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Using intuition can help you close more sales

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Business educators describe buying and selling as an emotional process.

Sellers try to appeal to buyer's emotions, and use enthusiasm to convey conviction and sell the sizzle. Feelings are natural, universal and very much human.

However, the business world frequently perceives feelings in a negative context. In fact, letting feelings control our actions without intellectual intervention is a recipe for disaster. Using feelings and intuition to our advantage can actually foster success.

Think back over your life or your business career. How many times have you had a strong feeling (positive or negative) about a job, prospect or potential sale? How often were your instincts correct?

We all have flashes of intuition, but many of us ignore or distrust them as irrational and useless distractions.

We may need to reconsider. The old admonition, "get in touch with your feelings," is good advice for salespeople.

Perhaps a better way to say it would be, "get in touch with your customer's and your own feelings."

Regardless of whether a feeling is an accurate hunch, a gut feeling, a flash of insight or defined as intuition, it helps thousands of successful managers and salespeople make excellent business decisions.

Malcom Gladwell, author of the best-selling book "Blink," talks about thin slicing and that initial intuition we develop before all the facts are available.

He cites a story about an ancient Greek statue the Getty Museum was considering purchasing. The Getty did all the normal background checks to establish authenticity. After 14 months of investigation, the Getty staff concluded the thing was genuine and went ahead with the purchase.

However, when an art historian named Federico Zeri saw the statue, he decided it was a fake in an instant. Another art historian took a glimpse and sensed the work somehow wasn't right. A third expert felt a wave of intuitive repulsion. Further investigations led to the discovery that

forgers in Rome had sculpted the statue. The teams of analysts who did the 14 months of research turned out to be wrong. The historians who relied on their initial hunches were right.

In an American Management Association report by Carol Goman, the New Jersey Institute of Technology and Douglas Dean studied the relationship between intuition and business success. He found that 80 percent of executives whose companies' profits had more than doubled in the past five years had above-average precognitive powers.

Management professor Weston Agor of the University of Texas in El Paso found that of the 2,000 managers he tested, higher-level managers had the top scores in intuition. Most of these executives first assessed all the relevant information and data available, but when the data were conflicting or incomplete, they relied on intuitive approaches to reach a decision.

As the volume of information increases, analysis alone is often too slow. It's the hunch, the gut feeling or flash of the subconscious insight that may bring the best solution. Selling professionals with high cognitive and intuitive skills have a distinct advantage in meeting challenges and solving problems.

- A good first step in developing your business intuition is to acknowledge and clarify your own feelings. For example, recognizing we're missing the mark in a presentation is a good thing. Making adjustments before it's too late might save the sale. Even greater value is apparent with the challenge of discerning buyer's false excuses from real reasons.

Listening to early gut feelings creates the opportunity to explore and question further. By mentally reviewing intuitions before and after a sales call, then comparing them with actual events, is a good way to start sharpening this skill.

- Second, know that not all feelings require addressing. When sharing feelings with customers or prospects, use I statements instead of you statements and express them tactfully. "I feel like I have upset you," is better than "You sound upset."
- Third, be empathetic. Being empathetic grows trust and understanding, and improves emotional control. Vicariously experiencing the feelings and thoughts of a buyer increases the likelihood of meeting or exceeding their expectations.

Develop empathy by asking clarifying and open-ended questions. Listen intently and notice non-verbal communication, such as clenched hands or signs of boredom. Investigate the why behind points of difference.

- Finally, keep a journal. Use it to capture your ideas, observations and perceptions. Write down your feelings and hunches. If you're going into a sales call with people you haven't met, imagine how they'll look and how they'll respond to you.

Record flashes of insight and keep a record of decisions you make on that basis. Review your journal occasionally to see which of your hunches were correct. By keeping score, you'll be able to evaluate (and increase) your accuracy.

Our powerful subconscious mind works to sift huge amounts of information, blend data, isolate

details and come to astonishingly rapid conclusions. Our job is to nurture and develop that process so we can trust it and use it.

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