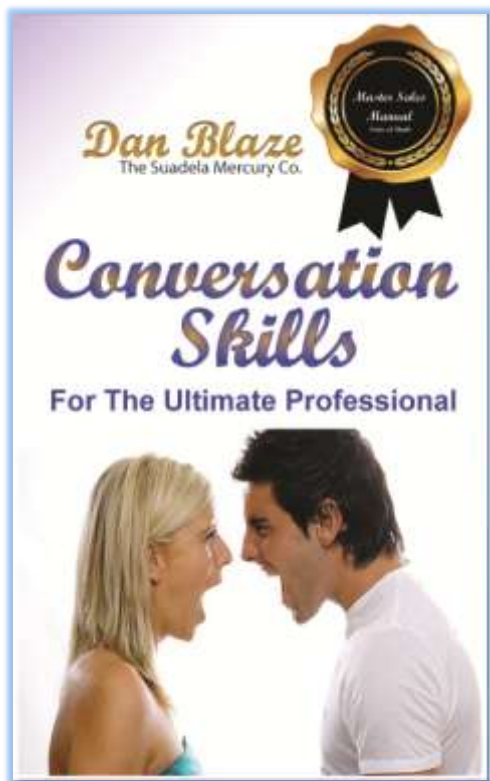


Conversation Skills

For The Ultimate Professional

By Dan E Blaze

(A 'Master Sales Manual Series of Books)



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About The Master Sales Manual Series of Books

Conversation Skills is the second in the Master Sales Manual Series of Books.

All titles in this series are based on proven models and principles as found in psychology, business, marketing and as passed on through professional training courses and seminars. You will not find any advice or suggestion skewed to my own point of view, or the point of view of others... Only cold hard facts, and proven concepts. The series is designed for true professional learning without the use of lengthy stories or multiple examples. If you're ready to dive right in, with information and techniques that you can start using today, then these are the books for you!

The Master Sales Manual Series of Books will take you through a broader view of sales in order to help you develop into a more complete professional. If you've ever been in a real selling situation, then you know that there is more to sales than simply telling others all about the wonderful features and benefits of your product. Sales professionals today need to win the customer over from start to finish.

The Master Sales Manual is the ONLY book that provides an in-depth review of each of the 10 critical skill-sets necessary to become a master at the art of sales. It is essentially a text-book reference guide to sales and adjacent fields of study. It is NOT your regular sales book, and is not designed to entertain you.

The Master Sales Manual: For the Serious Professional!

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Preface

I was 23 when I got into sales. My first job was selling windows for a national window company. They sat me at a desk with a little black phone, handed me the phone book, and said “ok, call people and sell them windows”. Then they explained “first thing is first, set up some appointments to go visit people”. “Visit who?” I asked! “Who do I call? Who wants to buy our windows” The answer that echoed to me from across the room was disappointing... “There’s the phone book - Start with A”. Thank God it was just a local phone book.

It was years later when I got hired with a large call-center that I received my first ounce of REAL training. How to sell... What to Say... How to Say it. They taught me to use features and benefits in succession... Give them a feature, and immediately follow up with a benefit. Just repeat this over and over. At the time, these were advanced sales skills... At least to me.

I remember reading that big companies such as Xerox and IBM would send their Sales force to be professionally trained. I remember wondering why none of the companies that I worked for (to date) had sent me to any formal sales training. I also remember asking myself over and over again how I could possibly become better at my chosen career.

As I moved from one job to another, I started paying attention to things. I would find the best seller in each job and listen closely to what he’s saying, and how he’s saying it... To the inflection in his voice... To the words he chose.. And then I would ask a lot of questions. I would often take time out to do this when I should have been working, which caused me many disputes with management. At some point... I decided it just wasn’t enough.

THE PROBLEM: Unless you work for some large corporation – Fewer and fewer companies are investing in sales training for their Sales force... And those who make an attempt to train their sales staff often provide very basic sales skills

So came the time for me to train myself. I started paying for professional training classes with my own funds. I started buying every sales book I could get my hands on. I bought audio tapes and listened to them day in and day out... And after time, some of it started sinking in. My sales skills started developing and I became a much more persuasive individual.

With so much confidence in myself, I took on opportunities as an independent salesperson with a heating and ventilation company. I was introduced to the world of DIY “Do It Yourself”..

THE SECOND PROBLEM!: Sales skills alone, just aren’t enough. You need a heck of a lot more than mere sales skills to be a well-rounded professional.

I had to create lead-lists; book appointments; plan and perform sales presentations; persuade them to buy; negotiate the offer; close the deal; and build a referral network. It may not seem like a lot, but I found it to be overwhelming for just one person.

With my new-found sales skills, I sought to teach myself everything I could about being a successful independent salesperson. Very little assistance in the matter was provided by the company (and as I moved to other positions later, I found this to be a growing trend).

I decided to spend years researching methods and techniques of honing every skill necessary to be the Perfect Sales Pro, and I wrote it all in one book entitled “The Master Sales Manual”. I wrote the book as a training guide for myself. This book – Communication Skills – is the second in a series of books designed to help the average salesperson train himself to become The Perfect Sales Pro.

Acknowledgements

No-one who achieves success does so without acknowledging the help of others.

- *Alfred North Whitehead*

It is important that I acknowledge all of the resources that I have had the opportunity to learn from... The series of books, audio and video available on the market today. The teachers that have taught me, my friends, my foes, and my family. As well as the universe called the world wide web.

I'd especially like to thank those people in my life who have encouraged me to continue writing, have had faith in my endeavor, and pushed me in times when my morale was low. In the famous words of the Beatles: We all need a little help from our friends.

Introduction

We often take conversation skills for granted. We fail to put forward the conscious focus and care in our words, sentences, phrases, and overall communication... Why? My guess would be this happens because we assume that a conversation is a conversation, and since we have been conversing all of our lives, we must, by now, be masters at the subtle art. Unfortunately, we are wrong!

The intrigue and complexity that occurs within every conversation, whether it be of one minute or one hour, is incredibly fascinating, once you allow yourself to begin understanding. Our unconscious mind processes over 10,000 threads every second, or so scientists believe. That's over 400 billion bits of information. We pick up on all of the subtle things that are accepted through our five senses; things you and I probably never even notice we're doing. The brain deciphers all of these subtle cues, decides what is important and what is not, and spits an idea into our consciousness allowing us to derive meaning from these events... And it does so without asking us first!

With this in mind, don't you think it you ought to be a little more careful as to how you allow others to perceive you? Don't you think you should take a little more control of the bits of information that you send out? And don't you think you could learn to understand others just a little more precisely?

By telling the conscious mind what to look for, and what is important, you allow that message to transcend into the unconsciousness. The next time your unconscious picks up on these subtle things, it will communicate back to the consciousness, and voila! You will be aware of it. You can, one step at a time, become the perfect communicator... Aware of every action they make, and every action you do.

I recommend, in addition to this book, you pick up a book on non-verbal communication (body language), as well as a book on persuasion. The unity of these three subjects can have an instrumental effects on your abilities to communicate perfectly.

SPECIAL NOTE:



Throughout this book, I use a book and pen, like the one to the left. This is my attempt at jumping outside of the script and speaking to you directly. Take special notes here, and enjoy!

Chapter 1

What's The Big Deal Anyway?



*Understand how communication happens:
Its processes, and coding.*

The assumption, of course, is that we are all natural communicators... And since we are naturals, we must also be experts. I mean, if I've been speaking English my whole life, I MUST be good at it... Right?

The truth is, like anything else, if you learn to do it wrong the first time and you practice it wrong till you've perfected that, then you become an expert at doing it wrong! Now, I'm not trying to say that you're speaking methods are incorrect... I wouldn't know that... But very few individuals who have not been involved in some form of communication training have excellent conversational skills. By that I mean, perfect communication skills – For the perfect professional! Ponder upon that as you read through this book.

Communication, whether in conversation or otherwise, is a delicate intervention of representation (of ideas), meaning (associated to those ideas), and intention (of the speaker). This will be reviewed several times throughout this book. In this next chapter, we review how communication happens and why that's important.

Communication?

Communication in any form is simply the sending of signals from one source that may be understood by a second source. Communication between animals (humans included) incorporates two types of signals: Signs and Symbols...

Signs are understood because they are the result of a cause, thus our understanding of the cause allows us to easily understand the sign, and thus the message it conveys. When a person blushes, we understand that they are embarrassed because blushing is the result of embarrassment. In conversation, when a person makes the “uhhh” sound, we understand that they are lost for words because the “uhhh” sound is the result of trying to speak when our words are lost (not literally of course).

Symbols on the other hand, are developed and understood by societies. Language is understood by those who learn and use that specific language, simply because of an implicit agreement between users of the language. There is no real reason why the sound uttered when we speak the word “baby” should refer to a new-born child, other than the fact that it has been agreed upon by English speaking societies. In other languages, the notion of a “baby” is understood by different utterances.

With all this in mind, you may now realize that you cannot not communicate. Even if you choose not to say a word, you are in fact communicating something, as the receiver of your non-communication creates interpretations and in return assimilates a response.

Reciprocity of Communication

It is important to remember that conversation must occur between two or more people... Too often, people enter a conversation for the sole purpose of doing 100% of the talking... This is not conversation – it is a monologue. Conversation occurs when two people interact back and forth, thus there is a reciprocal sequence of interactions.

Context of Communication

Since conversation may occur face to face, or it may occur through some other means, such as telephone, chat sites, email, etc. Conversation may or may not occur within a shared context. Not having a shared context may skew one's understanding of the other's meaning.

Layers of Communication

In human interaction, multiple signs and symbols are generated and combined to express single ideas; we discuss many of these signs and symbols in chapter 5. Such signs and symbols may include words and phrases, minor utterances (such as uhhh, uhmm, and ahhh), tonality, intonation, gestures and body-language, eye-gestures, and other forms of movement. Most often, words alone are not sufficient to provide an appropriate understanding of the message – words are only ‘one piece of the

pie' so to speak. It is thus necessary, for effective communication to take place, to understand the entire message.

This book is focuses strictly on audible conversation skills, and is not designed to provide a look at non-verbal gestures. You may want to pick-up a book on body language to acquire an understanding of non-verbal communication along with this book.



When engaged in conversation, attempt to pick up on the various layers of communication that exist so that you can better understand the total message. Check also for congruency between different layers of communication – your clients may be saying one thing, but showing something else.

The Conscious Vs. The Unconscious

We communicate both through conscious and unconscious signals, which are called cues. A “cue” is any large or small action or sound beyond the simplicity of words that can be recognized by the brain as input. This can be the moving of any part of the body (referred to as a major cue) or a more subtle movement or twitch that may not consciously be recognized (called a minor cue, often also referred to as a subtle cue). Cues send a type of signal to the receiver, who then consciously or unconsciously associates some form of meaning to it.

Let's just clarify what is defined as consciousness and unconsciousness; or what is referred to as the conscious and unconscious mind. The brain processes billions of bits of information per second - There are those things which we become aware of, and there are those things that we are completely unaware of. For example, the human heart (under normal conditions) beats somewhere in the vicinity of 100 beats per minute... Completely without the need to be aware of it, or otherwise interact in any way... It is autonomously handled by the unconscious. The oncoming of a sneeze happens in much the same way, as do breathing (in general) and reflex reactions. The body does what it needs to do based on messages that are sent to it by our brains, and we do not become aware of it until it has either happened or is happening, and in some cases not until it stops happening. These autonomous and independent activities within our brains are referred to as the unconsciousness.

Compare this to conscious activity, which is any activity that allows and/or requires you to be aware of occurrences. When you lift a coffee cup, your brain actually visualizes you doing so before you even begin to move. You are prepared for the actions that you must take, and the sensations that you are about to feel. When a ball moves toward you, you recognize that it is doing so and become aware of what is about to happen, what is happening, and what should happen to avoid injury. Your mind actually plays a sort of movie, or set of moving pictures that allow you to visualize this. This awareness is referred to as the consciousness.



A major key to developing expert communication skills is to learn to become aware of those things you would normally be unaware of – Thus having more control of the overall message that you send to the person receiving your message. By understanding the subtle cues of conversation, we can work toward this.

Speech Act

Whether we know it or not, every time we speak we are performing speech acts. A speech act is an act that is performed by speaking. John Langshaw Austin, a philosopher of language who also served in the British Intelligence Services MI6, made popular the term “speech act” in his book “How To Do Things With Words”.

Speech act theory suggests that there are three types of forces that occur in speech, either independently or in combination, they are:

Locutionary Force

This includes linguistic properties. The words / phrases are taken in a literal sense. For example, having said “I’m hungry”, I have made a statement in the fact that I am feeling hungry.

Locutionary force includes three main subdivisions:

- 1) **Phonic:** This generally refers to the process of producing a particular sound. The phonetics of speech.
- 2) **Phatic:** The arrangement of sounds that are produced.
- 3) **Rhetic:** The structure of sentences aimed at delivering a particular message.

Illocutionary Force

This is the purpose of having said what was said. An intention is made in the performance of having spoken. Referring to our previous example, having said “I’m hungry”, I could be expecting that someone give me some food, I could be suggesting that someone should tell me where I can get some food, or I may even be requesting that someone suggest to me what I should eat (especially if I am not familiar with the surrounding area).

Illocutionary force can be one of five distinguished classes:

- 1) **Assertives:** Speech acts where the speaker asserts his opinions.
- 2) **Directives:** Speech acts that seek to cause the listener to engage in some form of action (i.e. requests, commands, advice, etc).
- 3) **Commissives:** Speech acts that commit the speaker to some future action (i.e. promises, oaths, guarantees).
- 4) **Expressives:** Speech acts that express the speakers emotions and attitudes (i.e. Congratulations, excuses, thanks, etc).

5) Declarations: Speech acts that seek to change the context of reality, these are usually done only by individuals who have the power to do so (i.e. baptisms, pronouncing someone guilty by law, pronouncing holy union in marriage, etc.).

Perlocutionary Force

This is the effect or result that is produced, either on the speaker himself, or on the listener. Again with the example “I’m hungry”, the perlocutionary force could be that of inspiring someone to see it in themselves to buy me lunch (I’d really like that!).

Conversational Stance

Conversation, through its many communicative techniques, expresses the stance of both speaker and listener. Stance, is the position that a speaker takes in conversation, and may be extended to include the position taken by the listener as he generates a response to the speaker. In other words, stance is the combined influence of a person’s attitudes, opinions and perspective as displayed through their communication.

Stance is displayed through a variety of symbols and signals, the most common of which being body language, tone, volume, use of words/phrases, and emotional input. There are two subcategories of stance, they are:

1) Epistemic Stance: This is essentially the manner in which the speaker displays his knowledge and certainty of the information contained within the conversation. The more knowledgeable a speaker appears, and the more certain he appears that his knowledge is correct, the stronger his epistemic stance.

2) Affective Stance: Affective stance has to do with the emotions portrayed by a speaker, and the manner in which those emotions interact with the listener(s). It is sometimes thought to be a perspective on the personality of the speaker, however, this is not always the case.

The Communication Process

Communication doesn’t just happen. It isn’t some chaotic event that has no flow or structure. There is a flow to which all communication takes place. Sociologists have broken down the communication process into five basic stages:

The Sender

The first part in the communication process begins with you – The sender. Two different people could have the same thought, but ultimately intend on sending distinctly different messages. This has a lot to do with personality, values, morals and beliefs.

The Message

The message is the idea that you intend to get across. What’s important to recognize here is that when you decide to speak, you are verbalizing ideas that have formed in your mind. Studies have shown how people form some imagery in their mind and then attempt to describe that imagery

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