



8 KEY DIFFERENCES IN SELLING TO WOMEN & MEN

Research Reveals How Gender
Influences B2B Buying Decisions

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INTRODUCTION

My husband and I are avid remodelers, which means I've spent a lot (A LOT) of time at Home Depot and Lowe's over the last 15 years. I remember clearly, during those Saturday afternoons walking up and down aisles looking for just the right tile, how much I preferred shopping at Lowe's to Home Depot. My husband thought I was crazy - they were essentially the same store to him! But I insisted they weren't. I wasn't sure what it was, but I knew I found the experience at Lowe's more enjoyable. Turns out, I wasn't crazy.

In the early 2000s, Lowe's made a concerted effort to attract more female shoppers with wider aisles, brighter lighting, more big-ticket items on lower shelves, cleaner bathrooms, and more how-to clinics. Why? Because research shows that women make 80% of all home improvement decisions.

"But that's the B2C space," you might be thinking. "In B2B sales, isn't it all the same? Buyers make decisions the same way - the price, the functionality, the value they get back, and the recommendations from their peers."

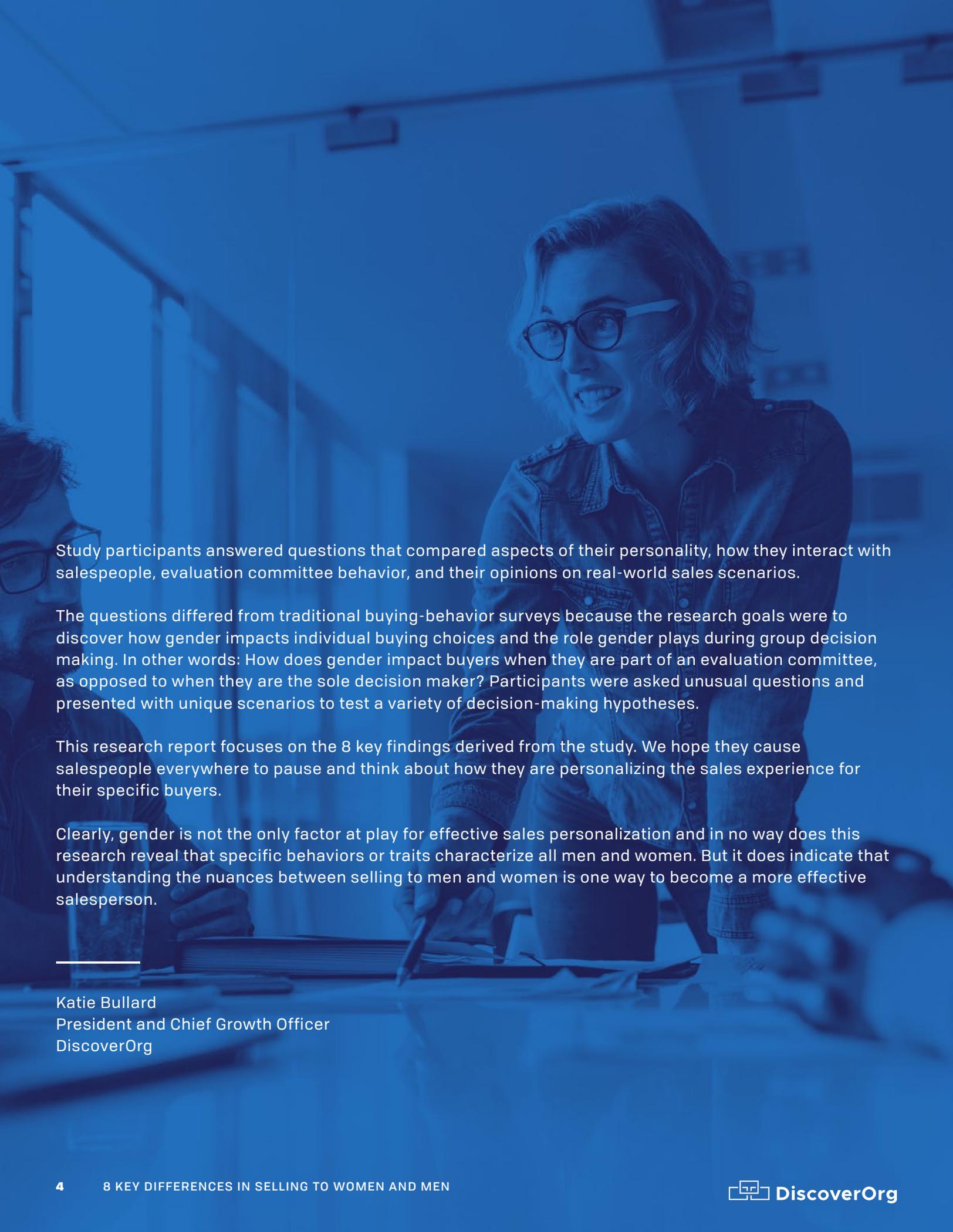
If that's the mentality you've adopted as a salesperson, it might be time to rethink.

In partnership with leading sales linguist Steve W. Martin, DiscoverOrg put this question to the test: Are there differences selling B2B products to women and men? If so, how should salespeople apply these findings?

To find the answer to these questions, over 350 business professionals who evaluate their companies' products and services took one of four different surveys over a nine-month period. The survey group was composed of 58% men and 42% women.



Katie Bullard
President and Chief Growth Officer
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Study participants answered questions that compared aspects of their personality, how they interact with salespeople, evaluation committee behavior, and their opinions on real-world sales scenarios.

The questions differed from traditional buying-behavior surveys because the research goals were to discover how gender impacts individual buying choices and the role gender plays during group decision making. In other words: How does gender impact buyers when they are part of an evaluation committee, as opposed to when they are the sole decision maker? Participants were asked unusual questions and presented with unique scenarios to test a variety of decision-making hypotheses.

This research report focuses on the 8 key findings derived from the study. We hope they cause salespeople everywhere to pause and think about how they are personalizing the sales experience for their specific buyers.

Clearly, gender is not the only factor at play for effective sales personalization and in no way does this research reveal that specific behaviors or traits characterize all men and women. But it does indicate that understanding the nuances between selling to men and women is one way to become a more effective salesperson.

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FINDING 1

Women Are More Likely to Have a Negative Perception of Salespeople - And Think That Salespeople Underestimate Them

The study participants were asked to complete word associations to understand their attitudes toward salespeople in general. The written answers were then categorized as having a positive connotation, a negative connotation, or a neutral connotation that was neither bad nor good.

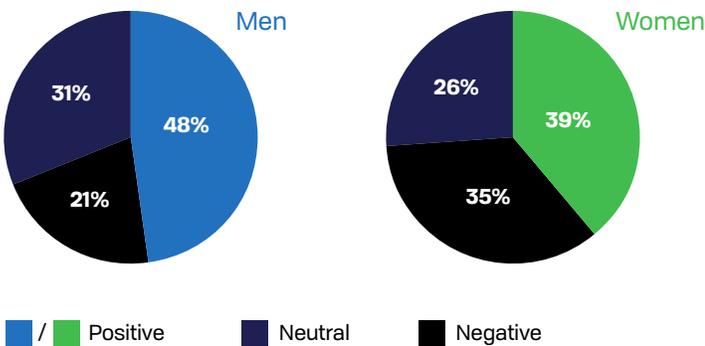
In general, men have a more positive perception of salespeople. For example, 48% of men had a positive association with the term "salespeople," while 39% of women had a positive association with the term. Conversely, 35% of women had a negative association of the word, versus only 21% for men.

The top three words men associated with "salesperson" were "money," "persuasive," and "tactics." The top word women associated with "salesperson" was "aggressive," which is negative, followed by "persuasive" and "money."

TWO-SENTENCE TAKEAWAY

No one likes to be underestimated - but 2/3 of women think that, as buyers, they often are. Check assumptions at the door, ask a few questions to gauge your audience's understanding of your product, and respond accordingly.

"Salesperson" Word Association



Top 3 Words That's Associate With "Salesperson"	
MEN	WOMEN
Money	Aggressive
Persuasive	Persuasive
Tactics	Money

What's The Bigger Mistake To Make?

Assuming the buyer knows less than they do



Assuming the buyer knows more than they do



FINDING 2

Women Are More Likely to Avoid Conflict and Prefer to Work with a Salesperson Who Makes Them Feel Comfortable

The selling style you use with a particular client will determine whether or not you win the business. With this in mind, what selling style do men and women buyers prefer?

There were significant differences between the top-ranked choices of men and women: 45% of men preferred a salesperson who listens, understands, and then matches the solution to the customer's problem - compared to 33% of women.

Thirty-eight percent of women, compared to 24% of men, preferred a salesperson who makes them feel comfortable and earns their long-term business.

A nearly identical amount of men (30%) and women (29%) preferred a salesperson who challenges their thoughts and perceptions and then prescribes a solution that they may not have thought of or didn't know about.

I prefer a salesperson who listens, understands, and then matches their solution to solve my specific problem



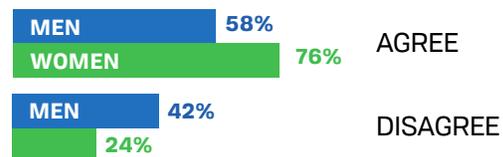
I prefer a salesperson who challenges my thoughts, perceptions, and then prescribes a solution that I may not have thought of or didn't know about



I prefer a salesperson who earns my trust by making me feel comfortable that they will take care of my long term needs



I tend to avoid conflict as much as I can



An interesting explanation for selling style preferences is based on the buyer's comfort with conflict, as shown in the figure above.

Seventy-six percent of women agreed with the statement "I tend to avoid conflict as much as I can." These buyers want to feel comfortable with the salesperson they are working with. Men and women who were more comfortable with conflict were more likely to prefer the salesperson who challenged their thoughts and perceptions.

TWO-SENTENCE TAKEAWAY

There is an equilibrium point where the buyer respects the salesperson's conviction and is not offended by their persistence, which enables the relationship to develop. While most buyers desire to avoid conflict, salespeople may act in a way the buyer considers too pushy (approaching conflict), or overcompensate by being too friendly.

FINDING 3

Men are More Likely to Pick up a Cold Call

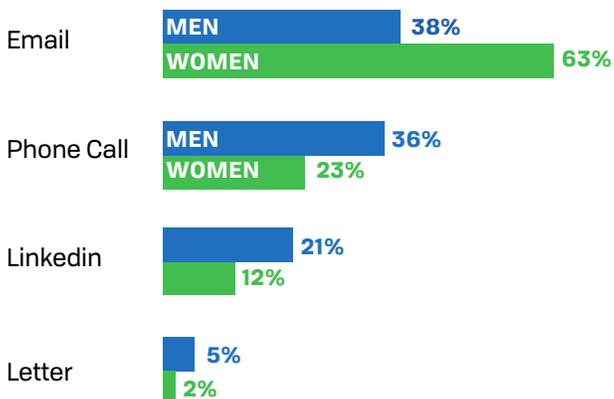
Men and women both prefer email as their primary contact method, as shown below. Nearly 2/3 of women selected email as the definitive favorite outreach channel. Men are 50% more likely to take a salesperson's phone call, while less than one of four women prefer them.

Salespeople who relentlessly cold call female prospective buyers are making a mistake. Women are 5x more likely to agree to a meeting from an email than a LinkedIn message - and 3x more likely to respond to an email than a phone call. It's also interesting to note that men are 75% more likely to respond to a LinkedIn message than women.

TWO-SENTENCE TAKEAWAY

A direct email or phone call is inherently more personal and strongly preferred over a less personal medium. Regardless of gender, email is king.

Since salespeople are trying to develop a relationship with you all the time, what is the best way to secure an initial meeting?



FINDING 4

Women Are Less Likely to Confront You When They Disagree

The prospective customer develops a pattern of behavior for dealing with salespeople after hundreds of interactions. Unfortunately, it is usually based upon negative experiences.

One of the most prevalent coping mechanisms used by buyers during meetings with salespeople is silence. Nearly 1 in 2 women buyers, (versus 1 in 3 men), responded that they would remain silent instead of confronting a salesperson or asking them to explain something the buyer disagreed with.

Successful salespeople understand the need to uncover and address the hidden biases and silent objections that are always in the back of the buyer's mind.

TWO-SENTENCE TAKEAWAY

Silence is not golden. If you're not getting vocal objections, ask more questions and drill down to see what the buyer really thinks.

If a salesperson said something you disagreed with during a sales call, would you:

Most likely remain silent because it isn't worth the time to argue



Most likely ask the salesperson to explain why he believes what he said



Most likely confront the salesperson as to why you disagree



FINDING 5

Men Are More Likely to Disrupt an Evaluation Committee's Decision-Making Process

In addition to sales-style preferences based on years of business interactions, men and women buyers have different perceptions about decision-making committees as well. In general, women believe that committees are more effective and will take a more active role on them.

Study participants were asked if the decisions made in a committee were right more or less than 50% of the time. The answers men and women gave were stark opposites.

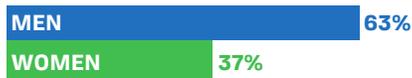
The study results show gender influences the dynamics of decision-making committees at work.

In the scenario shown below, men identified themselves as more politically oriented and more likely to take an active role in ensuring their best interest is protected. Once again, more men (64%) selected self-centered answers, using political skills to ensure the decision they wanted was selected, wanting the committee to make a decision that made their role easier, upset with members who promoted the wrong decision, and seeking to ensure their preferred decision was selected no matter what.

Women were more likely to take an approach that benefited the group as a whole: maintaining a positive attitude and participating in the decision-making process, and listening to the recommendations of senior committee members.

Perceptions of decision-making committee effectiveness at work:

Committee decisions are right more than 50% of the time



Committee decisions are right less than 50% of the time



TWO-SENTENCE TAKEAWAY

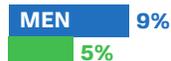
Whenever a company makes a purchase decision that involves a team of people, self-interests, politics, and group dynamics will influence the final decision. Women are more likely to put politics aside, maintain a positive attitude, and consider the recommendations of experienced committee members.

Let's say you are on a decision-making committee at work. The decision the committee makes will significantly impact how you perform your role, making it much easier. What best describes how you would behave?

I would use my political skills to make sure the decision I wanted was selected



I would be upset with the individuals on the committee who were promoting a decision that impacted me negatively



I would put my personal situation aside and make sure the decision made was best for the company



I would seek to make sure my preferred outcome was selected no matter what



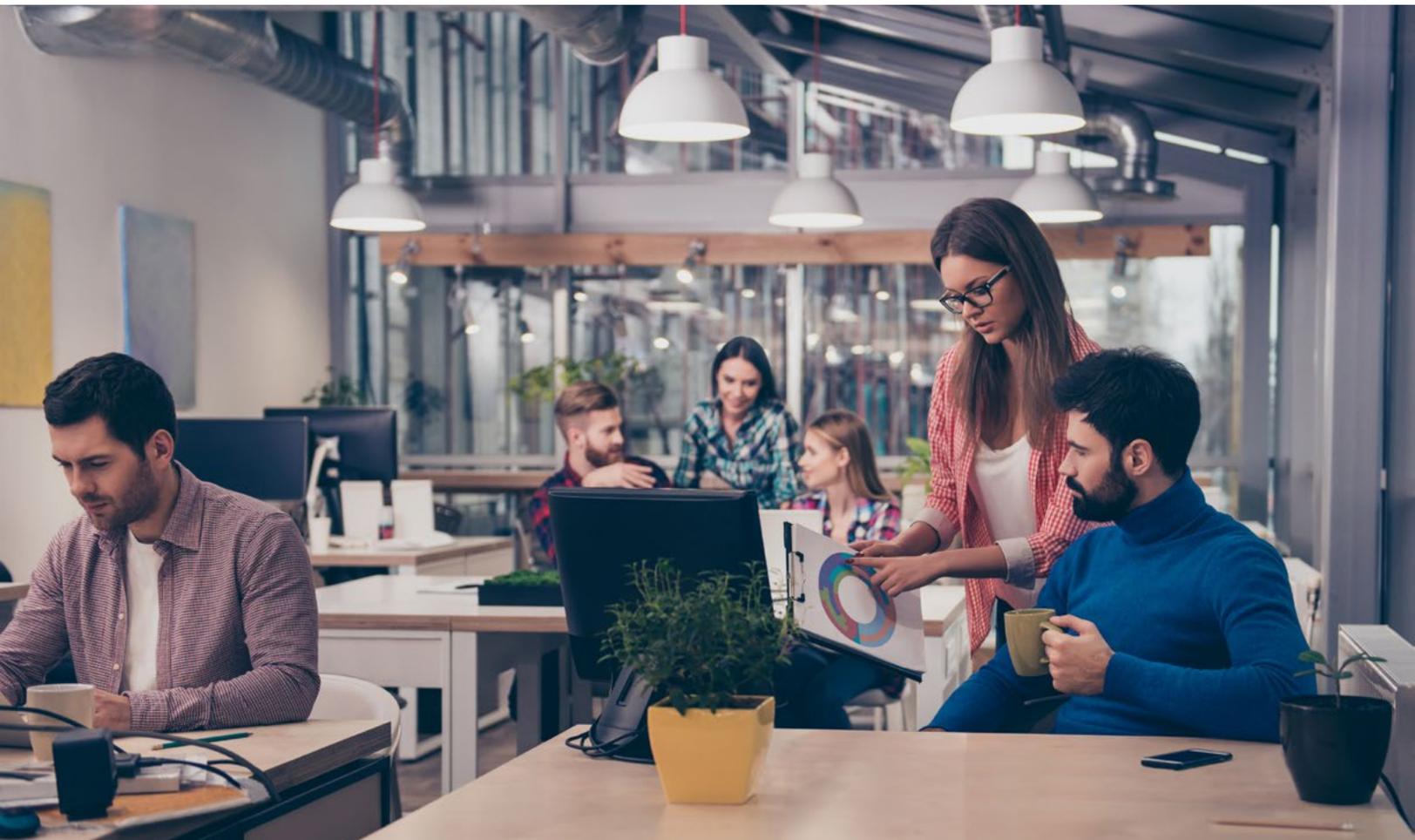
I would maintain a positive outlook and participate in the decision making process



I would listen to the recommendations of the more senior committee members



I would want the committee to make the decision that made performing my role easier



Now let's examine how gender influences vendor evaluation committee behavior to see if the group decision-making pattern continues. Study participants were asked to respond to the following scenario:

Let's say you are part of an evaluation committee that is selecting between vendors for a \$2,500,000 purchase that will enable a very important company initiative. There are six different members on the committee from across different departments of the company. Therefore, this is a very political decision as committee members have vastly different points on which a vendor should be selected. Which role do you think you would take if you were on this evaluation committee?

I would solely operate under the mindset that the solution selected has to be the best one for the company, regardless of politics



I would seek to make sure the preferred vendor was selected no matter what



I would want to select the product that provided me with the most marketable skill



I would try to remain very positive and stay out of the committee's politics



I would tend to follow the lead of the more experienced committee members



I wouldn't broadcast my intentions, but instead use my political skills to gain power



I might oppose a particular vendor because my arch-rival (a coworker whom I don't like or am competing against for a promotion) Wanted to select that vendor



Again, men were more politically oriented and sought to take an active role to ensure their best interest was protected. More men than women (39% vs. 15%) selected self-centered responses. The self-centered responses included seeking to ensure their preferred vendor was selected no matter what, picking the vendor that provided them with the most marketable skill, using their political skills to gain power, and opposing a vendor because an archrival coworker supported that vendor.



FINDING 6

Women are More Likely to Select Unknown Vendors Whose Product Functionality is Superior

Do men and women tend to select different vendors? Study participants were asked to select from three different products to determine how price and functionality impact their decisions.

Just 9% of women, compared to 34% of men, selected the most expensive product from the largest, best-known industry leader. Forty-five percent of both women and men selected the slightly cheaper and more functional product, from a smaller, lesser-known company. The biggest gender disparity is seen in the example of buying from an unknown company with the cheapest, most functional product: It was selected by 46% of women, versus 21% of men.

TWO-SENTENCE TAKEAWAY

Women tended to be more interested in value than prestige, and they are more willing to take a chance if they think they're getting a bargain. You should know going into the conversation that men are more risk-averse, especially when it comes to lesser-known companies.

Let's say you are making a product selection from three competing companies. Which one would you pick?

The product that costs \$50,000 from the largest best-known company that is the well-respected industry leader



The product that costs \$40,000 from the relatively unknown company that has 15% more functionality than the industry leader



The product that costs \$45,000 from the smaller lesser-known company that has 10% more functionality than the industry leader



FINDING 7

Women Expect a Greater Pricing Discount

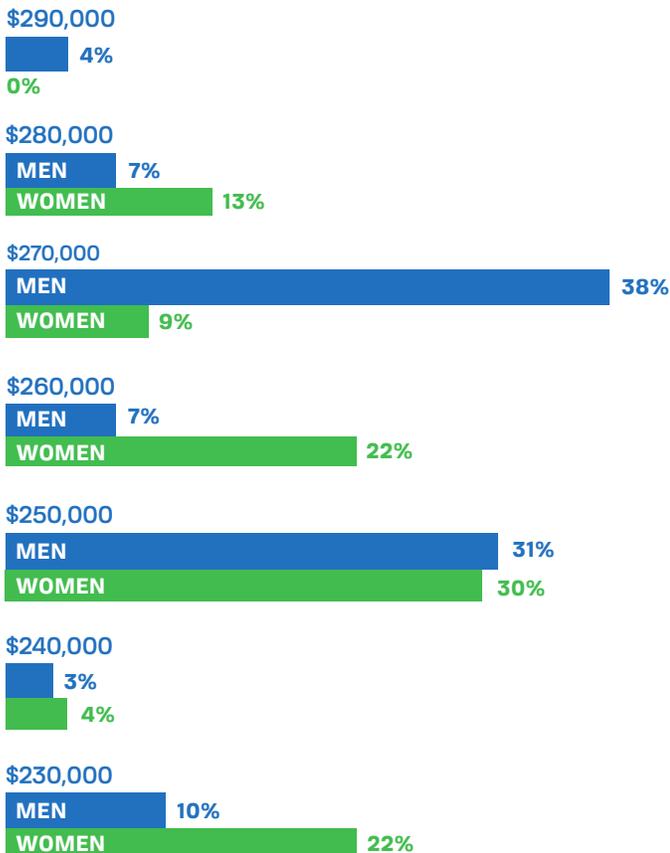
Price plays an important role in every sales cycle. Since it is a frequent topic during customer conversations, salespeople can become fixated on the price of their product and believe they have to be the lowest. However, the importance of price is different for various buyers.

Men expect to pay more and women want to pay less. When presented with a scenario where the list price of a technology purchase was \$300,000, 49% of men expected to pay \$270,000 or more compared to only 22% of women. And 38% of men and 52% of women expected to pay \$260,000 to \$250,000. Only 13% of men compared to 26% of women expected to pay \$240,000 or less.

TWO-SENTENCE TAKEAWAY

Deciding on how much to discount your product can be a tricky proposition because buyers have different sensitivities about the price they are willing to pay. Take the composition of the evaluation team into account, because gender may impact their perception of price.

Let's say you are in charge of negotiating an important \$300,000 technology purchase that will enable a business initiative that will save your company \$1 million dollars. Realistically, what price do you expect to pay after negotiations?



FINDING 8

Women Are More Likely Than Men to Self-Rate Their Negotiation Skills as Poor

Most salespeople assume the customer they are negotiating with has the advantage. After all, the customer has leverage because they can always buy a competitor's product - or not buy anything at all.

In reality, only 22% of women and 28% of men consider themselves good at negotiating with vendors and their salespeople. More women (17%) than men (7%) think they're poor negotiators, while approximately two-thirds of both genders consider themselves average.

How good do you think you are at negotiating with vendors and their salespeople?

Good



Average



Poor



TWO-SENTENCE TAKEAWAY

While it's a good idea to prepare as if the person you'll be negotiating with is an experienced expert, the reality is that only about one in four buyers consider themselves to be good negotiators. Therefore, don't always assume the buyer has better skills and more knowledge, because their negotiation strategy is based on the illusion of control.



CONCLUSION

Most salespeople see gender as a wildcard in the buying process. They understand that the sales process may be affected by a buyer's past experiences with salespeople.

Each buyer's experience is unique, but as this study demonstrates, gender differences don't create an unknowable position. These buyer behaviours reveal a larger pattern of responses, fears, desires, and impulses that are part of a common human experience. Understanding these behaviors offers buyers and sellers a transparent sales journey, an equitable outcome, and a more positive relationship - setting up both parties for growth.



STEVE W. MARTIN

Steve W. Martin is the foremost expert on "sales linguistics," the study of how customers use language during the complex decision-making process. His "Heavy Hitter" book series on the human nature of complex sales has helped over 150,000 salespeople become top revenue producers. His latest book is titled Heavy Hitter I.T. Sales Strategy: Competitive Insights from Interviews with 1,000+ Key Information Technology Decision Makers and Top Technology Salespeople. Steve is a regular contributor to the Harvard Business Review and teaches at the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business MBA Program. You can learn more about Steve at www.stevemartin.com.



KATIE BULLARD

DiscoverOrg President Katie Bullard has 15 years of experience in high-growth, PE-backed and public technology and data businesses. Before joining DiscoverOrg in 2016, she held senior leadership roles at D&B Hoover's, Accruent, and Mitratesh. She holds a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Virginia, where she graduated with high honors. Katie has been named as a 2018 Top 20 Women to Watch in business by SLMA, and her marketing team earned the 2017 Marketing Team of the Year award from the Software and Information Industry Association. Katie also serves on the boards of the Technology Association of Oregon and the Sales Benchmark Index.