

# The Nine Great Myths of Sales



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Doreen Lofthouse was a superseller. But successful selling is not all about bullish wide boys flogging you products you have no use for says sales guru Peter Belsey.

Doreen Lofthouse laid the foundations for the worldwide success of Fisherman's Friend when she started selling the family-made product in towns and villages around the family's base in Fleetwood, Lancashire.

She was so persuasive that, within a couple of years, they had opened their first factory. You might suppose that as a super-sales person she was a brash, pushy, foot-in-the-door merchant. Yet a moment in her company reveals her to be a gentle, quietly spoken and very private person.

That's because few occupations are more misunderstood than that of the salesperson – particularly in the UK where, even in business, "selling" is often a dirty word. "The stereotypical salesperson is a loud, smooth-talking extrovert", says Peter Belsey of sales performance improvement company Huthwaite international. "The truth is that successful sales people come in all shapes and personality types and that in one way or another most of us are selling most of the time."

Here he outlines nine great myths of selling:

## 1. Myth: Salespeople are born, not made

**Truth:** Selling can be learned. "It is a highly professional occupation and the skills needed to succeed are strategic and behavioural rather than simply intuitive. With effort and the right training and coaching support, sales skills can be developed."

## 2. Myth: You need the gift of the gab

**Truth:** The best sales people talk far less than the client. "Selling is not about talking people into doing things. The real skill lies in getting your client talking and thinking, by asking questions and listening to the answers, in order to unearth concerns and needs."

## 3. Myth: You must be an extrovert

**Truth:** There's no link between personality traits and sales success. "Natural extroverts and introverts can both succeed, provided they understand and are willing to adopt the right behaviours throughout complex negotiations. Much depends on the personality of the buyer."

## 4. Myth: You have to look the part

**Truth:** There is no correlation between appearance and sales performance. Many of the best sellers look very ordinary. "Far more important than first impressions is that you are seen to be highly skilled, professional and that you know how to deal with people."

## 5. Myth: You've got to know your product inside out

**Truth:** Too much technical knowledge can intimidate inexperienced buyers. "Ask questions rather than simply giving information. Your aim is to establish how well your client can absorb information and how best to explain your offer."

## 6. Myth: There are sales opportunities everywhere

**Truth:** Forget your natural optimism, you need focus to sell well. "You need to target your efforts to be effective. So identify realistic prospects and those with whom you have little chance. Don't 'spray and pray' – it's a waste of time and effort to focus on those whom you have little or no chance of converting."

## 7. Myth: They haven't called back, so they aren't interested

**Truth:** Persistence pays. Three quarters of buyers of professional service say no up to five times before buying. Yet 92% of sellers give up after the first 'no'. "Your client may not yet have identified a need or may be dealing with more important issues. By staying in touch, you can influence their thinking and, by keeping your name in front of them, you are more likely to be 'in the frame' when they come to consider a solution."

## 8. Myth: No one likes salespeople

**Truth:** If you are honestly addressing a genuine need, clients will love you. "Sales is not about persuading people to buy things they don't want. However, clients aren't always aware of their own needs. By helping the client define their needs and providing appropriate solutions, you will earn their respect."

## 9. Myth: Male and female clients require a different approach

**Truth:** Women are not more influenced by emotional factors and men are not motivated by technical and financial arguments. "The key is to ensure that, regardless of gender, the buyer feels you have their best interests at heart"



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