

Selling To Different Styles

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Each day we are faced with making hundreds of decisions. Most of us start our mornings by deciding whether or not to respond to the alarm clock. Our decision making continues throughout the day. Observing people making decisions clearly demonstrates that there are a variety of decision making styles. Experience also tells us that these people, all potential customers, respond most strongly to the sales approach which appeals to their particular decision making style. One of the most critical skills a sales person can possess is the ability to quickly size up the customer and determine their decision making style. The truly successful sales person adjusts his or her sales approach to better fit the customer's style.

People continually are sending us messages regarding their likes and dislikes. Unfortunately, most of us go through life missing, misinterpreting or ignoring these signals. These verbal and non-verbal messages tell the sales person exactly how to most effectively deal with the person.

Many experienced sales people say that customers don't buy a product or service, they buy people; they buy the sales rep. If this is true, it is so because most human beings respond to people with whom they feel comfortable. And, what is it that makes them feel comfortable? Though intangible and difficult to measure, most people are comfortable with others who share their values and who think along like lines. They are comfortable when they don't feel rushed, bored, insulted, criticized, overwhelmed or put upon. They are in "synch" with the sales rep.

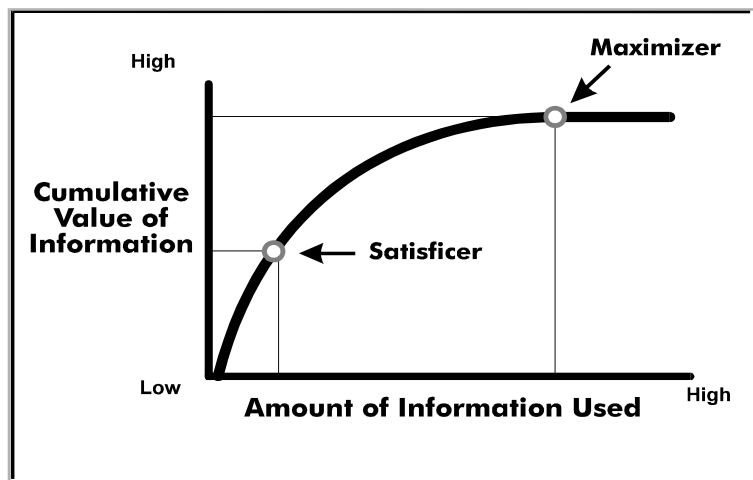
In sales, the greatest chance of success occurs when the customer and the salesperson are in "synch". But, how do you read the customer's signals and correctly interpret them? Though some sales people respond intuitively to the customer, most of us can improve our selling skills by paying attention to the messages being transmitted. Accurately reading and interpreting these human "beacons" is not just a chance occurrence.

People buy things for their reasons, not the salesperson's. The processes they use to decide to buy are identifiable and predictable. Appealing to an individual's distinct decision making style increases the chances of making a sale. However, one must first understand each of the styles.

The names we attach to each of the five primary decision making styles are Decisive, Flexible, Hierarchic, Integrative and Systemic and are derived from the Driver Decision Style Model developed by University of Southern California professor Dr. Michael J. Driver and as described in detail by Driver, Brousseau, and Hunsaker in their book, *The Dynamic Decision*

Information Use

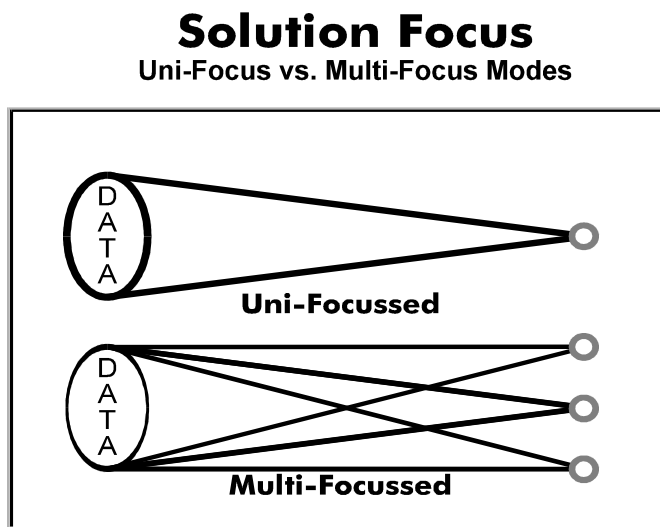
Satisficing vs. Maximizing Modes



Maker. Decision styles are learned habits of thinking. Like all of our styles -- writing style, style of talking, dressing, or of playing games, we learn to make decisions in school, at work, in leisure time activities, and from following the examples of others. Because of diverse backgrounds and experiences, people learn varied styles of decision making.

People differ widely in the amount of information they use in decision making. Some reach conclusions from just a few facts. Others reach conclusions only after gathering and

studying large amounts of information. Figure 1 graphically portrays the difference between the low and high information users.



The curve shows that, in general, the first items of information that you consider when making a decision contribute significantly to your understanding of the situation. Generally, the first facts have more value than do items of information you might consider later, after you already know a lot about the situation. Early in the process, your knowledge is going from zero to something greater. That is when information is most likely to be really eye-opening. Some people, the Satisficers, believe that they have enough information to make the decision at point B. Others, whom we call Maximizers, keep evaluating information until they simply are learning nothing new about the problem.

When faced with a situation calling for problem-solving, some people typically come up with one specific solution that they feel is the best or most feasible for the situation. We call this the uni-focus mode. Other people, faced with the same situation, quite predictably will generate a variety of alternatives or options for dealing with the situation. This is the multi-focus mode.

Keep in mind that information use and focus are completely independent of each other. Maximizers and satisficers are equally likely to be uni-focus or multi-focus decision makers. Uni-focus and multi-focus differences are easy to recognize in business strategies. Multi-focus decision makers prefer diverse strategies, perhaps even across industries. Their inclination is to want a mix of different businesses and activities rather than a strict, "stick to the knitting" strategy. Uni-focus decision makers prefer a strategy that concentrates in one industry or, perhaps, one product line. Too much diversification they see as distracting and detrimental to effectiveness. They have a clear and definite focus.

Focus differences between people are a major source of tension. Typically, uni-focus decision makers have very strong views about the best way to do things. Faced with any situation, they usually have a very specific criterion in mind, such as cost, quality, or fairness, by which they will evaluate any potential solution. So, they usually will find a solution that stacks up best according to their criterion or goal. Multi-focus thinkers, on the other hand, often use many criteria to evaluate potential solutions. In other words, they have multiple goals in mind. So, while one solution may fit some criteria very well, another course of action may fit other criteria

better. Consequently, they are more open to alternatives and are more conditional in their thinking.

This conditional way of thinking rubs uni-focus decision makers wrong. To them, their multi-focus associates appear confused, wishy-washy, lacking in values, or simply "flaky." On the other hand, the strong, highly focused views of the uni-focus people strike the multi-focus thinkers as being rigid, narrow, unyielding, and dogmatic. When the tension escalates, these rather polite descriptors give way to even more colorful adjectives! If the client and the salesperson have a different solution focus it spells potential trouble for the relationship.

Five Basic Decision Styles

By combining the two modes of information use and the two focus modes, we can identify several fundamentally different decision styles. Figure 3 shows these styles and also describes the key attributes of each of the styles. Experience indicates an individual will use one or two of these styles more frequently than the others. However, they probably will use the others also on occasion, even if only very rarely.

When communicating with others, each decision style has its particular strengths. But, when viewed from other angles, these strengths become obscured by negative qualities. When one views the other styles only from one's own style perspective, the negative qualities seem to grow and take on added weight. The greater the difference between the two styles, the more the tendency is to see only the negative qualities of the other's style. For the sales person this can produce disastrous results.

Five Basic Decision Styles

Figure 3

		Information Use		
		<i>Satisficers</i>	<i>Maximizers</i>	
Solution Focus	<i>Uni Focus</i>	Decisive Style Fast Action-oriented Efficiency-minded	Hierarchic Style Analytic Methodical Logical Quality-Oriented	Systemic Style Very Analytic Big Picture View Multiple High Priorities Complex Strategies
	<i>Multi Focus</i>	Flexible Style Fast Action-oriented Adaptable	Integrative Style Analytic Exploratory Creative	

Decision style compatibility and tensions in communication spring from the same two basic factors: Information Use and Solution Focus. Similarities in either of these two factors create points of compatibility in communications just as differences create points of tension.

So, any one style will have common ground as a basis for communications with at least two other styles that share the style's level of information use or focus. Finding these areas of common ground can help greatly to facilitate effective communications between the salesperson and a customer whose style differs. But first you must be able to size up others and pick out their decision style based upon the way in which they communicate; both verbally and non-verbally.

Clues to the Decisive Style

Decisives are terse in their communications. They keep talk short and to the point. They are mainly concerned with actions and benefits. They place a high value on efficiency and productivity. They like quick results. When they lay out a plan they start with their intended course of action, give a brief summary of their rationale and present a few essential facts. Though they may tell a few jokes, more often than not they will be one-liners. Then they get down to business. They'll state the purpose of the meeting and what they intend on getting out of it. Expect them to establish an ending time. They will start on time and will usually end on time. They don't like interruptions and questions. Commitments are important to Decisives. They are loyal to brands and don't shift products easily nor quickly without good cause.

The Decisive's office reflects their interest in efficiency. More often than not their desks are clean and clear. One in-box and one out-box. In their mind a clean desk is an efficient desk. There may be one or two pictures of family on the desk, credenza or walls. All other artifacts are directly related to business. Quite possibly there is a plaque from an organization such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, or The Optimists, which reflects the noble goals of the service club. Unlike the Hierarchic, whose book shelves are stuffed with technical manuals and other references, the Decisive's shelves, if there are any, look barren. An organization chart, sales chart or photograph of an on-going project may also be present. Simple graphs or charts reflecting quickly grasped data and facts may be seen. Orderliness and organization are the hallmarks of the Decisive's office and desk. There's a place for everything and everything in its place.

Integratives and Hierarchics are often suspicious of the Decisive's office. The orderliness and lack of paper work cause them to wonder if the Decisive has enough work to stay busy. They will make jokes that "a clean desk is the sign of a sick mind."

Clues to the Flexible Style

Flexibles also hold fast-paced discussions about the facts, with an emphasis on results. However, they differ from Decisives in that they favor talking about a variety of subjects, each quite briefly. They will keep things light. To keep a meeting from bogging down they will often use humor and jokes, at any point in the discussion. They like to keep their options open because they know how quickly situations change, particularly in today's electronic age. They like open-ended discussions and stay away from formal briefing charts, preferring the natural flow of conversation. They prefer solutions which can be implemented quickly and provide benefits on a broad front. They don't like solutions which require long term commitment of capital or other resources. They like a quick, visible return on their investment. They reject rigid agendas, may not start on time and most likely will not end on time. Though they like discussion, they dislike debates and arguments. They shy away from holding votes which result in winners and losers.

Flexibles have offices and desks which are also quite orderly. But one is more likely to find more photos of the family and business associates. Particularly evident are photos of the Flexible himself or herself with prominent public figures or senior officials within the

organization. Membership plaques are also evident, but rather than one, there may be many. Reflecting the Flexible's variety of interests, the person's memberships in social organizations may be many. You may note interesting pieces of art or other fixtures which are sure to grab attention and generate discussion. Look for signs of humorous, often social commentary, types of cartoons. You are likely to find a humorous award displayed which pokes fun at the Flexible. It is an effective way to relieve tension for guests.

Clues to the Hierarchic Style

You can spot a Hierarchic because he will be well prepared to discuss the topic. Hierarchics do their homework. They may arrive at a meeting with an armful of references, facts and figures. It is not unusual for them to have notes from previous meetings immediately available. Before taking a position on an issue they get the facts straight and sort them out using a method that logically dictates a particular course of action. They may employ a matrix to objectively weigh and compare the merits of each option. When called upon to make a presentation, Hierarchics typically present large amounts of organized information about their analysis, factors considered, methods used and alternatives considered. Last of all, they present a conclusion and a clear course of action. The sequence and content of their presentation is designed to lead the participants to the recommended course of action. The best course of action will, to the Hierarchic, produce the highest quality result. They naturally lean to solutions which consider quality over costs, efficiencies and short-term results. They want "to do it right the first time."

Normally, their office is a dead give away of the Hierarchic style. Book shelves are lined neatly with numerous technical manuals, references and professional publications. Their work is arrayed before them on their desk in numerous, yet neatly stacked piles. The credenza may also be stacked high with papers and other documents, but you sense an orderliness to the evident mass of information. There is a sense that the Hierarchic can lay their hands on any required information at its mere mention. The walls of the office may display various educational degrees conferred, as well as certificates of excellence and specialized training within their chosen field. Other awards and honors for excellent performance may be readily visible. There may also be a product sample laying about the office. When asked about the sample, quite often the Hierarchic will deliver a lengthy soliloquy about the product, demonstrating his in-depth knowledge of the design, specifications and utility.

Clues to the Integrative Style

Integratives face a tough problem. They have many ideas, but, unfortunately for them, they have only one mouth by which to communicate them. Consequently, they tend to interrupt themselves a lot. A real clue to identifying an Integrative decision maker is to listen to them. In the middle of a discussion they may stop, ponder for a moment and say such things as, "But, on the other hand . . ." or, "And, of course we could also . . ." It may be difficult to follow their reasoning. Others may describe the Integrative as having muddy or confused thinking.

Integratives, like Hierarchics, will spout a proliferation of facts and observations. But, it will sound more like exploring possibilities rather than a lecture. They like to bounce ideas off others and expect the same in return. Group problem solving is their idea of a good time because it surfaces varied and new insights and creative solutions. Integratives are often described by others as good listeners. In making presentations Integratives may show up with a large stack of colorful, artistic briefing charts, but seldom do they follow the agenda. They pay little attention to time and will schedule meetings to begin around "twos"! They let conversation go where it needs to go, believing that worthwhile solutions will bubble to the surface. They like diversified strategies which attack the problem or multiple problems on a broad front.

The Integrative office (or car) is easy to spot. Decisives will describe it as a mess. And, a mess it may appear. But the Integrative knows where most everything is. There may be no apparent

rhyme nor reason to the way the Integrative has things set up. The walls may have all kinds of different plaques, pictures, murals, deco art, plants, pictures of the family, quotations of poetry and diplomas displayed. Remember, this collage reflects their multi focused style and interests. Their view of the world will be evident from the variety of objects in the office. Amusingly to Decisives, quite often these same objects may be covered with a fine coat of dust. The Integrative's mind is so busy looping through numerous subjects it is not concerned with dusting and cleaning. Other things draw their attention.

Clues to the Systemic Style

Much of what we have said about the Integrative and Hierarchic styles applies also to the Systemic style which includes habits and traits of both of these styles. They are information maximizers who enjoy kicking around a variety of ideas, particularly when the subject is new or unfamiliar to them. When problem solving, Systemics initially view the issue from an Integrative's perspective but then they subtly shift their focus and behave much as Hierarchics do. As the process continues you will find them sharing a great deal of information, logic and meticulously classified and sorted analyses. When they make this shift they will typically stop asking for others' input.

Systemics tend to define problems rather broadly. Seeing sets of inter-related problems, rather than single issues. They will pursue multiple courses of action simultaneously and their strategies are frequently viewed as extremely complex. Particularly by Decisives who may cry "you're making a mountain out of a mole hill!" To communicate their complex strategies Systemics will often tell stories. In effect, the stories are parables. The points made suggest their perspective of the problem. Systemics also ask a great number of questions. Frequently, their questions lead the audience through the same logic path used by the Systemic to arrive at the conclusion she or he has already reached.

The typical Systemic's office is full of clutter. The piles of reference data and information will, most likely, be neat and orderly. You may expect to find a map on a wall, often a map of the world. Or, a globe might be prominently displayed. It is an indicator of their global perspective. Flow charts and PERT diagrams, with decision nodes and milestones, are also frequently found in a Systemic's office. It allows them to track numerous activities simultaneously.

Selling to each of the styles:

When selling to a Decisive -

- o Be on time. Be prepared and well organized. Present your conclusions and proposals first.
- o Get to the point quickly. Be fast paced. Keep things businesslike. Avoid detail unless asked to be specific.
- o Answer their questions directly and clearly. Be firm and self assured. Know their goals and objectives. Explain how your product or service will directly contribute to meeting those goals. Keep it simple.
- o Propose clear solutions. Define the benefits and relate them to the goals and objectives.
- o Do not waste their time. Get back to them and show the bottom line results of their decision to use your product or service.

When selling to a Flexible -

- o Be on time but allow time for the discussion to ramble. Show initiative. Stimulate their creativity, suggest new ideas and topics.
- o Be fast. Be bold. Introduce yourself and take the lead. Play on their intuitions and hunches.
- o Discuss the possibilities, listen to their hopes, dreams and aspirations. Incorporate them into your discussions. Don't over kill a topic. Be ready to move on quickly to another point when you sense the person is ready to move. Stay loose.

- o Give concrete examples to illustrate your points. Confirm quickly in writing any agreements you reach. Don't let much time go by.
- o Be sure you know that they realize what they bought before you book your sale. In closing a deal, try to avoid requiring long term commitments.

When selling to a Hierarchic -

- o Be systematic, precise and well organized. If possible, schedule two meetings. Use the first date to present your information. Program the second meeting, some days later, after the Hierarchic has had time to ponder the information before being asked to reach a decision.
- o Have your facts handy and in order. Relate your suggestions to their preferred method. Be prepared to back up any claims with data and other performance information or references from other users. Expect their corrections and input on your presentation.
- o Use clear logic. Try for zero defects.
- o Never try to win an argument. Listen well. List advantages and disadvantages.
- o Confirm and follow-up. Ensure service agreements are kept and documented. Be thorough.

When selling to an Integrative -

- o Get to know them personally. Plan for and allow a long time to develop the relationship. Go at a slow pace. Present the problem, as you understand it, and seek clarification. Engage them in determining potential solutions.
- o Have a variety of data sources available. Be sensitive to the human and emotional issues. Be cooperative and be willing to modify to meet their needs.
- o Avoid absolutes. Note, where possible, how the product or service can meet two or more needs. Communicate hunches.
- o Be ready to shift topics. Invite others' participation. Be open. Trust the process. Show how the product or service can contribute to better relationships and work conditions

When selling to a Systemic -

- o Be prepared for a lengthy engagement. Plan for the long haul.
- o If possible, get involved as early as you can in their search for a product or service.
- o Know your product or service, in depth. Study the Systemic customer. Know their needs. Present them with lots of information and ideas.
- o Look for connections between their interests and their goals.
- o Allow them to modify your ideas.
- o Be prepared for and watch for their shift from the Integrative to Hierarchic style.
- o Keep in touch, continuously. Keep the lines of communication open.



Selling Effectively to a Particular Decision Style

Quick Reference Table

<p style="text-align: center;">Selling to the Decisive Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be on time. • Be prepared and well organized. • Present your proposal first. Get to the point quickly. Be fast. Keep it simple. • Keep it businesslike. Avoid detail. • Relate your product or service to their goals and objectives. • Be firm and self assured. • Propose clear solutions. Define benefits. • Get back to them and show bottom line results. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Selling to the Hierarchic Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be systematic, precise, informed. • Allow time for them to think things over. Schedule two meetings. • Have facts and specifications available. Back up claims with data. • Invite input. Use logic. • Stress quality. Provide performance reviews from other users. • Don't try to win an argument. Listen well. • List pluses and minuses. • Follow through diligently on agreements. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Selling to the Systemic Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out as much as you can about their multiple priorities. • Determine how they see the "big picture." • Provide lots of information early - prefer-ably in advance. • Stay in touch. Communicate frequently. • Try to build a close relationship. • Treat them as a partner. • Emphasize any ways your product can be modified to meet their specific needs. • Emphasize as many benefits and features of your product as you can. Don't zero-in on any one benefit unless you know it is a key criterion. • Be very patient. Never press for a quick decision
<p style="text-align: center;">Selling to the Flexible Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be on time. Allow time to talk. • Show initiative. Be bold. Take lead. Suggest new ideas. • Stimulate their creativity. • Give several examples. • Discuss possibilities. • Be fast. Don't overkill a subject. Move quickly. • Be sure you know what they've bought. Confirm what they bought. • Don't ask for long term commitments. • Emphasize any flexible or adaptable qualities of your product. • Provide as many options and alternatives as possible. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Selling to the Integrative Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow lots of time to talk. • Show initiative. Suggest new ideas. • Stimulate their creativity. • Give illustrative examples. • Discuss possibilities. Listen to their hopes and dreams. • Get to know them at a personal level; build the relationship. Go slow. • Problem solve together. • Have a variety of data sources. • Be sensitive to the human side. • Avoid absolutes. Modify to meet their needs. • Discuss hunches. Be open. Show how product can meet many needs. • Be prepared to shift topics. 	