

While Styles and Attitudes May Differ, Both Genders can Succeed in Sales

By: Alan Buhler

Who makes a better salesperson, a man or woman?

While I believe men and women each have unique advantages and disadvantages in the selling profession, both can be equally successful.

But how do the genders compare when it comes to initiating contact, handling rejection, and job satisfaction?

When it comes to initiating contact, it appears men and women stand on level ground, according to a recent study.

In the past, sales executives across industries presumed that salesmen had the competitive edge when it came to seeking new accounts.

However, according to a study of nearly 30,000 salespeople across 10 nations submitted for presentation at the Society for Marketing Advances, that presumption is wrong.

"There is no difference. Saleswomen today are no more reticent to initiate contact with prospective buyers than salesmen," says William Weeks, a marketing professor and director of the Center for Professional Selling at Baylor University.

"There is a statistical difference favoring men by a point-and-a-half on a 100-point scale in the study, but that's all. In practical terms, there is no difference."

Gender is also part of a multi-faceted study co-authored by research scientist, George Dudley at The Behavioral Sciences Research Press and professors John Tanner Jr. and Lawrence Chonko at Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business.

Some of the study's findings include:

- Saleswomen (24.1 percent) say the opportunity to use their abilities keeps them selling, while their male counterparts (29 percent) say "show me the money!" Obtaining status and expressing creativity were least motivating for both salesmen and saleswomen.
- Maintaining a positive outlook (attitude management) is the single most important influence on sales success (44.1 percent for saleswomen, 44 percent for salesmen) -- regardless of country. Consistently seeking new customers (sales "prospecting"); (37 percent) is second. Price (0.4 percent) and advertising (4 percent) are least important.
- Salespeople saying "price," "product knowledge" or "advertising" is "most important to sales success" scored highest on a diagnostic test used to measure reticence in making first contact with prospective buyers.

With all that being said, after the initial contact with a prospective buyer, one of the biggest challenges salesmen and saleswomen face is rejection. But how differently do salesmen and saleswomen handle sales rejection?

According to John Gray, author of *Mars and Venus in the Workplace* his ninth book on the Mars/Venus theme, "A mistake women make is giving up too early on getting what they want. When a male worker hears 'no,' he wants to find another way, whereas women accept 'no' immediately as a boundary."

On the other hand, Gray says, "Men forge ahead by never admitting that they don't know the answer to a problem. Women are more likely to draw in others for help."

Selling today is far more sophisticated than ever before. Professional salespeople (both men and women) must continually analyze their sales skills and identify those areas that can be improved. One of the strengths of a great sales team is its diversity -- a group of individuals with varying talents, desires, and backgrounds working together toward a common goal.

Men and women each bring unique strengths to a company's sales organization. Ultimately, forward-thinking companies will always ensure their sales force consists of the best-trained, talented, energetic, positive-minded salespeople, regardless of gender.



Alan Buhler is Executive Vice President at CoreTrac, Inc. He can be reached at abuhler@CoreTrac.com or (512) 236-9120 ext. 272