



The Secret to Mattress Sales

Note: *This is a long article, but I encourage you to read it carefully and refer back to it often. It contains the most important concept I've ever discovered to help RSA's become more effective at selling mattresses: The Needs vs Wants Paradox. It is not an oversight that you will see references and explanations of this concept often on this site. It is the foundation of all my training and one of the main reasons I have achieved whatever success I have found in this industry.*

Is there really a secret to mattress sales?

Well, yes, I happen to believe there is. This article will explain what I've been teaching for over 20 years.

Why Mattresses are Challenging to Sell and Buy?

Mattresses really are challenging for RSA's to sell and for shoppers to buy. I know first hand. I've been observing teaching, training, coaching, writing and learning about selling mattresses for almost a quarter century.

While many sales professionals have mastered the process, many times more struggle with it on a daily basis. Just consider the amount of training it takes for RSA's to even reach a modest level of proficiency selling mattresses.

Most top level RSA's have reached their status because of their on going and regular training to increase their knowledge and selling skills. In most every seminar I've ever conducted, the majority of attendees are veterans wanting to improve. Always a humbling experience for me.

In home furnishings stores the amount of time spent on training for mattresses sales is disproportionately greater than any other product. When factoring in the simplicity of mattresses compared to the other categories, one has to concur, mattress sales are more challenging than most other consumer products.

Amazingly, the 80 / 20 rule applies. Eighty percent of mattresses sold in home furnishing stores are sold by twenty percent of the sales staff.

What's the Problem?

When you consider that everyone sleeps on a mattress every night, they wear out and get replaced, mattresses should be one of the easiest products to sell. After all, people don't browse for mattresses any more than they do for tires. If someone is looking, they are going to buy, period.

Additionally, can there be a more simple product. Four basic sizes, two components (mattress / foundation), simple ingredients (wood, steel, foam, fiber and fabric) That's it!

So why are mattresses a challenge to buy and sell? That is a question I asked myself when I first started selling mattresses (see the blog: My Story)

Is it the manufacturer's fault? Of course not. Obviously, manufacturer's want as many people as possible to buy their products. The same goes for retailers and sales associates.

So Who Is to Blame?

The answer is... the consumer. It's their fault. Keep in mind, we are all consumers, hence it is collectively all our fault. This may sound harsh, but it is none the less true. Let's rephrase it to say that the consumer is responsible for the difficulty because of human nature. It's the way we approach buying things we want as opposed to the things we need.

"If they say why, why, tell 'em that is Human Nature" - Michael Jackson

When shopping for things we need, we use intellect, logic and reason to discern value. We buy things we need for the function that the product provides. i.e Refrigerator = keep food fresh. Washing machine = clean clothes. Insurance = protect investments. Tools = fix things. Mattress = don't have to sleep on floor.

In most cases we seek value to get the maximum benefit for our dollars we reluctantly have to spend. "Bang for the Buck" as the saying goes.

When shopping for things we want, emotions rule the day. We tend to buy the things we want for how we imagine we will feel when we have and use them. i.e Cruising down the road in a new car. Our imagination allows us to vicariously experience using whatever it is we are focused upon buying. If the emotional payoff is powerful enough, we will find some way to buy it even if we can't logically justify spending the money. In other words, emotion will trump intellect. *"We really can't afford this right now, but what the heck, here's my credit card."*

The Needs vs Wants Paradox

In the late 80's I began teaching sales associates the importance of understanding the difference in how consumers approached buying need vs want products and I coined the phrase "*The Needs vs. Wants Phenomenon.*" Basically stating that most people prefer buying things they want over the things they need to the point that they will put off buying something they could really use only to spend more on something they have no business buying. I think we all can relate to this.

As I continued to explore consumer behavior, I modified the phrase to "The Needs vs Want's Paradox" (paradox being something that seems contradictory, but yet is true. i.e. exercising makes you less tired) realizing that in most every consumer buying decision, not just limited to mattresses.

I say there is a battle inside (our minds) over how we decide, to do what we do and buy what we buy. Hey, I think I'll turn that into a song. Often the intellect and the emotions are at odds, and often the emotions win.

As I studied consumer behavior more and more, I discovered that this was far from a phenomenon, it is an everyday occurrence.

So here is my definition of the Needs vs, Wants Paradox:

It's the things we need and depend upon most that we least like buy.

Things we need are mostly known as utilitarian items. Like tires, some appliances, insurance, and MATTRESSES to name a few. Things we use on a daily or regular basis and take for granted, unlike other home furnishing products that have an emotional component to them. People needing a mattress are often on a mission seeking that elusive best value. Their mindset is one of fixing a problem, of replacement, *satisfying a need*.

They always have some doubts about buying because they think, "what if another store has an even better value?" That's why mattresses are hard to sell and buy. But above it all, most people dread the process and just want to get it out of the way. Not a great attitude for RSA's to face on a daily basis.

When it comes to retail mattress sales, understanding the attitude and motivation your customer has about mattresses and shopping for them is the key to overcoming the challenges. The Needs vs. Wants Paradox is the most important concept you can learn. It opens the door to the secret of selling as I will explain in a moment.

Psychology 101

There is a psychological basis for this *Needs vs. Wants Paradox* and its called [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#). It is one of the foundational principles of modern psychology and has been almost universally accepted as valid.

Abraham Maslow discovered that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs and that certain lower needs need to be satisfied before higher needs can be satisfied. As one need is satisfied, a new need emerges and those needs are divided into categories of importance, beginning with survival or biological needs such as food and protection such as shelter and clothing. If those aren't satisfied, nothing else matters. The survival instinct will compel one to do whatever it takes to satisfy those most basic needs.

Once those needs are satisfied, new needs come to mind for social interaction and so on. I believe this to be a God given gift that can instill in each of us a sense to achieve and aspire toward greatness. Imagine a world where we were all satisfied with food, shelter and clothing and that was it.

In our society, not only are most peoples' basic needs met, most of us have moved well on up the ladder from them, but yet our mind continues to conjure up new needs. Somewhere along the way, we end up with most everything we need and then these needs that keep emerging become *wants*.

It's a never ending quest to buy (or do) the things we want. We spend lots of time creating and thinking about our wish list. Unfortunately, once we acquire the objects of our desire or do the things we dream of, they either don't live up to expectation or else the newness quickly wears off and we go on to our next item on the list.

As we climb higher our awareness and imagination broaden. If we are wondering where our next meal is coming from, we probably are not dreaming of how great life would be with a new satellite dish. But if most of our needs are met, we may well indeed dream of owning one. In fact we may spend considerable time dreaming of something we don't have. The further away we are from struggling to satisfy basic needs the more time we can spend in our dream world.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not being judgmental. There is no right or wrong to this behavior, its human nature to desire growth and to strive to climb the ladder to achieve the things we want to have, do or be.

So imagine that the average consumer who's thoughts dwell in the realm of dreams and desires, suddenly realizes she or he has to buy a new mattress or some other need item. A common feeling is disappointment. We feel we have to climb back down the ladder to deal with a low level need taking our thoughts and dollars away from the items earmarked on our dream list.

Maybe this is why you can spot the a furniture shoppers from a mattress shoppers by their body language the second they walk through the door. Is it any wonder that selling mattresses are

So if understanding consumer mindset and attitude is important, what can we do about it? How can we use this concept to make mattresses less challenging to sell.

The Secret to Mattress Sales

Here it is: **RSA's have the ability through simple conversation to change mattresses from a need to a want in the mind of most shoppers.** It is easier to get someone to think about a mattress in a new way than to try to demonstrate value and justify dollars.

In essence, rather than negotiating in the realm of need (intellect, reason and logic) the entire dynamics of the interaction between buyer and seller can be shifted to the realm of want (emotion, passion and imagination) a much more pleasant and productive environment for both.

So how can that be done?

Well the first step is to understand the difference between needs and wants. They are very similar. Acquiring either needs or wants utilizes the same action. One decides to buy something, she may research the product, and her options of where and how to buy it, perhaps shop around, then,make the decision to buy and then take ownership. The mechanics of the process are basically the same, and that's the good news. To help someone switch their thinking about a product from a need to a want doesn't require a wholesale change in the process, only the motivation behind the process.

The difference between need and want? A want is a need with an added emotional component. People anticipate and expect an emotional payback when they buy and use a product. It's that anticipation and expectation that motivates and compels them to buy. It's that simple.

So how do you add an emotional component to a mattress?

1. Put mattresses in the proper context.

"Before we get started, Did you realize that each and every month, the average person spends 10 days on his or her mattress. Imagine lying down here and not getting up for even one second, and then staying there for 10 24 hour days. Imagine then that you keep your mattress 5 to 7 years. We spend more time on our mattresses than anything else we own. The longer you spend in REM sleep per night, the better you will look and feel each day. That's why mattresses may be the best consumer product on the market."

2. Engage the Imagination

“Lie down in the position you normally wake up in. That’s how you probably sleep most of the night. As you lie there, close your eyes and imagine, it’s late, you’re tired and you have to get up early. Now slowly relax all your muscles and then focus on your feet, then your calves and work your way up your entire body to truly get the feel of the mattress. Then switch over from thinking how the mattress feels to you, to how you feel on the mattress. This is the best way to find the one that’s right for you.”

Once the imagination is engaged, the emotions will follow.

What is emotion? Feelings. What is the base word for feeling? FEEL. As simple as it sounds if you can get your customers to lie down on the mattress and really get the feel of it, then engage their imagination, more times than not, they will see mattresses from an entirely new perspective. Emotions are what motivate people to take action.

The Power of Emotion

For more than twenty years I’ve taught RSA’s to use this method and have used it myself countless times. More times than not, customers will say in so many words “Wow, I just never thought about a mattress like this. This one really is comfortable.” You can see an immediate change in body language.

From there the entire process becomes relaxed, conversational and actually quite enjoyable for both buyer and seller.

For those customers that don’t get it, and don’t want to get it, ones that have price and value are locked into the top of their priority list..just go ahead and help them find a good deal.

But you will find, the great majority of shoppers will switch their motivation for buying a mattress from a need to a want.

When someone wants something, he or she will find a way to buy it. If someone wants something badly enough, not only do you not have to sell it to them, you could try to talk them out of buying it to no avail.

That is the power of emotion and that is why turning a need into a want is the secret to selling mattresses!