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The Case for Accepting Reality: exploring aspects of mental imagery

I recently completed a doctoral dissertation exploring the reluctance of professional advisers (accountants, tax managers, consultants, etc.) to be involved in sales training. It grew out of my role as a business development trainer for a major UK accountancy/consultancy practice.

My study began by asking professionals within four of the six big accountancy firms in Britain why they themselves felt that they had problems. This revealed organisational, training and personality issues which were all explored in depth through personal interviews over a two-year period.

Within the study of personality issues I used Rodger Bailey's LAB (Language and Behaviour) profile to elicit working and motivational traits; so the research moved into the NLP arena. I had trained in both LAB and NLP, and am also a trained hypnotherapist and psychotherapist so the works of Erickson, Bandler, Dilts etc. are quite familiar.

The impetus to explore the mental images of participants, and to see what happened when these were changed, arose during the pilot study. Hundreds of participants on previous programs and courses had expressed their sales reluctance in similar ways:

- *I feel easier* doing the work.
- *I can hear* how bad I am.
- *I see myself* not being very good.
- *I don't like* salesmen.
- *I think of* double glazing.
- *A horror of* being a salesman.

These expressions include some form of internal image—pictures, sounds and feelings. While these images were not always precisely

articulated, some participants reported strong images when asked what the word “selling” meant to them. For example:

Mike, consultant

Oh yes, he has a bright, lavish(?) suit and a briefcase. He looks pushy. I’m watching him push the door bell. It’s a brown wooden door and I’m behind him sort of ten feet away. He’s—well—male, young, a light grey suit. I can hear the doorbell. He’s saying “good morning, can I interest you”—oh, now I’m inside the door behind the lady. Hah, he’s talking to my mother. Now he’s going to get it.

Graham, insolvency adviser

I don’t get this. Oh yes, here he is. Can I help you—go away, I’m just looking. God, he has a red tie, white shirt and the clothes that sales people wear. Oh, we’re outside, I’m close up, he’s talking to me. It’s going out of focus. I think I don’t enjoy this. I’m going to turn away.

David, auditor

He has a sharp suit. He’s tall, slick. He has a couple of gold rings and coloured cards—they are brochures. Usual stuff. He has a brown sheepskin coat, light brown. He’s got shiny shoes—black. What is he?—mid 30s? I can hear him. He’s got a Liverpool accent.

The other responses follow the same pattern: a young male in a suit, selling at the door or in a shop and doing all the talking.