

*** PUBLISHED IN STRATEGIC MARKETING MAGAZINE ***

TOPIC: **"Persuasion Science for Sales Consultants"**

WORD COUNT: (1800)

WRITER: Ian Rheeder, ian@markitects.co.za, Cell: 083-300 8080

Persuasion Science for Sales Consultants

An avalanche of brain-science has made the topic of persuasion easier to understand and implement. **Ian Rheeder** shares the breakthrough discoveries from neuroscience and their relevance to any executive that wants to know how to negotiate and influence.

Modern neuroscience has exposed that we are primarily a social species. And in the boardroom, because of these associated primal reflexes to connect, we are not half as rational as we think we are. Our ancient mammalian brain (limbic system) is the evolutionary residue – a current maladaptive misfire from the past – that should be factored into any persuasion system. Overuse of fear, for example, will disable a person's rational 'human' brain, shutting down cognitive and creative reasoning of the prefrontal cortex. At the crux of persuasion for sales and marketing people is adapting our style to these primal characteristics.

We also know that people have an unconscious repulsion to being persuaded – in other words, nobody likes being 'sold to'. Fortunately, neuroscience has also exposed that people are strongly motivated by the emotional engagement of trustworthy relationships. So how do we persuade, and get cooperation, without forcing someone to comply? Let's look at how we can use some golden nuggets spawned by neuroscience to persuade in a high-trust way.

Persuading with the brain in mind (ref. CUSP® System on p.5):

1. **Ask Questions:** If you want to be engaging, don't show up and immediately begin chattering incessantly about you, your product or your service. Rather ask questions, as this gets people to think and feel deeply about what they really want. From a neurological perspective, peoples' brains are 100% engaged in producing protein-memory when answering a question (ref. Appendixes on last page). Massive recent studies by Wood Brooks and John (2018) prove that asking questions builds rapport, trust, and confidence. The key is to get the *sequence* right and use a casual tone of voice. Dale Carnegie's 1936 advice "Ask questions the other person will enjoy answering" still holds true today.

2. **Social:** We are more sociable than any other species. We come to work to socialise, not just work. Banning coffee machine conversations, or even worse, not sponsoring coffee for workers will have a massive unintended consequence on your 'serendipitous collisions'. Why? Because people solve real work problems face-to-face – not huddled over a keyboard. Multiple studies show that, in sales, customers single out the calibre of the salesperson as being 200% to 400% more important than the products they sell. What we have learnt from this is relevant small talk (and asking questions) is critical at the start of negotiations and/or selling (ref. CUSP®). Follow up on quotations within 24-hrs (just like you would after a great first date). People are most likely to follow you if they are similar to you; so find similarities (i.e. shared values) and give genuine praise.
3. **Trust:** One of the best ways to make a sale is to build trust by showing empathy. Trust produces oxytocin, which is the platform for starting new relationships and maintaining existing ones. One of the fastest ways to build trust is to be the first to do a small favour (ref. CUSP®). Smile warmly, do a single eyebrow-flash during the handshake and show genuine sincerity when greeting (for example, by asking relevant questions). It's difficult to fake sincerity because we pick up on the unconscious micro-signals that warn us. Always remember that a small change in the level of mutual trust can have catastrophic consequences on everything. For example, a tiny loss of trust – through perceived unfairness or dishonesty – can cause a disproportional loss of influence.
4. **Feelings vs. Thoughts:** The rational human does not exist. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) was wrong when he said "I *think* therefore I am", which is not nearly as accurate as "I *feel* therefore I am". Feelings make us act, thoughts merely guide us. Hope, faith, love are feelings – not thoughts. At a rational level we know that yellow is the safest colour car. But almost nobody wants a yellow vehicle because of the feeling of not being accepted. Emotions are just as relevant in a business-to-business (B2B) scenario – for example, saving or making money for the business is emotional.
5. **Only one new task at a time:** In comparison to our 'feeling' brain (limbic system) our 'thinking' prefrontal cortex is not that well developed. The novice persuader bombards the receiver with too many messages, thinking they can absorb and remember them all. The expert communicator will not deliver more than two benefits for a product or service, as the drop-off in recollection is drastic. This is why persuaders need to offer fewer options. However, we also need to be *prescriptive*, or the receiver will feel that we don't believe in our own offering.
6. **The brain consumes 25% of our energy:** About 1100 litres of fresh blood flows through our brain daily. It operates at 400 billion bits/sec and is just as active when you are asleep. Our brain is only 2% of our body weight but requires 25% of our rest-time energy. Compared to other primates at only 8% energy consumption, our brain has a downside – we battle to make decisions when we are tired, which is known as

decision-making fatigue. This has massive implications for sales and marketing persuaders. Firstly, we need to be much more *prescriptive* in our approach (i.e. don't offer too many options). Secondly, when people are tired they battle to make tough decisions (i.e. before tea, lunch and home time). The job of the persuader is to be crystal clear with the prescription.

- 7. Body language is key:** Body language influences up to 80% of your persuasiveness. People naturally read body language and create a gut feeling about you. Our brain contains mirror-neurons that literally copy the expressions of others. If you look happy and confident, then your customer feels happy and confident. Inside our temporal lobe is a smile-recognition spot called the fusiform, which lights up when we see a smile. That's why watches are always advertised with the face showing 10-past-10 – because our brain's fusiform sees it as a smiley face.
- 8. Tell a story about people:** Because we are so social and have a magnificent imagination, our brains love listening to stories (i.e. case studies) that have a named person in them. In order for the story to produce serotonin and dopamine (naturally occurring chemicals in the brain that help your mind stay calm and enable you to resist depression and other mood disorders), it must progress from sad to glad. This is what really separates us from the apes – we have the ability to conjure up images of the future.
- 9. Happy people:** Because of our mirror neurons, our customer's moods are automatically lifted when they see us smile. Some studies show that a happy salesperson's sales increase by between 37% (i.e. face-to-face) and 400% (i.e. over the phone). Why? Because the happiness is transferred to the customer and makes them more inclined to purchase. In fact, happy people, due to serotonin and dopamine being released, are better at every single aspect of work.
- 10. Bad is much bigger than good:** While positive energy is contagious, it is also true that negative energy can spread through our mirror neurons three times faster. This is because our survival brain is designed to latch 300% harder onto negativity than positivity. Research shows that we should focus heavily on what potential customers will gain (which produces dopamine) and only gently remind them about the pain (which produces norepinephrine). It's the combination of dopamine and norepinephrine which really energises people to act.

The SCARF Model

Dr David Rock's 2008 neuroscience model called SCARF (Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness) explains the basic needs of the human race, offering the sales and marketing persuader a great tool. Following Rock's model, we can focus on five key areas of influence:

Status: Always be polite, alert and relevant. Never argue your point without first showing intense empathy. Smile, offer refreshments and respect the person's time. Understand their culture and subjective situation. Ask "What's important to you about...?" Show respect by following up on a quote within 24-hrs.

Certainty: Because of the drain on the brain of decision-making fatigue, persuasive people need to be much more *prescriptive* in offering crystal-clear solutions. State the problem and solutions clearly. Follow up on a quotation and assure them it's the solution they are looking for.

Autonomy: People have a craving for options to choose from. However, too many options hurt 'certainty'. Be prescriptive and confident when pushing these options, as people need your expert advice. The CUSP® Sales System (ref. Appendix on page 5), suggests developing more than one solution, just in case your customer wants a second option.

Relatedness: Being liked is important. Be sure to make relevant small talk, show a genuine smile, give a single-eyebrow-flash when shaking hands, pay genuine compliments and be the first to concede on something small (ref. CUSP®).

Fairness: By eavesdropping on the brain, neuroscience also illuminates why, when we negotiate, we need to make the other party feel like they are liked and being treated fairly. Mention 'win-win', do a favour or concede on something small.

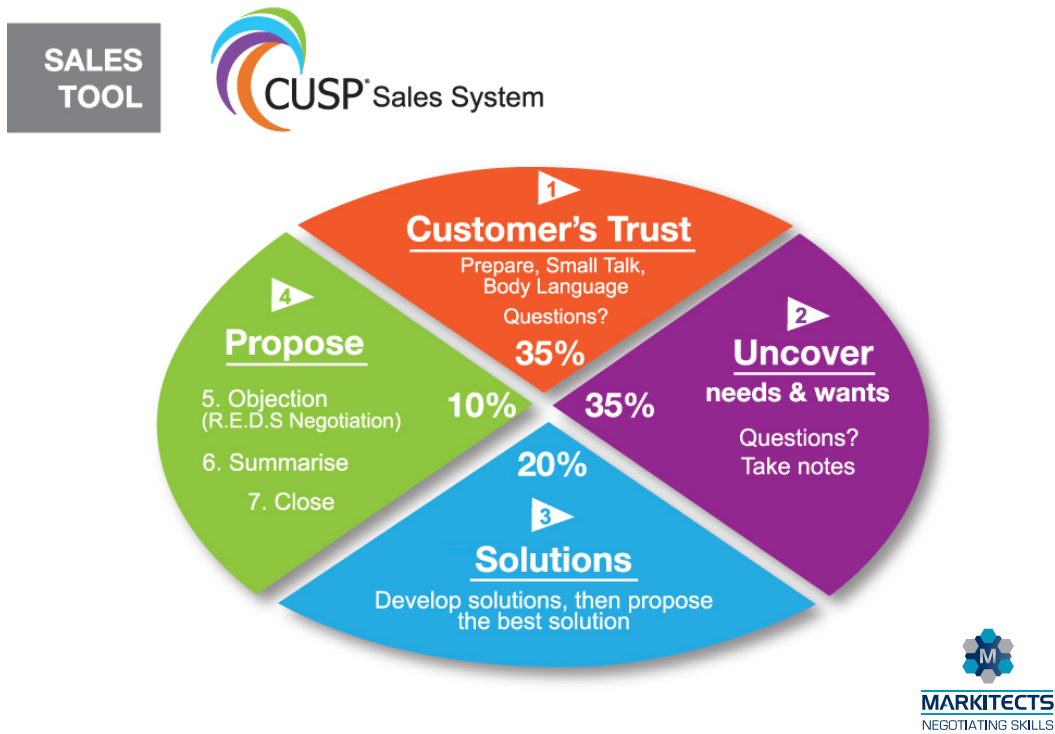
The five elements of SCARF are primary needs, "as important as food and water at times" (Rock, 2009:169). By observing the brain, neuroscience illuminates why, when we persuade, we need to make the other party feel like they are important, help them understand exactly what the offer is, give them an Option B, and make them feel they are liked and are being treated fairly.

One quick warning though: leaders, marketers, negotiators and salespeople need to recognise that all these persuasion disciplines overlap heavily. For example, leaders are salespeople and salespeople are leaders. Also, accept the fact that we are all involved in persuasion, or we will learn nothing.

Summary

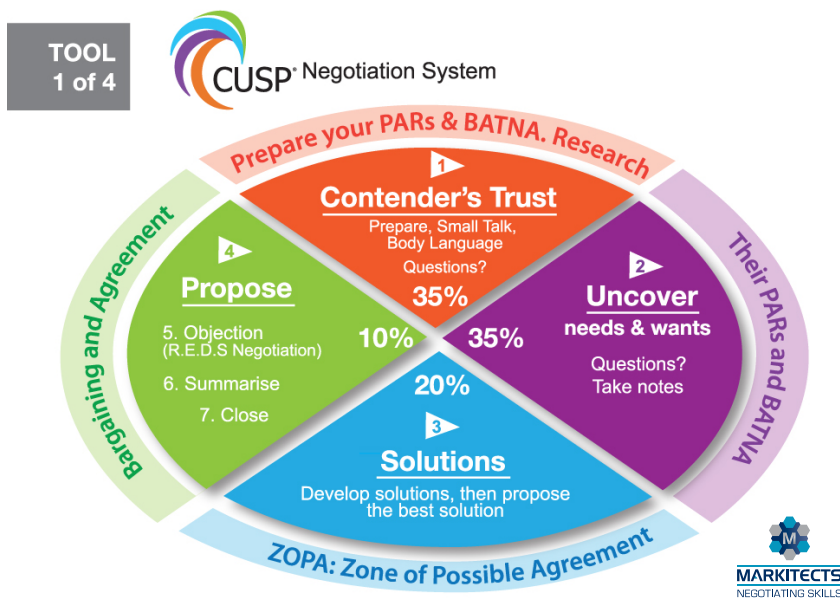
Fortunately neuroscience has simplified the topic of persuasion, allowing us to focus on a much tighter range of proven persuasion-levers. This is especially important because people are repelled when they detect that manipulative-tricks are being used on them. All the levers suggested above are high-trust ideas, however to be most effective in a face-to-face delivery, we need to genuinely want to help others -- put the other person first, show warmth (trust) and be confident (prescriptive) in your offer. Get ready to improve everyone around you, and at the same time improve your professional life.

Appendixes: CUSP ® Sales & CUSP ® Negotiation System



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R.E.D.S Objection handling: **R**epeat with **E**mpathetic tone, go **D**eeper (ask why), **S**olve



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PARs: **P**erfect Value, **A**cceptable Value, and **R**eservation Value
BATNA: **B**est **A**lternative to **N**egotiated **A**greement



Over the past decade Ian Rheeder has trained thousands of sales consultants. His previous corporate position was Marketing & Sales Director of the global zipper giant, YKK. He is a Chartered Marketer and holds an MSc in Persuasion Science (cum laude). He facilitates persuasion skills – marketing, sales and leadership.