

SUMMARY TO SELL IS HUMAN DANIEL PINK



Summary of “To Sell is Human” by Daniel Pink

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Learn why selling is part of human nature-- and part of every job!

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Introduction

We've all heard the phrase "to err is human," right? It's a comforting old classic because it reminds us that making mistakes is simply an intrinsic part of being a human being. But have you ever thought of sales as being an inherently human thing? If you're like most people, your answer is, "Probably not!" After all, if you're a manager, your job probably isn't about selling products as much as it's about managing people. Similarly, if you're a teenager with a summer job at an ice cream shop, sure, your job is technically in sales-- but you're not responsible for overseeing the marketing, promotion, or numbers for your employer. Ice cream pretty much sells itself and you're just there to scoop-- right? Wrong! You might be surprised to hear it, but Daniel Pink argues that both of those jobs are heavily centered around sales, even if you don't realize it. Understanding the hidden and interwoven nature of sales can help us explore its role in our lives and sell to our full potential. So, over the course of this summary, we're going to learn just that!

Non-Sales Selling

At first glance, that might sound like an oxymoron, similar to “jumbo shrimp” or “paid volunteers”-- things that can’t possibly exist in the same sentence because they’re polar opposites. But believe it or not, “non-sales selling” really is a thing, and Pink observes that it’s actually forming the backbone of Western society. That’s because it’s centered in what is commonly called the “Ed-Med Industries” (short for “education” and “medicine”). Just think about it-- doctors and educators aren’t necessarily trying to sell you a product, but they sort of are! They sell you on the necessity of education and medicine (and rightly so) and you pay thousands to access both. Education also requires non-financial sacrifices, like sacrificing your free time and pouring countless hours into the pursuit of a college degree.

They might not function in the same way as a door-to-door salesman or a tacky commercial, luring you in with the promise of a product that will combat your hair loss or make you happy, but they do still “sell” you on a “product.” In fact, these industries are so good at selling to you without directly selling to you, you don’t even recognize it when they pitch their products. That’s because they’re selling things like education and medical treatment, both of which are vital, inalienable human rights. Because we need those things, we don’t really think about them in the same way that we would a new vacuum or a supposed “miracle hair drug.” Instead, we often abandon our critical thinking skills and dive right in, paying whatever these industries ask without realizing that we’ve jumped for a non-selling sales pitch!

That’s not to hate on the education or medical industries, however-- far from it! The author acknowledges that both are absolutely necessary and beneficial for a functioning society. However, with that said, the author also believes it’s important for us to recognize the fact that these industries function very differently from what we consider to be the “traditional sales industries.” And because they are so influential and profitable in Western

society, we need to understand the inner-workings of industries that concentrate on non-sales selling if we want to develop a holistic understanding of modern economics.

The New Ethics of Sales

Have you ever watched the musical *Sweeney Todd*? Although it's known for its depiction of a deranged London barber who uses his trade as an excuse to cut the throats of all who wronged him, that's not quite the focus of our example in this chapter. That's because *Sweeney Todd* also offers a brilliant portrayal of another character: the quintessential snake-oil salesman. Set in the early 1800s, when pretty much anyone could get away with anything, it's no surprise that Victorian salesmen weren't the most ethical people in the world. And *Sweeney Todd* illustrates this perfectly through the character of Mr. Pirelli, a traveling Italian salesman. Mr. Pirelli rocks a small London suburb by showing up with what he claims is a "miracle elixir," guaranteed to treat baldness and literally cause your hair to grow overnight.

And because it's the 1800s, he doesn't have tests or licenses or focus groups or anything that would prove his claims; it's all down to his flashy sales pitch. And indeed, he pitches with gusto! He sells so convincingly, in fact, that nearly the entire town buys bottles of "Pirelli's Miracle Elixir," gullibly rushing off with their purchase before realizing that what they've bought is actually bottled cat urine. Now, that sounds pretty gross, but it probably also sounds like your general impression of salesmen. That's because it took a long time for the sales industry to catch up with modern ethics. And after decades of a system that relied on buyers being gullible, it's no wonder people are suspicious or that they constantly assume salesmen are trying to "pull one over on them."

Fortunately, however, the salespeople of today are working hard to rectify the errors of the past. Part of that is due to a little thing called the internet. Thanks to the internet, buyers no longer have to rely on the (untrustworthy) word of sellers like Mr. Pirelli. Now they can do their own research and take steps to protect themselves by learning anything they need to know about the seller, the product, and typical expectations of quality for anything they hope to buy. And if they want, they can even

“cancel” shift dealers like Pirelli by outing them online and warning others of their unethical tricks. It’s a great deal for buyers and the author believes that it’s high time we cultivated more transparency in the sales industry!

But what makes this phenomenon particularly interesting is its impact on the business sphere. Because it’s not only revolutionized the way sellers sell, it’s changed the entire culture around selling. For example, if you’re selling a used car, you can no longer count on a buyer’s ignorance and act as the gatekeeper for all information about anything related to cars. You can’t hope to convince a buyer that yes, of course, a car is supposed to grind and squeal when you press on the breaks. Because if you try, that buyer can easily confront you by saying, “Really? So, what about this article I read from this mechanic website...?” So, that means that you as a seller have to re-think your selling style (and hopefully that involves a lot of ethical decision-making!)

The author observes that this update is also relevant to non-selling sales industries as well. Because they can no longer act as the sole gatekeepers of relevant information, they must redirect their focus, find new ways to stay relevant, and channel their energy into helping customers engage with the information they can provide. For example, instead of teaching from the perspective of, “I know things that you don’t!” teachers can use this culture shift to cultivate a new way of teaching. This approach would be centered on a premise like, “I know you guys know a little bit about this topic, so let me use my expertise to help you learn more about that topic and think critically about it.”

As a result of this cultural update, the author argues that our traditional “ABCs of Sales” has been re-invented too. Gone are the days of “Always Be Closing!” Today, it should be all about “Attunement, Buoyancy, and Clarity.” As you can see, even this shift in wording marks a fundamental change in our attitudes when it comes to sales. “Always Be Closing” asserts that our objective is to make a sale, no matter what. But the updated model indicates that, as salespeople, our primary concern is being attuned to the

needs of our customers, being buoyant (or resilient) in updating our role in the world, and cultivating clarity in our sales policies.

Understanding our ABCs

So, now that we know the ABCs of sales have changed, the author believes it's important to take a closer look and understand them better so we can put them into practice. And that's just what we're going to do in this chapter, starting with Attunement. So, for starters, what does attunement really mean? And what does it look like in practice? In the previous chapter, we briefly mentioned that attunement means being attuned to the needs of our customers. Sounds pretty straightforward so far, right? Well, it's also a little bit more than that. Because in addition to understanding our customers' perspective and their needs, attunement is also about adjusting our own perspective so that we can work well with our customers. And sometimes that means increasing our self-awareness, especially when it comes to our own personality types.

For example, we often think that extroverts-- outgoing people with loud, bold, and friendly personalities-- are most likely to make a sale. We connect these personalities with traits like confidence and persuasion, all of which are perfect for making connections with strangers and encouraging them to buy things. But studies have repeatedly shown that extroverts aren't quite as effective salespeople as we imagine them to be! That's because many people are taken aback by flashy or disingenuous sales pitches. If they perceive an extrovert's pitch as being too showy or insincere, they're actually less likely to buy from them. Similarly, very extroverted salesmen are often likely to talk twice as much as they listen and this can be very off-putting to prospective customers as well.

However, that's not to say that all extroverts are bad! Personality differences are great and life wouldn't be very diverse or interesting if everyone had the same personality type. So, while the author is hardly saying that we need to get rid of extroverts, he is saying that this is a wakeup call for bold personalities to be sensitive to the needs of others. In this case, that might mean finding a middle ground. And it might surprise you to know that a "middle ground" personality type already exists! It's

called being an “ambivert,” and ambiverts can best be defined as being a cross between introverts and extroverts; they share traits from both personality types. So, whether you already are an ambivert or not, it may be a good idea to balance the sensitivity and listening skills of the introvert with the friendliness and confidence of the extrovert. This will not only improve your connections with customers, it will also help you make more sales!

Becoming Buoyant

There's no doubt about it: bouncing back from rejection is tough. And unfortunately, we're all going to face plenty of it in life. So, the trick is learning how to handle it correctly. That's what the "B" in our new set of ABCs is all about, because buoyancy is really just a fancy word for resilience. So, how can you become buoyant? The author affirms that developing resilience means re-writing a great deal of the therapy-speak and motivational lingo we may have internalized over the years. For example, how many times have you told yourself something like, "I'm the best salesman in the history of the world! I can sell snow to an eskimo!" That sounds super encouraging... until you get a door slammed in your face. Or until you hit a week of getting the door slammed in your face. And then you can't really fall back on your own statements of affirmation because they don't feel true.

So, if you want to combat that, the author recommends taking a different approach, one that actually draws on the principles of a popular children's cartoon! Maybe you've watched the kids' TV series "Bob the Builder" at some point in your life. Do you remember how-- in the intro song at the beginning of every episode-- Bob would enthusiastically sing, "Can we fix it?!" It always got his animated friends excited (along with all the kids watching!) but the author posits that it also asks an important question. "Can we fix it?" is an awesome starting place because it invites you to be realistic about your ability to address the situation. And it also helps you combat potential rejection by inviting you to develop realistic answers to questions that might arise.

As you can see, this is a much better approach than starting with an attitude of, "I'm the best and I can't fail!" While that's not to say that you shouldn't be enthusiastic or confident, it is a reminder that buoying yourself with false illusions of grandeur is unlikely to help you get very far. And it's definitely not going to help you combat the rejection you will inevitably face. So, ask yourself questions before you start and use your questions as

an opportunity to learn, grow, and find hidden sales tactics you might otherwise have missed! You can also cultivate buoyancy by developing a positive action plan for post-rejection moments. That's because handling rejection after the fact is every bit as important-- if not more so-- than preventing rejection in the first place. So, address rejection by being kind to yourself and avoiding negative self-talk above all. For example, don't tell yourself, "I'm a lousy salesman and no one will ever want to buy anything from me!" Instead, avoid generalizations, be realistic, and say something like, "I was a little off my game today" or "That person just doesn't need my product-- but someone else does!"

Curating Clarity

The last step in our ABCs goes back to a principle we discussed in the first chapter: the changing roles of salesmen. Because salesmen can no longer act as gatekeepers of information or expect gullibility from buyers, your job is to be an advocate for clarity instead of hoping to “pull one over” on your customer. So, how can you curate clarity in your business? Implementing steps “A” and “B” will actually help you do that! Because step A is all about being attuned to your customer’s needs, your improved sensitivity to your customers will help you learn more about what they really need. And that in turn will help you to ask the right questions. That’s where clarity comes in.

Clarity enters the equation when you can show your customers a new way to think about a common problem. Or when you can use your knowledge and expertise to help your customers solve their problems. For example, what if you put in the time and effort to discover that your leading competitor’s product is letting customers down in one major area? This would then enable you to tailor your product to meet that need-- and pitch it to your customers accordingly. By shining a new light on the situation, you can genuinely say, “I’m committed to being honest with you and meeting your needs!” And as a result, you’ll be able to be honest with your customers and authentic with the help you’re providing.

It may take a little extra time and effort, but doing that leg work is worth it if it helps you identify your customers’ real needs. And as you do so, remember that being genuine always pays off. People can tell when you’re being fake and the modern customer is smart. They’ll know if you’re lying to them or hitting them with another canned and flashy sales pitch. So, rise to the occasion, change with the times, and learn your new ABCs.

Final Summary

There's no doubt about it: the landscape of sales is changing. Gone are the traditional ABCs of sales; the salesmen of today should no longer be guided by mantras like "Always Be Closing." And our attitude towards sales isn't the only thing that's changed; the role of sales has evolved as well. The author observes that more and more industries-- particularly the non-selling sales industries-- are incorporating sales as a necessary part of the job. That's why we need to know how and why we sell. To help with this, the author has constructed what he considers to be the revised ABCs of modern selling. So, if you re-think your approach to sales and follow the principles of Attunement, Buoyancy, and Clarity instead, you'll be one step ahead and more in sync with your customers.



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