



CHEMISTRY, CHARACTER AND COMPETENCE

Insights into what creates the magic of selling: Part 1: Chemistry

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How many times have we heard the phrase: “S/He will never make **IT** as a salesperson?” I became curious many years ago when a national sales manager said this to me.

Lets take a look at John. John was regarded as a very conscientious person in every organisation he worked for. He had few enemies and a seemingly endless contact list. He would put in the hours, prepare lists of clients and diligently follow-up on calls. At a function, he would socialise with clients and potential clients. His references from past employees spoke fondly of John. On the surface John seemed extremely competent. Yet, in each of his jobs, John’s sales results were average or below average. You see, John didn’t quite have **IT**. John kept trying: he went on endless courses, practiced his questions, watched his peers and competitors at work, yet nothing seemed to change so he would move on, thinking the next environment would provide the missing link. Little did he know, the missing link was right inside, however like most of us, he had no idea of what it was.

To solve John’s (and people like him) problem, trainers come up with a plethora of instant and quick fixes. Sadly, many of these are simplistic and worse, many are (or verge on being) unethically manipulative. And, like similar trends in diets, they unfortunately rarely work. Just like dieting, when the fundamentals are addressed, when people believe in the fundamentals and they practice the fundamentals, results flow.

To add injury to insult I have been given the simplistic solution: “They just don’t ask for the order”. Inside me was a nagging doubt: I had seen the so-called failures turn around. My doubts led me on the quest to research and explore the question: “what are the differentiators that creates the **IT** factor?”

However, before getting too far into the detail, I would like to put the title of this article in context. Chemistry, character and competency have as their basis the writings of Aristotle who in the 4th Century BC delivered his treatise, Rhetoric. Rhetoric’s three premises for successful persuasion are those grounded in credibility (*ethos*), in the emotions and psychology of the audience (*pathos*), and in patterns of reasoning (*logos*).

In simplest terms, they correspond to:

- **Chemistry (Pathos):** Is simply data (or information) that we give or respond to. It is the basis of our emotional connectivity to others. Our chemistry can be channeled in new ways providing there is the will to do so.
- **Character (Ethos):** Is our credibility or integrity to deliver on what we are engaged to do. It is the strength to shift from self-interest or self-indulgence to *our* obligation towards others through adherence to the principles of fairness and/or sacrifice. Character is forged by our daily thoughts and discipline.
- **Competency (Logos):** Is the degree to which we have gained the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in our job. Competency measured in all aspects of the sales cycle. It is not simply product knowledge. It is also, our competency in the areas of preparation, questioning skills, presenting and analysing, generating options and so on.

Together, these three components make for a powerful “IT” factor and when harnessed effectively “MAGIC HAPPENS”.

Part 1: Identifying and managing chemistry

“In any team sport, the best teams have consistency and chemistry.” Roger Staubach

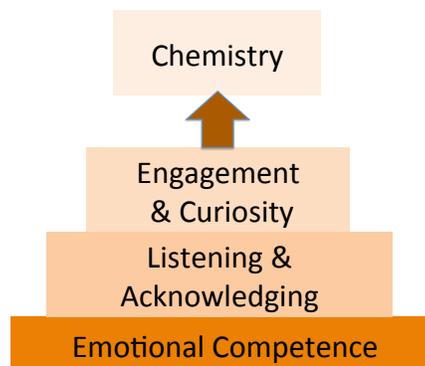
We have all felt the tingle of connection that comes with being in the early stage of love. This is chemistry!! It is something over and far beyond interests, attitudes and beliefs. When the chemistry is right, we generate deep connectedness which is a unique cocktail of ego, empathy and emotional energy.

Make no mistake, understanding and dealing with our own and others inherent chemical make-up is one of the hardest jobs we have assigned to ourselves. It is perhaps why it is dealt with at best very superficially and mostly ignored.....it’s just too hard. Great connectedness however, elevates our level of engagement to significantly higher levels where the right words are far less important our underlying intent. It is a dance with whoever is in front of us: it is not static.

It does however start with ourselves, not the other. Otto Scharmer recalls an interview with the late Bill O’Brien¹ (ex CEO of Hanover Insurance), where he asked O’Brien to sum up his most important learning experience in leading profound change. O’Brien’s response: *“The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener.”*

What exactly makes up the interior condition? I believe three factors dominate: emotional competence, listening and acknowledging, and empathy and curiosity. All of these reside in the domain of language: spoken and unspoken. We are what we speak!!

¹ Bill O’Brien was a pioneer in institutionalising vision and values in the wo Insurance President Jack Adam, Bill took a cut in pay and began working fo served as CEO between 1979–1991.



Are you, however, able to speak as your customers speaks and wants you to speak? Each of us has our own unique style of language and decision-making which means effective sales are aware of these differences and can match them.

Emotional competence

The exciting news is that new work in the areas of emotional intelligence and behavioural neuroscience has shown that we are capable of consciously or unconsciously detecting the emotions of others and that seemingly rational thought is impossible².

Emotional competence is important because I am of the belief that the transition path in sales has seen three evolutionary waves:

- The first was the product-centric focus where the salesperson focused on product benefits (not customer needs) and heavy, often manipulative persuasion.
- The second was the process-centric approach where questioning drove the buyer to realise the problem and identify with the impacts.
- The last wave has seen the emergence of the emotion-centric relationship where the buyer and seller work together to implement effective need-driven solutions. This is supported by the work of Dr Selina Tombs³ whose research shows emotional intelligence competencies are predictors of success in sales.

These softer measures are giving us greater insights into the factors that influence the abilities of leading sales people. In this latter situation, the benefits of improving emotion-related skills are becoming more apparent to many sale teams.

By definition, EQ is an individual's ability to recognize and regulate emotions in themselves and others. In practical application it is one's ability to understand how our emotions and the emotions of others impact action and performance. EI has no greater application than in a sales position.

We are hard-wired to make rapid judgments about people. Research indicates that we have a gut reaction within 150 milliseconds⁴ and form lasting judgements within the first half-hour of being in another's presence. With this subjective bias creeping into so many evaluations, the ability to create early rapport becomes critical otherwise subjective and inaccurate evaluative criteria can work as much against the sale process as they will for it. Our credibility and creativity are as important as what we are trying to sell. When pitching to a first-time customer, they will instinctively be searching for visual and verbal matches with their in-built stereotype models that fit these initial gut reactions to us⁵.

² Based on the work of Antonio Damasio who showed how emotions affect decisions and demonstrating pure rationale thought just isn't possible.

³ Selina Tombs (2011), *The relationship between human intelligence measures and career choice/performance*. Unpublished PhD thesis.

⁴ Isabel Taake, *The 300 Millisecond Gap*. Simon Fraser University.

⁵ Kimberly Elsbach (2003), *How to pitch a brilliant idea*. Harvard Business Review.

Unfortunately, so many sales presentations, sales follow-ups and closures are presented in the same way without regard to the varying styles of customers. Williams and Millar suggest these range from charismatic (initially buoyant however will make judgements on reviewing balanced information), thinkers (who can have contradictory opinions and need to reflect on the information provided), skeptics (who reject or are slow to come around to information that doesn't fit their world view), followers (who evaluate on the basis of trusted peers) and controllers (who focus on the pure facts and analytics of the information)⁶.

Listening and acknowledgement

A colleague of ours who is regarded as one of Australia's leading sales trainers with a global company, recalls the story when, as a young trainer for a multinational pharmaceutical company, she heard that the company's top sales person was to attend one of her courses. Extremely nervous, she ensured she met with this person prior to the program. Speaking of this meeting she recalls; "I have never felt so attended to. Here was our leading salesperson, sitting in front of me giving me 150% of his attention. He was not present to anything else going on around us. I could see and feel instantly why he was our top salesperson. It was a very special moment." As a society, we are generally deprived from having someone deeply attending to us. In general, it is estimated as few as 5% of the population can be classified as skilled listeners. So, what contributes to this state and why is listening so difficult for so many of us?

Given these factors, we ask, what are the drivers of this fear? Two possibilities arise:

- **Slowing down.** We are mentally too busy to stop and "be" whilst listening.
- **Unwilling or unable to let go.** We need to remain in "control" and whilst seemingly in control we listen at shallow levels.

These two factors combined we feel are based around the possibility that if I listen and connect at a very deep level maybe I'll be influenced, hear things I don't want to agree with, have my opinion changed, find out their point of view is valid, etc. and therefore not end up always being "right". In other words, this fear arises from the possibility of becoming vulnerable or made wrong and therefore we don't go to these places easily, resulting in superficial listening.

There are a large number of sales people who don't practice the art form of listening and if they do it is more technique at the lower levels.

If listening is one side of the coin, acknowledgement is the other. Our work has demonstrated time and time again that great engagers are continually acknowledging the other person's perspective, point of view and opinions. It doesn't mean they necessarily agree with them. But a party that gets acknowledged feels listened to.

Empathy and curiosity

⁶ Williams, GA and RB Miller (2002), *Change the way you persuade*. Harvard Business Review.

I believe empathy is both an ability and a belief. It is the act of wanting to know another person's feelings, reasoning, values and point of view.

Perhaps one of the great examples comes from the world of acting. Successful actors have to BE somebody else: they have to give up being themselves and see the world from the perspective of the character they are playing. Highlighting this is the wonderful story about Marlon Brando, regarded by many as one of the finest actors of the 20th Century. Brando was taking part in a role-play in his first year at acting school. The class had been instructed to act like chickens, with the additional instruction that a nuclear bomb was about to fall on them. Most of the class clucked and ran around wildly, but Brando sat calmly and pretended to lay an egg. Asked why he had chosen to react this way, he said, "I'm a chicken, what do I know about nuclear bombs?"

Good sales people are curious, genuinely curious. So often when the curiosity drops off, so does their interest in you. The other very important thing about curious people is they are less self-absorbed: they want to know about your issues and what you both can do together rather than being self-centred.

Highly observant sales people are very competent at matching, mirroring and pacing. These somewhat less understood terms come from the world of behavioural science.

Summary

Understanding how to manage chemistry, yours and theirs, is a powerful tool that is the first step in being a great sales person. Our work connecting physiology and neurology shows we can shift the signals you are sending out before you utter one word. It is setting in process the steps that enable you to have more influence over the drivers of your clients reaction to you. It is managing their gut instinct (which occurs at about 150 msec after your stimulus – verbal or non-verbal) and rational thought (occurring about 450 msec).

Powerful and exciting stuff!!!