

Men Can't Sell – Women Can! And We Can Prove It!

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Abstract

Men and women approach most things in life differently. Perhaps women, with their edge in empathy, simply make better sales people (Joy and Kane- Benson, 1994). You can hypothesize all sorts of reasons for this - perhaps women are perceived as more trustworthy and less threatening than men, or women are more amenable to the demands of balancing work life and career advancement, or this is merely a function of men and women using their different strengths to approach sales differently.

Regardless of gender, today's business prospects are looking for the best value for their dollar. Seemingly, the most talked about difference is first impression. While opposite genders (male seller/female buyer or female seller/male buyer) seem to prime the candidate (seller) and allow a little more openness in the beginning, a customer's (buyer's) decision-making process is consistent, and more times than not a seller's attention to detail wins over "opposites attract." Typically, women are multitaskers that have an extreme attention to detail, have a need for organization, communication, and a desire for Win-Win situations (Joy and Kane-Benson, 1994).

Even when testing men and women for facial cue recognition (figuratively construed as "buyer's cues") women test ... better... than men. Facial cues are well-recognized negotiation tools (Vendere Team, 2010).

A more analytical approach, of course, **to determine if men really can't sell as well as women** would probably be a more straightforward comparison of data. This was our approach. We examined 10 years of data from the National Collegiate Sales Competition (NCSC), which provided a series of patterns to trace the progression of each gender through the various rounds of the sales competition, to ultimately ranking the top four winners from the final championship round. The format of the competition consists of rating the contestants on various sales skills during an approach, needs identification, product presentation, closing, and overall communication and selling objections skills mastery.

The process used involved matching competitors' and adjudicators' (judges of the competition) gender. In other words, male and female judges were each used, as well as male and female competitors to determine actual matched rankings (National Collegiate Sales Competition). Because all players were dressed professionally, we were able to control for attire. Initially, the sample size for each year of the competition is 134. Winners from the first round proceed to the next set of rounds (either wild-card or quarter-finals), then on to the semi-final round, and finally the top four (4) contenders to the championship round.

So Do Women Make Better Salespeople than Men?

Some experts believe that women have innate exceptional selling skills that are easily honed to perfection. Tom Peters, co-author of *In Search of Excellence* notes that women make better salespeople than men, and that women working in sales jobs love selling and excel at what they do. Ginni Rometty (IBM Chairman, President, and CEO) agrees, insisting that a woman can close deals without spending hours on the golf course (Cohn 2017). They both purport that women have a natural ability to nurture relationships, to build trust and create a consensus. According to Peters, women are more likely to appear in front of a prospect because they're 25% more willing to make cold calls than men. He believes that women are more effective in getting an audience with their prospects. And while "hunting and closing" skills are statistically the same, women generally have more selling skills and strengths than men.

A recent article by Carolyn Cohn highlights why women make better salespeople. She attributes a woman's success to some basic principles. One, they recognize the needs of potential (and actual) buyers; two, they are

good listeners—women spend 80% of their time listening and 20% asking questions. They also understand the important elements involved in successfully closing a deal (Cohn 2017).

When many think of someone in sales, they think of a well-dressed man. While many in sales are male, women have earned a well-earned and much-respected position in the sales industry. Ultimately, the level of success that sales professionals enjoy is up to them - how hard they work, how dedicated they are to improving their sales skills and how focused they are on providing excellent service to their customers (Phelps, 2017).

The reality is that while the gender pay gap is slowly closing, women are still getting less than their fair share of compensation. According to Martin (2013), women are performing better than men, yet still earning less for the same jobs.

With buying and selling, by nature, women have it all over men (Cohn 2017). Women have an emotional core, which is extremely effective when it comes to being able to be outrageously successful at selling products and services. In selling any product or service, relationships are at the heart of the success of the entire process. Cohn (2017) states that before one is able to cultivate any relationship, there must be a real emotional connection between the persons. People react to other people and what they are communicating on an emotional level. Without this connection, a relationship can die before it ever has a chance to live. The presence of feelings on both sides is essential.

Why women make such amazing sales people

If you flip it around and consider what sort of reaction buying invokes in a large number of women, you will see that the element of emotion is present in the buying as well as in the selling. Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule; however, on the whole, women feel good when they buy things. As women build their relationships with other women (and men in some cases), they are building a foundation of trust and credibility.

On the sales side, it is a simple fact that nobody understands women better than women. It is not that the women who are doing the selling are manipulating or conniving. It is just that they are smart enough to be able to identify the problems that the buyers are experiencing and are also smart enough to come up with a way to solve those problems. They are naturally going by the WIIFM (What's In It For Me) principle. In other words, it doesn't matter how wonderful the seller is and clever, talented, skilled, etc., they are. All that matters is that sellers have the ability to solve the problems of the buyer.

This study explores the concept and definition of gender, gender bias, and gender stereotype in a sales setting. The objective is to discover the type and level of influence a person's gender contributes to evaluation, performance and judging in student sales competitions. Women, because of the way they relate to people in general, have a natural ability to be successful salespeople. The emotional element is critical and people will react emotionally without even realizing it.

Comer and Jolson (1991) indicated a saleswoman's performance is adversely impacted by how closely the sales manager perceives her conduct conforms to undesirable gender stereotypes. Pinar and Hardin (2005) determined that gender and how it impacts selling and sales performance is biased and stereotypical. We are continuously examining the gender effect and aim to support the thesis that **Men Can't Sell – Women Can!**

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: This study explores the influence that gender yields in a competitive sales environment. Emphasis is placed on performance outcome rankings from a buyer or seller being of the same gender vs them being of different genders in order to determine the propensity for females to outperform men in selling products and services. Conclusions and generalizations from this study will propel gender-related research in sales.

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