taking this course!

“I Sell Stories”

Selling is vital in all aspects of business, just as it is in daily life. Consider Ike Richman, the vice president of public relations for Comcast-Spectacor, who is responsible for the public relations for all NBA and NHL games and hundreds of concerts and events held at the company's Wachovia Center in Philadelphia. When you ask Ike to describe his job, he replies, “I sell stories.” What he means is that he has to “pitch”—or advertise—his stories (about the games or concerts) to convince the press to cover the events that he is promoting. So, even though he is not in the sales department, his job involves selling. Gary Kopervas, similarly, is the chief creative strategist at Backe Digital Brand Communications. He works in the creative department in an advertising agency, yet he describes his job as “selling ideas,” not creating ads. Connie Pearson-Bernard, the president and founder of Seamless Events, Inc., an event planning company, says she sells experiences. For many of her clients, she also sells time because she and her team execute all the required details to create the perfect event. As you notice, all these people are engaged in selling, even though “sales” may not be included in their respective job descriptions. Clearly, whether you pursue a career in sales or in another discipline, selling is an important component of every job...and everyday life.

The New World of Selling

There are some people who might think of selling as a high-pressure encounter between a salesperson and a customer. Years ago, that may have been the case in some situations. But in today's world, successful selling is not something you do “to” a customer, it

is something you do “with” a customer. The customer has a voice and is involved in most selling situations. In fact, Internet-based tools such as forums, social networks like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn along with websites, live chat, and other interactive features allow customers to participate in the process no matter what they are buying.

Brand + Selling = Success

What do Ikea, Red Bull, Mini Cooper, and Apple have in common? All four are strong and highly identifiable **brands**. You might wonder what role a brand name plays in selling strategy. Perhaps it is not always noticeable, but when you buy a Red Bull at the corner store for some extra energy, at that very moment, a specific, chosen brand has become an extremely powerful selling tool, and it has significantly influenced your inclination to purchase *that* particular drink. Selling can only be successful when that thing that you sell has *perceived* value applied to it by the consumer—why Red Bull rather than another caffeine drink? Red Bull must be more effective if a person chooses it rather than the other brand nearby. A brand is a tool to establish value in the eyes of the customer because it indicates something unique. On the surface, a brand is identified by a name, logo, or symbol so that it is consistently recognized. Michael R. Solomon, Greg W. Marshall, and Elnora W. Stuart, *Marketing: Real People, Real Choices* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 286. But a brand is more than that.

A great brand has four key characteristics:

1. It is **unique**. (Ikea furniture has exclusive, on-trend styling at unbelievable prices.)
2. It is **consistent**. (Red Bull looks and tastes the same no matter where you buy it.)
3. It is **relevant**. (Mini Cooper looks cool and doesn't use much gas, and you can design your own online.)
4. It has an **emotional connection** with its customers. (An iPod, with hundreds of personalized qualities, becomes a loved companion.)

A brand is important in selling because it inherently offers something special that the customer values. In addition, people trust brands because they know what they can expect; brands, over time, establish a reputation for their specific and consistent product. If this changes, there could be negative repercussions—for example, what would happen if thousands of Mini Coopers started to break down? Customers expect a reliable car and would not purchase a Mini if they could not expect performance. Brand names emerge in all different sects of the consumer market—they can represent products, like PowerBar, or services, like FedEx. Brands can also be places, like Macy's, Amazon.com, or even Las Vegas (everyone knows that what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas! Brands can be concepts or causes like MTV's Rock the Vote or the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. Brands can also be people, like Lady Gaga, Martha Stewart, or Simone Biles.

When products, services, concepts, ideas, and people demonstrate the characteristics of a brand, they are much easier to sell. For example, if you go to McDonald's for lunch, you know you can always get a Big Mac and fries, and you always know it will taste the same whether you go to the McDonald's near campus or one closer to your home. Or if you go to Abercrombie & Fitch, you can expect the store to look and feel the same and carry the same kind of merchandise whether you go to a store in Baltimore, Maryland, or Seattle, Washington.

The same concept applies to people. Think about your classmates: is there one that is always prepared? He or she is the one who always does well on the tests, participates in class, is a good team player, and gets good grades on assignments. This person has created a brand. Everyone knows that they can count on this person; everyone knows what to expect. Conversely, the same is true for a person who is often times late and sometimes arrives unprepared. You probably wouldn't want to work with that person because you're not sure if that person will hold up his or her end of the project. Which one would you choose as a teammate? Which one would you trust to work with on a class project? Which person is your brand of choice?

The Power of an Emotional Connection

Uniqueness (no other fries taste like McDonald's), consistency (a Coke tastes like Coke no matter where you buy it), and relevance (your college bookstore is only relevant on a college campus, not in your local mall) are clear as characteristics of a brand, but the most important characteristic is also the most abstract—the emotional connection it creates with its customers. Some brands create such a strong emotional connection that its customers become brand fans or advocates and actually take on the role of selling the brand by way of referrals, online reviews, user-generated content, and word-of-mouth advertising.

Harley-Davidson measures their customer loyalty by the number of customers who have the company's logo tattooed on their body. Fred Reichheld, “The Ultimate Question: How to Measure and Build Customer Loyalty in the Support Center,” presented via Webinar on May 14, 2009. These customers are emotionally connected with the brand, which offers unique selling opportunities for Harley-Davidson dealerships. Another example of emotional connection to a brand can be found by examining consumer

relationships to sports teams. Fans willingly advertise their favorite team by wearing T-shirts, hats, and even putting decals and bumper stickers on their cars. They attend games (some of which require hours of standing in line) or watch them religiously on television. For popular events, in fact, many times customers are willing to pay more than the face value of tickets to attend; some will spend hundreds of dollars to see the NCAA Final Four, the World Series, or the Super Bowl. These consumers are emotionally connected to their teams, and they want to be there to support them. A loud, sold-out stadium certainly illustrates why it's easier to sell brands when customers are emotionally connected. Howard Schultz, the former chief executive officer of Starbucks, believed strongly that the brand stands for more than beans. During an interview, he said, "By making a deeper emotional connection with your customers, your brand will stand out from the hundreds, if not thousands, of vendors, entrepreneurs, and business owners selling similar services and products." Carmine Gallo, "How to Sell More Than a Product," *BusinessWeek*, May 19, 2009, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2009-05-19/how-to-sell-more-than-a-product> (accessed May 21, 2024). Schultz is especially passionate about the role salespeople have in creating the "Starbucks" experience; with an early campaign stating "It's not just coffee. It's Starbucks."

The concept of emotional connection is not limited to the brand, it is also an especially critical component in the actual practice of selling. Customers are much more readily persuaded to make a purchase if they develop an emotional connection with the salesperson. If you go to Best Buy to look at a new home theater system, a helpful (or unhelpful) salesperson can make all the difference in whether you buy a particular system from that particular Best Buy or not. If the salesperson asks questions to understand your needs and develops a good relationship (or emotional connection) with you, it will greatly increase your chances of purchasing the home theater system from him.

Clearly, brands are fundamental building blocks in the selling process. The bottom line is, great brands = great sales.

Key Takeaways

- **Personal selling** is a powerful part of everyday life. The selling process can help you get what you want both personally and professionally.
- You are always selling your ideas, your point of view, and yourself in virtually every situation, from class participation to going out with friends.
- In order to understand the selling process, you have to understand **brands**. A brand can be a product, service, concept, cause, location, or even a person. A brand consistently offers value to a customer with something that is unique, consistent, and relevant and creates an emotional connection.
- **Brands** are important in selling because customers trust brands. The brand doesn't end with the product, service, or concept; the salesperson is also a brand.

? Exercise 1.1.1

1. Identify a situation in which you were the customer in a personal selling situation. Discuss your impressions of the salesperson and the selling process.
2. Think about this class. In what ways do you sell yourself to the professor during each class?
3. Think about your school as a brand. Discuss what makes it unique, consistent, and relevant and have an emotional connection with its customers. How would you use these characteristics if you were trying to sell or convince someone to attend the school?
4. Think about the following brands: Xbox, Victoria's Secret, and BMW. Discuss how each brand forms an emotional connection with its customers. Why is it important in selling?

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