

White Paper

White Paper Selling Styles - Buying Styles by Dudley & Goodson

Selling Styles and Buying Styles

Why Successful Selling Depends on Behavioral Flexibility



Executive Summary

Why do some salespeople create immediate trust while others struggle to connect with the very same customer? Why do certain customers want detailed technical information while others care more about relationships, credibility, speed, security, or status?

And why do many sales organizations continue to train salespeople in one “correct” selling method despite overwhelming evidence that customers buy differently? The research conducted by George Dudley and Shannon Goodson provides an important answer.

Their work demonstrates that there are six distinct sales styles and six corresponding buying styles. No sales style is universally superior. Instead, effectiveness depends on the salesperson's ability to recognize the customer's preferred buying style and adapt accordingly.

This concept — known as Style Plasticity — represents one of the most important yet overlooked capabilities in modern selling. The research is based on empirical data gathered from more than 300,000 salespeople worldwide and forms part of the broader behavioral science tradition behind Sales Call Reluctance® and the SPQ Gold® framework.

This white paper explores:

- The six sales styles
- The six buying styles
- How customers make decisions differently
- Why behavioral flexibility matters
- How salespeople can identify buying preferences
- Why many sales organizations underperform despite strong products and training
- How organizations can use these insights to improve sales effectiveness

The Problem with “One-Style-Fits-All” Selling



Many organizations still train salespeople as if there is one ideal way to sell. Some organizations emphasize relationship building. Others focus heavily on needs analysis. Some train highly competitive closing techniques. Others prioritize product expertise.

But customers are not identical. Some customers want speed. Some want safety. Some want technical detail. Some want emotional trust. Some want status and credibility. Some want consultative dialogue.

The challenge is not whether a sales style is “good” or “bad.” The challenge is whether the sales approach matches the customer’s preferred buying behavior. This is where many sales conversations fail. Not because the salesperson lacks effort or competence. But because the behavioral match between buyer and seller is weak.



The Six Sales Styles

1. Service-Oriented Selling™ (S-O-S™)

This style emphasizes:

- reliability
- follow-through
- keeping promises
- customer support
- long-term dependability

These salespeople focus strongly on what happens after the purchase.

Customers often experience them as:

- trustworthy
- responsible
- supportive
- dependable

This style is particularly effective when customers value security, continuity, and long-term support.

Potential limitation: The salesperson may become overly service-focused and/or challenging customers.

2. Competition-Oriented Selling™ (C-O-S™)

This style focuses on:

- persuasion
- influence
- results
- winning
- competitive advantage

These salespeople often enjoy competition and are highly driven by targets and achievement.

Customers may experience them as:

- energetic
- persuasive
- ambitious
- performance-oriented

This style works particularly well with customers who appreciate decisiveness, momentum, and strong commercial positioning.

Potential limitation: The salesperson may sometimes push too hard or prioritize winning over understanding.

3. Image-Oriented Selling™ (I-O-S™)

This style focuses heavily on:

- professional image
- credibility
- presentation quality
- sophistication
- professional positioning

These salespeople carefully manage how they present themselves and their offering.

Customers may perceive them as:

- polished
- credible
- professional
- impressive

This style is often effective with customers who value brand image, exclusivity, prestige, or social credibility.

Potential limitation: The interaction may feel overly polished or less authentic if not balanced properly.

4. Need-Oriented Selling™ (N-O-S™)

This style focuses on:

- identifying customer needs
- asking questions
- understanding problems
- tailoring solutions
- consultative dialogue

These salespeople spend significant time exploring the customer's situation before presenting solutions.

Customers often experience them as:

- attentive
- thoughtful
- consultative
- customer-focused

This style works particularly well with customers who want to feel understood before making decisions.

Potential limitation: The salesperson may overanalyze or delay moving the process forward.



5. Product-Oriented Selling™ (P-O-S™)

This style emphasizes:

- product knowledge
- technical specifications
- features
- performance details
- comparisons

These salespeople are often highly knowledgeable about their products or services.

Customers may perceive them as:

- competent
- informative
- precise
- technically credible

This style is especially effective with technically oriented buyers.

Potential limitation: The salesperson may focus too much on the product and too little on emotional or relational factors.

6. Rapport-Oriented Selling™ (R-O-S™)

This style focuses on:

- trust
- personal connection
- mutual understanding
- relationship building
- emotional comfort

These salespeople build relationships naturally and often create strong customer loyalty.

Customers frequently experience them as:

- warm
- approachable
- trustworthy
- relationship-oriented

This style is highly effective with customers who value emotional trust and long-term relationships.

Potential limitation: The salesperson may avoid tension, difficult conversations, or commercial pressure.

The Six Buying Styles



Just as salespeople have natural behavioral tendencies, buyers also have preferred ways of making decisions.

Understanding these buying styles is critical.

Because customers rarely buy based only on logic. They buy based on how they prefer to process trust, risk, information, emotion, and decision-making.

The six buying styles

1. Service-Oriented Buying Style

These customers value:

- reliability
- guarantees
- follow-up
- support
- consistency

Typical questions:

- “What happens if something goes wrong?”
- “How does your support work?”

These customers want reassurance that they will be taken care of after the sale.



2. Competition-Oriented Buying Style

These customers value:

- strong deals
- negotiation
- performance
- competitive positioning
- measurable advantage

Typical questions:

- “How are you different from competitors?”
- “Why should we choose you?”

These buyers often enjoy fast decisions and clear commercial logic.

3. Image-Oriented Buying Style

These customers value:

- status
- brand reputation
- prestige
- exclusivity
- social proof

Typical questions:

- “Who else uses this?”
- “What companies work with you?”

These buyers are often influenced by perceived credibility and reputation.

4. Need-Oriented Buying Style

These customers value:

- understanding
- personalization
- listening
- tailored recommendations

Typical questions:

- “Do you understand our situation?”
- “How would this fit our specific needs?”

These customers want thoughtful exploration before commitment.

5. Product-Oriented Buying Style

These customers value:

- technical detail
- specifications
- data
- comparisons
- factual accuracy

Typical questions:

- “How exactly does it work?”
- “Can you compare this with alternatives?”

These buyers often want extensive information before deciding.

6. Rapport-Oriented Buying Style

These customers value:

- trust
- chemistry
- personal comfort
- relationships
- long-term collaboration

Typical questions:

- “Who will we work with?”
- “How long have you worked with clients like us?”

These buyers often decide emotionally before justifying decisions rationally.

How to Identify a Customer’s Buying Style

One of the most important sales capabilities is behavioral observation.

Successful salespeople continuously observe:

- communication style
- pace
- body language
- emotional signals
- priorities
- questions
- decision patterns

Examples:

Fast-paced and direct communication

Often indicates:

- Competition-Oriented
- Image-Oriented

Detail-heavy questioning

Often indicates:

- Product-Oriented
- Need-Oriented

Personal storytelling and relational focus

Often indicates:

- Rapport-Oriented
- Service-Oriented



Style Plasticity: The Hidden Advantage of Top Salespeople

One of the most important conclusions from Dudley & Goodson's research is that successful salespeople rarely rely on only one behavioral style.

Instead, top performers demonstrate:

Style Plasticity

The ability to flexibly adapt their sales style to the customer's preferred buying style.

This does not mean becoming fake or manipulative.

It means:

- adjusting communication
- emphasizing different strengths
- adapting pacing
- changing presentation style
- responding to customer preferences

Behavioral flexibility often separates:

- average salespeople from top performers
- inconsistent results from sustainable results
- transactional selling from trusted advisory relationships

Why This Matters for Modern Sales Organizations

Many organizations focus heavily on:

- CRM systems
- sales process
- pipeline tracking
- sales methodology
- activity metrics

But far fewer organizations examine:

- behavioral flexibility
- customer buying preferences
- communication adaptation
- emotional comfort zones
- behavioral resistance

This creates a hidden performance gap.

Because even highly skilled salespeople often default to the style that feels psychologically safest for themselves — rather than the style the customer actually needs.

This is especially important in:

- complex sales
- consultative sales
- leadership sales
- professional services
- relationship-based industries
- international sales environments

The Connection to Sales Call Reluctance®

There is also an important behavioral connection between sales styles and Sales Call Reluctance®.

Many salespeople naturally avoid behaviors that feel emotionally uncomfortable.

Examples:

- A highly Rapport-Oriented salesperson may avoid competitive confrontation.
- A Product-Oriented salesperson may overfocus on information instead of initiating dialogue.
- A Service-Oriented salesperson may hesitate to push for commitment.
- A Need-Oriented salesperson may overanalyze before asking for action.

This means that sales performance is not only about skills.

It is also about:

- emotional comfort
- behavioral preference
- psychological avoidance
- and adaptability.

Organizations that understand these dynamics gain a significant competitive advantage.

Implications for Leadership and Sales Development

Leaders should recognize that:

- different salespeople succeed differently
- customers buy differently
- behavioral diversity is valuable
- flexibility matters more than rigid scripting

This requires:

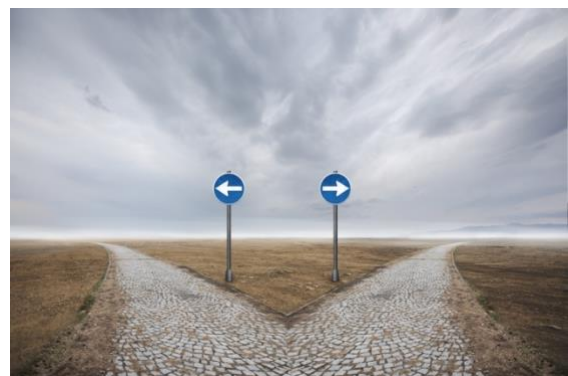
- behavioral awareness
- coaching
- observation
- adaptability training
- psychological safety
- and more individualized sales development.

Instead of asking:

“What is the best sales style?”

Organizations should ask:

“How well can our salespeople adapt to different buying behaviors?”



Conclusion

The research of George Dudley and Shannon Goodson fundamentally challenges the idea that successful selling follows one universal formula.

Customers are different. Salespeople are different. Contexts are different.

The most successful sales organizations understand this.

They recognize that sales effectiveness depends not only on process, products, or persuasion skills — but on behavioral flexibility and the ability to match customer preferences.

In a world where trust, communication, emotional intelligence, and customer experience are becoming increasingly important, Style Plasticity may be one of the most valuable capabilities a salesperson can develop.

Because successful selling is not about using the same style with every customer.

It is about understanding people well enough to adapt.

About the Research

The concepts presented in this white paper are based on the research and methodologies developed by George Dudley and Shannon Goodson, including their work on:

- Sales Call Reluctance®
- SPQ Gold®
- Selling Style Profile Analysis
- behavioral sales psychology
- performance behavior research

The research is based on empirical data from more than 300,000 salespeople worldwide and has been applied internationally across a wide range of industries and sales environments.

About Confident Approach

Confident Approach helps organizations strengthen sales performance, leadership, behavioral execution, and team effectiveness through research-based methodologies focused on:

- Sales Call Reluctance®
- behavioral sales development
- sales activity
- leadership development
- Belbin Team Roles
- communication and collaboration
- behavioral flexibility
- team and organizational performance

For more information:
www.confidentapproach.com