Selling to Women
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During our time together today you will learn how to improve the effectiveness of your communication with both men and women, thereby increasing your sales results. My brief outline: I will cover a few relevant biological and social differences because these differences form the foundation for our communication style differences. We’ll talk about how and why men and women communicate and perceive differently. So much of the confusion, conflict, and misunderstanding we experience is all about perception—or perhaps more accurately in misperception. And as I address each style difference, I will give you some specific tips and some specific strategies for success when working with these differences while prospecting and selling. And we’ll have some fun along the way!

I mentioned perception differences. Each of you has a blank sheet of paper either in your portfolios or as the back page of your handout. Please take that paper; you won’t need a pen or pencil. I’m going to ask you to close your eyes and hold up that blank sheet of paper in front of you. Very quickly, step one, fold the paper in half and tear off the upper right corner. Step two, fold it in half again, and this time tear off the upper left corner. Finally, step three, fold it in half once more, and this time tear off the lower right corner.

Now you can open your eyes. Some of you were cheating anyway; I can see you from up here. Open your papers, hold them up, and compare all the different patterns around the room. Isn’t that interesting? I used the same instructions, the same words, for everyone in this room, and look at how many different patterns we got! People perceive things differently, and when you add gender differences to that, it’s no wonder we have conflict and confusion.

Let’s briefly discuss the women’s market. Why target women? You’ve heard this many times—women are no longer a niche. You know that they’re really the prominent market out there. According to the hundreds of advisors I have interviewed, women are more loyal, they often choose relationship over product, and they often refer twice as many clients and prospects as male clients do. But men and women are different, so you can get even better results by understanding how they’re different and taking those differences into account when prospecting and selling.

The key purchase motivators for women involve, first of all, connection and community, whether they realize it or admit it or not. Women want to feel connected to the people they buy from, to the people they do business with. They want to feel part of the community, part of a group. They want to be respected and taken seriously, cared about. They really want to be friends with people they do business with. They want to feel trust about that person, and they want to feel trusted themselves.

Also, women want convenience. How can you make it easy for her to buy from you? How can you let her know how your product or service makes her life easier or better? Finally, the reputation of your company and of you: What are the ethics, the morality, the social responsibility, the community involvement and contribution? These issues make a difference to women. So those are the key purchase motivators. The primary motivators that we’re going to be talking about today, and that you can have the most impact on, are the connection and the community, the trust and the respect.

I’ve added some value to this program for you by including some input from your peers. Over the years, I’ve interviewed,
oh, somewhere between 250 and 300 advisors, and I’ve sprinkled some of their input and advice throughout my program here. You can hear what they have to say about what’s important to them regarding selling to women and what advice they might have for their peers in the same situation.

I mentioned that I was going to cover some biological differences. Every single physiological system in the human body varies between men and women, especially the brain, and you know that the brain controls everything. So it makes sense then that because our behavior is different, and our communication is different, our purchasing decision styles will be different as well. So by understanding how the most impactful biological differences affect our communication behavior, it will help you understand better how to approach and sell to women as compared to men.

With men, I think the most impactful biological difference is that most of them have 10 to 100 times more testosterone than women do. As you know, testosterone is the hormone responsible for aggression and for competition, and, well, speaking of aggression, I have a little confession to make. A few years ago my energy level just tanked. My doctor prescribed a little testosterone to help boost my energy. Oh my gosh! I could not believe the difference. Where I noticed it the most was in my aggression level and where I noticed that—was with driving. I’m already an aggressive driver; I really didn’t need a boost in that area. Let me tell you, I was driving like a bat out of hell. I was taking risks, I was scaring myself, but I couldn’t stop. It took me a couple of weeks to connect the dots and I was like, “Oh my gosh, it’s that testosterone!” Wow, did that open my eyes.

I have been studying gender differences for 18 years. I know intellectually and conceptually how testosterone affects the human body, but until I felt it myself physiologically . . . let me just say, because I’ve studied men and women for so long, I understand men more than most women do, and I have great respect and affection for men because of that understanding. That respect just increased, now that I know what men have to control and manage every day. I think the world would be a different place, a better place, if just for a couple of weeks, women could experience the levels of testosterone that men have. And if men could experience the levels of estrogen that women have, we would understand each other so much better—so much better!

Yes, men are more competitive. I had a gentleman talk about one example after one of my programs. He said, “Yeah, men are more competitive. Here’s a perfect example: If women go to a public restroom and there’s a cigarette butt floating in the toilet, they will flush it before they use the restroom. Men will make an Olympic sport out of that.”

There is another biological difference with men. By the way, all of these biological differences stem from survival purposes. They started way back at the beginning of our evolution, and every difference is to help keep us alive. We may not need them for those reasons nowadays, but back then they were all for survival. One of those differences is that male’s brains are organized in such a way as to slow down more easily when men are overwhelmed so that they can focus and save lives. What can overwhelm them these days is a lot of words coming at them. So they get accused of zoning out, but if you need or want more female clients to help you qualify for MDRT, zoning out is really not recommended.

Here are a couple of biological differences that women have that are very impactful on communication styles: First, the areas of the brain in the human body responsible for emotions and verbal use are larger in women than in men. Not only are they larger, there are more connections between them. So yes, women generally are more emotional than men, but it doesn’t mean they’re too emotional. Do you hear the judgment in the word too? So we have to be careful about that, but yes, they are more emotional. Just as men, generally, but not always, are more aggressive, it doesn’t mean that men are too aggressive. Now obviously there are situations in which someone could be too emotional or too aggressive for that specific situation, but it doesn’t mean generally that they’re too emotional or too aggressive.

Anyway, generally women are more emotional, and they like to talk about their emotions; that’s the way they process and bond and create those connections and that sense of community that I mentioned earlier. Also with women, their brains are circulating oxytocin, which is a bonding chemical. Compare that to men’s brains, which are circulating testosterone. Oxytocin is actually referred to in the scientific community as “the cuddle chemical.” So women really like processing and bonding, and the best way for them to do that is by sharing and talking about feelings and emotions.

Here are a few comments from your fellow advisors out there in the world. One comment was that female clients are more open to advice and products. Sometimes women feel that men are just trying to make the sale and they don’t care for them personally. You can see how that flies in the face of those purchase motivators of connection: respect and trust. Women don’t develop trust as easily, and they’re often the decision maker. They will lose trust if they’re pressured or if they feel that the advisor is in it for the sale, instead of for...
their best interest. They really need to feel that the advisor is in it for their best interest rather than for making a sale.

There are a few behavioral differences that I wanted to address when comparing masculine to feminine. Back in caveman times, as I mentioned before, men were responsible primarily for saving lives, for keeping the species going. They did that by hunting, protecting, and building. So wouldn’t it make sense that socially, or behaviorally, men were wired for independence, status, competition, and superiority? They had to feel as though they had a high status and were more superior in order to attack that enemy coming over the hill, or to bring down a woolly mammoth, which was probably the size of this room, in order to feed their tribe, or to kill the saber-toothed tiger that was threatening their family. They had to feel as though they had a high status and were competitive and superior.

On the other hand, back in caveman times, women were primarily responsible for pregnancy, childbirth, and rearing children, through relationships and the family unit. So, considering that, their primary wiring was for consensus and collaboration, for connection and harmony, and you can see how those things—consensus, connection, and harmony—really add up to relationship. That is another way of talking about those purchase motivators of connection, respect, and trust. Women need to feel as though they’ve got a relationship. They want a friend, a friend they can trust and depend on.

A lot of times, when men find out that I’m a gender issues expert, first of all they’re afraid to talk to me, because they’re afraid they’ll say something wrong and I’ll correct them or scold them in some way. But I always tell them, “No, you don’t have to worry about that. I’m going to be the last person to take offense because I look at it through your eyes.” That doesn’t mean I’m immune to being offended, by any means.

Anyway, they’ll ask me, “Jane, what’s the secret to women?” Well, I know they’re talking about their personal lives, but I also know that the answer applies to their professional lives as well. That answer, the secret to women, is one word and it’s security. In this situation, requiring emotional security—that relationship I was talking about—doesn’t mean that they’re too emotional or that they’re needy or any less intelligent. What it means is that they’re motivated and are looking for—whether they realize it or admit it or not—connection, trust, respect, and caring. That’s what they’re looking for. That’s what you need to supply as an advisor. So you don’t have to treat them like babies. They want to be treated like an equal partner, with respect and caring at the same time.

So more input from your peers includes this: With a man, be the obvious expert. With a woman, be genuine, be warm, and create that relationship. A second comment: “Women sometimes are intimidated by men.” It’s very helpful to do joint work with female advisors, and by the way, I’ve specifically asked this question of male advisors, and they have responded by saying they get equal or higher closing rates when they do joint work with women because it provides them a different perspective. It provides the client a different perspective as well.

Some advice says to give equal attention to both spouses, regardless of who is talking, and if somebody is very quiet, ask questions to pull that person in. As a side note, another advisor also told me they did an activity in their office at a staff meeting where they filmed themselves in a role-play during an appointment with a couple and thought, even after the filming, that they were giving equal attention to both the man and the woman. But then, once they saw the tape, they realized that they were giving much more attention to the man, and that is natural. So it’s not that I’m criticizing that. It just will not give you the best results. You really have to work hard at giving equal attention to both genders. What I mean when I say that it’s natural is that it’s natural to feel more comfortable with and look at people who are most like yourself.

If you’re a woman selling a man, it may help, depending on your voice, to talk deeper, slow down a little bit, and lean back a little, which gives you an air of confidence, and use your hands less in order to mimic more of how a man talks than how a woman talks. These are generalities, of course, but they’re a good starting point.

Now I want to show you a few minutes of a videotape that was produced by Deborah Tannen, called Talking 9 to 5: Women and Men in the Workplace. She is a gender communication expert, a Ph.D., at Georgetown University. Several years ago, she went out into the workforce, and into the world, and taped children and men and women in different office situations. She had the tape running long enough that people became oblivious to the recordings, somewhat similar to reality TV today; I guess you could call it the first reality TV. Then she edited out segments that help to reinforce some of the differences we’ve been talking about, and I mentioned how men are wired for status and women are wired for connection. These are probably the two most important words to remember from this program today, but I want to show you this segment. It’s about five minutes long and demonstrates status and connection differences in both
children and in adults. [video] So you can see why status and connection are very important and very applicable, particularly to the sales process.

Now I want to dive into the real nitty gritty and get into the specific communication difference: style versus perception. I will, first of all, cover a few masculine style differences. Whether they’re expressed by a man or a woman doesn’t matter, and that’s the beauty of this work. It doesn’t matter who has the masculine style, a man or a woman. As long as you know what constitutes a masculine style, you’ll know how to deal with it; the same applies with a feminine style. Anyway, I’ll start with the masculine style and talk about what it looks like and how it is often perceived by people with a feminine style. Then I’ll cover a few aspects of a feminine communication style with resulting perceptions or, a better word, misperceptions by people with a masculine style. And while I go through each style difference, I will be giving specific tips for sales success with each style.

A couple of points that are very important: No style is right or wrong, good or bad. These are just differences. It is very important to accept these as just differences and not to judge them as right or wrong, and as I mentioned before, they’re generalities. There are always exceptions to the rule. You will see yourself on both sides of the page, as well as others you know, but as I mentioned, once you recognize what masculine and feminine styles are, you’ll be able to deal with them regardless of who is expressing them.

A couple of other points: You know, we’re all a blend of both masculine and feminine. On a continuum of 100 percent feminine to 100 percent masculine, everybody has his or her own unique spot on that scale. So we’re all a blend of both, and—very important for an audience like this, which is primarily men—when I say feminine style, I don’t mean what you think of as “girly.” What I’m talking about is a style that incorporates and honors those purchase motivators of being focused on connection: caring, supportive, collaborative, consensus building. It’s participative management, really. So that’s what I mean by a feminine style.

All right, I mentioned before that the foundation of a masculine style is built on the wiring for independence, status, competition, and superiority. What that can look like is someone being very brief and offering few details, offering less emotional support and less eye contact, and being very difficult when asked for help or clarification. Now I will cover each one of these independently. And did you notice that I mentioned being very difficult when asked for help? What comes to mind when I say that? Right: directions. It’s like, “No we don’t need to pull over; I’ll find where we are. Let’s see. Okay, there’s the North Star over there.” It’s probably why Jimmy Hoffa’s still missing.

Women don’t mind pulling over and asking for directions. They can find new people to talk to and new friends that way. But now, giving directions? Usually, men are very direct, very to the point, clear and concise. “South on Main, East on Broadway, second house on the right. Boom, you’re there.” Women? Women are a little more verbal, a little more visual. Something like this: “Yes, well, you know where that little white church is on Main, down at the end? Right. Yes, that little church all the way down at the end. Exactly. Well, don’t go that far.” And what about this one: One time somebody said, “Okay, now you’re going to come to a place in the road and you’re going to feel like you want to go right, but go left.” I did figure it out, but I was wondering.

So, masculine style: Men are more brief and focused and offer few details. Remember, they were wired to get things done, to solve problems, and to save lives. They didn’t have time for details. But women, or people with a feminine style, don’t generally work that way. A woman views that person who is very brief and focused as not being interested in connecting with her, not wanting to develop a relationship, not taking her seriously, and not caring about her needs.

Some strategies for success would be—and this is something you advisors are good at—to find common ground. Is it the community? Is it family, church, sports? Somehow get to know a little bit about her. Make her know that you want to know her. Offer more details. Ask her detailed questions so that she feels as though you’re truly getting to know her and her needs. And take notes. Don’t just ask a question as you’re scribbling and make it sound as though you’re reading a question off a form. Make her feel as though it’s your question and that you really want to know the answer. Approach her to create a friendship and to help her. Don’t make her feel as though you’re approaching her to make a sale. If you’re working with a man, or a woman who has a masculine style, basically keep it short unless that person asks for more details.

Some bits of advice, relevant to these issues, from your peers: Women ask for more thorough questions, so be sure to come prepared for every appointment. Understand that it may be a longer process because of that. They want to develop a relationship first. They ask more thorough questions. It takes them longer to make decisions because they want to create that connection. They also like to get as much information as they can, and involved in that is their desire...
to build trust. Somebody said, “Pay attention, listen, and watch.” He also said, “Tell them to shut up and pay attention, listen and watch,” but I thought it best now to put that in writing. Women are visual, so use drawings, use charts, so that they can visualize what you’re talking about.

Another masculine style, and this is out of many, many, many style differences. I’ve selected just a few to talk about today. Men don’t tend to give the same level of emotional support. Showing emotions back in caveman times was a sign of weakness. I mean, if a man stood in front of an enemy and burst into tears, he’d probably be killed right on the spot. So they don’t show emotions. Plus, they don’t have as easy access to their emotions as women do because that part of the brain is smaller in men than in women, but women are emotionally supportive, so they view that lack of emotional support from men and figure, “Well, men just don’t care.” It’s not true, but that’s women’s perception, so be aware of how you might be perceived.

Let women share their experiences. That will show some emotional support. They are processing. They’re connecting. You’ve got to empathize, which means you should share a similar story. Empathize does not mean sympathize. Make sure they know that you really understand what they’re talking about and how they feel. And one of the best ways to do that, as opposed to just nodding your head and saying you understand—because I assure you that they’ll be sitting there thinking, “Oh, no, he doesn’t”—is to share a similar story that happened to you, for instance, about someone you know, another woman you work with, your wife, whatever, so that she can go, “Oh, he does know what I’m talking about.” And you don’t want to make it a competition. You’re not trying to top her, by any means. You’re just trying to show that you get it. You want to be sure and listen, follow up, keep in touch, offer information and references, particularly references of other women, and be patient.

Another point: Be in service mode, not in closing mode, and don’t assume, don’t jump to conclusions, if you’re working with men, that men don’t care. That is absolutely not true. One of the most important things I’ve learned in the 18 years of studying this topic is that men do care, but they just show it differently by doing things, by fixing things. But the women you’re calling on don’t have the opportunity to develop the kind of relationship where you’re going to be fixing things for them. They need to know you personally.

A couple of more pieces of advice from your peers: First, don’t push too hard or close too soon. Second, show that you care by listening closely and sincerely, and this is in quotes, “It all comes down to relationship. Does she believe I’ll be there for her and that I have her best interests in mind?” That’s what you’ve got to convince her of, that you’ve got her best interests in mind. Third, trust is more important to her than price. Finally, this little bit of advice: In this person’s experience, men tend to want the bottom line—meaning, how much are they going to save or how much are they going to earn? —and women want security. Of course, women are going to want to know how much they’re going to save or earn, but the most important thing is how it will contribute to their feelings of security.

Another masculine style is that men tend to listen silently and avoid eye contact. In the past, eye contact was a sign of aggression, a dare between two men, and nowadays, in the workplace, men fear that if they have too much eye contact with women they might be accused of flirting, so they think it’s safest to avoid it altogether. As far as listening silently goes, men are silent listeners, whereas women are such active listeners you know that they are listening. There’s all this activity going on and feedback and comments, so it’s a very different situation. So women (or people with a feminine style) often interpret or perceive people with a masculine style as if they’re not listening or that they don’t care.

So some strategies for success: Be sure and maintain eye contact, but don’t stare them down. Break your contact every couple of seconds with just a slow blink or a look to the side, as though you’re trying to think about what she’s saying or what you’re going to say next. Take notes, as I mentioned before, but don’t do any multitasking. When I bought a car a few years ago, my salesman was, oh, mid-20s, I guess. I’m not exaggerating when I say that every 90 to 120 seconds he would pull out his cell phone and respond to a text, I’m sure with his girlfriend. It was driving me crazy. Now, I would have gotten up and left had it not extremely inconvenienced me, so I stuck with it. But finally I said one word. I just looked at him with a very frustrated look on my face, and said, “Dude.” And he got it and stopped texting. Now, here’s the thing: I did buy the car, but I will not refer that salesman. So there are consequences.

Use active listening skills. You know what those are. Repeat their words, ask questions, and clarify, even if you know what they mean. It shows that you’re really listening. Avoid interrupting, which can be difficult. It has to be done sometimes, but just show real genuine interest, and if you’re working with a man, don’t assume he’s not listening if he’s not looking at you.
Now I want to show another short segment in the tape that shows differences in eye contact, and I think you'll find this fascinating. [video]

Now I’m switching gears to the feminine style, which as I mentioned is rooted in a foundation of being wired for consensus, collaboration, connection, and harmony. What that can look like is someone asking for opinions, which is a form of collaborating; taking longer to make a decision because she needs trust and connection first; discussing problems and feelings, which is the way she bonds and processes; and using inclusive language. Again, I’ll go through each of these individually.

A few more bits of advice first, and comments from your peers: Women make decisions more quickly if they buy into you. Be sure and confirm how you’ll be there down the road, focus on service, be confident, know what you’re talking about, and be prepared. Also, be honest and thorough. If you don’t know an answer, tell her that, and tell her that you’ll get it to her the next day. Be very thorough with details.

Let’s talk about the feminine style of discussing decisions, asking for opinions, and collaborating. A masculine style is a very independent decision-making style. So men aren’t as collaborative, generally speaking, as women are. They view women who walk around saying, “Well, what’s your opinion? What would you do in this situation?” as being indecisive and insecure and incompetent when that’s not necessarily the case. Keep in mind that she’s more comfortable asking questions. She’s creating connection. She wants to do more homework, and she’s probably a lot smarter than many people would give her credit for. Provide other women clients as references. Give her the time and information that she needs, and if you’re working with men, be very brief, decisive, and confident in what you’re doing. And, of course, you want to be confident regardless of whom you’re working with.

By the way, be aware that a lot of women, as you know, now have a masculine style, especially in the workplace. If you’re meeting with her in her office or at lunch, and she’s looking at her watch and has an impatient or bored or frustrated look on her face, she’s trying to tell you something. She needs to get going, or she’s bored or frustrated. So get to the point and ask her how you can best serve her needs at that moment and what specific information she needs or doesn’t need. But she will try to show you with body language, long before she’ll ever say, “I need to go” or “This is boring” or “I don’t need to know this” or something like that. So, again, regardless of who’s expressing the masculine style, be aware it can come from either a man or a woman, and respond appropriately.

Another feminine style is that women discuss problems and feelings, which is viewed as being too emotional, as being troubled and weak, by people with a masculine perception because they’re not used to talking about things. If you’ve ever read John Gray’s work *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, you know that men go into their caves. They just want to solve their own problems by themselves.

Some strategies for success: Accept this—that women discuss problems and feelings. It’s just the way they bond and process. Don’t assume that they’re weak or incapable because of that. A good mantra to keep in mind is that differences aren’t weaknesses. A second tip for success is, as I mentioned before, to empathize with them. Offer some personal disclosure about yourself, especially if it involves family or anything that she’s talking about, so that she can get to know you. A third point is, be patient. She’s establishing connection and trust, and the talk that may be small to you is of big importance to her. And, on the other side of the coin, if you’re working with someone with a masculine style, avoid discussing personal issues, especially if you’re talking with a man.

A couple of more bits of interest: Practice role-playing with couples to see how much attention you give the women. Be careful not to underestimate women; they are very capable. And that came from a man, as I remember. Women ask more questions. They don’t mind admitting that they don’t know the answer to something. Be careful not to pressure women. They can take it, but they don’t appreciate it, and know the products.

Finally, feminine style involves inclusive language, and that would include tag questions. Something like this: “This is a really good conference, don’t you think?” Hear how she’s asking for an opinion? It asks for permission, I mean, to have the opinion that it’s a good conference. Whereas, a more powerful or more masculine style would be “Good conference.” So be careful about those tag questions and judging them incorrectly. Apologies—women have a habit of using apologies. They are not actually apologizing most of the time. It’s just a conversational smoother. It’s a habit. They’re trying not to come across too harshly, but it weakens them in the minds of men and it weakens women’s communication.

And they use disclaimers. Things like this: “Well, this is just my opinion, but don’t you think . . . ?” Well, hear how saying “This is just my opinion” weakens what comes next? Nobody even wants to listen. Just state your opinion.
I learned in business a long time ago to state my opinion as fact, and if I’m wrong, well, then I just say I’m sorry. So be careful how you judge those.

Women use indirect requests. They’re trying not to come across too harshly. They don’t want to have to tell somebody what to do. They figure that if you really know her and what she needs, and if you’re really listening, she can just drop a hint, but it backfires. It’s often viewed as being manipulative. The request is misunderstood as a request. Nobody gets it.

So some strategies for success: Understand that these are just style differences, and avoid judging them as less intelligent or weak. Dial up your “I’m sorrys” and “pleases” and “thank-yous” if you have a masculine style; it’ll get you several brownie points. Realize that indirect requests are still requests, and if you’re a woman selling to a man or someone with a masculine style, watch your apologies and disclaimers and so forth because of the way they may be misperceived.

Now that you know more about gender communication style differences, do a little activity in which you think about what you wish your opposite sex prospects and clients understood better about you.

I’m going to close with a poem I wrote, which is very relevant to this topic, called Working with Men and Women.

Together forever, men and women will be.
Accepting this with gratitude and joy is the key.
Be aware of our differences, inside and out.
Try to understand and respect what each is all about.

Nature and nurture gave us quite disparate ways
Of talking and behaving, which never cease to amaze.
But, differences aren’t wrong, right, bad or good,
Just interesting diversities to be learned and understood.

So, be inclusive and real, put pressure aside,
Let status and connection be your trustworthy guides.
Everyone just wants to be respected and valued.
So, work with our differences and bring your results more good.