

Excerpt from “Four People You Should Know”

The Payoff - Why it's worth making the effort to understand personality

If you can accurately identify someone's personality style you will increase your chances of understanding how they view the world, how they perceive you, and how they will interpret your words and actions. This is true whether it's in a sales situation, a difficult team meeting, or a critical personal situation. You will gain insights into how others make decisions; in what environment they work most effectively; the type of communication that gets through best; how they will react in stressful situations or when conflict arises; and what they find of value to them personally or for their organization. Identifying and understanding personality styles can give you a great advantage in building a relationship with someone - built on *their* terms and not yours.

Your understanding of what's important to them and their needs will set you apart from others who are trying to accomplish the same objectives. It's as if you already know, better than anyone else, how the situation will unfold and how the story will end.

It's fairly simple for a sales person to ask the customer: 'what are your needs?' But sometimes a sales person can gather all the information, use it intelligently to present an appropriate solution, accurately convey the value of the solution - but still not win the sale. Why not? Usually we come to the conclusion that the competition was more aggressive, came up with a better price/performance package, or had better products. Sometimes we never find out the real reason.

Understanding personality styles helps us to gain further insights into why people make one buying decision rather than another. People make decisions based on two distinct sets of needs: personal needs and business needs. Business needs are logical and objective, emotional needs are personal and subjective.

Both are important, yet often a sales person undervalues one or the other. A sales person who is strong on relationships will be successful with a customer of similar temperament, but might underestimate the importance of performance data to a customer that needs the reassurance of facts. A sales person who is very data-oriented may not make due allowance for the way the customer *feels* about the deal.

Emotional needs are complex and have strong effects. Some examples of emotional needs are:

- Caring how you perceive that others will view you: for example, weighing what others within your company will think of you if you make a decision one way or another.
- Having a driving quest for a promotion, a raise, a bonus or a power play within the organization, rather than doing what is best for the company.

These personal needs will impact buying decisions. Sometimes, what appears on the surface as an objective, measurable business need, becomes subjective at the time a buying decision must be made. The answers to questions such as ‘How will this decision impact employee morale?’ ‘How will it affect our competitive position?’ or ‘What will our customer think of this?’ are subject to emotional, personal perspectives that vary for specific personality types. Here, the buyer perceives the impact of the buying decision as a personal impact on them or their colleagues. Often the buying decision-maker will not reveal emotional needs until the seller has built up a relationship with this person.

Business needs are not as hard to determine since they are generally logical and codified into a company’s measurements for success. Customers can quantify the value of business needs. They can weigh how a purchase or decision will impact productivity, revenue, expenses, research and development, and market share. For some customers such business perspectives dominate the decision-making process, with emotional factors in the background. For others, the emotion can dominate, with business factors only taken into account to establish minimum objective requirements.

When you understand a customer’s personality style, you are more able to determine, in any specific case, whether the personal needs are more important than the business needs, or visa versa. Is Mary more objective or subjective? Will John look for only the tangible benefits or the intangible ones also? Will their decisions focus more on the quantitative aspects or the qualitative?

When I’m the buyer, the sales person had better build a relationship with me or I’ll walk out the door. For my personality type, the act of selecting a car, for example, is personal and my emotions will lead. But in selecting a dealer and negotiating a price, I compete hard. My personality style is to make everything into a competition.

However when I’m the seller, I would never win a sale negotiating in my typical competitive style. When I’m in a business situation selling a customer a product, I know that I have to work with their personality and adjust my behavior to meet the needs of their personality style. My knowing the customer’s personality style will change the strategy and tactics I use to influence the buying decision.

For example, if the customer is a conservative person, cautious and data-oriented, I will try to provide objective facts and figures with realistic estimates of payback and return on investment. Trying to get that type of customer excited about the impact on public image or employee morale might not work so well.

On the other hand, a different personality type might lose interest when being led through the details and analysis of how the product or service might work. For someone competitive and ambitious, it might pay off more to focus on how the solution will win new business, and maybe improve the way he or she is viewed in the organization.

Understanding someone's personality will help you tailor your strategy and guide your approach when influencing him or her to take specific actions. It will help you understand what drives their ego. A tailored strategy will vary for each personality and reflect the circumstances around the decision that needs to be made. I have found that, too often, personality is the dimension that is missing in the sales approach.