



Getting emotional?

No, just in touch with your selling side

words | Paul Myles

Sometimes it's good sales practice to explore the cracks in your sales suit of armour, argues **ReMap**

Sometimes, the hardest thing for a sales professional to achieve is true self-awareness. Most of the time, he or she spends the day bolstering personal ego, motivating the drive to the next close.

But, say sales training specialists ReMap, embracing the frailties that exist in everyone opens the route-map to boosting sales performance.

SI caught up with ReMap associate CIPDs, Martin Perry and Ian Saunders to help explain how addressing the things that make us want to cry can lead to sustained success.

Both former financial sales specialists, Perry and Saunders saw that the traditional 'hard-arse' approach to selling was doing many sales professionals a disservice and limiting their ability to perform and decided to help change this thinking by launching ReMap about 13 years ago.

Perry told *SI*: "Shortly after setting up we realised the sales preference questionnaire (SPQ) designed by BSRP and the programme that runs alongside it was very different – it proves it works and, from a business perspective, that would be a unique selling point.

"In sales and staff development, there is a widely held belief there are three things that are important if they are going to be successful: normally, the ASK model – attitude, knowledge and skills.

"We found most organisations focus their resources for staff development, or indeed recruitment, on skills and knowledge. So, in terms of recruitment, you go for competency-based assessments, you'll be asked for evidence of your skills and knowledge and how good you are. Your CV does the same and interviews do the same, assessment processes also all concentrate on skills and knowledge.

"When you're employed, most of the development offered to people rests on skills in terms of sales or providing technical knowledge. There's good reason for that, because it's easier to do!"

Perry argues that this 'lazy' approach to staff

management overlooks the essential assessment of attitudes within members of the company's sales force.

"The attitudinal bit is very difficult to assess, very difficult to measure and incredibly difficult to train," Perry explains. "We see a part of the attitude bit being sales call reluctance (SCR), a phrase we use to describe the discomfort people can feel while in a sales environment or undertaking a sales role."

He said that without addressing this propensity to be reluctant in selling, no manner of other attributes will make the sales person be able to perform at the optimum level.

Perry continued: "We are passionate that if we don't get that right, if our emotional resilience isn't correct, then skills and knowledge become redundant. Because, no matter how skilful and knowledgeable you are, if you don't have an emotional capability to actually undertake the tasks needed to be successful, then skills and knowledge count for nothing."

Saunders said the perceived difficulty in addressing a sales professional's emotional attitude has resulted in it being ignored altogether by many training models available in the UK today.

He said: "The hard bit is there are lots and lots of people out there with profiling tools that start at £5 a pop but most of them don't accurately assess how a sales person truly feels. That's the bit that's unique for us is that the profile is incredibly accurate at identifying the emotional landscape a sales person has.

"That's important because you need that to be right to work with people and in many cases, most sales environments, aren't conducive to admitting that you have issues of this nature. We're all meant to be, as sales people, Superman and invincible and 'every No takes us one step nearer to a Yes', 'rejection is the breakfast of champions', we've heard all the clichés but actually most sales people are normal, they have fragilities themselves, they have emotional concerns about how they are perceived and all that has a much bigger impact than the industry sometimes recognises."

It was work completed by psychologists in the US that inspired ReMap's approach to looking at the emotional and mental attitudes that dictate a sales person's performance potential.

"The background theory to this is very, very simple," said Perry. "If you take what we call the energy model – when we wake up in the morning our batteries are 100% full of energy and all of that should be directed towards achieving our behavioural objectives, our goals.

"Unfortunately, call reluctance kicks in at some point during our day and that energy is directed elsewhere and goes into avoidance. This could be very overt, it could be that I just have a 'home' day and I need to do lots of things in my office, I need to clean my car rather than going out on territory to sell.

"That's because I feel uncomfortable. I've woken up with

energy but there's something nagging away in my brain that says, 'I don't want to make that phone call, I don't want to see that key target, I don't want to ask them any damn questions'. Alternatively, it could be a little bit more subtle such as I will go out on territory but I won't see the ones I should be seeing, I'll go and see the soft targets, the people who are nice to us, the people who provide the information we need but we don't actually sell to them.

"It could even be that I get on territory, I see the right people but my avoidance is, I don't ask the right questions. Instead of asking, 'when can I get an order from you and how much do you need?' I back off and say, 'will you consider it?'"

Perry is quick to point out that there should be no blame attributed to this because, in most cases involved, the reluctance is not wilful but involuntary.

He explained: "We all have a whole range of avoidance techniques we use subconsciously. You don't go about thinking 'how much avoidance can I undertake today?' But these get in the way of using our skills and knowledge effectively.

"We are able, through an online questionnaire, to identify 12 things that make us feel uncomfortable. They can be tasks, they can be environments, they can be things we need to do that are our responsibilities."

Saunders expanded on this, saying: "Unlike some profiling tools where they try to put you in a box they are often cross-shaped with four options. We don't operate that way because we know sales people's emotions can rollercoaster during the week. So we assess all 12 to see the level of change. For some people, call reluctance will kick in at a certain negotiation but another can kick in at a different situation.

"We are not trying to badge or label people. We say 'these are all the things you are sensitive to and when the working week changes, the tasks change and the clients change, things will flair up and then die down.

"We offer a proper MOT about what is going on in their heads when they sell."

Perry stressed that the assessment is not about types of people but about their habits often learned from their earliest experiences.

"It's all about learned behaviour and not about personality," said Perry. "Most psychometric tests in this country attempt to measure who you are, your personality but the SPQ does not do this, it measures how uncomfortable you are and, therefore, what the behaviour is predicted to be like in certain conditions. So regardless of your personality, whether the most extrovert or introverted person on the planet it doesn't matter, you can all suffer from call reluctance and it's the behavioural piece which is the most important piece.

"We are able to predict, because of your sensitivity, your emotional lack of resilience, we can predict very accurately what you are likely to do in certain situations."



ReMap lists the 12 different behaviour traits as:

- Doomsayer** – energy goes into avoidance because I'm worried about things.
- Over-preparation** – avoidance in procrastinating.
- Hyperpro** – image and doubting oneself and over compensating by avoiding sales but making the client feel good about them
- Stage fright** – unease at being centre stage
- Role rejection** – Rejection of the sales role where the sales person prefers being an information resource to the client rather than closing the deal
- Yielder** – Backing off and being apologetic rather than challenging with direct questions
- Social self-conscious** – intimidated by certain individuals, avoiding those with wealth, power, status
- Separationist** – uncomfortable using friends to sell
- Emotionally emancipated** – uncomfortable about using family connections
- Referral aversion** – reluctance to ask for referrals because it may appear sleazy
- Telephobia** – uncomfortable making cold-calls for business
- Opposition reflex** – becomes challenging when challenged without achieving the end goal.

Saunders said adverse sales behaviours can stem from a variety of experiences and environments the sales person has experienced through life. He said: "These are learned traits and can be imprinted from parents, teachers, society, the press for example a lot of sales people in medicines and pharmaceuticals are very sensitive about what they do because of the negative exposure in the press. Maybe passed on from sales managers and even customers – all learned behaviour which can be corrected."

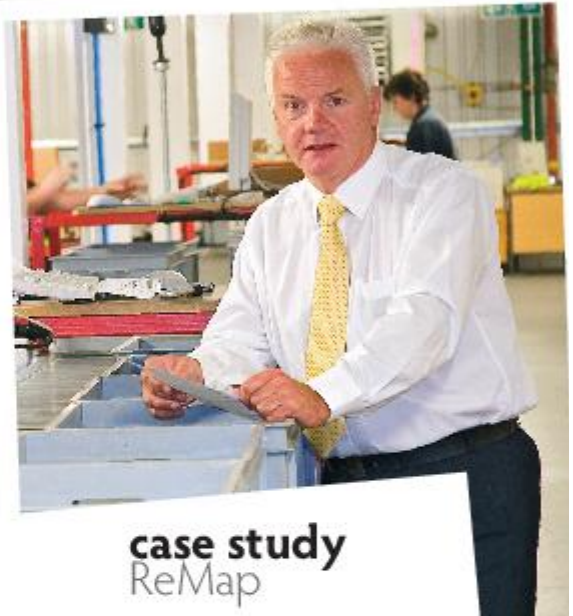
ReMap aims to change these habits by helping sales people face up to their own frailties. Perry explained: "Like biting your nails there are two ways to change the behaviour – one is to consciously think about it every time you go to bite the nail, using self-talk and will-power, and the other is to paint nasty tasting stuff on the nails and that is a mechanical method.

"We use both to enable people to remember to do things in certain situations which can be as quick as a few days or up to a few weeks to change core reluctance.

"This is a change that is sustainable and can last for good because we have changed a sales person's behaviour."

And ReMap has shown some real sales performance boosts with clients that have undergone its training courses.

Perry said: "We can measure performance against specific aims that challenge person's issues over a four week process following our two-day workshop and then set ongoing aims for the managers to maintain these new habits – better for the individual and for the company. ReMap get on average a 85% success rate with this new aims." 



case study ReMap

So does the ReMap approach work? Ian Styles, managing director of Axminster Tool Centre/Brimarc which saw a 23% hike in sales during the teeth of recession. He said: "The work undertaken with ReMap allowed us to totally rethink our wholesale sales operation looking to engage the whole team and re-invigorate the external sales staff.

Within weeks of the initial training we were seeing instant results and a team seriously coming together working in unison for the common gain of increased sales and service level improvements. Sequential selling and greater sales agent customer interactions quickly resulted in improved sales and ultimately better communications all round.

"In all a win-win situation has resulted and worked well for Brimarc with year-on-year increases in sales and margins. Profit margins on sales have increased by 5% as well as overall turnover.

We were so pleased with the results achieved in working with ReMap that we have engaged them to work with another division of our company."

