



# Mslexia

for women who write

Number 9, Spring/Summer 2001

## The mind's eye looking inside the female brain

How to hook an editor

A slut's guide to housework

Julie Myerson on blood and gore



The idea that 'a good salesperson can sell anything' is utter rubbish. To sell successfully you must (a) focus on what your customer wants and (b) believe in your product. If you've done your research, you'll already have some idea of what an editor might want. Your product is your writing, and you know that's good (don't you?). All you need to do now is put the two together.

People love buying from the good salespeople. But what makes them good? Firstly, they are paid by what they achieve. So they are responsible for their own success, which in turn makes them self-motivated and self-reliant. They're also independent, creative, imaginative, intuitive, empathic. Sound like anyone you know? Good. Now go for it.

#### ■ Bump up your confidence

Even top salespeople need to work on their self-confidence. Here's how they do it. Start a scrapbook, with images of what you would like to achieve, who you would like to be. What's your ideal home? Mine's a remote cottage surrounded by mountains and sea. Paste in a newspaper headline 'Booker prize goes to Your Name' or 'Your Name wins Columnist of the Year award'. On the cover of your scrapbook, write 'All of this is already mine'.

According to Bruce King, author of *Psychoselling: double your income from sales in 8 weeks*, if you have a clear picture of what you want, your subconscious mind will make it happen for you. He calls this 'Psychodynamic Programming'. (This is one application of Neurolinguistic Programming, which is explained in more detail on page 41)

You really can programme yourself to have a positive mental attitude. Muhammad Ali told himself and everyone he met that he was the greatest, and that's exactly what he became. And don't forget to praise yourself for what you've achieved so far. Compile a record of your successes and pin it where you can see it.

#### ■ Find your customer

The salesperson's first challenge is finding prospective customers, or 'prospects'. You've already identified yours – the Features or Commissioning Editor. You've worked out what you think they would like to buy from you, and you've made an initial approach in writing. Unfortunately they have not rushed to the phone to commission you. So now you're going to have to phone them and sell them your idea.

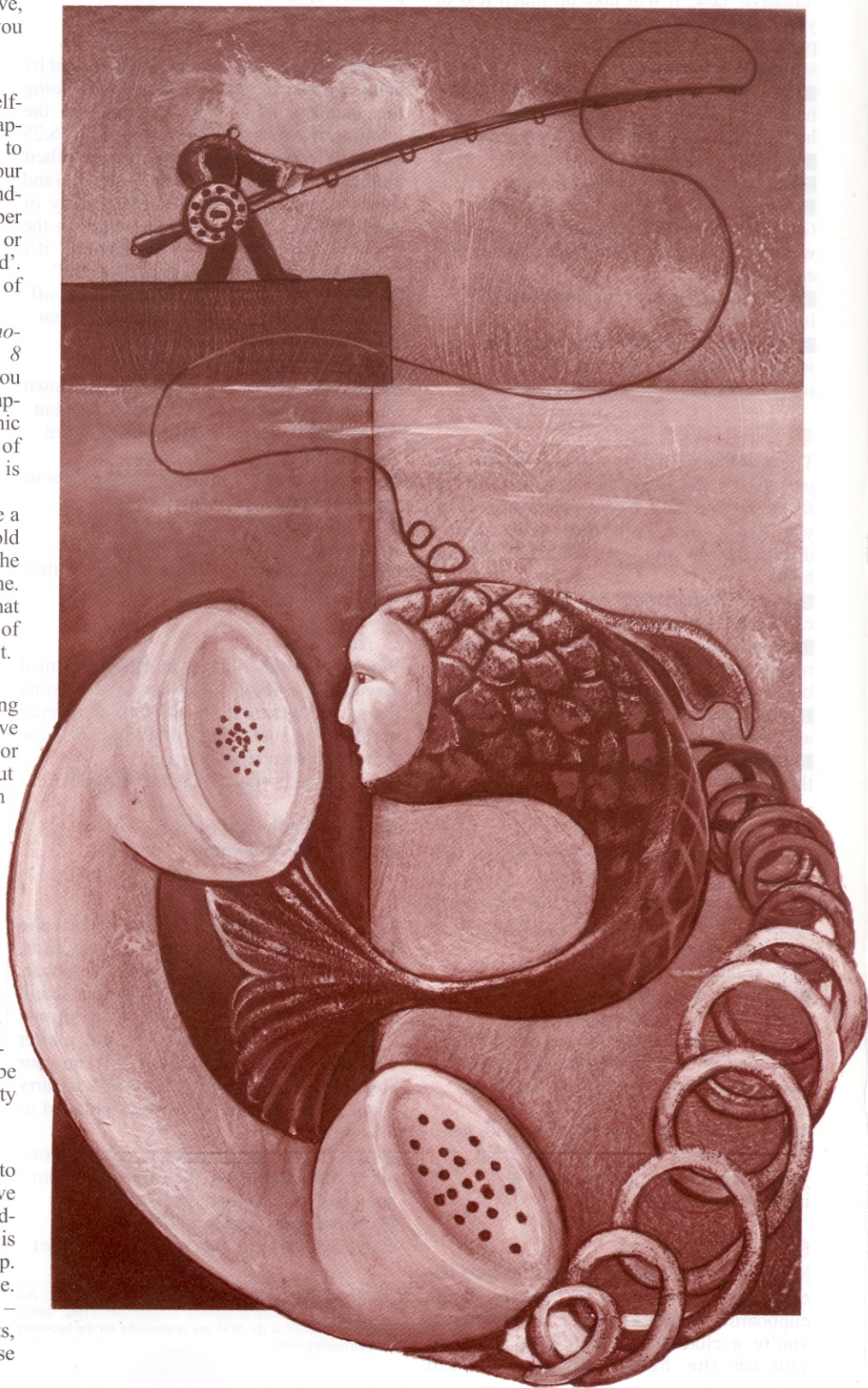
In the sales business we refer to this as 'cold calling'. Most salespeople hate doing it too. No one likes rejection. The best way to avoid rejection is never to try at all, to give up writing professionally and keep a diary instead. But before you give up, remind yourself that it's not you as a person who might be rejected. It's your idea – and there are plenty more where that came from.

#### ■ Speak to the buyer

You must speak to the person with the power to buy. If you don't know who that is (and you've no business sending out a synopsis without finding out first), dial the switchboard, ask who is responsible for commissioning, and hang up. Next time you ring ask for that person by name.

Be prepared to deal with 'gatekeepers' – receptionists, secretaries, editorial assistants, whose job it is to screen calls. Never antagonise

# Landing a commission





So you have an idea for a brilliant article. You've found out the name of the Commissioning Editor. And you've sent in a scintillating synopsis. Now it's time for that follow-up phonecall. Having earned a mountain of money selling life insurance, **Caroline Deacon** explains how to apply telesales techniques to convincing a reluctant editor to buy your ideas.

them; they're potential allies. You may have to talk to them several times, so if they form a positive impression of you, they're more likely to help you get through. Try: 'When will s/he next be in? When is a good time to make contact?' If this fails, because you've encountered a well-trained gatekeeper, then go round them. Phone when they're unlikely to be there: at lunchtime, first thing in the morning, after five.

### ■ Develop a good telesales manner

Before you make your sales call, be prepared. Have copies of your synopsis in front of you, as well as pen and paper. Once you get hold of the person you need to speak to, announce yourself in full, clearly and confidently: 'This is Caroline Deacon'. Next check that it's a convenient time to talk. Don't worry if it's not. Arrange a time to ring back. Next time you call it will be pre-arranged, which is 'warm' (as opposed to a 'cold' call), and you will have advanced down the road towards a sale.

First impressions are really important in selling. Even though you can't be seen, your voice and what you say are projecting an image. An editor (like anyone else) will buy from someone who sounds like a winner.

It can help if you look smart. Though they can't see you, it will increase your confidence - remember how uncomfortable it feels when you underdress for a social occasion? And smile: it makes you sound positive. Standing up and using gestures will make you sound more dynamic. It may help to hang a mirror above the phone to remind you to project yourself.

Now that you sound good, make sure that what you say is clear, positive and concise. Hold the phone correctly; if it's tucked under your chin you'll sound muffled. Say why you are calling: 'I'm ringing about the synopsis I sent you last month'. Even if you feel aggrieved that she hasn't bothered to reply, stay polite and be ready to focus on her situation. And don't gabble to keep them on the line. You need to develop a dialogue or they'll want to escape.

### ■ Make the Editor trust you

Trust me, people buy for emotional reasons, not logical ones. Your Editor is going to buy from you because you sound good, because you sell your idea and she trusts you to deliver. Don't imagine that editors plan their schedules calmly and logically. Like most people, they're probably operating by the seat-of-the-pants method: commissioning at the last minute, casting about wildly for

something interesting. If you ring at the right time, it'll be you that gets the work. The editor will know what she doesn't want, however, and have a good idea of the kind of thing she might like. You need to find out what this is, and to do this you must listen.

### ■ Become a good listener

You have two ears and one mouth. Use them in that proportion. Good listening on the phone is not easy. You must focus, try to understand their situation, and take notes as necessary. Show you are listening with encouraging noises: 'umm... go on... yes'. Repeat back what they say to show you've understood and provide an opportunity for them to clarify if you haven't. The more understanding you demonstrate to your prospect, the more likely it is that she'll buy.

It is tempting in a sales situation to interrupt and gabble. Don't. Avoid finishing people's sentences for them and don't jump to conclusions. No-one likes to be ignored or interrupted. Be aware of these reasons for ineffective listening: (a) assuming you know what's going to be said and (b) planning what to say when it's your turn.

### ■ Overcome their objections

Once you have reminded the editor about your proposal (she may have 200 a week, so be prepared to explain it again), there are two possible outcomes. Either she'll say, 'Ooh yes please' (unlikely) or she will provide an objection - a reason not to buy.

The good salesperson views objections as opportunities. It means your prospect is listening and is interested. Without objections, there is rarely interest.

You must acknowledge and accept objections, rather than arguing with or dismissing them. Sometimes they're based on a misunderstanding, so all you need to do is to clarify. And don't put them on the defensive. Rather than saying, 'No, that's not right...', it's better to say, 'Perhaps I did not make that clear, actually what I meant was...'

Often you can minimise an objection by repeating it in your own words, perhaps in the form of a question.

*'I'm not sure flagellation is right for our magazine.'*

*'You don't think it is quite right?'*

*'Yes. We really need articles about...'*

Bingo! She's told you what you need to offer instead.

Isolating the objection can also work.

*'I don't think readers would enjoy 5,000 words about robins' nests.'*

*'So you think robins' nests are interesting,*

*but perhaps they don't merit 5,000 words?'*

Again, you've sold it. Either she'll tell you how many words she does want on robins' nests, or she will go on:

*'Well, not just robins' nests. That's a bit narrow.'*

So now you can offer to cover sparrows' nests as well.

What about the 'We'll get back to you' or 'I'll have to think it over' objections? Try this:

*'Of course you need time. I understand. Just so I'm clear in my mind, which points exactly are you thinking over?'*

Now she's back on the hook, telling you her objection to your work, which you can then clarify, etc. etc. If she persists in 'thinking it over', don't worry. Just ask how long she'll need, and arrange to ring back the day after she's made her decision.

### ■ Be alert for buying signals

In the case of an editor, buying signals are any indication that she is imagining how your piece would work in her publication. Perhaps she starts asking questions. Good salespeople treat anything apart from a dial tone as a buying signal. But you may not feel brazen enough for that yet.

Once you've got a buying signal, relax. You're there. All you have to do now is...

### ■ Close the deal

This is where many would be salespeople flag, just short of landing the fish: they don't ask for the business.

There is no real magic in closing. On its own it will not create a sale. Everything else you've done during the call is just as important. However, closing is necessary because people dislike change, and not buying is easier than buying. Closing helps your prospect push through that inertia and swallow the bait. Here are three tried and tested methods of closing:

**The step-by-step close** leads your prospect little by little:

*'Is your email address editor@internet.com?'*

*'Yes'*

*'Do you like copy by email?'*

*'Yes'*

*'Right. I'll send it to you by email by 20 June. Thank you very much.'*

**The either/or close** tricks them into a deal:

*'Do you want it for the June or July issue?'*

What can she answer, but to buy?

**The doorknob close** is the close you do as you are being shown the metaphorical door:

*'I understand that you're not going to commission this. But could you just tell me, for the record, what was wrong with my idea?'*

She will then give you her objection, you can clear it up and you're back into a sale!

Finally, don't underestimate the power of SILENCE. This is crucial. When you've asked a closing question, shut up. If you don't speak, she will. And if you've pitched your close correctly, it will be easier for her to say 'yes' than 'no'. ■

CAROLINE DEACON is a freelance journalist specialising in mass-market parenting magazines and a tutor for the Writers' Bureau. She worked for five years as top sales person, then sales trainer, for Confederation Life (now Sun Life Canada).