



THE BETTER BUYER BY

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In some companies, buyers are utilized primarily as clerks, filling requests and placing purchase orders based upon the directions of requisitioners. In other organizations, the buyer role is more strategic and, analytical, requiring the communication skills befitting a manager or coach. In such organizations buyers:

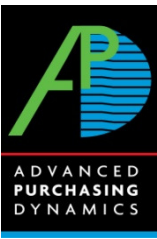
- Understand the key objectives of their company and the profiles of the commodities they are buying; they use these to develop commodity vision, strategies and action plans that support company objectives.
- Perform financial analyses of commodity cost drivers, total acquisition costs on a long-term basis, factoring in inflation, currency fluctuation and commodity pricing forecasts.
- Manage the overall relationships between their company and their suppliers, creating long-term relationships that benefit both, while resolving complicated issues that arise from conflicting interests and performance issues.

How can we identify the buyers with the skills and abilities that these more forward-looking organizations require? In short, how do we find the Better Buyer?

Many organizations have translated the competencies to be a Better Buyer into their own terms and hope that by communicating these requirements to hiring managers and interviewers, the interviewing process alone will identify the Better Buyers.

However, the Better Buyer is composed of key ingredients blended together in the right proportions like an award-winning recipe. These elements of success are like the nutrients we need for great physical well being. Proportions are crucial because even crucial vitamins and minerals can become health hazards if taken in extreme doses or not combined properly with others. For some nutrients and behaviors a little goes a long way. Will the interview alone identify whether a candidate has enough but not too much of each ingredient? **Research clearly shows that interviews do not produce great selection results.** An overriding factor in hiring mistakes is the inability to describe crucial job competencies in a measurable form. We address this with our instrument which assesses the building blocks of all performance.

We have had significant success using a more scientific approach for identifying the Better Buyer through a comprehensive approach that incorporates looking for the Better Buyer through a new lens, the leading behavioral technology instrument, *The Attentional & Interpersonal Style* (TAIS) inventory. TAIS inventory assesses the building blocks (or nutrients) of performance, most notably the different ways of paying attention which are required for top performance in all arenas. Because hiring is inherently risky business (predicting the future), we find real value in triangulating interviews and job performance with TAIS inventory so that each prong of the triangle informs the others. When you find congruency among the various inputs, you are more certain of the skills you are hiring.



Individuals complete a TAIS assessment on-line in 30 minutes.¹ Based upon how the individual answers 144 questions, a personal inventory is developed covering the following dimensions:

- **Attentional Variables**
 - Awareness
 - External Distractibility
 - Internal Distractibility
 - Analytical/Conceptual
 - Action/Focused
 - Reduced Flexibility
- **Control or Moderator Variables**
 - Information Processing
 - Orientation Toward Rules and Risk
 - Self-Confident
 - Self-Critical
 - Focused over Time
 - Performance under Pressure
- **Interpersonal Characteristics**
 - Control
 - Physically Competitive
 - Decision-Making Style
 - Extroversion
 - Introversion
 - Expression of Ideas/Intellectually Competitive
 - Expression of Criticism and Anger
 - Expression of Support and Affection

Using these TAIS inventory dimensions, we have identified the recipe for the Better Buyer. For example: Extroversion in the Better Buyer is good but, how much extroversion is enough? Too much? Or too little?

How did we do this? APD and Dr. Pratt have been utilizing TAIS inventories for the screening of buyers and purchasing managers since 2004 [Pratt has used this instrument with many other positions for over 30 years]. We then went through the entire population of buyers, identified the Better Buyers and created a Better Buyer composite profile. Better Buyers were identified as follows:

1. Buyers who were identified by their management as excellent performers.
2. Buyers who were recognized by their management as excellent performers based upon promotions they received.

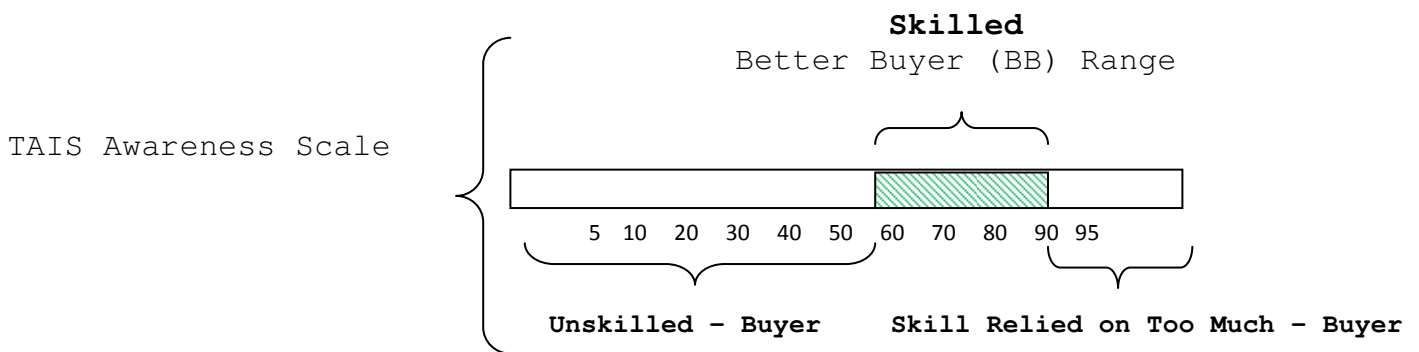
¹ Technical note: a psychological inventory is, in reality, just a structured interview *with known decision* rules. This objectivity enables the APA (American Psychological Association) to find that they are more valid than interviews per se.



What intelligence does such a composite provide us? Note that for each style or scale on the inventory there are descriptions of the behaviors that indicate too little of the skill or style, the most effective amount, and overuse of the skill. We are going to share with you some of what we have found on key scales. We have written these from the perspective of the supplier working with the buyer.²

ATTENTIONAL PROCESSES: Awareness, “Street Sense”

Awareness helps Better Buyers read their environment, adjust to unspoken or nonverbal signals given to them in real time -- on the fly, so to speak.



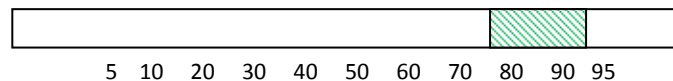
Unskilled	Skilled	Skill Relied On Too Much
Buyer does not notice when others are uncomfortable. Oblivious to unspoken signals. Rarely detects what is going on in supplier organizations or his or hers unless you spell it out.	BB recognizes needs of others often before they do. Knows what is going on in the environment. Uncanny sense of who is going to do what before it happens. Knows when to talk and when to not interrupt, who are the real players in organizations. Has keen political acumen.	Buyer has trouble concentrating in a crowd. Seems too tuned into the hectic, loses self in the spirit of the moment and has to retract what s/he has said s/he will do.

² Note: in other work by Enhanced Performance Systems, Dr. Pratt’s parent company, the ideal profile for a given position is called a Mission Profile. This term is being used most notably in the US Army’s work on developing leaders and teams among its elite forces. For example, a mission might require a helicopter pilot to work in Afghanistan under cover of dark, be able to shoot enemies and within a split second refocus on finding the right landing spot to recover his troops, and then make a safe escape. The TAIS-trained professionals use a combination of statistical data (when there are exemplars for such positions) and expert judgment to make this composite or Mission Profile. In all our work, statistical tendencies of exemplars have matched what those who know the demands of the position say is required to be a top performer.



ATTENTIONAL PROCESSES: Conceptual/Analytical

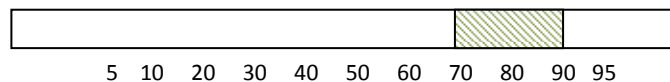
Conceptual or analytical style of attending helps Better Buyers keep up with the complexity of their companies' and suppliers' worlds. It enables them to understand how their commodity strategies can be utilized to meet the objectives of their companies.



Unskilled	Skilled	Overused Skill
Buyer has to have things explained repeatedly. Does not understand the complexities of the business so cannot help supplier as strategic partner. Fails to make connections between parts of business and other factors.	BB thinks ahead with and for supplier. Anticipates trends and consequences. Helps supplier think through its moves when supplier seems reactive or short-sighted. Shows new angles to buyer-supplier business interactions. Curiosity keeps BB interested in life and the business.	Buyer analyzes things so much that nothing gets done or things get too complicated. So ivory tower that reality is lost in planning. Expects tasks to be completed too soon.

Selected Key Interpersonal Competencies

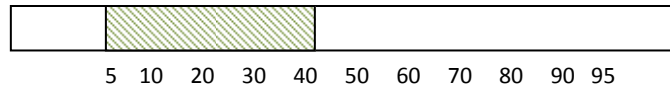
Control/Taking Charge



Too little tendency	Skilled	Overused Skill
Little ambition for him/herself or for supplier. Buyer sits back to let others get things done, expects them to just happen. Will not "push" others (gently or not).	BB takes initiative to get things rolling and sees that they keep going even pushing others when necessary. Delegates well but targets people with comparable dedication and gives them proper direction. Looks for opportunities to jump ahead.	Overly controlling buyers begin to tell suppliers how to run their business, often fighting them at every turn. It is a bad sign when buyer tries to do everything him/herself, not trusting anyone, getting too strung out to concentrate on key items.

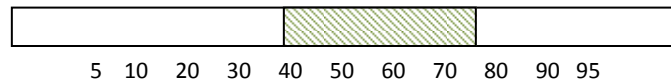


Decision Making Style
(low score = quick; high score = cautious)



Too Quick	Just Right	Too Slow
Too impatient buyer pushes too much or at wrong time. Does not recognize the legitimacy of supplier internal cycles. Often says we can do something major before adequate study.	BB can get an answer or decision in time for suppliers to seize opportunities. Knows when to stop and check things and when to push on even though not all the information is available. BB is willing to make a decision and adjust as necessary.	Buyer hesitates to do anything without complete information. Worries even minor facets of contract to death. The effect is to take the steam out of any momentum. Slow decisions make supplier unable to deliver to his or her organization what is needed in timely manner.

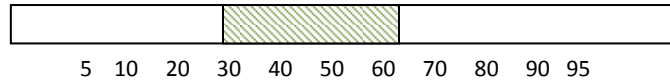
Expression of Thought and Ideas



Unskilled	Skilled	Overused Skill
Disinterested in technical side of the business. Does not explain new information to you. Listens so passively you can't tell if s/he comprehends your message. Does not lead conversations to get needed information from top-level people. Afraid to ask questions, risk appearing ignorant.	Listens as much as s/he talks. Listens first. Handles complex information well and processes it and explains it to you in time frame you have. Asks the right questions at right time to gain "need-to-know" information. Can separate rational concerns from emotional issues when needed.	Talks incessantly, interrupts others frequently. Shuts down discussion. Answers simple questions with more than you want to or need to know about the topic. Can get too caught up in the need to understand everything rationally and not realize how people are connecting on other levels.



Expression of Criticism/Anger

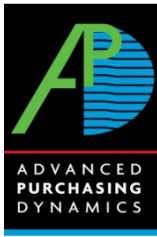


Unskilled	Skilled	Overused Skill
<p>Avoids any disagreement. Says yes just to avoid any unpleasantness and thus becomes disingenuous. People say yes to requests from buyer just to get rid of him/her yet rarely feel there will be any negative consequences if they fail to follow through.</p>	<p>Straight shooter. Has the courage to tell you when you are taking a wrong turn. Takes corrective action. Makes people in the system feel responsible for completing related tasks as promised or delegated.</p>	<p>Has a temper and loses perspective over many minor problems. Is so negative that many people avoid him or her and thus s/he does not get access to key information. Often argues instead of listening.</p>

Utilizing TAIS to Improve Your Team's Results

TAIS can be utilized to provide a coordinated return on your talent management dollar:

- Used as a hiring screening tool TAIS can be the key component in identifying the Better Buyer, avoiding costly hiring mistakes. This can be done with the APD Better Buyer Profile or with a customized profile that is developed to capture the Better Buyer in your organization.



- TAIS can be utilized with your existing team to enhance performance feedback and improve performance:
 - Provides the basis for more concrete performance feedback
 - Provides compensation strategies when ratings are in the “Unskilled” or “Relied on Too Much” ranges.
 - Serves as the basis for group and individual training and development.

APD and Robin Pratt can assist you by:

- Developing a strategic recruitment program designed to help you identify and hire Better Buyers.
- Developing a comprehensive program to assess, train and team-build your organization to deliver superior results.

We find that organizations that use any of these interventions are more specific in their performance reviews, coaching, succession planning, and eventually selecting new talent.

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