

# SALESMANSHIP

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October 10, 2025

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2025). *SALESMANSHIP*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=41179>

## SALESMANSHIP

**Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** Marketing, Business Administration, Psychology

### 1. Core Definition and Modern Approach

Salesmanship is viewed as a specialized form of advertising and persuasive communication, designed to demonstrate how a particular product or service will satisfy the consumer's wants. The distinct advantage of this approach lies in the **face-to-face situation**, which fundamentally differentiates it from more impersonal forms of advertising. This direct interaction permits the salesperson to immediately determine the customer's specific needs and observe their reactions as the sales talk proceeds, allowing for real-time adaptation of the approach and selling points to the individual prospect. Furthermore, if the salesperson has a variety of products available, this personalized interaction enables them to select the option that is best suited to the customer's individual requirements, ensuring a tailored solution.

### 2. Historical Shift: From Pressure to Service

The modern conceptualization of salesmanship represents a significant divergence from the older, though still occasionally observed, approach where the salesperson sought to overpower the prospect with overwhelming "personality" and pressure. This outdated method relied heavily on enthusiastic but often empty phrases to convince the potential buyer that the product was a great opportunity they must not miss. Today, however, the successful sales process must function as a **two-way affair**. The salesperson is required not only to talk but also to ask probing questions and listen actively. This mandate requires a shift in focus, where the salesperson must think more in terms of **servicing the client** than strictly selling the product.

The adoption of this newer approach signifies a move towards being **customer-oriented** rather than strictly sales-oriented. Evidence suggests that this methodology leads to greater long-run success because its ultimate objective is not merely the immediate transaction, but ensuring that the product is optimally suited to the buyer's requirements, thereby fostering lasting client relationships and reducing post-sale dissatisfaction.

### 3. Re-evaluating the Sales Personality

The radical change in sales philosophy has been accompanied by a transformation in the concept of the ideal "sales personality," impacting selection criteria, training programs, and required sales techniques. Older treatises and popular books frequently offered extensive inventories of seemingly desirable traits, including **aggressiveness**, verbal fluency, self-confidence, enthusiasm, extraversion, and emotional stability. However, different authors suggested conflicting sets of traits,

often lacking empirical evidence to support their choices.

This traditional, generalized approach breaks down when considering the high variability in sales roles. Selling sophisticated computers demands different skills than selling shirts, just as wholesale selling differs significantly from door-to-door sales. For example, traits like overconfidence or overt aggressiveness would be a distinct hindrance when dealing with prospects for scientific equipment. In this context, an emotional or overly enthusiastic approach would be highly suspect. Instead, a thoughtful, well-informed explanation, with special attention paid to features that specifically meet the company's technical requirements, is far more likely to be effective.

#### 4. Selection Methodologies for Sales Personnel

Contemporary companies have largely abandoned the search for a singular, universal "sales personality," focusing instead on recruiting men or women who possess the specific aptitudes required to sell their particular product to their targeted market demographic. For this specialized selection purpose, the most useful single method involves the use of a carefully devised, **weighted application blank**. This tool is constructed based on detailed studies of the characteristics demonstrated by salesmen who have proven both successful and unsuccessful with the specific product or service offered by the organization.

When selecting high-level sales personnel, the selection process is often supplemented by an intensive interview process and the administration of a battery of carefully selected psychological and aptitude tests. It is important to note, however, that some researchers maintain that general sales aptitude tests are of limited practical utility, positing that the distinct requirements of differing sales jobs render generic assessments largely ineffective.

#### 5. Training and Development Focus

In the domain of sales training, both **on-the-job training** and simulated environments, such as **role playing**, are considered highly effective methods. The ideal amount of training required varies considerably depending on the individual trainee's background and the complexities of the specific job. Roles involving technical selling, for instance, often necessitate extensive, long-term preparation, including specialized classes, refresher courses, and frequent sales conferences designed specifically to keep the salesman current with rapidly evolving information.

A defining characteristic of modern sales training is its emphasis on comprehensive **information mastery** rather than merely focusing on superficial selling techniques. This shift is crucial because the successful salesperson must be thoroughly prepared to answer intricate questions posed by the prospect, requiring detailed knowledge about both the company's product line and the offerings and specifications of key competitors.

## 6. Empirical Evidence on Effective Sales Methods

While extensive empirical field research concerning the sales process remains meager, and laboratory studies utilizing simulated sales interviews are often considered limited and artificial, certain investigations have yielded significant results concerning effective sales methods. One notable study compared highly effective saleswomen engaged in **door-to-door selling** for a national organization against less effective counterparts (Pace, 1962). An interviewer, blinded to the sales records of the participants, evaluated specific aspects of their oral communication, including language use, voice modulation, dramatic appeals, and critically, their **listening behavior**. The substantial differences observed between the two performance groups strongly indicated the importance of stressing advanced communication and active listening skills in both selection and training programs for this specific sales type.

A second influential investigation involved a field study of driver-salesmen within a large company (White, 1940). This research uncovered a crucial finding: the sales records of the men were found to be completely unrelated to their generalized personality descriptions. Salesmen categorized as "negative, colorless, weak, and drab" performed just as well as those described using highly positive traits such as "genial, cordial, familiar, and easygoing." This observation provides robust evidence against the traditional emphasis on a mandatory charismatic personality.

Instead, the study emphasized the importance of systematic methods and procedural diligence. For example, salesmen who routinely took the time to count the dealer's existing stock of the company's products received orders that were, on average, two and a half times larger than those secured by salesmen who neglected this inventory step. Similarly, those who proactively informed the dealer about the week's special offer before processing the regular order averaged 27 per cent more sales per call than those who took the regular order first. These results collectively support the argument that the **systematic methods** employed by the salesperson are generally more predictive of success than their personality traits.

As noted by Anastasi, there appears to be significant room for wide individual differences in personality among successful sellers. This suggests that the focus should be on encouraging each individual to leverage their unique pattern of traits and abilities to their best advantage, rather than conforming to a generalized, prescriptive set of rules for interpersonal interaction in a sales context.

### Further Reading

[Salesmanship - Wikipedia](#)

[Sales Process and Methodology](#)

Anastasi, A. (1964). Psychological Testing. Macmillan.

Pace, H. (1962). Study of Effective and Ineffective Saleswomen.

White, M. (1940). Field Study of Driver-Salesmen.

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