



## EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2003

### PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL SELLING

#### General Comments

One wonders is the preparation of an examiner's report still a worthwhile exercise. It certainly appears that nobody reads them, at least not the students, and that was particularly apparent this year. The same problems and weaknesses highlighted over the years in previous examiner's reports – failure to read the question, failure to follow the instructions in the question, failure to address the topic in the context required, failure to study around the issues, failure to study the issues, etc. etc. – were all in evidence again this year but were magnified. This magnification of examination weaknesses is reflected in the marks.

In addition to the customary weaknesses a new phenomenon emerged on this occasion whereby candidates used words and phrases of relevance to the subject area but entirely irrelevant to the question being answered or to the context in which it was employed. This misuse of terminology proves that the candidate did not understand the misused term itself or indeed the syllabus area that was being written about.

Overall there was a 50% failure rate in the subject this year, the highest since the introduction of the subject. The average mark achieved was only 36%. (In assessing these figures it should be noted that only 16 students elected the subject this year).

#### Question 1

This question should have involved the student outlining the stages of a typical marketing plan and describing how the salesperson fitted into each of those stages. The attempts at this question offered a microcosm of all the examination weaknesses identified above. Students typically ignored the marketing plan and the salesperson's role in it and instead wrote of the role of selling in marketing, the role of selling in the marketing communications mix, the role of selling in 'marketing programmes', the functions of selling, or the functions of the salesperson. In addition, few offered anything that might be construed as an examination of a topic. Not surprisingly the average mark achieved on this question was 3.7 out of a possible 20.

#### Question 2

In attempting this question it would have been useful to produce a diagram of the purchase decision process and then use that model as the framework against which the question might be answered. Few presented a diagram and those who did presented the wrong one. It is baffling how students of selling might consider the SPIN process or the Stimulus-Response process as representations of the consumer buying process. Of all who attempted the question nobody noted that the example of 'expensive electrical equipment' is a high involvement purchase with all the attendant implications for the salesperson. It also bears

repeating that listing the stages of a process does not constitute 'explaining' the process as the question demanded.

### **Question 3**

Page 21 of the Student Yearbook states that: "Every student is expected to be aware of major current business and economic stories (published in the national daily and Sunday newspapers and business magazines)". This question would have rewarded those who had the expected awareness and who could integrate it with their understanding of selling. Unfortunately few had. In most cases the effects of monetary changeover, inflation, interest rates, economic growth rates, employment levels, economic uncertainty, and so on were ignored. So too were their effects on the selling profession.

### **Question 4**

This question required the candidate to explain a statement. It didn't ask for discussion, for agreement or disagreement, just for an explanation. What is implied by 'a partnership' and why should it be the objective of the selling process? Unfortunately some candidates experienced difficulty explaining 'the selling process' never mind its possible partnership objectives.

### **Question 5**

This was a popular question and was largely subject to good answers. It should be borne in mind however that it required a good memory rather than a thorough understanding of any academic theories or concepts. Students lost marks by not offering a description as the question sought, by not describing the requisite ten sources, or by merely describing (or often only listing) variations of the same source.

### **Question 6**

This was the most popular question on the paper. Those who performed poorly on it typically confused the sales call with the selling process. An additional weakness was the failure to include the setting of objectives as part of the sales call plan.

### **Question 7**

Statistically this was not the worst answered question on the paper but nonetheless the answers presented can only be described as pathetic. Anybody who has ever considered the area of personal selling or studied it to any extent must be aware of the importance of closing in the selling process. Anyone who ever read past examination papers must be aware of its importance as an examination topic over the years. No such awareness was in evidence however. It is hard to believe that any student of selling could get only 10% or less of the marks available for a straightforward question on closing the sale but that is what almost one-third of the students who attempted this question were awarded. Many showed no understanding or appreciation of the closing techniques or indeed in some cases any appreciation of the selling function itself.

### **Question 8**

"Discuss" requires one to examine all aspects of the statement, not just to agree or disagree and explain why. On that basis, few students discussed the statement. The statement as presented is not true in a modern selling environment but the opposite is certainly not true either as some implied by the logical extension of their argument. Were a salesperson to accept 'no' every time it is heard s/he certainly would not succeed.