

The Importance of Managing Visibility

by George W. Dudley & Shannon L. Goodson

Natural self-promoters, like Anthony Robbins and Dennis Rodman, instinctively exploit opportunities to make themselves visible. For most of us, however, visibility management triggers an emotional struggle between our desire to make our competence visible, and our reticence to appear too forward or immodest. Yet in today's hotly competitive sales environment, it's not enough to be good at what you do, earning what you're worth takes more. You have to practice "visibility management," letting people know who you are and what you do well. Managing visibility is an integral component of modern career management.



The conflict most people experience when they try to stand up, step out and make their contributions visible is not pleasant. In fact, to some, it's both gut wrenching and stressful. Left unattended in professions like sales, it's also career lethal. In our research during the past 30 years involving more than 500,000 sales and non-sales-people, we identified common conflicts, hesitations and fears associated with making first contact for sales advancement. We then statistically grouped all the behaviors into an identifiable cluster, which we named "Inhibited Social Contact Initiation Syndrome" (ISCIS).



ISCIS is a technical acronym for the more familiar name we gave it, the “Fear of Self Promotion.” When the Fear of Self Promotion affects salespeople, it’s called the fear of prospecting because it places an artificially low ceiling on the number of first contacts, which can be initiated with prospective buyers on a consistent basis. Some salespeople make only a fraction of the calls they could make. Others make even fewer. Some don’t make any. They can’t. For them, prospecting for new business is emotionally out-of-bounds. Cut off from opportunities to sell, their sales careers sputter and gasp, until eventually they suffocate. Maybe you know a salesperson like that. Maybe you manage one. Maybe you are one.

Early in our research, we studied the expected statistical link between actual sales results and sales prospecting. As one goes up, the other goes up, too. Then, we turned to the connection between sales prospecting and sales call reluctance® and found them to be inversely related. That means, as prospecting fears go up, sales prospecting goes down. Again, that was expected. What followed, however, was not. Looking for a non-selling group to contrast with salespeople, we decided to study administrative management personnel in a large corporate office. We studied the total salary increases and number of promotions received by each manager in the sample over a five-year period. The results are not mere statistics. They’re a wake-up call.

We found those who were promoted most often and given the biggest salary increases did not necessarily turn out to be those judged as to be the most technically competent. It was those who were most willing to make whatever level of competence they had. Ongoing studies provide still more proof. We compared out-placed CPAs, in one study, to CPAs in the same organization who were not out-placed and found that the CPAs who lost their jobs were more reluctant to make their contributions than those who were retained.

What Keeps Salespeople from Prospecting?

The following data was gathered from SPQ*GOLD®, a diagnostic test designed by Dudley & Goodson to measure prospecting fears. Sample size: 40,859 salespeople across many industries. Scores range from 0 percent (very low prospecting resistance) to 100 percent (prospecting meltdown).

Type	Typical Salesperson
Overall prospecting “brake”	31%
Worries about prospecting	14%
Too much time getting ready	41%
Insists on projecting ultra-professional image	45%
Dreads seminar selling	37%
Conflicted about being in sales	27%
Waiting for just the “right” time	35%
Intimidated by up market prospects	24%
Won’t prospect or network friends	50%
Won’t prospect or network relatives	50%
Uncomfortable asking for referrals	24%
Cringes at telephone prospecting	31%
Unable to accept management, advice, coaching or training	8%



We can draw two practical conclusions from the body of applied and theoretical research we conducted:

- like it or not, today everyone sells, not just professional salespeople; and
- the first tell-tale signs of prospecting fears are not found in sweaty palms, rapid heartbeats, churning stomachs, or shallow breathing -- you feel it first in your wallet!

Visibility management –A Modern Link to Success?

Visibility management consists of all the things you can do to make sure others know who you are and what you do well. It's the unseen mechanism at work in all modern definitions of success which include making money. You hear it at work in presentations given by success gurus at sales conventions; television evangelists pandering for money; authors pitching books on Oprah; scientists struggling to publish grant-seeking research; movie stars promoting their latest blockbuster film; and infomercial pitch people compelled to give something back to society."

According to our research, visibility management has become the real eighth habit of highly successful people, which is why in 1996 we tagged it as such. When it comes to making money – and lots of it – it's also the most potent.

<u>Call Reluctance® Type</u>	<u>Behavioral Style</u>
Doomsayer	Wastes energy worrying about prospecting
Over Preparer	Over analyzes, under acts, confuses knowing with doing
Hyper Professional	Overly concerned with image, considers ordinary prospecting demeaning
Stage Fright	Fears making presentations to groups (small, large or both)
Sales Role Rejection	Conflicted or embarrassed to be in sales
Yielder	Fears appearing too pushy or intrusive
Social Self-Consciousness	Intimidated by up market prospects
Separationist	Uncomfortable networking through friends
Emotionally Unemancipated	Uncomfortable networking through family
Referral Aversion	Uncomfortable asking for referrals
Telephobia	Uncomfortable prospecting on the telephone
Oppositional Reflex	Resists anyone who tries to manage, coach, advise or train





Managing your visibility is intimately connected to the Principle of Recognition and Reward that we discuss in our book, *Earning What You're Worth in Sales*. First, you have to make your competencies visible before they can be recognized. Second, they must be recognizable before they can be financially rewarded. Fail to honor this principle, and you could become competent, but the recognition and rewards generated by your contributions will flow towards someone who may be less deserving but more visible. Unnoticed competence leaves you invisible. It happens every day, and it can cost you *plenty*.

Overcoming Your Visibility Fears

Whether you're an individual salesperson trying to grow your career, or a sales executive trying to manage a sales organization, unless you learn to overcome your fear of self-promotion, your career may be subject to setbacks. At the very least, you will deny yourself innumerable opportunities to excel, especially financially. The following four steps provide a starting point for managing your visibility – and may help remove the hurdles that the Fear of Self Promotion places on your success:

- Step #1: **Know** that the fear exists. Awareness is the most important first step. It exists whether you believe it or not and has measurable consequences.
- Step #2: **Admit** that you have it. This is very difficult for some people because it requires the strength to acknowledge a weakness and the will to take responsibility for it .
- Step # 3: **Assess** it. Use appropriate methods to find out how reluctant you are to promote yourself. You can use special-purpose psychological tests like SPQ*GOLD®, or simply ask colleagues and co-workers.
- Step #4: **Apply** yourself. Rhetorical commitments are cheap. Do something that will positively change your lack of visibility. For example, map out a plan to tell others what you do well. Then, execute your plan. Or make your goal even simpler: Make one contact each day that you would otherwise have avoided making.

Robert Louis Stevenson said, “Everybody lives by selling something.” He was right. By taking your foot off the visibility management brake, you can begin to draw the attention you deserve to the most valuable product you offer: yourself. And that’s one of the most important steps you can take on the way to earning what you’re worth.

About the Authors

George W. Dudley and Shanon L. Goodson are recognized as the world’s leading authorities on sales call reluctance and the fear of self-promotion. For almost thirty years they have studied the reasons why so many talented, hard-working people fail to earn what they are worth. With Backgrounds in science, research to them is not a hobby. It’s a lifestyle. Their research has been featured in popular and professional media including CNN, The Financial Times of London, The Australian, European Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies, and The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology.