During July 1997, I spent a day with Julie (a pseudonym) as she sold educational books door-to-door. Julie usually worked alone so she was happy to have me join her as she walked and drove around a Midwestern suburban community. She knocked on her first door just before 8 a.m. and worked nearly nonstop for the next fourteen hours. Being a door-to-door salesperson for the Enterprise Company (a pseudonym) is a difficult job. The Company's salespersons are supposed to run between doors to maximize their time talking to prospects. However, since the temperature was in the 90s the day I was with Julie, we walked instead. Unfortunately, only a dozen of the hundred people who answered the door allowed us into their air-conditioned homes. This cumulative rejection is actually more difficult for Enterprise salespersons than the physical wear-and-tear of carrying a heavy sample case eighty-one hours a week in all types of weather. I followed Julie, and other college students selling books door-to-door, in order to better understand "premise control," the process by which a company attempts to control workers by changing the way they think. Enterprise uses this process in an attempt to create salespersons who will work hard even though no one is watching them.

I should say a few other things about my day with Julie. During breakfast at Hardy's she had me read from the motivational classic *The Greatest Salesman in the World* (Mandino 1968), which she called her "bible." Her favorite passage began: "Never will I be of concern that
my goals are too high for is it not better to aim my spear at the moon and strike only an eagle than to aim my spear at the eagle and strike only a rock?” (p. 90). Then we went into the Hardy’s parking lot, where we did “executive exercises,” a form of calisthenics in which we acted out parts of a day in the “book field.” (By acting silly in public, salespersons are supposed to remove the “cool” pose of the typical college student and get prepared to be enthusiastic about educational books.) The dashboard, ceiling, sun shade, and steering wheel of Julie’s car, which we drove between neighborhoods, were covered with slogans such as “Winners perform consistently regardless of how they feel!” and “Everybody’s getting ’em!” While in the car, we listened to a motivational tape made by two top salespersons, and as we walked between doors, Julie talked about all the “positive” things that were happening to us. All of these practices are taught by the Enterprise managers to increase salespersons’ commitment to their job and to shape the meaning the job holds for them. Julie, in fact, was committed to having a “positive mental attitude,” one of the key concepts that were supposed to shape salespersons’ summers.

All of these techniques were taught to Julie and other salespersons to help them maintain what I call Enterprise Thinking in the book field. During a week-long sales school, Enterprise managers provide students with two types of training. The first, technical training, is what you might expect salespersons would need to know: what to say to prospects at the door, how to deal with objections, how to close a sale, and so on. However, sales managers thought that this type of training was less important than the other type, what they called “emotional training,” which focused on the meaning of the job. Emotional training taught salespersons how to think and feel about the job.

Sociologists call this management strategy “premise control” (Perrow 1986) since it involves attempting to control workers by changing their cognitive premises—the way they think.1 Enterprise salespersons who work hard when nobody is watching (and not all of them do) do so in part because they have learned to think about the job in a way different from the way they did before sales school—or the way you or I would probably think about it. For instance, sometimes salespersons have a “zero day” during which they sell no products. If I made no money after a hard day’s work, I would think about getting another job. However, a properly trained Enterprise salesperson would view the day as a character-building opportunity. Also, she would focus on the services she performed for the sales prospects, such as getting them to think about education and exposing them to

the most positive person they would meet all summer. Getting dealers to think this way is what premise control or “emotional training” is all about. In this chapter I describe how I use William Powers’ Perception Control Theory (PCT) to make sense of how premise control works at the Enterprise Company.

Methods and Overview

I spent about a year conducting research on the Enterprise Company. During the spring I observed two recent college graduates recruit teams of salespersons on my campus, attended their training sessions, and interviewed the recruits. Then I spent two weeks at sales school observing sessions and examining company documents. During sales school, I met Julie, who was one of seven student dealers I followed for a day of selling that summer. During the summer I also attended a number of Sunday meetings. (Enterprise salespersons work alone six days a week, but get together on Sundays for recreation and additional training.) Near the end of the summer, I went back to the company headquarters, where I conducted focus groups of salespersons who had just finished the summer. Finally, I interviewed students from my campus when they returned from the summer. My coresearcher on this project, Nancy Berns, had sold for the company when she was a college student herself. For further details on our research methods, see Schweingruber and Berns (2003, 2005) and Schweingruber (2006).

After giving an overview of the Enterprise Company, I will describe the “shared definition hypothesis,” a popular social science formulation that applies to collective action at the Enterprise Company and for which PCT can better account than previous theories. Thereafter I describe and illustrate how Perception Control Theory is able to make sense of the premise control that takes place among the company’s door to door salespersons. Finally, I discuss some of the complications of premise control brought to light by this analysis.

Enterprise Company Overview

Enterprise’s founder, a Southern minister, began the company’s student sales program in the wake of the Civil War to meet the needs of young Southern men. Shortly after the war began, the company had smuggled Bible plates from the North and became the only Bible publisher in the Confederacy. The Bibles, sold for 50 each and distributed to Confederate soldiers, were the company’s most
prominent product for the next century. At the conclusion of the war, Enterprise began organizing young Southern men impoverished by the war to sell these Bibles and other religious books to earn money for college tuition. Many of the contemporary features of the program were already in place by the 1910s. These included students selling in territories far from their hometowns, selling throughout the summer and delivering books shortly before returning to school, working six days a week and meeting in groups on Sundays, and having experienced student dealers recruit their friends and supervise them in the field. From its beginnings, the program was based on a religious or quasi-religious message about the good that results from selling books door-to-door, both for the seller and the customer. A 1903 recruiting brochure claimed that:

The man that engages in a business that is in itself a good work will find enjoyment never before experienced. Why should not a man do all the good he can and can he do anything better for God or man than to place a good book in the home?

The company underwent major changes in the 1970s. The number of salespersons grew nearly tenfold from 1960 to the mid-1970s, when it surpassed 7,000. However, it has declined considerably since this peak. In 1997, the year I did my field research, there were only 2,885 salespersons. However, between 1979 and 1997, the average sales (controlling for inflation) per student nearly doubled as work standards increased and the techniques of “emotional training” were improved. Enterprise has also changed the products its student dealers sell. Although it still has religious books in its line, its flagship products are multivolume sets of educational books.

The organizational structure of the company resembles that of a network sales organization and functions similarly. People advance in the company through building their own organization within it. All second-year salespersons receive the title “student manager” and are encouraged to recruit first-year dealers. As a financial incentive, these student managers receive a percentage of their rookie dealers’ sales and a higher percentage of their own sales. After graduation, salespersons can continue to sell and recruit teams, and, if successful, rise through the ranks of the company. All the company’s sales managers sold books door-to-door themselves and most continue to do so until they have achieved the rank of direct sales leader. What is significant about this organization for this chapter is that everyone in the company is involved in emotional training. Everyone with a single summer’s experience is a manager and is trained to provide training to rookie dealers and to each other. Rookie dealers are also enlisted to help each other maintain Enterprise Thinking.

The company has a strong corporate culture that 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, pp. 312–313). Managers and salespersons engage in behaviors they admit are bizarre, such as taking cold showers in the morning, doing “executive exercises,” and talking aloud to themselves between doors, but they believe these behaviors contribute to controlling their thoughts and keeping them working. As you can imagine, many salespersons refuse to accept Enterprise Thinking or are unable to make it work for them. Each summer, about a third of salespersons quit the job before the summer ends. Many others fail to maintain the work schedule they are supposed to. Of the seven salespersons I followed, only Julie stayed “on schedule.” This meant she started before 7:59 a.m. and worked until after 9:30 p.m. and took minimal breaks. Everyone in the company is aware of the constant temptation to get “off schedule” and the continuous emotional management, performed on everyone and by everyone, is designed to help people maintain Enterprise Thinking and, as a result, perform Enterprise Action—the work routines prescribed by the company.

**The Shared Definition Hypothesis**

Enterprise Company managers believe that in order to have thousands of college students performing similar work routines across the country, they need to share a way of thinking. Enterprise Action requires Enterprise Thinking. The idea that shared cognitions are required for collective action is a common idea in the social sciences. I call this the “shared definition hypothesis,” after one of its earliest forms. The shared definition hypothesis is present in some form in a number of sociological perspectives with the shared frameworks given labels such as “definition of the situation” (Thomas and Thomas 1928), “knowledge” (Berger and Luckmann 1966), “frames” (Goffman 1974; Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986), and “meanings” (Blumer 1969; Becker 1953; 1982). What is lacking in these earlier versions is that they do not clearly explain how shared cognitions lead to collective action. This can be seen in one of the most popular and
sophisticated versions of this hypothesis, the adaptation of “frame analysis” to study participation in social movements.

Erving Goffman, who, like other interactionist sociologists, anticipated some of the insights of Perception Control Theory, used the term “frame” to describe “schemata of interpretation” that render “what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful” (1974, p. 21). These frames allow their users to “locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms” (p. 21). Frames provide the means by which people are able to perform collective action. People are able to coordinate their activities only if they share frames because people fit their lines of action together by fitting them to these jointly held frames. Misframing, failure to understand the appropriate frame, can lead to inappropriate, meaningless, embarrassing, or even dangerous behavior.

One of the most popular uses of frame analysis is by scholars of social movements, who argue that frame alignment—people sharing a frame—is “a necessary condition for movement participation, whatever its nature or intensity” (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986, p. 464). Social movement organizers attempt to achieve frame alignment with framing: “the assign[ing] of meaning to and interpret[ing] relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988, p. 198).

A great deal of research has been conducted under this framework, but most of it focuses on describing frames. None of it explains why sharing a “frame” causes people to do something, alone or together. One attempt to address this shortcoming involves the creation of more types of frames. Snow and Benford (1988) argue that social movement organizers must perform three types of framing. Diagnostic framing “involves identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality” (p. 200). Prognostic framing involves the identification of “strategies, tactics, targets” (p. 201). Motivational framing involves the creation of a “rational for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action” (p. 199). These three types of framing seem to address the questions “what,” “how,” and “why.” This typology illustrates the complexity of the problem, but still does not explain how a particular organization of experience leads to individual or collective action. Perception Control Theory, though, is up to the task.

**PERCEPTION CONTROL THEORY**

Since this entire book is about control theories, my description of Perception Control Theory will be brief and focused on elements that are used in this chapter. The first component of Powers’ Perception Control Theory is a conceptualization of the individual’s organization of experience. Powers argues that all that we know about the world is derived from assemblies of neurons processing the primitive information that occurs when sensory receptors are stimulated. These stimuli may indicate pressure, light, sound, vibration, balance, taste, or smell but are meaningless to us when considered alone. Powers calls these elementary perceptions intensities and argues that they are the components of other, more complex perceptions. Drawing upon evidence about the nervous system, he proposes a hierarchy of eleven perceptual categories. A signal at each level is formed by combining electrochemical signals from the level below it. Since it is the higher levels that are of most interest to sociologists, McPhail (see chapter 3 in this volume) collapses these eleven levels into three composite levels: presymbolic perceptions (intensities, sensations, configurations, transitions, events, relationships), symbolic perceptions (categories, sequences and programs), and metasymbolic perceptions (principles and system concepts). The Enterprise metasymbolic perception “positive mental attitude” (PMA) illustrates how perceptions are constructed from other perceptions at lower levels of the perceptual hierarchy. PMA represents a constellation of lower-level perceptions. At the symbolic level, it involves carrying out particular programs, for example, the different steps of the Enterprise sales routine, strategies for keeping optimistic. At the presymbolic level it involves particular gestures and expressions, as I shall explore in this chapter. During their training, dealers learn what combinations of lower-level perceptions make up a PMA. They must individually construct their perception of PMA from these other perceptions, but do so under the guidance of managers and other dealers. Later in this chapter I will provide more examples of the three levels from Enterprise Thinking.

Powers argues that our reality is, by necessity, neurologically constructed and that this construction takes place as we interact with our environment and through thinking, planning, and imagining. People are constantly “reorganizing” their perceptual organization as they struggle with new problems. Although Powers does not elaborate on the social nature of this construction, it is clear that our organization of experience is created and modified through interaction with other humans in our environment."
Powers argues that people act in their environments by attempting to bring their perceptions—at any level of the hierarchy—to desired states (called perceptual standards or reference signals). Each perception and perceptual standard is connected in a negative feedback control system that attempts to eliminate any discrepancy between them by changing the perception to match the standard. Each negative feedback loop, formed by neurological connections in a person’s brain, functions through constant, continuous error detection and correction. Powers’ theory is succinctly captured in the title of his book Behavior: The Control of Perception (1973). Metaphorically, our goals are pictures in our heads and we act to make our perceptions match these pictures. Powers assumes that we act in an environment filled with disturbances to the perceptions we attempt to control, an assumption that is certainly true in any social environment that contains several people, each pursuing his or her own goals.  

People achieve perceptual standards at higher perceptual levels by establishing new perceptual standards at lower levels. At the lowest level, intensities, people act on their environment by contracting their muscles. Since each perceptual signal is ultimately derived from first-order signals from the environment, the individual normally must act on the environment to alter any of these signals. Returning to the example of positive mental attitude, once dealers understand what a PMA is, then they can adopt having a PMA as a perceptual standard, or goal. They can compare their own actions against their goal and alter and adjust their actions until they perceive that they have a PMA. Enterprise dealers who have successfully adopted the metasymbolic goal of having a positive mental attitude attempt to achieve this perceptual standard by carrying out the symbolic programs and sequences of behavior that make up a PMA. In order to carry out these symbolic sales behaviors, dealers must carry out presymbolic behaviors, that is, talking, making facial expressions, moving limbs, and the like. Learning to perceive what a PMA is and learning to act in accordance with it both happen simultaneously under the surveillance and guidance of managers and other dealers who instruct, encourage, and correct.

Perception Control Theory, then, provides the tools connecting the organization of experience to action that other versions of the “shared definition hypothesis” do not. A control system represents both an organization of experience and a related purpose. Each control system is an organizational framework because it combines perceptions from lower levels of the hierarchy into a new perception. Each control system can also include a goal of altering the perception to a desired state. The perceptual standard is the goal of the system, but this goal is unintelligible apart from the perception it controls. And this perception, derived from lower-level perceptions, is a unique organization of perceptions from lower levels. As frame analysts suggest, organizers have to suggest perceptual standards that address questions such as “what,” “how,” and “why.” Perception Control Theory shows how goals at these levels are connected and how they produce individual and collective behavior.

Powers does not focus on the issue of social behavior, but McPhail (1991; McPhail and Tucker 1990) has adopted Perception Control Theory to understand collective action. McPhail, in an improved version of the shared definition hypothesis, argues that two or more people act collectively by pursuing perceptual standards that are similar or related. Furthermore, most complex social behavior results from two or more individuals voluntarily adopting similar or related perceptual standards from a third party. Since perceptual standards exist as neurological signals, there is no way for an organizer to physically set one in the head of another person (McClelland 1994). Instead, organizers must rely on words or other symbols to communicate these standards and to ask people to accept them—often in conjunction with explicit or understood coercion and/or with present or future compensation. Organizers attempt to get people to reorganize their perceptual hierarchies.

**Enterprise Thinking and Enterprise Action**

In this study of door-to-door sales, I was interested in explaining how Enterprise Thinking (the way salespersons are supposed to think) leads to Enterprise Action (the work routines they are supposed to be performing). In this section, I use Powers’ hierarchy to explain how this happens. The higher-level purposes taught by Enterprise managers, metasymbolic or “why” purposes, are constructed with the intention that in order to achieve them, salespersons must perform the Enterprise Action, the “what” and “how” goals also taught by the Enterprise managers. Table 4.1 summarizes this hierarchy with examples from the Enterprise Company. The following sections describe and give examples of each of the three levels, starting at the bottom of the hierarchy.

**How Purposes**

At the lowest levels of Powers’ perceptual hierarchy, people control the parts of their bodies. McPhail uses the terms “presymbolic
perceptions” or “how” purposes to encompass Powers’ levels of intensities, sensations, configurations, transitions, events, and relationships. These perceptions include all of the body motions needed to carry out the Enterprise job: walking, picking up a book, turning the pages, moving the mouth to form words, and other such acts. Most of the “hows” of the job involve everyday body motions—talking, walking, manipulating books—that salespersons learned as children. However, a significant part of sales training involves refining and altering these everyday “how” purposes to more effectively carry out the “whats” of the job.

Many examples can be found in this simple script for approaching customers, which accompanies a verbal script.

A. Go to the door more often used.
B. Knock 3 times.
C. Step back 2 steps.
D. Turn to the side profile.
E. Smile.
F. Talk slowly.
G. Relax, lower voice.
H. Pause in your approach only when indicated!

There is no question mark at the end of the phrase “Do you have a place where we can sit down,” because the tone of your voice makes it a statement. As you say this, you simultaneously:

I. Break eye contact and reach for your case.
J. Step forward.
K. Pick up your case as you complete your step and reach for the door.
L. Keep your eye on the doorknob, do not look at Mrs. Jones [Enterprise slang for the prospect].

This script includes instructions for numerous presymbolic perceptions of speaking (tone, volume, speed), facial expression (smile), body position and configuration (stand two steps behind door, turn to side profile), and eye orientation (break with Mrs. Jones, look at doorknob). Although dealers may learn this series of body positions by memorizing the symbols (words) that represent them in the sales manual, they eventually learn to perform them without thinking of these symbols. Instead, through the process of reorganization, they become “automatic” movements that are an integral part of the symbolic or “what”-level purposes of their approach.

Incidentally, when I followed Julie and other salespersons, I was given “how”-level instructions so I would contribute to the impression given off to the sales prospects. These instructions were standard ones given to rookie salespersons who learned to sell by following student managers. For instance, at the door I was to stand several steps behind Julie and face the direction opposite hers.

What Purposes

McPhail uses the term symbolic perceptions or “what” purposes to comprise Powers’ levels of categories, sequences, and programs. What distinguishes these perceptions from presymbolic perceptions is their connection to symbols. Categorization requires symbols that identify or refer to the categories of similar lower-level perceptions. These symbols can be used to construct symbol sequences and contingent symbol sequences, or programs. Enterprise dealers are asked to learn these three types of symbolic perceptions. I will briefly discuss categories and sequences before treating two types of programs in more detail.

Enterprise dealers must learn new categories, and attached terms, to describe and make sense of their work. For instance, dealers learn that during any moment of interaction with a prospect they will be in
one of these steps: “preapproach,” “approach,” “introduction,” “demonstration,” “close,” “answering objections,” and “collecting cash.” Also, each encounter with a person in their territory can be categorized into one or more of these categories: “call,” “door demo,” “sit-down demo,” “weak sale,” and “strong sale.” Dealers must learn these terms so they can communicate with managers and other dealers about their job and in order to set goals for themselves. For instance, each dealer is asked to set a personal goal of thirty demos each day. A demonstration does not require the dealer to go through the entire sales talk with the prospect (a rare event for the dealers I followed), but to state the price before the prospect shuts the door. During these encounters, dealers combine perceptual information—the sights and sounds of the interaction—into a category-level perception: Was this a demo or just a call? Teaching dealers a set of categories is essential to the company’s premise control efforts since dealers must learn to control for perceptual standards that involve categories, such as achieving thirty demonstrations a day.

Enterprise dealers also learn to put these categories together into sequences. The most basic of these sequences is the cycle of selling, which places the seven different categories (preapproach, approach, etc.) or steps in order. Knowing these categories themselves is not enough to be a salesperson. They must be carried out in the proper order. Dealers move from one step to the next with a goal of collecting cash. Another example of sequences are scripts, chunks of speech that must be memorized so they can be repeated to customers. Each step in the cycle of selling includes these verbal scripts, which are designed to be uttered in sequence.

More on the Cycle of Selling

Programs are sequences of categorized perceptions/standards that include if-then decision points. They are required for any kind of complicated social action. Dealers begin learning the sales script through memorization of a sequence, but they soon learn that interaction with a customer requires making decisions. When a customer interrupts a dealer to ask a question or raise an objection, the dealer cannot just continue repeating the sales script. Instead, she must make an appropriate response, perhaps a variation of another memorized script, and then return to her original script or jump to another one. Seasoned dealers learn that the cycle of selling is best represented not as a sequence of steps, or even a cycle, but as a complicated flow chart. For instance, if a prospect objects during the close (step 5), the dealer answers the objection (step 6) and then demonstrates another section of the book (step 4) before moving again to the close (step 5). Enterprise training stresses learning the sales routine as both sequences and programs. Dealers are urged to learn the scripts “word-for-word” because they are so skillfully composed but also to learn the proper set of contingencies for moving from one part of the sales script to another.

What-ifs

A second example of the program-type “what” purposes are appropriately called “what-ifs.” These are book field scenarios that dealers learn from their managers, who believe that dealers must be prepared for anything that might happen on the book field and know how to deal with it. If dealers have a negative experience they are not prepared for, they are in danger of quitting. But if they can deal with the negative experience by remembering discussing it with their manager and learning how to respond to it, then they are more likely to remain in the field and continue selling books. Much of this preparation can be expressed in these simple “what-if” programs. Each what-if describes a situation that may happen on the book field and gives the proper student dealer response. All of the responses are some variation on the theme of continuing to sell books. Common scenarios that student managers discuss include working in all types of weather (scorching heat and cold rain) and having a “zero day.” Student managers are supposed to describe these situations in great detail. One manager’s description of rain included shoes that do not ever dry, socks fallen down to the middle of your foot, feet hurting from the wetness and no one letting you in their houses. In addition to describing these scenarios to dealers, Enterprise managers also set up commitment opportunities for dealers to agree to do “what” when “if” happens. Much of this commitment goes on during one-on-one meetings when a manager asks questions such as, “Will you finish the summer if you total your car?” and the dealer answers, “yes.”

Why Purposes

Metasymbolic purposes are the “why” of Enterprise Thinking, the principles and systems of principles that make the “what” worth doing. Instilling salespersons with these types of purposes is the task Enterprise managers call “emotional training.” In fact, they call these “why”-purposes “emotional purposes” because salespersons are
supposed to learn to feel strongly about them. Table 4.2 lists nine of these purposes. The first four involve becoming a better person by building a self that is more “positive,” or one that is a “finisher” or a “professional” or by becoming a man or a woman. All of these are connected to the company’s claims that selling books door-to-door can bring about a personal transformation. Or, in the words of the company’s motto, the job “builds character in young people.” Enterprise’s character-building efforts are an essential part of its premise control. Building character is both a means and an end. Character building is a means because dealers who accept the proper metasymbolic perceptual standards—principles and identities—will continue to sell books. Enterprise Thinking is supposed to lead to Enterprise Action. Character building is an end because the personal transformation dealers undergo is one of the main benefits of the job.

The remaining five emotional purposes in table 4.2 involve transforming relationships with other people, such as potential employers, book-selling teammates, rookie salespersons, customers, or family and friends back home. Borrowing from Mead’s (1934) concept of the “generalized other,” I call these people “emotional others.” Mead argued that people carry on internal conversations with a “generalized other,” which is a mental representation of a community with which each person interacts. Likewise, an Enterprise dealer visualizes having conversations with these emotional others and experiencing the results of these conversations. She may visualize Dad being proud of her accomplishment in the book field, or being recognized by her teammates at the next Sunday meeting, or an elementary school student who is able to succeed in class because his parents bought a set of educational books from her. Through visualization and other individual commitment practices, many dealers are able to motivate themselves by focusing on these emotional others.

Emotional training involves finding which of these potential emotional purposes might motivate student dealers and helping them adopt them as “why”-purposes. You might imagine that many college students would be interested in some of these goals. However, the job of the Enterprise managers is not just to have each of his salespersons adopt one or more of these “why”-purposes, but also to connect these “why”-purposes to the “what”-purposes required to sell books. A well-trained salesperson will desire, for example, to become a “professional” (“why”-purpose) by going through the cycle of selling with customers (“what”-purpose) using the appropriate body movements and voice inflections (“how”-purposes). Presumably all college students want to be a man or a woman; however, few of them probably

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Table 4.2 Some Enterprise Company Emotional Purposes (Why Purposes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building a better self</th>
<th>Becoming “positive”</th>
<th>By handling negative situations in the book field with a “positive mental attitude,” dealers become more positive persons who can better deal with adversity and accomplish goals in school, work and family life.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a “finisher”</td>
<td>By completing a summer of selling books, dealers set a pattern of finishing what they start that will follow them throughout their lives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a “professional”</td>
<td>Dealers attempt to become a “professional educational consultant” who learns and employs a body of specialized knowledge to make sales, not a “peddler,” who ignores Company instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a man or woman</td>
<td>By interacting with a variety of families, dealers discover what types of husbands or wives they want to have and what type of mom or dad they want to become. By finishing a summer, dealers also make themselves more desirable to the other sex.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Transforming relationships**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential employers</th>
<th>By having a successful summer, dealers make themselves more desirable job candidates.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teammates</td>
<td>Dealers build relationships with other dealers through mutual support, fulfilling commitments to finish the summer and friendly competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rookie dealers</td>
<td>Experienced dealers attempt to become good student managers by setting an example for the first-year dealers they have recruited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>Dealers attempt to build positive relationships with customers by adopting a “service-minded attitude.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and friends</td>
<td>Dealers may “dedicate” their summer, or some part of it, to a family member or friend who supports them. By focusing on the sacrifices Mom or Dad has made for them, dealers learn to appreciate their parents more and become better sons and daughters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**God**

Dealers who are religious may believe that God is using the job to “sculpt” them and that He guides them on the book field.
Professionalism

Enterprise managers attempt to convince student dealers that they should become "professionals." Calling a job a "profession" and its practitioners "professionals" suggests that the job requires advanced training in a body of knowledge, skills, and ethics that are standard to that profession. On the other hand, being "unprofessional" suggests failing to perform a job according to these standards. When Enterprise managers urge dealers to be "professional," they have similar meanings in mind. These managers attempt to convince dealers that they cannot engage in door-to-door sales in any manner they see fit, but that they must learn and practice a set of standardized procedures that has been developed by the company. Professionalism is a metasymbolic standard that makes explicit the importance of adopting symbolic and presymbolic standards. Being a "professional" is incorporated into the half-serious title "professional educational consultant" that dealers often use to refer to themselves. During the "executive exercises" that Julie and I used to start our day together, we chanted: "I'm a sales machine. I'm a professional educational consultant. But most of all I sell books. Lots and lots and lots and lots of books."

The word "professional" is often used in the general sense of dealing with prospects, landlords, teammates, and parents respectfully and ethically. But Enterprise also connects two specific sets of work practices to the idea of professionalism. The first of these is the importance of memorizing a sales script. The section in the official sales manual on "Salesmanship and Professionalism" is an explanation of why dealers should memorize a sales presentation and gives pointers on how to memorize. The implicit argument of this section is that selling door-to-door is a profession with a body of specialized knowledge that must be learned. For instance, the opening paragraph tells dealers that:

These presentations have been prepared, used, and proven effective by the top salespersons. Each year they are improved as student salespersons add new ideas. Isn't it reasonable that a top experienced salesperson is better qualified to present the product than someone who has never sold?

The second set of work practices connected to the idea of professionalism is gaining information about your sales area. "Professional educational consultants" are contrasted with "peddlers" who go door-to-door without a larger understanding of the sales area. The goal of a professional educational consultant is to learn all of the networks in town—employers, schools, churches, families—so she can use them to sell books. Once the dealer finds out about a prospect, she can then name the prospect's children's teachers, the children's classmates whose parents bought the books, and customers who belong to the family's church or who work with one of the parents. Julie, for instance, made a practice of naming customers whose children were schoolmates of a prospect. However, other dealers I followed were more haphazard in this respect. They were also less faithful to the scripts they were supposed to memorize. Creating a "why"-level perceptual goal—being a "professional educational consultant"—was an attempt by Enterprise managers to have more salespersons pursue the "what"-level practices of using scripts and of gaining and using sales-territory information.

Becoming a Man or a Woman

During sales school, one of the Enterprise Company's top sales managers informed the salespersons that during the summer they would be "finding out what it is to be a man or a woman." Becoming a man or woman is one of the most interesting emotional purposes because we think of "men" and "women" as entirely different types of people—"opposite sexes." Yet male and female college students working at Enterprise learn roughly the same "what"- and "how"-purposes. Enterprise managers attempt to convince female student dealers that carrying out these lower-level purposes will help them accomplish the goal of becoming a woman and male student dealers that carrying out the same lower-level purposes will help them reach the goal of becoming a man.

The connection between gender roles and the Enterprise job was simpler to manage when all of the salespersons were salesmen. Then sales managers could claim that the skills the job required and the virtues it taught were intrinsically manly ones. The addition of women dealers in the 1970s complicated matters. Not only did it require adding "or a woman" to claims about personal growth, it also confused the gendered nature of the work. Many of the skills required for the job, such as building relationships and interacting with children, are stereotypically female strengths. Whether because of their greater skills in these areas or some other reason, women dealers average higher sales than men. Male dealers, though, do not view the job as a female one at all. Instead, many interpret their lower average sales in a positive light. One reason women sell more books, according to some men, is that they are less threatening than male dealers and therefore
more likely to get in the door. Thus it is the male dealers’ size and strength—masculine characteristics—that pose a handicap for them. Another claim some male dealers make is that women have an unfair advantage because of their sex appeal (despite the fact that most sales prospects are women).

In spite of these complications, Enterprise managers suggest at least three ways dealers can strengthen their gender identity—male or female—by selling books door-to-door. All of these were illustrated during a sales school “women’s meeting” that I was allowed to attend. The meeting addressed topics such as dress, nutrition, health, and safety. The final section, on relationships with men, contained claims about how the job can make you a better woman.

First, dealers can learn about their gender role from observing their sales prospects. The women’s meeting’s main speaker claimed that “on the book field you will learn what kind of wife you want to be, what kind of mother you want to be, and what kind of man you want to marry.” This is a claim I heard from many Enterprise managers and salespersons. Likewise, men could learn what kind of husbands they wanted to be, what kind of fathers they wanted to be, and what kind of women they wanted to marry.

Second, dealers can strengthen their gender identity by becoming independent of members of the other gender during the summer. This claim was emphasized during the women’s meeting. Near the end of the meeting, several experienced female dealers took the stage to warn rookies not to let men “take your summer away from you.” One described how a male student manager had fallen in love with her and driven four hours to see her when they were supposed to be going door-to-door. She told him to get lost and not “steal her summer.” Another encouraged women not to complain about their jobs to their boyfriends back home since they would sympathize with them instead of encouraging them to keep selling. Since they were making a sacrifice by being away from their boyfriends for the summer, they should make the sacrifice worthwhile by being a successful saleswoman. These stories supported the message that women needed to learn to be independent of men. (Enterprise also encourages salespersons to become independent of their families, friends, and anyone else who could interfere with them selling books.) On the other hand, if a woman was dating a “bookman,” she should support him and help him make the most of his summer. Similarly, at a more informal men’s meeting I attended, the sales manager warned men not to “mess around” with “bookwomen” during the summer and not to return home to reconcile with your girlfriend if she breaks up with you.

The third reason that dealers can become a man or a woman is that selling books will make them more appealing to the opposite sex. This theme also came out during the women’s meeting. The leader of the session summed up the earlier student testimony about dating by telling the women to “live life so you can look back on the summer and have no regrets . . . Don’t find the right person. Become the right person.” Students also heard that many of them would want to marry only someone who had been able to finish a summer selling books for Enterprise. Finishing the summer with no regrets would help a woman become the type of person a bookman would want to marry.

Dedication and Skeptics

Enterprise managers claim that the experience of selling books door-to-door will create new relationships with other book sellers and sales prospects, transform existing relationships, and maybe even help student dealers find God. This section illustrates the general strategy of using “emotional others” by examining the claim that book salespersons can transform their relationships with family and friends back home and, not incidentally, use these relationships to sell books.

During recruiting, Enterprise managers assume that potential salespersons’ families and friends will be skeptical or even hostile to the idea of door-to-door sales. Thus, a good deal of effort is devoted to controlling information between recruits and their families. For instance, they are given a model letter to send to their parents describing the program, and parents are invited to a “parents’ tea” to meet parents of experienced dealers. However, when the summer begins, many dealers have friends and even family members who are “skeptics.” Enterprise managers have developed “why” purposes for dealing both with supportive family and friends and with “skeptics.”

One way that these 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 may post a picture of them in their car or even call them in the morning to tell them they will be selling for them that day. Some pretend the recipient of the dedication is present and have imaginary conversations with him.

Like all emotional purposes, dedications do not work for some dealers. One problem with dedications is that they may make dealers homesick. Another is that Mom or Dad may believe that selling books for Enterprise is a foolish way to spend the summer. Family or friends with this opinion—skeptics—may be the focus of another emotional purpose.

Selling for skeptics is the flip side of a dedication. Both involve selling for friends or family back home. But, while dedications are aimed at supportive friends or family, the use of skeptics as an emotional purpose is directed at those who doubt the ability of the student dealer to earn money selling books door-to-door. For some salespersons, skeptics can be a powerful motivation, as it was with this dealer:

My biggest thing was my dad told me that this was the stupidest decision I was ever going to make in my life. I’m going to go out there and waste a few weeks of my summer, come back and he’s going to tell me, “I told you so.” So even when the slightest thought of why am I here came to my mind, I was like “To prove my dad wrong. I can do this. It may be hard, but I bet you my dad couldn’t do this.” Which is just stupid, but that was the big thing. That was my big thing all summer.
(white female, first-year dealer)

Dealers use similar methods to keep skeptics in their minds as they use for dedications, including posting a picture of the skeptic in a car or at headquarters. Dealers also attempt to visualize skeptics’ reactions to their return home. If a dealer quits the job, her skeptics would say, “I told you so.” If a dealer finishes the summer, though, she will be able to show her parents her “big check.” (Enterprise jargon for a profit of over $5,000). She will be able to ask her friends what they did during the summer and then tell them how great her summer was and, incidentally, how much money she made. Dealers are supposed to visualize these differing scenarios when they are considering quitting.

Although these two types of “emotional others,” the skeptic and the recipient of a dedication, are used differently in the book field, the goal of both sets of practices is to lead to improved relationships. Student dealers will learn to appreciate their parents more through dedications. Proving skeptics wrong will increase their admiration for you and maybe even convince them to become Enterprise salespersons.

Levels of Purpose and Perception

Organizing through Suggesting Perceptual Standards

From the previous sections, it should be clear that premise control at Enterprise involves suggesting perceptual standards at all three levels. Some of these perceptual standards may require a good deal of reorganization since goals such as having a “positive mental attitude” or being a “professional educational consultant” and their connections to the nuts-and-bolts of selling books are alien to most recruits.

Enterprise managers have made a science of this type of organizing—suggesting perceptual standards to salespersons and aiding them in maintaining these standards. Their techniques for doing this can be divided into four broad categories.

First, Enterprise organizers present and describe the standards they desire student dealers to adopt, justify their adoption, and urge dealers to adopt them. Organizers carry out this persuasive organizing in a variety of settings and use a variety of media. They meet with dealers one-on-one and conduct meetings with as many as several hundred dealers. They use lectures, motivational talks, personal testimonials and other types of speech, as well as PowerPoint presentations, videos, skits, and demonstrations, to advocate the adoption of Enterprise Thinking. They also provide dealers with books, manuals, and audio and video tapes that promote Enterprise Thinking.

Second, Enterprise organizers provide dealers with opportunities to make a commitment to adopting Enterprise Thinking. These commitment opportunities provide dealers with occasions to make both verbal and written commitments to some aspect of Enterprise Thinking. During one-on-one meetings with sales managers, dealers make implicit and explicit agreements—the latter often sealed with a handshake—to sell books and adopt elements of Enterprise Thinking. Some of these agreements are put into writing, such as personalized lists of emotional purposes and letters dealers write to themselves and their managers describing their commitment to the job. Dealers also have opportunities to make commitments to other dealers during team meetings where dealers share their goals and incentives for selling books. In addition, managers attempt to orchestrate dealers’ communication with their social network outside the company so that dealers’ commitment to Enterprise Thinking is made clear to their friends and family.

Third, Enterprise organizers organize teams of dealers where both of the first two processes can take place and where team members support each other in maintaining Enterprise Thinking. This team
organizing strategy is designed to create teams with leaders who can carry on persuasive organizing in the absence of the organizer. Ideally, all members of each team will join in this responsibility of assuring each other about the value of Enterprise Thinking and supporting each member’s commitment to sell books. These teams also provide many commitment opportunities for their members. Ceremonies performed by the teams provide both persuasion about the value of Enterprise Thinking and opportunities for members to commit to it.

Fourth, Enterprise organizers provide student dealers with strategies to use on their own to help support and strengthen their continued adoption of Enterprise Thinking. These individual commitment exercises include reading books and listening to the tapes provided by organizers as part of their persuasive organizing, and reading the written records of commitment produced by the dealers during commitment opportunities. They also include repeating “positive phrases” aloud and visualizing scenarios suggested by the organizers.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Following Julie was my first look at the practice of selling books door-to-door. We met at sales school, where I learned that she had been a top first-year dealer the previous summer. The summer I followed her, she ended up selling around $34,000 worth of books. Following her gave me a fairly good look at the way Enterprise Action is supposed to look. All of the other dealers I followed, though, illustrated the fact that most salespersons fall far short of the standard set by the company. All of them were “off-schedule.” Among their off-schedule activities were knocking on the front door over an hour late, taking a half-hour nap, spending ninety minutes with a prospect (twenty minutes is supposed to be the maximum), quitting before 9:30 p.m., and driving around for half an hour without stopping at a house. The salespersons all had seemingly reasonable reasons for being off-schedule. They seemed reasonable to me anyway, but they were not reasonable from the perspective of Enterprise Thinking. These dealers were also “off-script” (my term). All of them used some sections of the official Enterprise sales scripts. However, most of them did not use them “word-for-word” as they were supposed to and all of them left out entire sections of the official sales talk. Enterprise managers were aware of the various off-schedule and off-script problems and their training is aimed at helping dealers improve their adherence to company standards.

The gap between the purposes of Enterprise managers and the actions of salespersons illustrates the difficulties of organizing. Since people are self-directed, purposive beings, and since organizers have no way of setting another person’s purposes, all sorts of problems can arise in the organizing process. The perceptual standards suggested by Enterprise managers were often not successfully accepted by dealers. There are three reasons for this. First, the results of adopting these standards did not fulfill many of these dealers’ other goals. Simply stated, they hated the job, or at least many aspects of it. Doing what they were asked to do resulted in loneliness, exhaustion, regret, and other negative outcomes. Second, dealers were unable to successfully adopt these standards. At the presymbolic or symbolic levels this may mean that dealers had not yet acquired the skills to convey the proper attitude at the door or that they had trouble memorizing the sales scripts. Enterprise managers assume that these problems will be overcome with practice. A more serious problem is with dealers who were unable to adopt metasymbolic standards. For some dealers, concepts such as “positive mental attitude” or an “emotional purpose” just did not make sense. They could repeat what others said about such concepts, but could not experience them themselves. They seemed unable to change the way they perceived the job (reorganize)—or they quit before they could make that change. Third, some dealers did not attempt to voluntarily adopt some suggested standards. They heard them, imagined using them, and the imagined result was not a satisfying one, that is, it did not meet any of their other goals.

**Suggesting Perceptual Standards at Different Levels**

Getting another person to adopt a perceptual standard presents distinctive challenges at each level of the perceptual hierarchy. Learning presymbolic standards can be difficult because, as the term suggests, words do not easily capture particular body configurations, facial expressions, or voice inflections. This is illustrated by the training of actors and athletes, which typically involves hands-on practice and correction. Worker control that focuses on presymbolic standards is exemplified by Frederick Taylor’s emphasis on body mechanics. Organizing this type of activity involves “direct control.” Managers supervising through direct control monitor body movements of workers, or the immediate results of these movements, and give orders correcting them. Direct control is the least efficient type of control because it does not “draw on the accumulated experience, training, or intelligence of the subordinate” and “require[s] continual effort and time on the part of management” (Perrow 1986, p. 129).
The type of worker control that focuses on symbolic-level perceptions is "bureaucratic control," which is "embedded in the social and organizational structure of the firm and is built into job categories, work rules, promotion procedures, discipline, wage scales, definitions of responsibilities, and the like" (Edwards 1979, p. 131). Since the metasymbolic principles of the bureaucracy, such as efficiency and calculability, are widely shared in our society, organizers can use symbols to communicate appropriate categories, sequences, and programs to subordinates.

Premise control is the most sophisticated form of worker control because it "grows out of incentives for workers to identify themselves with the enterprise, to be loyal, committed, and thus self-directed or self-controlled. Such behavior involves what may be called the 'internalization of the enterprise's goals and values.'" (Edwards 1979, p. 150). However, successfully suggesting and adopting metasymbolic perceptual standards is difficult. These controls are "most important near the top of organizations because managerial work there is less routine, the consequences of decisions are hard to assess immediately, and access to company resources is greatest, providing more opportunities to use company property for one's own ends" (Perrow 1986, p. 130). However, high-level managers and other professionals typically gain metasymbolic standards slowly through long schooling and experience, which also weed out those who cannot successfully adopt them. Learning metasymbolic standards by Enterprise salespersons and the accompanying weeding out process take place during a much shorter time span.

An important consequence of relying on unobtrusive control is that it fails to produce a minimal level of work in many student dealers. Edwards (1979) argues that bureaucratic control is designed to ensure a minimal level of performance by its workforce, not peak performances. Unobtrusive control at Enterprise, though, is designed to produce peak performances. Dealers are trained to squeeze as many hours, demonstrations, and sales into a day as possible. However, many dealers fail to meet even the company's minimal standards.

Conclusion

As I write this chapter, thousands of college students across the country are in the final days of preparing for a summer of selling books. They will soon be leaving for sales school where they will undergo an intensive program of emotional training. Some of these will, by their own accounts, undergo a life-changing transformation on the book field. They will learn about themselves, develop greater self-confidence, gain better appreciation for their families, or even find God. Many will dislike the job so much that they will leave the book field within days of arriving. Using Perception Control Theory to conceptualize their training and work has resulted in insights about the difficulties of using premise control to organize workers. In particular, it gives a way to connect concepts such as "positive mental attitude" and "professional educational consultant" (Enterprise Thinking) to the nuts-and-bolts activities of the door-to-door salesperson (Enterprise Action).

Control theory itself is a system concept, a metasymbolic perception, that is as alien to many sociologists as "positive mental attitude" is to many rookie book salespersons. Doubtless, many sociologists and sociology students are uninterested in learning this system concept or simply do not get the way it reorganizes sociological theory and data. However, I believe we have much to learn from its elegant understanding of human behavior, which is compatible with several significant sociological traditions and, importantly, our emerging understanding of the human nervous system. I hope this chapter and this book prove useful in demonstrating the theory's usefulness and provoking perceptual reorganization in at least some readers.

Notes

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1. Premise control is also called "normative control" (Etzioni 1961; Kunda 1992), since it operates by changing people's norms, and "unobtrusive control" (Perrow 1986) since its operation isn't apparent once people's norms have been changed.

2. Powers' framework is compatible with Blumer's (1969) three premises of symbolic interactionism: (1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (2) the meaning of such things is derived from social interaction; and (3) these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process. Powers' ideas have gained most ground among symbolic interactionists as demonstrated by the contributors to this volume. (See also note 3.) Powers' conception of how individuals organize experience also bears similarities to claims made by social constructionists (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

3. Both Mead (1938; see Shibutani 1968) and Goffman anticipated Powers' understanding of behavior. Goffman (1974) described behavior as the performance of "guided doings," which begin with a mental decision: "A serial
management of consequentiality is sustained, that is, continuous corrective control, becoming most apparent when action is unexpectedly blocked or deflected and special compensatory effort is required” (Goffman 1974, p. 22).

4. McPhail also suggests two other ways that two or more individuals can have similar or related perceptual standards: (1) two or more individuals may independently generate similar or related perceptual standards; and (2) two or more individuals, such as those confronted with a mutual problem, may interdependently generate similar or related perceptual standards.

REFERENCES


