

Ask the Coach

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Green Light – Red Light – Yellow Light

Part 1

All drivers love green lights – yet we get green lights only about 38% of the time. The remaining 62% you're either stopped or slowing down. While we may be impatient at the yellow and red lights, we recognize they are a fact of life, and for the most part we accept them.

In sales we also get green, red and yellow lights, yet the history of sales systems illustrates just how poorly we have dealt with the basic fact that buyers object, resist, procrastinate and just say “no.” I believe that there are 4 distinct sales systems; an examination of each of the systems will illustrate the purpose and methods used to make the sale and how yellow and red lights are handled.

First some definitions:

- Green light: You receive positive responses and the sales process proceeds easily towards yes.
- Yellow light: You receive objections, expressions of concern, disagreements and resistance.
- Red light: You receive some form of no, or simply, no.

Each sales system has its own method of dealing (or not) with red and yellow lights.

THE SALES SYSTEMS

TYPE 1: “THE HUCKSTER” (High Pressure Pitch)

We've all seen sales pitches at fairs and carnivals or have experienced high pressure sales people at some time in our lives. The characteristics of the person who practices this type of selling is displayed in the following chart.

Basic Goal: Make the Sale

Win for the seller	Yes
Win for the buyer	NA
Win for the manufacturer	NA

Basic Sales Techniques Used

Presenting	Yes
Dealing with Objections	No
Closing	Yes
Asking Questions of the Buyer	No
Building Trust	No
Listening	No
Building Customer Relations	No
Honest Dealing with Yellow & Red Lights	No

THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME:

For The Seller:

In addition to making the sale, the high pressure system may also cause the seller to suffer from burnout and low self esteem. High turnover in the sales position, and low regard for the buyer (who is merely viewed as a means to the end) are often unintended results of The Huckster method.

For the Buyer:

In addition to buying the product or service, the result can lead to distrust of sales people, unwillingness to share true goals with sellers, and often, low regard for sales people in general. Buyers then may also try to avoid sales people whenever possible.

TYPE 2: "THE PERSUADER" (The Refined Canned Pitch)

This sales person is often very smooth and may be described as a "blue suede shoe" salesman. Often very successful (as may be Type 1), the goal of The Persuader is still to meet the seller's needs; genuine concern and understanding of the buyer is not a primary objective.

Basic Goal: Make the Sale

Win for the seller	Yes
Win for the buyer	NA
Win for the manufacturer	NA

Basic Sales Techniques Used

Presenting	Yes
Dealing with Objections	Yes
Closing	Yes
Questioning	No
Building Trust	No
Listening	No
Building Customer Relations	No
Honest Dealing with Yellow & Red Lights	No

THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME:

For The Seller:

In addition to making the sale, the sales environment may be more relaxed and less stressful (compared to Type 1). However, complex sales will create difficulties for this style because the objective is to make the sale, and not to truly understand the buyer's needs, which is a critical requirement in a complex sales environment.

For The Buyer:

This may be a more relaxed buying process (than method 1), but this method may still contribute to a feeling of distrust of sales people, because the selling method still views the buyer as a means to the end.

TYPE 3: "THE PROBLEM SOLVER" (Counselor Selling)

Counselor selling, founded by Larry Wilson about 30 years ago, was a revolutionary process which placed much more emphasis on dealing with the buyer as an equal, and not someone to be manipulated. Often a more lengthy sales process, the long term outcome is generally more favorable for both buyer and seller than methods 1 and 2. This system is designed to help the seller discover the gap between where the buyer would like to be and where he is at the moment - then fill the gap with the seller's products and services.

Basic Goal: Make the Sale

Win for the seller	Yes
Win for the buyer	Yes
Win for the manufacturer	?

Basic Sales Techniques Used

Presenting	No
Dealing with Objections	Yes
Closing	No
Questioning	Yes
Building Trust	Yes
Listening	Yes
Building Customer Relations	Yes
Honest Dealing with Yellow & Red Lights	?

For sophisticated sales people, counselor selling (The Problem Solver) is probably today's most widely used sales process, and provides the best long term results of the 3 methods described.

THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME:

For The Seller:

More solid sales, more responsive and positive relationships – higher self-esteem for the seller.

For The Buyer:

A better relationship with the seller; a more positive sales experience and a greater sense of having met important personal goals.

How are green lights, yellow lights, red lights dealt with in the 3 sales systems described? None of these systems has the basic objective of dealing effectively with yellow and red lights. A mature sale system, on the other hand, accepts and understands that we as sellers need to honestly deal with objections, concerns and differences of opinion. In none of the 3 systems described above is the seller trained to deal effectively with "no." Nor does the system integrate the concept of not making the sale. Finally, the current systems do not teach us to have a willingness to hear and accept no.

This discussion has been presented in very stark terms. In fact, there are many sales people who do practice dealing with red and yellow lights; the analyses offered here have to do with the basic system itself, and not any particular sales person.

Part 2

Part 1 of this article discussed the 3 basic selling systems in use today (The Huckster, The Persuader, The Problem Solver). None of these systems has, *as a core requirement*, that the seller effectively, honestly and openly deal with yellow and red lights. The net result is that both the buyer and seller often experience much more tension, pressure, difficulty and wasted time than would occur if there were a more effective way of conducting the selling process.

The obvious question: Is there a system that can incorporate the good aspects of current selling systems and also effectively deal with yellow and red lights?

The answer: “The Partnership Process.”

TYPE 4: “THE PARTNERSHIP PROCESS” (A Mature Selling System)

The Partnership Process views the prospect as one whose opinions, needs and concerns are important and fundamental aspects of the selling process. This process acknowledges that no sale will be made unless the following points are successfully covered when dealing with the client or prospect:

- The purchase of the product or service must effectively solve the client’s needs.
- We have listened to and responded to all client concerns and objections.
- We have included all stakeholders in the decision making process.
- The basis for the sale is an improvement in the client’s well-being, business practices, profitability.
- All parties to the process win (buyer, seller, manufacturer).
- The sales process is not manipulative – it is collaborative.
- The seller will walk away when a sales situation is not in all parties’ best interest.

Basic Goal: Make the Sale

Win for the seller	Yes
Serve the buyer	Yes
Win for the manufacturer	Yes

Basic Sales Techniques Used

Presenting	No
Dealing with Objections	Yes
Closing	No
Questioning	Yes
Building Trust	Yes
Listening	Yes
Building Customer Relations	Yes
Honest Dealing with Yellow & Red Lights	Yes

THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME:

At first glance it may look as if this system is totally idealistic – and totally nuts! But think about this: isn't the Partnership Process exactly what every salesperson dreams of instituting when his/her ideal practice is achieved?

- Only dealing with ideal clients
- Only selling the products right for the buyer
- Never forcing the sale
- Always including all stakeholders in the decision making process.
- Always using collaborative, not high-pressure tactics.

The primary reason that the new sales model is so different from the old system is due to a profound shift in attitude: from *fear* to *faith*. Faith that we can effectively deal with the yellow and red lights so common in any selling process.

Issue	Old System	New System
Gathering data about needs	Based on matching needs to our products	Based on matching needs to client solutions (which may or may not include selling your products)
Includes all stakeholders when gathering data	Will talk to those who'll talk to us.	Will not proceed if we cannot talk to all stakeholders

Issue	Old System	New System
Bottom Line	We hope the sale is good for all parties	The sale <u>must</u> be good for buyer, seller, manufacturer
Yellow Light (Caution)	Often hopes problems will go away	Consistently deals directly with concerns – will not proceed if concerns not met
Red Light (Stop)	No specific process used on a regular basis	Consistently deals directly with concerns – will not proceed if concerns not met
Willing to abandon the sales effort	Not if we can “make” our products fit the client's needs	Yes, if client's needs are not met by our products /services
Close	Often mailed, may be long and filled with extensive charts and graphics.	Always presented in person; often simple, but always based on extensive knowledge of client's true needs

The Partnership Process is based on faith – faith that you'll find enough good prospects to leave the bad ones behind; faith that dealing honestly with objections is the right and only way to sell, and faith that doing it the right way will be beneficial for all parties in both the short and long term.

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