2.2: What Does It Take to Be in Sales?

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the characteristics required to be successful in a career in sales.
- Understand what you can expect from a career in sales.

When Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple, delivered the commencement address at Stanford University in 2005, he told the story of how he and Steve Wozniak started the now $32 billion company in a garage in 1976. Jobs said, "I was lucky—I found out what I wanted to do early in life."Steve Jobs, "You've Got to Find What You Love," commencement address at Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, June 12, 2005, in Stanford Report, June 14, 2005, http://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/june15/jobs-061505.html (accessed June 16, 2009). But life at Apple wasn't always so perfect. When he was thirty, just one year after the launch of the Macintosh, he was fired from the company he founded. Although he was publicly humiliated and frustrated and didn't know what to do next, he realized that he indeed loved what he did. From there he went on to start Pixar, the company that created *Toy Story*, the world's first full-length computer-animated feature film.

He left the Stanford graduates with some personal words of wisdom to think about as they prepared themselves for their careers: "Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it."Steve Jobs, "You've Got to Find What You Love," commencement address at Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, June 12, 2005, in *Stanford Report*, June 14, 2005, http://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/june15/jobs-061505.html (accessed June 16, 2009).

To be successful in sales, and in life, you must love what you do. If you aren't passionate about your profession, you will never be the best. You will always fall short because the people who love it will naturally excel. It seems simple enough: do what you love. But what if you love many things or don't know if you've found your niche? Don't worry—there are questions you can ask yourself to help you determine whether a career in sales will excite you and make you want to leap out of bed every morning.

Are You Born to Sell?

How do you know if sales is your passion, the career of your dreams? The first step is taking this course. You'll have an opportunity to learn about sales and actually put your knowledge to work in real-life situations by role-playing with your classmates. After reading this chapter, you will better understand the profession of selling and what it has to offer. This chapter includes insights about which personal characteristics and talents are best suited to sales, which industries you might work in, and how you can be successful in the profession.

Just like being a teacher requires traits such as a love of learning, an ability to communicate, and the talent to make concepts come alive for people, selling calls for certain personal characteristics as well. Some people think that successful salespeople are those who have the "gift of gab," but that's not really what makes salespeople effective. Although communication and relationship building are valuable skills, just being able to talk to people is not enough to be successful in sales. Consider the following points that make a salesperson successful and see if these are a good match to you and your skills.

Character and the Ability to Build Trust

It never goes without saying that character—the combination of your beliefs, tendencies, and actions that you take—is the single defining trait for a salesperson (or any business person, for that matter). Dave Kahle, "The Four Characteristics of Successful Salespeople," *Industrial Distribution* 97, no. 4 (April 2008): 54. Your character defines how you will conduct yourself, and it is the yardstick by which customers measure you. After all, your customers are spending their money based on what you say you will deliver; they have to trust you. If you ever break the trust for any reason, you will likely lose not only the sale, but you will most likely lose your reputation, and, ultimately, your livelihood. According to a survey by Forrester Research, trust and believability are so important in the buying and selling processes that 71 percent of buyers based their decisions on these traits. Robert W. Bly, "Everyone Loves a Story," *Target Marketing* 32, no. 6 (June 2009): 23. See why Jake Nickell, founder, and Jeffrey Kalmikoff, chief creative officer, of Threadless.com think that being trusted by the customer makes a great salesperson.

Link

The Founders of Threadless.com on the Importance of Trust in Selling

www.inc.com/ss/what-makes-great-salesperson#4

The Ability to Connect

The most successful salespeople know how to engage their customers in a way that helps the customers identify for themselves the way the product or service offered can deliver value. The Xerox Company, after conducting a survey to identify the characteristics of their peak-performing salespeople, says it best: "Your prospect will never buy because you present a pitch. She instead buys from what she convinces herself of. This means that if you are selling a watch, telling your prospect you will cure his ignorance of time will not be enough. Your prospect will literally talk to himself to discover that this watch will indeed keep him from running late. He will not listen to you; he will only listen to himself."Kerry Johnson, "Five Characteristics of Peak Sales Performers," Event Solution International, www.eventsolution.com/education/businessarticles.html (accessed June 16, 2009).

A good salesperson will use his personal skills to connect with a customer, so that their conversation prompts and echoes the customer's own internal thought process. It is ultimately this ability to connect that allows the salesperson to build relationships and trust. This video highlights how a motorcycle trip, passion, and connecting led to a sale with Harley-Davidson.

Video Clip

Interview with Jim Cathcart, President, Cathcart Institute

Learn how a motorcycle trip led to a sale.

http://www.sellingpower.com/content/video/?date=8/12/2009

Listening Skills

Contrary to popular belief, speaking is not the most important aspect of selling—listening is, because "salespeople are communicators, not manipulators."Monroe Porter, "Six Common Characteristics of Successful Salespeople," *Pro* 20, no. 6 (May 2008): 33. It's interesting to note that many of the salespeople who are constantly talking are actually not successful. It is those salespeople who have a genuine interest in listening who learn precisely what the customers' needs, priorities, and opportunities are. Listening skills are the fundamental basis for forming a connection. "Listening builds relationships," according to Marjorie Brody, author of *Help! Was That a Career-Limiting Move?* She suggests a "silent solution" to many problems in the form of listening.Pamela J. Holland and Marjorie Brody, *Help! Was That a Career-Limiting Move?* (Jenkintown, PA: Career Skills Press, 2005). The challenge for many people is that listening with undivided attention is hard to do. According to Barry J. Elms, CEO of Strategic Negotiations International, psychologists say that we listen using only 25 percent of our brain.Steve Atlas, "Listening for Buying Signals: Missing Your Prospects' Buying Signals," *Selling Power* 20, no. 2, http://www.sellingpower.com/content/article.php?a=5350 (accessed March 16, 2010). That means that the other 75 percent is thinking about a response or thinking about something else. Salespeople who take notes, refer to written material, and are intently aware of their nonverbal cues can be extremely successful because they see and hear things that people who are talking just can't absorb.Steve Atlas, "Listening for Buying Signals: Missing Your Prospects' Buying Signals," *Selling Power*20, no. 2, http://www.sellingpower.com/content/article.php?a=5350 (accessed March 16, 2010). See why Andy Taylor, CEO of Enterprise Rent-A-Car, thinks great listening skills make a great salesperson.

Link

Andy Taylor, CEO of Enterprise Rent-A-Car, on Listening Skills

www.inc.com/ss/what-makes-great-salesperson#1

The Ability to Ask the Right Questions

It was Einstein who said, "If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on it, I would use the first fifty-five minutes to formulate the right question because as soon as I had identified the right question, I knew I could solve the problem in less than five minutes."Kim Michael, "The Most Powerful Tool in the Sales Arsenal—Part 1," *American Salesman* 54, no. 6 (June 2009): 3. This

demonstrates the power of asking the *right* questions. Those questions can only be asked when you listen and have the ability to connect. Paul Blake, whom you met at the beginning of this chapter, believes that asking the right questions is vital to the success of his sales force. That's why he leads by example and always asks one key question when he is interviewing candidates for sales positions: "Do you believe you have the right to change someone's opinion?" That single question tells him all he needs to know about the candidate and how she would perform on his sales team.Paul Blake, interview with the author, Greater Media Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA, December 11, 2009.

The Willingness to Learn

You might think that just because you are in school, you are learning everything you need to know for your career. Although you are building a strong foundation, you will continue to learn new things every day when you are working. Salespeople must not only have product knowledge and understand the buying and selling process; they must also learn skills that will make them more effective and efficient as salespeople. For example, in one study on salespeople, executives mentioned that salespeople must be willing to learn more than what appears to be required. Financial skills, negotiating skills, and even speed-reading courses were mentioned as additional training needs.John F. Tanner, Jr., Christophe Fournier, Jorge A. Wise, Sandrine Hollet, and Juliet Poujol, "Executives' Perspectives of the Changing Role of the Sales Profession: View from France, the United States, and Mexico," *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* 23, no. 3 (2008): 193. It's important to note that besides constantly learning new skills, salespeople have to be students of the business. Skills and abilities are developed and fine-tuned over time, and experience plays a role in the learning process. So it stands to reason that salespeople are not "made" simply because they have the title. Just as it takes seven years to become a doctor, three years to become a lawyer, and a thousand hours to become a barber, a great salesperson develops over time.Margaret Norton, "Is the Successful Salesperson Made or Born?" EzineArticles, ezinearticles.com/?Is-the-Successful-Sales-Person-Made-Or-Born?&id=1020044 (accessed June 16, 2009). If you're thinking about pursuing a career in sales, keep in mind that like other professions it takes time, training, and experience to be successful.

The Drive to Succeed

You can't be successful if you don't set goals. Great salespeople set goals for themselves, achieve them, and celebrate those achievements. They visualize what they want, then put together a plan to get it. Kelley Robertson, "10 Characteristics of Successful Salespeople," Business Know-How, http://www.businessknowhow.com/marketing/successful-salesperson.htm (accessed June 16, 2009). The drive to succeed is important not only in sales, but also in life. Consider Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps. He set out to do something that no one else had ever done: win eight Olympic gold medals. It's instructive to look at his drive to succeed and what he did to prepare for and achieve his goals. While Phelps has had some recent public relations (PR) challenges about his behavior out of the pool, it doesn't diminish his hard work, drive to succeed, and accomplishments.

Which Generation Is Best at Selling?

There are now three generations in the work force: baby boomers (born 1946–1964); Gen X (1965–1980); and Gen Y, also known as millennials (born after 1980). According to a recent survey by the consulting firm Generational DNA, 42 percent of Gen X sales reps exceeded their sales goals while 37 percent of Gen Y and only 32 percent of baby boomers exceeded their goals. But everything is relative as the survey also revealed that boomers are more likely to have more ambitious goals, which is a reflection of their experience level.Geoffrey James, "Which Generation Is Best at Selling?" BNET, July 29, 2009, blogs.bnet.com/salesmachine/?p=4424&page=2 (accessed July 27, 2009).

Resilience and a Positive Attitude

It's important to remember that you will hear "no" more frequently than you hear "Yes, I'll take it." That challenge, however, is offset by the thrill of victory when the sale is made and a relationship with the customer based on trust is built. You can only succeed when you go the extra mile, by investigating one more lead, going back for the second sales call even when the first hasn't been successful, and trial closing even if you are not sure you can really get the sale.Dave Kahle, "The Four Characteristics of Successful Salespeople," *Industrial Distribution* 97, no. 4 (April 2008): 54. It's the eternal optimism that pushes you, even when others might think there is no reason to pursue the sale. If you think you can make it happen, you should definitely be in sales.

The Willingness to Take Risks

Has anyone ever told you, "You won't know until you try"? That statement is especially true in sales. You can set yourself apart by taking smart business risks. Think about how you consider taking risks in everyday life and how they pay off. For example, let's

say you are from a small town and you chose to go to a college in a big city because you wanted to experience something new. That was a risk; it took you outside your comfort zone. But if you hadn't taken the risk, you would have never known what life in a big city was like. Great salespeople go beyond the norm to explore and test the waters. For example, making phone calls to senior executives that you have never met, networking with people you don't know, or making a presentation to a room full of customers all involve some level of risk. But getting out of your comfort zone and taking risks is how great opportunities are found.Dave Kahle, "Characteristics of a Successful Professional—A Propensity to Take Risks," *Agency Sales* 36, no. 6 (June 2006): 40.

Taking risks in life and in selling is best summed up by Lisa McCullough, a high-profile stuntwoman: "Don't focus on your fears, focus on what you want."Lisa McCullough, "Lessons from a Stunt Woman," video, *Selling Power*, http://www.sellingpower.com/content/video/?date=3/23/2007 (accessed March 16, 2010).

Video Clip

Taking Risks

Lisa McCullough shares her thoughts on taking risks in this video.

http://www.sellingpower.com/content/video/?date=3/23/2007

The Secret to Success: Failure

"No risk, no reward" is a familiar saying. But best-selling author Jeffrey Gitomer says, "No risk, no nothing." He believes the only way to succeed is to take risks and sometimes fail. It's the failures that can lead to success.Jeffrey Gitomer, "No Risk No Reward," video, May 17, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBHBk-A4a5M (accessed August 28, 2009). He talks about the importance of taking risks and failing in this video.

Why Taking Risks Is Important to Success

Video 2.2.1: Find out why salespeople need to take risks.

Source: Buy Gitomer, Inc.

The Ability to Ask for an Order

It may sound intuitive that successful salespeople shouldn't be afraid to ask for a customer's order, but you would be surprised at how often it happens. Most customers *want* you to ask for their order. "Would you like fries with your hamburger?" "What can I get you for dessert?" and "Would you like to pay with credit or debit?" are all examples of salespeople asking for the order.

A large percentage of the time these salespeople are successful and meet their customers' needs at the same time. You reduce your chances of being successful if you don't ask for the order.Monroe Porter, "Six Common Characteristics of Successful Salespeople," *Pro* 20, no. 6 (May 2008): 33. In other words, if *you* don't ask for the order, someone else *will*. See why Fred Franzia, founder of Bronco Wine Company and creator of "Two Buck Chuck" wine, thinks that asking for the order makes a great salesperson.

Link

Fred Franzia, Founder of Bronco Wine Company, on Asking for the Order

www.inc.com/ss/what-makes-great-salesperson#5

Independence and Discipline

Most sales positions require independence, self-motivation, and discipline. Although these traits may seem contradictory, they are actually complementary. Independence is especially important if you are calling on customers in person. It usually requires travel, either locally by car or by plane, which means that you have to be able to manage your time without being told what to do. In fact, it means that you set your schedule and do what you need to do to meet your sales goals. But having this kind of independence requires discipline. As Michael Janusz, an account manager at ACL Laboratories put it, "I went into sales because of the dynamic environment, competitive aspect, and income potential. I do think there is a shortage of good salespeople. I think this is because it takes a unique blend of skills and a disciplined person. There are many people who can talk well, manage a territory well, or work hard. However, not many can put it all together."“What Do Salespeople Want?” *BizTimes*, March 30, 2007, www.biztimes.com/news/2007/3/30/what-do-salespeople-want (accessed June 19, 2009). Besides having an independent streak, salespeople must be focused and hardworking in the long term, or they will not enjoy consistent success over time.

Flexibility

Along with the need for independence comes the importance of flexibility. Just as you are able to set your own schedule, you have to be flexible based on your customers' needs. Most sales positions are not nine-to-five jobs. That means you might be working nights or weekends, or you might be traveling out of town during the week or even long periods of time, especially if you are selling internationally. You have to be available when your customers want to buy. Before you cringe at the prospect of grueling hours and long flights, remember that this kind of schedule may also work to your advantage. You may have some weekdays off, which allow you to enjoy family, sports, or other outings that you might not otherwise have an opportunity to enjoy.

Passion

If you're not passionate about what you're selling, how do you expect your customers to believe in you and your product? You have to love what you do, believe in it, and feel passionately about it. Passion encompasses all the traits mentioned above; it's how they all come together. Passion is the element that sets you apart from other salespeople and makes your prospects and customers believe in you and your product or service. See why Selena Cuff, head of Heritage Link Brands, thinks passion is what makes a great salesperson.

Link

Selena Cuff, Heritage Link Brands on Passion

www.inc.com/ss/what-makes-great-salesperson#0

Bringing It All Together

If this seems like a lot of traits, think about the list of traits that might be required to be a doctor, lawyer, or college professor. Every profession requires a lot of those who pursue it. To make it easier, you may want to think about how these traits come together. Mahan Khalsa, founder of FranklinCovey Sales Performance Group and author of *Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play: The Demise of Dysfunctional Selling and the Advent of Helping Clients Succeed*, sums up the traits of a successful salesperson this way: "There are three traits that define a successful salesperson: business intelligence (IQ or intelligence quotient), the ability to create rapport and build trust (EQ or emotional intelligence), and a good way to approach and to follow up sales (XQ or executional intelligence; the ability to execute the sale)."Mike McCue, "Lessons from the Master," *Sales and Marketing Management*, March 1, 2008, 22–24.

Want to know what employers look for when hiring a salesperson? This video features Mary Delany, chief sales officer at CareerBuilder.com, discussing what she looks for in candidates for sales positions.

Video Clip

Interview with Mary Delany, Chief Sales Officer at CareerBuilder.com

Learn about the characteristics of a great salesperson.

http://www.sellingpower.com/content/video/?date=1/5/2007

Power Player: Lessons in Selling from Successful Salespeople

It's All about *Their* Stuff

Mark Bozzini, CEO of Infinite Spirits, learned a powerful selling lesson early in his career. His job was to sell more bottles of wine than were sold the previous year, which seemed easy enough. But when he called on a wine and spirits retailer, the storeowner told him that his products didn't sell and he would rather not have them on his shelves. So much for selling more bottles of wine. An average salesperson might become pushy, or even leave and seek a sale elsewhere. But Bozzini, an intuitive and passionate salesman, was determined to make the sale. He spent an hour rearranging the store display and asked the storeowner to give it a chance to see if the product sold better. The new display worked, and the storeowner became one of Bozzini's best customers. The moral of the story: always remember that "the customer doesn't care about your stuff. They care about *their* stuff."Anna Muoio, "Sales School," *Fast Company*, December 18, 2007, www.fastcompany.com/magazine/19/one.html?page=0%2C2 (accessed June 23, 2009).

Creating Value Is the Name of the Game

The role of a salesperson can be summed up in one sentence: "Salespeople are value creators."John F. Tanner, Jr., Christophe Fournier, Jorge A. Wise, Sandrine Hollet, and Juliet Poujol, "Executives' Perspectives of the Changing Role of the Sales Profession: View from France, the United States, and Mexico," *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* 23, no. 3 (2008): 193. To further describe what this means, think about a recent visit to the Apple Store. If you go to the store at virtually any hour, it is filled with customers. The salespeople are not just those that are pushing a product, hoping that you buy so that they make their sales quota. They are experts who know everything about the products in the store whether they be MacBooks, iPods, or iPhones. The salespeople engage you in dialogue, listen, and learn about what you are looking for. They ask questions like, "What do you do with the photos you take? Do you like to make videos? Do you want to easily access the Web from your phone?" No techno-talk, no slick sales pitches. They just want to know what's important to you so that they can let you try the product that not only fits your basic computing needs, but blows you away.

Apple and its sales team know that computers are complicated and can baffle even savvy users. To build trust and confidence with their customers, they developed the "Genius Bar" so that Apple users know that they can always to talk to an individual and find help with any problem or question they may have. In fact, Apple dedicates a section of their Web site to the Genius Bar and invites customers to make an appointment online to come to a store to talk to one of the "resident Geniuses." Talk about creating value. As a result, Apple is able to charge a premium for its product and generate such demand that in some cases people are lined up to buy their products, as was the case for the launch of the iPhone 3GS in June 2009.Brandon Griggs, "iPhone 3GS Launch Has App Developers Seeing Gold," *CNN.com*, June 19, 2009, www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/06/19/iphone.3gs.launch (accessed June 26, 2009).

WII-FM

While a job in sales can be demanding, it can also be very rewarding in many ways. Even in these days of iPods and Pandora, **WII-FM** (**W**hat's **I**n **I**t **F**or **M**e) is a radio station that everyone listens to. It's not a bad thing to think about what's in it for you. After all, if you are considering investing your career in the selling profession, you should know what's in it for you.

What Will You Be Doing?

The life of a salesperson is never dull. You could be working with a single customer or with multiple customers. You might work in a corporate office, or you might work from your home. You might talk to customers via phone, live chat, instant message, and text, or you might meet with them in their office in your neighborhood, your region, or anywhere around the world. You might be working on research to identify new customers, preparing a presentation for a new or existing customer, meeting with customers face-to-face, following up to get contracts signed, or communicating inside your organization to be sure all goes well to deliver the

product or service to the customer on time and on budget. On any given day you might be working on any number of activities to support an existing customer or to approach, present, or close a new customer.

What Can You Achieve?

A job in selling can be a gateway to wherever you want to go. Stanley Marcus, the ninety-three-year-old chairman emeritus of Neiman Marcus, started as a messenger boy, then as a junior salesperson in his father's store before working his way to the top. Michael Dell started by selling computers from his dorm room.Anna Muoio, "Sales School," *Fast Company*, December 18, 2007, www.fastcompany.com/magazine/19/one.html?page=0%2C3 (accessed June 23, 2009). Selling could eventually give you fame and fortune, but more immediately it can also give you the satisfaction of providing solutions to people, financial opportunity, and even financial independence. Even in today's challenging economy, these goals are possible.

Sales drive every company's growth. When you are in sales, you are responsible for the future of the company. That's why many sales positions offer unlimited income potential. Sales is considered a **pay-for-performance** profession.Michael Levens, *Marketing: Defined, Explained, Applied* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2010), 186. That means that you are paid based on your performance, which in this case is sales. Your income is commensurate with the amount of sales you generate; simply put, you can make as much money as you want. This is a major difference between sales and most other disciplines. In most sales positions, you earn a salary and perhaps some other elements of compensation, such as a bonus. In sales, you can determine your income because it is usually not limited to a specific number; it is based on the amount you sell. Although this topic is covered in detail in Chapter 14, it's worth noting here that you have the power to determine how much you want to earn when you have a successful career in sales.

If you want to check out base salaries for sales positions in your area or the area in which you would like to work, go to Salary.com and use the Salary Wizard. You'll be able to see the average salary, bonuses, benefits, and more.

Link

Salary Information

This is a resource to research salary and other compensation elements for different positions in areas across the country.

http://salary.com

Key Takeaways

- To be successful in sales and in life, you have to enjoy what you do for a living.
- A good salesperson does more than sell; he builds a relationship and trust with the customer and offers solutions.
- A successful salesperson is a good listener. It's important to listen and understand the challenges that the customer is facing in order to present solutions that will work.
- Asking the right questions is critical to being successful in sales. It is the right questions that provide an opportunity for customers to share their challenges. Successful salespeople are always learning new things from selling techniques to technology in order to bring the best ideas to customers.
- Selling requires independence and discipline. There is no typical day in selling so salespeople have to be able to manage their own time.
- One of the biggest challenges of being in sales is the number of times you hear "no." Successful salespeople are resilient, have a positive attitude, and are willing to take risks.
- Passion is one of the most important characteristics of a successful salesperson. If a salesperson isn't passionate about what he sells, it's unlikely that his customers will be motivated to buy.
- The primary role of a salesperson is to create value for the customer and the company.
- A job in sales can be very rewarding on both a personal and a financial level, and it can lead to just about any career path you choose.

Exercise 2.2.1

1. Think about someone you trust such as a parent, professor, friend, classmate, or colleague. Describe why you trust him or her. Now, think about that person again. Would she say that she trusts you? How would she describe why she trusts you?

2. Ask a classmate to describe his background and then describe yours for five minutes each. Write a summary of his background based on what he or she said and ask your classmate to do the same. How accurate was each of your summaries? How many details did each include in the summaries? What did you learn about listening skills?
3. Discuss the sentence, “Salespeople are communicators, not manipulators.” What does it mean? Why is it important to know the difference in sales?
4. Describe at least three characteristics of a good salesperson. Do you have any or all of these characteristics? What is appealing to you about a profession in selling? What is not appealing to you about a profession in selling?
5. Invite a salesperson to visit your class (in person or via Skype) to discuss his career in sales, what he thinks is most rewarding, and what he finds most challenging.

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