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## **The Neuroscience of the Car Buying Process:**

*Hooked or Hijacked: How Much Does the Unconscious have to do with Car Buying?*

**PITTSBURGH, PA- Women-Drivers.com** As a living, breathing, reactive human being, everyone has, at some point, experienced the phenomenon of fight, flight or freeze; of entering a situation and muscling through or retreating and running away. Little things that come up in everyone's daily life might evoke these reactions, but larger events and decisions, such as purchasing a vehicle, may cause a more complex response. This article informs a car buyer about how the unconscious mind can play tricks and take them away from rational decision making to emotional and reactive choices that are not in his or her best interest. Stated another way, a buyer must avoid being "hijacked" by irrational thoughts or reactions that are inconsistent with the ultimate goal of purchasing the best vehicle at the best price. Consumers who go into the car buying experience open minded, aware of potential pitfalls and prepared to stay real and in the moment, will keep the upper hand, negotiate soundly, keep their eyes and minds on the objective, and end up with a positive result. They will walk away satisfied and confident.

### **Brain Makeup and Hard Wiring**

Dr. Barbara Schwarck, PCC, of Clear Intentions International®, a company that provides break-through executive Neuro-Emotional Coaching, identifies three fundamental parts of the brain involved in decision making. The neocortex, as the smart and conscience part of the brain, produces language, reason, and anything having to do with analysis. The limbic brain stores memories and our reactions to certain situations and experiences – it's the part of the brain that records and produces emotion. The reptilian or the survival part gets activated when it perceives that survival is at stake. It is unconscious and can be quite irrational, leading one to jump to conclusions or even to take flight by giving up and walking away.

"When confronted with a situation, the human brain, whether consciously or not, retrieves memories and experiences that elicit reactions based on those past recollections," explains Dr. Schwarck. "Take, for example, buying a car. If your previous experience was favorable, you are likely to walk into your next car purchase positively and confident. If, however, your previous experience was unsatisfactory, you are likely to be defensive, hesitant or guarded." And, even one who has never bought a car may have pre-conceived notions and approach the experience influenced by friends, family members or even simply TV. This is the limbic brain at work being reactive, instead of rational; being experiential and not reality-based.

### **You Never Get a Second Chance to Make a First Impression**

A perfect example of the limbic brain at work happens to *every* person repeatedly and, without a conscious thought, occurs the very moment a consumer walks into the dealership. It is well-recognized that within the first few seconds of meeting a new person, a person forms an immediate impression that is not necessarily based on facts, but rather on intuition and personal history. This means, in the context of any purchase

and sales interaction, that when a buyer doesn't know the salesperson – as in most cases assumptions tend to be made based on initial reactions and interactions from both persons. From the way a person looks to the way they dress, judgments tend to be made before words are ever exchanged. Meeting for the first time, people make immediate impressions: good, bad or neutral. And, it's all based on our memories and associations, usually having little to do with that person specifically.

The buyer may, because of unconscious associations, immediately not like a particular salesperson. Perhaps the salesperson resembles a one-time friend with whom the relationship soured. Or, the customer may be turned off because the salesperson's shirt is not tucked in. In this case, the buyer may make a negative association that the salesperson is sloppy and careless, even if the shirt is not tucked in because of a stain or because the salesperson is simply unaware.

In the same context, purchasers should be well aware that a salesperson will size them up and, right or wrong, make assumptions. Perhaps the salesperson assumes that because a woman walks in with a ring on her left finger, she is married, even going so far to as assume that her husband will be joining her shortly. Or, the salesperson may assume that a single male may be looking for a sports car, when in reality, he is a single father of three and needs a minivan or SUV.

In this situation, a buyer's best defense is a good offense, which means having the awareness that the salesperson may unwittingly be getting the sale off track from the start, not intentionally, but because of assumptions made by either. A buyer should be prepared to put assumptions or prejudices aside and give the interaction a chance to work. One might think of it this way: a buyer doesn't want assumptions made about his or economic status, intelligence or negotiation skills. Why shouldn't a salesperson receive that same regard?

There is significant danger when taking freedoms and making assumptions that can often lead to the patron being hijacked and led off track from the car-purchase objective. What this teaches the buyer is to be clear with the salesperson. Forestall hijacking by honest and direct dealings, leaving assumptions and conclusions behind.

### **How Does A Buyer Overcome These Self-Created Triggers?**

There are many ways in which buyers can help themselves by thinking through the car-buying experience even before walking into the dealership. Of course, one will research the car and the dealership, but it's the unconscious that is going to make the ultimate difference. Here are a few guidelines to keep your brain "in the moment" and rational when buying a car:

1. Consumer should shop only when they are feeling good. Decisions and important interactions will be least successful if the buyer is tired, hungry or generally not feeling well. It's much easier to hijack someone who is in a weakened physical or emotional state. Hunger, exhaustion and stress at the time of negotiation are not precursors to a favorable outcome. On the other hand, if one is healthy, rested, balanced and comfortable, that positive mood is likely to be reflected in a more positive outcome.
2. The most effective way to prevent being hijacked at the dealership, or at any point in life, is to take notice and be aware of the interactions that are taking place. Buyers should assess whether they are making unintentional or unwarranted judgments. Then, the consumer, having recognized what assumptions may have been made, should reassess the situation and make a conscious effort to identify these thoughts and emotional responses and see what is really going on.

3. The three most common reactions to a stressful situation are fight (negotiate from a point of negativity and fail to reach a common ground) or flight (give up, walk away and fail to reach a common ground). But, there is a third option: putting a temporary freeze on the situation works as well. A purchaser who finds him or herself stuck, confused or feeling overwhelmed, may simply walk away and take a break, maybe finding someone else to interact with. Then, the buyer may return to the purchase situation renewed, refreshed and with a clear mind. Ultimate agreement now becomes much more likely.

“Indecisiveness, lack of or over confidence, frustration or anxiety can all impact a buying decision,” says Dr. Schwarck. In short, the objective in going into any car buying interaction is to have a positive attitude and to keep the purchasing goals at the forefront of consciousness. Buyers who can accomplish that will not be taken out of their comfort zone and will maintain control of the situation. The consumer must try to avoid having preconceived notions, carefully assess the sales pitch and avoid judging based on prior experiences. This is how to maximize effective results.

Outlined below is a chart demonstrating the four (4) common scenarios when purchasing a vehicle.

Where Flight or Fight Show Up	Scenario	Probable Outcome
	1. The buyer likes and trusts the salesperson and likes the vehicle.	Most likely, the buyer will purchase the vehicle at this dealership and return as a loyal customer.
	2. The buyer likes and trusts the salesperson but is unsure of the car.	The buyer may stay and purchase a vehicle from the salesperson based on the connection that they made. The buyer, though tending to feel bad about the amount of time the salesperson has spent; most likely will opt to look elsewhere at other brands and dealerships, hoping for a similar sales experience.
	3. The buyer does not like or trust the salesperson and is unsure of the vehicle.	Had the salesperson and buyer connected there was a chance to put the buyer in a different vehicle, however, with no connection to the salesperson or vehicle, this will almost always result in no sale and the customer leaving and not returning to this dealer.
	4. The buyer does not like or trust the salesperson, but loves the car.	If the salesperson had connected with the buyer, the sale would have been made, but, a buyer who does not like or trust a salesperson will almost always go to another dealership offering the same vehicle and look for the connection with the other salesperson.

### **Cultivating Trust and Connection – The Golden Nugget**

Buying a car is much more complicated than research, price and comparison. A human connection has to be made for the process to work effectively and to a mutually satisfactory end. When one is ready to buy a car and meets the salesperson for the first time, the best thing to do is take a quick assessment. Consumers must take a moment to see whether they can relate to the salesperson, putting aside preconceived notions and stereotypes. A buyer must have an open mind and make a fair determination of whether this is someone to work with. Removal of prejudices that are engrained from past experiences is the very first step to a good outcome.

### ***Trust + Listening + Respect + Knowledge + Price + No Pressure = Satisfied Car Buyer***

How is this equation achieved? Through mutuality. How do the buyer and salesperson achieve mutuality? By connecting on a conscious and unconscious level.

How do they connect? They listen to each other and, hearing what is said, respond to the issues in front of them that are important to the other. They try to understand each other's agenda. They do not make judgments based on appearance or accents or other outward indications. As in any negotiation, they head for a win/win situation. They keep open minds. They do not make assumptions or play games. They leave prior negative feelings and interactions behind.

What happens when they fail to connect? The situation will most likely end poorly and with no sale.

Bear in mind Dr. Schwarck's teaching: the limbic system, the one that jumps to conclusions and makes snap judgments, likes to take over, particularly in stressful situations. Instead, a buyer must use the neocortex to be cognizant, aware and thoughtful. Prior experiences should not be allowed to foil the objective.

A purchaser must go into the car buying experience with the perspective that both parties want to make a satisfactory deal. And, this can be achieved as long as a true connection is made. According to Dr. Brené Brown, Researcher and Storyteller, "Connection is the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard and valued, when they can give and receive without judgment."

When the salesperson greets a buyer, the buyer should sense that the salesperson can be trusted and is prepared to listen. When both the consumer and seller come to the table with respect, and knowledge is shared with no pressure, the situation will be a success. Consumers will get what they want: a good experience and a new set of keys. And sales personnel will get what they want: the satisfaction of making a sale and potentially winning a customer for a long time.

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