

## THERE IS NO COMMODITY SALE

“There is no such thing as a commodity, only people who act and think like commodities.” (Ted Levitt, *Thinking About Management*)

Salespeople in commodity and consumable markets often feel powerless in dealing with their customers. They erroneously believe that customers hold all the cards during negotiations. Wrong! A purchasing agent from Boeing Aircraft once said to me, “If salespeople only knew how powerful they were, they would be dangerous. Any one of them has the power to shut down our production lines.”

For the salesperson who believes that price is all that matters, why does your company need you? If it were true that price is all that matters, your company could use technology to stay in constant contact with customers and give them real-time pricing as it changes. If this makes you uncomfortable, that’s good. If you believe a low price is all that counts, your job is on the endangered species list.

Make yourself relevant. Stand out. Be different. Why do some people resist this simple, yet powerful strategy? Standing out for some people may seem unnatural. After all, there is safety in numbers—blending in with the crowd. Some people call this group-think. Standing out requires extra effort. It is a lot of work to find ways to differentiate. Besides, if differentiating works, then you must take responsibility for standing out. Those who expend the effort soon realize that there is no traffic jam on the extra mile. Some people shun that much accountability. Being different demands creativity. This is the essence of differentiation—there is no commodity in creativity.

Having sold and built a business in a commodity market, I totally reject the notion that every buying alternative is exactly the same. Having trained more than 100,000 salespeople over the past 32 years, I know that the same product from the same company from two different salespeople are two different solutions altogether.

There are tens-of-thousands of examples of companies that sell copper wire, rice, sand, chemicals, precious metals, petroleum-based plastic resins, paint, fertilizer, bottled water, etc. that do not compete based solely on price. Their core-commodity, naked products may be identical, but their enhanced, value-added solutions are different. They ask and answer these three questions: Are our products exactly the same? Are our people exactly the same? Is our company exactly the same? If you can answer “No” to any one of these questions, you are not in a commodity market!

---

Author byline: Tom Reilly is a professional speaker and author of twelve books. Tom is literally the guy who wrote the book on *Value-Added Selling* (McGraw-Hill, 2010), the book that started the value selling revolution. For more information on Tom's presentations, training, and products, visit his website [www.TomReillyTraining.com](http://www.TomReillyTraining.com) or call his office, 636-537-3360.