



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2002

PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL SELLING

General Comments

This paper was subject to a disappointingly poor performance overall. 46% of scripts were of a D grade, 13% of C grade, and 10% of B grade. 18% of students achieved an F grade while a further 10% required compensation if they were to pass. The average grade achieved was D, a mere 42.2 marks.

The low marks continue to surprise given that the subject lends itself to a combination of common sense and personal experience. Once again the annual problems were evident: failing to read the question properly, poor exam technique, depending on single learning resources, sketchy answers, and not being able to apply the theory to practical situations.

Question 1

Some students didn't seem to be familiar with the marketing communications mix or with the elements that constitute it and so didn't get marks. Others chose to explain or list the roles of personal selling rather than its advantages over the other mix elements and so equally didn't get marks. Still others opted to discuss whether or not personal selling is the most powerful element in the mix rather than explaining why it is the most powerful as required by the question. They didn't gain marks either.

Question 2

The essence of this question was that the objective of the salesperson is not to sell but to help the prospect to buy. Its answer would involve an explanation of the seller's role as a consultant and a problem solver. Many students inferred from the statement that salespeople persuade prospects to buy irrespective of their need. This is an obvious misinterpretation of the statement and shows a lack of familiarity with the work of Buskirk and Buskirk. Students also showed an inadequate understanding of business orientations and marketing philosophies.

Question 3

This question required a reproduction of material from the textbook or from class notes. As a consequence it was subject to the best answers on the paper. However many students failed to gain marks because they confused the term 'customer complaints' with 'customer objections' and talked of 'forestalling objections' rather than 'handling objections'.

Question 4

Despite the fact that some aspect of closing the sale is examined every year students still appear ill-prepared to handle the question. Many took the simplistic view that the ‘assumptive close’ involves merely assuming at a particular time that the prospect has decided to buy. This technique is more subtle than that. It involves the belief that “the prospect is going to buy” being reflected in the attitude, demeanour, words and actions of the salesperson throughout the sales process. Many students also lost marks by explaining the assumptive close but failing to show how it “underlies all other closing techniques” as the question required. In the second part of the question many students had considerable difficulty in adequately describing three closing techniques of their choice.

Question 5

This was a simple question that deserved a simple answer but students chose to complicate it. The application of common sense alone would have allowed many marks to be garnered on this question but it was seldom applied. Often students attempted to reproduce some generic list of information items required and information sources to be used. Many, probably even most, failed to apply their answer specifically to the retail sector and to the first-time call as required.

Question 6

In answering this question students showed a lack of knowledge of the textbook and confusion with the basic terminology of personal selling. Many students offered advice on ‘the selling process’ rather than ‘the sales presentation’. Advice on the use of FAB, SPIN¹ and/or Stimulus-Response were important elements of this answer but should have been accompanied with details on setting objectives, building buyer confidence, building credibility, listening, questioning, and so on.

Question 7

A discussion involves the examination by argument of a topic. In relation to this ‘discussion’ students tended to adopt a position of agreement or disagreement and *briefly* outlined that position. This meant that the many attendant issues were entirely ignored.

Question 8

Everybody who attempted this question was aware that the Pareto Principle is otherwise known as the 80/20 rule. With few exceptions they then simplistically suggested that 80% of one’s time should be devoted to 20% of one’s customers and vice versa. The implication of this is that the salesperson is not spending time seeking new customers. Other issues that were ignored include: What if a top 20% customer ‘dies’? Are all customers worth keeping? Is constant growth required? Can small customers be grown? Can Pareto be applied to non-selling time? And so on.

¹ SPIN is a registered trademark of Huthwaite Research Group.