Right Condition #1 – The Right Attitude
By Charles Fifield, Senior Lecturer and Baylor Sales Coach

“Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.” Winston Churchill

“Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude.” Zig Ziglar

Highly effective personal selling begins and ends with the salesperson’s or agent’s right attitude. Football Hall of Fame coach, Vince Lombardi, is quoted as saying, “Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.” In the day-to-day world of football coaching and the on-the-field performance pressure endemic to that sport, there is probably significant truth to Lombardi’s view of the game. In the life of an agent aspiring to high performance, however, to focus on winning as the only outcome will naturally produce suboptimal performance results, especially in the long-term. Instead if Coach Lombardi had said, “Attitude isn’t everything, it’s the only thing,” he would have better captured the critically important mindset that defines today’s highly effective agent.

That is not to say that the agent’s winning isn’t important, because it clearly is. Unlike football, however, successful real estate selling isn’t played on a zero-sum playing field. The agent must artfully balance what may be termed, “The Salesperson’s Dilemma.” That is, when do I compete (win-lose thinking) versus when do I cooperate/collaborate (win-win thinking)? Both mindsets are important to the salesperson’s success, but a competitive focus during the interaction with customers will produce many undesirable side effects in the business of real estate sales. For those agents who want to make a career out of real estate sales, the road to long-term success (the agent’s winning) is paved with positive customer outcomes and the fruits of their resulting satisfaction.

By positively managing one’s attitude, you can literally change customers’ perceptions of everything, emotionally and physically. The right attitude affects every aspect of our lives, and especially buyer-seller interactions. Buyers are affected not by the things that a
seller does, but by their perception of the things that happen. Simply stated, a buyer’s perception is reality. Sellers can’t control what perceptions their buyers see or feel, but they can strongly influence them.

**Your Attitude Creates Your First Impression**

Perception-is-reality is clearly evident in the seller’s making of a first impression. Can an agent close a sale in less than ten seconds? According to many research studies, you can do it even faster. Seven seconds is the average time it takes to make a first impression. If your first impression is negative, you probably won’t get a second chance with that potential client. On the other hand, if you make a positive first impression, there is a high probability that the buyer is more likely to take the agent and the company represented seriously. One study concluded that there was an 80% correlation between the prospect’s first impression and his/her decision to purchase or not to purchase.

There have been many articles written on how to positively shape a positive first impression, whether face-to-face, over the phone or via the Internet. It begins with the agent having a positive attitude about him/herself and others – I’m okay and you’re okay. Another critical attitudinal factor is to not look like your industry’s stereotypical role (see related article in this issue on Salesperson Stereotypes). In other words, be sure to not act like a “sales duck.” People simply don’t want to be sold so neither look nor sound like the stereotype of a salesperson. That means watch your pace, which should be slow at first and watch your tone of voice, which should be low at first. Also, maintain a professional, but not a slick-looking appearance.

Although verbal exchange is a minor first impression factor, choose your initial words very carefully. One of the important first verbal expressions is to use the other person’s name immediately. That sends a message that you are focusing on the buyer, who happens to believe that he/she is the most important person in the room. Next, try to express some form of gratitude for the meeting (see December 2009 Keller Center Research Report for related article). Remember that fear is the number one deterrent to a salesperson’s early effectiveness and confidence absorbs fear. Preparing thoroughly for the sales exchange provides the needed confidence.

**Anticipate Resistance**

When you approach a prospective customer, remember that most customers are predisposed to zero-sum thinking – they don’t want to lose or be sold. They are quite naturally operating in a risk management and fear mode. The last outcome the prospective customer wants is for the seller to win and the customer to lose. As a
consequence, you have to anticipate resistance. How you respond or manage the early exchange is extremely important to the outcome. Being able to effectively communicate with such a buyer is a real challenge. The practice of asking effective questions and active listening are invaluable tools to positively influence this necessary change early in the interaction.

**Be Likeable**

Buyers believe what they want to believe and they tend to believe you more if they like you. In his book, *The Likeability Factor: How to Boost Your L-Factor*, Tim Sanders suggests four key ingredients to one’s likeability or being emotionally attractive:

1. **Friendliness** – your ability to communicate liking and openness to others
2. **Relevance** – your capacity to connect with others’ interests, wants, and needs
3. **Empathy** – your ability to recognize, acknowledge, and experience other people’s feelings
4. **Realness** – the integrity that stands behind your likeability and guarantees its authenticity

When you improve these areas and boost your likeability factor, you bring out the best in others and your selling effectiveness is materially improved. According to Zig Ziglar, “People don’t care what you know until they know what you care.”

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do you sincerely care about the well-being of others or are you simply manipulating others for the well-being of yourself?
2. How genuinely friendly have I been today in my personal, phone, or electronic interactions?
3. How did I behave with strangers and friends alike, when no one was watching?
4. Did I provide others with something that would help them in their business or personal life?
5. Have I put myself in the shoes of the people with whom I’ve interacted today?
6. Did I truly consider the ups and downs, successes and disappointments that the other person may be experiencing that could affect their interactions with me?

How You Think About the End Result Shapes Winning Attitudes

Personal selling is a process and should be planned with the desired end in mind. The goal of “selling” should not be to make a “sale,” but rather to assist a buyer in making a value-adding purchase decision. Going into an interactive meeting with the attitude or mindset of selling someone will often pre-condition the agent to a very different mindset from how s/he plans to participate in a jointly developed purchasing process. For the professional, it may not engender a much different result. However, when agents think in terms of selling someone, their thinking almost always degenerates into “I’m going to” or “I will make the sale.” This implies a focus on the agent versus the client’s wants, needs, problems, etc., and indicates no longer a jointly designed effort or result, which are important conditions to highly effective personal selling.

Employ the Necessary AAAA Selling Attitudes

One of the clear differentiators between the average agent and the highly effective agent is the latter’s learned ability to anticipate the needs, wants, problems, and concerns of buyers. Experience plays a significant role in the development of this advantage, but much of the work is done because the successful agent understands the power of quality preparation to selling results. Agents can never predict, but they can always be prepared.

The second A stands for the willingness to be adaptable to the relationship dynamics of personal selling. A condition to building the perception and feeling of trust within the buyer, a cornerstone ingredient to any win-win relationship, is the agent’s attitude or willingness to adjust to the human needs or personalities of others. An agent’s readiness to adapt in terms of human dynamics, i.e., perceived assertiveness and perceived responsiveness are important factors in his/her ability to sell.

You might picture walking across the Golden Gate Bridge as the transformation process of personal selling and leading a buyer through a purchase or change decision. The bridge has two foundational support towers to its structural design and three spans, including what to change, what to change to, and how to cause the change. Let’s consider one of the support towers to be the agent’s relationship building skills and the other to be the necessary value-creating skills. Regardless of which way you choose to walk across the bridge, the relationship building skills will be most important early in the sales interaction. The reason is that agents must sell themselves first. If the buyer doesn’t buy
the agent, which is largely based on perception, there is little chance that they will later purchase either the recommendations or properties presented.

The third A represents the agent’s attitude of being agile and willing to quickly modify or improvise to the dynamics of an interactive meeting with buyers. Scott Ambler in his book, *Agile Modeling*, suggests the following to becoming more agile:

1. Collaborate, don’t control – Agile salespeople collaborate with others to achieve their goals. Highly effective salespeople realize that the best use of their selling time is to be actively working with buyers.

2. Focus on proactively delivering solutions on a regular basis. You should work to be perceived as a valuable resource to work with; otherwise, you will be perceived as an energy drain or worst case a waste of time and an impediment to progress.

3. Know your key stakeholders and seek active stakeholder participation.

4. Embrace change, don’t fight it. Agile salespeople accept inertia as a threat to their success. They accept that change happens and find ways to become efficient at responding to change. Change should be welcomed as a door to selling success opportunities.

5. Be customer centric. Customers are the bottom-line architects of business. The implication is that salespeople must be flexible and prepared to work in ways which may not be ideal for them.

6. Focus on value. Agile salespeople are constantly assessing the value of doing something, and if there isn’t value being generated then they rethink their approach.

7. Constantly ask, “Is there either a more effective (doing the right things) or more efficient (doing things right) way of reaching the desired outcome?”

The final A is being aligned. Highly effective agents get quickly aligned or connected to the buyer’s “eager wants” or “hot buttons.” Selling is telling a story about how when certain events happen, benefits (happy endings) for the buyer are engendered, i.e., connecting the buyer’s wants with the agent’s available capabilities. To accomplish this with the least amount of waste necessitates having an attitude of eagerly mining for gold.
An agent who is not *aligned* is therefore irrelevant and simply playing out a game of blind man’s bluff selling, which is feature-heavy and benefit-light.

Getting quickly *aligned* also necessitates the need for a well formulated pre-call sales plan to stay on track. Highly effective agents attempt to work off a standardized format so they don’t have to think about their discovery/diagnosis or mining process. Instead, the agent’s thoughts and listening skills are free to focus on the buyer’s responses and communication, both verbal and more importantly, non-verbal.

**Summary**

One of the key necessary conditions to becoming a highly effective agent is your attitude about yourself, your chosen profession, and your relationship with your customer. Agents can make several attitude-based changes to their selling that will strongly impact their conversion rate. This ratio is one of the most important metrics to managing your practice to achieving higher sales productivity results. Simply seeing more qualified prospects is not enough. Having the right attitude is all about working smarter and faster. Salespeople and agents should manage what they can change and work to improve those factors that when changed will produce the most significant productivity impact. Having the right attitude is a little thing that can make all the difference in the world.

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Chuck Fifield is a Senior Lecturer for Baylor University’s Hankamer School of Business, Marketing Department – Professional Sales and Communications and serves as the faculty consultant to Baylor’s Sales Team and Uproar Music and Entertainment Group, a student managed business. He joined the faculty at Baylor University in 2001, where he has also taught in the Graduate Business School (Operations Management), the Management Department (Negotiations and Conflict Resolution) and the Economics Department (Principles of Macroeconomics). Chuck has taught or guest lectured at other Texas-based Universities in the fields of sales, international business, money and banking and finance/investments. Professor Fifield has conducted sales research and training for several organizations, including most recently State Farm Insurance. Prior to joining Baylor, Chuck was a financial consultant to businesses located throughout the U.S. for nearly thirty years. He owned and operated several financial service businesses in the fields of securities, real estate, oil and gas and insurance.