

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Buying and Selling Information: A Guide for Information Professionals and Salespeople to Build Mutual Success. ML Gruenberg. Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc.; 2014. Softcover: 195 p. Price: USD\$49.50. ISBN# 978-1-57387-478-6. Available from: <http://infoday.stores.yahoo.net/buying-and-selling-information.html>.

At some point in their career, most library workers will have to meet with salespeople. Whether the purpose of that meeting is to learn about a new product, renew a subscription, or break the bad news that your library can no longer subscribe to a service, it is important that the experience is a positive one for both parties. Unfortunately, the art and skill of buying and selling is not something we spend much time learning about during our training. Often our first experience with negotiating the purchase of a new product is while the purchase is happening. It should therefore come as no surprise that a quick search for “librarian negotiation skills” reveals many courses and papers on the topic. For those wishing to improve their relationship with salespeople and hone their negotiation skills, *Buying and Selling Information* is an excellent resource.

The purpose of *Buying and Selling Information* is to help information professionals and information sales representatives successfully navigate the process of selecting resources. Through the use of real-life stories and situations from Gruenberg’s over three decades of experience in the information business, the book covers the purchase and renewal experience in three broad areas: the relationship between the librarian and the salesperson, the sales meeting, and “closing the sale”. Each part includes several concise chapters covering topics such as how to get the most out of your tradeshow or conference trip, preparing for a meeting with a salesperson, and negotiation skills.

Buying and Selling Information is written to appeal to those new to the world of information services as well as veterans who would like to polish their skills or learn how to negotiate a purchase more effectively. Through accessible and entertaining writing that easily keeps the attention of readers, Gruenberg guides us through the often murky world of how information products are bought and sold. Library workers and salespeople will see themselves in many of the anecdotes interspersed throughout the book. Most readers will relate to stories such as the need for persistence when making a sale (i.e., “Why does my sales rep keep calling me?”), the importance of honesty during the buying process (if it is going to take a month to get a purchase approved, everyone’s life is easier if you are upfront about it), or librarians having difficulty managing their time in the exhibit hall at a conference.

Each chapter begins with song lyrics (from Gruenberg’s encyclopedic knowledge of popular music) to help frame

the topic. Each topic is covered in sufficient detail to allow the reader to take away many pearls of wisdom, but it is not presented with so much extraneous information as to make it difficult for the reader to determine what might be important to consider in their day-to-day practice. To summarize his arguments, Gruenberg ends each chapter with a “knowledge points” box that serves to reinforce content and provide easy access for future reference. The chapters themselves are presented in a logical order, starting with the relationship between the “information pro” and the “sales rep”, moving to the process of successful sales meeting, and concluding with advice on how to approach the end of a sale or purchase. All readers will find value throughout the book, regardless of their level of experience working with salespeople, although novice library workers will find more value in the first part of the book and more experienced workers will find the last part most applicable.

Compared with other resources for library workers on the subject of negotiation, *Buying and Selling Information* appears to be unique in its approach to the topic. Because Gruenberg is a salesperson, he spends an equal amount of time speaking to his fellow salespeople as he does to library workers. Because of this, each side gains a better understanding of the needs and expectations of the other. Most importantly, Gruenberg is very direct in his position that, while it takes two people to complete a sale, it is ultimately the library worker who will make the purchase and thus holds the power in the relationship.

As a profession, the idea that we hold the power is something we forget, often to our detriment. In my own experience working with salespeople, I have frequently found myself frustrated by a lack of progress or miscommunication. It was with this experience in mind that I began my reading of *Buying and Selling Information*. Much to my surprise, I saw opportunities to incorporate Gruenberg’s suggestions into my own work with vendors. While not always successful, I have found all of the advice to be helpful in some way when working with a salesperson, even if it is something as simple as taking 30 seconds to respond to an email or phone call to let them know when I have time to talk. *Buying and Selling Information* is a quick read that is full of practical advice for readers, and should be considered an important resource for anyone who wants to make the most of their collection budget.

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