



Don't Mistake Confidence for Ego



There is no shortage of derogatory opinions of how ethical or upstanding sales people are. The masses often compare everyone in the profession to a used car salesman, someone who couldn't make it academically at anything of substance. Announcing to your parents that you want to grow up and 'get into sales' may not be as well received as say, becoming a Doctor or Lawyer.

Yet, I would argue that sales has been in existence longer than either of those and has been in the fabric of society since the Middle Ages. From bartering and trading of antiquity, to the exchange and 'sale' of philosophy, ideas and beliefs, innumerable countries, industries, companies, communities and careers have been built on the not-always appreciated act of buying and selling.

Some professions have a tendency to be dominated by either men or women and sales is no

exception. In a [2014 'Trends of Women' study conducted by LinkedIn](#), women represent 39% of all sales roles (up from 36% in 2004) and the average percentage of women in sales, across all industries, that hold Director or higher positions is only 27%. Is this underrepresentation because women aren't interested in getting into sales? Or is it because they don't feel they have what it takes to be successful? I believe it is a little bit of both unfortunately. I think many women don't want to get into sales because

the portrayal of the job has always been dominated by aggressive, ego-driven men. One only needs to re-watch the 1992 classic *Gengary Glen Ross*, and more recently *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) to understand why there is a huge misperception on what it takes to be successful in a sales career. Having spent almost 25 years either being an individual quota carrying sales rep, managing entire sales teams or advising some of the largest sales organizations in the world, I can tell you those descriptors couldn't be further from the truth. In today's more socially connected, relationship driven environment where the customer is looking for additional value with each interaction they have with a brand, women are in a perfect position to be more successful than their male counterparts.

Do I think being a women in sales has its advantages? Of course I do. But I also think there are advantages of being a man in sales too. I only think of myself as a sales person, gender neutral on the job I am doing – my ability to hit quota is binary, you either hit it or you don't. The report that ranks performance doesn't have a bias one way or the other. It just shows the facts. One only has to look at those who have built a successful career in sales to see that there are more similarities than differences in personality traits between genders, even though there is a significant difference in the percentage of each who pursue a career in sales. The skills needed are a combination of personal attributes, attitudes and actions. Perseverance, commitment, integrity, assertiveness, collaboration, empathy, relationship building, storytelling and more importantly confidence are all required skills for someone who wants to be successful in sales. However, how those various attributes are used, when they are used, and why they are used is where I think you start to see the differences between men and women sellers. As Sheryl Sandberg, the COO at Facebook, once said, "When a little boy asserts himself, he's called a 'leader.' Yet when a little girl does the same, she risks being branded 'bossy.'"

There is no question that sales is competitive, not

only between companies but between individuals who may even be on the same team. It is only natural that those who are successful at achieving quota and winning big deals will gain confidence in their abilities over time. I refer to myself as a 'recovering seller' since I no longer carry a quota or lead a sales team. However, over my 15 year sales career, I was frequently a top performer. I wear this badge with pride, especially since I have always sold technology, which to this day is dominated by men. There have been many circumstances where my confidence has been misinterpreted as having an ego. Unfortunately, those two things are not easily discernable, especially for a woman in sales. For me, I always kept myself in check by remembering how I was able to build up that confidence, and further my career. Yes there were lots of wins, but early on there were just as many defeats. The lessons learned from those losses is what made me a better seller over time. And if you're like me, you always remember the losses. It wasn't always easy, and there were too many times I found myself humbled by the reality of being in high-tech sales. However, all the confidence in the world doesn't mean all deals will go your way.

I remember like it was yesterday during the interview process at one of my first sales jobs. It was 1995 and the CEO wanted to hire me as their very first, and only sales rep. Before we wrapped up our time together he said to me "I really think you would be a great addition to our team, but I'm not sure anyone will take you seriously if you are selling technology and your name is "Tiffani". I just looked at him, I wasn't sure what to say, my first exposure to a bit of gender bias in the workplace, so I just laughed it off and took the job. I think part of me wanted to prove him wrong, and the other part just wanted to make money. In less than a year I 10x his business, made a few good commission checks and was recruited by a much larger company. While not the standard career path, the next ten years were on a fast track. I changed jobs almost every 18 months to gain more responsibility and increase my earning potential. I built some of the first cloud based sales

teams. Expanded my sphere of influence running sales, marketing and customer service and pushed the envelope on what it meant to 'socially sell' as one of the beta clients for Eloqua. My last quota carrying job was building and running the indirect channel business at Gateway Computers, a Fortune 500 company.

I didn't understand my path really until I was offered a job with Gartner as a Research Analyst in 2005. Talk about a hard transition. Being a practicing seller, I had to learn how to become an academic. Someone who studied what worked and didn't work for both small and large sales organizations. After 10 years, I had reached Vice President, Distinguished Analyst and Research Fellow for my work on a multi-year research project on the Future of Sales. Today I feel so fortunate. I am able to give back in some small way to an industry and a profession which has been so great to me. I am part of an incredible company at Salesforce whose culture supports diversity and inclusion led by our CEO Marc Benioff and Chief

Diversity Officer, Tony Prophet. As the Global Growth and Innovation Evangelist, I get to vicariously sell alongside an amazing team, help our customers be more successful, and travel the globe talking about how companies can build high performing sales organizations. With over 250 keynotes under my belt over the past decade in front of hundreds of thousands of people, I am often the only woman on stage and I can tell you it isn't possible to do that without having confidence in myself and my ability to deliver. If being a woman helped me to better at my craft – then who am I not to take advantage of it? My next order of business is to send this cover to my old CEO who wasn't really sure that I could be successful in sales, let alone in technology sales. OK, yes, that was a bit of ego, but I never said I was perfect. ■

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