

Training In Salesmanship

Training, a factor of good business

MARCOS PONTUAL

The mainspring of the Industrial Revolution that is progressively intensifying its development, is trade. It is selling, in all of its phases, that ensures the opening up of new markets and the maintenance and renovation of existing ones. Industrial productivity is in direct ratio to commercial productivity. As mass production and commodity diversification grows more complex, competition, the main resultant thereof, becomes increasingly problematic. All the efforts in the way of market investigation, publicity, propaganda, distribution, and sales promotion, can culminate or be destroyed in the sales interview, whether in marketing or merchandising. The interview is one of the most complex situations in human relations that exists.

If we bear in mind that production is the final result, in terms of a finished

product or a service rendered, it may be affirmed that sales production is measurable in terms of the volume of sales obtained by the sales effort. When anything interferes with production, we are up against a production problem, for instance: A customer enters a shop and asks for a kid purse (or handbag), and the salesgirl replies "We've nothing under Cr \$3,000.00—that any good?" The customer makes up his mind to buy a ready-made suit and, noting a defect in the seam up the side of the trousers, asks the salesman about it, only to be told: "Oh! That's a new system the factory is using . . ." The customer hesitates over a certain article, a fountain pen, for instance, and finds the salesman has nothing better to say than: "It's smart, strong and easy to fill," without explaining that it is smart because of the range and pattern of the colours

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that make it distinctive; strong because of the materials it is made of or the way they are assembled; and easy to fill because of a new design that dispenses with springs, rubber parts and lever action.

The customer who has ended up by buying the purse is assailed by the shop girl with questions like: "Nothing else, today, madam? Is that all you desire? What else can I do for you?"—questions in general that are asking for a negative reply, but could have been productive of positive results had they been accompanied by the attractive offer of a pair of gloves or a belt to go with the purse. The customer stops at a show-case and begins to examine the goods on display, but only elicits from the girl behind the counter a lackadaisical "Good day, sir, at your service . . . What can I do for you?" instead of specific explanations that tend to hold the interest already shown by the customer and increase it.

Customers whose query as to the price of a cut of cloth is met with the bald response of "Fifteen thousand cruzeiros" and a take-it-or-leave-it attitude are customers who fail to buy, or take a long time to make up their minds or are ill-inclined to make further purchases. Cases like these, that are common enough in our stores, and the same sort of thing on the wholesale market amount to a drop in sales, which is a diminution that, lowering the sales volume, interferes with production and hence is a production problem.

Necessity of Training

Just as in the industrial process a production problem affects the production indices, so in sales the same thing

happens when a human factor fails for lack of salesmanship.

Among the solutions applicable to a production problem, once a thorough investigation has been made of the facts from the most varied sources, such as the personnel involved, the management in charge of this personnel, sales statistics, records of production and quality, etc., the most outstanding, as regards faulty personnel, is the question of training.

What Training for Salesmen?

The training schedule in answer to this query of how the sales force should be trained comprises the following units:

Psychological foundations of salesmanship

Once it has been accepted that a sales interview really is a complex situation in human relations, it should be borne in mind that a specific plan for training in salesmanship must include a unit dealing with psychological adjustments between buyers and sellers, comprising personality and its development through psychological adjustments and special forms of adjustment, inferring therefrom the basis of a classification of types of buyers and conclusions as to their fundamental traits and those that should be developed in the personality of the salesman.

By means of this unit, two results will be obtained from the salesmen: the redefinition of a series of aspects relating to their personal development; a better understanding of the reaction and attitudes of the prospects, during the interview, which is indispensable for their development.

The interview technique

The next unit on this schedule is narrowly linked to the previous one and is concerned with the study of salesmanship. The sales interview being a new contact for the salesman, as regards environment, installations, the person of the buyer, the volume and kind of transaction, etc., it is a situation of adjustment. This being so, the sales technique must be presented and developed with the object of constituting for the salesman a technique of adjustment to this situation.

Salesmanship, though fundamentally the same for the two principal types of salesman, retail and wholesale, varies in development in accordance with the variation in the aims of each of them.

The aim of the shop salesman is to *hold and increase* the interest that drew the customer into the store. The aim of the commercial traveler or traveling salesman on the other hand is to *arouse the interest* of the prospect that visits. Respecting these differences, sales technique should basically cover phases such as: *getting into touch and contacting the customer; awakening interest; attractive display of the goods; allowing the customer to "feel" the goods; what price to quote and how to quote it; bringing out selling points; persuasion technique; characteristics of the courtesy close and how to secure "extra" sales.* Special emphasis should be laid on the phase concerning selling points, which constitutes, it might be said, the *specialized skill of the salesman*. Appropriate use of selling points involves a thorough knowledge of the business, the product and the market.

Method to be employed

Training in salesmanship means, as with any other kind of training, systematic instruction with a view to production. Chiefly for this reason, the method to be employed must secure maximum participation of the group.

Taking a group of fifteen salesmen, the first unit: Psychological foundations of salesmanship can be developed in six hours by the method of practical demonstration by the chief participants. The latter, together with imaginary buyers, should enact, in accordance with the technique of role-playing, a real situation as close as possible to the sales interview. Hence, goods, samples, price lists and other representative aspects of a sales interview should be on hand to make the scene more realistic. In this way, sales technique is progressively deduced by the group itself in the discussions and commentaries that follow the demonstration, moderated by the instructor. After ten hours, the natural training ought not to stop; it is pursued, not only through the effects of the supervision to which the salesmen are submitted, but also by the organization of periodical refresher meetings and the discussion of the new experiences that are being obtained.

Management, Training and Good Business

The success of this training as a whole will depend on the open support of the management of the concern. This support should stem from a conviction that the training is an instrument of productivity and the expression of this

conviction will make itself felt in every step that is taken, such as designation of those responsible, performance of jobs of work, financial backing supplied by the firm, allowance of space, materials, etc., work standards equivalent to those developed for the trainees. With the support guaranteed, its intensity will enable (and this is the only way) results to be continually checked and advantages noted. Commercial undertakings develop through "good business" and training in salesmanship is one of the factors of good business.

New York Service Awards



Left photo: Harold B. Schmidhauser (r.) receives 20-year service award from N. Y. Metropolitan Chapter President William J. Glennon.

Bottom photo: President Glennon with other members who received 20-year awards (l. to r.); H. Walter Shaw, Samuel B. Magill, and James H. Kohlerman. At the same chapter meeting, 10-year awards were presented to Charles D. Campbell, Robert L. Craig, Joseph D. D'Onofrio, Paul Jones and Lorenz G. Schoebel.

