

Being Gender Intelligent Can Improve Sales

Barbara K. Mednick, Star Tribune Sales and Marketing

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Being aware of the inherently different ways in which men and women talk can help to improve sales. Understanding these differences and becoming "gender intelligent" is increasingly important as the workplace becomes more diverse and women make more purchasing decisions.

Female Purchasing Power

"For the first time in economic history, American women are the key buyer or influencer in the majority of all purchases in markets as diverse as electronics and financial services," according to Terri Whitesel, founder and president, *Interpret-Her*TM, a Minneapolis company that focuses on marketing to women.

"Many women complain that in various purchasing situations, they are not taken as seriously as men. Men don't always look for cues; they make assumptions about women that may or may not be true," explains Whitesel.

Companies can benefit greatly from acknowledging the differences between women and men when they develop, market, advertise and sell their products, according to the article "Why Women Buy," by Janet Bell Crawford, on www.PROFITguide.com.

"Historically, men were the primary decision makers, so businesses interacted with men using a male-oriented sales approach. There was no need to consider other communication styles because everybody (men) understood where everybody else was coming from."

Linguistic Style Differences

Being gender intelligent is particularly relevant to sales. The way people talk – known as linguistic style – refers to characteristic speaking patterns and includes such features as directness or indirectness, pacing and pausing and word choice. Linguistic styles differ between men and women for two key reasons:

- Women and men learn different communication rituals, according to Deborah Tannen, Ph.D., a world-renowned linguist and author of 15 books, including "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation."
- Recent biological evidence shows that brain wiring is different for men and women, according to the book, "Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps," by Barbara and Allan Pease.

Processing Information

For example, a woman will verbalize a series of items out loud in random order. "Processing information out loud is a learning style for women," says Whitesel. The Peases explain that in a business meeting, men view a woman thinking out loud as being scatterbrained, undisciplined or unintelligent. In business, women need to limit their conversation and talk only about conclusions.

Indirect Vs. Direct Speech

Another example of linguistic differences is indirect vs. direct speech patterns. When women speak they tend to use indirect talk, the Peases explain. While this builds rapport among women, it often doesn't work with men because they don't

understand the rules. In business, indirect speech can be disastrous for women, because men can't follow a multi-tracked indirect conversation. Men's sentences are short, direct, solution-oriented and to the point. This kind of speech helps close business deals quickly and is a means of asserting authority over others. Men need to understand that indirect talk is part of a woman's wiring.

The bottom line: To increase sales, one must strive to be gender intelligent and know how to ask, listen and respond to questions from both genders.

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