



TRACOM GROUP

THE CREATOR OF **SOCIAL STYLE**[®]

A T R A C O M G R O U P W H I T E P A P E R

SOCIAL STYLESM and SPIN Selling



OVERVIEW

Some people say that selling is an art. But according to Neil Rackham, selling has more to do with following a process and having a good plan than it does with any inherent abilities. The SPIN Selling model was developed by Rackham based on extensive research he conducted on what differentiates successful from less successful salespeople. The model outlines a time-proven strategy that any salesperson can implement to become more effective.

SOCIAL STYLE has been used by sales professionals for decades to build rapport, deal with objections and ultimately improve sales results. This whitepaper looks at how SOCIAL STYLE supports and enhances SPIN Selling.

SOCIAL STYLE Connections

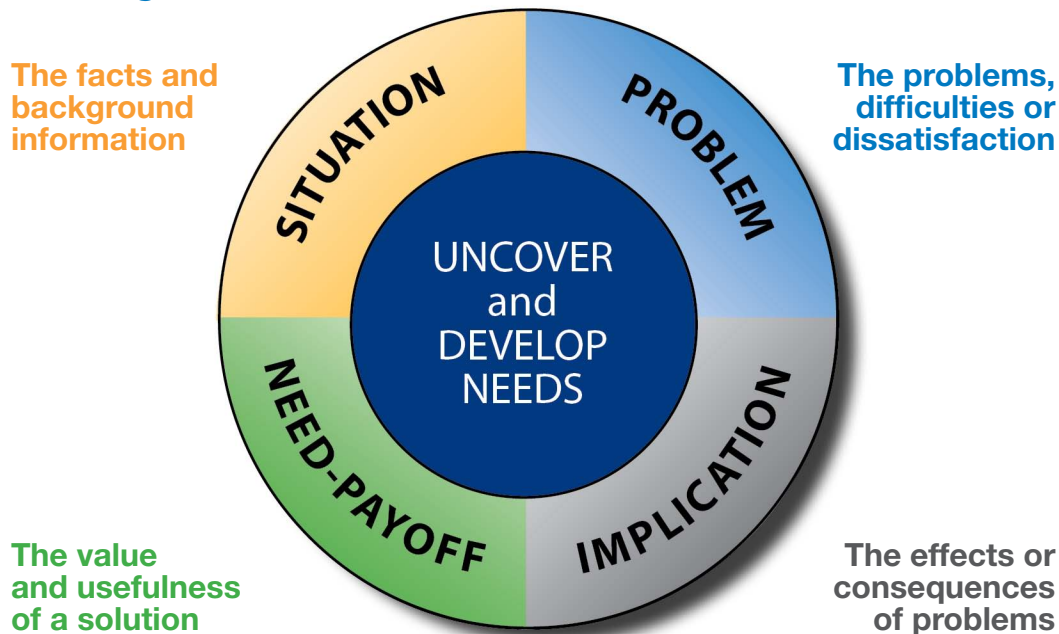
SOCIAL STYLE is the world's most effective interpersonal skills model. The *Connections* Whitepaper Series looks at how SOCIAL STYLE complements and supports other popular workplace programs including Situational Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Crucial Conversations and The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.

Introduction

The SPIN model has proven useful because it takes the mystery out of how successful salespeople accomplish their objectives. In a similar way, the SOCIAL STYLE Model demystifies people's behavioral styles, including the ways they typically interact with salespeople and how they make buying decisions. SOCIAL STYLE can be used in conjunction with SPIN Selling to further increase sales success by showing how people's behavioral styles, including the salesperson's, affect the sales process. In addition, the Versatility component of the SOCIAL STYLE Model enhances salespeople's effectiveness by describing behaviors that are fundamental for implementing the SPIN strategy effectively. In fact, Rackham states that three things are critical for implementing the SPIN model successfully, and each of them is related to Versatility.



SPIN Selling: An Overview



The original research for the SPIN model highlighted one critical aspect of successful selling; the buyer does most of the talking. This is not because talkative people are more likely to buy than un-talkative people, but because successful salespeople are skilled at using questions. The questions used in selling situations can be categorized into four types, described below.

Situation: These types of questions are used to discover facts about the buyer's existing situation. Successful salespeople use these questions to set the stage and gather important context, but they use them sparingly to avoid interrogating or annoying the buyer.

Problem: These types of questions ask about problems, difficulties, or dissatisfactions that the buyer is experiencing with the existing situation. The purpose of these questions is to focus the buyer on problems and set the stage for the salesperson to help solve those problems. These questions should be asked more frequently than Situation questions.

Implication: These types of questions are used to inquire about the consequences or effects of a buyer's problems, difficulties, or dissatisfactions. These are the most powerful types of questions, and the best salespeople ask a lot of these. They can be the most difficult questions to ask since they are designed to induce a certain degree of discomfort for the buyer, leading to a strong need for the buyer to act.

Need-payoff: The final technique involves asking questions about the value or usefulness of a proposed solution. These questions help buyers focus on solutions and how the product or service can help them solve problems. The idea is not to *tell* the buyer how a product can solve her problems, but rather to use skilled questioning that results in the buyer coming to this realization herself. When skillfully employed, these questions get buyers to tell salespeople about the benefits of their own products or services, rather than the other way around.

How SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility Enhance SPIN Selling



The selling process involves multiple phases, from the preliminary stage of meeting buyers through obtaining commitment and closing the sell. SOCIAL STYLE contributes to each stage, but for the purposes of this paper we're going to limit our discussion to the SPIN process, which usually occurs after establishing rapport with a buyer and before obtaining commitment. For additional information about how Style affects the selling process, [click here](#).

In the book "SPIN Selling¹," Rackham notes that "Asking questions that are important to the customer is what makes the SPIN model so powerful." We agree. This is similar to the Platinum Rule we teach in our workshops – do unto others as they would have done unto them. In other words, consider other people's Styles and preferences when interacting with them. Customers' Styles can influence the types of questions that are important to them.

The SOCIAL STYLE Model contributes to the SPIN Selling techniques in three main ways. The first two involve applying Style to selling situations, where salespeople can benefit from awareness of the effects their own Styles have on buyers, and also how to recognize and manage the Style behaviors of buyers. The third contribution comes from practicing Versatility, and affects all aspects of the SPIN process, from planning through closing.

The Salesperson's Style

Each Style has strengths and weaknesses, and these become quickly apparent in selling situations. Salespeople who understand and consciously monitor their Style-related behaviors can become much more effective questioners. In order to implement SPIN effectively, salespeople need to practice the SOCIAL STYLE concepts called "know yourself" and "control yourself."

For example, one of the strengths of Driving Style salespeople is that they focus on outcomes and solutions to problems. These salespeople quickly move the buyer's attention to solving problems, especially if they are skilled at using Implication and Need-payoff questions. Their focus on results benefits buyers by providing them the solutions to their problems without

The Salesperson's Style – cont.

wasting much time; the solution comes quickly and efficiently. However, Driving Style salespeople may suffer from an inability to listen carefully, and they are often highly impatient. Since the SPIN model clearly shows that the most effective salespeople are those who talk less and listen more, Driving Style salespeople who do not monitor and control their Style behaviors will be at a disadvantage. They will rush buyers through the selling process at an uncomfortable pace, and they will not take the time to listen to important information from buyers. Not only will this annoy buyers, but it will almost certainly result in decreased success for the salesperson.



Driving Style salespeople aren't the only ones who need to monitor their behavior. Amiable Style people might seem to have an advantage in selling situations. After all, they want to build strong relationships with buyers and will go out of their ways to be helpful. They do not want to take advantage of buyers or disappoint them, and they would rather maintain a good relationship with buyers than close a quick sell. This behavior benefits buyers in obvious ways. They are not rushed into a purchase, they can take time to consider the options, and they can trust that the salesperson will not take advantage of them. However, Amiable Style salespeople who do not monitor and control their Style-related behaviors will hinder their own effectiveness.

The SPIN model highlights the importance of asking questions, and some of these questions can be tough to ask. In particular, Implication questions are the most powerful of the four question types, but Amiable Style salespeople may shy away from asking these questions

because they are designed to make buyers uncomfortable. These salespeople avoid risks and will not want to ask questions that they feel are too personal or that might damage the rapport they have with buyers. Their hesitancy to ask Implication questions will result in decreased effectiveness in selling situations because they will not be able to urge the buyers to consider problems with their current situations.

The Buyer's Style

Salespeople who know themselves and control themselves are solving one-half of the Style equation. To ensure success, they also need to consider their buyers' Style by "knowing others" and "doing something for others," and how these affect the SPIN Selling approach.

Each Style has specific ways of interacting with salespeople and making decisions. For example, Expressive Style buyers make decisions based more on intuition and opinion than objective facts or information. They want salespeople to support them so they can succeed and look good to others in their organizations. Since they are big-picture thinkers, if a salesperson spends too much time asking Situation or Problem questions, these buyers will become quickly annoyed and will not hesitate to end the sales process. This is because these questions are very fact-based, require detailed responses, focus mostly on the past, and do not give any hints about solutions or how the situation can improve. A salesperson who overuses these questions can come across as an interrogator instead of a problem solver, and Expressive Style buyers have limited patience for this. Therefore, with these buyers it is critical to move quickly into the Need-payoff types of questions, since the purpose of these questions is to focus on the advantages of the sellers' products or services. This will excite Expressive Style buyers and communicate to them that the salesperson is their partner and will help them succeed.

This approach is very different from what a salesperson would use with an Analytical Style buyer. These individuals make decisions based on verifiable facts and they avoid risks. They will look for evidence of the quality of products and services, and need to feel comfortable that their decisions are based on a comprehensive process. Therefore, they are more comfortable with the initial Situation and Problem questions because these questions indicate that the salesperson is being thorough in how she approaches the problem. She is taking time to understand the context and is preparing to base her solutions on her understanding of what has happened in the past. Asking these types of questions, at least in the initial stages of the sales process, also helps Analytical Style people develop a degree of comfort with salespeople. These buyers do not respond positively to salespeople who push too hard.



Versatility and SPIN Selling

Rackham clearly states that there is no magic formula for achieving better sales results. However, he does claim strong evidence showing that if salespeople get just three things right, there is a high probability that they will achieve superior results using the SPIN Selling method.²



They are:

- Get on the buyer's side of the table.
- Invest in planning.
- Give yourself a periodic checkup.

Accomplishing these three things requires hard work, persistence, and a shift in perspective. Versatility, a measure of interpersonal effectiveness, is related to each of these three activities. Let's look at each action and how Versatility helps.

Understanding the Buyer's Perspective

To succeed with SPIN Selling, salespeople need to change their thinking so that they stop behaving like sellers and, instead, adapt the buyer's perspective. This requires a shift in perspective to share the buyer's concerns, and to focus less on persuading and more on understanding. Rackham states that "From working with many hundreds of top salespeople in fields as diverse as consulting and chemicals, we find that the primary perspective of top salespeople is *understanding* rather than persuading."

Empathy is the ability to understand someone else's perspective. Salespeople who use empathy to understand their buyers are more likely to ask questions and are less likely to rush into overwhelming buyers with solutions. It's not surprising that empathy has been identified as a key indicator of success using SPIN Selling, since it has been shown through research to be related to success in multiple fields and areas of life, such as educational achievement and leader effectiveness. In TRACOM's Versatility model, empathy is a component of Feedback, which is fundamental for salespeople. In addition to empathy, Feedback includes the ability to listen effectively, communicate in ways that match the communication style of the buyer, and develop productive relationships with others. Of all the components of Versatility, Feedback is perhaps the most important for salespeople to understand and practice. As Rackham notes, top salespeople view each sales call as an opportunity to understand rather than to persuade.

Invest in Planning

Few salespeople succeed by just winging it. According to Rackham, while many salespeople spend significant amounts of time planning for the strategies they'll use on their accounts, they don't spend enough time planning the tactics they'll use for specific calls. In "The SPIN Selling Fieldbook," a number of tools are provided for planning for sales calls, including written call plan forms.

Versatility and SPIN Selling – cont.

Salespeople who succeed with their planning are, to a large degree, exercising high levels of Competence. Competence is the component of Versatility that includes the skills of conscientiousness, flexibility, innovation, perseverance, and optimism. Each of these competencies is clearly related not only to effective planning, but to the execution and follow-up of sales opportunities. Top salespeople reliably meet their customers' expectations, find creative and flexible approaches for solving their problems, and persevere through challenges and setbacks without losing their positive frames of mind. Top salespeople would agree that without these attributes, they would not be very successful.

Periodic Checkups

The final aspect for successfully implementing SPIN Selling is to periodically collect input about performance. We are all creatures of habit, and top salespeople are no exception. Even skilled salespeople occasionally slip into old and bad habits. Rackham recommends recording sales calls and analyzing the conversation afterwards. Using a form, salespeople can listen to the conversation and record the number of each question type they ask, and the outcomes of these questions. This exercise will provide the type of reality check that salespeople need to stay on top of their performance.

Once again, Versatility is relevant for this activity. The Versatility Profile provides information about performance in all the areas discussed previously. Salespeople can request to receive this feedback from their customers, leading to a greater level of understanding about how their customers perceive their behavior. Getting regular Versatility checkups is something we strongly encourage, for the same reasons Neil Rackham mentions. In addition to these formal checkups though, salespeople who learn about Versatility, and who consciously practice what they learn, will find that they become more adept at monitoring their behavior and the effect they have on their customers. In a sense, Versatility helps salespeople develop a personal radar system that gives regular information about themselves and their effectiveness in selling situations.

What about Image and Presentation?

In our discussion about the importance of Versatility, we would be remiss if we didn't mention the other two components of Versatility - Image and Presentation. Image is a measure of the appropriateness of one's dress and appearance, while Presentation measures a person's effectiveness when presenting information in formal settings, such as sales calls. It doesn't take a great stretch of the imagination to see how important Image and Presentation are to salespeople. Effective salespeople make sure they understand the dress codes and expectations of clients before going on sales calls. Would a top salesperson wear jeans and sandals when visiting his client on Wall Street? Unlikely.

As for Presentation, the Versatility Profile provides input about salespeople's ability to make themselves clear, ask questions to clarify their understanding, and pay attention to the mood and communication styles of customers. These skills are the bread and butter of sales calls, and Versatility provides mechanisms for improving in this area.

Benefits & Summary

The SPIN Selling model provides a framework for salespeople to increase their effectiveness. It has proven the test of time and has been used by tens of thousands of sales professionals. The SOCIAL STYLE Model has also been used successfully by countless salespeople over many decades. The two models naturally complement one another by arming salespeople with concrete tools for working more effectively with their clients. An awareness of SOCIAL STYLE helps salespeople understand the effects their behavior has on clients, while also helping to understand how to interact with clients based on their client's Styles. By practicing Style awareness, salespeople will have a much better chance of asking the right types of questions, and therefore will achieve greater success. Versatility supports all aspects of client management and selling situations. In particular, aspects of Versatility such as Feedback are shown to be fundamental for the successful application of the SPIN Selling approach.



TRACOM GROUP

THE CREATOR OF SOCIAL STYLE®

6675 South Kenton Street, Suite 118

Centennial, CO 80111

303-470-4900

www.socialstyle.com

About the Author

Casey Mulqueen, Ph.D. — Director of Research & Product Development

Casey Mulqueen oversees the research and development of TRACOM's various assessment instruments and products. He has experience developing a wide variety of assessments such as personality inventories, 360-degree feedback programs, performance appraisal systems, and employee engagement programs. His expertise in cross-cultural assessment and norming has helped ensure that TRACOM's global surveys are valid and reliable throughout the world. He is a writer who has authored a variety of materials including books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Casey has an M.S. in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology.

Related Whitepapers

[Emotional Intelligence: What's New, What's True — Improving EQ with Behavioral Styles](#)

[SOCIAL STYLEsm and Situational Leadership](#)

[SOCIAL STYLEsm and The Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#)

[SOCIAL STYLEsm and Strengths Based Leadership](#)

[SOCIAL STYLEsm and Crucial Conversations](#)

References

1. Rackham, Neil. SPIN Selling (1988). McGraw-Hill.
2. Rackham, Neil. The SPIN Selling Fieldbook: Practical Tools, Methods, Exercises, and Resources (1996). McGraw-Hill.





TRACOM GROUP
THE CREATOR OF SOCIAL STYLE®

More Performance Resources are a Click Away

TRACOM offers a variety of whitepapers, research and productivity tools to help individuals and organizations achieve high performance. Click www.socialstyle.com or any of the links below:

YouTube

The **“TRACOM SOCIAL STYLE” Channel** features short videos explaining the SOCIAL STYLE Model and how it benefits Managers, Sales Professionals and Individual Contributors.

Blog

Our High Performance Blog is an interactive forum for discussions on a wide range of performance topics and our **Performance Library** is your one-stop source for all TRACOM resources.

Find us on: **facebook**

Follow TRACOM using popular **Social Media** sites including LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.



Watch **On-Demand Webinars** discussing Emotional Intelligence and Best Practices in Global Training



TRACOM also publishes a **SOCIAL STYLE Tip of the Day**. Each Tip contains Style-specific, practical advice for improving your productivity and that of those around you.