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*Wednesday September 3, 2014*

## **Manipulative sales techniques**

**By Jim Taylor**

**I'm not particularly interested in vacuum cleaners. As a comedian at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival commented, "All they ever do is collect dust!"**

**But I am interested in the sales techniques used by their representatives. Last month, a Filter Queen sales rep demonstrated both his product and his process at our house.**

**"Filter Queen?" you may well wonder. "Are they still in business?"**

**Yes, they are. And not much has changed.**

**Thirty years ago, I got suckered into a similar demonstration. The representative showed me how his vacuum cleaner could suck up a one-inch steel ball. (Our vacuum cleaner would go it too, but the ball blew a hole in the back of the filter bag.) His sales pitch asked a series of questions, all carefully phrased so that I had to give answers favourable to his equipment.**

**That process hasn't changed, although the technology has. Instead of playing with steel balls, this representative demonstrated me how much dirt his vacuum cleaner could suck up from carpets and baseboards that had been vacuumed earlier that week.**

**Of course, without his special test filters, we couldn't duplicate his demonstrations with our existing built-in vacuum cleaner. Advantage, to him.**

### **Leading questions**

**His sales technique was painfully obvious – ask only questions to which the prospective victim can't help agreeing. If I get into the habit of agreeing, the reasoning goes, I will sell myself on his product.**

**Things haven't changed much. A friend described how he sold**

**encyclopedias door to door over 50 years ago to pay his university fees. Same process -- never give the victim an opportunity to say “No.”**

- **“Do you consider education important for your children?”**
- **“Wouldn’t you like to give them to have an advantage?”**
- **“Do you think knowledge is valuable?”**

**If he could get into the house, my friend said, he could evaluate the family’s interests, and focus his questions more effectively. “When they open the door, I move forward, just a fraction,” he explained. “Everyone has a comfort zone; instinctively, they back up a couple of inches. I move forward again. It takes only a few moves before I literally have a foot in the door.”**

**Recently, a total stranger confirmed that she had used exactly the same technique to sell make-up door to door.**

**Unfortunately for this particular Filter Queen rep, I recognize when I’m being manipulated. So I played along dutifully. I saved my “No” until he asked me to sign on the dotted line.**

## **Negative reactions**

**But I couldn’t help comparing his sales process with the way that most of the churches and charities I know operate. Instead of approaches that encourage people to say “Yes,” we typically try to make them feel guilty. Especially the most faithful members.**

- **You’re not doing/giving enough.**
- **You’re letting us down.**
- **We might have to shut down this program...**

**I have occasionally joked that my church should run a travel agency called “Guilt Trips.”**

**I wonder if the desire to avoid being manipulative pushes those of us in persuasive professions to go too far in the other direction. Labour disputes, for example. Lobbying for justice issues. Politics. Dealing with bureaucracies. Often, negotiations start with a frontal attack on the other position.**

**Perhaps, without copying door-to-door techniques, we could at least start by seeking common ground.**

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## **YOUR TURN**

**Last week's column about the origins of prejudicial words that we still use without thinking provoked lots of responses.**

**Ralph Milton wrote, "Stephen Greenblatt (who is Jewish) writes in his book 'Will and the World' that Shakespeare uses a number of anti-Jewish slurs in his plays, even though he probably never met a Jew. The Jews had been expelled en masse from Britain several hundred years (1290) before his time. But there are slurs like 'Am I a Jew that would do a thing like that?' throughout the plays. And the witches brew at the beginning of 'Macbeth' includes a 'liver of blaspheming Jew.' Greenblatt says Shakespeare used those phrases unthinkingly because they were part of ordinary everyday discourse. But the character of Shylock in 'Merchant of Venice,' while mean and evil, is highly developed, sympathetic and nuanced to the point that 'the Jew takes over the comedy in which he appears.' By contrast, other portrayals of Jews in English plays and literature at that time were uniformly one-dimensional caricatures of evil.**

**Isabel Gibson: "As a white woman, I was never subjected to racial epithets, but as a young woman, it annoyed me to bits that no one called a man of my age a 'boy,' yet I was routinely referred to as a 'girl' even in academic or professional settings. I challenged this usage (often rudely, I fear), to no evident effect.**

**"I no longer challenge rudely (at least not in this sphere!), but I continue a practice I adopted deliberately 40 years ago -- referring to any adult female as a woman. 'Be the change you want to see in the world' -- apparently Gandhi said that. He didn't say, 'And be prepared for a long wait.'"**

**Tom Watson mused, "The use of black is interesting. I recall a time in the late 1980s when another colleague and I were leading singing at a meeting of Hamilton Conference. At some point we used Lydia Good's song 'I'm a little black bug on the overhead projector.' One person objected to the song because of the negative inference of the word 'black.' Truth is that black is a colour, and the song about the little black bug does not cast it in negative terms at all. When I pointed that out, the objecting person apologized. Could it be the case that we sometimes hear what we want to hear?"**

**"As one who learned English as a second language," Nenke Yongkind noted, "I have worked to use it well. I miss using words that have become appropriated by groups to exclusive use e.g. gay. Gay is different from happy, and not everyone in the 'gay community' is gay. I also miss no longer being able to use 'niggardly.' According to Wikipedia, 'niggardly' is an adjective meaning stingy or miserly, cognate with 'niggling', meaning petty or unimportant, as in 'the niggling details'. And though it is not related to a racial slur, it is assumed to**

be so because of how it sounds.”

New reader Gordon Kerr clarified one reference: “‘Blackmail’ does not likely have any relation to people of colour. It was the Scots

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackmail> and those nasty reivers.”

Margaret Trapnell raised another no-no: “I remember being chastised when I once wrote a letter to The Observer about the use of the term ‘the rule of thumb’. In some of my reading I had learned that this could refer to the size of rod which could legally be used to beat your wife. I commented that we needed to think before using such terms. Some disagreed with what I said, saying that that wasn’t the true meaning, that I had over reacted to this ‘harmless’ term. Words can hurt, they can say what we really do feel, or just cause us to be careless -- speaking without thinking.”

Robert Caughell brought up another oft-challenged term: “Another saying is ‘calling a spade a spade’, which I think refers to a black man in an unkind manner. And, I admit saying the above on occasion without thinking. Having grown up in a small town in an era of nasty comments about Jews, Italians, etc., it is a hard habit to break. Living in Toronto opened my eyes to seeing all the different nationalities living together. I was humbled in my old attitudes toward them. And I changed the way that I looked at/thought about people. Learned bad habits can be unlearned.”

Yes, apparently “Christian” can be used pejoratively. Marilyn Stone wrote, “Regarding descriptive slang, my husband, Nelson, and I have occasionally used the phrase ‘Christianed them down’ for getting a reduced price, in honor of a quote from George Bernard Shaw: ‘The Jews generally give value. They make you pay; but they deliver the goods. In my experience the men who want something for nothing are invariably Christians.’

Ivan Gamble mentioned some other pitfalls: “While working as a Social Worker with a First Nations Colleague, I used the word ‘Squaw’. She told me it was a ‘derogatory term’, so I haven’t used it since. Secondly, I once visited a Madame Tussaud’s Wax Museum. One featured person was Louis Riel. During my school years, I was informed that he was ‘a half-breed’. But the wax figure was that of a cultured gentleman.”

And Steve Roney hoist me with my own petard: “Watch your language, Jim! Check the etymology of ‘denigrate.’ It means ‘to make black.’

Steve also argued, “There is no special list [of insults] for men, because MOST insults are, at least in practice, exclusive to men. It would be odd at least to hear a woman referred to as a blackguard, an asshole, a bastard, etc., although these words do not refer specifically to male anatomy. ‘Male

**chauvinist' or 'male chauvinist pig' are also sex-exclusive."**

**Margaret Tribe commented on last week's commentators: "I feel that the two camps of respondents are not really at opposite sides. The comments brought to mind one of my favourite modern hymns by Carolyn McDade (VU 282), which says in part, 'Stubborn is the grass sowing green wounded hills...', and then on through many of the atrocities that humans have wrought upon the earth -- slavery, oppression, intolerance, misuse of power, and more -- to '...there was a love,...'. The earth and nature are closer to the Creator than many of the people in the world, and so, yes, she heals herself. But that does not mean that it is okay to abuse her. In a similar way, it is not okay to think and do things that are wrong because we know that God loves and forgives unconditionally. With knowledge and understanding comes responsibility, and those who know and understand must be responsible. All of creation is connected, and we must consciously work together with God and Mother Earth to heal all wounds."**

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## **PSALM PARAPHRASES**

**Protests and demonstrations are not necessarily the only way to achieve change. This paraphrase of Psalm 149 suggests another way.**

**1 Angry words aren't enough.**

**New times call for new ways to praise God.**

**2 So dance. Sing.**

**Show you love God with your bodies as well as your words.**

**3 Use every means you have**

**--your music, your work, your social systems--  
to demonstrate your love for God.**

**4 God will not shun you because you show your emotions.**

**Love is not limited to important positions or plummy accents.**

**5 So join together with others.**

**Link your hands and link your lives.**

**Clap your hands and sing;**

**Raise the roof in praise of God.**

**6 Let the vigor of your voices overflow into your living.**

**Seize each challenge as an opportunity --**

**7 to promote justice among all the people,**

**to bring to judgment to those who cause pain and suffering.**

**8 Even ruthless dictators cannot resist the surge of popular pressure.**

**The longer they try to withstand the tide, the deeper they drown.**

## **9 That is how to give God praise. Let us praise God!**

**For paraphrases of most of the psalms used by the Revised common Lectionary, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publishing, [info@woodlake.com](mailto:info@woodlake.com).**

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### **YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...**

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For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [www.traditionaliconoclast.com](http://www.traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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### **TECHNICAL STUFF**

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca), or send a note to [sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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