

SUCCESS THROUGH A POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE?: The Role of Positive Thinking in Door-to-Door Sales

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This case study focuses on the use of a motivational philosophy called “positive mental attitude” (PMA) by door-to-door salespersons. While agreeing with Leidner’s finding in her study of a similar company that PMA functions as a form of worker control, I show here how the flexibility of PMA makes it useful to salespersons, who draw upon it to deal with everyday work problems. Dealers draw upon their personal goals and values to form *motivational foci*—the content of the positive thinking they wish to maintain—and attempt to keep these thoughts in mind through *motivational practices* learned during their training.

“Remember that *time* is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon *that* the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides.” Ben Franklin, quoted in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. (Weber [1904–1905] 2002)

“You alone can control the hours you work in running your own business. Similarly, you alone can control what you put into those hours. . . . Some of the most successful people in the business commit themselves to working 13¹/₂ hours every single day! They go to work before 8 a.m. and they never come home before 9:30 p.m.” (Enterprise Company sales manual)

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists have a long-standing concern with the encroachment of capitalism on the selves of workers. This concern has been expressed in at least two different ways. First, organizational scholars have noted the growing importance of “premise control” (Perrow 1986), also called “normative control,” the control of workers by changing the way they think, and decried its “totalitarian” nature. “In this view, then, normative control is a sophisticated and manipulative form of tyranny in the workplace, a threat to both freedom and dignity, an unwarranted invasion of privacy” (Kunda 1992:15). A second thread of sociological criticism has focused on a more general Spirit of Capitalism. Max Weber [1904–1905] 2002 pointed to the self-improvement literature of Benjamin Franklin as an early example of this spirit in that it advanced “the idea of the *duty* of the individual to

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increase his wealth" (p. 16). This philosophy of "self-improvement" has been supported by a self-help industry that has persisted and evolved from *Poor Richard's Almanac's* appearance in 1732 to the current motivational universe of books, tapes, speakers, and seminars (Biggart 1983; Anker 1999a, b). Although products of this industry have attracted less scholarly attention than premise control has, they have been the target of criticism and ridicule for being banal, selfish, ridiculous, and possibly harmful. However, "scant attention has been paid by researchers to the reactions of purchasers and readers of self-help works" (Starker 1989, p. 150).

This article addresses both of these concerns with an examination of the on-the-job use of "positive mental attitude" (PMA) at a door-to-door sales company. PMA is a variant of the "positive thinking" tradition, a venerable strand of self-improvement philosophy. PMA was developed by Napoleon Hill, author of many motivational books, and W. Clement Stone, founder and chairman of Combined Insurance, and is described in their book *Success through a Positive Mental Attitude* (Hill and Stone 1960). PMA is both an individual self-improvement strategy (the focus of the book) and a program of premise control that was enacted among door-to-door salespersons at Combined Insurance. Robin Leidner (1993), in her study of Combined Insurance, views PMA primarily as a form of worker control and work routinization. According to her analysis, managers attempt to transform the personalities of workers through PMA so they will be enthusiastic about the job and the standardized sales routines prescribed by the company, and will be able to approach prospects with confidence.

My research focused on another door-to-door sales company, which I call the Enterprise Company, that uses PMA as a form of premise control. Company managers hope to inspire their salespersons, mostly college students on their summer breaks, to put in over 80 hours a week at an extremely demanding job. However, my investigation reveals a more complicated story. By focusing on how PMA is actually used by salespeople in the "book field," I show how it only functions as a form of premise control when it is useful to these salespeople in dealing with everyday work problems. This analysis shows that PMA in practice is characterized not just by standardization, but also by flexibility and personal variation. Salespersons use motivational practices associated with PMA as a personalized tool kit to deal with everyday work problems. I focus in particular on three common practices: reading and listening to "positive material," such as self-help books and motivational tapes, memorizing and repeating "positive phrases," and committing specific goals to writing. Dealers also draw from their personal goals and values to form *motivational foci*: the content of the positive thinking they are supposed to maintain. This article shows that without this flexibility, PMA would be much less appealing to its users and, therefore, less useful to managers who intend that its adoption by salespersons will lead them to continue carrying out company work routines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber argued that modern capitalism involved not just the development of a new form of social organization, but

also the creation of a new “economic ethic.” This ethic involves “the idea of the *duty* of the individual to increase his wealth” (p. 16) such that “this striving becomes understood completely as an end in itself.” The “subjective acquisition of these ethical maxims by capitalism’s particular social carriers (such as businesspersons or workers in modern capitalist companies) constitutes a condition for capitalism’s further existence” (p. 18). Weber pointed to the self-help writings of Benjamin Franklin as exemplifying this ethic.

Although self-help literature continues to exemplify and teach this ethic, social scientists since Weber have not made use of its potential for understanding the capitalist ethic. They also have given scant attention to how people use this literature (for an exception, see Simonds 1992). To the extent that they have noticed self-help literature, researchers and commentators have tended to be critical of the genre and its claims. For instance, Kaminer’s (1992) overview calls the self-help tradition “covertly authoritarian and conformist, relying as it does on a mystique of expertise, encouraging people to look outside themselves for standardized instructions on how to be. . . . It is anathema to independent thought” (p. 6) (see also Schneider and Dornbusch 1958; Cawelti 1965; Huber 1971; Ehrenreich and English 1978; Meyer 1980; Elson 1985; Starker 1989; Zimmerman, Holm, and Starrels 2001). However, readers of self-help books report finding them helpful. For instance, Starker (1989) reports that respondents to his survey of Portland, Oregon, residents read 2.82 self-help books a year with 64.7 percent reporting reading at least one “really helpful” book at some point. In addition, 83.3 percent of respondents said self-help books in general were either “often helpful” or “sometimes helpful,” while none said that the books were harmful.

A few scholars have focused on how motivational techniques found in the self-help literature are used in formal organizations. Particularly important are the works of Nicole Woolsey Biggart (1989), who examined the direct-sales industry, and Robin Leidner (1993), who studied Combined Insurance, which was founded by PMA-cocreator W. Clement Stone in 1922 and where the techniques of PMA developed by its founder are still being used. Biggart and Leidner both view these techniques as a form of what Charles Perrow (1986) calls “premise control,” the control of workers by “control of the cognitive premises underlying action.” Premise controls are most important at the top of organizations and where work is not routine (Perrow 1986:130). However, premise controls are also found in sales jobs, particularly in direct sales, where direct and bureaucratic control are less useful and dealers need to engage in skillful interactions with prospects (Butterfield 1985; Biggart 1989; Leidner 1993; Pratt 2000; Chan 2001; Lan 2001; Schweingruber and Berns 2003).

Premise control, also called “unobtrusive control” or “normative control” (Etzioni 1961; Kunda 1992) and the associated concept of corporate culture (Scott 1998:312), represent another long-standing concern of sociologists, the encroachment of capitalist firms on the minds of workers. The concept of corporate culture has had great visibility in both popular and academic literature (e.g., Davis 1984; Frost et al. 1985; 1991; Jelinek, Smircich, and Hirsch 1983; Denison 1990; Ashby 1999) since the 1980s, thanks largely to Peters and Wasserman’s (1982) *In Search of Excellence*, which argued that successful

companies are characterized by a strong corporate culture, that good leaders create and maintain it, and that good workers internalize it (see also Deal and Kennedy 1982). Such culture is “inculcated and reinforced by rituals and ceremonies that provide collective occasions for expressing solidarity and commitment; by the raising up of heroes that personify common goals; and by the creation of slogans and symbols that signify shared values” (Scott 1998:312–13). Biggart’s discussion of network-selling organizations described corporate cultures organized around “value rationality”: The “conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects of success” (Weber 1978:25). “Committed distributors see their work as a superior way of life that embraces political values, social relations, and religious beliefs. It gives them not a job, but a worldview, a community of like-minded others, and a self-concept” (Biggart 1989:9). This worldview is built through controls such as (1) creation of a new self; (2) celebration of group membership; and (3) stakeholder claims, “practices designed to promote organizational continuity” (p. 135). These controls are implemented through exercises such as confessionals, rituals, and regularized group contact. Although some scholars (e.g., Kantor 1985) have viewed the increasing importance of corporate culture positively, there is a long tradition of social criticism regarding the encroachment of the corporation on the worker’s mind, heart, and “soul.” “Hard work and deference are no longer enough; now the ‘soulful’ corporation demands the worker’s soul, or at least the worker’s identity” (Edwards 1979:152) (see also Bendix 1956; Mills 1956; Whyte 1956; Hochschild 1983; Willmott 1993; for an overview see Kunda 1992:14–6).

Gideon Kunda (1992) took a more nuanced approach to corporate culture and premise control in his study of a high-tech firm. He describes the problems and limitations of this type of control, in particular “a contradiction between the requirements of internal and external control of the self” (p. 214). Workers engage in a balancing act between role embracement and role distancing.

This balancing act may be observed in the ironic stance that permeates ritual performance and social interaction; in the self-consciousness that infuses members’ discourse; in the humor that at once highlights and denies ambivalence; in the rapid frame shifts in the course of presentations; and in the qualifiers that precede many statements and the escape clauses designed into them. More tellingly, perhaps, it is evident in the pervasiveness and centrality of the metaphor of drama in the construction of experience, and the oft-repeated and widely shared insight that things are never as they seem. (P. 215)

Many workers experience “burnout,” which Kunda views not as a psychological condition, but a “loss of the required capacity of self-management: maintaining boundaries and managing role distance” (p. 199). Kunda does describe workers who embrace their company’s ideology, but they appear to do so because they like some aspect of their work or the company itself, not because they use this ideology to get things done. Workers struggle with the demands of normative control; managers use it to manage workers.

Robin Leidner’s work provides the closest parallel to the present study, since she also researched a door-to-door sales company that uses positive mental attitude. As part of her

research, she went through the company's sales training, which was built around the philosophy of positive mental attitude. Building on Biggart's work, Leidner views PMA as a way to routinize work by transforming the personalities of its workers. Leidner contrasts Combined Insurance with McDonald's in her book, *Fast Food, Fast Talk*, a study of the routinization of service work. McDonald's provides an example of routinization by pre-specifying all of the workers' decisions as they interact with customers. Combined Insurance represents an example of "routinization by transformation." This type of routinization is an attempt to change, and standardize, the thinking of salespersons. According to Leidner (1993):

When prespecification has been extended as far as possible but workers' discretion is still required, employers may then try to transform their workers into the sorts of people who will make decisions that employers would approve. The effort to train workers to deal with varied situations may include teaching them a variety of routines and a set of decision rules that govern when to use each routine. This strategy may seem more like skills training than routinization, but to the extent that the process involves transforming workers' characters, personalities, and thought processes so that their reactions to variable work situations will be predictable, it is in fact another form of routinization, one that extends more deeply in workers' psyches than does task prespecification. (Pp. 36–7)

One of the advantages of PMA as a worker-control method is its nonfalsifiable explanation for failure: "insufficient belief or effort on the part of those who fail. . . . Under the Combined Insurance system, then, all failure was personal, and doubt in the system was evidence of insufficient commitment and of negativity" (p. 104).

Although Biggart and Leidner both examine motivational techniques as a form of worker control, they both also give some attention to the advantages of working in organizations reliant on premise control. First among these is that the controls "hardly seem like controls. What a sociologist sees as 'controlling' is to a distributor an expression of belief and enthusiasm" (Biggart 1989:156). For this reason, workers feel they are freer than their counterparts at bureaucratic organizations. Indeed, "the organization is perceived as helping individuals achieve their own goals, not as manipulating workers to an alien end established by management" (Biggart 1989:164). Leidner reports that Combined Insurance salespersons did not necessarily resent attempts to routinize their work since the standardized sales practices helped them in their interactions with prospects. In particular, salespersons found useful several PMA practices that helped them maintain "confident optimism."

Leidner's richest descriptions of these practices, which include those recommended by Stone and Hill, focus on training, where the view of PMA as a form of control through transformation is most obvious. Salespersons learned and chanted positive slogans like "I feel healthy, I feel happy, I feel terrific!" They put in writing their "commitment to succeeding with Combined Insurance Company by applying myself to the system, as learned in Chicago, in its entirety for eight hours a day, minimum, quality time, for five days a week, minimum, for three months." They committed to reading "self-help material" daily and "playing self-improvement tapes." She reports that agents used PMA

practices in the field and found them useful. Although Biggart provides less detail about these practices, she does report that “my interviews suggest that the consumption of [motivational books and tapes] is considerable and widely viewed by distributors as an efficacious, even critical, practice” (p. 137). Maintaining enthusiasm, one of the purposes of these motivational techniques, is especially important for salespersons, who have to deal with unpredictability, pressure to perform, and other difficulties connected to sales work (Prus 1989a:256–63, b). However, Leidner, Biggart, and others who study direct sales (Chan 2001; Lan 2001) give little or no attention to how dealers use these practices to motivate themselves when they are actually working outside of contact with their companies, how they personalize these practices, and what these practices mean to them.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

The focus of this study is the Enterprise Company, the oldest extant door-to-door sales company in the United States. Its door-to-door sales program was started in the late 1860s to help young Southern men impoverished by the Civil War pay their way through college by selling Bibles and other religious books during the summer. Although the company now sells mostly educational books designed to help elementary and high-school students do better in school, it continues to employ college students during their summer vacations.

The Enterprise Company was chosen as a research site to investigate premise control. Because salespersons work alone and are technically independent contractors, the company’s opportunities for direct and bureaucratic control (Perrow 1986) are limited. Instead, company managers attempt to change the way workers think and feel, a process they call “emotional training.” The overarching research questions of the project were: How does premise control work (or not work) in a company, and how does it affect the experience of company workers. Using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998), I attempted to discover the key meanings in Enterprise Thinking (my term) and explore how workers use and/or resist these meanings to pursue their personal goals, which may or may not correspond to the company’s official goals. Positive mental attitude is one of a number of the key meanings that make up Enterprise Thinking. Enterprise managers also teach student dealers proper thinking about money (Schweingruber and Berns 2003), self-transformation (Schweingruber and Berns 2005), and teamwork. The principles of Enterprise Thinking are designed so that adopting them requires, at least in theory, carrying out official company work routines (Schweingruber forthcoming).

My approach to the corporate culture of the Enterprise Company is drawn from Ann Swidler (1986, 2001) and Howard Becker (1982), both of whom describe actors who use culture to get things done. In particular, I use Swidler’s (1986) metaphor of the tool kit to describe how salespersons draw from elements of self-help literature to accomplish their purposes in the face of everyday work problems. This approach is compatible with the work of Colin Campbell (2005), who shows how consumers appropriate, personalize,

and customize products, sometimes subversively, for their own purposes. It can be contrasted with an approach that renders workers as “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel 1967) of corporate culture and also with Kunda’s (1992) more nuanced approach, which treats workers as intelligent actors but does not investigate how they use elements of corporate culture to get things done.

The research for this article was conducted during the spring and summer of 1997 using a variety of research methods. During the spring of 1997, I observed Enterprise managers recruit and train college students at a large university, which I will call Midwestern University (names of people and institutions in this article are pseudonyms). I conducted interviews with both the managers and the student dealers-in-training, and then followed this team to sales school at Enterprise headquarters in a large Southern city, where they underwent an intensive week of training. I also attended a second week of sales school, which is held throughout the spring and summer, so I could observe sessions designed both for rookie dealers and “student managers” (salespersons with at least one summer’s experience). During these two weeks, I also examined and copied a variety of company documents.

During the summer, I followed seven student dealers for one day of selling educational books door-to-door. Since dealers occasionally “follow” another dealer as a form of training, I was able to adopt this role during these days and was able to both watch salespersons in action and converse with them about their work. These days typically lasted 15 hours since they included breakfast, 12.5 to 13.5 hours of going door-to-door and a return trip to the dealer’s “headquarters” (their residence, usually a rented room in a private home). I also attended eight “Sunday meetings,” group meetings of salespersons held during their only day off, in five different states. At the end of the summer, I attended three days of “check out” at the company headquarters to talk to student dealers who had just completed a summer of selling. I conducted nine focus groups there with a total of 34 participants. I also reinterviewed salespersons from Midwestern University.

Although I primarily used qualitative research methods, I also conducted a two-wave survey of rookie dealers. The primary goal of the survey, which had both open-ended and forced-answer questions, was to examine how students’ adoption of various components of Enterprise Thinking affected them, including their sales performance and their evaluation of the summer. The first survey was given to approximately 460 first-year student dealers during two of the company’s week-long sales schools and was returned by 327 for a response rate of 71 percent. A second survey was designed for these same dealers at the conclusion of their summer, but only 91 of these were returned. The low response rate of the second wave is due in part to the high drop-out rate of student dealers and in part to the difficulty of distributing the second wave of the survey. The first survey was distributed at sales school, which is run by the company’s marketing department. I was present at this distribution. The second survey was supposed to be distributed by the various sales managers’ “organizations” that comprise the company. Some organizations failed to distribute the survey consistently or distributed it to the wrong students. Although these data from the second wave of the survey are less than ideal, I use some of them here as supportive data for findings from the qualitative portion of the study.

WHAT IS POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE?

As I will describe below, users of self-help books tend to read them looking for particular techniques or ideas, not for a coherent argument. However, it is worthwhile to describe the arguments of *Success through a Positive Mental Attitude* (1960) by Napoleon Hill and W. Clement Stone and give an overview of its historical context. As suggested by the book's title, *Success through a Positive Mental Attitude's* premise is that success, broadly defined ("physical, mental, and moral health; happiness; wealth; or any other worthwhile goal whose attainment does not violate the laws of God or the rights of your fellow man," [p. xiii]), will result from adopting a positive mental attitude. The authors claim that conscious reasoning and decision making are subject to the "inner urges" of the subconscious and promise to help the reader train his or her subconscious mind. The result is changing one's future.

When Henley wrote the poetic lines, "I am master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul," he could have informed us that we are the masters of our fate because we are the masters, first, of our attitudes. Our attitudes shape our future. This is a universal law. The poet told us with great emphasis that this law works whether the attitudes are destructive or constructive. The law states that we translate into physical reality the thoughts and attitudes which we hold in our minds, no matter what they are. (P. 8)

Hill and Stone offer two different claims about how PMA leads to success. The first claim is that people with PMA will develop "complete control of both conscious mind and unconscious impulses" (Cawelti 1965:214). They will work harder, develop good habits, and not give up. They will do whatever it takes to achieve success despite any obstacle or circumstance. The second claim is that the mind can achieve success independently of the body's action. "Your brain sends out energy in the form of brain waves. And this energy is power which can affect another person or object" (Hill and Stone 1960:64). Explaining either of these claims is not the book's strong point since it resembles a collection of stories and metaphors more than an attempt at a sustained argument. One key metaphor is that the mind is an "invisible talisman" with two sides. One side is "emblazoned" with the initials PMA. The other side has the initials NMA (negative mental attitude). By flipping this talisman to the PMA side, a person can "attract" success. The NMA side "repels" success. Any situation can be approached with a PMA or NMA. Flipping the talisman to the PMA side means reframing a seemingly negative situation as a positive one. What is important is not objective circumstances, but the attitude a person has toward them.

The bulk of the book consists of anecdotes that illustrate the importance of developing a PMA and 16 other "success principles." These include: definiteness of purpose, going the extra mile, self-discipline, enthusiasm, teamwork, learning from defeat, creative vision, and using "cosmic habit force." Again, these stories are often quite vague on how a PMA works. Some seem like fairy tales. For instance, a woodcutter with NMA will not finish the job, allowing a man with PMA to find \$2,250 in a log.

Although Hill and Stone may have coined the phrase "PMA," the concept is part of the "positive thinking" tradition that is "the most popular and historically resilient self-help

idea" (Kaminer 1992:46). It has its roots in the "New Thought" movement associated with Phineas Quimby, Ralph Waldo Trine, and others in the late 1890s (Anker 1999a, b; see also Cawelti 1965; Weiss 1969; Huber 1971; Meyer 1980; Kaminer 1992). An early, balanced critique of the movement appeared in William James' ([1902] 1985) *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and Sinclair Lewis' (1927) *Elmer Gantry* contained a satire of it. New Thought was "an amorphous collection of beliefs about the power of mind and spirit to transcend mere material realities (and generate wealth)" (Kaminer 1992:45). One strand of the movement was characterized by the claim that belief is "a cause-effect mechanism by which the believer might readily attain results that address felt needs, whether for health or wealth" (Anker 1999a:210). Norman Vincent Peale's (1963) *The Power of Positive Thinking* represents one of the most popular examples in this genre. Current advocates of this tradition include talk-show host Oprah Winfrey (Lowney 1999) and celebrity financial consultant Suze Orman (1997). The entire positive thinking tradition, of which *Success through a Positive Mental Attitude* is an exemplar, has attracted much ridicule, both for its presentation and its substance. Regarding Hill's (1960) *Think & Grow Rich*, Kaminer (1992) comments, "Hill is worth quoting at length, not because any of his statements make sense but because none of them do; virtually impossible to satirize, he need only be quoted" (p. 53). The claims of the tradition, when they are understandable, have been dismissed as naive wish fulfillment dressed in pseudoscientific language.

However, Hill and Stone do provide some specific suggestions for developing a PMA. All of them involve putting positive messages into the mind. First, the reader is told to read inspirational materials, including self-help books and the Bible. Their final chapter, titled "The Amazing Power of a Bibliography," includes a list of 64 suggested books. Second, the reader is supposed to memorize and repeat positive phrases or "self-motivators," such as "Day by day in every way I'm getting better and better" and "You can do it if you believe you can." Third, the reader is supposed to set and write down specific goals, such as "My major definite aim is to be a millionaire by 1960." These practices were still being used at Combined Insurance during Leidner's study and are being used at the Enterprise Company today.

PREMISE CONTROL AND PMA AT THE ENTERPRISE COMPANY

The Enterprise Company has a strong corporate culture with rituals, ceremonies, heroes, slogans, and symbols (Scott 1998), and premise control is the dominant form of worker control. Enterprise managers refer to the goal of transforming salespersons' selves as "emotional training." While "technical training" involves learning sales scripts and routines, emotional training involves changing the way student dealers think and feel. An important part of emotional training, which is considered more important than technical training, is developing a positive mental attitude. Although the concept of PMA is not so central at Enterprise as at Combined Insurance, it is part of the standard vocabulary of sales managers and salespersons, and is taught at sales school and described in the sales manual. Stone and Hill's book is not one of the three motivational books issued to all rookie dealers, but it is promoted by the company and made available to dealers at cost.

The skill of keeping a PMA is often illustrated in an exercise in which dealers attempt to reframe negative situations they may encounter in the book field. Managers describe to their trainees particular scenarios they may face—rain, dog bites, slamming doors—and discuss not just how they should react to them, but how they can see them in a positive light. A broken car, for instance, means you will get some exercise. Rain means sympathetic people will let you into their homes. A natural disaster that destroys your sales territory means that people will need new books. Whenever something bad happens in the book field, dealers are supposed to come up with three of these positive reframings.

The lack of on-the-job supervision explains why premise control makes sense for Enterprise management, but student dealers actually use these practices because of the difficult conditions, physically and socially, of door-to-door sales work. Because of these conditions, around a third of dealers each summer quit the job before finishing their 12 weeks of selling. Physically, the job requires carrying a heavy book bag for over 13 hours a day, six days a week, in all weather. Dealers are supposed to be showing books from 7:59 a.m. to at least 9:30 p.m. During this time, they are to be either talking to a prospect or moving—running actually—to the next door. Breaks, except for two short meal breaks, are discouraged. The job is even more difficult socially since it requires initiating an awkward interaction—asking a stranger for entrance into his or her house to demonstrate a product—and facing constant rejection. The seven dealers I observed in the book field knocked on an average of over 90 doors per day. At approximately one third of these doors there was no answer. An additional third refused to let the dealer give any kind of demonstration. The dealers averaged 32 demonstrations (30 is the company's minimum expectation), but of these, 24.4 were "door demos," which means the prospect would not let the dealer into the house. These demonstrations often lasted less than 30 seconds before the prospect shut the door. The dealers averaged just 7.6 sit-down demonstrations, where the prospect agreed to sit down, in the house or on the porch, for a full demonstration. Fewer than half of these prospects (3) bought anything from the dealer. Companywide, dealers averaged just over two sales a day. So an Enterprise dealer's day is filled with rejection along every step of the sales process. Although this rejection is not usually rude, the cumulative effect of it can be emotionally draining.

Despite these objective difficulties, a majority of dealers who finish the summer come to define the most difficult part of the job in terms of themselves. Answering the open-ended question "What was the hardest part about your summer?" on the end-of-summer survey, fully 63 percent of the respondents gave an answer that framed the hardest part in terms of their own ability to control their thinking or actions. These answers included keeping "on-schedule" or continuing to work when they did not want to (24 percent), remaining positive or keeping a PMA (13 percent), and staying "motivated" (13 percent). These responses suggest that student dealers have, to some extent, adopted PMA's nonfalsifiable explanation for failure that places responsibility on the individual. Enterprise dealers describe themselves as constantly struggling against temptations to get "off-schedule," in other words, taking extra breaks, or quitting the job.

Although these dealers often talk about fighting negative *emotions* in the book field, it would be a mistake to think of Enterprise's concept of PMA simply as emotion. Indeed,

the Enterprise version of PMA as described in the company's sales manual, *Selling 101*, makes an important distinction between feelings and attitude:

As William James said, "It seems like feeling should precede action when in reality action precedes feeling." So if you want to feel a certain way, your actions will dictate your feelings. Positive mental attitude means that you do not let your feelings dictate your actions. . . . You see, it is not the circumstances that happen to you in life; it is the ATTITUDE toward those circumstances that determines the kind of person you are going to be.

Student dealers are taught that they will have negative emotions in the book field, but they should not allow these feelings to control their actions. Instead, if they undertake the right actions, they can create positive feelings. Attitude, then, is not emotion, but is a set of cognitive strategies for reframing situations so that they are viewed positively, not negatively. Positive attitude leads to proper action that then results in positive emotions. Since dealers are constantly struggling against these negative emotions and against themselves, they are generally open to the strategies Enterprise managers suggest for achieving success through a PMA. So while premise control sometimes takes a top-down form, as when managers instruct and motivate workers, it just as often involved salespersons sharing with each other their struggles in the book field and techniques for dealing with them. Dealers discuss and use these techniques in a clearly self-conscious way. Motivational techniques are a constant topic of conversation among dealers, who are always looking for new ways to stay motivated in the book field. Dealers are not supposed to criticize any motivational techniques since this is "negative," but they do discuss them with humor and often take an ironic stance toward them, as did the high-tech workers described by Kunda (1992). Dealers realize how ridiculous they seem to outsiders and jokingly compare themselves to members of religious cults and to mental patients.

A TOOL KIT OF MOTIVATIONAL PRACTICES

The Enterprise Company equips its salespersons with a variety of techniques for dealing with the physical, social, and emotional difficulties of their jobs. During their struggle to continue working, dealers may search for something—anything—that can help them get to the next door. It may be something they learned in sales school or read in a motivational book or that was suggested by another dealer. Some techniques work for some dealers and not others. Something that works one day may not work the next. A technique that made no sense when described in sales school may eventually be just the thing to get through the day. If something works, dealers continue to use that technique. If something stops working, they try something else from the collection of strategies they have learned, all of which can be derived from the claim of PMA that the mind should be filled with thoughts that are positive. Because the use of PMA at Enterprise is characterized by variety, Swidler's tool-kit metaphor is especially appropriate. The Enterprise tool kit consists of two types of tools: *motivational practices* and *motivational foci*. Motivational practices, such as repeating positive phrases, help dealers focus on positive thoughts to the exclusion of negative ones. Motivational foci are the content of the thoughts

themselves—the positive things dealers are supposed to be thinking about. This section will discuss the three motivational practices that are central to PMA. The subsequent section will discuss three key motivational foci that dealers attempt to keep in mind by using the motivational practices.

Positive Phrases

One of the most popular motivational practices is repeating positive phrases aloud. Enterprise managers recommend that dealers continually repeat positive phrases, or affirmations, between doors because “it’s impossible to think a negative thought when saying a positive phrase.” According to the end-of-the-summer survey, 34.8 percent of dealers repeated positive phrases to themselves at least half the time, with an additional 33.7 percent indicating they repeated positive phrases between 25–50 percent of the time. Dealers report two different benefits the phrases have on their thinking. First, the positive phrases help them focus on whatever they are saying. According to one dealer:

It was so weird at first, like ‘This is going to be the greatest day,’ ‘I love people, I love my job.’ At first I’d say it and I’m like ‘Oh, my God, what am I doing,’ but the more you say it, the more you actually start believing it. So that helped me out tons. Also, the weeks that were just terrible were when I wasn’t positive, when I never even said them.
(white female, first-year dealer)

Second, saying prescribed positive phrases keeps nonprescribed thoughts from creeping into their minds. Student dealers in one focus group discussed the importance of “babbling,” talking continually, regardless of the specific content, to keep negative thoughts from gaining a foothold:

Dealer 1 (white female, second-year dealer): [Babbling is] never letting yourself stop talking, because when you stop talking, you start thinking and when you start thinking, it gets out of hand.

Dealer 2 (white female, first-year dealer): Thinking is bad.

Dealer 3 (white female, second-year dealer): It doesn’t have to be necessarily super-positive. It can just be like “Man this is a beautiful day” or “That was the coolest mom.” “I have awesome, awesome families in my territory.” “People are so education conscious.”

The dealer’s claim that “thinking is bad” seems bizarre since the job is quite taxing mentally. It makes sense, although, to dealers who are attempting to distinguish between positive and negative thoughts. For dealers repeating positive phrases, “thinking” represents a temptation to focus instead on negative aspects of the job.

Positive phrases can also be used to drive out negative thoughts that have already begun, as this dealer reported:

Positive phrases have made a really big effect on me. I just say them constantly. Like whenever I’d get a negative thought in my head out in the book field, I’d just force myself to say [a positive phrase]. Say it over and over, I scream it or whatever. That really helps quite a bit. (white male, first-year dealer)

Managers and dealers stress the importance of repeating the phrases constantly since any letup can allow dealers’ thoughts to stray. According to one dealer:

I found that when I was really good about positive phrases, they really worked. If I didn't do it 100 percent of the way, then that was it, they dwindled out. . . . Because the thing is: if I was saying something [positive] out loud, it's so true, you can't think anything negative. You just can't; it's impossible. But you have to be so focused and so dedicated to doing that 100 percent of the time. (white female, third-year dealer)

Many of these phrases are reminders that the dealer is having or will have great success in the book field. These include phrases such as "Everyone's getting them," "Who's next," and "Get your checkbook ready—here I come." Others express the salesperson's love of the job, for example, "It's a great day to be a bookie" and "I love people and I love my job." Another category of phrases prepares dealers to recover from rejection, for example, "Meet a neg, shake a leg" and "I don't care if I sell one unit today—I'm just going to have a blast." A phrase can also redefine a potentially negative facet of the job, like the heat, in a positive way, for example, "I love the sun, for it warms my soul." Like all motivational techniques, positive phrases do not work for every dealer. Some admitted that it is possible to say a positive phrase and think a negative thought. According to one dealer:

I tried them. I tried them over and over. When I didn't want to sell, I'd try positive phrases. They sounded fake because I was thinking one thing and I was saying another thing. So they didn't really work that well. (white male, first-year dealer)

Positive Material

The term "positive material" describes the motivational books and tapes that dealers are advised to use to fill their heads with positive thoughts and keep out negative ones. Dealers are supposed to read positive material every day. Rookie dealers are provided with three books in their sales kits: *Now Is Your Time to Win* (Dean 1982), *Life Is Tremendous* (Jones 1968), and *The Greatest Salesman in the World* (Mandino 1968). Additional motivational books, including such classics as *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Carnegie 1936), *Think & Grow Rich* (Hill 1960), and of course, *Success through a Positive Mental Attitude* (Hill and Stone 1960), can be purchased from Enterprise at cost. Several of these are included in student managers' sales kits each year. According to the survey, 39.6 percent of dealers reported reading positive material at least five days a week, with an additional 26.4 percent answering three to four days a week. The remaining 34 percent reported reading positive material less than three days a week.

Many dealers' favorite motivational book was *The Greatest Salesman in the World*. Like most motivational books, *The Greatest Salesman* presents a list of principles that lead to success. Unlike most other books, though, *The Greatest Salesman* works its principles into a plot, which involves the birth of Christ, the Apostle Paul, a Middle Eastern salesman named Hafid, and 10 scrolls that explain how to be the greatest salesman in the world. These scrolls, whose themes include "Today I begin a new life," "I will greet this day with love in my heart," and "I am nature's greatest miracle," describe mind-sets that dealers are supposed to take with them as they knock on doors. As this excerpt illustrates, Weber's capitalist ethic continues to be found in self-help literature:

Today I will multiply my value a hundredfold.
 I will not commit the terrible crime of aiming too low.
 I will do the work that a failure will not do.
 I will always let my reach exceed my grasp.
 I will never be content with my performance in the market.
 I will always raise my goals as soon as they are attained.
 I will always strive to make the next hour better than this one. (Pp. 91–2)

Dealers read these books to motivate themselves and also use them as the raw material for other motivational techniques. For instance, dealers may incorporate lines from the books into positive phrases, as this dealer reported:

Greatest Salesman in the World had a lot of good principles in it. *Now Is Your Time* and *Life Is Tremendous*. I read those and I also read my Bible every night. So between all that stuff I would pick a key idea or a simple sentence and just try and repeat that to myself or write it down on top of my pre-approach pad every time I got to a new page. And that kept me going. Just something simple I could relate to. (white female, first-year dealer)

This dealer's use of the books was not unusual. None of the dealers I spoke to commented on any of the underlying theories in the books or noticed any of the logical problems observed by the genre's critics. Dealers typically do not read the books to discover a sustained argument, but to find some nugget of motivation they can use. The books are also filled with stories that help put the dealers' book field problems in perspective. According to one dealer:

Some of the stories, like in *Now's Your Time to Win*. . . . You think about, like the guy's car blowing up and some of the stuff he went through. And if you get frustrated about the situation you're in and you've got it right there on paper in your selling bag. You think about all the stuff they went through, you have to kind of laugh about how frustrated you are. I'm like, man, no one's home. OK, his car blew up, which was a little bit more serious. For me it wasn't the motivation, it was more just putting everything in perspective. (white female, first-year dealer)

Most tapes available from Enterprise are recordings of talks given by sales managers, top dealers, and other speakers at company events. One popular tape of a motivational speaker is included in the sales kit. Other tapes are available from the company for \$1.50 apiece; some of these are distributed at no cost at sales-school sessions. Many of these tapes contain "advanced sales" advice, both technical and emotional. One of the most popular tapes consists mainly of two former top dealers telling funny stories about selling books. Although it offers little technical advice about selling, dealers like it because it shows how much fun selling books can be.

Written Goals

Another motivational practice, again suggested by Stone and Hill, is to write down specific goals. During sales training, Enterprise managers have student dealers make specific goals that are personally meaningful and put them into writing. Writing down the goals accomplishes three things. First, it makes the dealers determine what

their goals are. These goals can be very detailed and specific, as this salesperson reports:

I set goals every single night. I try to hit those goals every day and I think about my goals and how bad it feels at the end of the day if you haven't hit your goals. . . . I set demo goals every day for 30 demos a day, and then also set customer goals and unit goals. And I set a unit goal every night that would be better than my day before and a customer goal that would be a little better than my day before. And then I would break it down, 2 hours and 15 minutes at a time. (white male, second-year dealer)

Second, writing goals usually involves sharing them with someone else, such as the manager or teammates. Sharing goals allows other people to remind the dealer of her goals and hold her accountable for meeting them, as this dealer reported:

I just sat down and made a list of things I wanted to accomplish before I came home. I had that taped to a pre-approach notebook. And any time that I would get frustrated, I would look at it. And my student manager knew every single one of my goals and every night he would ask me. . . . It's like a daily reminder—there's no thinking about it. If you make it visible and you let other people know about it, you feel like you have a little more responsibility to actually achieve it. (white female, first-year dealer)

Third, the written goals allow the dealer's present self, during training, to communicate to a future self, during the summer (see Schweingruber and Berns 2005). This is significant because Enterprise managers frame these two selves differently. Managers tell dealers that their thoughts during training are clear and rational. In training, dealers have not begun to experience the negative aspects of the job and, importantly, they still have regular contact with their managers and teammates, who help sustain proper thinking. One sales manager had his dealers fill out a "persistence card," which was to begin with the lines:

Dear X, I wrote this when my head is clear. This is what I want to get out of this summer.

Letters like these are addressed either to the sales manager or the dealer himself and are used in various ways. Each dealer's persistence card was mailed to her during the fourth week of the summer. Another manager had his dealers write a letter to themselves that was to be opened only when they were about to quit. Letters to the sales manager provide information to her about a dealer's reasons for selling, which she can then use to help coach the dealer. Sales managers also send letters to their dealers during the summer to remind them about their reasons for selling.

A TOOL KIT OF MOTIVATIONAL FOCI

Motivational practices, such as positive phrases, positive material, and lists of goals, illustrate one way that PMA is personalized. One technique may work for one dealer, but not others. Motivational foci illustrate an even more significant type of personalization. Motivational foci are the positive thoughts themselves—goals, values, or people that dealers can think about in the field to keep their minds off negative aspects of the job. Motivational practices are used to keep the proper motivational foci in mind. Enterprise provides a tool kit of these foci, but many will have no salience for particular dealers.

During training, Enterprise managers learn about student dealers' experiences and goals so they can suggest motivational foci that will be meaningful for those dealers. Although these foci are personalized, managers can choose from a standardized menu to run past their dealers. Thus, motivational foci are also a tool kit for managers. Enterprise managers and dealers call these motivational foci "emotional purposes" because dealers are supposed to feel strongly about them. A major part of emotional training is developing these emotional purposes (see Schweingruber and Berns 2005).

Social movement scholars use the term "frame expansion" (Snow et al. 1986) to describe how a social movement organization increases the types of goals it is pursuing to appeal to more potential participants. The development of emotional purposes during emotional training is a similar process. Enterprise managers attempt to find something positive that dealers will be able to focus on during the summer. Is the student religious? If yes, maybe he can focus on God. If not, focusing on God makes no sense. The student needs tuition money? Then this can become her focus. The student's parents are supportive? The dealer can dedicate the summer to them. The student's parents believe Enterprise is a scam? Then the dealer can concentrate on proving them wrong—but in doing so, increases his parents' respect for him and improves their relationship. This section describes three of these motivational foci.

Service-mindedness

One of the most popular emotional incentives is service-mindedness. Dealers who adopt service-mindedness as an emotional purpose focus on providing service to the people who answer the door. One reason for adopting service as an emotional incentive is the belief that sales prospects can ascertain dealers' true intentions at the door. The prospect can tell which dealers are out to help themselves and which ones are interested in providing an educational service. Since prospects do not want to "be sold," service-mindedness redefines selling as service. This belief in the efficacy of service-mindedness to increase sales conforms to the general PMA belief that success can be created by thinking certain thoughts, regardless of objective circumstances. For example, during a focus group, two dealers discussed the importance of thinking proper thoughts:

Dealer 1 (white female, third-year dealer): Whether you perceive it or not, it really does show through the door. Whatever your attitude, whatever secret feelings you're harboring, I know. I put on a fake smile. Some days I just feel like—uggg—and I'd put on a fake smile. . . .

Dealer 2 (white female, first-year dealer): Mrs. Jones [Enterprise slang for a sales prospect] knows.

Dealer 1: Yeah, my sit-downs went down. I don't know how they know but they know. Like psychic connection here. So if I get on the ball and I truly pick myself up with positive phrases or whatever, you automatically see it. The sit-downs go up, the sales go up. If I'm not throwing a pity party, things work out better. . . . But do you know the thing I found out about that? Nothing changed. Mrs. Jones did not change. The territory didn't change. The only thing that changed was your attitude. And that was the biggest thing. It just makes all the difference.

Dealer 2: “Your attitude makes more of a difference than their attitude”—that quote.

Dealer 1: Absolutely. Their situation? People who have gone bankrupt have bought books because I had a great attitude and I communicated the need.

These dealers claimed that even a prospect’s bankruptcy, a seemingly formidable obstacle for a salesperson, can be overcome with a proper positive service-minded attitude. Note also the references to positive phrases that dealers use to focus on service-mindedness. One dealer refers to repeating them between doors and the other quotes a phrase to make her point. Dealers tailor their motivational practices to help them keep their minds on their motivational foci. For instance, dealers focusing on service-mindedness might use phrases like “The kids out here need me to work” and “I’m so excited about helping families and helping children.” Many dealers keep their minds on customers by repeating aloud the names of customers, which reminds them of “neat families” who bought books, or of upcoming prospects. Another positive phrase about service-mindedness is printed on a large piece of red poster board and included in dealers’ sales kits for hanging in dealers’ bedrooms or cars. It reads:

This is the best day I’ve ever had! I can, I will, and I’m going to help 30 people today live a richer, fuller, more meaningful life because I stopped by and showed them my books.

This phrase illustrates the belief that dealers can perform a service even if no book is sold. PMA itself can become their product. Since the dealer is the most positive person that prospects will meet all summer, prospects will be able to tell there is something special about them and may learn to be more positive themselves.

An alternative definition of service could be offered that would involve, for instance, accepting the prospect’s definition of the situation and not attempting to sell to those who are bankrupt. Enterprise’s official definition excludes the prospects’ claims of what will best serve them. Since most prospects initially reject the idea of buying educational books, salespersons must maintain the company’s definition of service if they are going to persist with their sales demonstrations. However, many salespersons feel uneasy with this aspect of the job. One student who quit the job during the summer reported:

I didn’t like the aspect of “bulling” my way into a door. If someone asks me to buy something and I say no, I expect to be left alone. I don’t like to do something to someone I wouldn’t want done to me, and I feel that’s what the second part of the approach was.

Just as all motivational practices do not work for all dealers, neither do all motivational foci.

Dedications

A number of emotional purposes involve focusing on people other than the dealer himself. Focusing selfishly on oneself is considered negative, especially since it usually involves thoughts about the pains and disappointments of the book field. Many of the people focused on are part of the dealer’s life in the book field, including prospects (the focus of service-mindedness) and teammates. However, another popular motivational focus is on friends and family back home (dealers spend the summer outside of their

home states). One way that distant loved ones are made real is by symbolically dedicating all or part of the summer to them. The most organized system of dedications is the “Mom’s Week” or “Dad’s Week” that many sales manager organizations sponsor. During these weeks, dealers sell “for Dad” or “for Mom” instead of for themselves. Dealers attempt to think about all of the sacrifices that Mom and Dad have made for them, as this dealer reported:

I dedicated a week to my dad. I would tell myself, “Dad worked so hard for me all these years. He went to work so many days that he didn’t want to work just because he knew he had to provide for me. That’s love and I need to show him how good of a job he did.” (white female, second-year dealer)

To help keep Mom or Dad in mind, dealers tailor their motivational practices to the dedication. They may work their parents into positive phrases, post a picture of them in their car, and even call them in the morning to tell them they are selling for them that day. Making written lists can also become part of dedications, as this dealer reported:

I sat down and wrote down all the sacrifices my dad had made and all the things he has done for me and all the reasons I thought he was a great dad. That was the easiest week to work, that week. That was my easiest week of the summer. (white male, first-year dealer)

Like other motivational foci, dedications do not work for all dealers. A major problem with dedications is that they may make dealers homesick, as this one reported:

Dedication to someone, that did not work for me at all. It just makes you think about home. You just start missing everybody. Maybe that’s an excuse, but when I was thinking about my family at all, even as a motivational source, it wasn’t very effective . . . I just wanted to go home. (white male, second-year dealer)

God

A third emotional purpose, which illustrates again the personalized nature of PMA, is God. Although Enterprise’s student-sales program began with door-to-door Bible sales, the program is now open to college students of any or no religious background. For students who are religious, though, God can become a reason for selling books. In fact, God is such a good reason for selling that some dealers who are not religious sometimes speak as though God is an unfair advantage. Christian dealers report that God gives some “greater purpose” to their sales routines, as these dealers claimed:

Dealer 1 (white male, second-year dealer): I think when you think about what you’re doing out there, you’ve got to have something beyond yourself that you’re doing it for. . . . You just have to have somebody with you.

Dealer 2 (white female, first-year dealer): You work 80 hours a week but that doesn’t count the paperwork when you get home and everything you do in the morning to get ready for the day. So your life is books and you have to have some kind of greater purpose to go out there door-to-door.

These dealers may believe that God wants them to sell books for Enterprise, that God can use the job to “sculpt” dealers, and that God can guide them in the book field. According to another dealer:

God wanted me to do this job. That's why He had everything happen, everything fall into place. . . . It's like, why am I out here? Because God wants me to, so get going. . . . You don't fight God. (white female, first-year dealer)

The God-focus is a larger part of some sales managers' tool kits than others. A few sales managers have built organizations within Enterprise that have a very religious focus. Christian dealers in these organizations recruit like-minded students from their campuses, who may see Enterprise itself as a "Christian company." Other sales managers' organizations do not have this religious focus.

DISCUSSION

How do the results of this study bear on the issue raised at the beginning of the article: sociologists' long-standing concern with the encroachment of capitalism on the selves of workers? This study supports Leidner's claim that positive mental attitude can be used by management as an effective form of worker control. In 1997, relying almost entirely on this type of premise control, Enterprise successfully recruited nearly 3,000 salespersons who subsequently worked 1.7 million hours, gave 4.6 million sales presentations, and sold over \$30 million worth of books to some 280,000 customers over the course of the summer. However, there also appears to be significant shortcomings to this type of premise control. Edwards (1979) argues that bureaucratic control is designed to ensure a minimal level of performance by its workforce, not peak performances. PMA-based premise control at Enterprise is designed to produce peak performances from dealers by having them squeeze as many hours, demonstrations, and sales into the day as possible. However, it fails to motivate many dealers to meet the company's minimal standards.

During 1997, 32.6 percent of dealers sold fewer than six weeks (half of the standard summer) and 42.8 percent sold fewer than eight weeks. Of those who did stay in the field, most fell short of the exacting standards put forward by company managers. Of the seven dealers I followed, only one, Julie, avoided any serious "off-schedule" problems. Julie knocked on her first door at 7:55 a.m. and her last at 9:44 p.m., gave 49 demonstrations, and spent a minimal amount of break time despite temperatures in the 90s. The other dealers committed such taboos as returning to "headquarters" during the day, taking long breaks (up to 3.5 hours) without knocking on doors, spending 90 minutes with a prospect (the official limit is 20 minutes), and taking a half-hour nap on someone's front lawn. Beth, the dealer who had the most successful day, making eight sales and collecting over \$700 in down payments, told me that she spent part of a typical day at a bookstore, mall, or movie and sometimes "fudged" the statistics she submitted to her managers. Beth's approach of varying her commitment to the job to suit her own purposes was not unusual, but it contrasted sharply with official Enterprise Thinking taught in sales school. In addition to being off-schedule, most dealers I observed also fell well short of the expectation that they would memorize the official sales script and use it word for word. Managers and dealers were both aware of the large gap between the strict work routines taught in sales schools and promoted throughout the summer and the actual behavior of dealers. The inability of Enterprise to successfully motivate many of its salespersons suggests that

claims that premise control is inherently tyrannical or requires employees to forfeit their souls be treated with some skepticism. At Enterprise, using PMA as a form of worker control appears to work only to the extent that (1) salespersons perceive an alignment between their own interests and the interests of the company to sell as many educational books as possible and make as much money as possible; and (2) workers find the practices of PMA useful for advancing these interests.

Leidner (1993) claims that Combined Insurance's salespersons used standardized work routines suggested by their managers because "management and agents shared an interest in controlling the behavior of prospective customers in order to sell as much insurance as possible" (p. 147). A similar situation exists at the Enterprise Company. Although student dealers are technically independent contractors who may set their own prices, they are effectively paid on a commission system which pays them approximately 40 percent of their total sales. Some dealers, though, rejected this alignment of interests because they accepted prospects' definition of the situation as when, for instance, they took a prospect's objection that they could not afford the books at face value rather than countering it with a memorized response. Others rejected the alignment because they had alternative ways to earn money over the summer. The sales school survey asked whether students had another job opportunity if they did not finish the summer with Enterprise. As Table 1 shows, dealers who had no other opportunity had more sales (one unit of sales equals approximately \$10 of sales and \$4 of profit) and worked more weeks. Students who had other options had less reason to become heavily invested in the Enterprise ideology and, instead of avoiding thinking about the negative aspects of the job, may have compared them to its benefits. This type of cost-benefit analysis is usually considered very "rational." Enterprise managers, however, associate clear and rational thinking with accepting the company's official premises. According to the company's recruiting manual, the job offers college students what they are looking for—money and experience—and the main reason they reject it is "fear." As one manager told us, "it doesn't make sense" not to sell books. Although Enterprise's version of rationality may fall short of a dispassionate cost-benefit analysis, adopting it may actually be valuable for college students who have committed to it, especially if they do not have another job opportunity. Constantly comparing the job's positives and negatives would interfere with dealers' efforts to get through the day and skillfully engage in interactions with prospects. Similarly, Shelley

TABLE 1. Do You Have Another Job Opportunity Available If You Do Not Finish Your Summer with Enterprise?

	N	Percent	Mean units sold [†]	Mean weeks on job ^{††}
Yes	165	50.6	756.3	7.1
Maybe	104	31.9	756.1	7.0
No	57	17.5	1037.1	9.0
Total	326	100.0	805.0	7.4

[†]"No" group differs from combined "Yes" and "Maybe" groups, $p < .05$.

^{††}"No" group differs from "Yes" group and from "Maybe" group, $p < .01$.

Taylor's (1989) research on "positive illusions" suggests that victims of trauma who have "overly optimistic assessments of their situations and the beliefs that they control them" (p. ix) fare better than those with more realistic assessments.

Does PMA Work?

There would be no reason to adopt the positive thinking approach so central to the company's program of premise control if salespersons did not believe it helped them deal with problems they encountered in the book field. While observers of premise control worry about its tyrannical potential, critics of positive thinking tend to view it as nonsense. However, this study suggests that the techniques of positive mental attitude may "work." In suggesting that PMA "works," I mean not that Stone and Hill's theory describes something universally true about human behavior, but simply that some salespersons are able to use tools in the PMA tool kit to accomplish some of their goals. I offer two types of evidence.

The first type of evidence is the testimony of dealers themselves, who described the success they had with the motivational practices and foci associated with PMA at Enterprise. In addition to claiming success through a PMA on the job, as described above, many dealers believed they had learned something valuable that could be used in other areas of their lives:

Dealer 1 (white female, second-year dealer): I think being able to be self-motivated is so important. Not just in this job, but everywhere. Like taking that back to school with you and actually being able to be motivated now to go to class every day. And not just to go to class, but do well in class.

Dealer 2 (white female, second-year dealer): I think you're right. You see people everyday who are off-schedule in life. And this job, maybe it's superstructured as far as schedule goes. But it's so good at teaching us how to be on-schedule for life. Because it doesn't have to be this intense as a summer of selling books, but it teaches us how, like you said, to self-motivate.

For some, PMA presented a new way of looking at life:

Every day I loved the job, except for maybe one or two. I had a great time. Just being able to go through every day with such a positive attitude. Whether you need to force it upon yourself or not, you just learn it. You learn to just love every day. It's weird the way you change the way you look at life. (white male, first-year dealer)

For these dealers, the personal transformation Enterprise managers attempted to facilitate was perceived as a positive change that would carry over to other aspects of life.

A second type of evidence suggesting that PMA can "work" for dealers comes from the end-of-the-summer survey. This survey suggests that (1) having a PMA is associated with having a successful summer and (2) the use of two motivational practices is associated with maintaining a PMA. Table 2 is a correlation table that includes five variables from a survey given to dealers after they finished their first summer with Enterprise. One question asked, "While you were working, what percentage of the time were you successful in keeping a positive mental attitude?" Dealers could choose from four ranges of percentages. Only 11 percent of dealers indicated they kept a PMA 76–100 percent of

TABLE 2. Positive Mental Attitude Correlation Table

	Positive material	PMA	Positive summer	Units sold
Positive phrases	0.38*	0.51*	0.41*	0.46*
Positive material		0.32*	0.39*	0.14
Positive mental attitude			0.56*	0.50*
Positive summer				0.38*

* $p < .01$.Note: $N = 91$.

the time. The other answers broke down as follows: 43, 36, and 10 percent of dealers answered “51–75,” “26–50,” and “0–25 percent,” respectively. Dealers were also asked “Overall, how positive or negative was your experience selling for Enterprise this summer?” The variable that was most strongly associated with their answer to this question was the percentage of time they kept a PMA ($r = .56, p < .01$) (see Table 2). Having a PMA was also associated with a more objective measure of a successful summer, total sales ($r = .50, p < .01$). Dealers who were more successful in having a PMA sold more books. From this cross-sectional data, it is impossible to tell the causal direction between these variables. No doubt dealers who sell more books have an easier time maintaining a PMA. However, dealers’ own descriptions of their work routines suggest that having a PMA also leads to better sales performance and better feelings about the summer. (Another complication in interpreting these data is the distinction between having a positive summer and reporting having a positive summer. Since dealers are trained to reframe negative experiences as positive ones, those who report they have adopted a PMA may be more likely to describe the summer in positive terms.)

The dealers were also asked what percentage of the time they performed two prescribed techniques for developing and maintaining a PMA, reading positive material, and repeating positive phrases between doors. Both techniques were associated with having a PMA (positive phrases, $r = .51, p < .01$; positive material, $r = .32, p < .01$) and with reporting the summer was a positive experience (positive phrases, $r = .41, p < .01$; positive material, $r = .39, p < .01$). Again, these correlations do not indicate what causal relationship, if any, exists between these variables. However, since the intention of the motivational practices is to create a PMA, these correlations suggest they may be successful in doing that.

Individual Responsibility for Success or Failure

One major consequence of unobtrusive control at Enterprise is that most or all of the responsibility for achieving success is placed on individuals. Enterprise student dealers are taught that they are responsible for their own success. If they are failing to achieve a certain level of sales, it is assumed that they have not committed to Enterprise Thinking and/or are not carrying out prescribed work routines. This formula for success at Enterprise is neatly captured in the title of a recruiting conference session: “Attitude + Work Habits = A Great Summer.” There is no room in this equation for blaming anyone but yourself for your not-so-great summer.

There is some tension in the company between this belief in individual responsibility and the practical requirements of training and managing student dealers. Enterprise managers do believe there are other factors that go into having an impressive summer because they have created an impressive training program for preparing student dealers, emotionally and technically, for the book field. The training of student managers to recruit, train, and manage rookies reflects the belief that good management will result in a lower attrition rate. In fact, some of the management training suggests that it is the student managers who are responsible if members of their crew quit. Many Enterprise managers believe that a contributing factor to the company's high attrition rate is a widening gap between the values of the company and that of the typical college student. Some managers believe this is the company's fault for failing to change with the times.

However, a belief that the company can do better in training dealers is not incompatible with a belief that it is entirely a dealer's responsibility for succeeding or not. Managers attempt to provide dealers with tools for succeeding in the book field and also to convince them that they will succeed, no matter what, if they follow the company's suggestions. This focus on individual responsibility probably has a mixed motivational effect on the dealers who accept it. Some dealers accept that their problems in the book field are the result of their own shortcomings and view this discovery of their weaknesses as a form of personal growth. Some of them want to come back for a second summer so they can work on these weaknesses. According to one dealer:

I feel like I had a whole lot more potential than my stats displayed. I really am looking forward to coming back and kicking this job in the butt. (white male, first-year dealer)

For other dealers, though, their lack of success in the book field was experienced as a painful feeling of personal failure. According to one dealer:

I didn't do well. I was in that lower half. I was in the lower category. You start thinking, why can't I do this? I never thought it was because of the company. I just thought I was a personal failure. I thought I sucked. One day your confidence can be on top of the world. And the next day you feel like—the low. It's just like your body is just going through these highs and lows. Your stomach sometimes almost hurts from it—going up and down, up and down. (white female, first-year dealer)

This dealer was eventually able to deal with these feelings and did finish the summer. For many, though, these feelings lead to quitting, which may only exacerbate a dealer's negative evaluation of herself. Joann, one of the Midwestern University dealers who left early, told me she remembered hearing a sales school speaker who said, "You can say you want to quit but if you quit you have to look in the mirror and see a failure." According to Joann:

I really, really thought I was a failure. . . . For a while the Enterprise program really ruined me. I really felt bad. It wasn't that I was concerned about people around me thinking I was a failure. I felt like failure to myself.

Dealers who quit are advised to go back to company headquarters so they can be "unsold" on the idea that they are a personal failure, an example of Goffman's (1952) "cooling out the mark." They meet with their sales manager or another company official and are encouraged to find the positive in their summer and feel good about themselves. Not all dealers who leave early experience these feelings of low self-worth. Some of them reject

the company's assignment of blame or even believe that it discredits the entire training program.

The focus on individual responsibility has two additional implications. First, the belief that positive thinking can overcome any obstacle may result in less effort being placed on removing some of those obstacles. Several sales managers complained to me that the company failed to provide them with information about their assigned sales territory, such as how many books had been sold there in previous summers and basic demographic information. This poor marketing research follows from the company's positive thinking approach to sales territory. The belief that poor sales performance is because of poor sales territory is often given as an example as negative thinking.

A second implication of the focus on individual responsibility is that some salespersons project these beliefs onto the United States economic system. These dealers believe that upward mobility is simple for those who are willing to work hard. Two "proofs" are offered in support of this view. The first is Enterprise itself, which allows hard workers to earn thousands of dollars during the summer. Dealers point out that if someone really wanted to earn money, they could sell books. The second proof is the failure of money to motivate Enterprise dealers (see Schweingruber and Berns 2003). One manager, a recent college graduate, told me that most people do not have money because they do not want it enough:

Money is not a good motivator. There are 270 million people in the U.S. and there is way over \$270 million [sic]. Everyone could make a million if they wanted to work hard enough. Most people don't want to work that hard.

When I heard him make this claim at a spring training meeting, I assumed he meant \$270 trillion dollars, which would break down to a million dollars for every person. Then I heard this same claim made by a company official on an advanced sales tape. In fact, neither math nor the actual stratification of wealth in the United States is important for those making this argument, which is based largely on the personal experience of selling books door-to-door. It is not clear to me how many student dealers made this connection between individual responsibility for success and the U.S. stratification system. However, dealers who completed both waves of the survey tended to report holding more conservative political beliefs after finishing the summer than at sales school ($p < .05$). There was also an association between conservative political beliefs and feeling the summer was a positive experience ($r = .40$, $p < .01$). In addition, the company counts a number of nationally and regionally known conservative politicians among its alumni.

CONCLUSION

This article described how positive mental attitude, a positive thinking motivational philosophy, is used by door-to-door salespersons during the course of their work. While previous work has conceptualized PMA primarily as a form of worker control, this article demonstrated that workers use PMA because it helps them cope with negative working conditions and achieve success in their jobs. In addition, many dealers believe that learning PMA is part of an important personal transformation. I conceptualized PMA as a tool

kit that contains a variety of motivational tools. These include motivational foci, which comprise the content of positive thoughts, and motivational practices, which help dealers maintain the proper foci. Since motivational foci are derived from a dealer's own values and goals, there is a good deal of personalization and creativity in using PMA. This sort of flexibility suggests the limitations of conceptualizing PMA as a form of standardization, but it should not completely alleviate concerns by critics who worry about the encroaching of corporations on the psyches of their employees. Indeed, this case study suggests that the ability to personalize premise control techniques may make them even more effective. However, this study also shows that these workers are by no means "cultural dopes" (Garfinkel 1967). They adopt the principles and techniques in Enterprise's premise control system only to the extent they find them useful for dealing with the day-to-day concerns of their work. They discuss them self-consciously and often take an ironic stance toward them. This study provides insight on premise control by focusing on a company that relies almost entirely on this type of control. However, Enterprise is probably a rarity in this regard. What this study cannot tell us is how premise control and, in particular, the use of the positive thinking tradition, works when combined with other control techniques and how workers experience this.

In addition to contributing to the scholarship on organization control, this study provides one of only a few scholarly accounts of how people use the techniques and products of the self-help industry. Its findings also raise a number of additional questions about the self-help industry and how people make use of its products. First, how do self-help products function in more traditional companies that make greater use of direct supervision and bureaucratic control? The Enterprise Company and Combined Insurance both rely on premise controls because of the limitations of other types of worker control and the perceived alignment of workers' and managers' interests in controlling the behavior of sales prospects. Salespersons use PMA techniques to cope with the particular difficulties of these jobs. These findings would suggest that office workers who are exposed to self-help products by their employers might react to them quite differently. Workers may also use motivational techniques differently if they are learned outside of their workplaces. One interesting aspect of the self-help industry is that some products are purchased by companies to motivate their employees and some are purchased by individuals to become more motivated on their own. Perhaps these individuals may view these techniques as a way to escape their workplace or to limit its control of their lives. Perhaps some individuals who learn these techniques from their companies may also use them in a subversive way.

Second, how do self-help philosophies like positive mental attitude function outside of workplaces? PMA and similar ideas form the basis for self-improvement programs aimed at families and other relationships, personal finances, and other areas of life. This type of motivational program may be used very differently than those aimed at work. Presumably, the personal transformation will be more clearly aimed at meeting the needs of the individual, not his or her employer.

Third, what are the characteristics of people who reject self-help products or find that they do not work and what are the consequences for them? In this study I interviewed

student dealers who left Enterprise and found that many of them experienced feelings of personal failure. However, I did not look at long-term consequences of their Enterprise experience. Presumably, many people buy motivational books or attend seminars but then fail to become sufficiently “motivated” or come up short on achieving their goals. Do these people conclude that self-help programs do not work or do they conclude the fault lies in their personal shortcomings? Are the only true believers in PMA the success stories?

One of the reasons it is important to better understand how self-help and motivational philosophies like positive mental attitude work, or do not work, is because individuals use them to make sense of and negotiate not just work environments but also the larger U. S. stratification system. The positive thinking tradition makes a fundamentally antisociological claim that individuals can, without exception, bypass the constraints of social structure through changing the way they think. It is not difficult to understand the appeal of this thinking for those who are successful since it explains how their success was earned. But the role of this type of “motivation” in negotiating social structure is probably more complicated. In jobs that require interactional skills, such as sales work, learning how to transform the self, or at least the ability to present the self to others, may be a significant advantage. As service work becomes more important in the economy, society may require more “motivated” selves. In other jobs, though, this type of motivation may offer fewer benefits for workers and may function only as a form of worker control. Also, since “motivation” and “self-help” themselves can be quite expensive, access to whatever advantages they bring is itself dependent upon one’s existing resources. Thus, the self-help industry provides a window for looking at such core sociological issues as the connection between self and society, the nexus of structure and agency, and the link between personal troubles and social issues.

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