

The Heavy Hitter

After hundreds of hours of intensive research and a rigorous product evaluation, the day had arrived for the customer to publicly announce which product the company would purchase. The customer opened the meeting in a solemn voice, causing the salesperson's heart to skip a beat. "Well, I guess you know why we asked you to come in today," she said. Then her expression suddenly changed to a happy grin. "We have submitted our recommendation to management to purchase your product!" The salesperson exhaled a sigh of relief and laughter filled the room. In the festive atmosphere that followed, congratulations and many thanks were exchanged between these new friends.

If you ask a salesperson in a company, "How do you sell your product?" you will most likely get a less-than-accurate answer, if any answer at all. The salesperson may recite an oversimplification of the sales process, such as "I get a lead. I meet with the potential customer to determine if my product fits. They evaluate my product against others, and if they like it, they buy it." Or, the salesperson may not answer at all by subtly changing the topic of conversation. By providing these superficial answers, salespeople are not trying to be evasive or condescending. Rather, to try to explain all the complexities and the intricacies of the sales process would be an exhausting, time-consuming project. Frankly, they may not even know the real answer because most successful salespeople are simply doing what comes naturally.

However, not all salespeople are successful. Given the same sales tools, level of education, and propensity to work, why do some salespeople succeed where others fail? Is one better suited to sell the product because of his or her technical background? Is one more charming or luckier? Or is one able to utilize past sales cycle experiences and adapt them to the current sales environment? Does one better understand the human nature of sales?

THE INTANGIBLE SIDE OF SALES

The sales process has an entirely intangible, human side. And mastery of the intangible, intuitive, human element of the sales process is what separates Heavy Hitters from other salespeople.

The art of mastering the intangible side of the sales process can be found in the field of neurolinguistics, the study of how the human brain uses and interprets language. I first began studying this field while I was attending college and working part-time at a medical billing company as a computer programmer.

As a programmer, I became knowledgeable about the fundamentals of how computers work. I learned the importance of the structure of language and how to build a “model.” Models are the descriptions and representations of how a system works. Understand a model and you can re-create a system. Models enable repeatable, predictable experiences.

Computers also taught me about the preciseness of language. After becoming versed in the workings of operating systems, I began programming. Programming requires great discipline, and I began to realize the importance of maintaining logic along with the construction of words. Order is just as critical as precision. Because a program has layers of complexity, I also began to recognize the interrelation among two or three separate concurrent streams of logic. In other words, I began to train myself to maintain multiple states of thought at the same time.

Fortunately, Dr. Constantine Callas, the owner of the medical billing company, took a personal interest in my career and introduced

me to the works of Dr. Milton Erickson. A leading originator and practitioner of psychiatric hypnosis, Dr. Erickson had an uncanny ability to help people with severe medical problems. Both psychiatrists and neurolinguists have studied his language strategies for changing patient behavior. Dr. Callas had trained under Dr. Erickson and had successfully utilized Dr. Erickson's techniques in his own practice. Learning the Ericksonian approach to neurolinguistics dramatically changed my life.

I have been practicing neurolinguistics for over 20 years. During this time, I have extended the concepts Dr. Erickson used, as well as created many entirely new paradigms. Most importantly, I have specifically applied all of these concepts and paradigms to the sales process.

Before he died in 1980, Dr. Erickson published hundreds of professional articles. Within the medical community, he was both respected and considered controversial. His works and teachings have been painstakingly analyzed, documented, and recorded. He wanted the world to understand the formal methodologies he used to communicate with his patients. These methodologies are also directly applicable to communicating with potential customers. The following passage by Dr. Erickson is from *Advanced Techniques of Hypnosis and Therapy: Selected Papers of Milton H. Erickson, M.D.*¹

I had a polio attack when I was seventeen years old and I lay in bed without a sense of body awareness. I couldn't even tell the position of my arms or legs in bed. So I spent hours trying to locate my hand or foot or toes by a sense of feeling, and I became acutely aware of what movements were.

People use little telltale movements, those adjustive movements that are so revealing if one can notice them. So much communication is in our bodily movements, not in our speech. So much is communicated by the way a person speaks. My tone deafness has forced me to pay attention to inflections in the voice. This means I'm less distracted by the content of what people say. Many patterns of behavior are

reflected in the way a person says something rather than in what he says.

Most people recognize someone's spoken words as the most significant element of communication. However, the language a person uses is composed of both verbal and nonverbal communication. Through the use of this "whole" language, we express our needs, wants, desires, and experiences to the outside world. The verbal and nonverbal language you use is a complete representation of your personality and yourself.

As I began to read more about Dr. Erickson's work, I gained an entirely new understanding of how language is directly related to predicting human behavior. I observed that if you understood how a person used language, you could build a model of expected behavior. I also became acutely interested in hypnosis. Normally, you communicate with people's conscious minds. You rely on their conscious minds to forward your message to their subconscious minds. The subconscious mind is where information is validated and decisions are ultimately made. Hypnosis enables a person to bypass this forwarding process and communicate directly with the subconscious mind.

THE TRUTH ABOUT HYPNOSIS

People have different perceptions about hypnosis. Some think of a swinging pocket watch and a soft voice repeating, "You are getting sleepy." Others think of a stage hypnotist making unsuspecting subjects perform embarrassing acts for laughs. Every day, newspaper advertisements stress the benefits of using hypnosis to help provide the willpower to lose weight or stop smoking. Meanwhile, some people strongly believe that hypnosis does not exist. To some extent, each of these observations is correct.

In fact, each and every communication between people has hypnotic qualities, but in varying degrees. Some conversations have a lot of hypnotic qualities and others almost none. Therefore, if you are staring intensely at an object while being told you are getting tired,

you will probably accept the suggestion since your eyes will become fatigued. This communication interaction has multiple dimensions—the physical aspect of your eyes getting tired coupled with the verbal suggestion being given. Conversely, if you are having a brief conversation with a colleague at the copy machine, the discussion is more likely to be more superficial (or one-dimensional) and lack hypnotic qualities.

Hypnosis is about influencing another person's behavior with suggestions that correspond to their values and beliefs; it is not about making someone fall asleep or dance the “funky chicken” on a stage in front of strangers. Dr. Erickson also thought of it as “intellectual learning by the unconscious.”² In reality, Heavy Hitters are hypnotists who use hypnosis all the time, in every conversation. Therefore, one could argue it is just a normal part of their conversation and doesn't really exist. It's merely an additional dimension of language.

Heavy Hitters influence their customers with a fantasy. The fantasy is that their product will make the customer's life easier, happier, less expensive or enable the customer to make more money. Although Heavy Hitters are competing against similar fantasies being told by competitors, their message reigns supreme, and their product is accepted by their customers as being superior.

Heavy Hitters want to influence potential customers to buy their solution. They accomplish this through their natural ability to communicate with customers and make them feel at ease. By analyzing and modeling their communication strategy and tactics, we can learn how they persuade customers to buy. However, this requires understanding how each individual uses his or her own unique language to communicate.

Intuitively, Heavy Hitters have learned the fundamentals of neuro-linguistics, and they apply the concepts naturally and automatically. Somehow, they know that if they speak in a certain way, in a particular style, a customer will respond positively. They also recognize that the style they use changes from customer to customer naturally.

Persuading people to change their minds takes more than a promise that their fantasies will be fulfilled. It takes meaningful

communication, and this requires speaking each customer's unique language. This skill set can be learned by thoroughly understanding the mechanics of communication and the way the brain works in conjunction with the entire body to communicate. We will study this further starting in the next chapter.

A BREED APART

Salespeople are a different breed of people in society. Stereotypes about their gregariousness, tenacious drive, and money-based motivation show how the rest of the world (including their own companies) views them. While Heavy Hitters may share these characteristics, they have additional superior qualities that separate them from their peers. Clearly, they understand that one of their key responsibilities is building and managing relationships.

They have to manage a tremendous number of relationships externally with customers and partners and internally within their companies. To accomplish this, they have developed an extraordinary ability to communicate and influence people while making them feel safe and comfortable.

Building relationships requires rapport. Building rapport requires the complex process of human communication, so we will examine the different layers of communication that occur in every conversation between Heavy Hitters and customers.

Members of another exotic profession share some of the same qualities as salespeople—professional poker players. Like sales, their profession is about strategy, knowing human nature, and winning. Poker players have acquired an uncanny ability to read their opponents' unintentional mannerisms and predict the cards they are holding. Meanwhile, professional poker players are masters of their own emotions who are as comfortable matching the pot on a bluff as they are when they hold four aces.

Poker players know that any novice can have a lucky streak. However, it's the serious players who make money in the long run. They study the game and constantly seek to improve their skills. Sea-

soned gamblers have encountered every card combination. They always remember which cards have been dealt and measure their bets carefully in accordance with their odds of winning. They select their strategy based upon the latest information; in this case, it is the last card dealt facing up.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RAPPORT

Heavy Hitters know that the value of information depends upon its accuracy, timeliness, and confidentiality. So, how do they get privileged intelligence about the deal they're working on? By building a deep relationship with someone within the customer's organization. This is one of the fundamental premises of the sales cycle. For many years, the term "coach" has been used by all types of salespeople, selling every conceivable product, to define the person who provides this data.

All sales involve a salesperson being "coached" through the evaluation process. Why would someone coach one salesperson versus another? To establish a relationship with a coach, Heavy Hitters build different types of rapport with a customer. At the foundation is a special relationship, a personal rapport between two individuals. Although powerful, this personal rapport is meaningless unless technical rapport is present. Technical rapport is achieved when a product's features satisfy the customer's requirements. Finally, there must be a business rapport between the two companies to consummate the deal.

Heavy Hitters' secret to survival is being able to qualify an opportunity. Every company has competitors. Today's enemy may seem to be the company that is twice your size and invading your market space. It could also be the little company with an exciting new product. But the real enemy is time.

Heavy Hitters manage their time by qualifying people. They are trying to find one fundamental truth, "Will I win the deal?" They will use their intuition to validate every piece of information in order to find the answer to this question as soon as possible. Most importantly, once they determine they can win a deal, they are able to

persuade the customer to choose their product. Persuasion is a key distinguisher between Heavy Hitters and other salespeople.

There are two schools of thought about Heavy Hitters. The first is that persuasive people are born that way. You either have that quality or you don't. Conversely, others feel that you can learn to be a Heavy Hitter. After meeting thousands of salespeople of all ages and from every conceivable background, I have made my decision about this controversial subject. Yes, some people are naturally gifted. However, almost any salesperson can learn to be a Heavy Hitter. I have personally witnessed the most unlikely individuals succeed when everyone else thought they would fail. But here's the important point: Each of us becomes a Heavy Hitter using our own particular style, in our own individual way. Even though an underdog salesperson may not have the bravado and charisma we typically expect of salespeople, she can be equally successful and a Heavy Hitter just the same.

Qualifying a deal is a complex process. The qualification occurs most simply at the business level. Do the customers have a budget? What is their time frame to buy? This type of qualification is fairly straightforward. However, qualifying the political environment requires intuition. We want to know if the customer is giving us truthful answers, and we use our intuition to form our personal judgments by reading the customer.

Heavy Hitters have developed an intense intuition. They uncover important information by analyzing their prospect's words, actions, and behavior. They know when they are being told the truth. Anyone can acquire this skill by understanding how language, the brain, and the body work in combination. Interestingly, they don't always say the same thing. Being able to decipher truthful communication is critical to Heavy Hitters' success. Just as poker players know when an opponent is bluffing, Heavy Hitters have the ability to read each of the individuals involved in a deal.

Heavy Hitters intimately understand that selling is a process as well as a specific result. The sales process starts with the creation of a relationship between people who understand each other's needs.

Heavy Hitters are always trying to determine what a customer wants and to create an environment that encourages the customer to be receptive to their message. They will decide where they should spend their time and where they shouldn't waste resources.

During the early 1990s, the term "win-win relationship" was being used everywhere to explain how to successfully negotiate your position while still enabling the other party to achieve its goal. However, the concept of win-win relationships does not go far enough in characterizing human relationships. Relationships are created when people share the same activities or when they are motivated to achieve the same goals. Goals can be defined into very personal prioritized desires, called "benefactions," where a personal benefit is gained from taking an action. Heavy Hitters strive to understand the benefactions of each member of the selection team, the people who will decide whether or not to buy the Hitter's product.

INTEGRITY

At the foundation of Heavy Hitters' success are credibility and integrity. Heavy Hitters know their environment will influence their behavior and their behavior will influence the environment. A president of a company once rationalized, "If the truth is better served by a lie, then it's okay to lie." This attitude is wrong. When fundamental benefactions do not match or when one party takes advantage of another, buyer's remorse and resentment will break up the current relationship and ruin all potential future partnerships. Heavy Hitters exhibit a morally sound code of conduct in all their dealings with customers.

At some point during your career, you will jealously listen to unscrupulous colleagues brag about a deal they just won and the size of their commission check. These salespeople are not Heavy Hitters. In the end, a strong moral compass will result in more relationships and therefore more sales.

Integrity also provides an additional psychological benefit you may not have thought of. It protects our fragile psyches when we lose

a deal. Knowing that we did everything ethically possible to win helps us handle our hostility, funnel our frustration, and recover more quickly from losing. Instead of unproductive second-guessing, we correctly rationalize that this deal simply wasn't meant to be and we move on to the next one. Integrity gives us inner strength and comfort with ourselves.

Heavy Hitters know they probably will be selling products for several different companies during the next 10 years. They understand that technical innovation is moving at an unimaginable, accelerated rate. This, in turn, is compressing the life cycles of companies and their products, which succeed or fail in a shortened time frame.

Heavy Hitters can return to a company they have previously sold to and be perceived as credible. With that being said, the key asset Heavy Hitters bring to their next job is not the contacts in their PalmPilots or laptops. The main reason for hiring an established Heavy Hitter is that he or she has demonstrated success at building and managing relationships, and this process can be repeated infinitely, resulting in consistent sales performance.

THE NATURE OF ENTERPRISE SALES

The primary goal of a sales organization is to deliver revenue to the company by winning business. This goal is accomplished mainly by adding new customers or by creating new opportunities with existing customers. In every company, each department has its own customers.

For example, marketing defines a product for engineering, engineering builds a product for sales, and accounting provides the funds for marketing. With the exception of the sales department and support-related functions, each department's customers are mainly internal to the company, both physically and culturally. The sales department is unique. Its focus is on external customers, geographic and cultural outsiders to the organization. Just as gamblers traveling from town to town must be aware of the local laws and customs, salespeople who journey from customer to customer must adapt their behavior to each customer's particular environment.

The nature of enterprise sales is that the deals are large, the decision process is complex, and great personal rewards are possible for individuals who can close deals. But what exactly is an “enterprise” sale? It has three major characteristics. Obviously, the first characteristic is the size and complexity of the product. If you sell big-ticket products such as computers, machinery, commercial real estate, telecommunications, or planes, you are involved in enterprise sales.

The second characteristic is the complex nature of the sales cycle. It is a process that involves multiple people, or multiple groups of people, who in varying degrees make the purchase decision. The decision is made over a period of time that is typically measured in weeks or months.

Finally, the size of the purchase is large. A deal can be either one large single purchase or a steady stream of future revenue. These sales may involve material items such as electronics and equipment or the creation of new ideas, license agreements, and partnerships.

The concepts and principles of this book apply to a wide range of sales segments that share these characteristics. They also apply to any product that is typically evaluated and purchased by a committee. This may vary from the purchase of a building or selection of an advertising firm to the acquisition of a company. However, the case studies and examples in this book are based upon my personal experience, which happens to be in the computer industry.

MENTORS

A sales organization is typically a mentor-based environment. Inexperienced salespeople don’t know what they haven’t seen for themselves. Usually, it’s through the “school of hard knocks” that they gain their experience. Unfortunately, this takes time. By emulating how Heavy Hitters view the sales cycle, this time frame can be shortened, and the predictability of results can be improved.

In a typical sales organization, role modeling occurs very informally and irregularly. However, through nonstructured interactions, salespeople learn tactics to help close deals. All organizations include

both good and bad salespeople. Obviously, we want to model the successful ones. We want to understand how they have mastered rapport, language, and the sales cycle and developed their intuition. Equally important, we want to understand what doesn't work and shouldn't be modeled.

BUSH LEAGUERS

Professional baseball players who continually make mistakes are demoted to teams in the minor leagues. These obscure teams play in small towns across America. In the slang of baseball, the players are called "bush leaguers." Sales also has its share of bush leaguers, who make the following common mistakes:

- They talk too much on a sales call and don't listen to the customer enough.
- They present the same pitch in the same way to every customer.
- They don't know their customer or product well enough to drive account strategy.
- They assume information they don't know, thereby taking the wrong action.
- They fidget with many accounts and don't focus on the winnable ones.
- They don't put themselves in the position of being their own customer.
- They don't take the time to continually analyze their performance.
- They don't understand how to marshal their resources or use their manager.
- They set unrealistic customer expectations or make commitments that their product or company can't fulfill.
- They expect to win the deal without a coach or think they have a coach when they don't.

Most importantly, bush leaguers don't consistently close business. Compared to Hitters, their wins take longer, require more resources, and are less predictable. Bush leaguers need to model Heavy Hitters most of all.

OPPORTUNITY COSTS

If this is a weekday and you happen to be reading this book on an airplane, chances are the majority of the passengers on your flight are salespeople on their way to customer meetings. You have to wonder how many will be successful and how many of these trips are unnecessary. Travel is one of the largest sales-related expenses in any company. Inexperienced salespeople are infamous for "chasing bad deals," or pursuing business they can't win. The opportunity expense of doing this is just as big. Spending time on deals you can't win means you are not spending time on deals you can.

Just as Heavy Hitters will only spend their time on winnable deals, they will only be part of a winnable sales environment. They know that their manager plays a key role in their success. The manager is responsible for the infrastructure that supports their efforts. Heavy Hitters also manage their managers. In other words, they understand their manager's style and act accordingly.

The concept of the sales force has changed dramatically during the past decade. The days of command-and-control military-style sales organizations are over. Heavy Hitters want to be part of an interactive sales democracy. They want their opinions heard and their recommendations acted upon. Most of all, they want to make an impact.

CONCLUSION

Heavy Hitters understand how to build personal relationships and have mastered the art of communication and persuasion. They have accumulated a reservoir of experience working with customers during the sales process and possess a highly developed intuition that drives their choice of strategy and persuades a customer to buy.

If you are in sales, you make your living by talking. If you were a pilot, you would attend years of flight training school and many hours of simulator training before you were allowed in the cockpit of a jumbo jet. If you were a lawyer, you would intensely study law for several years and have to pass your state's bar exam to ensure your proficiency. If you are in sales, you need to understand the use and interpretation of language. You need to understand the process of communication and how it determines the level of rapport that is established between people. You must be able to adapt your use of language to a customer's thought process and personality. Language can be directly linked to a person's behavior. It can be deciphered to predict future behavior and truthfulness or used proactively to influence a person's thinking or opinions.

Different assumptions can be made about why you are reading this book. You may be relatively new to sales and want to improve your base level of knowledge. You may already be an experienced salesperson seeking to expand your sales skills with additional techniques. Or you may work completely outside of sales and desire to discover what the field is all about. Regardless of your motivation, you can summarize almost everything regarding sales in a single sentence: Sales is about speaking the language of the customer.

However, an invisible boundary exists between the seller and buyer. Both the seller and buyer edit their language and hide their true feelings or try to keep the conversation at a nonpersonal level. It's the salesperson's job to remove this boundary and create a friendship.

At the beginning of this chapter, I told a true story of a customer who played a practical joke on a salesperson. The customer's prank is the main point of the story. You would only play a joke like this on someone you liked and knew very well. It's evidence of great rapport and true friendship.

The story contains another important truth. As a salesperson, you have the chance to start relationships with exceptional people who will become your customers and friends. And you have been given unique abilities to accomplish this worthy goal. Perhaps a new attitude is in order. Instead of trying to be so cunning and calculating, perhaps you

should try being a little more caring. Instead of solely focusing on revenue, maybe you should concentrate more on relationships. Finally, successful communication is at the foundation of all long-term relationships, as we'll see in the next chapter.