



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2001

PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL SELLING

General Comments

The overall profile of marks this year was quite poor. The average mark was only 42 while the most frequently achieved grade was D. 29% of candidates failed to achieve the pass mark, only one candidate achieved a B and nobody achieved an A. On the positive side, however, it was particularly noticeable that the higher quality answer sheets were full with practical examples, often in relation to the candidates' employing organisations. This is a practice that has been encouraged in the past and a good example to all future candidates.

This year's scripts showed little evidence of the essential textbook having been studied and no evidence of any supplemental reading having been undertaken. In addition, it is disappointing that having studied personal selling for a year and apparently in many cases having worked in the area that candidates might still suggest that a salesperson's job involves "...distracting customers from the real issue" and other variations on that theme.

Question 1

Nobody attempted this question. It is surprising that not one candidate offered an attempt given that the topic of sales forecasting is clearly part of the syllabus and has appeared on several previous examination papers. It is particularly unfortunate that this situation pertained given that a number of candidates were not otherwise able to attempt the five questions that the paper demanded.

Question 2

Not surprisingly this was the most popular question on the paper. What is somewhat surprising, however, is that it was the question that was subject to the weakest attempted answers. It is astonishing the number of people who showed no appreciation of closing techniques despite the obvious importance of closing on the syllabus, in the selling process and on all previous examination papers. The examiner wonders whether candidates read the recommended text, read their notes or attend class. There was no evidence in the answers that any of these options were utilised or indeed of common sense being applied.

Question 3

The attempts to answer this question again left the examiner wondering if anybody had read the reading list or in any way supplemented the main text. This question required an answer that described a process that started with Problem Recognition and ended with Post-Purchase Evaluation. There was no single correct set of steps in between. It would have been beneficial if candidates had outlined their answer with a diagram of their proposed process.

Question 4

The two biggest weaknesses in answering this question were that candidates failed to address “*all* aspects of sales call planning” and largely failed to mention the absolute importance of setting sales call objectives. Candidates tended to concentrate on qualifying the prospect and having detailed product knowledge. These are essential aspects but do not constitute a complete answer.

Question 5

Candidates should have emphasised that a complaint received is only the tip of the iceberg. There are many more customers, or ex-customers, with the same problem who didn't complain. In addition, they should have stressed that a well-handled complaint will lead to stronger customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Weaker answers tended to confuse complaints with objections.

Question 6

This question asked candidates to assess the role of personal selling in the marketing function. Candidates however presented details of the roles of the personal seller in society and made little attempt to incorporate it into the context of the marketing function. The roles of marketing researcher, market forecaster, marketing planner and image builder were generally omitted in favour of the role of marketing communicator.

Question 7

As with Question 4 the primary problem with this question was that candidates failed to address “*all* elements of the sales call” as required but tended instead to concentrate on presentation. Such an approach omitted to mention such elements as qualifying, understanding the prospect, ensuring the prospect understands, listening, getting and keeping attention, handling objections, closing, and so on. Better answers included the idea of the prospect asking questions.

Question 8

This was the best answered question on the paper. Candidates generally did not include the customer in the demonstration. They showed the customer how to use the product only, rather than letting the customer use it him/herself. In stating the objectives that they might be pursuing in giving a demonstration, only one candidate suggested that making a sale might be a useful objective. It will seldom be the sole objective but it is always a useful one.