CMNS 332
Term Paper

All in the Game

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April 2, 2007
I. Introduction

Persuasion and rhetoric are key in car sales; however, being honest is another story. I have been working at a car dealership as a receptionist for over two years now, and I have witnessed through my experience that the business could not do without persuasion because that is all that it takes to win people over. Car salespeople understand that it is the survival of the fittest in the game of retail sales and so they live, eat and breathe the first three principles of rhetoric to succeed, as suggested by Rhoads et al.: liking, commitment or consistency, and reciprocity. Over a certain period during the sale process, the mood and relationship between the client and salesperson shifts to another level that allows the salesperson to jump onto the next three principles of rhetoric that comes in to play, which are: authority, social validation and scarcity. Like the Sophists, car sales take what exists and works with the system at face value because car salespeople understands that there is no getting around human nature (Poulakos, 1999). In fact, Sophists are not concerned with seeking “truth” but of winning through rhetoric (Poulakos, 1999). Gorgias extends the Sophist perspective with the argument that language is a pervasive power that can not be resisted (Poulakos, 1999). Additionally, Aristotle uses the concept of ethos, pathos and logos, and the three qualities of a speaker to further demonstrate how rhetoric and the rhetorician are enhanced (Poulakos, 1999). Equally important, Gorgias also emphasizes the power of sight and images as a source of pervasive stimuli (Poulakos, 1999). Finally, Bacon introduces that all thinking
is a negotiation between three faculties of internal rhetoric (reason, imagination
and affection) in which persuasion is enabled. Car sales and car salespeople,
among many others in the retail sales industry, illustrates how many ways of
rhetoric and persuasion can be used successfully to gain control and power by
engaging with the client on an emotional level.

II. The Business Influence: Principles That Lead to Success in Commercial
Settings by Rhoads et al. Part I

In car sales, the car and the client are already there – all there is left to do
is to engage with the client with a little push and shove. The first persuasive
principle for success is “liking”, according to Rhoads et al. in The Business
Influence: Principles That Lead to Success in Commercial Settings. Liking can
increase influence by increasing attractiveness, cooperation, similarities and
compliments. Being liked, as a salesperson, means that the salesperson is able
to establish positive energy that invites and welcomes the client to voluntarily
move closer in:

There appears to be a positive reaction to good physical
appearance that generalizes to favorable trait perceptions such
as a talent, kindness, honesty, and intelligence. As a
consequence, attractive individuals are more persuasive in
terms of both changing attitudes and getting what they request.

(Rhoads et al., p. 532)
In the same way, physically attractive car salespeople are generally more valuable and efficient in persuading their clients to agree to the offer (Reingen & Kernan, 1993, as cited in Rhoads et al, p. 533). In addition, car salespeople who exude a sense of similarity with their clients' taste, character or lifestyle, have the tendency to connect with their clients better: “We like people who are similar to us and grant them favorable treatment in charitable, negotiation, and legal settings” (Rhoads et al, p. 533). Thus, those car salespeople who share similarities with their clients have a better chance of successfully influencing since the salesperson-client relation has now gone deeper.

Moreover, car salespeople attempt to look for patterns of consistency in their clients’ lives in order to show their clients that that particular commitment can be kept and even translated into their new car purchase. Rhetoricians understand that people are compelled to keep their self-image, that they may have spent so much time and money on building, in line and at a consistency: “Once an individual takes a stand, goes on record, or establishes a position, there is a tendency to respond in ways that are stubbornly consistent with it”(Rhoads et al, p. 525). Therefore, car salespeople look for commitments that already linger in their clients’ life and bring them out to show how the consistency can live on through the new vehicle (Rhoads et al., p. 527). Commitments and consistencies could include being an environmentalist, a pet owner, a bicyclist or even a student whom loves music. Accordingly, reciprocity is yet another principle that can be used by car salespeople as a way to be persuasive because it gives off a strong touch of obligation. I often overhear car salespeople
reminding their clients how difficult it was and long it took to track down the car that meets all of their personal specifications. The principle of reciprocity “states that favors must be returned in kind” (Rhoads et al., p. 514). Hence, finding room for commitments of a client in a car purchase, along with rubbing off reciprocity are, in turn, persuasive principles car salespeople use to employ a more emotional hold with their clients.

III. The Business Influence: Principles That Lead to Success in Commercial Settings by Rhoads et al. Part II

In the same way, being authoritative is also considered a business influential principle that can be successful in a car commercial setting as recommended by Rhoads et al.: “Legitimate authorities are extremely influential sources” (Rhoads et al., p. 520).

The principle of authority involves having recognition, providing clear guidance and sustaining a façade of credibility. This principle is persuasive because it is natural to want to meet the terms of seemingly recognized authoritative figures (Rhoads et al., p.520). Many times, following the footsteps and advice of a car salesperson that has an authoritative feel, like the sales manager, will sometimes facilitate client’s to make decisions fast because the decision is convinced and assured to be the right one (Rhoads et al., p. 520). I regularly witness the sales manager, and even the assistant sales manager, reiterate to their clients their management position when they introduce themselves. It is funny to see the
managers tell me, “hold all my calls”, as they walk past me with their clients to display their credibility. This is odd of them to do because holding all calls is already a procedure all receptionists have always known to do when sales people are with clients. Also, uniforms “are another universally recognized symbol of authority that can bring about mindless compliance” (Rhoads et al., p. 521). Car salespeople are often sent home if they attempt to attend work with no tie or with unsuitable assemble, like a polo shirt: “When wearing the uniform rather than street clothes, the confederate could produce significantly more compliance with requests” (Rhoads et al., p. 521). On the contrary, the management would never send me, as a receptionist, home even if I went to work in my gym attire because it does not matter if I give off authority. The business suit makes a vast difference for car salespeople because it releases an authoritative connotation “that says ‘follow me’” (Rhoads et al., p. 522). When a car salesperson puts on a complete business suit, they make the impression that they are serious, confident and sure of themselves – someone who looks like they can be trusted. Consequently, social proof is another persuasive principle that is applicable among car salespeople during the sales process. Social proof and the desire for validation can also be seen as the need for reassurance in making the correct choice: “Because the desire to choose correctly is powerful, and the time in which to choose is forever diminishing, the tendency to follow the crowd is both strong and widespread” (Rhoads et al., p. 529). Clients are always happy to know that their decision was also made by many others before them because “[w]e are particularly likely to mimic the behaviors of others when we are
uncertain of how to proceed, when many others are performing a certain behavior, and particularly when those others are like us” (Rhoads et al., p. 532). That is why car salespeople bother to inform their client facts to provide validation as a way to relieve and reassure them of their choice. The authority and social proof principle suggested by Rhoads et al. both take on rhetorical roles as it molds the client’s impression of the salesperson closer towards credibility and trust.

Last, but certainly not least, scarcity is a pervasive principle I observe the most at the car dealership. Scarcity of an item can also be known as a quality for it increases attractiveness and desire: “First, items that are difficult to obtain are nearly always more desirable than those that require little effort” (Rhoads et al., p. 518). Rhoads et al. continue to explain that what energizes scarcity to work is the need to protect the freedom of choice (p. 518). Indeed, “[p]eople seem to be more motivated by the thought of losing something than by the thought of gaining something of equal value” (Rhoads et al., p. 520). In *The Art of Seduction* by Robert Greene, the author suggests that people are vulnerable to what is unattainable to them (2001, p. 200). Greene develops the theory of the Trinagle Effect: when one appears to be an object of desire (2001, p. 200). Specifically, the Triangle Effect illustrates that when something or someone is out of reach because they are occupied by someone or somewhere else, they become more attractive and more desirable to the eye (Green, 2001, p. 200). Similar to that of Rhoads et al.’s concept of scarcity, they both agree that people want what they can not have, since “[i]tems and opportunities appear more attractive as they
become less available” (Lynn, 1991, as cited in Rhoads et al., p. 514). Greene goes on to say that people are selfish and greedy within whether people like it or not; it is in people’s nature to be the one who gets to have the item or person that everyone else wants. Once again, like Rhoads et al. show, it is in people’s nature to want to protect their freedom of choice (p. 518). There have been countless instances where I hear car salespeople remind their clients to the same effect as, “the production for that model is nearly sold out for the next [x amount] months and we only have a few left to sell”. Scarcity is not only a principle but a tool that car salespeople use on a regular basis to close off the deal and to push their clients towards a firm decision, especially when the client is hesitant. Therefore, scarcity along with its five other values listed by Rhoads et al’s as principles to business influence have been proven to be of good use in the car sales industry because the principles allow car salespeople to engage with their clients on a complex and emotional state, with or without the clients being fully aware.

IV. Winning Through Rhetoric

Car salespeople are like the Sophists because they are not concerned about discovering and reaching “truth” but purely of succeeding in a sale through rhetoric and persuasion. Like car salespeople, Sophists are moral relativists who believe that truth is relative to where one is and takes each issue at hand on a case-by-case system (Poulakos, 1999). In fact, Sophists do not believe that there is one absolute truth (Poulakos, 1999). To them, it is more essential to work with
the structure at face value – to take the form, organization or coordination for
what it is and work with its advantages and disadvantages: “Sophists took the
legal system at face value” (Poulakos, 1999, p. 9). Sophists believed that belief
and conjecture, or learning, is based on opinion and playing on the things,
objects or images that are already in the visible order because “[a]ccording to the
Sophists’ perspective, the court was an arena of symbolic competition”
(Poulakos, 1999, p.9). Protagoras agreed with the Sophists that morality and
truth are both relative and that there is no real truth out there (Poulakos, 1999). In
addition, Protagoras states that because what is moral and true are relative,
persuasion wins (Poulakos, 1999). In other words, the argument that is most
persuasive and wins must be the morally correct one because it serves more
people (Poulakos, 1999). Thus, on Protagoras terms, what is done is more
important and more significant than what is thought (Poulakos, 1999). At the
same time, in Self-Confidence and Persuasion in Car Buying, Gerald D. Bell
points out that the most easily persuaded are those whom do not have strong nor
weak confidence: “Since those with moderate self-confidence were neither
secure with their own judgment nor highly defensive, they were the most
persuadable”(Bell, 1967, p. 46). Therefore, the likes of Sophists and car
salespeople have learnt to be persuasive with others because they understand
that each system and individual must be taken case by case to seek the
weaknesses and strengths of their emotions and engaging in these emotions is
necessary to determine how to be rhetorical at best.
On the other hand, Plato disagrees with the philosophies of the Sophists and argues that Sophists are distractions from truth and immoral in practice (Poulakos, 1999). Plato insists that taking money for teaching what seems to be “truth” is immoral (Poulakos, 1999). He believes that doing so is immoral because he sees this as compliance and obedience being gained through the form of trickery and flattery (Poulakos, 1999). To Plato, virtue is his first priority; therefore, the Sophists’ logic of placing argumentation before virtue is ultimately immoral (Poulakos, 1999). Plato sees and “understands that the capacity of language to falsify and deceive” and “acknowledges that they are vulnerable to emotional manipulation” (Poulakos, 1999, p. 18).

However, Gorgias agreed with the Sophists and concluded that the knowledge of truth is impossible to find (Poulakos, 1999, p. 9). Truly, Gorgias believed that one can ultimately only rely on opinion and persuasion, and this must be done through language (Poulakos, 1999). Furthermore, he suggested that the best persuasion has the most power (Poulakos, 1999). Like the Sophists, he agreed that rhetoric was to be measured by success and not via integrity: “Sophists taught a practical rhetoric, a rhetoric measured by success, not by theoretical integrity” (Poulakos, 1999, p. 9). This is because, once again, there is no truth, nor right or wrong, but only opinion and persuasion. Rhetoric, to Gorgias, is in the power to persuade, and persuasion is accomplished through words because “people cannot resist the persuasive power of language” (Poulakos, 1999, p. 11).
With regards that change occurs in language among people, Gorgias recommended that language spelled out the beliefs and values of people and, therefore, can also direct the actions of people.

Asserting that humans are creatures of passion and reason, Gorgias suggests that their emotional and cognitive makeup is shaped by language. This means that what and how they think is largely the result of the interaction between their biological nature and linguistic learning; it also means that their actions issue directly from their thought. Thought and understanding, however, cannot remain fixed; they are subject to change because people constantly encounter new forms of language. That this is so, Gorgias notes, is evident from the fact that scientific explanations, ordinary opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and values do change.

(Poulakos, 1999, p. 11)

In other words, “the cause of change is language” and is the source that enables people to take on new perspectives and, in conclusion, emotions (Poulakos, 1999, p. 11). Car salespeople, like other persuasive minds, understand the concept that language plays a big part in changing their clients’ minds because it can shift the clients’ emotions right or left.

Meanwhile, Aristotle also makes the connection that emotion and rhetoric work together. He brings forth the ethos, logos and pathos logic to his
understanding of rhetoric. According to Aristotle, ethos is the character of the rhetorician and can be enhanced by memory coupled by logos and pathos, which contain the feelings that already exist (Cutbirth, 2004, p. 81). Logos stands for the logical reasoning that claims that “persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question” (McKeon, as cited in Cutbirth, 2004, p. 81). Logos refers to the content in the rhetorical message, but it moreso emphasizes the force of the message or language (Cutbirth, 2004, p. 82). Ethos is recognized as the most powerful out of the three because it highlights the qualities and strengths of the speaker, which includes “competence/practical wisdom, good moral character and good will” (Cutbirth, 2004, p. 83). Finally, Aristotle uses pathos to explain the “use of emotions as a technique of persuasion. The classical theorists saw emotion as a powerful and necessary proof but were fearful that emotions could interfere with their ideal of rational decision making” (Cutbirth, 2004, p. 84). It is because of the reason that emotions can “interfere with their ideal of rational decision making” (Cutbirth, 2004, p. 84) that makes pathos stand out for rhetoricians. Taking a hold of emotions is the rhetorical skill that explains how car salespeople become so persuasive at their job.

Further, Gorgias knowledge of rhetoric is extended with his theory of persuasion that includes images as persuasive stimuli. People, Gorgias observes, are susceptible to images and things sitting in front of them because sight is the most pleasurable sense that expels the truth: “Whether they issue
from language or sight, images affect people in various ways, creating in them emotional responses ranging from fright to pleasure to desire to madness” (Poulakos, 1999, p. 12). That is why visuals of the cars for sale are constantly played on the television set, are displayed in person on the showroom floor and are replicated in images on posters and desktops wallpapers everywhere on the property of the car dealership. Images act like language because images are just as rhetorically stimulating, and thus explain how a car dealership and the car salespeople can persuasively bring together all senses susceptible to emotions.

Bacon helps to conclude my point that persuasion is based on emotion. He states that all thinking is a negotiation between three faculties of internal rhetoric: reason, imagination and affection. Being successfully influenced, he says, is a play in combination of any of the two faculties. Reason is long-term and runs on being rational. Imagination and affection, on the other hand, are short-term. For instance, reason and imagination together can move the will and enable persuasion to buy a car. Cars have a powerful influence on how people feel about themselves among society: “Cars as cars augmented the consumer, and so augmented they gave the consumer a physical mobility that played out their social mobility” (McCracken, 2005, p. 79). Indeed, cars represent who the clients believe they are and assist to exemplify a self-image. Thus, with Bacon’s three faculty of internal rhetoric toying with emotions is how a car salesperson can win and achieve a successful persuasion.

V. Conclusion
If humans did not contain emotions, there would be no point in having car salespeople. And if car salespeople and car dealerships did not consider the way persuasion and rhetoric works, there would be no success in the selling of any cars. Engaging with the emotions of the clients through the game of rhetoric is how car salespeople manage to persuade. Rhoads et al. lay out the six principles in the business of influence including: liking, commitment or consistency, reciprocity, authority, social validation and scarcity. Similar to that of the Sophists, I display how car salespeople take the retail sales to face value because of the understanding that what exists is simply how human nature works and the best solution is just to work with it. Gorgias persists that language is the root of emotions and that language is not just words: “It enables us to establish our selves, and ourselves, as individuals and as members of groups; it tells us how we are connected to one another, who has power and who doesn’t” (Lakoff, 2000, p. 39). Truly, life is about control and power because the world is about relationships and relations that map out our connections with one another as a way to make sense of our place in the world. Rhetoric and persuasion holds an influence among these relations and connections. Moreover, Aristotle demonstrates his theory of ethos, pathos and logos that enhances the pervasiveness in rhetoric. Subsequently, Gorgias pays attention to the significance of sight and images as a factor to our vulnerability in being persuaded. Is it so dangerous that rhetoric works to showcase what seems to be the truth when it is already known that truth is different for everyone? Better yet,
is it immoral to some extent when one uses the skills and strategies of persuasion or is it just being realistic? I conclude that there is no getting around human nature and there is a need to do what it takes to win because life can be a game and it is all in the game.

Bibliography

**Primary Sources**


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