



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2000

PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL SELLING

General Comments

With an average mark of 43%, and a failure rate of 26%, this cohort of examination candidates produced the weakest set of scripts since *Principles of Personal Selling* was added to the first year curriculum. Many reasons can be identified for this poor performance: lack of preparation, apparent dependence on a single learning resource, failure to read the question, failure to follow the instructions of the question, and so on. Unfortunately, all these reasons have been identified in the examiner's report over the past few years and have simply gone unheeded. The single biggest problem this year was an obvious failure on the part of students to read the question that they were attempting to answer. As the May 1999 examiner's report said, "...students ... appear to read the questions until they recognise a word or phrase and then proceed to write all they know on that topic. This technique does not garner marks. Marks will only be awarded where students address the topic in the context specified by the examiner". This is still entirely true but will it be heeded in August or next May any more than in previous years?

Question 1

This was a poorly answered question particularly so as common sense could have garnered many marks, even without formal learning. Many students who chose the question made no attempt to answer it as it was asked. Instead they compared personal selling with other elements of the promotions mix, explained the selling process or explained the buying process. While the description of the standard benefits was vital - change agent, risk reduction, transfer of knowledge, tailoring message to specific needs, etc. - it was also important not to omit the obvious economic and social benefits such as extensive direct and indirect employment.

Question 2

Most students performed relatively well on Part A of this question where they were asked to explain the self-concept theory. However Part B, which required an examination of the implications of the theory for the personal seller, proved more difficult as students were apparently incapable of applying theory. Those who did apply the theory typically limited their answer to the self-concept of either the seller or the buyer. Both members of the dyad have self-concepts that have implications for the seller. Also the sales manager's self concept may have important implications for the salesperson.

Many who attempted the question never really 'explained' the self-concept as they were instructed but rather 'listed' or 'outlined' or 'identified'. There are no marks for rephrasing the question.

Question 3

In answering this question many students made no attempt to address the statement or only addressed half of it. In addition many students seemed to read the statement as "A salesperson doesn't need to know much about his/her product". Naturally there were few marks awarded for addressing an alternative statement. A statement on an examination paper is not an excuse to write all one knows about the concepts mentioned in it. It is designed to measure the students' ability to frame an opinion and to present a cogent and well constructed argument. This question instructed students to 'discuss' the statement and again this instruction was largely ignored.

Question 4

The major problem encountered with this question was in relation to following the instructions. Most students were familiar with consultative selling but chose to 'demonstrate your understanding' or 'explain' rather than evaluate its use in relation to a particular situation.

Question 5

This was the best answered question on the paper though it is incredible that all students didn't attempt it given that common sense alone could have acquired most of the marks. In explaining the value of completing sales call reports students should have looked at it from the point of view of the salesperson, the sales manager and the company in general. On Part B about ten items should have been listed as important for inclusion on the report.

Question 6

This was the most popular question on the paper but not well answered. Students gave a lot of detail about the prospecting process and sources of prospects but very often neglected the statement as presented. A good answer would have addressed the importance of prospecting and of new customers, the inevitable loss of existing customers, the Pareto principle, and time management.

Question 7

This was one of the more popular questions but the worst answered on the paper. Most students were not familiar with the assumptive close and so couldn't explain it. Consequently in the absence of this knowledge they were unable to relate it to other closing techniques. Such a lack of familiarity seems odd when the area of closing the sale is such an important part of the job and so regularly recurring on this paper over the years.

Question 8

This was the least popular question on the paper. In attempting the question it was important to make the answer specific to expensive capital equipment. Otherwise the better answers simply described the process of making a sales pitch in writing and explained the reasons why this would be necessary.