

THE
CONTRACTOR'S
GUIDE TO
SALES SUCCESS

*The Blueprint
for Long Term
Business Growth*



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I dedicate this book to my father and mother, John and Jean Gard, who provided me with a lifelong model for teaching by example: creative thinking, consistent honesty, patience, integrity, honor, and a never-ending desire to learn and excel!

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INTRODUCTION

This book is written for you, the salesperson that wants to stay sharp and has a burning desire to continuously sharpen skills and improve sales numbers.

If you're in the building materials business, great, since most of my examples come from my 35 years' experience in that industry, selling to every part of the supply chain. Whatever industry you are in, however, the content of this book will be relevant for you.

In my opinion, it's easy in any kind of sales organization to get stuck in a rut making routine sales calls, talking to the same people week in and week out (or the same kind of customer) never really connecting with any of them and not really identifying any of their real needs or fears. Stuck in a rut, going through the motions of selling but not really hitting a home run. Does this sound familiar?



My hope is that the principles presented in this book will challenge you to apply a new strategy to your sales approach. Dig into your customer's business. Ask lots of questions to determine their needs and fears. You might be thinking, "My customers don't have fears. What do you mean?" Well, if you think that your customers don't have a high level of anxiety and fear about talking to contractors and salespeople (YOU), consider rethinking the situation. Mr. and Mrs. Jones are wary of all contractors, including you. The only contractor that Mr. and Mrs. Jones trust is the one that they either have a recommendation for or the one they have already worked with and know is reputable. If you aren't one of those, their guards will be up when you walk through the door.



Your potential clients have shopped you on the Internet. They have asked their neighbors if they know you. They need someone who solves their problems. They are looking for integrity, honesty, and, possibly a lifelong relationship; not typically things most salespeople would understand that they need.

To deal effectively with the needs and fears of current and future clients, focus on the basics: showing empathy; developing trust; selling good, better, best and so on. I will help you target potential customers and develop programs and services that cater to their needs, build trust and create relationships that go far beyond the buying and selling of a product or service. The techniques

I share with you, when applied to each selling situation, will help you win at your sales game.

To begin with, practice safe sales by keeping current on your customers' /vendors' needs. Building lifelong relationships that offer value to your customers on their turf, not on yours requires that you ask questions and focus on their needs, not yours.



In years past, the “good old boys” network worked really well for most of us coming up through the supply chain ranks. If you came around once a week and did what you said you were going to do, you got the business. But things are different today. Your customers are savvier now, more than they have ever been. Your clients have lots of sales people calling on them; they have many choices. And convincing your clients that you are offering the best value is not as easy as it was in the past. So you need to acquire some new skills and use techniques that weren't part of the good old boy network to gain an edge over the competition. Digging into your customers' issues and showing sincerity, honesty and integrity will give your customers a “warm fuzzy,” making them comfortable in buying you and your products and services, not your competitors'.

All of this brings me to why I've written this book! Your career path may be similar to mine. And I'm sure that over the years you've been in this profession you've learned things about yourself and things about your customers that make you really good at what you do. I also know that a lot of you already understand the techniques that build relationships. This book isn't rocket science and there won't be any great revelation in here to boost your sales immediately. It's all common sense stuff that we all know but sometimes forget in the pressure of business. And in today's construction industry marketplace, the way we sell and what we focus on when we sell has changed.

Construction is at a crossroads. I'm happy to share these proven tips and techniques to elevate your sales game because I'm confident they'll help you reach your goals and ambitions in our great industry.

To your success!

Larry



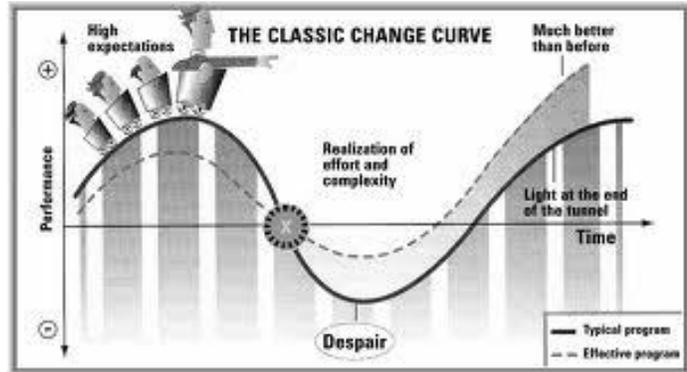
OK, There is sun,
So that directions is 'up'

THE CHANGE CURVE AND TRAINING

Our industry is in rapid change mode right now. What worked 10 years ago might not work today, but there are some basics that are still standard rules of the road to focus on and remember.

Buyers are smarter than ever and there are a lot of salespeople trying to get your customer's orders. You need to be on top of your game and execute well, or you may lose the sale. That's money out of your pocket, never a good thing.

I have been extremely fortunate to have worked for some highly talented managers who made sure that I was exposed to more sales training and strategic thinking than I ever thought I could absorb in a lifetime.



That continuous training, was what made me better at selling my products and helped me achieve what I wanted: more sales, which meant more dollars. Also, that training prepared me to manage multiple state territories for some of the largest manufacturers of building materials in the world. I've evolved from being the contractor to selling to the contractor, to selling to the lumberyard, to selling for the manufacturer and pulling the sale through the contractor and the lumberyard at the same time.

A note about self-training

I continue to self-train. I feel like I need to learn something new every day so I can stay ahead of the change curve. To be truly successful in sales, you need to continue to learn daily. You should be craving new information to remain ahead of your competition. Gathering intelligence regarding your products, services and competitors is how you get ahead of the proverbial selling pack, along with a few hyper-focused techniques.

There are plenty of free sources for you to continue your product and service training, e.g., YouTube videos and Internet searches. You can find almost anything on the Internet. Just type into your browser what you want to learn and a number of topics will come up. Click to pick the one you want to watch first and get started.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I made my first sales call the day after I graduated from high school. I decided to paint houses in the neighborhood I grew up in as my summer job. At the time, I didn't think of myself as a salesman, I just did what I had to do to make some money. As time has gone by and I've reflected on my life, I've realized that I must have had a basic instinct for sales. I knocked on every door in the neighborhood asking if there was any painting that needed to be done. I sold my neighbors on the fact that I knew how to paint and that I was good at it. I completed my work in a manner that was like I said it was going to be, finished the work when I said I would, and completed the work for the amount I said I would do it for. Needless to say, I was busy painting houses all summer. Does any of that sound familiar to you?



A number of years later after military service, I decided to try that painting thing again and started a small painting company called Al's Painting & Contracting. Why I called it Al's I still don't know. I'm still not sure why I didn't call it Larry's Painting or Finishing Touch or something catchy like that. But Al's seemed like the right name at the time. I knew that I could paint and that I could convince people I knew what I was doing.

I didn't know how to run a business, but I did have the desire to start a business, so I printed up 1,000 flyers and off I went, door-to-door, distributing flyers throughout my neighborhood and surrounding areas. And that was the beginning of my sales career.

In the years that followed, I called that area my golden triangle. I marketed and worked in the same 10 square mile area for 17 years and made a respectable living for myself by earning a good reputation for quality workmanship and building a repeat client base. My business evolved from painting houses to doing small repair jobs to building room additions to building custom homes, and I was selling every step along the way. I did it all: marketing, accounting, sales, project management, carpentry, painting and odd job problem solver. Oh, did I mention that all of this was learned through continuous self-training?

When I decided to stop building and remodeling and started the next phase of my career, I chose what I knew best, building materials. Once you get that sawdust in your veins, it's hard to imagine being involved in any other industry.



For a number of years I sold high-end windows, doors and moldings to contractors and homeowners. As I went through multiple sales training workshops and long hours practicing presentations on the features and benefits of the products we sold, I gained

confidence and wanted more of a challenge. Moving into the two-step millwork business I sold millwork to lumberyards and assumed a medium-sized territory, which I grew from \$300,000 to \$2.5 million in four years.

Wanting more pay and more of a challenge, I searched for my next job for 2 years, ultimately landing in the manufacturing sector. That job offered a career opportunity and I found it as I sat on the couch in the living room, reading the Sunday paper. For the next 8 years, I was very fortunate to work with some talented managers in world-class companies, managers who made sure that I received rigorous sales training that would equip me to successfully manage multiple state territories for some of the largest building material manufacturers in the world.

While in manufacturing, I pulled the sale through by working with one-step distributors, two-step distributors and their customers. By using creative training techniques and co-selling alongside the sales reps that were my customers, I not only learned my customer's needs, fears and ambitions, but I was also able to educate my customers and their customers on my products. I learned how my business dovetailed with my customers' businesses, an insight that provided a huge competitive edge. This is a technique that works really well!

In 2008 I started Gard Business Coaching. Back then it was known as Creative Business Solutions. My mission and my passion is to help sales people and business owners in the Roofing Industry set higher sales goals, sell smarter, and sell more.



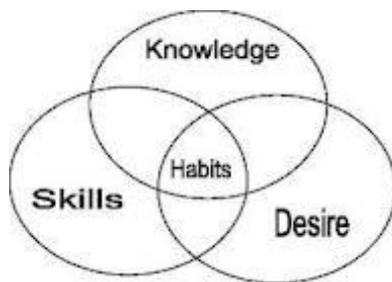
I do this by helping my customers focus on a mindset of abundance and using a solution sales approach that relies on lifelong customer relationships.

WHO ARE THOSE GUYS?

Who are those salespeople who don't think they need to train and sharpen their skills? Those who are comfortable with their ten customers and are reluctant to try anything new. Where do they think they are going?



As I have traveled the country, I have been amazed at how many so-called salespeople don't have a clue as to what it really means to be excellent at our craft.



I'm talking about the people who have no interest in learning and growing. I think these folks are simply embarrassed and don't want anyone to suspect that they know considerably less than they appear to know. They are afraid to accept any type of training because others will find out who they really are. This type of salesperson doesn't have a clue as to why people make buying decisions or do the things they do; they just cruise along, unwilling to grow to the next level. They think they don't need training

because they already have all the answers.

This type of salesperson will never achieve true sales excellence until s/he commits to product and technique training. Constant hunger for more information will help you climb out of the doom scenario that the "box of limited sales" represents.



We have to remember that "Sales is more than a profession; it's a way of life." Sales is something that you have to work hard at every day. It's a discipline that needs to be developed and refined to demonstrate professional leadership. If you understand the concept that there is always someone out there sharpening his saw every hour of every day, then you can see why you need to be doing the same. Sure, there are a lot of schleps out there. But for every 10 schleps, there is one hard-core learner, that individual who is always trying to discover how to do the job better, faster or cheaper to get an edge on the competition. That's the guy who you are competing against. So you'd better be doing some sharpening and reinventing of your own.

If you don't take initiative to learn and grow, you will always be chasing the leader. You say you want to be the leader? That requires thinking and behaving like a leader; the only way you'll get (and stay) ahead of the pack is through continual training.



If you want to differentiate yourself and your company from your competitors and earn recognition as an industry leader, the best advice I can give you is to be hungry for information and knowledge that you can ultimately share with prospects or clients. The knowledge you gain today can provide real value to your customers tomorrow and into the future.

Here's a practical first step: have a discussion with your entire sales group on "How to develop perception of value in the first client meeting/sales call." What value do you bring to the table besides a low price? What can you offer to a customer that will make him or her willing to pay a higher price that also allows you to reap a higher profit?

SALESPEOPLE ARE INTERESTING PEOPLE

Salespeople often travel extensively. You'll find them living in hotels or napping in cars, airports, and even on interstate exit ramps. They may drive and fly thousands of miles a month and know where the best eating establishments and hotels are at every stop. And they know exactly how to convince you and me that they know what they are talking about.

Salespeople are a force in our economic life. As a discipline, they generate more commerce than any other. What they sell needs to be manufactured or created, and they are ultimately responsible for everything that is shipped on rail cars, trucks, planes, ships and any other mode of transport worldwide.

They are analytical thinkers who solve problems for their customers (if they are good at what they do), and the best ones are experts at building long-term relationships with their customers and vendors.



ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE A SALESPERSON?

The oldest profession in the world is still the greatest profession. Whether this is your first sales position or you are already an experienced pro, being successful in your role requires a commitment to daily learning.

NOT EVERYONE IS A SALESMAN

How do you know if you are a salesman? Unfortunately, not everyone who holds a sales position is an effective salesman. Not everyone is ideal for this business. There are a lot of people who work for sales organizations that never get into the business of selling.

Most people think that sales is one of the simplest professions in the world. We just drive around all day taking people out to lunch and playing golf, right? Sales is about more than walking into someone's home or office and persuading them to buy a bill of goods. It's about being prepared with product knowledge. It's about asking the right questions to determine your customer's problems, needs, and fears. It's about crafting a solution that makes you valuable. Knowing your products inside and out, or knowing something about your competition or the marketplace will differentiate you from the competition and help you win the sale. You should want to be known as the best at what you do. Anything less is unacceptable. Strive for excellence. If you don't, you will always be frustrated in this business, and you will never reach your full potential.



If you're unwilling to work hard, commit to long hours some days (sometimes for nothing more than a "maybe"), study to become an expert on your products, your customers and the competition, then I recommend that you find a nice safe job in something other than sales. Maybe you should cut and run now while you still have the opportunity.

If you are committed to knowing as much as possible about what you do, however, and you're willing to adopt the mindset that you can never know it all, then read on, to find out what it takes to reach your full sales potential!

THE MAN WHO SOLD HOT DOGS!

Below is a story about a man who sold really good hot dogs. There is a moral to the story . . . do you know what that is?

There was a man who lived by the side of the road and sold hot dogs.

He was hard of hearing so he had no radio.

He had trouble with his eyes so he read no newspapers.

But he sold really good hot dogs.

He put up signs on the highway telling how good his hot dogs were.

He stood on the side of the road and cried: "Buy a hot dog, Mister!"

And people bought!

He increased his meat and bun orders.

He bought a bigger stove to take care of this trade.

He finally got his son to come home from college to help him out.

But then something happened.

His son said, "Father, haven't you been listening to the radio?"

Haven't you been reading the newspapers?

There's a big depression.

The European situation is terrible.

The domestic situation is worse.

Whereupon the father thought, "Well, my son's been to college, he reads the papers and he listens to the radio, and he ought to know.

So, the father cut down on his meat and bun orders, took down his advertising signs, and no longer bothered to stand out on the highway to sell his hot dogs.

And his hot dog sales fell almost overnight.

"You're right son," the father said. "We certainly are in the middle of a great depression."



The moral to this story is never give up. Don't listen to what the naysayers are saying. This guy sold really good hot dogs. Everyone liked them. Everyone bought them. He should have believed in himself and his product and just kept his sales rhythm going. There is much to learn from this. We need to consider our sales rhythm and remember to stay focused on the plan.

NEVER GIVE UP

Selling is the best-paying hard work in the world, and it's also the poorest-paying easy work in the world. It's your choice. The key to success is consistent effort. You should never give up, no matter what things look like. No matter how long a sales slump has lasted, no matter what the market conditions are. **Don't believe everything you hear.** Run your own race and keep your own counsel. Keep doing what you know works until you make the sale.

A great salesperson always keeps looking for something to sell—some problem to solve. Discovering something new or adapting an existing product for a different purpose, can help you solve your customers' problems and create new opportunities for both you and, potentially, your customers. Keep looking for solutions and believe in yourself. Persistence is essential.



THINK OUT OF THE BOX!

Customers want to be sold!

“Thinking out of the box” is a phrase that I learned from a Regional Manager I worked for in the late 90s. He always said that I needed to identify what the customer needed, get creative, and provide a solution that made me valuable. **Thinking out of the box.** Sounds easy doesn't it?

Here are some interesting things that I've learned about customers over the years...

- Your customers want to be sold!
- They want solutions to their problems.
- They want to work with someone that not only solves their problems, but who also **partners** with them to solve future problems.
- They want you to make their lives easier.
- They prefer to work with someone they perceive as similar to them.



If you keep these fundamental principles in mind and ask targeted questions to help you understand your customers' needs, wants and fears, you can have a very rewarding career in sales.

DEFINING WHAT IS OUTSIDE THE BOX

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

“Thinking outside the box” and “thinking beyond the box” (also called “thinking out of the box” or “thinking outside the square”) is to think differently, unconventionally, or from a new perspective. This phrase often refers to novel or creative thinking.

This is related to the process of lateral thought. The catchphrase, or cliché, has become widely used in business environments, especially by management consultants and executive coaches, and has spawned a number of advertising slogans. To think outside the box is to look further and to try not thinking of the obvious things, but to try thinking beyond them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATIONS

A recent study by *Harvard Business Review* states that leaders of companies put a great deal of emphasis on the importance of doing business in person and link it directly to the bottom line.

The study shows that 87 percent of professionals think face-to-face meetings are essential for sealing a business deal, while 95 percent said they are key to successful, long-lasting business relationships.

When there are gaps in connecting with your customers, there are opportunities for distrust and fear.



In face-to-face meetings, our brains process a lot of nonverbal cues that we use as the basis for building trust and professional intimacy. Face-to-face interaction is information rich with nonverbal cues.

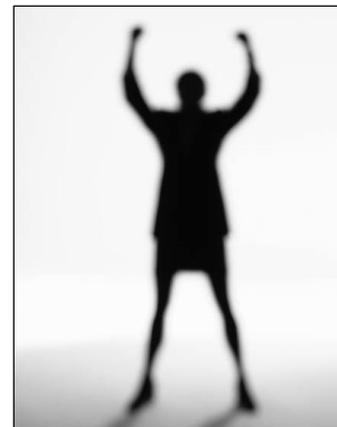
We interpret what people say to us only partially from the words they use. We get most of the message, and the entire emotional nuance behind the words, from vocal tone, pacing, facial expressions and body language.

We rely on immediate feedback, the instantaneous response of others, to help us gauge how well our ideas are being accepted. The moment we see an emotion expressed on someone's face or read it in a gesture or posture, we subconsciously place ourselves in the other person's "mental shoes" and begin to sense that same emotion within ourselves.

Real communication occurs when we listen with understanding to see the idea and attitude from the other person's point of view, to sense how it feels to them, to achieve their frame of reference in regard to the thing they are talking about.

Reaching the goal of real connection, understanding and empathy, is why in-person interactions are crucial to your professional success.

When a communication has any emotional charge, a face-to-face meeting is the most effective way to communicate to your customers. It's the only way others can see for themselves the alignment of your verbal and non-verbal messages and be convinced that your motives match your rhetoric.



Consider your business relationships to be like those of “old friends.” Mutual respect, freedom to discuss challenges and opportunities, and people doing what they say they’re going to do are all at the core of this type of relationship.

When is the last time you met face-to-face with a prospect or an existing client? Did you talk to them with the intention of a lifelong relationship? If you haven’t looked at them in this way, perhaps it is time for you to do so.



BE CREATIVE & PROACTIVE

Years ago when I was selling two-step millwork, I called on lumberyards in my territory, one that had been vacant for about six months and significantly underperforming. When I began making my rounds trying to figure out what was what, I asked customers this simple question: **“How can I help you?”** One customer answered, “You can go into my warehouse and count my moldings and let me know how much I have out there.” He found counting his moldings an unwelcome task. So I walked into the warehouse and counted his moldings. When I returned with the count, he said, “Looks like I need some molding; what can you get for me?” Well, being the crack salesman that I was back then, I said, “Of course! I can have them here on the next truck.”



As I drove away that day, I realized that I could do the same thing for the next 65 customers that were probably just like this guy. So I started telling everyone I called on, “I’ll be glad to count your moldings if you’d like.” I was surprised to find that many customers were more than happy to let me do just that.

My territory sales quickly grew beyond belief. I was so excited about how well that strategy worked that I began doing the same thing with other products. I figured that if I could count plastic moldings, I could also count interior and exterior doors, windows, stair parts and everything else in my product line. At one lumberyard, I was assigned a desk because I spent so much time there counting and writing orders.

Later I realized that by identifying a need the first customer had and creating a solution that made his life easier, I became valuable to the customer’s business. I provided a value-added service that no one else was willing to provide and didn’t cost the customer anything. This was certainly “thinking out of the box,” at that point in time. I also exploded my sales. Today there are still a number of guys I competed against who provide the same service. Their customers remain loyal because of the value the salesmen add on an ongoing basis.

You may think that that’s such a simple thing. Well, yes it is; but it’s often the small, simple things that get you noticed. Sometimes going out of your way for a customer is just what is needed to differentiate you from all of others who are offering similar products and services. See how this works?

SOLUTION SALES

As I left a recent St. Louis home show talking with an old friend who owns a well-known remodeling company in the same market, my friend mentioned, "I would like for someone to connect me with a major manufacturer that I can partner with to increase my brand recognition."

"I can do that for you," I commented.

After six months of planning and discussing with a major manufacturer, I negotiated a plan to partner with a distributor, the manufacturer and my remodeling company friend for the benefit of all. Of course, this type of sale requires a process commitment. It takes an initial plan and many refinements to arrive at a final plan that is agreeable for



everyone, but it's also an endeavor that has increased sales for the manufacturer and me while providing my friend the partner he needed to execute a focused brand awareness campaign, an initiative that is essential for growing his business.

You have just read about a practical application of the solution sales principle. I knew that if I could put all of these people together, I would get more sales with this customer, who also happens to be a friend. **Solving your customer's problems is key to success.** If you bring solutions to the table that help your customer reach goals that were unattainable before you showed up, you will be successful.

Do you see how this works? Maybe it's still a little soon ...

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

A number of years ago, while employed as a Sales Manager for a drywall distributor, I opened a lumberyard account that I knew was going to be a difficult sale. I gave the account to Bill, an associate, telling him that this will be a difficult account to win, but when you do win it, it will be worth the trouble. The customer is not close to anywhere, so getting there is always a long drive. We wanted to sell truckloads of drywall to this guy who we knew bought and sold a lot of drywall, but wouldn't buy ours. I told Bill to just keep calling on him and take care of him, advice that Bill followed religiously.

One day the customer called and said he was in a pickle. He was out of drywall screws and needed them for one of his large installers. Even though it was a two-hour drive there and two-hours back, Bill delivered the screws. This small action that was laborious to do during Bill's typically busy day, got him noticed.

Shortly after that small delivery, the customer began to respond to Bill's helpfulness on small orders with larger orders. By standing out from the competition, Bill ultimately won most of this customer's drywall business.

On the front end, it was only a couple of boxes of drywall screws; but on the back end, this was a very big win. This customer has become one of the distributor's largest lumberyard accounts. *See how this works?*



RELATIONSHIPS ARE AT THE CORE OF SUCCESS

In real estate there is a phrase, “location, location, location.” Well, in building material sales there is a similar one: “relationship, relationship, relationship.” If you want to be successful, you must follow this rule. It’s the one piece of information that determines whether you are great at what you do, or just mediocre.

A lot of industries make their marketing decisions based on the products they sell. Yes, the products we sell are important. And if you don’t have the right products, customers will go to the company that does have them. But products aren’t the only things to consider. Success should be based on customer-based strategies because solution sales and relationships are at the core of creating win-win scenarios that are meaningful to people. Without the relationship, customers won’t be loyal to you when it’s time to make the buying decision.

If you have a long-term relationship with a buyer, price won’t always be the deciding factor, because the buyer knows that you are doing everything possible to offer the most competitive price and dedicated service. Yes, that’s right, the old integrity and honesty thing. They know you from past experience and trust you to provide value. That’s what a selling relationship is all about. In a buyer’s mind it is often a question of “Is this guy my friend?” If you are, you win!



PROBING QUESTIONS

You should be able to come up with questions you can ask your customers to reveal their goals and needs. Asking open-ended questions that don’t give your customers the opportunity to respond with a simple “yes” or “no” are the preferred method to find out what their business challenges (or “business drivers”) are.

Generally speaking, people are pretty much down to earth. If you ask just a few probing questions and listen closely, you can find out exactly what your customer needs and expects from you.

Your success in sales ultimately depends on taking the time to ask concerned questions and allowing the relationship time to develop.



WIN-WIN SCENARIOS

Everyone talks about win-win, and I don't want this book to be like all the others, so I'm not going to spend much time on the concept.

Win-win is when both parties are satisfied. The more win-win scenarios you create, the more you will sell and the longer you will retain your customers' loyalty. Therefore, the ideal sales strategy benefits the customer (through perceived value) as you and your employer benefit from premium pricing (and profit).



USE THE KISS PRINCIPLE

You have probably heard about the KISS principle before, but it's worth repeating. "Keep It Simple, Stupid" should govern how you orchestrate the sales process. The more complex you make the process, the less likely you will achieve sales success. Complex transactions increase the likelihood of misunderstanding, which often leads to distrust, eroded rapport, and fewer sales.

Complex sales can also cause buyer resistance, because additional time is needed to unravel the complexities and determine the bottom-line value. Offering the simplest solution or path—making the process easy—often determines success or failure.

The KISS principle can be applied to any business function: planning, operations, business development or sales. Make the sales process simple, transparent and easy for your customer; you'll both reap the rewards.

ABUNDANCE MENTALITY

It's been my experience that most salespeople work from a scarcity mindset. They think that there are only so many opportunities available and that they must get their fair share before they can help others around them to succeed. This is a flawed paradigm.

If you want to be successful beyond your wildest dreams, start thinking in terms of abundance. Use your creativity to develop solutions that meet your customers' needs. Help your customers reach their goals, and you will reach yours as well.



GIVE, GIVE, GIVE...

Abundance mentality means that there is enough for everyone . . . a bottomless pit of opportunity. So give unconditionally. Help your customers in whatever way you reasonably can. Clients will buy from you once they see that you can help them achieve their business goals. And remember, small sales often lead to bigger sales.

THINK LIFETIME CUSTOMERS

Top salespeople don't think about the sales commission, they think about how to develop the relationship. The sale will come from the relationship. If you focus on bringing value to your customers and continue to enhance the relationship, you will win!

Your customers want to do business with someone they like and trust. They also like to do business with someone they are comfortable with, someone with similar interests and values. Since people buy from people they like, remember to enhance the relationship and work towards becoming friends.



Remember also that your customers may have hundreds of salespeople like you and me calling on them. There is always someone out there who is sharper than we are, someone who can win the order from a disgruntled or extremely cost-conscious client.

Competing effectively in today's global marketplace requires that we build strong customer relationships and provide value to achieve loyalty. Once you achieve preferred vendor status, doors open to "hidden" opportunities that the competition never sees.

IS YOUR APPEARANCE PROFESSIONAL?

Have you ever studied yourself in a mirror at home to see how others see you? If not, try it sometime. Stand in front of a full-length mirror just before leaving for work. Do you look credible? Would a prospect want to buy something expensive from you? Would you buy from you?

I've met so many salespeople in years past that didn't think their appearance made a difference in their sales results. There are some basic rules about dress that are worthy of your attention. If you don't have a clue as to my train of thought, visit your local public library or bookstore and find the book *Dressing the Man*, a book that will give you a little history on different types of dress. Understanding what goes with what, what doesn't go with what, and what to wear when are as essential as knowing your products and your competition. Note that there are similar books on appropriate dress for women.

Dressing improperly for the task can easily short-circuit your sales efforts. Did you know that you should dress up a step from the level of the person you are calling on? If you happen to find that you are over dressed, you can always take off your tie, sport coat or suit jacket to dress down a bit.

I'm serious about this aspect of your sales technique. It is simply critical if you expect to develop strong rapport with your prospects. Generally speaking, people want to do business with people like them. If your clients see you as an equal who brings value, you are on track for success. And that is the first step in developing rapport and trust; the second step is the sale. See how this works?

DOES YOUR VEHICLE LOOK PROFESSIONAL?

This is one of my pet peeve subjects! Your vehicle should be in pristine condition both inside and outside whether you are driving a company vehicle or your personal vehicle during working hours. If your employer has provided you with a vehicle to do your job, you should show your appreciation by keeping that vehicle clean at all times.

Your vehicle should be presentable enough so that anyone can ride with you at any time. It should be so clean that your boss is pleased with how you and your vehicle represent the company.

SALES SLUMPS AND WHAT TO DO WITH THEM!

One thing is sure, slumps will occur. If you have been in sales for any length of time, you know that you have good years and bad years. There will be days, weeks, months, and even years where it seems like nothing goes right. Note that even the best of the best producers have slumps. You are no different, so don't let a sales slump get the best of you.

When we get in a slump, we are in a rut, and a rut is a grave with the ends kicked out. How to get out of the rut? Getting Back to the Basics (Sales 101) is what I recommend.

Don't be negative, don't panic, don't over work, don't get down on yourself and above all, never give up! Call on a new customer every day. Make another sales call at 4:30 in the afternoon. Create target lists; make a plan and work your plan. You will surprise yourself at the successes you'll find. Most importantly, keep the slump in perspective. Believe in yourself and remain confident that you are the best.

A slump is just that, it's only a short-term situation that will pass. Chart your sales so you can see where you have been, where you are and where you want to go. If you have any sales history, you can even predict how long the slump might last. All these things help you visualize your business. This shouldn't be anything new to you. Sometimes we just forget to do the simple things that help us see what needs to be done to get to the next level.

YOUR CUSTOMERS BUY YOU FIRST!

Some of the most successful companies in the world have a brand associated with their products. Kleenex is one example. Kleenex is a single brand, but everyone calls tissues of any brand, “Kleenex.” Sheetrock is another example. Sheetrock is a brand of drywall, but consumers often call drywall “sheetrock” because USG has done such a good job of branding its products. It’s no surprise that you should have a brand too. You should be known for what makes you special to your customers. When your customers think of this one memorable thing, they think of you, because that represents your brand. Being in sales isn’t about whom you know, it’s about who knows you . . . and what you are known for.

I’m not talking about your company’s brand. I’m talking about your personal brand. What do your customers think of when they think of you? **Your customers buy you first, you know.** You have something to offer that sets you apart from your competition. Promote yourself. Think about how to advertise what you offer that is unique to you. Establish yourself as an expert in your field. Be known as a problem solver and an innovator. Brand yourself! Willingness to share your professional expertise is one of the best sales tools you have. Be a resource to your customers. People will want to have you around if they believe you offer value.



When I sold millwork, I learned that no one at the lumberyards I called on knew how to figure stair parts estimates efficiently. I studied the parts and pieces of the brand that I was selling at the time and became an expert at stair parts. Once the lumberyard sales people learned that I was the stair parts whiz, they called me when they bid stairways. I had branded myself as an expert in staircases. Not coincidentally, stair parts became my top selling product. *Do you see how this works yet?*

FIRST THINGS FIRST

If you really want to know how to win more sales and build long term relationships, then help your customers by first discovering what they need. You will not win new sales by assuming that you know what the customer wants. Ask questions until you are completely sure you understand what they need; this is essential to building trust and rapport. Once you know what the customer needs, help him or her create a plan for accomplishing the goal—within budget and timeframe parameters.

Let's consider an example. You've met a customer that you think doesn't have enough money to do what they are discussing with you. How do you proceed? Respect the customer and complete the estimating process even if you don't think the customer has the money. Why? Because you do not have authority to make the decision for the customer. If they find your estimate too high, they will tell you. You don't know how much money your client has, and you don't know what will be considered excessive. If you've decided your client can't afford what you've presented, you have an opportunity to help your customer create a plan that helps them accomplish their goal.

You can sell a package of smaller sales that adds up to the whole project over an extended time period. Always be in selling mode when you are in front of your customers. Provide solutions that meet their needs and unique circumstances. Every customer's situation will be different, but if you focus on solution sales, you have a greater chance of sales success.



YOU MUST HAVE A PLAN

Because the future is generally uncertain and things are likely to change with the passage of time, organizations plan to increase their ability to adapt to future eventualities. The first step in planning is to establish standards and objectives that will give direction to the activities that need to be performed. Planning helps crystallize goals and objectives, providing standards against which to measure performance.



The purpose of a plan is to provide a reference point. It's what you go back to over and over again to make sure you are doing the things you need to do to be successful. When you want to increase your income, put your plan to paper and look at your plan every day.

Begin with the end in mind; establish your goal, your purpose. Write the plan down, review it over and over, revise it and refine it as often as you need to, to maintain momentum toward your goal.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Collecting contact information only one time is critical in setting up an efficient customer database. The importance of keeping all of the customer's information in one organized place (ideally a CRM system) is critical to a successful business operation of any type today. There are a number of these types of systems on the market that work well. You just need to investigate two or three of them and choose one that works best for you.

ARE YOU USING A CRM SYSTEM?

One of the most important skills that you need to master is information management. Your ability to organize information will directly impact your sales success. Information management is the key to daily productivity and influences everything you need to do, from researching to learning faster to keeping your email inbox empty.

An effective CRM system helps you through better sales tracking and real-time visibility. Such a system will allow you to track every step of the sale—from phone calls and emails to collaboration with colleagues—in an easily accessible, centralized location allowing you to stay on top of deals and build stronger client relationships.

With real-time analytics, you can make smarter business decisions and achieve higher close rates. The average CRM user experiences 29% more sales, 34% increased sales productivity, and a 42% increase in forecast accuracy.

Information management is a corporate responsibility that needs to be embraced at every level of the organization from the upper-most levels of management to the front-line worker. Organizations must hold their employees accountable for capturing, managing, storing, sharing, preserving and delivering information appropriately and responsibly, to internal and external customers.

Customer relationship management (CRM) systems will help you streamline the customer care process, a vital element of practically all business models. Often web-based software packages, CRM systems are provided by companies such as Oracle, Zoho Corporation and Salesforce.com. These packages and services benefit everyone inside the organization, from the sales person and account manager to personnel in the marketing and customer retention departments.



SHARED INFORMATION

Customer relationship management systems aggregate data obtained from clients and distribute it among the different departments in your organization. CRM systems collect and maintain detailed customer-specific information, such as purchase histories and preferences. Everyone working with a specific customer has access to the information: account managers, sales professionals and upper-level management—all can make informed decisions regarding a customer account.

IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICE

CRM systems improve the customer service experience. Many such systems include a detailed note-taking and contact system, allowing sales professionals and others to record when and why a customer was contacted. Having this information at your fingertips saves time by preventing you from making repeated telephone calls, sending repeat notices and asking repeat questions, which only annoy or frustrate your customer.



CRM systems also record the date of customer contact and many allow you to set a reminder for the next follow-up point-of-contact with the customer.

Contacting your customer at the appropriate time, every time, makes your company seem professional, organized and concerned about maintaining the relationship. Improving the customer's experience may lead to repeat purchases and greater loyalty. And it certainly builds trust and rapport.

BETTER MARKETING

Implementing a CRM system gives your organization the chance to improve and simplify your marketing system. Since these systems record customer purchases, you will know which products or services your customer buys. This allows your sales team to cross-sell items that complement products or services your customer already has, items that can be highlighted or auto-suggested by the system.

System data also can tell you which customers are profitable and which are not. This information can be used strategically to identify and target profitable customers, thereby focusing marketing efforts where you will enjoy the greatest return.



YOU CAN'T ASSUME YOUR CUSTOMER'S NEEDS

Some sales reps assume they know what the customer is going to buy. This is a serious mistake! There is no way you can possibly know what a customer's limits are, or what their needs or fears are, without asking a series of questions that identify their exact needs, fears and goals. If you think you know this stuff before you have gone through the fact-finding process, you need to find another job. Your customers expect you to be interested in what they are doing and what challenges they are currently facing. You do this by showing concern and by asking questions so that you can understand what they are dealing with. Without asking probing questions, you never get to the root of the customer's need. You simply don't know everything. As a matter of fact, it's better to assume that you don't know anything going into the sale. Using that strategy, you are forced to ask questions to understand what the customer needs, wants and fears.

**To Save Time,
Let's Just Assume
I Know Everything**

For example: when selling Good, Better, Best, if you assume that the customer won't be interested in better or best options, you may miss the biggest sale of your career. You never know which customer will buy better or best until you present the options. From your client's perspective, you can't assume anything and you don't know everything. You must be crystal clear on the customer's needs before you present anything in the way of solutions.

HOW TO SET UP A SALES CALL FOR SUCCESS

Sometimes enthusiasm and knowledge of our products or services can become our biggest obstacle in the sales process. In our rush to make a client aware of all the wonderful features and functions of our company, products and services, we overwhelm them with information that they don't need to know yet. It is much better to lead with questions to understand exactly what the customer needs, rather than focusing on promotions you have going on this month.

Open with a simple question, "How can I best help you with what you want to accomplish?" and then listen carefully. Let the customer describe her situation and her needs. Don't assume you understand what she means. Clarify the customer's comments by repeating them in the form of a question so the customer can confirm what was said before you proceed.

The more focused you are on listening to the customer's needs, the more likely the customer will talk herself right into doing business with you.

Always ask:

- Open Ended Questions - to understand the customer's situation
- Closed Ended Question - to clarify specific problems

SHARING YOUR AGENDA IS A BIG DIFFERENTIATOR

Almost no one in sales does this, and those who do, often do not do it well. Letting the prospect in on your plan helps position you as a professional. You look like you've been there and done that. This is not your first rodeo.

Sharing your agenda also provides you an opportunity to demonstrate right up front that you "get it" and that this meeting isn't about you, it's about the client and his needs. It's a chance to ask good questions on the front end so you can begin developing trust and rapport from the start. You might say: "What would you like to get out of this meeting?" or "What are you hoping to accomplish?" Try it. You'll like it.



SHARING YOUR AGENDA HELPS YOU CONTROL THE CALL

If you don't lay out a plan for the call, then the prospect usually jumps in the driver's seat. How often have you heard "What do you have for me?" or "All right, you've got your 30 minutes, go!" Even worse, how about the aggressive prospect that goes on the offensive and peppers you with questions. Before you even realize it, you're back on your heels, being led down paths you didn't intend to take. It's 20 minutes into a meeting and you haven't learned the first thing about your buyer or his situation.

Sharing your agenda shakes the buyer up

Your prospect fully expects you to pull the “show up and throw up” act that he’s used to hearing from the majority of salespeople that have called on him. In many cases, once the salesperson opens her mouth, the buyer lapses into selective listening mode expecting her to launch into the typical monologue. You can actually shock a prospect by setting up the call properly.



Prospects are immediately surprised that you have a plan and are sharing it; they are even more surprised that you are expecting a dialogue. This is where your skills make a difference in setting the customer’s expectations and differentiating yourself and your company from competitors.

Sharing your agenda tremendously increases your chances of making the sale.

DEALING WITH OBJECTIONS

Hear what your customer is saying

Give your customer your full attention and avoid the temptation to think about your response while s/he is speaking. Learn to be an active listener, one who not only listens to what the prospect is saying, but is also trying to discover the meaning behind the words.

Research indicates that 65% of our communication is nonverbal. Therefore, it is vitally important to listen for voice inflections and pay attention to body language. In addition to observing your prospect's gestures, you also need to be mindful of your nonverbal signals, body language and voice inflections.



Feed what you think you've heard back for clarification

By repeating the objection in the form of a question, your prospect has an opportunity to expand on the initial concern. For example, if your prospect said she doesn't have money in the budget, you feed the comment back with, "You don't have the money in your budget?" This technique reduces perception of pressure. By having the opportunity to explain her position, your prospect will frequently answer her own objection. Another reason for clarifying the objection is to make sure you are addressing the exact concern and not creating a new one.

Some objections will be of greater importance to your prospect than others. Once you clarify the objection, ask your prospect how important that concern is to her.

Answer the objection

Take the following into consideration:

- Make sure you stay big picture and be prepared to provide details as necessary.
- Use graphs, charts, or numbers if using the big picture approach isn't effective.
- Make sure that the objection has been resolved before you try to move forward in your closing process. Ask the question: "have I addressed all of your concerns?"

Ask for the order after objections have been addressed

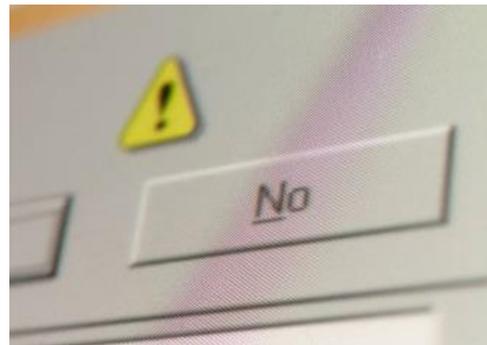
You may have to ask for the order several times before you get the sale, so make sure you vary your closing questions. Remain patient and be persistent without becoming argumentative.



OVERCOMING THE OBJECTIONS AND ASKING FOR THE SALE

Okay, let's say you didn't get the contract signed and instead you have an objection or multiple objections that stand in the way of signing the deal. So now what do you do? Studies indicate that a prospect will say no—on average—five times before s/he actually buys. As a professional salesperson, it is important to remember that an objection is not a personal rejection of you.

Simply put, an objection is nothing more than a request for additional information. As a general rule, prospects are hesitant to commit to purchasing a product or service until they have convinced themselves they need it and that they are getting it at a fair price. Top producing salespeople not only expect objections during the sales process, they anticipate them.



Believe it or not, objections are a good sign and you should look forward to them. If your prospect weren't somewhat interested in your product or service, s/he wouldn't be asking questions. Typically, your prospect's objections fall into four major categories; no money, no perceived need, no hurry, or no trust. If you haven't built trust and rapport with your prospect, qualified them financially, and conducted a thorough needs analysis by asking questions, you can expect them to use objections to derail the sales process.

When your prospect voices an objection, treat it with respect and hear him out. Interrupting when you should be listening is a significant factor in the loss of trust and rapport. Even though you may have heard that same objection many times, avoid the temptation to address a prospect's concerns prematurely.



Before you begin your response, it is important that you understand your prospect's specific concerns. Otherwise, you run the risk of shooting yourself in the foot by voicing an objection they had not even considered. I recommend you restate and gain agreement on the specific objection prior to responding. This approach not only provides clarity, but it also builds rapport.

DON'T OVER-EDUCATE YOUR CUSTOMER

When addressing an objection, don't dump the kitchen sink on the prospect. Most salespeople have a tendency to overwhelm or bore their prospects by over-educating them. In an attempt to impress them with how knowledgeable they are, some salespeople lengthen the appointment and use up their valuable fallback positions.

One step at a time; not all at once. It's much better for you to keep your vast knowledge to yourself when asking questions of a potential customer. When the customer asks a question about product or service, you share a nugget of information. This allows you to give an impression of professionalism by having an answer to all the objections, questions or concerns your customer has.

There are times when your prospect's objection may be disruptive. You may therefore want to delay answering until you are further along in your presentation. When you make the decision to delay your response, I recommend that you write the question down and ask if it would be all right to address that concern later in the presentation. If the same objection comes up twice, you need to stop and address it immediately.

PRESENTING THE CONTRACT WHEN CLOSING SALES

Most of the products and services we are selling involve some sort of sales contract **that must be signed**. For the most part, people don't like to sign things. We've all been repeatedly reminded to read the fine print or to have our lawyers and accountants look over the contract first. Then there is the fear of closure once we sign, knowing that this is it and there is no turning back. Because of these factors, you should be careful when presenting the sales contract. Here are the rules to follow:

Ask for the client's autograph instead of a signature

Try to avoid asking for a *signature* because of the negative connotations of finality we discussed above. It may be subtle, yet when you are getting orders signed, you want *everything* to be going positively for you.

The autograph approach works well for a few reasons. First, the autograph approach puts a little humor into the situation. Again, whenever and wherever you can interject humor in a potentially stressful situation, do it.

The other reason the autograph approach works well is that the word "autograph" has a positive connotation and *very few* salespeople use it. This sets you apart and, for most customers, provides a refreshing change.



Present the sales contract and a pen, and remain silent

Turn the contract around to the customer, slide it in front of him, present the pen, point to the area for him to sign, ask for his autograph, and then find something else to do while your customer is reading and signing the contract.

Remember, if you watch him while he is reading, you will make him nervous and you may cause him to change his mind.



If you have to fill out the contract or write some things on it before you present it, it's okay to talk during that time. However, you want to keep the talk light in nature—the weather, vacation plans, family, and similar subjects. Try to stay away from discussing business unless you need your customer's input to fill out certain parts of the contract. Occasionally make eye contact with the customer while the two of you are talking.



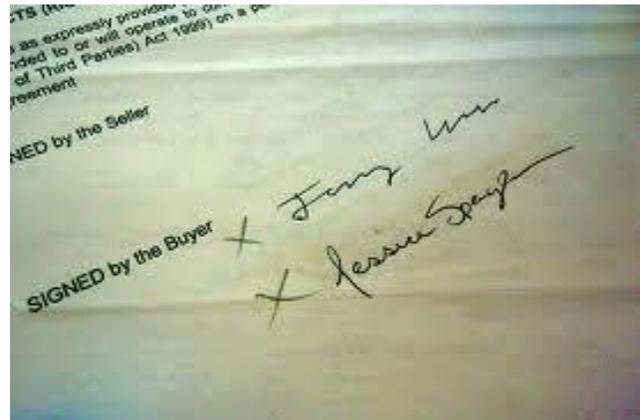
Remember, though, that your primary goal is getting the paperwork filled out and signed by the customer.

Another consideration is *when* to fill out the paperwork. Some salespeople like to have the paperwork filled out before the sales call; others like to work on it while they are with the customer. Some prefer to have the paperwork typed, while others prefer to write it out. Some prefer to fill in the paperwork while they're engaged in the sales call to use as part of the closing technique (as with "The Order Form Close.") Some salespeople prefer to have the contract all filled out so they can get it in front of the customer as soon as possible.

As a rule, it is best to have the paperwork filled out before you arrive. If you can't fill it all out, do as much as you can before the meeting. Collaborate with other top salespeople to find out what approach they use to best effect.

Once you've presented the paperwork and indicated where the person is to sign, **be quiet!** Presenting the paperwork for a signature is the same as asking a closing question. Keep quiet so you don't distract your customer from signing. When you present the contract, she is focused on the business of signing it—you don't want her mind wandering at this point. Once she's signed the contract and handed it back to you, you can then speak freely and thank her for the business, the final step in the process.

Note 1: Always make some sort of mark next to the area where the person must sign. For example, most people use an X, which is appropriate. When you present the contract, place your index finger just above the mark you've made and say, "I just need your autograph right here."



Note 2: Where you look while the customer is signing is also important. Never look directly at the customer, the contract, or even in that general vicinity while the customer is signing. If you do stare, she will feel your eyes burning a hole right through her. This creates a feeling of being under the spotlight, a place people don't want to be when they are signing a contract.

Instead of staring at her, look off to your left or right at something on the wall, or pull out your planning book and start to do some work there. When the prospect sees you with her peripheral vision, you want her to notice that you are not paying attention to what she is doing. This makes the signing process much more relaxing.

Note 3: Make sure you have a decent, working black or blue pen to present the customer. You don't have to have an expensive pen; just make sure it is consistent with your professional image. Also, have a backup pen of equal quality should the first pen fail for any reason. My personal pen, "The Million Dollar Closing Pen" as I like to call it, is always in tow, ready to sign any contract at any time.

Thank your customer for his or her business!

Here I am referring to the thank you at the signing of the contract, not the thank you that is part of the follow up to the sale.

Thanking the customer for his business is a *very important* step when getting a contract signed. It doesn't have to be anything lengthy, and what you say depends on the product you are selling. For example, if you are in the construction industry, you may say something like, "Joe, thank you very much for your business. This is a great first step for our company, and I look forward to a long and profitable relationship." Or, simply, "Thank you very much for your business." Sometimes brevity is best!

Obviously, the word *profitable* could be used with regard to many other products and services, but it definitely applies when talking about the construction industry. Here are some other examples:

- "Joe, thank you very much for your business. I/We really appreciate the opportunity."
- "Kathy, thank you for the confidence you've shown in me. I look forward to working with you on this project."

You may be selling a product or service that requires a somewhat more detailed thank you. For example, you may need to give the customer some information on what will happen next. Here's an example:

"Joe, first, thank you very much for the business. Jim Smith from our installation department will be calling you sometime today to set up a time to stop by and go over the details of the window installation. Do you have any other questions for me at this point? Great! Once again, we appreciate the business and Jim will be in touch with you shortly."



The most important thing is to work a sincere thank you into your final comments after you've received the order.

Not only what you say, but also how it is said is important. Look the person in the eye, smile, and nod your head up and down slightly as you speak your words of thanks. Put emphasis on your words and give them some emotion. Don't go overboard, but do be sincere.

Your "thank you" will vary based on factors such as order size, the length of the sales process, the kind of competition you faced, if any, and how much business the customer has done with you previously.

ARE YOU KEEPING UP WITH CHANGE?

“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.”

– Alvin Toffler, Futurist

Today, like never before, you must be open to change to be successful. You and your organization must constantly change and evolve to survive. You’ve heard it—we face more change in a year than our grandparents faced in a lifetime. For us that means Technology, Customers, Markets, and Competitors.

Unfortunately, most people (even entrepreneurs) choose death over change.



In *Change or Die*, Alan Deutschman asks, “What if you were given that choice? We’re talking actual life and death now. Your own life and death. What if a well-informed, trusted authority figure said you had to make difficult and enduring changes in the way you think, feel and act? If you didn’t, your time would end soon—a lot sooner than it had to. Can you change when change matters most?”

THE BAD NEWS: Although we all have the ability to change our behavior, we rarely do. Research shows odds of 9:1. When faced with the dire need to change, we don’t. How many of you have made, and stuck with a New Year’s resolution? How is that working out for you? The odds are simply not in your favor.



DESCRIPTION OF INSANITY

Insanity is defined as doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. We KNOW we should change, but habits, attitudes and behaviors make us regular practitioners of insanity. What is the answer for businesses, entrepreneurs and professionals, wanting to create and maintain a competitive edge? John Kotter, recognized leadership expert says “The central issue is never strategy, structure, culture, or systems. The core of the matter is always about changing the behavior of people.”

There you have it. To change your results, you must change your own and others’ behavior.

THE GOOD NEWS: Change is possible and the formula includes common ingredients. So what's the secret to significant, sustainable change? It's not tough to do, but it is tough to maintain.

TO HAVE YOU MUST FIRST BECOME

Too many people look for a fast fix. Change is a process, not a single event.

Rarely do people consider what they have to change about themselves to meet their goals. To have a six-figure income—you must become a person with skills and capabilities worth someone's paying you that amount. For a great relationship with a spouse and children—you must become someone your spouse and children see as worthy of the relationship. To have a single-digit golf handicap—you must become a golfer with the skills, discipline, and attitude required for that level of play.



If, when faced with death, only 10% of people will make a sustainable change, how can organizations hope to make change stick?

The best thing you can do is become someone who learns, unlearns and relearns...faster than your competition.

CREATE VALUE WITH PROSPECTS

How do you compete in your marketplace? Are you seeking to sell high volume at low prices? Or, are you creating value around your product or service? If you compete solely on price, chances are your company will not be able to survive long term. The Champion Salesperson understands that great salespeople sell high volume and high margin. One without the other is a recipe for disaster. One of the keys to success in selling high volume and high margin is the ability to establish value with prospects.

Value is the perception a prospect has regarding your product or service. Value can be defined mathematically as the perceived benefit over perceived cost and price. Creating value starts with belief in your product or service and the ability it has to satisfy your prospect's needs. Before walking into the prospect's home or office, do research to find out as much as possible about your competition, the prospect, and the industry. Armed with confidence and knowledge, you will be able to create value.

The value you create with prospects is not dictated by what you tell, but by what you ask. So many salespeople try to talk their way into value creation. **Value is determined by the prospect, not the salesperson.** So then, asking the right questions will allow you to understand what the prospect perceives as value. Remember, you cannot learn if you are talking. Be exact about your properly placed questions 20% of the time and listen to the prospect's needs 80% of the time.

Your questions should be focused on what the prospect wants to achieve. Ask questions about the prospect's goals and objectives and the benefits of achieving those goals and objectives. Other questions could explore the consequences of not reaching the objectives. As you can see, when you know the answers to these types of questions, you should be able to show the prospect the value your product or service will bring.

The champion salesperson sells high volume and high margin through the creation of value with each prospect. S/he understands what value is and asks the right questions to create value.



Situation

When presenting a prospect with different solutions, which option should you present first?

- Highest priced
- Mid-priced
- Lowest priced

Answer

The highest priced option is the best solution to present first. Research shows that if the prospect is interested in your product or service, s/he will go with the higher priced solution if budget permits. However, if s/he is interested in purchasing your product or service and the higher-priced option exceeds the budget, the mid- or lower-priced option will be attractive to because it seems reasonable in relation to the higher-priced option.

A WORD ABOUT GOOD, BETTER, BEST



Present Good, Better, and Best every single time. In most markets, you can expect 40% of clients to buy GOOD, 40% to buy BETTER, and the last 20% to buy BEST. The problem we all have to deal with is that we never know which client is which.

Another way to look at this is if you only present GOOD (what the customer called you for) you will only sell the first 40% of the buyers in your marketplace. You will never know who the 40% are who buy BETTER, and you won't know who the 20% are who buy BEST either. You will never have the chance to reap the benefits of presenting GOOD, BETTER, BEST.

Oh, and one other thing bears mentioning: if you are one of those salespeople who don't believe in selling GOOD, BETTER, BEST, you will never sell the upgrade or make the extra profit margins that go along with this selling technique.

AVOID SELLING PRICE

When there is no value, there is only one thing left, PRICE. Value is what your customers are looking for. When you bring them value by either doing something that helps them do their job or bringing them a better product or service for the same price, you have done your job.

Try to figure out what your customer really wants or needs. It may have nothing to do with product or service. To provide value, you have to be willing to sit down and ask probing questions to find out what the needs are. If you are able to provide value to your customers, how important is price in the equation?



The more value you bring to the table, the less price matters.

UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER PERSON'S VIEWPOINT

Part of the “empathy process” is establishing trust and rapport. Creating trust and rapport helps us to have sensible “adult” discussions (see Transactional Analysis, another useful model for understanding empathy).

Establishing trust is about listening and understanding, not necessarily agreeing with the other person (which is different). **Listening without judging**

A useful focus to aim for when listening to another person is to try to understand how the other person feels and to discover what they want to achieve. Dr. Stephen Covey, of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, is one of many modern advocates who urge us to strive deeply to understand the other person's point of view.

It is difficult, and rarely appropriate, to try to persuade another person to do what we want; instead we must understand what the other person wants and then try helping them to achieve it, which often includes helping them see the way to do it.

We must work with people collaboratively to enable them to see what they want and then help them to see how to achieve it. **This establishes trust.**



TRUST & RAPPORT

Customers will resist aggressive persuasion. The “pushy” persuasive approach immediately polarizes you and your customer, and the resulting emotional issue then dominates the sales process, removing any chance of saving the customer or the project. All initial effort must be to establish rapport and understanding; without rapport nothing can be done.

Your style must be highly sympathetic and interested. Most sales reps have a tendency to use a confrontational, competitive or challenging tone that makes matters worse. Stay “with” the customer; understand and sympathize (you don’t have to agree). Instead of presenting an opposing proposition and trying to direct the conversation, allow the discussion to develop comfortably.



Use a training exercise to identify suitable empathic information once initial rapport has been established: what do we need to know in order to help? how to position the need to ask questions? how to ask for this information?

Identify approaches and “ready-made” phrases to view customers’ situations objectively: “let’s look at this together and see what the options are...” rather than following the natural tendency to go head-to-head, countering the customer’s position with superior argument, justification or, worse still, implied or direct threat (such as penalties, etc.). It’s easy to fall into the confrontation trap because so much sales training and experience is based on the power of persuasion, which can be highly confrontational when you put a customer on the defensive.

If your prospect doesn’t like you, s/he will become empowered to accelerate and reinforce withdrawal the moment s/he feels the slightest bit challenged or opposed. Using a positive approach is a more productive strategy.

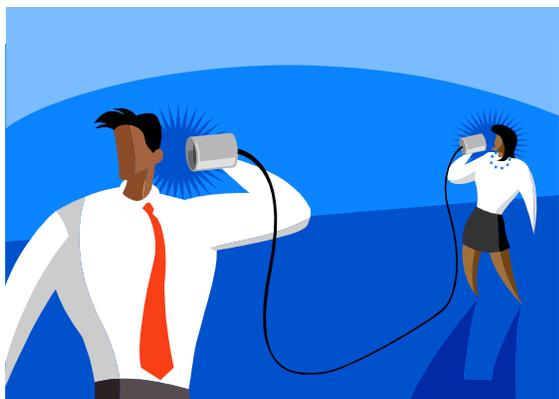
The secret to building customer trust and rapport lies within the relationship of the first few seconds, so stay focused and stay positive. A good relationship is the foundation for future sales.



Role-play sympathetic phrases and tone for this scenario: you meet a friend in the street and learn from that s/he has suffered an upsetting experience—listen for the natural empathy and sympathy—there is no instinct here to persuade the friend to “get a grip” or “snap out of it”—the natural sympathetic response is the basis of building trust, empathy and rapport.

Trust, rapport, empathy and understanding are powerful relationship builders. They form the bedrock of sustainable business and sales careers.

LISTENING



Of all the communication skills, listening is arguably the one that makes the biggest difference. The most brilliant and effective speaker ultimately becomes undone if s/he fails to listen properly.

Listening does not come naturally to most of us, so we need to work hard at it to stop ourselves from “jumping in” and giving our opinions.

Sadly, most people don’t listen—they just take turns speaking—we all tend to be more

interested in announcing our own views and experiences than really listening and understanding others.

This is ironic since we all like to be listened to and understood. Stephen Covey rightly says that when we are understood we feel affirmed and validated. He also coined the expression: “Seek first to understand, and then to be understood,” which serves as a constant reminder for the need to listen to the other person before you can expect him or her to listen to you.

LEVELS OF LISTENING: “EFFECTIVE LISTENING”

There are different types of listening, typically presented as levels of listening.

Bear in mind that listening is rarely confined to words. Sometimes what you are listening to will include other sounds or intonations or verbal/emotional noises. Sometimes listening involves noticing a silence or a pause, “dead air” as it’s known in broadcasting.

You might instead be listening to a musical performance, an engine noise, or a crowded meeting for the purpose of understanding and assessing what is actually happening or being said. As you will see, listening in its fullest sense ultimately includes many nonverbal and inaudible factors, such as body language, facial expressions, reactions, cultural elements, and the reactions of speaker and listener to one another.



Summary of Listening levels:

1. **passive/not listening:** noise in background - ignoring
2. **pretend listening:** also called “responsive listening” - using stock nods and smiles and um-hum, yes, of course, etc.
3. **biased/projective listening:** “selective listening” and intentionally disregarding/dismissing the other person’s views
4. **misunderstood listening:** unconsciously overlaying your own interpretations and making things fit when they don’t
5. **attentive listening:** personally driven fact gathering and analysis, often with manipulation of the other person
6. **active listening:** understanding feelings and gathering facts for largely selfish purposes
7. **empathic listening:** understanding and checking facts and feelings, usually to listener’s personal agenda
8. **facilitative listening:** listening, understanding fully and helping with the other person’s needs.



THE TRUE ART OF LISTENING

Turn off your self-talk

We cannot hear what the other person is saying if we have our own thoughts getting in the way. We talk to ourselves while others are talking to us. The rate of speech in our own heads is about 600 words per minute (wpm). Most people, clients included, only speak about 150 wpm. So slow down and focus on their words.

Hear what the other person is saying

Often we allow our filters to interpret what the other person said. A filter is anything that becomes a barrier to hearing what the other person is saying. When thinking ahead for your response, bias, background, culture, education, socioeconomics and such, act as filters. The salesperson must eliminate filters to hear the message of the customer.



Physically let the person know you are listening

Eighty percent of our message is delivered in how we appear to the other person. A positive nod of the head, a verbal “uh-huh” or “OK” are clues that you are still with them. Open body language is critical. Folding our arms in front of our body is a closed position that signals to others we are mentally turned off to their words. Solution: keep your hands at your sides in the listening position.

Paraphrase using “I” language

To make sure you hear what the other person said, repeat key words to verify what was said. For example, say: “So, if I understand you correctly...” People don’t always say what they mean. Successful salespeople paraphrase the important parts of what they heard.

Secret to improving your listening skills

Place a tape recorder in the top drawer of your desk and record your side of the next eight telephone conversations. Find a quiet corner and listen to what you said. Identify one element you dislike and focus on changing it. Then put a rubber band on your wrist as a reminder of the habit you want to change. Be patient: most habits take an average of 30 days of constant practice to change.

NOTE: Great listeners become great salespeople. How great a listener are you?

EMPATHY SKILLS



For relationships, communications, complaints, customer retention and conflicts.

Empathy and trust are a platform for understanding, communication and relationships. Empathy and trust are essential in developing solutions, winning and retaining business, and avoiding or diffusing conflict. Empathy and trust are also essential for handling complaints and retaining customers.

These days we need to be more effective communicators to be successful in business and in life. The “steps of the sale,” persuasion, closing techniques, features and benefits do not build rapport or relationships; empathy, trust, understanding and sympathetic communications do. One-sided persuasion is not sustainable and is often insulting, especially when handling complaints. Trust and empathy are far more important in achieving and sustaining successful personal and business relationships.

A direct result of the “hard-sell” days is that many consumers and business people are reluctant to expose themselves to situations where they may be asked to make a decision. This makes arriving at a deal more difficult, and very special skills are now needed to manage the situations in which business is done.

Most modern gurus in the areas of communications, management and self-development refer in one way or another to the importance of empathy, really understanding the other person’s position and feelings. Being able to step back and detach from our own emotions is essential in building effective, constructive relationships.

Whether for selling, customer retention, complaint resolution, or conflict mediation, empathy helps.

BODY LANGUAGE

How to read body language signs and gestures

Non-verbal communication or “body language,” technically known as kinesics (pronounced kəˈnēsiks), is a significant aspect of modern communications and relationships

Body language therefore becomes relevant to sales representatives and business owners where communications are seen and physically observed.

Body language is also relevant to relationships outside of work, e.g., in dating and mating, and in families and parenting.



- **7% of the message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in the words that are spoken.**
- **38% of the message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said).**
- **55% of the message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in facial expression.**

Communication includes listening. In terms of observable body language, non-verbal (non-spoken) signals are being exchanged whether these signals are accompanied by spoken words or not.

Body language goes both ways:

- Your own body language reveals your feelings and meanings to others.
- Other people’s body language reveals their feelings and meanings to you.

The sending and receiving of body language signals happens on both conscious and unconscious levels.

BODY LANGUAGE AND EVOLUTION

The evolutionary perspectives of body language are fascinating in terms of its purpose and how it is exploited which, in turn, feeds back into the purpose of body language at the conscious and unconscious levels.

Human beings tend to lie, deceive, manipulate, and pretend. It’s in our nature to do this, even if only to a small degree. People intentionally and frequently mask their true feelings for various reasons.

Transactional analysis theory is useful in understanding this masking behavior. In expectation of these “masking” tendencies in others, humans try to imagine what the other person has on his or her mind. This need to understand what lies behind the mask obviously increases with the importance of the relationship.

Body language helps us to manage and guard against these tendencies, especially in flirting, dating, and mating rituals. Body language also helps people to communicate and resolve relationship issues when conscious behavior and speech fail to do so. Body language has evolved in spite of human awareness and conscious intelligence, rather like a guardian angel, body language can help take care of us, connecting us to kindred souls and protecting us from threats.

While the importance of body language in communications and management has become a popular interest and science in the last few decades, human beings have relied on body language instinctively for many thousands of years.

Not surprisingly, poker players of the American Wild West were early exponents of the interpretation of body language. Winners needed not only to be handy with a six-shooter, but also skilled in reading other people’s non-verbal signals and in controlling their own.



Before these times, explorers and tribal leaders had to be able to read the body language of potential foes to know whether or not to trust, defend, or attack. Our caveman ancestors certainly needed to read body language if only because no other language existed.

Humans have also learned to read the body language of animals (and vice-versa) although early humans most certainly had greater skills in this area than we do today. Shepherds, horse riders and animal trainers are keenly attuned to animal body language that, for many, extends to the human animal.

Body language and the ability to read nonverbal communications and feelings are in our genes. Were these factors not in our genes, we would not be here today. Women tend to be better at perceiving and interpreting body language than men. This is perhaps a feature of evolutionary survival, since females needed good body language skills to reduce their physical vulnerability to males and the consequential threat to life, limb and offspring. While females might not be as physically vulnerable in modern times, they do tend to employ body language for sending and interpreting signals more effectively than do men.

EYES – BODY LANGUAGE

Our eyes are a very significant aspect of the nonverbal signals we send to others. To a lesser or greater extent, we all “read” people’s eyes without knowing how or why, and this ability seems to be inborn.



Eyes, and especially our highly developed awareness of what we see in other people’s eyes, are amazing. From a distance that is too far away to see the detail of a person’s eyes (as much as 30-40 meters), we know when there is eye contact. This is an absolutely awesome capability when you think about it.

We can also see whether or not another person’s eyes are focused on us, and we can easily detect the differences between a glazed-over blank stare, a piercing look, a moistening eye long before tears come, and an awkward or secret glance. We probably cannot describe these and many other eye signals, but we recognize them when we see them and we know what they mean.

When we additionally consider the eyelids, and the flexibility of the eyes to widen and close, and for the pupils to enlarge or contract, it becomes easier to understand how the eyes have developed such potency in human communications.

A NOTE ABOUT EYES: LOOKING RIGHT AND LEFT

As described here, left and right are for the person giving the signals and making the movements. Eyes tend to look right when the brain is imagining or creating and left when the brain is recalling or remembering. These eye movements relate to the right and left sides of the brain—in broad context, the parts of the brain handling creativity/feelings (right) and facts/memory (left). This is discussed in greater detail below, chiefly based on NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) theory, developed in the 1960s.

Under certain circumstances “creating” can mean fabrication or lying, especially (but not always) when the person is supposed to be recalling facts. Looking right when stating facts does not necessarily mean lying. It could, for example, mean that the person does not know the answer, and is talking hypothetically, speculating, or even guessing.

All of this being said, start paying attention to your client’s eyes, and try to determine what kind of nonverbal signals s/he is sending. Or, better yet, start paying attention to the nonverbal signals that you are sending to your clients. If you do take the time to understand this aspect of reading your customers’ feelings and intentions, you will have a much better chance of becoming a top sales producer.

MIRRORING

Matching body language signals

Mirroring or synchronizing body language and speech characteristics tends to aid the process of creating and keeping rapport (a mutual feeling of empathy, understanding, and trust). The term “synchronized” is arguably a more accurate technical term because mirroring implies visual signals only, when the principles of matching body language extend to audible signals also, notably speech pace, pitch, and tone, etc.

“Mirrored” or synchronized body language between two people encourages **feelings** of trust and rapport because it generates unconscious feelings of affirmation. When another person displays similar body language to our own, we react unconsciously by feeling “This person is like me and agrees with the way I am. I like this person because we are similar, and s/he likes me too.”



Avoid sending mismatched signals that translate into unconscious feelings of discord, discomfort, or even rejection. The unconscious mind thinks, “This person is not like me; s/he is different from me; I am not being affirmed, therefore I feel defensive.”

Advocates and users of NLP use mirroring consciously as a method of “getting in tune” with another person and, with a little practice, you should be able to match and then gently alter the signals and—supposedly—the feelings and attitudes of others.

Speech pace or speed is an example. When you are speaking with someone, first match his or her pace of speaking, then gently change your pace to slower or faster and see whether or not the other person follows you. Often they will follow.

People, usually peaceful and cooperative souls, naturally match each other’s body language. To do otherwise can create discomfort, even though we rarely think consciously about it. When another person leans forward towards us at a table, we often mirror and do likewise. When they lean back and relax, we do the same.

Sales people and other professional communicators are widely taught to mirror all sorts of more subtle signals as a means of creating trust and rapport with others and influencing attitudes.

Mirroring, when done consciously, is not simply copying or mimicking. It is most effective when movements and gestures are reflected in a subtle way so that the effect is natural. Obvious copying would be regarded as strange or even insulting.



TARGETS & GOALS

Do you have goals? Do you ever think about them? Do you keep a sheet of paper somewhere with a list of your goals for this week, this month, this year or next year?

If you expect to grow and hone your craft as a top producing salesperson, you must have goals. My long-term, short-term, and weekly goals bounce around in my head all the time. I write them down and carry them with me in my planner so I can reflect on them and strategize on how to make them happen. When I reach one or two, I set that many more new goals. Always set a new goal when one is accomplished. Never be satisfied that you have completed them all and that you don't need any more.



An interesting thing happens when you write down your goals. You become part of a unique club. Roughly 15% of people in business write down their goals and plan their days, weeks and months, leaving the majority—85%—without written goals.

Something else interesting happens when you write down your goals. Your subconscious mind—which wants you to succeed—subconsciously processes those goals and works on achieving them. I guarantee that if you write down a set of serious goals for a year, you will be totally surprised at the end of the year when you pause to reflect. You will find that you have achieved most of your goals if not all of them, simply because you wrote them down. Do you understand the value of this exercise? Are you seeing how all these recommendations contribute to your success?

HAVE A MENTOR

Mentor (mĕn'tôr) noun:

1. A wise and trusted counselor or teacher.
2. Serving as a trusted counselor or teacher, especially in occupational settings.

Mentors are more than simply teachers. Mentors provide knowledge and advice, but their most effective tools are questions. They ask questions to help you gain awareness, arrive at insights or develop perspective. In short, mentors help you gain self-awareness and skills.

The most important thing I've learned about having a mentor is that I've got someone whom I can trust. Someone I can go to for answers on important topics that I know little about. A trusted counselor and teacher that helps me make business decisions when the path isn't so clear. Certainly you have had one of those moments when you knew you needed to do something but you didn't know what to do. A mentor is someone you can trust with your thoughts and unproven ideas. And sometimes a mentor also becomes a friend, which is just an added bonus.



A mentor should be someone you respect and trust, someone you look up to, a role model. S/he will be known for integrity and subject matter expertise in a discipline.

This isn't generally the guy in the next cubicle. It might be an old boss that you respect; it could be a pastor or someone you know in business. But the longer you're in business, the more you'll realize that you need a mentor.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST WEAKNESS?

One of the most important personal development principles that I talk about is that your weakest area will limit your ability to take advantage of your strongest area. The various parts of our lives—physical, mental, social, spiritual—are deeply interwoven, and we cannot simply consider each part in isolation.

People often identify themselves with their strongest area: I'm an athlete (physical). I'm a geek (mental). I'm a party animal (social). But then they may fall into the trap of allowing their weak areas to go undeveloped.

While capitalizing on your strengths is good advice, your ability to do that will largely be determined by how you handle your weaknesses. A dumb, unfocused athlete is unlikely to do as well as a smart one. An antisocial athlete will miss out on the chance to be part of a team. Consider each possible pairing of the physical, mental, social, and spiritual elements, and notice how each can help or hinder another.

It's tempting to continue working on our strengths while ignoring our weaknesses. Our most important results will often come from our strengths—that's true. The best way to improve those results, however, is often to work on our weakest areas. This helps us in two ways: first, by shoring up our weak areas, we prevent them from getting in the way of our strengths; secondly, if we take this far enough, we can turn those weak areas into secondary strengths that augment our primary strength. Turning weaknesses into strengths requires a concerted training effort.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE TIME MANAGEMENT?

Is time management one of your daily challenges? If so, how do you define time management?

For many salespeople, this definition begins by focusing on time and how to get more time out of 24 hours. This paradigm sets most people up for failure because no one can manage a constant! Managing time is about juggling many different things—because there is no constant.



Improving your time management skills begins with shifting the paradigm and focusing on the real challenge—YOU! Possibly now you are thinking, “Okay, it’s me, but the issue of getting things done is still a problem.” You are absolutely correct. However, by shifting the paradigm, you can put specific steps into action to meet the challenge.

From my perspective, time management is really the apex of goal setting. Without goals, whether or not we are late for a meeting or sending out a proposal or taking a phone call isn’t critical.

What I have also discovered is that the majority of people (probably more than 90% of those whom I’ve encountered), do not have a proven goal-setting process in place. It would seem likely then, that ineffective time management is a symptom of poor goal-setting behaviors.

Time management is really about goals and values. By not having values and goals, or a commitment to achieving those goals, individuals are faced with not having enough time to do what they say they are going to do. Time management is failing to distinguish “must-do” tasks from “should-do” tasks. Must do’s are those things that you have given your word on or something that will cause suffering to someone if left undone. Everything else is a “should do.” You then prioritize should-do’s based on your goals (there’s that word again). Time management is, at its core, a self-management skill.

When you shift your paradigm, your focus changes. If you accept that time management is about you, your goals, and your ability to manage yourself, then you will have the tools to make the most out of every single day.

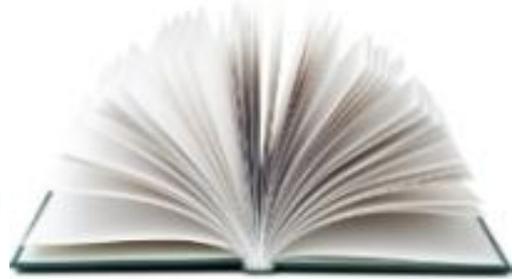
“High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectation.”

– Jack and Garry Kinder

PLANNERS, WHICH ONE WORKS?

Time management planners are popular, and with good reason. Proper planning is vital for effective use of your days, weeks and months. Once you know a “to do” is on the calendar, any sort of action in support of it is easier.

So which ones should you use? It’s a personal choice. Many people highlight the advantages of technology tools as time-management planners. Other people prefer a paper-based approach. Whichever you use, the purpose of planners is simple: to help you convert intentions into actions.



Planners may be electronic or paper-based, but they need to be functional. How often do you refer to your planner? Frequent access and referral are keys to success.

What they do

Essentially, your Daily Action Planner (DAP) can include two types of information:

1. Tasks
2. Appointments

Your planner is a list of what you plan to do *and when you plan to do it*. Used properly, it will allow you to manage your time far more effectively than most people ever do. Why? Because you start each day knowing exactly what you have to accomplish today—no more, no less.

HOW TO USE IT SO IT ACTUALLY WORKS

It’s all about limits and buffers. Time is finite; you can only do so much in one day. That being the case, set up buffers between the assignment of the task or scheduled activity and the time you actually do it.

Things come into your life randomly. A request here, an invitation there; you just don’t know what to expect. Effective time management planners impose order on activities so you know what needs to be done and when to do it.

A Daily Action Planner works like this: whenever you are given a task, or think of one that needs to be done, defer it. Put it off until tomorrow, or until the day that you deem most appropriate for it. Unless it’s genuinely same-day urgent (most things aren’t), write it on tomorrow’s date page.

Building in this buffer means you know the limit of what you will do each day. You also have the chance to prepare for it.

AN EXAMPLE

It's Thursday the 8th and you're at work. Each idea, task or request that you get is deferred until tomorrow. You put them all in your daily planner under "Thursday 9th." That report you were given? Tackle it on Friday. The invitation to a product launch? Reply on Friday, and so on.

Whatever it is, unless it's a must-do-today task, put it off. You go home on Thursday evening knowing exactly what you need to do tomorrow because you have a limited list of things to do. You don't add anything to Thursday's date because it goes on your Friday list.

WORK IN BLOCKS OF TIME

What if you don't get the report finished in one day? Think in terms of time on the task rather than completion of it. Allocate as long as you can manage to it, then reschedule for the next day. This may be the following working day or a later date. Repeat to complete.

So, your Daily Action Planner is a finite list of daily tasks to do. You'll know what to do and when to do it.



Tip: Don't forget that you still have to actually do each task! There's no way around that, though trying these time management techniques will help.

APPOINTMENTS

Depending on the number of scheduled activities you typically commit to, give thought to whether or not to combine your time-management planners. Either separate actions and appointments or combine the two into one planner. Use trial and error with your planning systems until you discover what suits you.

ADDITIONAL TIME-MANAGEMENT PLANNERS

Apart from knowing what you're doing on a day-to-day basis, a planner will also help you see the bigger picture. Besides focusing on your day-to-day schedule, use a weekly, monthly or yearly planner. You can use the dates on these as prompts for actions needing to be added to your DAP.

For example, you look at your big-picture planner and remind yourself that you have a birthday to remember next month. Simply write down "buy card and gift" in your DAP a couple of weeks before the big day, and voilà! job done.



To sum up:

- Task comes in
- Write it down on tomorrow's action list (or some future date)
- Do it on the date you say you will.
- Remain aware of the big picture, too.

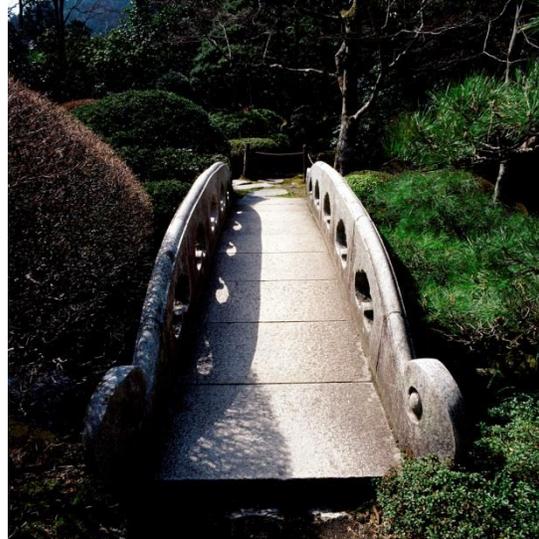
Bottom line: effective use of your time-management planner means you know what to do and when to do it.

TAKE ACTION NOW TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS SOONER!

Wouldn't it be great if you could have everything you want magically appear with the snap of a finger? Like the old adage says, "You can't get something for nothing." The secret to achieving your goals comes down to taking action. There is no magic code that is given to a select few at birth. Achieving goals is an inherent ability we all have; you can achieve absolutely every goal you imagine, but you need to get moving.

One of the benefits of taking action is that your movement is the very thing that bridges the gap between imagining a dream and manifesting it. Action = Results! Consistent effort equals success.

That's not to say that the road to goal achievement is free of challenges, and it's rarely a breeze. Ask anyone if their hard work was worth it in the end, and most will answer in the affirmative. The benefits of taking action far outweigh using only a fraction of your potential and living with regret. You can move from feeling controlled to being in control. Once you realize the power you hold and the benefits of taking action, your life will never be the same.



At this very moment, you have 3 choices:

1. Give up on achieving your goals.
2. You can get serious about pursuing your goals and taking action at a later time.
3. Achieve your goals now and realize your dreams!

Sometimes you don't work hard to achieve your goals because you just aren't willing to do what it takes—and that's okay if that's really your choice. Fear of failure and disappointment can keep us trapped in a mediocre life that is so much less than what we deserve. You were born with the potential to succeed, and anyone that has told you differently is just plain wrong.

If you knew you were born for success and that achieving your goals is what you were made to do, would it make it easier to justify their aggressive pursuit? The truth is that your success is inevitable. Failure is something we have learned from our environment—it is not part of our inherent nature. So now that you know you were born for greatness, embrace the opportunity to make your life a fantastic one!

If you are at step #2, taking action at some later time, that's good, but you might as well go for #3. The gap between #1 and #2 is the greatest, so if you're here, you've already done half the work. If you could have anything in the world right now, what would it be? Close your eyes and imagine having what you want... Feel it, see it, and breathe it in. Now tell me how delaying that good feeling could possibly benefit you. You deserve everything you are imagining. Quit thinking and talking about it and just do it!

If your choice is number 3, Congratulations! If you are in this category, you already feel the fire and know you want more. So let's get to work! First, remove the words can't, try, and maybe from your vocabulary. There is no such thing as try. You either do or don't. Commit to achieving your goals or don't commit—it's really that simple. You were born for greatness and trying to achieve your goals is not the same as committing to achieve them.

How do you plug fear into this thinking?

Fear is never an excuse for not taking action. You are exactly where you are right now because you have been too fearful to step outside your comfort zone. To get to where you want to be, you have to feel the fear and take action anyway. The fear is only temporary, while the benefits of moving forward through the fear last forever. After you take action, you will wonder what you were so afraid of in the first place.

Taking action creates support

The minute you start taking action to achieve your goals, people will rush to support you, but they have to know you are serious and mean business. The support of friends and associates and even unlikely opportunities will all come to your rescue as soon as you show everyone you are committed to achieving your goals.



Quit talking the talk and start walking the walk

Talking about taking action and actually taking action are not the same. The sooner you get walking, the sooner you'll get there. If you want to achieve your goals within the timeframe you desire, quit wasting time and procrastinating. Start today by just doing what you know you need to do.

Life is not a predetermined set of circumstances—it is what you make of them. When you commit to achieving your goals, you realize how much power you really have. And to see the benefits of taking action—you must start. Have faith that you are programmed for success and that you are already equipped with everything you need to get to where you want to be.

Keep your focus on your goals and know that the benefits of taking action are so much bigger than anything you have to do to get there.

“Do or do not. There is no ‘try.’”

- Jedi Master Yoda



IT'S TOO EXPENSIVE!

How often have you heard current clients or prospects utter the objection, “It’s too expensive”? Probably dozens or hundreds of times. Have you ever considered how many more sales you could have closed if this objection had never come up? Probably many more. Overcoming this objection and producing better sales outcomes requires that you first identify what motivates clients to utter that objection and then see whether or not there is something you can do to eliminate the complaint.

When clients tell you “it’s too expensive” or “it doesn’t fit my budget,” is it because they find the price too high or because they don’t perceive the real value of your offer?

In any transaction, when a client finds that your product or service is too costly, there are two important factors to consider: price and value. In order for an exchange to take place, the client must perceive the value of your offer as greater than the asking price, otherwise there will be no agreement.

The obvious solution is to reduce your price or throw in complimentary accessories or other products. By choosing the easy option, however, you are reducing your profitability as well as your commission.

If, on the other hand, you alter the client’s perception so that the product or service value greatly surpasses its price, you can reach profit targets and close the sale.

Let’s look at the procedure for getting your client to appreciate the value of your product or service. First, a simple question: how much would you be willing to pay for a Mont Blanc pen?

- A. Less than \$50
- B. Between \$50 and \$100
- C. Over \$100

If every reader could answer, then:

hundreds of you would choose A, hundreds of you would choose B, and hundreds of you would choose C.



Why? Because for some, the most important factor to consider in buying a pen is simply its utility, whereas for others a Mont Blanc pen is a symbol of success, exclusivity and prestige.



For those who are wondering, most Mont Blanc pens sell for between \$100 and \$1000!



The above example clearly shows that appreciation for any given object varies from one person to the next. Why is it that some clients recognize that your product has a lot of value, while others feel that it has less value?

In the first case, the sales consultant asked relevant questions that made it possible to determine the client's needs, concerns, and the specific problem(s) that the product is intended to solve. In the second case, the sales agent did not draw a correlation between the product's features and the client's perspective.

Since this perspective will vary from client to client, you must ask questions to be able to offer a solution tailored to the client's specific requirements. This is how you can effectively increase the value of your product or service in the client's eyes.

The products you offer should feature specific valuable elements, but if your approach is to simply list all these wonderful characteristics (as so many salespersons do), you will greatly dilute the value of your offer and your client will often conclude that the price is too high.

When serving customers, it is important to describe only the product features that have a direct link to the customer's need, desire, problem or concern. By doing so, you increase the product's value. The price is always relative to the benefits that your client will derive from the product—the more useful the product is to the client, the higher the monetary value s/he will place on it.



To eliminate price-related objections and obtain better sales results, you must ask in-depth questions aimed at identifying your client's concerns and sources of stress. Once you have that information, you can propose a product or service that is based on what is important for THE CLIENT, not on what YOU THINK is important.

You must get this part right to drive a notable increase in sales. Try it! Asking questions develops trust and rapport. Do you see how this works?

MARGIN & MARKUP: THE DIFFERENCE

There are a lot of sales representatives who don't understand the difference between margins and mark up. There is a big difference between the two, especially the higher the dollars get. So here is a brief clarification.

Margin and markup actually refer to the same thing—the difference between what you pay for a widget and what you sell it for. The difference is the perspective: margin is the difference as a percentage of the selling price whereas markup is the difference as a percentage of the buying price.

Here's an example:

You pay: \$50

You sell for: \$55

Difference: \$5

Margin = $\$5 / \$55 = 9.1\%$

Markup = $\$5 / \$50 = 10\%$



As you can see, margin and markup end up with different values, so make sure when you are calculating your estimates to use the correct measurement method. On most projects in our industry, margin is the defining number in a project value. Margin determines how much you get paid.

IT'S OKAY TO SAY NO

What if your customer tells you your price is too high? Always deliver your sales presentation in the form of good, better and best. This will give your customer options to choose from and increase the likelihood of a sale. In this way, you won't lose the customer who is genuinely interested in your products and services. Customers will work with you to identify the most viable option if they trust the relationship you are building with them. Failure to provide options gives your customer an "out" or a reason not to do business with you.

When a customer gives overt clues that s/he will be more demanding than you can justify from a profitability perspective, you can part on good terms by thanking him or her for their time and acknowledging that you don't have what they need at the price they can afford at this time. You can always call again offering additional options, or simply choose to find customers in your target market that are a better fit for your products and services.

Note that when a customer is difficult at the front end, it should be a warning to you that the whole job may go the same way. Those who are difficult on the front end are frequently difficult during the project and at the end when you are trying to collect your final payment.

Saying "no," and walking away are sometimes the smart thing to do. By choosing to do that early in the game, you don't lose anything other than time, which is always cheaper than managing a challenging client through a project that doesn't live up to your profit and commission expectations.

CONCLUSION

Increasing sales productivity necessitates a written plan and goals that focus on **solution-based sales** and **lifelong relationships**. Planning helps crystallize your goals and objectives and provides standards against which to measure your performance. Begin with the end in mind; establish your purpose and goals. Write the plan down, review, revise and refine it as often as needed to maintain momentum towards your ultimate goal.

My earnest hope is that you now understand why the secret to building customer trust and rapport lies within the relationship of the first few seconds. Your customers want to do business with someone they like and trust. They also want to do business with someone they are comfortable with, someone with similar interests and values.

Closing more sales depends on your ability to build **trust and rapport**. So, how have you been treating your customers—like a favored relative or a good friend? Have you been working with solution-based sales in mind? Do you really think you are the sharpest tack in the box? I hope not, because there is always going to be someone who is sharper than you are who can win your customers' favor.

The **value you create with prospects is not dictated by what you tell them, but by what you ask them**. Value is determined by the prospect, not by you. So it's important to remember that top salespeople don't think about the sales commission, they think about how to develop trust and rapport and bring value to the relationship.

Solving the customer's problems is your key to success. Selling solutions that help your customer reach goals that were unattainable before you showed up will help you grow profit (and commission). Be hungry for information and opportunities for professional training and development so that you can differentiate yourself and your company from your competitors and gain credibility as an industry leader. A serious commitment to lifelong learning helps you increase both product knowledge and sales effectiveness, assuring that you provide value each time you speak with your clients.

Knowledge is power. Give these suggestions some consideration and use the strategies I've laid out to present a professional image, outshine your competitors and win the sale. Isn't that what it's all about?



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