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Reader Service # 119

SALES MANAGEMENT

Sell better by tapping the right sense

by Kate Bertrand

Greg Stebbins remembers sitting in on a sales call with a young rep who was pitching a high-ticket medical diagnostic product. As the dialogue between the rep and the prospect evolved, it became clear—at least to Mr. Stebbins—that the two were *not* communicating.

The rep, who preferred telling to showing, kept talking about the product. But the visually oriented client wanted to see a picture of it. Eventually, the conversation deteriorated into a show vs. tell confrontation. It was the classic sales miscommunication.

Amazingly, the rep had product brochures in his briefcase. But he didn't bring them out because, "He was locked into his own form of communication," says Mr. Stebbins, president of Venice, Calif.-based Stebbins Consulting Group. The firm trains salespeople to identify and match the communication styles of customers and prospects.

For sales reps and managers alike, adapting to different communication styles is crucial. It enables reps to determine customer needs and helps sales managers communicate meaningfully with reps.

According to Mr. Stebbins, salespeople who've learned to match their customers' communication styles have enjoyed productivity gains of 24% to 300%.

By listening to how prospects use language, the rep can identify which of the five senses they are attuned to and respond accordingly. For example, customers who frequently use words such as "colorful," "eye-opening" and "view" think visually.

Similarly, those who often use terms that describe the sense of touch—such as "moving," "handy" and "fetching"—are kinesthetically inclined.

Depending on the sense they emphasize, people are categorized as: visuals (sight), auditories (sound), kinesthetics (touch), olfactories (smell) or gustatories (taste).

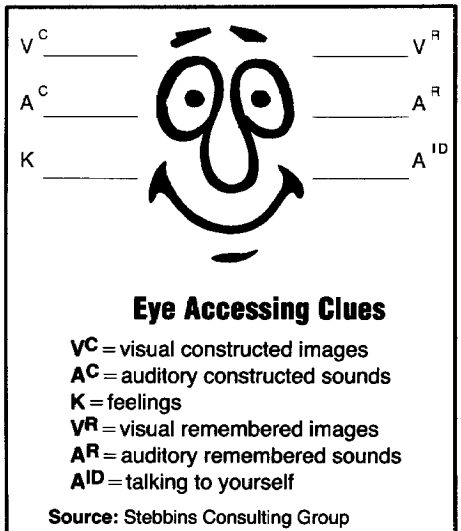
The Eyes Have It

Another way to determine how the prospect thinks is to monitor his or her eye movements. Mr. Stebbins' research into psycholinguistics, the psychology of language, shows that people's eyes move in certain predictable ways as they access mental data.

The eyes move up to the right or left when the person accesses visual images. The eyes move sideways, to-

ward the ears, with the access of sounds. When feelings are accessed, the eyes move down and to one side. Down and to the opposite side means the person is experiencing an internal dialogue.

In addition, the eyes move in one direction when accessing a remembered sound or image and in the opposite direction to access a constructed, or imagined, sensation. The accompanying diagram shows the eye pattern



common to about 85% of the population. Among the other 15%, the eyes move to the opposite side when accessing feelings, constructed visuals and constructed sounds.

To determine which percentage the prospect is part of, the sales rep can ask a nonthreatening question such as, "Where are you from?" The prospect's eye movement while answering indicates the side on which remembered images and sounds reside.

The salesperson who can identify information-accessing styles can craft meaningful communications with each prospect. Say the rep asks Ms. Prospect what she considers when purchasing the product in question. Her eye pattern shows an internal dialogue followed by a constructed visual image and a kinesthetically loaded verbal answer.

The rep responds with a statement that addresses, in turn, each step in her thought process. He says, "When you *mull this over*, you'll see how this will *dovetail* with your plans."

As Mr. Stebbins says, "All you're doing is matching their communication style." ■