

Cognitive Dissonance in Marketing

There's a characteristic of humans that might be getting in the way of making your business a success.

Human beings are hard-wired to be very uncomfortable when faced with information that conflicts with what they believe. It's especially dis-comfortable when the beliefs are about themselves and the facts conflict. This discomfort is called cognitive dissonance. The human reaction is to explain away the facts that disagree. Self Justification. You've done it, I've done it. Most of the time, we just look a little silly sticking to beliefs when we oughtn't. We look rigid; we look like we can't admit our mistakes.

But it can cause us bigger problems, too. Here's what might happen. You go to the store at lunch time when you're already hungry and a little cross. You snap at the sales person, perhaps calling her a really unkind name and use hurtful adjectives. Your belief about yourself, however, is that you're a good person, and good people don't hurt or belittle the sales help. You are faced with cognitive dissonance and many people--in fact most--solve the uncomfortable situation by demonizing the sales clerk. "She was stupid and not doing her job at all. She deserved it because she's a bad person. I'm still a good person, but she was awful and deserved my ire." You have self justified and made her the bad guy. Mistakes were made, but not by you.

On a larger more insidious level it's the brain mechanism responsible for some of the most horrific inhumanity. The Holocaust and things like Abu Gharaib and lynchings occurred because people who saw themselves a good people decided it was ok to treat others badly because those others were bad, evil, different, or less than human. Self justification can be a slippery slope. once stepped upon.

In your rural business, you may be sabotaging yourself because of cognitive dissonance. Somewhere along the line you've run into salesmen, selling or salesmanship that was pushy, hardcore, high pressure. You "believe" that salesmanship and selling is crass, sleazy, insensitive and unpleasant. You are none of those. You're sensitive, low key, and certainly not pushy! Oops! But your barn is getting full, your workroom is overflowing and you need to get some of those products into new homes! You may be facing cognitive dissonance. How can you possibly be a salesperson? You're a nice person! Right?

Let's start with defining salesmanship and selling. It is only pushy and unpleasant when the person has forgotten the golden rule of selling. You're not trying to get them to buy what they don't want, you're there to **serve your customer**. *You lead; you don't push*. You learn about the customer, what he's hoping for and you lead (not push) him to the products that will get him what he hopes for. And his hopes are always about how he'll feel with your product, not about the facts of it.

Salesmanship is not only necessary for your success, but it's noble. It helps people. It brings joy to their lives, helps them get where they want to be. You CAN be that kind of salesperson. It's about a win-win interaction that leaves you both with what you want.

For the last five years, I've been teaching groups of farmers about how to market their animals and products. I wish I had a nickel for every person who's told me how uncomfortable selling makes them. Selling has a bad rap. Good people sell with sensitivity, with service in mind, and with complete knowledge of selling techniques that lead customers to feel good about their purchases.

There should be no cognitive dissonance about learning to be a powerful and effective sales person. Change the belief of what sales means! Make the decision to learn what strategies and tools make you effective. Don't just read a little, but put your heart and your time into practicing the skills to make them your own. When I give you sentences to use, if they don't sound like your own, rewrite them so they do and then practice. **Doing** is the pathway to success! And watch those self justifications!

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