



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2004

PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL SELLING

General Comments

This year there was a 39% failure rate in the subject. This is an improvement on last year but is still inappropriately high. The average mark achieved per student was slightly below the pass mark.

Many students demonstrated a general inability to answer the question that was asked or often to even appreciate where the topic fitted into the function of selling. This resulted in what can at best be described as a simplistic or naïve explanation of the topics. There is no doubt that the application of basic common sense would make a considerable contribution to success in this subject given that students either work in the profession or interact with salespeople on a regular basis. There was no evidence in this year's scripts of that common sense being applied however. As with previous years, poor examination technique was again in evidence.

Question 1

Students might have approached this question by outlining their understanding of the marketing mix. Then the role of the salesperson within that mix could be examined. The question invited an examination of the various roles of the salesperson and how they subscribed to planning and implementing a particular marketing mix. It also invited a differentiation of selling from the other marketing communications tools in the promotional aspect of the marketing mix. It did not require a delineation of the selling process as some students offered.

Question 2

Follow-up is the last stage of the selling process or the first stage of the next process, depending on one's perspective. Its function is to show appreciation for the order, ensure satisfaction, etc. etc. The extent of follow-up will depend on such factors as the importance of the sale, the importance of the customer, and the complexity of the product. That's all common sense. What does not make common sense is that a salesperson might engage in follow-up to confirm details of the order. Wouldn't s/he have got those details when the order was taken in the previous stage of the selling process? To have to follow-up for such details would be the height of inefficiency and also indicate ineffectiveness. Such a suggestion however frequently occurred.

Question 3

This was the least popular question on the paper but also had the highest average mark. The student could have presented one of many processes as long as it started with some indication of the recognition of a problem and ended with an evaluation or review of the implemented solution. It is important to note that the question asked the student to 'Outline' and not to simply 'List'. Many students did the latter and didn't garner the marks that they might have. This emphasises the need to fulfil the instruction in the question. Part B could have been

addressed by means of common sense alone. Such issues as: guarantees, after-sale service, supplier reliability, etc. should have been examined.

Question 4

Another question based on common sense. A *Sales Call Report* is a report on a sales call. Many students of the Principles of Selling seem to miss this connection. Sales call reports are used as a management control tool and as a basis for evaluating salespeople and designing training programmes. A sales call report is not a customer file, is not a customer card, and is not a sales presentation.

Question 5

This was another question to which common sense could make a major contribution. The question asked about the tasks to be fulfilled in the *pre-approach* stage. As the term suggests these are the tasks to be completed before approaching the prospect. It therefore involves qualifying the prospect, setting objectives, planning the call, etc. The well-worn, but nonetheless apt, phrase: *prior planning prevents poor performance* is particularly applicable to this question. Many students dropped the phrase into other answers but didn't recognise its relevance to this one.

Question 6

This is a standard, regularly recurring, question on the paper. This year it tended to result in a general meander through the selling process, often without making any concession to the sales presentation methods. Typically the presentation methods that should have been explained were consultative selling, FAB, or the stimulus-response technique, though other methods could also have been introduced. In the meander through the selling process several students mentioned or briefly outlined one or more of the presentation methods and so picked up marks by accident.

Question 7

As the question used the words "*close a sale*" many students took the opportunity to write all they knew on closing techniques and related issues. Naturally they received very few marks for this as it wasn't particularly relevant to the required explanation of the statement. This question was subject to the worst answers of all the questions on the paper. Students in general showed no understanding of *buying signals*. Most offered no explanation of what a buying signal is. Most students failed to demonstrate that they had read the relevant page in the essential text (page 362 in this case) or indeed ever studied the topic.

Question 8

Similar to previous years when the Pareto Principle was examined this question was subject to very simplistic, naïve answers. The principle suggests that 20% of customers account for 80% of sales and so on. Without thinking of the consequence of their statement students infer a simple linear relationship between those figures and the allocation of resources and suggest that 80% of resources should be devoted to 20% of customers. There is no doubt that resources should be allocated disproportionately to the number of customers but for an industrial salesperson allocating 80% of his time to a few customers could involve spending several days a month with each one. That would be tantamount to harassment and should be identified as such from common sense.