

Rebirth of the Salesman

The World of Sales is Evolving. Are You?

Cian McLoughlin

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Cian McLoughlin © 2015

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REBIRTH OF THE SALESMAN

Cian has written a timely masterpiece for professional salespeople as they navigate unprecedented change and disruption. The battle for relevance and the imperative to deliver value makes this book a must read for anyone committed to both protecting and transforming their sales career.

Tony Hughes · Business author, keynote speaker and #1 ranked influencer for professional selling in Asia Pacific by Top Sales World Magazine

In Rebirth of the Salesman, Cian is doing what all great salespeople do: He is looking at selling from the customers' perspective. The truth is, we don't sell. They buy. The more we do to help them buy; the more we sell. This is an insightful and uplifting book filled with the kind of courage and common sense that characterizes all great salespeople.

Kristin Zhivago · Author, business technologist and President of the Cloud Era Institute

The commodisation and accessibility of information in recent years has shifted the balance of power from sellers to buyers. The customer of today is more knowledgeable, sophisticated, and educated than ever before. What does that mean for you if you're a sales professional? Cian lays out the answers in this step-by-step guide for safeguarding and growing your sales career. A must read for anyone wanting to take their rightful place in the brave new world of B2B sales.

Matthew Michalewicz · Entrepreneurship, innovation and success psychology expert, author of *Life in Half a Second*

A book that will help you to meet your customers where they are, which in a changing world is exactly where you need to be.

Bernadette Jiwa · Brand strategist, TEDx speaker,
author of four Amazon #1 bestsellers, voted Best
Australian Business Blog 2012

*We have witnessed more advances in the world of professional selling in the past five years than in the previous 50. As buyers become increasingly self-educated, the sales role in many industries will undoubtedly diminish. How can organizations survive, let alone thrive in this new environment? In his excellent new book *Rebirth of the Salesman*, Cian McLoughlin provides a blueprint to guide us.*

Jonathan Farrington · Founder and CEO of Top
Sales World Magazine

Besides being an experienced sales leader and consultant in his own right, Cian has been a business partner of Miller Heiman Global “on the front lines” doing exactly as he represents in his book...focusing on how the customer buys to inform how to sell. His insights here are grounded in facts and reality, not theory and ‘mind-mush’.

Rich Blakeman · Managing Director,
MHI Global Channel Sales Centre of Excellence

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Thanks to you, the reader of this book, for your willingness to come on this journey with me. I hope we make good travelling companions.

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A special thanks to my Mum and Dad for instilling in me a love of the written word and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

I'm proud to dedicate this book to my wife Shelley and my son Conor, who make it all worthwhile.

*Why am I trying to become what I don't want to be ...
when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute
I say I know who I am.*

— Biff Loman, Death of a Salesman

FOREWORD

The world has changed, how we conduct business has changed and how we sell has changed. Seems pretty obvious doesn't it? But in reality, most individuals and organisations still use selling techniques from a bygone era and wonder why they aren't working.

Then along comes Cian McLoughlin. Cian is a master sales trainer, specialising in business-to-business. He is leading the way in a world where most industries need to completely rethink their sales strategy and their overall approach to sales.

Every industry needs a person like Cian to challenge conventional thinking and be bold enough to ask the tough questions. Even more importantly, this person needs to provide an alternative future and that is what I took from his book, *Rebirth of the Salesman*.

In *Rebirth of the Salesman*, Cian starts by showing how important it is to rethink our approach to sales and explains the reasons why. His argument is extremely compelling and sets the scene for what lies ahead in this extraordinarily inspirational and practical book.

Cian achieves this by showcasing the character traits that are not normally talked about in sales conversations. Things like humility, imagination, curiosity and optimism. These are the topics we need to be talking about in all business conversations, not just in sales conversations. The fact that Cian has identified this, in a world where he is a leader, shows just how much the world has changed.

Another aspect of *Rebirth of the Salesman* that I find inspirational is the interviews with some of the most impressive sales thought leaders on the planet. An interview is only as good as the questions being asked and, once again, Cian shows how attuned he is to the evolving needs of the modern salesperson by the depth and intelligence of his questions.

This is a great book and Cian is one of the most impressive people I have met. I have been selling for over 30 years; I have sold everything from retail to corporate-to-corporate in over 20 countries. I've long felt that the sales world was struggling to adapt and it has been well and truly disrupted, but with little response. A book like *Rebirth of the Salesman* has the potential to change individuals, which is exactly where the revolution needs to start.

Andrew Griffiths

International bestselling author/media commentator

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INTRODUCTION

Start with Why

People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it.

Simon Sinek · Author, speaker, and thought leader

'I'm sorry, we've decided to go with Company X instead of you. But thanks for all of your hard work.'

Hearing this statement from a customer or prospect can be the bitterest of pills to swallow, particularly after a long and complex sales cycle. If you've ever found yourself curled in the foetal position clutching a bottle of red wine, having shed vast quantities of blood, sweat and tears trying to close a sale only to see it slip from your grasp at the last moment, then *Rebirth of the Salesman* may be just the book for you.

Whether you're a sales leader, professional salesperson or simply someone with an interest in business, I believe this book will contain some valuable insights for you. What you'll get is a blueprint to help you craft a memorable pitch, master the art of storytelling in business, hone your sales skills and much more besides. In addition, *Rebirth of the Salesman* will offer you a clear understanding of the factors influencing your customers' purchasing decisions and a way to extract candid feedback from any deal you pursue. You're likely to find yourself nodding in agreement at certain points in the book and wincing in pain at others, but I'm confident there will be plenty of 'ah-ha!' moments in between.

I wrote *Rebirth of the Salesman* with two types of readers in mind. The first are senior sales leaders looking for new ideas or to validate their own theories about sales success and their customers' decision making criteria.

If you fit this profile, I'd encourage you to annotate or highlight as you go, and reach out to me directly if you still have questions or if you'd like to discuss a particular topic further.

I also wrote it for sales professionals and business people keen to develop their skills, build their careers and better anticipate the wants and needs of their customers. I have a particular affinity with young salespeople carving out their niche in what can be a demanding and occasionally cut-throat area of business. I've trained and mentored thousands of younger salespeople in recent years and I have always tried to instill in them the creativity and endless possibilities of our profession, plus an understanding of the positive impact we can have on the businesses we sell to on a daily basis.

My goals in writing this book are to:

- help you to recognise how the sales industry is evolving and make sure you have a strategy to evolve right along with it
- provide specific, actionable and hopefully engaging insights that will allow you to focus on key skills or personal development opportunities, to help lift your game
- reinvigorate those of you who have been ploughing a lonely furrow for many years now and may have begun to lose sight of the purpose and clarity you once had about your chosen profession, and
- help you to seek out the treasure trove of valuable insights and nuggets of customer gold, which sit waiting to be mined just below the surface of the deals you work on every day.

At its simplest, I wrote *Rebirth of the Salesman* as a guide book for sales and business people everywhere, curious to know more about what's really happening in the mind of their buyers and to get a peek behind the curtain of their customers' decision-making processes. Ultimately, *Rebirth of the Salesman* was written to get to the heart of one central question:

As sales professionals, why do we win and lose, and what can we really do about it?

How to get the most value out of this book

Each chapter in this book focuses on a specific topic, offering key insights and providing steps to follow as well as additional suggested resources and material, to help you to develop your skills in a particular area. You could

read it from cover to cover, picking out the strategies and ideas you think might work best for you in your own sales adventures. Equally, you could dip into a specific chapter, if you're looking for inspiration or you're struggling to get past a particularly tricky sales roadblock.

However you decide to read *Rebirth of the Salesman*, I'd encourage you to do so with an open mind and an open notepad by your side, to capture ideas as they occur to you. You have my blessing to scribble in the margin and annotate key paragraphs at will!

Throughout the book, I have also included a series of interviews with a number of extremely experienced and insightful sales leaders from across the Australian business landscape. Each interviewee provides their own unique perspective on the skills and personal attributes that salespeople will need to develop or refine to keep pace with the changing nature of the sales industry.

My advice to you when reading these interviews is to sit back, relax and enjoy the insights they provide. That's certainly what I did when I conducted the interviews, and I learned more than I ever anticipated.



Before we go any further, you may well be wondering, who is this guy and why should I listen to a word he has to say? How can he presume to tell me anything about my customers, my colleagues and the sales industry in general? Why is what he has to say any different to the countless sales books already in print?

These are important questions and my answers lie at the heart of this book. The need to establish credibility, authority and trust at the beginning of a new relationship is critical to creating an impactful message. So as we prepare to embark on this new relationship of ours, let me tell you a little bit about myself and the *why* that has led me to this point:

- I've trained thousands of salespeople and sales leaders across Australia, Asia Pacific and sub-Saharan African regions – *but that's no reason to pay attention to what I have to say.*
- I've spent more than 15 years as a professional salesperson carrying a sales quota in the software industry, an industry which prides itself on its sales prowess and deal execution expertise – *but that on its own doesn't make me an expert.*

- I've become a regular sales and marketing commentator in the mainstream media; including television, national newspapers and magazines around the world – *but that doesn't mean I've got all the answers.*
- The reason I hope that I can impart some new ideas and fresh perspectives to you in this book, is that I've taken the time to meet with, talk to, and learn from both sellers and buyers. It's only by examining the opposing sides of the same coin that you can begin to unravel the mystery of what makes some salespeople successful and why customers really make the purchasing decisions they make.

I've conducted countless Win/Loss Reviews over the past four years with customers and senior decision makers across the Asia Pacific region. Many of the candid and honest insights which these customers provided have made their way into this book and have shaped my impression of how the world of sales is evolving. This is the reason why I hope that you can feel confident in embracing and acting on some of the ideas, insights and strategies contained in these pages.



As a child I used to talk a lot; I was always trying to understand what was happening around me. I'm sure I drove my mum crazy, hanging from her apron strings and constantly asking questions:

Why is the sky blue? Why can't dogs fly? Why does it always rain in Ireland?

Even back then, I wasn't afraid to ask the hard-hitting questions! I have a theory that most young children could trump even the most seasoned interrogators, because from the moment they learn to speak, kids are constantly questioning what they see around them. This unquenchable thirst for knowledge and an understanding of their environment is undoubtedly what fuels their creativity and imagination.

Unfortunately, as we grow older and wiser, many of us begin to lose the ability to really question what's happening around us. We may become better educated and more well-travelled and worldly, but there's often a tendency to become a little jaded as well. Once we begin making assumptions and jumping to conclusions rather than testing and questioning our surroundings, we're in danger of losing sight of the all-important '*why?*' in our lives.

Searching for my personal *why*?

So let me share with you my *why* which was not only the genesis of this book, but also of many of the personal and professional decisions that I've taken in recent years. Like all tricky questions, the search for my *why* required genuine soul searching and the need to confront some uncomfortable realities.

I can't really think of a better place to start my story than when I was lying on a hospital trolley in the emergency room's resuscitation area, focusing all my attention on the perforated holes in the ceiling tiles and trying to shut out what was about to happen. Even writing this now, some years after the event, I still experience a slight wave of panic. This wasn't my first time in this particular hospital's emergency room. Over the years I'd become an all-too frequent visitor. Stress works in mysterious and insidious ways and manifests itself differently in everyone. For me, every so often and without warning, it caused my heart to suddenly slip into atrial fibrillation, or AF, as it's called in the medical world.

When AF strikes, your heart starts to beat faster and in an abnormal rhythm, causing palpitations, an irregular heartbeat and occasionally chest pains or fainting spells. Untreated, complications can include stroke and heart attack. Treatment options include medication, surgery and electric shock therapy. It was this last treatment option I was now facing after almost a week in AF. As the nurses prepped me for the procedure, dry-shaving patches on my chest and repositioning the heart monitors before putting a tube down my throat, I made a vow to myself that if I got through this ok, I would make some drastic changes to my work-life balance and make damn sure I never ended up in this predicament again.

Thankfully I did get through it ok...in fact my Guardian Angel must have been watching over me that day, because moments before the procedure to stop and restart my heart took place, one of the nurses noticed that my heart had suddenly reverted back to a normal sinus rhythm. The chances of that happening at that precise moment after a week in AF were incalculably small. I felt like a condemned man receiving a last minute reprieve. The important thing is that I never forgot the vow I made to myself that day and it has informed every decision I've made in my life since then.

By now you're probably wondering why I'm sharing this deeply personal and rather harrowing story with you. The answer is simple: the world of enterprise sales, complex sales, big deal pursuit; call it what you like, can be an incredibly stressful and panic-inducing profession to pursue. Towards

the end of my corporate sales career, I made a simple discovery that turned my world upside down and one which has inspired many of the insights I'll share with you in this book. I always recognised that sales could be stressful, but I assumed the stress stemmed from the fear of failure or the inability to close deals and hit numbers. It was only after much soul-searching and self-reflection that I realised that the majority of the stress actually comes from our fear of the unknown. There are a multitude of unknown factors present in every single sales cycle:

- What is the competitive landscape and what is our strategy to combat them?
- What are the key decision drivers for our customers?
- What is their appetite for risk, for change, for investment?
- Are we dealing with the ultimate decision-maker, a key influencer or just a tyre-kicker?
- How can we dislodge the incumbent supplier or differentiate our offering from the other solutions being proposed?

The list of unknown factors varies from deal to deal, but it never goes away. I'm sure those of you who have carried a sales quota for a few years will be nodding your heads in agreement, and those of you who may have managed salespeople over the years will realise it's actually these 'unknowns' that usually form the basis of your sales forecast meetings.

Questions that often emerge in those meetings include:

- Tell me about your strategy for differentiating between us and the competition?
- How would you rate our level of executive sponsorship within this company and what is your strategy to improve this?
- What key insights did you extract from the discovery process with this customer and explain to me how you intend to weave these themes into your strategy for this opportunity?
- How are you going to get this deal closed by the end of the month? Remember, we need it to close.

There is a simple equation in sales: The more unknowns that exist in a sales pursuit; the greater the risk and the higher your chance of losing the deal.

Which brings me to my *why*?

I realised that it's the customer's perspective that really matters when it comes to answering these unknown questions and expelling the doubt and uncertainty from the sales process. It seems like such an obvious insight, but it turns out that only a tiny minority of businesses have effective strategies to extract customer insights and feedback from each sales cycle they pursue. Critical questions need to be asked, such as:

- Why do we win some of the deals we pursue in telecommunications but lose all of the deals we bid for in government?
- Why do we keep losing to the same competitor in one location but beat them convincingly in another?
- What are the critical factors informing my customers' final decisions when price, product and brand are taken out of the equation?

For years, across countless sales cycles, these questions would haunt me. In the end, like all tricky questions, the answer was obvious and supremely simple. All I had to do was to find a way to ask these customers the most important question of all...why?

Suddenly that innate skill I possessed as a young boy, to question everything and not simply accept the status quo, could be put to good use again. In fact, this ability to question, to search for clarity and simplicity in the face of complexity, became the genesis for my decision to build a business focused around answering questions. Put another way, it became my *why*.

Ultimately, if *Rebirth of the Salesman* helps each reader to add a couple of new weapons to their sales arsenal, win just one more deal or qualify-out earlier from a single losing sales cycle, then this book will have served its purpose. Equally, if it helps to prevent another young salesperson or sales leader from buckling under the weight of uncertainty and succumbing to the stresses of the unknown as I very nearly did, then I'll feel that this has been a worthwhile journey.

Simon Sinek, the author and academic whose TED talk prompted me to search for my own personal *why*, makes an interesting point about the importance of creating a sense of purpose and belief around what you do in your working life. He explains that:

The goal is not to do business with everybody who needs what you have...the goal is to do business with people who believe what you believe.

So if you believe, as I do, that the world of B2B sales is changing and that the skills, attributes and behaviours of salespeople must also change to remain relevant and connected, then I sincerely hope this book provides some insights and strategies to help you along your journey.

Happy selling!

Cian



Character trait: HUMILITY

CHAPTER 1

Embrace the Unknown

The successful man is the one who finds out what is the matter with his business before his competitors do.

Harvey Firestone · American businessman and founder of the Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company

It's a strange sensation, sitting in a room full of intelligent, articulate and professional colleagues, when one of them suddenly whips out a crystal ball, pulls a scarf tight over his head and starts searching for patterns and meaning in the sales universe.

You may think I'm joking, but having spent almost 20 years in the B2B sales game, my colleagues and I would regularly morph into fortune tellers or tea-leaf readers, in a vain attempt to understand the motivations and buying behaviours of our customers. If we'd just lost a deal, we would wrack our brains trying to interpret the signals, analysing the subtext of each and every customer interaction, and eventually opt for a variation on one of these three conclusions:

- **We lost on price**—an oldie, but a goodie.
- **The customer was always going to select the other vendor**—hard to prove, but then again hard to disprove.
- **We lacked executive sponsorship**—a clever one, because it shares the responsibility around a little, but is sufficiently vague to avoid any direct finger pointing.

Many of us have wrestled with these and other perplexing questions during our time in the sales industry. It seems crazy that so many companies

could spend such huge amounts of time, money and resources in sales pursuits and receive nothing of value in return if they don't win the deal. Yet precisely that scenario is taking place on a daily basis, across a huge number of companies and industries, around the world.

From developing nations to Western economies, billions of dollars are being squandered each year on sales activities, which return zero value to the vendors taking part in them.

In my own sales career, time after time we'd push ourselves to the limit to complete a tender response late into the evening or on a weekend, submit it moments before the deadline and then walk on eggshells for weeks until we heard if we'd made the cut. If we made it through, we'd take a deep breath and throw ourselves into presentations, demos, blue-printing and a myriad other sales steps, in the hope that eventually the customer would see the light and pluck our solution from the pack of hopefuls.

Sometimes all that blood, sweat and tears would be rewarded and we'd get the call to say we'd been successful. We rarely understood or even asked why our solution had been chosen, but that never seemed to matter. We'd crack open a bottle of bubbles, congratulate ourselves on a job well done, and almost immediately shift focus to the next most important deal, waiting for our attention.

On more occasions than I care to remember, however, we got the other, far less enjoyable call, telling us we hadn't been successful and thanking us for our time. Let's just pause for a moment, for a collective sigh of frustration at the amount of wasted time, money and effort we have all expended over the years, chasing deals which ultimately came to nothing. Deals which we thought we would definitely win, but somehow conspired to lose. Opportunities which looked and smelled like a bad idea from the outset, but which we somehow convinced ourselves we had a shot at.

My first ever Win/Loss Review

One day I decided I'd had enough of this wastage and constant uncertainty, so I did something so crazy, so outlandish, I feared it might be a career limiting move. I asked one particular customer would he mind spending an hour with me, after the sales cycle had concluded, to conduct a debrief on a recent deal we had just won.

Perhaps surprisingly, he said he would be happy to. It was a memorable meeting, so much so that it changed the course of my career and my life. Let me give you a quick synopsis of what happened...

At the time I was working for a large global software company. I was coming to the end of what can only be described as the most successful day in my entire sales career. My sales colleague and I had visited five prospects that day, all of whom were close to making a final purchasing decision. Some were existing customers, considering an additional purchase, others were brand new prospects weighing up how they should proceed. We went from meeting to meeting in a whirlwind of taxis, coffee and positivity, eventually getting firm commitments to purchase from the first four organisations. It was the type of day any young sales executive dreams of.

By 5pm my colleague and I were ready for our final meeting. We had a pretty good relationship with our internal sponsor in the company, a smart young man whom we had come to know pretty well after months of workshops, meetings and negotiations. As it was late in the afternoon, we asked our sponsor how he'd feel about adjourning next door to the pub for the final decision meeting. He looked slightly bemused, but said he'd be happy to oblige.

To give you some context on this particular deal, it wasn't one we were feeling hugely confident about. We knew we were up against some stiff competition, suspected our solution was the most expensive and we knew it wasn't a perfect fit with the company's business requirements.

Imagine our surprise, then, when our sponsor congratulated us and told us they had selected our solution to address their business needs. We had a drink to celebrate and talked through the next steps around project timeframes and milestones.

The accepted wisdom is that you learn more from your losses than from your wins, but I don't necessarily subscribe to that philosophy. In this particular deal, a few weeks after we were given the green light, I sat down to conduct the debrief and here's what he told me. I've taken to calling it my Stephen Bradbury moment. (For those of you who might not get that reference or simply want to relive the moment again, I've included a link to the YouTube clip at the end of this chapter.)

THE WIN REVIEW

The conversation began as you would expect. I asked my sponsor if he'd mind sharing why they had selected our solution as the best platform to address their business needs and what specifically it was that differentiated us from the competition. From there, the discussion took a decidedly unexpected turn:

Him: “You first lost this deal at the very start of the process, based on the less than impressive tender response your organisation submitted and the massive price difference between you and the other vendors.”

Me: “First lost this deal?” What was this guy talking about I wondered, but smartly decided to keep my mouth shut.

Him: “As it happened, two of the other vendors qualified out of the process for their own reasons so by default we brought you through to the next step, because we needed to have at least three vendors at the next stage of the evaluation.”

Me: Ok?

Him: “You lost the deal for a second time, based on the initial presentations which you and your colleagues conducted. Our users felt your solution was too complicated and not as user friendly or intuitive as the other options on the table.”

Me: Ok, this is getting weird, I thought to myself, but again decided to keep my mouth shut.

Him: “We were leaning towards one particular solution, but weren’t quite ready to make our decision. The sales process coincided with this particular vendor’s end of financial year and they offered us a pretty hefty discount to select their solution. The discount was appealing, but we were following a formal selection process and still had a number of steps to pursue. When we politely declined their offer, their behaviour became pushy and abrasive and they began pressuring us to make a decision. We immediately lost faith in this company and took a decision as a management team to disqualify them from the rest of the process.”

You have to remember that this was the first time I had conducted an in-depth debrief of this nature. I had no idea what to expect and I certainly wasn’t expecting the story I was being told now.

Him: “You lost this deal for a third time, during the legal, negotiation and best and final offer stage.”

By this stage I was completely bewildered and was just listening in total silence to his feedback, wondering how we could have possibly won the deal.

Him: “As you’ll recall we had a very formal selection criteria. When it came to the crunch our user community scored the other solution higher in every category and so this was the solution I took to our CFO for final approval. He had been involved in the process all along, but wanted to ensure the users were onboard with the new solution. Do you remember when we asked you for your five year product road-map, late on in the process?”

Me: “Yes, I remember.”

Him: “That was the turning point. The other vendor took quite a while to respond and when they did come back, they said they could only commit to a three year product road-map. This was too big a risk for our CFO and he decided that despite the concerns about user interface, despite the higher cost and the fact that the user community favoured the other solution, the safest option was to select your product for our needs.”

This was and will always remain the luckiest of sales wins in my career. We were right at the back of the pack all along, but the other vendors conspired to trip themselves up and get disqualified from the race and, through sheer luck, we won the deal. Why did I relate this story, you may well be wondering? We got lucky on the deal; what could we possibly learn from this? A huge amount as it happens.

Unfortunately, having a great product or service and conducting yourself in a professional manner throughout the sales cycle is simply not enough. We made some almost fatal errors during this sales campaign, which in any other transaction would have cost us the business. However as a result of this debrief meeting, we had a clearer understanding of the gaps in our offering, and the way in which our competitors had positioned their solutions against us and targeted our perceived weaknesses.

It provided us with a template for how to improve in future deals, and, because it was not generic feedback, it gave us specific insights we could understand and act upon in our business.

It also provided a timely reminder that without an ironclad understanding of your customers’ decision-making criteria and their appetite for risk, you run the risk of losing a transaction from an otherwise winning position. In this instance, risk was the key decision-making factor. In subsequent reviews I’ve conducted for other B2B sales companies, factors like cultural fit, the quality and credibility of a key technical resource, or the vendor’s depth of industry knowledge have all represented a key decision point for customers.

In the world of B2B sales there's no silver bullet to success, but as a sales executive or sales leader, undertaking consistent reviews of both winning and losing sales cycles is a significant step in the right direction. The message it sends to your customers and your colleagues is that you have a desire to learn, to constantly improve and innovate, to leverage the single most valuable data source available to you: the candid and frank feedback of your customers and prospects.

I'd like to share a final piece of customer feedback with you, which stemmed from a Win Review my company Trinity Perspectives conducted for a vendor in the technology space. The vendor's company had just won a significant deal and the customer agreed to participate in a wide ranging post-sales interview, focusing on the complete gamut of the sales process. At one point they were asked whether any particular action or behaviour of the vendor had particularly impressed them and how much this had swayed their decision making process.

The customer was able to highlight a number of areas in which this particular vendor had excelled, including their partnering strategies and the cultural fit which they demonstrated, but they singled out one specific area as key to their decision. The customer explained that when it came down to the legal negotiations and best and final bid, the two vendors who had been neck and neck up until this point, suddenly diverged significantly. I'll do my best to paraphrase how one of the senior decision makers in the business explained this:

We knew this was going to be a long and arduous process, because we were requesting a lot of deviations from your [the technology vendor's] standard contract. Unbeknownst to you, we were conducting exactly the same conversation with another vendor in tandem, because we still weren't sure which way we would go.

Over the course of more than a week of face to face meetings with our legal team, your representative was constantly trying to find ways to help us get the outcome we needed. He was reasonable, calm and creative in his approach and we greatly appreciated that. On the few occasions where he informed us he couldn't find a way to achieve what we were looking for, we took him at face value and moved on, because we trusted he had done everything in his power to get us the result we needed.

This individual's professionalism and can-do attitude reassured us that as an organisation, your team would be easy to deal with and when we hit a problem with this project, as we knew we would from time to time, it wouldn't become a major roadblock which could derail the whole process. By contrast when we engaged in the same discussion with your competitor, they fought us tooth and nail on every point, would barely give an inch and left us with the distinct impression that if we were to select them, this is how the entire project would be conducted.

In sales, as in life, knowledge is power. With it, we can make informed decisions, alter or amend our strategy on the fly, and innovate our offering to better reflect the needs of our customers and prospects. Without it we're flying blind; unable to tell why we're winning or losing and so unable to re-create positive winning behaviours and turn them into consistent practice across our business. We become destined to continue repeating our mistakes, like the Greek mythological figure Sisyphus, who must roll the same boulder up a hill for all of eternity.

So What Can You Do?

1. Take a moment to recognise the amount of valuable data available to you at the end of every sales cycle. If you/your sales team have conducted yourselves in a professional and ethical manner, then you have earned the right to request a detailed and specific debrief.
2. Don't fall for the flawed argument that only the losing deals should be interrogated. You'll often learn a lot more from your wins than you might imagine and these are priceless lessons, especially if they can help you to win more in the future.
3. Position the Win/Loss Review at the very start of the sales cycle to your prospective customer. That way you not only normalise the idea and gain their agreement to participate, you have already begun to differentiate yourself and your organisation from the competition, through your professionalism.
4. Use a third party, either a neutral person within your own business or an external company, to conduct the review on your behalf. This separation allows your customer or prospect the space in which to

provide their frank and candid feedback and ensures that the potential for awkwardness or embarrassment is removed.

Go Here And Read This

Rick Marcet's book: *Win/Loss Reviews - A New Knowledge Model for Competitive Intelligence*

Trinity Perspectives' website: *Win/Loss Reviews - Why, How and Now What?* This series of three articles is available to download from trinityperspectives.com.au

Stephen Bradbury wins gold: youtube.com/watch?v=fAADWfJO2qM



Character trait: IMAGINATION

CHAPTER 2

Become a Great Storyteller

*It isn't necessarily the person with the best idea who wins.
It's the person with the greatest understanding about what
matters to people and how that translates to an opportunity
to serve and delight them.*

Bernadette Jiwa · Brand strategist, TEDx speaker
and author

Everyone loves a good story. From the time we're old enough to sit up unsupported, we begin gleaning snippets of information and forming our views on the world from the stories we're told. We start by learning to recognise colours, objects, animals and plants. Through repetition, the timbre of our parent's voices and limbic muscle memory, pretty soon we're retaining key parts of these stories, words, sounds and eventually meanings.

My little boy is three years old. When he's listening to his favourite stories before bed each night, despite his limited vocabulary, he can sense if mum or dad has skipped a page (because we were too tired that evening and wanted to put our little guy to bed early)! The funny thing is, without stories, humanity would still be in the dark ages.

From the aboriginal paintings daubed on the walls of caves, through the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, right up to today, stories have always played a critical role in the growth and development of our societies. Through parables, fables and stories, information has been passed down from generation to generation. Without these stories, be they written or oral histories, knowledge would be lost, and innovation and invention would grind to a halt.

Fast forward a couple of millennia and stories have remained an invaluable mechanism for teaching, introducing new content, and normalising ideas in people's minds, through shared experience. Let's face it, human beings are hard-wired to relate to a story, which explains the ongoing popularity of literature, movies and news programs. The way society has consumed its stories has constantly evolved through the ages. It began with simple rock-art and etchings, combined with traditional oral story telling which has endured for thousands of years. With the advent of the written word and eventually the printing press, the ability to capture and share stories grew ever more popular.

Nowadays we seem to prefer to consume our stories in bite-sized chunks of information:

- a 500 word blog post
- a 40 second video clip, or
- a 140 character tweet.

Just the fact that I switched to bullet points will have drawn your eye instinctively to this spot on the page, which provides a subtle clue that this information is more important than the rest and should be observed closely. The storytelling medium continues to change and evolve, but the powerful lure of stories to the human psyche remains a constant.

Every day we're bombarded with good advice, pearls of wisdom and lists of the 'Top 10 Things We Absolutely Must Do' if we want to engage and inspire the people around us. There's so much of this advice, so many great ideas at our fingertips, it's sometimes overwhelming. Too often we simply give up and default back to doing what we've always done.

I'd like to think that my book is different, but I'm okay with the fact that for some of you it won't be. I've spent hundreds of hours interviewing and engaging with customers and vendors who have recently participated in significant purchasing decisions, probing their decision-making criteria and looking for patterns and nuggets of insight.

I've taken all of this information and distilled it into a single book, packed full of tips and strategies for becoming more successful at selling and remaining relevant in this evolving industry for many more years to come. And now I'm about to dismiss all of that in only my second chapter!

If you ignore everything else I have to say in this entire book and embrace only one concept, make it this one.

In order to become a great salesperson, you need to become a great teller of stories.

In order to become a great salesperson, you need to become a great teller of stories.

No there isn't an echo, I just felt the need to repeat this golden rule to ensure it sinks in properly. Many of the customers I meet on a daily basis tell me they find it hard to distinguish one vendor from another. They use phrases like 'apples for apples' to explain their difficulty in telling these competing solutions apart.

For some strange reason, when we visit a customer for the first time and launch into our spiel about our company's market leadership position, our focus on innovation and our elevated position in the Gartner quadrant, we believe they'll be blown away by the awesomeness of our pitch. The sad reality is there's every likelihood that the sales guy we bumped into in reception as he was leaving, probably spouted some very similar lines, showed some equally impressive customer logos and also failed to wow the audience with his 'solution'.

Pitching is not about winning the deal per se, it's actually about winning the right to move on to the next step of the process and hopefully sowing some seeds of interest and engagement with your audience. This is an incredibly important concept that we'll explore further in the chapter on Pitching. For now, I'd like you to focus on one key insight. There is no better or more effective mechanism to sow the seeds of interest and engagement, than a few interesting and relevant stories sprinkled liberally throughout your customer interactions.

In fact, many people believe that within the next five years, storytelling will become the single most important skill to master for those individuals wanting to become successful in business. In her three bestselling books (*The Fortune Cookie Principle*, *Difference* and *Make your Idea Matter*) and her wonderful TEDx talk www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rRjtNKCz_U Bernadette Jiwa explains the power of storytelling, both in business and in life. To many of us, the concept of storytelling couldn't be further removed from the very grown-up, very important business of closing big deals and becoming a trusted adviser to our customers.

Believe me when I tell you, the ability to harness the power of the story is the single most effective way to educate, engage and inspire your audience. Many businesses, big and small, have begun to recognise and embrace this

knowledge in recent years. You only have to look at the plethora of narrative devices being used by advertisers recently, to recognise how subconsciously impactful storytelling can be.

Let's face it, we're all sick and tired of being sold to and overtly targeted by sales campaigns; however, we continue to be engaged by the stories of others. In his highly acclaimed books and writings, bestselling American author Seth Godin poses an interesting question: 'Why do we prefer Coke over Pepsi, GE over Samsung or Ford over Chevy?' He provides a slightly surprising answer to that question. From Seth's perspective, 'we don't actually love the brand, we love ourselves'.

As Godin explains:

Yes, every brand has a story - that's how it goes from being a logo and a name to a brand. The story includes expectations and history and promises and social cues and emotions. The story makes us say we "love Google" or "love Harley"... but what do we really love?

We love ourselves. We love the memory we have of how that brand made us feel once. We love that it reminds us of our mom, or growing up, or our first kiss. We support a charity or a soccer team or a perfume because it gives us a chance to love something about ourselves.

Isn't that just a little cynical you might ask? Tapping into the human psyche, recognising people's deep rooted connection to stories and leveraging this knowledge to help us create a relationship with them and sell them something. My answer is: 'that depends'. It depends on your motivations, it depends on what you're selling, it depends on whether you're trying to trick or cajole your prospective customers into parting with their hard-earned money, or whether you really believe you can add value or improve their life in some way.

As bestselling business author Andrew Griffiths and ex-Facebook and Twitter marketing guru Nick Bowditch outlined in their fascinating one-day workshop 'The Art of Storytelling', 'you've got to become an observer of great stories to tell great stories'. As a number of the sales leaders interviewed throughout this book will attest, great salespeople understand the power of stories, anecdotes and customer case studies, and they hoard them like precious treasures.

Examples include:

- impact statements
- industry anecdotes
- customer war stories
- customer testimonials, and
- references.

The list goes on and on. They all have one thing in common, however: it's less about how the story is captured and retold and more about how relevant and impactful it is to your audience. You might decide to:

1. Use a 20 second video clip, to capture a customer's excitement at using your new product for the first time.
2. Throw in a couple of relevant customer anecdotes in a presentation to a group of prospective clients.
3. Write a great press release with your customer as the hero, when their project comes in under budget and ahead of time.

So long as the story that you tell is relevant, authentic, and told in an entertaining, educational or inspiring way, it should serve its purpose well. What's that purpose you might ask? To ensure whoever you are speaking to is interested and engaged by what you have to say and they retain the key pieces of information you want them to retain.

There are now so many channels available to tell stories that it can be incredibly confusing and time-consuming. Should I blog on my own or my company's website, or write articles on LinkedIn? What about the mainstream media; how can I harness that to help me amplify the stories I tell? How could I ever achieve anything from 140 characters on Twitter? I can't imagine how Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest or the myriad of other social platforms could ever help me achieve my business goals.

Nobody said it wasn't confusing, but that doesn't mean you can't carve out a niche for yourself. You can tell some great stories, share some worthwhile insights and eventually become known for something. Hundreds of years after their deaths, Shakespeare, Dickens, Bronte, Joyce and many other writers still live on in our world. Why? Because they understood how to capture something compelling, engaging and often inspiring and wrap it up in the framework of a story.

I recently came across an interesting quote from Neville Christie, an Australian businessman and entrepreneur, who said that ‘in the 21st century, the role of the CEO is a dual purpose role: chief philosopher and chief salesperson/storyteller.’ So to recap: If you take away nothing else from this book, please remember this:

Become a storyteller, the business world and the world in general will thank you for it!

So What Can You Do?

1. Tell people your story, where your company came from, what you stand for, and what you are proud of!
2. Tell the story of your customers, who they are, why they selected your product or service, and how it changed or improved their lives. Make them the heroes!
3. Constantly be on the lookout for great stories and capture them in customer case studies, testimonials or through the incredible power and reach of social media.
4. Understand the back-story of your target audience and find a way to join it up with the story of your brand if at all possible.
5. Develop a spreadsheet or a word document to capture all of your stories, as a repository that you can dip into whenever you need to.
6. Make the decision to become a storyteller!

Go Here And Read This

Seth Godin’s blog: sethgodin.typepad.com

Bernadette Jiwa’s website: thestoryoftelling.com



Character trait: CONSISTENCY

CHAPTER 3

Big Game Hunter or Fertile Farmer?

Pretend that every person you meet has a sign around his or her neck that says, 'Make me feel important.' Not only will you succeed in sales, you will succeed in life.

Mary Kay Ash · American businesswoman and founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics

Over the course of the last 20 years, I've been lucky enough to work with some of the largest and most strategic sales organisations in the world, either as a direct employee or in a consulting and advisory capacity. During that time, working with tech and telco firms, financial services companies and airlines, I've been exposed to some incredibly smart and experienced people. Hopefully a little bit of their knowledge and strategic insights have rubbed off on me along the way, but, and let's be honest, just because lots of people share a certain opinion, that doesn't always make them right!

A case in point for me is the strange fixation so many large businesses have on splitting their salesforce into two separate and autonomous groups, to focus on new business acquisitions or existing customer retention and expansion. It's a commonly held belief that certain individuals are more suited to prospecting and hunting for new business, while others are better suited to account management and expanding the footprint of existing customers. The logic behind this argument is often pretty fuzzy and I'm yet to see a matrix of the skills, characteristics and behavioural attributes that distinguishes these big game hunters from their fertile farming cousins.

However the more intriguing question for me is: Should we really be segregating our customers that way and, if so, does it actually make sense to use our best and brightest salespeople to target brand new white space

business, rather than broadening our base within our current customer pool? Let's have a quick look at the characteristics of the two types of customers:

New prospective customers and their buying behaviours:

- sales cycles tend to be longer and more costly
- usually a competitive sales cycle, often with multiple vendors including the incumbent supplier
- trust, rapport and an understanding of their organisational culture needs to be built from scratch
- conversion rate tends to be significantly lower, given the increased number of variables and the competitive nature of the sales cycle
- the prospective customer has no predisposition to purchase your product or service
- the cost of sale tends to be significantly higher, and
- no obvious economies of scale or organisational synergies exist.

Existing customers and their buying behaviours:

- sales cycles tend to be shorter and more cost effective
- deals tend not to be competitive and your product or service is often the incumbent (although not always the corporate standard)
- trust, rapport and an understanding of the customers' organisational culture should be transferred from the prior sales cycle, assuming that consistent account management has occurred post sale
- conversion rate tends to be higher, given the reduced number of variables and the fact that these deals are often non-competitive in nature
- existing customers are often predisposed to purchase your product or service, having done so previously, and
- economies of scale and organisational synergies can often occur through extending your solution footprint across an organisation.

Pause for a moment and ask yourself which of these two target markets appear more inviting to you. You may be assuming that this is a trick question...but it's not. Your existing customer base is undoubtedly the more lucrative and rewarding target market, with larger deal sizes, less discounting, shorter sales cycles and a much higher conversion rate.

Now, before I get too carried away explaining the merits of focusing on your customers, it's important we acknowledge certain cold hard facts. If you have a very small pool of customers or you're in the process of establishing your business, it's critical you develop new customer relationships and close new deals. Just like a gene pool, so too a customer pool thrives on renewal and fresh bloodlines.

If you're introducing a new product or service, your existing customers can often be a good place to start; but so too can a new target market. If you have developed a solution specifically focused on a particular industry or sub-segment of an industry, it's important you drive adoption through that industry vertical, which will, by definition, require new customers. I absolutely acknowledge all of those different scenarios, which lend themselves to new customer acquisition.

But all of those valid reasons don't change the fact that a large number of sales organisations have become fixated with the idea of white space/blue sky/green field customers. The holy grail of sales (which for some strange reason always seems to be associated with a colour) is often pursued to the detriment of good account management and increasing your footprint within your installed customer base.

We could argue the merits of why this has happened, what percentage of sales revenues are derived from new business versus installed customers or how best to quantify the cost of sale, but I'd rather focus on something much more important. How to develop a happy customer base, one who is willing not just to buy more of your products/services, but to refer you to other areas of their business and their industry at large. Customers who stand ready to support you by becoming early adopters and evangelising your solution to the market. You know the type of customer I'm talking about; they rave about your product, tell their friends about it at barbecues, they're the first to sign up for your events and are always willing to take a reference call or present at a user conference.

It sounds too good to be true doesn't it? The funny thing is, these types of customers don't magically occur; they are created. Created by the excellent service they receive from their account managers, by the exceptional product

or service they purchase which exceeds all of their expectations. Created by including them in your R&D and innovation cycles, by trusting them to share your story in the market, and on occasion asking them for their input or advice along the way. To unravel the conundrum of these incredible lighthouse customers and early adopters, we actually need to understand the behaviours and attributes of the salespeople who service their needs and are responsible for creating this bond of solidarity and mutual benefit along the way.

So that's exactly what I undertook to do. Throughout all the Win/Loss Reviews, customer interviews and one-on-one meetings I conducted in recent years, I asked about what aspects make for a great salesperson or account manager. The feedback I received was broad and varied, but a number of key themes were repeated again and again:

What do customers really want from salespeople?

1. **They want you to be professional:** It almost goes without saying, but in order to build trust and rapport with a customer, it's imperative that all of their interactions with you are professional. Let's examine what that actually means:
 - a. As a prospective customer, if I start to research your product or service online (where 92% of research begins) your company website needs to be visually appealing and well laid-out, with easy to consume, socially-proofed information, preferably focused on my industry.
 - b. My next step will often be to contact your company either directly or by leaving behind my information in exchange for some free content on your website. It's critical that the first human interaction your prospective customer has with your company continues to demonstrate this sense of professionalism. It needs to be timely, it needs to be friendly, it needs to be helpful and, most importantly, it needs to progress the relationship forwards to the next stage.
 - c. Step three is often the most critical; this could be a face to face meeting, a web demo, an in-depth discussion over the phone or via email. How you conduct yourself in this meeting, the research you have done pre-meeting, the quality of the questions you ask and how you follow up with the prospect; all of these factors and

many more will be taken into account when the prospect assesses how professional you are.

- d. Throughout the remainder of the sales cycle; every presentation, every document, every interaction which you or your colleagues have with this prospective customer, will either increase or decrease your organisation's perceived professionalism in their eyes.
- e. The final step in the pursuit of professionalism is unfortunately the one where so many sales organisations fall down, and ironically it's the most important. Good, professional, and consistent account management is the key to repeat business, to bigger deal sizes and to applying the 'land and expand' strategy effectively across your entire customer base. Get this right, and you create a loyal and proactive customer for life. Get it wrong, and all of the work up to this point can be undone in an instant!

2. **They want you to listen, understand and take action:** Lots of organisations conduct customer surveys for different reasons: To track satisfaction levels, test the waters for new product offerings, or assess how their products are performing in certain target areas. What relatively few organisations do, however, is develop communication channels which allow for continuous, two-way dialogue to occur between a vendor and their customers.

Let's be honest, how many of us have received surveys from our service providers over the years and just ignored them? If you don't have a personal relationship with anyone from the company, if you don't know what they're going to do with your feedback and you don't think it will make a difference anyway, why would you be inclined to participate?

If, however, a customer community exists where your customer can join their voice with other customers and see their feedback or suggestions acted upon, they are significantly more likely to speak up. If, as a customer, I have developed a good rapport with the account manager who has been supporting me and they ask for my opinion or insights, I'll be far more likely to share. If I see this as a regular and important part of the way my service provider innovates their solution and a way to improve the service they offer me in the future, then I will have a huge motivation to support them. If I know that my voice

will be heard and what I have to say will be taken seriously, then yes, I'm pretty sure I'd be prepared to share.

- 3. They need you to be consistent and reliable:** Consistency can mean lots of things and, let's be honest, there are some companies and even some salespeople out there who are consistently terrible in the service they provide. Thankfully, with the advent of consumer review sites, peer to peer validation and a myriad other information sharing mechanisms, those organisations are either getting better or getting buried far more quickly than at any other time in history. Those salespeople who fall into this category are also discovering there is nowhere to hide and the types of roles they are being offered are rapidly dwindling.

Consistency from a customer perspective means regularity of communication and clear service level agreements, which are not just adhered to, but exceeded. A great user experience is crucial, from the person who answers the phone, to the engineers designing the product and the consultants delivering the service.

- 4. Your customers want you to take the time to get to know them well:** I speak elsewhere in this book about the importance of corporate memory, of really taking the time to know your customers and capture their information in a way that is easy to store, access and add to. Really getting to know your customers isn't simply about trying to sell them more of your products or services. It's about becoming connected in a deeper and more meaningful way to the problems we solve for them. It's about engendering loyalty, and about them proactively promoting your products and services to their colleagues and peers in an unsolicited fashion because they love them so much.

By getting to know your customers at a level beyond the standard customer and supplier interaction, you will often see opportunities to co-innovate. They bring you into their strategic planning processes and value the opinions and insights you can bring. The term 'trusted adviser' has become clichéd in recent years due to its overuse and a poor understanding of what it really means. Take it from me, the best and most successful salespeople are invariably the ones who have achieved this trusted adviser status with their customers and are often viewed by their customers as an extended member of their internal team.

5. **Last but by no means least, they want salespeople and account managers to add value when they interact with them:** Let me unpack this one a little bit further. Value adding activities can run the gamut from the tiniest task to the grandest of gestures. Some of the greatest salespeople I have ever met found both small and large ways to add value at virtually every step of the sales process. A few simple examples include:

- I found this White Paper on that issue we were discussing; I thought you might find it of interest.
- We have an industry expert in town next week, I was wondering if you'd like to meet them for a coffee and chat about your project.
- I thought I'd share a copy of our draft presentation for next week. I know that quite a few of your senior executive team will be in the room and I felt you might like to get a sneak preview before the presentation itself.

So What Can You Do?

1. Hunter, farmer, or hybrid salesperson, it really doesn't matter. The types of behaviours, traits and personal characteristics that senior decision makers are looking for in their vendors and account managers are pretty consistent across all types of salespeople. So ask yourself: Which are the areas where you excel and which are those where you have room to improve?
2. Now pick one or two areas from the list of behaviours and start to actively focus on lifting your game in these areas.
3. Play the long game in building relationships and establishing trust, rapport and credibility with your customers. Even though sales can be a high pressure environment and some sales organisations have a 'two non-performing quarters and you're out' mantra, you can't fake or speed up this process.

Go Here And Read This

Raintoday.com/Library/Articles: *7 Tips for Maximizing Time and Deepening Relationships with Executives*

Kristin Zhivago's blog: zhivago.com/blog

Trinity Perspectives' website: *Coffee Moustache – how to build trust in sales situations.* This article is available to download from trinityperspectives.com.au



Sales Thought Leader Interview #1

MATTHEW MICHALEWICZ – THE ENTREPRENEUR

Matthew is an international expert in entrepreneurship, innovation, and success psychology. He has established Boards that include former Heads of State, Nobel Peace Prize winners and Fortune 500 CEOs. Matthew has a proven track record of starting businesses from scratch and selling them for tens of millions of dollars. His business achievements have been featured in numerous television shows and publications, including *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek* and *Forbes*. He was named the Pearcey Foundation ‘Entrepreneur of the Year’, was on the *Business Journal*’s ‘40 under 40’ list of accomplished business leaders and was one of Ernst and Young’s ‘Entrepreneur of the Year’ finalists.

Matthew is the author of several books, including *Life in Half a Second*, *Winning Credibility*, *Puzzle-Based Learning* and *Adaptive Business Intelligence*. He is a Visiting Fellow at the University of Adelaide where he lectures on the subject of technology commercialisation, and is an investor and limited partner in Blackbird Ventures, an Australian early-stage venture capital fund.

Cian: Matt, what skills or attributes make for a great salesperson?

Matthew: I’m not sure if this is the right way to describe it, but I would say social or situational awareness. Being able to see and be aware of what’s happening in a certain situation. I was in a situation with a friend of mine not too long ago where he was trying to tell someone about a particular product. The person he was talking to wasn’t a buyer and was trying to give him some advice.

“Did you know that...?” he began and, before the guy could finish his sentence, my friend cut him off. Not on purpose, but he cut him off.

I just observed and after the meeting I said, “I want to give you some friendly advice. Don’t be defensive. If someone criticises your product or asks if you have thought of various aspects, don’t immediately jump in and be defensive. Listen to them.”

You’re always at a disadvantage when you’re the first to speak. If you interrupt, you’ve shortened the amount of speaking the other person would have done and the amount of information you would have received, which could have provided you with an advantage when you began speaking.

I’m not sure if it’s the most important skill, but it has to be right up there. If you can’t read the situation in real time and respond to it, it’s very difficult to be successful, because you’re not adaptive. You just come in with a tape, you play your tape, and if everyone’s in the right frame of mind, it works. But if at any point in time someone isn’t reacting and you can’t see that, you just keep playing the tape and then you walk out and you didn’t get a deal.

Cian: If one of your old sales team were to read this book, what would be the three key lessons you’d want them to take away about becoming a better salesperson?

Matthew: My last business, Solve IT, was a traditional B2B enterprise sales company. In my view there are three predominant models:

- business-to-consumer
- business-to-distributor, and
- business-to-business.

So keep in mind that this response relates to a business-to-business salesperson. I believe the relationship is everything. I always tried to develop relationships with people where I felt like I could call them on the weekend, where I could be honest with them, they could be honest with me and so forth.

So I try to step out of the box of ‘I’m a salesperson selling to a company’, because that’s an awkward box to be in. Can we leave that box for a second, be friends, have a coffee or a beer, go out to dinner together, talk about things that we have in common? Can we develop some level of rapport and trust, so when we re-enter that box again it becomes a different type of conversation? That’s the first lesson.

The second lesson is that people buy when value exceeds price. So many sales cycles, especially in the B2B space, focus on the features and technical elements of the product or service. How something is done, how it's delivered, the people that are going to deliver it; in reality most customers don't really care that much about these things.

They want the outcome. I call that the prize. So what is the value of the prize? How much value is it going to deliver? With what level of certitude can we bank on it? Can you actually sell it, and does the value dramatically exceed the price that you're charging? A lot of salespeople lose focus on what the customer is really buying and the value doesn't exceed the price.

That leads me to my third point which is to sell the outcome. Always be selling the outcome. Get people emotionally attached to it. Think of window cleaning. A guy came to my house recently and I was working on my computer. He starts talking to my wife, pitching to her about how he wanted to clean the windows. It was all about the chemicals and the method he uses and how he does this and that. I couldn't listen to him anymore!

I said, "I have to give you some advice, ok?" even though I knew I might be taken for one of those arrogant Americans... "People don't care about the process. They care about the outcome. My wife only wants one thing. Clean windows, right? How long will it take? How much will it cost? And can you be sure, hand on heart, the windows are going to be squeaky clean? That's what you should be talking about, right?"

Talk to me about the outcome... So that's got to be the last lesson; too many salespeople talk about the process, the problem. But when it actually comes down to the value of the solution, they're weak, they're short.

Cian: What behaviours do you think customers find most frustrating when engaging with salespeople?

Matthew: Dishonesty. Everyone's heard of 'smoke and mirrors' or 'Vaporware'. I've got a great slide I use in some presentations about what I call the 'Golden Sales Experience'. It has a list of six or seven attributes that customers highly value when they engage in a sales conversation.

The first one is knowledge. How many times have you gone and talked to a salesperson and they didn't know their ass from a hole in

the ground, right? Tell me about this TV? Genuinely care about my problem and my outcome. How many times have you been in a sales conversation where they couldn't care less?

Being passionate, enthusiastic, like someone at a winery telling you about the wine, that just loves wine. "Let me tell you about this particular wine, how it was grown, and the history." So that makes it a great experience; knowledge tied with passion. They want to match the wine to the type of experience you're looking for and they're genuinely interested in helping you.

Cian: And you walk away with a case of wine in your arms without quite knowing what just happened.

Matthew: Correct. So I think if you look at what businesses do, it's the opposite of that. They provide little or no training to salespeople. And it's the lack of sales training, the lack of product training, all of these different things which lead to a collapse in this knowledge. Even the basics of social etiquette are often missing: How to deal with people, be charismatic, engaging, sociable and responsive; there's no training there.

Lastly salespeople who can't deliver on their promises. So you take your car to be serviced, they call you an hour later and say, "It will be ready at 5 o'clock and it will cost \$500..." You come at 5 o'clock. It's not ready, they say it will be ready tomorrow and it's going to cost you \$2,000. That will piss you off, right? Same scenario...you buy a big IT solution for \$10 million and three years later it has cost you \$30 million; it pisses you off right? The ability to deliver or even over-deliver on a promise is rare.

Cian: So how do you think the sales process is changing Matt, and what skills are salespeople going to need in the future to be relevant?

Matthew: Customers are becoming more sophisticated in all areas, knowledge is more accessible for people in general and that's only going to accelerate. Which means the era of the salesperson having this tremendous knowledge advantage over their customers is over. Nowadays weaknesses in salespeople are going to be exposed immediately. You can't bullshit anymore. You've got to really know.

Cian: So are customers saying "I want you to know your product. I want you to know my industry. I want you to know how the two of these interrelate."

Matthew: Exactly. And I want you to know your competitors' products. How are you different? How are you better?

Imagine buying a car. You're sitting in some Mercedes model, and you go and talk to the salesperson and say, "look, the equivalent class of this in a BMW is a 5 series right? What are the key differentiators you have on a 5 series? I don't need you to go line item by line item, but why do people pick a Mercedes over a BMW?" And the salesperson doesn't know. They have to go back to a brochure, because they are not well versed in it. How many times does a Mercedes salesman go onto the BMW dealership and play the role of a buyer?

Cian: It's an interesting point. I'm seeing more and more salespeople I know, who were the big game hunters back in the day, rapidly losing relevance because their skills, which were the skills to have, are no longer seen as valuable. And unfortunately they are struggling to reinvent themselves.

Matthew: Yes, times are definitely changing. Salespeople will have to reinvent themselves quickly.

Cian: With the advent of social selling, my sense is that it's no longer about B2B, but P2P (person-to-person). We now have the ability to not just see a business as a business, but to look through and see the individuals inside, to find out who they are, research them, talk to them directly.

Matthew: I agree with you. It's always been people that buy within businesses. The old thing about solution-selling, finding your champions, sponsors...in the end it might be the biggest of international companies, but it's still an individual human being that's sponsoring your deal, that's fighting the fight inside the company. That's exactly what you just described. P2P, fantastic description.

Cian: Matt I'd like to get your feedback about the value of analysing your wins and your losses at the end of the sales process. How important do you think it is for organisations to do that in whatever format they choose?

Matthew: Critical. Not just in sales; I think in anything. As a human being, forget business for a second, anything you do that has importance, you should analyse the outcome and try to do it better in the future. That's the whole aspect of learning. So if there are cases where you've nailed it, why did you nail it? If there are cases where you just bombed, why did you bomb?

Have you taken your best salespeople and interviewed them? Tried to dissect:

- What makes them great?
- What do they do that's different or unique?
- Do they follow some kind of special process that others aren't following?
- Are they just highly charismatic or highly engaged?
- What is the differentiator in success in sales versus losses in your business?

You really should know the answers to these questions and if you don't, you're shooting in the dark.

Cian: Matt, thank you so much for sharing your time and your insights on the world of B2B sales.

Matthew: You're welcome Cian.



CHAPTER 4

Brand...You!

There are only two ways to influence human behaviour: You can manipulate it or you can inspire it.

Simon Sinek · Author, speaker and thought leader

“People buy from people” is one of the oldest business adages of them all. If you’ve worked in a sales role at some point in your career, I can almost guarantee you’ve heard this expression. It’s usually uttered by some veteran of the industry, with grey hair and worry lines from years of forecast calls, where every quarter is more important than the one just passed. The updated version which I subscribe to states that, “People buy from people they know, like and trust”.

Over the past four years I’ve trained and mentored thousands of sales-people across Australia, the Asia Pacific region and Africa. The majority of these were young men and women, in the 25-35 age bracket. They were enthusiastic to learn, desperately seeking strategies to connect with prospective customers, to understand what was happening in their business and hopefully add value in some way.

When I asked them about the biggest challenges they faced day-to-day, they would often talk about struggling to get past the gate keeper or tell me about the difficulties they experienced building trust and rapport with prospective customers. I’d love to tell you that there is a silver bullet that could transform your relationship with customers, allowing you to leap the gatekeeper in a single bound, landing squarely in front of the decision maker, but unfortunately that’s not how it works. Selling large deals, in the business-to-business world, takes patience and requires you to invest significant amounts of energy establishing credibility and developing trust along the way.

Before we start delving into strategies to develop or enhance your personal brand, you may well be wondering why you should bother. You're selling a product or service right? What difference does it make who you are or whether your LinkedIn profile is updated or not? You're a salesperson, working for an organisation with a strong brand, recognised as a leader in your market. You've got a great product that's well priced and is selling well, why should you waste your time focusing on your personal brand in the market?

Based on the countless hours of 1:1 interviews I've conducted with key decision makers across multiple industries, the survey responses I've reviewed and the reports I've prepared for vendors, here are a couple of compelling reasons for you to consider focusing on your personal brand.

1. **Clichéd as it may sound, it's all about adding value:** The majority of enterprise sales cycles take a minimum of six to eight interactions with the prospective customer, usually many more. Assuming it's a competitive sales opportunity, you need to recognise the fact that if you're interacting a minimum of six to eight times with your prospective customer, one or more of your competitors are almost certainly doing so as well.

It's safe to assume that every time these other salespeople meet your prospect, they are looking for ways to develop a better understanding of their needs, to demonstrate their knowledge of the industry and to create a sense of rapport and connection. It's critical therefore that you also strive to add value, to differentiate not just your product or service, but yourself. One of your primary goals should be to stand out in a crowded market and have something that really distinguishes you from your peers in the industry.

Make no mistake, before they ever make a decision about whether or not to buy your solution, the customer is deciding whether they like and trust you. It's vital to understand that they will be subconsciously linking these two decisions together. If this insight in anyway surprises you, then the wonderfully insightful author and keynote speaker Valerie Khoo has got you covered. As she so eloquently puts it, '*Welcome to the reputation economy*'.

One deal which I reviewed illustrated this point perfectly. After a lengthy and costly sales cycle, the prospective customer called the CEO of the vendor directly. The thrust of the conversation was as follows:

We really like your solution and we think it would be a good fit for our needs, however we really dislike your salesperson. He is unprofessional, inappropriate and doesn't understand our industry. Unless you replace him, we wouldn't even consider selecting your solution.

What's unusual about this example is that the customer actually took the initiative to speak to the CEO directly. In most instances that wouldn't happen, instead the customer would simply decide in favour of someone else and the company would never know why they had lost the deal.

- 2. Cultural fit:** Cultural fit is a fascinating catch-all term that customers use to cover a whole range of different decision drivers, both positive and negative. Interestingly in my research, cultural fit is one of the three main decision making criteria that B2B customers cite as their reason for selecting a company to work with.

What is cultural fit? Google it and you'll find a wide variety of definitions and interpretations. One I came across on a sales website called Barret.com summed up many of the key questions which speak to an organisation's culture (see below). I'd like you to take a moment and try to answer these questions, in relation to the current role you are in and the company you represent.

- What is our purpose for being in business?
- What are our core values?
- What is our promise to our customers?
- Is our promise aligned with our core values and actions?
- What value do we create for others beyond the product?
- How do we behave in times of crisis?
- What do we expect from our suppliers, partners, etc.?
- How do we want our leaders to behave?
- Who would we be proud to be associated with?

As a sales leader or salesperson interacting with a prospective customer for the first time, ask yourself how impactful these types of

questions could be as you embark on a new relationship with a potential customer.

Yes, of course you want to understand their business needs, discover their pain and start talking about your solution, but what about getting to know them a little better first. Think of this as the courtship phase of the relationship; you're a long way from marriage or even becoming an exclusive couple, this is your chance to discover what they're all about, to get the back story...do yourself a favour and don't rush it!

- 3. Who are you? You are who the internet says you are!** Something funny happened a few years ago. The internet went from being a place where we read the newspaper, Googled ourselves and 'liked' our friends' travel photos, to becoming the single source of truth for most people. We're often too time poor or simply lack the desire to fact check and research elsewhere, so the internet has become the default answer to virtually every question.

At the same time as this fundamental shift was taking place in the way in which people interacted socially, a similar shift was occurring in the business community. Over the past few years, the world of solution selling, which many of us came to know and love (or at least tolerate), merged with the world of social selling, which few of us really know or understand, to form a new hybrid world, which the vast majority of us are still trying to work out.

The first thing that most salespeople do after, or in many cases before, they meet someone new, is Google their name. They check their prospects' LinkedIn profile, see what groups they belong to, what shared connections they have, and read any articles that they may have written. From there they might check to see if they have a Twitter account or if they use Facebook in a business context. In five minutes they have begun to build up a picture of who that prospect is, what they do, and where they fit in their organisational pecking order.

Make no mistake, prospective customers do precisely the same thing with you. The question then becomes, what will they find if they Google your name? What type of digital footprint have you created to represent yourself in the online world? Does your LinkedIn profile just 'tick the boxes' or do you write, comment, and share content with your network?

Do you have a Twitter account or a personal blog and, if so, what type of content are you sharing? What other information sources do you use and how do you share this content with others in your network?

Remember: You are who the internet says you are.

One area which has the ability to trip up a lot of people, is the non-business related information about you that exists on the internet. This is information that could create a very different impression to your carefully crafted LinkedIn profile. Pictures from a weekend away with your friends, political or social commentary that you may have posted on websites, in fact anything that is at odds with the image that you are hoping to portray.

‘Brand...You’ is entirely your responsibility and, make no mistake, it’s as real to most people as the flesh and blood version of you, standing in front of them preparing to pitch for their business. Just like large companies do with their own brands, it’s your job to curate all the information and content that exists online about you, to ensure that it appropriately represents what you stand for and reflects your values. If it doesn’t, it’s your job to challenge this version, because you will definitely be judged on it.

- 4. Your digital shadow:** Statistically, the average salesperson changes roles every 4.4 years and, for sales leaders, that number increases slightly. In a career spanning 35 years, this means an average of eight to 10 different employers.

For the past 50 years or more, salespeople and sales leaders moving from company to company carried with them little more than a cardboard box, a rolodex of business contacts and a resume outlining their skills, attributes and triumphs in the sales arena. That’s not a lot on which to build a new career, yet the majority of sales professionals have managed to do it over and over again, every 4.4 years or so to be precise. Reinventing themselves in a different business, pivoting their knowledge, and parlaying their sales skills to secure their next ticket to the dance.

In the era of social selling, that paradigm has shifted dramatically. Your cardboard box and rolodex have been replaced by your email contact list and LinkedIn profile. Your resume still exists, but rest assured it can be instantly fact-checked in the online world and rarely has the

impact that it used to. The major advantage you have over your peers in the industry a decade ago is the size of the digital shadow you have created over the duration of your career and how far the span of your influence stretches.

Think recommendations on your LinkedIn profile. Think peer reviewed articles that you have written, industry awards you may have been nominated for or won, groups or associations that you are an active member of. We're all aware of our digital footprint, but recognising the impact of your digital shadow is an equally important step.

So what steps can a young (or not so young) salesperson take to improve their chances of securing that next dream job or promotion, whilst developing or enhancing 'Brand...You'?

So What Can You Do?

1. **Open a Twitter account:** If you haven't already got one, open one immediately and start following some key leaders in your industry. Consume, share and, if you feel ready to, actually create some content. It will change the way that you interact with your customers and how you add value. One quick tip on building a following on Twitter: Follow the people who follow the leaders. These people share an interest in similar content and ideas and are more likely to follow you in return, thereby increasing your sphere of influence.
2. **Leverage LinkedIn while you still can:** Join groups, ask questions, provide ideas, gain access to your target audience, comment and share the content of others, write and post your own articles, videos or presentations. LinkedIn, like Facebook and other social media platforms before it, has a shelf-life and over time its ability to connect you with key decision makers and influencers will diminish. Now is the time to act and take ownership of your online presence.
3. **Stop watching from the sidelines:** It's easy to sit back and consume the content of others; it takes a little more guts and determination to share your own thoughts and ideas with the world. What might surprise you is that what you take for granted can be really insightful to others, and you'll very quickly get hooked on the buzz you get from sharing and receiving feedback. It's not for the faint hearted, but it's

definitely an important step in developing influence in the new world of social selling.

4. **Take care of your personal brand and it will take care of you:** Just like relationships in the real world, your online audience requires attention, care and consistency. The more you share of yourself and your ideas, the stronger your brand will become and the more pronounced your influence will be. You shouldn't go too far wrong if you consider adopting a similar mantra to the one that actor Ashton Kutcher uses for the content he posts to his 17 million Twitter followers: *Entertain, educate, engage or inspire.*

Go Here And Read This

Doyle Buehler's book: *The Digital Delusion – How to Overcome the Misguidance and Misinformation Online*

Adam Houlahan's book: *Social Media Secret Sauce*

Valerie Khoo's website: valerikhoo.com

Alex Piroux's website: linkfluencer.com

Ashton Kutcher (Twitter): [@aplusk](https://twitter.com/aplusk)



Character trait: EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT (EQ)

CHAPTER 5

Customer Memory is King

There is only one boss: the customer. And he can fire everyone in the company, simply by spending his money somewhere else.

Sam Walton · Entrepreneur and founder of Walmart

I once heard a story about Bill Clinton, back when he was Governor of Arkansas, before he ever made a tilt at the White House. The story goes that Bill used to go to political events and fundraisers on a regular basis and when he got home, he would sit down and make notes about the people he had met on little notecards.

Greg Stevens: doctor, two sons at Boston College.

Sarah Jackson: recently lost her husband, very influential on the school board.

Before events, Bill would scan the guest list, consult his notes, and if he saw that Greg Stevens or Sarah Jackson would be attending, he would ask how Greg's two boys were getting on in college or how Sarah was coping since her husband's passing. You get the picture.

I'm not sure how accurate this story is, but I like to think there's at least a grain of truth to it. You see, people like to be remembered. It's human nature and it serves to create a deeper level of connection. If I tell you something about myself, in a personal or business context, I expect you to remember what I've told you. Hopefully you'll be able to use all the nuggets of information and insight I've provided, to build up a more detailed picture of me and ultimately to better understand me as a friend or better service my needs as my account manager.

Some months ago, I co-authored a bestselling Amazon book called *Secrets of Business Success*, which focused on helping small and medium businesses embrace ideas and strategies from the big end of town. In it, I outlined the critical importance of customer information and intimacy, as a way to deepen and enrich our relationships with our customers and prospects.

In the old B2B world, company information was king. We would pore over annual reports, the minutes of shareholder meetings, anything we could get our hands on which might give us an insight into the company we were about to do business with. Although still important, this type of information is no longer sufficient to make you relevant to the customers you engage with on a daily basis.

Over the past few years, a new layer of customer insight has been added to the old B2B approach. In an age of social selling, where LinkedIn, Twitter and personal blogs can tell you so much about an individual's views and preferences, person-to-person (P2P) is rapidly emerging as the new paradigm for those salespeople wanting not just to survive, but thrive in the brave new world of enterprise sales. For what I hope will be the only occasion in this book, bear with me while I channel my negative self for a moment.

As your customer or prospect, here's what I don't want...

As a customer or prospect of your business, when I provide you with personal information, I expect you to capture, retain and use that information to improve or enhance the way you service my needs.

1. *I don't want to have to repeat my life story every time I speak to a new person; in fact I'd rather not have to speak to new people all the time.*

My preference is that you provide me with a single point of contact to your company, a dedicated account manager, who can add value and who understands the culture of my business.

2. *I don't want to be inundated with irrelevant information about products or services, which aren't pertinent to my needs. This merely gives me the impression that you're trying to flog me something from your kitbag.*

I recently experienced a perfect example of this with one of my IT service providers. In the space of two and a half years, I've been contacted by no less than six different salespeople telling me they are my new account manager and they'd like to better understand my needs. This is invariably followed up with an email asking whether I

want to buy some more software and telling me about a special offer or discount which runs out at the end of the month. These types of interactions by salespeople are in no way value-adding; in fact they're counterproductive. By placing the focus on their own internal drivers and KPIs, these salespeople fail to see the negative impact this type of communication is having on me as a customer and on my perception of their company as a whole.

Smart sales organisations and salespeople are learning the importance of building a complete picture of their customers, at both the individual and company level. They're seeking out creative ways to interact with and add value to their customers and in the process are cementing a long term, mutually beneficial relationship.

3. *Oh and one more thing, as a long term customer of yours, I'd prefer if you didn't constantly ask me to fill out your customer satisfaction surveys or provide endless feedback on your service.*

Just so I'm clear, that doesn't mean I don't understand the importance of providing feedback and I'm not willing to provide it, if approached in the right way. But constant surveys when I can't observe any visible change in your company's behaviour or understand how my feedback will be used, are actually counterproductive.

As your customer or prospect here's what I really do want from you:

1. *First and foremost, I want you to demonstrate that you've understood my wants and needs.*

This is undoubtedly the crux of all large sales cycles and it's often the first hurdle where many salespeople fall. Later in the book, we'll look at the importance of discovery/needs analysis as a way to build up a complete picture of a prospective or existing customer, but here's a sneak preview. You should never ever start talking to a prospect or customer about your solution, until you have a firm grasp of their problem, need, opportunity or area of interest.

Pause for a moment to consider this conversation:

Patient: *Doctor, I have a problem, it's pretty bad I need your help.*

Doctor: *Don't worry about a thing, I'll schedule you for surgery tomorrow and we'll fix that right up for you.*

Patient: *But Doctor you haven't asked me any questions about how I'm feeling, you have no idea what's wrong with me.*

Doctor: *Don't worry, I see patients like you all the time, I know exactly what you need, just trust me.*

Ok, it's a little far-fetched but not nearly as far-fetched as you might imagine. On countless occasions, we have all seen salespeople (and occasionally been guilty of this ourselves) who jump straight past diagnosis to cure, before they even understand the symptoms or have examined the patient.

Doing this not only jeopardises your chance of ever winning the business, it skips the single most important step in any sales process. The time when we have a blank slate, an opportunity to really get to know our prospect and the moment when they'll begin teaching us exactly how we should sell to them.

2. *Once you've gained an understanding of my problem, need, or pain, you've made it to the start line. Now the fun begins. This is the time when as a prospective customer of yours, I'm assessing every aspect of my interaction with you and your colleagues and paying attention to how well you can articulate a compelling vision for how we will succeed together.*

Make no mistake about it, a large percentage of an organisation's decision making criteria comes down to factors other than price, solution fit or even your company's brand in the market. You are certainly being assessed on how you conduct yourself, the quality of your presentations and any documents you submit.

However, customers are also watching how you interact with your colleagues, how you engage with their team, and how confident you are in articulating your solution. They are weighing up your ability to challenge them, to suggest new ideas, or to propose innovative solutions to intractable problems. The limbic feeling sides of their brains are sending signals which may ultimately play a fundamental role in their final decision.

In short, prospective customers are buying you as much, if not more, than the product or service you're selling. So you'd better be sure you're bringing your A-game to every customer interaction.

In their fascinating White Paper entitled, 'What sales winners do differently', Mike Schultz and John Doerr from the US-based Rain Group

outline some of the key differences between high achieving salespeople and those in the chasing pack. Their top ten list of attributes may surprise you:

1. *Educated me with new ideas or perspectives*
2. *Collaborated with me*
3. *Persuaded me we would achieve new ideas or results*
4. *Listened to me*
5. *Understood my needs*
6. *Helped me avoid potential pitfalls*
7. *Crafted a compelling solution*
8. *Depicted purchasing process accurately*
9. *Connected with me personally*
10. ***Overall value to the company is superior to other options***

You'll notice that of these 10 attributes, only the last one relates to an organisational measure as distinct from a personal measure. Which underlines even more clearly the critical roles played by the salespeople and how vital their performances can be in determining who comes out on top.

So how does this all relate to corporate memory you may well ask? All of these insights, these nuggets of customer information and personal preferences need to be captured, understood and then appropriately leveraged during each interaction with your customer. Like a complex jigsaw puzzle, they need to be assembled, until a clear picture of your customer begins to emerge.

As the lead salesperson or account manager, it's not sufficient for just you to see this picture clearly. If you're working with a team to deliver a solution to your customer, it's imperative that everyone is looking at the same picture, working on the same jigsaw puzzle. If you've ever tried to complete a jigsaw puzzle with a large group of people, you would have realised that many hands do not always make for lighter work!

You now have to begin playing a dual role, liaising with lots of different stakeholders and understanding what's important to them. Then capture all of these diverse pieces of information and interpret them into a consistent and clearly defined picture. And that's where your organisation's corporate memory comes into its own.

Many of the largest businesses around the world from Apple to Amazon, Google to General Motors, have recognised the critical importance of capturing customer information and have invested heavily in tools and technology to improve their understanding of their target audience and build an exceptional customer memory. No matter the size of your company, nor the complexity of your sales process, no single step could be more beneficial to your business than getting a handle on your customer data.

So What Can You Do?

1. Recognise the power which customer memory can play, in helping you develop deeper and more lasting relationships with your customers and prospects.
2. Become genuinely interested in understanding what's happening with your customers' business and ensure you capture those insights in a way you can quickly access and share.
3. Don't rush your discovery/needs analysis process at the start of the sales cycle. This is often the most critical step to really developing an understanding of the underlying issues within the business, not just the problem that has been stated.
4. Become an active listener and earn the trust and connection of your customers and prospects. Don't try to fake this step; as humans we are hard-wired to spot fakes and phonies and will do our utmost to avoid interacting with them in the future.

Go Here And Read This

Simon Sinek's website: startwithwhy.com

Raintoday.com/Library/White Papers & Ebooks: *What Sales Winners Do Differently*

Jill Dyche's book: *The CRM Handbook – A Business Guide to Customer Relationship Management*



Character trait: CURIOSITY

CHAPTER 6

The Science of Discovery

*Throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour.
Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.*

Mark Twain · Author, essayist and humourist

TWO experiences in my personal life taught me the critical importance of a questioning mind and the value which a detailed discovery process can provide in any sales cycle or big deal pursuit.



In 2002, almost a year to the day after the September 11th attacks, I was privileged to hear Rudy Giuliani speak at a conference I attended in the United States. Earlier that year, Giuliani had been chosen as *Time Magazine's* person of the year and two stories he told that day struck a chord with me. Giuliani began by reflecting on his time as the District Attorney of New York, listening to hours of mafia wire taps, in preparation for the trial of some of the most notorious crime figures in US history. After hundreds of hours listening intently to the banal conversations of known felons, searching for pieces of evidence he could incorporate into his case, Giuliani knew his subjects inside out. He knew how they spoke to one another, the slang they used, how to read their tone of voice. He could even do a pretty realistic impersonation of a New York mobster's accent.

Giuliani explained that throughout his entire career as a lawyer and District Attorney, for every hour he expected to spend in court, he would undertake at least two hours preparation. He researched obsessively, analysed

every possible obstacle, permutation and combination of how the facts might be presented, to ensure he was completely ready for any eventuality. This level of preparedness, attention to detail and unquenchable thirst for knowledge was what would ultimately propel Giuliani to become Mayor of New York and a central figure during one of the most infamous moments in US history.

The second story Giuliani shared that day, related to his decision to run for the position of Mayor of New York. Before he ever made public his decision to run, Giuliani realised he needed to start preparing himself for the job, in case he was successful. He recognised that to be an effective Mayor he would need an in-depth understanding of a wide variety of different subjects regarding the smooth running of the city of New York. He already had a background in law, but lacked an in-depth understanding of issues related to healthcare, city infrastructure, policing, fire and medical emergencies and many other topics.

So in advance of announcing his candidacy, Giuliani took it upon himself to carefully select a group of people to teach him about each of those topics. Individuals who could provide him with the background knowledge and basic grounding he would need, to be able to make informed decisions on critical matters relating to New York City, without having to completely rely on his advisers. Giuliani knew without a shadow of doubt the importance of discovery and research, to support him in achieving the end goals he had set for himself in business and in life.



Fast forward a few years to 2006, where I was lucky enough to spend a week exploring the Galapagos Islands, with my then fiancée, now wife of almost ten years. We flew from the capital Quito across the Ecuadorian coast to the island of San Cristobel, one of only four inhabited islands in the Galapagos archipelago. On our first day we visited the Charles Darwin museum, where we learned about Darwin's research, how he catalogued and meticulously analysed the different plant and animal species on each of the islands, which ultimately formed the basis for his theory of evolution.

The science of discovery, that rare combination of a questioning mind and a thirst for knowledge, has helped shape the world we know and continues to impact all aspects of our daily lives, in countless ways, big and small. The very best salespeople I've met in my career, those who have successfully carved out their niche in the challenging and high pressure world of enter-

prise sales, tend to be the ones with an inquisitive mind and an insatiable appetite for knowledge.

They approach every prospective sales cycle with a Darwinian sense of curiosity and an analytical mind. They begin by trying to develop a better understanding of the organisational landscape around them, the business problems, the industry characteristics and the key people of influence within the business. From there, they shift focus to the political and competitive landscape of the organisation, gaining an in-depth understanding of the products or services their customer sells, who the end-customers are, and how the organisation actually makes money. They capture all of this information like pieces of a vast organisational jigsaw puzzle and then set about putting the pieces together, until a clear picture begins to emerge.

Just as Darwin did more than a century earlier with his boxes of scientific equipment, these great salespeople leverage all of the tools at their disposal. They interview key leaders in the business, and devour company reports and information available on the internet. They speak to industry experts, colleagues and people in their business network, to build up a complete picture of the company and the key stakeholders within the business.

One salesperson I know spent an entire day travelling around on a rubbish truck, to get a more granular understanding of the challenges and issues facing his customer in the waste removal sector. Just imagine how much credibility this earned him, in terms of his day-to-day interactions with that customer. Like so many other great salespeople, he had a desire to understand the inner workings of his customers' business, before earning the right to talk to them about his ability to help out in some way.

Why go to all this effort, you may ask, when a salesperson might close a deal without a lot of this background information and research? It's simple really, most great salespeople know from past experience the more granular their understanding of the organisation, its staff and customers, its partners and competitors, the greater their ability to influence. Also, the higher the likelihood that they can provide the customer with a compelling, accurate and irrefutable solution to their business problem.

This all probably sounds a little bit far-fetched, drawing a parallel between the single greatest scientific discovery of mankind and the far more mundane task of selling a high value product or service to a prospective customer. So let me spell it out more plainly...just like the plants and animals on the Galapagos Islands, the sales industry has undergone a massive evolution also. No longer are salespeople expected to merely be walking, talking product

brochures, ready to extol the virtues of their solution at a moment's notice. I can get all of that information myself at the touch of a button thank you very much, so what else have you got for me?

In this brave new world of high-value selling, just like the Galapagos Islands of millions of years ago, you have to evolve or die, that's all there is to it. I've witnessed first-hand friends and colleagues whose skills were highly valued and handsomely rewarded a decade ago, become rapidly obsolete through a lack of ability to evolve and adapt. It's painful to witness this fall from grace and a sobering lesson for those that remain behind. The animal kingdom has long lived by the adage, 'survival of the fittest'...in the world of sales, it can be replaced with 'survival of the most inquisitive and adaptable'.

So What Can You Do?

1. Never lose your thirst for knowledge and your enquiring mind. Scour the internet for information, read company reports, industry journals, seek out people with experience in your industry for a crash-course.
2. Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know' or 'I don't understand'; it's not a sign of weakness, it simply shows your desire for knowledge, but make sure the questions you ask are intelligent, considered, and demonstrate the preparation you have undertaken in advance.
3. Become a Renaissance man/woman, read widely, seek out information, listen, question and continually seek to clarify and understand.
4. Don't just go to the usual sources of information; expand your horizons to leverage Twitter, LinkedIn groups, industry bodies and any other source available to you.
5. Prepare well, and ask intelligent open-ended questions when engaging with a new prospect.
6. Don't be a lone wolf. Learn the value of teams, leverage the knowledge, insights and networks of your team to achieve the goals you're trying to achieve.
7. Make sure you capture this information in a format to which you can refer easily. This information will form the basis for the sales strategy you develop and any negotiation that may occur further down the track.

8. Triangulate your information, check with multiple sources, never make assumptions about the accuracy of what you know, and continually re-check this information throughout the duration of the sales cycle, because it can often change along the way.
9. Don't just passively consume; actively contribute to the knowledge pool. One of the single fastest ways to develop credibility is to express your opinions on topics in a public forum. Write blog articles, contribute questions or comments on LinkedIn groups, broaden your horizons, have an opinion, and don't be scared to express it publicly.

Go Here And Read This

Jill Konrath's website: jillkonrath.com

Charles Darwin's book: *On the Origin of Species*

Rudolph W Guiliani's book: *Leadership*



Sales Thought Leader Interview #2

TIM EBBECK – THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

Tim Ebbeck is Managing Director of Oracle Corporation, Australia and New Zealand. Prior to Oracle, he was Chief Commercial Officer of NBN Co where he led the programmatic strategic review of the NBN. Previous to that, Tim was CEO of SAP in Australia and New Zealand. Between 2008 and 2012, he led the SAP business to its four most successful years ever, including successes in all major industry segments and enabling some of the largest business transformations ever undertaken in Australia and New Zealand.

His thought leadership focus includes many public speaking engagements, including addressing the Commonwealth Business Forum in Perth in 2011. Tim is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Powerhouse Museum and was appointed a Director of CPA Australia in 2013 and serves on the Policy Governance Committee.

Cian: Tim, I'm interested to know what newspapers, magazines or journals you read on a regular basis. How do you like to stay informed?

Tim: I look at a wide variety of news sources over the course of a day. I'll get a news synopsis from the web, something like Google news to get a snapshot. I'll also read the *Financial Review*. But principally it will be current news, focusing on customers and where the market is operating. I also read a lot of blogs, online technology and leadership blogs. Then I'll often head off into different areas, wherever a particular topic takes me.

What I'm finding is it's actually opening up new sources of news and content, so I don't become bigoted in the news I consume. I also use Twitter and LinkedIn for information.

Cian: What groups do you belong to on LinkedIn?

Tim: As many as you're allowed to. The ones I follow and take a real interest in are leadership groups, groups about culture or groups that I've got a very direct interest in. But principally, leadership and culture are the ones that really interest me.

Cian: I'm interested to know, in your experience, what skills or attributes make a great salesperson?

Tim: Firstly any salesperson needs to love what they do. It's the best job in any company in my opinion. I know at times it's carrying the burden and in some organisations you're at the bottom of the pyramid when you should be at the top, but they've got to love what they do. They've got to actually love the journey of selling.

The second thing is that the best ones I've ever seen have very strong discipline. It may not necessarily be the discipline that a company wants to impose on them. A great example for me was a sales rep I used to work with a few years ago, let's call him Dave. Dave had a very structured process. He never told you what it was, but you could always see that he had a structured process he was working to. Salespeople like this don't miss any steps of the process. And selling is a process; the art aspect is just a small part of it.

The third attribute is they are extremely collaborative. Whereas a selfish salesperson doesn't win in a sustainable way, great salespeople collaborate, they know how to bring in capability and use it when appropriate.

The final attribute for me is that they need to attract followers. If they're going to attract followers, they need to be a leader. So the best salespeople I see really are natural leaders. They know how to lead in situations and also when to step back. And they celebrate! There are lots of salespeople that actually don't celebrate their wins, which I just don't get.

Cian: When you work so hard for it, you might as well stop to smell the roses?

Tim: That's right, enjoy the moment.

Cian: Can you think of a memorable deal you were involved in during your career Tim, and the lessons you learned from that deal?

Tim: You learn every single time. One of the things I should have said about salespeople, is that one of the fundamentals of good leadership is being self-aware and learning all the time. It's not just the case that you learn from losing as you learn from winning as well. I remember a particular deal from my past, which was a very complex process, that went on for a long time. We got into the game of negotiation and actually enjoyed the game, although we probably let the process go on too long and let ourselves be led a bit, because we were enjoying the journey.

We had a great process on that deal. We prepared for every single meeting and rehearsed in advance. That's one of the things I hammer very hard: preparing, rehearsing. But on that deal, we did it brilliantly and we got the outcome. I personally feel we got a win-win outcome, even if we did let it go on a little too long.

I can also think of a deal we just won recently, where we executed flawlessly. I've put a lot of pressure on my team, particularly with regards to rehearsal of demonstrations and preparing for meetings. On this deal:

- the executive engagement was good
- there was clear alignment of our respective visions, and
- it was really good to actually see tick-tick-tick-tick close. Wow, it works!

Cian: What about if you flip the coin to deals you may have lost over the years and insights or lessons learned from those deals?

Tim: I think a lot of the lessons I push back into the organisation come from the 'bad learnings'. So every engagement with the customer needs to be extremely well-rehearsed and scenarios developed, because Murphy's Law comes into play all the time.

Someone calls in sick or you're doing a demo and it goes off script, or it's not consistent. So many of the best learnings come from losses...I've got a line that I use which you may have heard before, "use every asset of this great company" and I mean that. So if you're not using every asset, you're not giving yourself the best chance of winning. In my experience,

one of the classic mistakes is not thinking through what the customer is really trying to achieve.

Cian: Having a blinkered view?

Tim: Exactly. For example if you're arguing about a discount on a product, when it represents 10% of what the customer's going to spend, you're missing the point:

1. The customers planning to spend this much.
2. The outcome is going to be that much.
3. Move the needle here, get away from focusing on the discounting conversation, move on to something else.

Cian: What other lessons have you learned from winning and losing deals Tim?

Tim: I think there are a number of things:

- Preparation.
- Always take your customers' perspective.
- Always try to genuinely understand the outcome your customers are seeking. Often they can't articulate it initially, so if you can help them to articulate it, you're in a winning position.
- Always take the time to understand their process and avoid having 'happy ears' regarding the process.
- Ensure you know who the decision-makers are, who your coaches will be. Equally recognise people who might actually work against you.
- Finally, adaptability is important as well. I see salespeople who still behave the same today as they did 20 years ago. They put on a different coloured suit and tie, but everything else is pretty much the same.

Cian: I know exactly what you mean. I've spoken to many salespeople who are saying, "My skills are essentially obsolete. I'm becoming a dinosaur". That's actually one of the driving forces behind this book—to help

salespeople who have been at the pinnacle of the industry, who don't have the skills to be relevant anymore and whose careers are in a slow, but steady downward spiral.

Ok Tim, let's change the focus a little. What do you love about sales and what do you not enjoy as much?

Tim: The thrill of the chase. I think from a very personal level, I love watching people team up and get creative. I love adding value to the sales cycle, although one of the things I don't necessarily do so much in my role is get actively involved as much as I'd like to. I love:

- seeing people teaming up
- seeing people grow
- seeing people come up with creative solutions
- seeing people confront tough situations and then overcome them
- watching them learn from these experiences, with a spirit of genuinely doing the right thing for their customer, because they really do want to help the customer, and
- seeing customers get an outcome from that is always enjoyable for me.

Cian: This next question is close to my heart and an important theme in this book Tim. How important do you feel it is for a B2B sales organisation to spend time analysing the deals they win or lose?

Tim: To me, it's critical. I use the term DNA a lot. One of the things I ask my team members to do is to leave some of their sales DNA behind every time they engage. DNA enrichment is critical in an organisation and building it into the muscle memory of the organisation is vital. As sales professionals, we need to take time out to explore what we did well, what we didn't do well and what we are going to change.

Two years ago I employed a guy that headed up the business analytics side of the America's Cup team.

Cian: Really? Wow.

Tim: He tells a wonderful story about how they were using real-time in-

formation to feedback into the performance of the yacht. It's exactly the same in a business.

Cian: And that was the ultimate 'come from behind' victory as well. So you feel it's critical to extract information as a way to analyse and say, 'where do we need to improve, where do we need to tweak, refine?'

Tim: Correct.

Cian: Why do you think so few companies in our industry do it or do it inconsistently?

Tim: They're lazy. It's not part of their DNA, and I think many are also too tactical. If its bad news they don't want to hear it, so they've got happy ears on and if it's good news, they just assume everything was perfect. Remember, no one wakes up in the morning wanting to buy technology. So we shouldn't talk to them about technology—it's not about features and functions, it's about benefits. It's always been about benefits.

Cian: In my experience it's often 'apples for apples' in the customers' eyes from a technology perspective, but it's really the people involved who make the difference.

Tim: I had a customer say to me on one occasion, "not one person from your company has ever walked in here and asked me about my problems". Customers hate being talked at, they hate being sold to. In my view we've got two ears, two eyes, one mouth, so great salespeople need to become the master of the question. Talking the customer's language... our job is to translate our business to their business.

I think cultural fit is also critical. Customers hate it when they're dealing with someone they just don't think they can work with or trust. Trust and selling will always be connected, although they are probably two words you wouldn't often expect to see together. It's always been about trust for me.

Cian: Tim, thanks so much for your time and your insights, it's been great chatting with you.

Tim: You're very welcome.



CHAPTER 7

Tale of the Tape

You've got to want to be in this incredible feedback loop where you get world-class people to tell you what you're doing wrong.

Bill Gates · Philanthropist, investor, computer programmer and inventor

Many of the best salespeople in the world look to champion athletes and sports people for inspiration. We respect their hard work and dedication, value their endurance and tenacity and, in our more reflective moments, occasionally see aspects of our own feats in the corporate world reflected in their achievements.

To be the best at something you have to work hard and be singularly focused, but you also have to leave nothing to chance. The level of preparation, research and attention to detail which most successful athletes undergo to ensure victory is extraordinary.

Very few professional athletes suddenly become superstars of their sport. They focus on minute details of their training, their diet, their preparation, anything in fact that might help them achieve small but vital improvements in key areas of their performance. In many sports, winning comes down to a fraction of a second, a moment of individual brilliance, a supreme effort of mind over matter.

The one percenters

In my experience, success on the sales playing field often comes down to small differences also. Few suppliers are 50% better or worse than their competitors. We win based on lots of small advantages we create for ourselves, which are often referred to as the 'one percenters'. Make no mistake;

we lose for exactly that same reason. Although we work hard, focus on our craft and give our all to the pursuit, the one area where most salespeople fall down in comparison to professional athletes is our lack of scrutiny of the ‘post-match tape’, after we have won or lost a piece of business. Too often it’s like the contest never took place, we mentally erase the tape, bury the pricing documents and Request for Proposal (RFP) responses in some deep dark network drive, lick our wounds and move on to the next opportunity. Well, I’m here to tell you that’s a mistake!



Elsewhere in this book I have alluded to the fact that analysing your wins and losses may be the single quickest, most cost-effective and impactful decision you could take to grow your sales base, reduce your cost of sale and learn when might be a good time to qualify out of a deal. Whenever I talk to sales organisations about this topic, the first question I’m always asked, often with a note of incredulity in the voice of the questioner, is, ‘Why would a customer agree to provide feedback at the end of a sales cycle, particularly if ours wasn’t the winning bid?’

It’s a great question and if I’m honest, it was probably my biggest fear when I embarked on the journey to create a Win/Loss Review program as part of Trinity’s service offering back in 2011. It’s kind of like the *Field of Dreams* concept in reverse: ‘If we ask them, will they answer?’ It turns out most customers are happy to share their feedback. The funny thing is that customers are people too, with all the same human emotions and instincts as everyone else. That statement even holds true for procurement people!

Harnessing the ‘Law of Reciprocity’

One of the extraordinary things about human evolution is that we’ve developed a myriad subconscious behaviours, traits and responses to stimuli, which unconsciously guide much of our behaviour and actions on a daily basis. One of these behaviours has been referred to as the ‘Law of Reciprocity’ by the well-known behavioural scientist Dr Robert Cialdini. As Cialdini explains it:

The Law of Reciprocity is a social convention which causes us to feel that we must repay in kind what another person has provided us. We are obligated to repay that person in the future, regardless of whether we like them or not, even if the favour is uninvited.

This also works when we refuse a person’s request; we feel we should make up for it by saying yes to their next request. For

example, if a customer says no to a sale you can still ask for a referral and you are likely to get it based on this law.

Following the logic of Cialdini's Law of Reciprocity, if you have done a good job in helping your customer review your product or service and assisting them in coming to a purchasing decision, then you have earned the right to ask for feedback. Furthermore, when you explain to your customer that this feedback will help to improve the way that you or your team engage with future customers, there is a high probability that they will be eager to help. It sounds easy if you say it quickly, doesn't it?

Surely the vast majority of prospective customers who participate in a sales cycle wouldn't be willing to give up their time to provide feedback of this nature, you may ask? Maybe if you won the business, but definitely not if you lost the business, right? Actually, wrong. When the request is made in an appropriate manner, when you explain how the feedback will and equally importantly will not be used, the majority of customers are more than happy to give up their time and their insights.

Of course, I'm the one writing this book so it's easy for me to make this claim. I'm sure some of you reading this chapter are thinking to yourselves, 'I've been in the sales game for a long time and I'm simply not convinced that customers would be prepared to open up and share this type of feedback and competitive intelligence with a vendor at the end of the sales process'.

I thought you might say that...so before I even put pen to paper, I reached out to literally thousands of senior decision makers and procurement people and asked them the following question:

If a vendor came to you looking for feedback, learnings or insights about their performance during a sales cycle, would you be inclined to participate...and if so why? What's really in it for you?

Here's just a small sample of the responses I received from senior decision makers and procurement people from around the world:

**DOMINIC KELLY – MANAGER, STRATEGIC PROCUREMENT
CONTRACTS AND SUPPLY CHAIN, DEFENCE FORCES OF IRELAND**

Hello Cian,

I always provide comprehensive feedback to all companies who tender for our requirements. The feedback is usually as detailed as I can

get without compromising the competitive advantage of competitors and divulging commercially sensitive information supplied by competitors. As a general point, most of my Request for Tenders (RFTs) are evaluated on a two stage basis, stage one being a simple pass/fail evaluation of whether specific information requested in the tender has been provided.

Those who pass stage one are evaluated on the substance of their solution offered and are scored against criteria weighted by importance. All of these stage one and two criteria are clearly outlined in our tender documentation.

It is unbelievable the volume of responses which do not provide the requested information at stage one. As a result, the comprehensive submissions they put a lot of time and resources into are not even fully assessed at stage two. Similarly those who make it to stage two often do not appreciate where the points can be scored and the areas we deem important in a particular requirement.

I provide a full and frank assessment of each tender to unsuccessful bidders for the following reasons:

- 1. Fairness and transparency—as a public body it is important to show that the tender process is open and fair.*
- 2. Often my requirements are serviced by a small number of international operators—it is not in the best interests of my organisation to assist in the development of monopolies and oligopolies—therefore where feedback encourages future competition, the longer term benefits are obvious and outweigh the short term workload.*
- 3. Feedback can help companies develop innovative solutions to meet my requirements, often providing better and more cost-effective solutions.*
- 4. Feedback often helps identify areas within products, services, processes etc. which, if taken on board by a potential supplier, can improve the supplier's quality offering. This directly impacts on and supports my quality management initiatives.*
- 5. Providing detailed feedback in the first instance generally reduces my overall post tender workload. I find the more detailed the feedback; the less likely I am to have to deal with multiple queries*

(although I am always available to speak with or meet suppliers to further discuss their concerns if required).

For suppliers who are successful, open communication, feedback, quality evaluations and contract management meetings and reviews are critical. Generally if feedback is left until after the delivery of goods or service has concluded, you have left it too late.

From a procurement perspective, supplier relationship management (SRM) and contract management (CM) are most important. I personally believe that the majority of value delivered and cost savings that procurement departments achieve is made at the CM stage. Generally the initial procurement cost is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to cost. The majority of my time is taken up with SRM and CM, and I constantly strive to increase that proportion of my activities.

**STEVE DRAPER – PROCUREMENT DIRECTOR,
WHIRLPOOL CORPORATION**

Cian,

I would begin with the assumption that the business relationship is intended to be ongoing and not a single transaction. Otherwise no one benefits/cares about feedback of any kind.

That being the case, feedback is critically important to the mutual success of the parties. However, the sales cycle itself is a very small part of what is important to me. A vendor's ability to meet all of a buyer's requirements is what will determine if there is another opportunity for them in the future.

I want an efficient sales cycle—easy for me to transact with you relative to other suppliers—but I'm willing to put up with some difficulty in that space if you provide a great product or service that helps my business to achieve its goals.

Post-sale performance in the areas of quality, delivery, financial stability and strategic fit have a much greater impact on whether a supplier will get another opportunity. Sourcing/procurement professionals should be more than happy to provide feedback around agreed upon KPIs as both sides benefit from these kinds of engagements.

As a buyer we are able to better drive vendor performance in areas that are important to our business, and as a provider of goods and services, you are better able to target areas for improvement. We win together.

RICHARD JEFFRIES – PROCUREMENT PROFESSIONAL

Cian,

I think it's important to give feedback on what suppliers did well. Firstly, from a relationship building perspective, this softens the blow of not being awarded the contract. Secondly, it helps the supplier to reflect upon the unsuccessful bid in a measured fashion. And finally it can be a future negotiation opportunity.

RICHARD YM SENG – REGIONAL HEAD ASIA PACIFIC, AIG

Hi Cian,

Yes I would participate in such a feedback session, the main reason being that in any relationship (in this case B2B), it takes two hands to clap. Open and honest feedback when shared with a view to improving relationships, always goes towards raising the “win-win” factor in that relationship.

So What Can You Do?

1. Begin to view yourself and your sales team as finely honed athletes, searching for that small extra edge to achieve victory.
2. Just like sportsmen and women do at the conclusion of a closely fought match, settle down with your post-match tape (Win/Loss Review) to work out how you can lift your game next time or what the key elements were that helped you secure victory.
3. Change your perspective and recognise the value Win/Loss Reviews can provide to the customers and prospects you're engaging with every day. You become a better, more responsive and engaged salesperson, by listening to and acting on the advice and insights they provide.

4. Most importantly, don't fear or shirk the awkward conversations, the added scrutiny and occasionally uncomfortable insights. It's precisely these moments when we are at our most vulnerable and exposed that we learn the most important lessons and the ones which tend to last a lifetime. If you really want to mix it with the best of the best, on the sports field or in the boardroom, you have to actively seek out your areas of weakness or inexperience and take responsibility for plugging those gaps.

Go Here And Read This

Matthew Michalewicz's website: lifeinhalfasecond.com

Dr Robert Cialdini's website: influenceatwork.com

Bill Gates on Twitter: [@billgates](https://twitter.com/billgates)



CHAPTER 8

Network Like a Pro

The richest people in the world look for and build networks, everyone else looks for work.

Robert Kiyosaki · Author, motivational speaker and financial commentator

When we think of networking, many of us have a mental image of an awkward business networking function, glass of wine clutched tightly in our hand, praying we'll see someone we know and be able to go over and talk to them.

Although the premise of these events is usually meeting new people and expanding your existing network, the first lonely few minutes can make the thought of networking a frightening concept for many. Few people, even extroverts, enjoy being the one that has to break the ice by walking up to a complete stranger, sticking out their hand and saying 'hello'.

The funny thing is, once you get over that initial hurdle, the next part is often quite enjoyable. You meet someone new, exchange some basic information and quite often find a point of connection or common interest in the first few minutes of the conversation.

You're then in the enviable position of chatting animatedly to a new and interesting person, while the other networking wallflowers look on, wishing they were as outgoing as you!

It's a myth to assume some people are born great networkers, whilst others are destined to always lurk in the shadows, unwilling or unable to strike up a conversation. In fact there are plenty of myths surrounding networking, so let's quickly explore a few of them:

Myth #1 – Most people don't like being hassled by strangers and aren't looking to meet new people.

Fact: The majority of people working in your industry are also keen to build their network, although many of them also struggle to know how. Furthermore, if they have taken the time to attend a networking event, chances are they are very keen to meet new people too.

Myth #2 – Networking is only for extroverts, salespeople or people who have nothing better to do on a rainy Tuesday evening!

Fact: Whether you're introverted or extroverted, new to your industry or a 20-year veteran, networking should be seen as an important and enjoyable part of your job. Not only will it build your circle of connection and influence, it is likely to improve your understanding of your industry, thereby making you better at your job.

Myth #3 – Networking really means trying to 'use people' or 'sell to people' and you are not comfortable with either of those behaviours.

Fact: Networking should never be about trying to sell, nor should it be about using people to get something. Ironically the best networkers actually do the very opposite of this. They focus on developing relationships, helping others and making mutually beneficial connections. If you set out to help, support and add value to those you meet, you'll soon find they are more than happy to reciprocate.

One of the key things to remember when networking is that it is a two way street. You have to establish a rapport and demonstrate credibility first, before even beginning to discuss business opportunities. Just imagine how you'd feel if a perfect stranger launched into a business pitch, before you'd finished introducing yourself.

Before becoming a 'cubicle escapee' in 2011, I attended my fair share of business networking events. Working in the IT industry for almost 15 years required me to become fluent in the language of tech. I'm not talking about Java or C++, I'm talking about the language of the 'Three Letter Acronyms' or TLAs for short (pun intended). If you couldn't distinguish your CRMs from your ERPs, your ROIs from your TQMs, you ran the risk of losing track of the conversation completely and becoming the human equivalent of a nodding dog.

One of the golden rules of networking is to ensure you take the time to get to know the person you're speaking to and understand a little bit about

their background, before diving into any technical areas. As Matthew Michalewicz, the sales thought leader interviewed earlier in the book explains, your goal should be ‘to provide the listener who has never met you before, with a clear and succinct understanding of what you do’.

A useful technique to remember for achieving this is: *Name – Same – Fame*.

Start with your name. Say it clearly and give the listener a moment to take it in. This is a tricky one for me, because I have an unusual name and people often ask me to spell it, which leads to questions about where I’m from and why I don’t have an Irish accent anymore!

Once you’ve managed to get past the name hurdle, move on to same. This step requires you to explain in a single sentence what you do. The key here is to use terminology that the listener is likely to be familiar with and, again, give them a second or two to take in the information. Here I would usually say something like, ‘I’m the founder and CEO of Trinity Perspectives. We’re a sales consulting and advisory firm’. The mistake many people make at this early stage is trying to say too much too soon before the person they are talking to has been able to process the information they have just heard.

Step three is fame. We use the term fame, because it rhymes with name and same, making it easy to remember, but also because it nicely captures the third step. This is where you get to add some colour or context to what it is you do. You get to explain what your specific area of expertise or niche is. Often this is the point where the conversation will begin to take an interesting turn.

To use myself as an example again, at step three I’d often say something like, ‘at Trinity, we specialise in helping sales businesses better understand why they win and lose the deals they pitch for’. The question I’m most often asked at that point is, ‘that’s interesting, how do you do that?’ and the conversation evolves from there.

Networking tips for introverts

I mentioned earlier that networking is not just for extroverts and I think it’s important to provide some context for that remark. Rather than focusing on self-promotion as an extrovert typically does, introverts are often more comfortable learning about someone new, asking questions and processing answers. A high level of focus and the ability to process verbal and non-verbal clues can enable introverts to gain a vast amount of information about the individual with whom they are speaking. By asking

open-ended questions such as, ‘so what line of work are you in?’ introverts can show interest in someone.

Introverted networkers often do particularly well in the follow-ups after a networking event, where their focus and attention to detail can be put to good use. Writing a personal note as a follow-up to a networking event can be an excellent strategy, particularly if it’s accompanied by an interesting or engaging piece of information that relates to your original conversation with that person. Here are some of the best networking strategies I have found for introverts:

- **Introverts often write down impressions and observations, and think through questions before answering.**
 - **Strategy** – pause before initiating interactions with potential contacts. Think, plan and then talk.
- **An introvert’s comfort zone is often private. They tend to be highly selective in choosing friends and develop deep relationships.**
 - **Strategy** – focus on cultivating a few, in-depth connections, rather than meeting the whole room.
- **Introverts tend to be inner-directed and renew their energy from within or with close friends.**
 - **Strategy** – a two-step process works best here. Create a meaningful connection in the room, then take a step back to recharge, before repeating step one.
- **It’s said that in networking situations ‘extroverts collect, introverts connect’.**
 - **Strategy** – instead of jumping in; pause, observe the situation, gather any data required and then proceed.

Social selling and the new normal of networking

While the old adage that ‘people work with people’ is undoubtedly still true, there are two related questions that this book aims to answer:

1. How will people work with each other in the future?
2. What new skills or behaviours will help salespeople remain relevant in this brave new world of customer engagement?

What are the new networking norms?

Sales and marketing practices are changing:

Whether you operate in the B2B or B2C world, you can't have failed to notice the rapidly shifting dynamics between buyers and sellers. The balance of power has shifted irrevocably to the buyer and will never shift back.

'Telling and selling' is becoming less effective:

Content marketing is the new norm, centered on relationships and talking 'with' rather than 'at' people. Blanket marketing is dying a slow death and in its place, targeted and segmented content, focused on small but highly engaged micro-niches, is emerging. Successful sales and marketing companies know their target audiences intimately and will continue to refine and improve the story that they tell each audience.

The rise of the personal brand vs the product brand:

Nowadays, many personal and professional relationships are built entirely in the digital space. Many thought leaders and influencers have amassed thousands of Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook followers from across the world, from all walks of life. People who they have never met and will likely never meet, but with whom they share a common interest or intersection. This is the connection economy and it is here, in this peer reviewed world, that many of the deals, small and large, will happen.

So what does this mean for individuals keen to build new networking relationships? What new methods, channels and tools are available to us? Now that we've finally mastered the face to face networking world, are we required to learn yet another set of networking skills and behaviours? The simple answer is yes.

The more complicated answer is...that depends. It depends on which communication platforms your audience and target customers frequent. It depends on what you are trying to achieve with your networking. It depends on whether you see networking as a strategy to fill your sales funnel or a softer form of engagement, which you'll use to broaden your reach and expand your knowledge. Whatever reasons are motivating you to embrace social networking and whatever communication platforms you may decide to use, you might like to consider the following:

Moving from networking to social networking

The way your prospective customers are consuming information, and finding out about your products and services is changing rapidly. We all know that.

Unfortunately, knowing it and acting on it are two different things. Many businesses, both big and small, are paralysed by how quickly the sales and marketing landscape has changed and are unable to fundamentally shift their thinking from the old sales and marketing paradigms to the new one.

Before you jump in with both feet, take a few moments to ask yourself some questions. Where do my ideal customers go for their information – peer to peer referrals perhaps? Where do they congregate—in the bricks and mortar or online world? Research whether there are specific online thought leadership events or webinars you could attend or LinkedIn groups you could join. Find out how other competitors in your space or businesses in adjacent industries communicate with their audience and consider trialling similar techniques.

Once you've got some semblance of clarity on these questions, you should be ready to start making changes to your existing networking strategies. Don't throw out the baby with the bath water. Slowly phase out the old strategies while phasing in the new. Not all customers and prospects have embraced this brave new world of social networking either and it's important you are still able to have conversations across many different mediums.

For the small minority of you who may think that social networking is a passing fad, my only advice is ignore it at your peril. In the old days of sales and marketing, the question which was often asked was, 'what's our win rate?' Nowadays the question we need to be asking is, 'how many opportunities do we miss out on, because we're not in the right place, at the right time, with the right information?'

So What Can You Do?

Nine quick-fire networking tips:

1. If in doubt, smile. People will respond, because chances are they're feeling awkward too.
2. Ask a question; it's a great way to start a conversation. Then ask another; it's a great way to keep the conversation flowing.
3. Most people have name tags. Even though it may feel awkward at first, try using the person's name to create a sense of familiarity and connection.

4. Have lots of business cards and a pen. Jot down relevant information on the back of your business card, rather than simply handing it over blank. That will help remind the person you met what you talked about, and increase the chances of them reaching out again.
5. Have a goal, be prepared, and hone your intro/pitch.
6. Embrace your fear and set a target number of new contacts per event.
7. Make sure to follow up, preferably with a tailored and value-adding communication.
8. Focus on short, high-impact conversations, then exit and regroup.
9. Dip your toe into the world of online networking, whether through LinkedIn groups, Twitter, an online industry body or the myriad of other networking forums available.

Go Here And Read This

Keith Ferrazzi's book: *Never Eat Alone – And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time*

Meghan Wier's book: *Confessions of an Introvert – The Shy Girl's Guide to Career, Networking and Getting the Most Out of Life*

Robert T Kiyosaki's book: *Rich Dad, Poor Dad – What the Rich Teach Their Kids about Money That the Poor and Middle Class Do Not!*



CHAPTER 9

Rise of the Machines

Unless individuals have the power to defy commoditization and define their own lives, their potential is vulnerable to the crushing forces of objectification.

Tom Hayes · Marketing executive, blogger and author

In his Pulitzer Prize winning play, *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller presents a sobering vision of the fear and isolation confronting an ageing salesman, struggling to come to terms with his declining fortunes, in an industry that is rapidly evolving around him. In the last five of my 20 years in the B2B sales industry, I've witnessed my fair share of Willy Loman-style declines, as high performing salespeople I knew and admired slowly withered on the vine. A few suffered the same fate as Loman and are now selling their wares in the big sales warehouse in the sky, but many suffered a plight almost as bad.

They were fired or quietly managed out of companies, told there was a skills mismatch or the company was heading in a different direction with its sales strategy. Their targets were dramatically increased or their territories dramatically reduced; whatever it took to ensure they were no longer part of the sales force. They ended up taking jobs at smaller companies, with tougher patches to cover and managers who neither knew nor cared about their past glories. Eventually and inevitably, many walked away from the sales industry altogether.

Let's not kid ourselves; over the last few years the sales industry has shifted on its axis forever. Customers and prospects have become better informed, and sales cycles have become increasingly commoditised. The ease of access

to information and peer reviewed materials reduces the gap between the experts and everyone else. The balance of power has swung to the buyer and will never swing back. The stark reality is that the existing skills and experience of many 30, 40, 50 and 60-something salespeople, with plenty of petrol left in the tank, are becoming increasingly obsolete and irrelevant in this brave new world of sales.

Rise of the machines

In a recent report on the decline of the B2B sales industry, Forrester Research Inc. noted, ‘nearly 75% of B2B buyers say buying from an e-commerce site is more convenient than buying from a salesperson, and 93% say they prefer buying online when they’ve already decided what to buy’. The report, which cites information from the US Department of Labour for the period 2012-2020, breaks down sales professionals into four categories and shows an interesting trend emerging.



Those at the bottom of the sales value chain, or ‘order takers’, who generally process orders that customers could easily place through online self-service platforms, stand to lose the most number of sales jobs. In fact, almost a third of these salespeople are projected to disappear by 2020. At the other end of the spectrum, ‘consultants, who have extensive knowledge about the buyer’s company to help the buyer understand what her company needs to purchase’, are likely to see a 10% increase in their numbers, to 550,000 in the US by 2020 in Forrester’s estimation.

What the data is telling us is that the projected job losses and gains in this period will have an inverse correlation with the level of service a salesperson offers: The more perceived value you’re adding to your customers, the less chance there is of your role becoming commoditised and eventually replaced with an online sales portal or some other form of automated fulfillment mechanism.

This should be of some comfort to those of you at the higher end of the B2B supply chain, operating in complex strategic sales cycles, with many moving parts and longer decision cycles. Sales professionals in industries such as pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, which are ripe for disruption and automation, have far greater cause for alarm. These individuals should also possess a strong motivation to try to reinvent their skills while they still can, before the influx of newly unemployed and under-employed salespeople hit the job market.

Is that how it has to be?

Should these diligent and hardworking sales professionals simply hand back their laptops, cut up their frequent flyer cards and resign themselves to early retirement or the daunting prospect of skilling up in a brand new career? My personal view is that this would represent a criminal waste of experience and hard-won knowledge, and a crippling brain drain from the sales industry, which would be poorer for the loss.

As Ian Lowe, CEO of Go-Givers Australia, so eloquently explains:

Sales at its core is about people, yet the very essence of our humanity; passion, curiosity, creativity, authenticity and trust have been diminished in favour of a mechanical execution of the 'sales process'.

So what can we do, individually and collectively, to stem the tide of salespeople leaving our industry and increase the value and relevancy that we bring to our customers as a whole? After a lot of time, research and soul-searching, I've come up with four strategies for staying at the top of the sales game and keeping the machines at bay, for now at least.

So What Can You Do?

1. Become consciously competent

Symptom—Far too many experienced salespeople rely on instinct, muscle memory or plain old gut-feeling in their day-to-day sales activities. Why do they do this? It is simple; they've been in the sales game for years and have always been pretty successful so why mess with a proven formula?

Cure—Focus on what you're doing each day, be specific and write things down. When you're preparing for a customer presentation capture:

- what you do beforehand
- where and how you conduct your research and discovery
- who you speak to (internally and externally)
- whether you do a dry-run, if so, how long before the presentation or meeting, and
- whether you invite an internal customer sponsor to provide input in your dry-run.

Once you've captured this information, follow the same process for your lead generation activities, your discovery meetings with prospects, the way you respond to tenders, and how you prepare for a negotiation. You get the picture. The more of the innate behaviours and patterns of work that you can capture; the higher the likelihood that you will continue to be successful and a valuable asset to the business.

Get this information out of your head and down on paper. You may think you run the risk of giving up your secret sauce or letting folks get a peek behind the Wizard of Oz's curtain, but what you're really doing is quantifying the value you bring to the organisation and providing another outlet for your skills and knowledge. You're also ensuring your hard-won knowledge can be recognised and has appropriate value placed against it, which is much harder to do when it resides between your ears!

2. Find yourself a reverse mentor

Symptom—Whenever we hear the word 'mentor', we inevitably think of a single directional flow of information and knowledge, an experienced industry veteran taking a young and enthusiastic recruit under their wing to guide and advise them as they build their careers. This is a wonderful tradition in many organisations and despite the often high-stress, occasionally cut-throat nature of the B2B sales world, it's a tradition that continues to flourish today in many companies.

Cure—The problem with this old mentoring model is that all of the value flows in one direction. The experienced industry veterans dole out their Yoda-like pearls of wisdom, which their acolytes gratefully accept. Demand some value in return, I say. Take a leaf out of former GE Chairman Jack Welch's book, who was one of the first champions of the reverse mentoring phenomenon. Become a mentee, ask these young people stupid questions, it will encourage them to ask you stupid questions in return (remembering of course that there's no such thing as a stupid question)! It will also serve to break down the awkwardness that can sometimes exist at the beginning of a mentoring relationship. Try asking them the following:

- If you were going to buy a new car or a new computer, what process would you go through to research it? Who would you speak to, where would you go for information?

- Where do you go to access news content?
- Who or what do you believe represent trustworthy sources of information?
- What do you like to read in your spare time? What technology platforms do you spend the most time on, and who do you admire in business and in life?

Don't just do this because these individuals are the customers of the present and the future, do this because it will keep you relevant, connected, and, most of all, because it will keep you learning.

3. Stop ignoring social media

Symptom—You either pay lip service to social media or ignore it completely. The average senior salesperson is active on LinkedIn, uses Facebook socially whilst only about 20% are active on Twitter.

That might sound like a pretty good cross-section of the social media spectrum, so what's the problem? The problem is that the vast majority are just floating along the surface of the social media river, without really getting wet. A recent Pew Research Centre study found that 'just over one quarter (26%) of internet users aged 18-29 use Twitter. Most notably, those aged 18-29 represent nearly double the usage rate for those aged 30-49'.

Cure—Start taking an active interest in the communication platforms of the present and the future. Recognise where your customers and prospective customers are going for information, for research, and for peer-to-peer reviews. Be there waiting for them with valuable information they can use, in a format they can quickly consume, with an insight or point of difference which will make you remarkable:

- Don't be afraid to have an opinion and express it.
- Become a human content aggregator, find interesting and relevant content and share it with your network. (The key words here are interesting and relevant; over-sharing or poor content is a no-no.)
- Dip your toe in the water, join a new LinkedIn group and start to actively engage rather than passively read.

- Sign up to Twitter and follow some thought leaders or industry experts that interest you.
- Take a leaf out of Ashton Kutcher's book (@aplusk) who has a simple mantra for the Tweets he sends out. He believes everything you post online has to 'entertain, educate, engage or inspire' and with 17 million followers and counting, he must be doing something right.


4. Stop confusing 'busy' with 'productive'

Symptom—You're busy all...the...time! Talking to customers, writing or overseeing tender responses, booking flights, preparing for demos, prospecting for new leads, submitting expenses...the list goes on and on. The funny thing about the really successful people in life, as in business, is they often seem to have more time at their disposal. They seem to have magically acquired an extra couple of hours each day, to give them the breathing and thinking space that the rest of us lack.

Cure—The best strategy I've come across here is to pause and take stock of the tasks you perform in any given day/week/month.

We rarely break stride long enough to question whether all of the activity is really value-adding. Spend a day, or better yet a week noting down the different daily activities you undertake:

- how much time you spend on email
- on the phone and internet
- chatting with colleagues or friends
- participating in non-value adding meetings, and
- a million and one other great time wasters that we're all guilty of.

Once you have a better sense of your day-to-day tasks and activities, take some time to prioritise them. Which do you believe are really important activities  talking to customers, preparing for demos or workshops, problem solving for clients, or working on new innovations with your colleagues?

Now look at the non-core activities...if you're anything like me, this will be a long and rather confronting list. The key to time management

is to begin outsourcing these non-core tasks to colleagues, junior staff members, external members of a virtual team, in fact anyone who is better suited to the task and most likely a lower cost resource than you are. By finding someone better suited to these non-core activities, you can finally free up your time (perhaps the single most precious commodity for all salespeople) whilst still ensuring the task is accomplished and someone is accountable for the outcome.

Master these four techniques and you will have gone a long way towards reinforcing the value you bring to your organisation and future-proofing your skills against the slow but inevitable rise of the machineys!

Go Here And Read This

Ben Way's book: *Jobocalypse – The End of Human Jobs and How Robots Will Replace Them*

Eric Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee's book: *The Second Machine Age – Work, Progress and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*

Tom Hayes's book: *Jump Point – How Network Culture is Revolutionizing Business*



Sales Thought Leader Interview #3

SIMON PETERSON – THE SALES LEADER

Simon Peterson is the Area Vice President of Commercial Sales for ANZ at Salesforce, having previously been in charge of leading the sales strategy for the enterprise business for the Asia Pacific region. As a sales leader, he is focused on the continued development of his teams and motivating them to achieve extraordinary outcomes for the business and the customers they serve.

During his career, he has held senior roles in professional services, operations, sales and sales management. Prior to joining Salesforce, Simon spent 20 years working at SAP in a variety of roles in Australia, Canada, the US and Germany.

Cian: Simon, I'd like to start off by finding out what skills or attributes you feel make a great salesperson?

Simon: They've got to be high on the emotional quotient (EQ) scale. When they're talking to someone, they've got to try to understand that person's emotions and what they're thinking, not just what they're saying. Nowadays people buy based on a value proposition, but they also buy based on a whole lot of trust. For me, the most important attribute is understanding the importance of the EQ side of the relationship, in terms of building that trust.

Sales is all about human psychology. When you're talking to somebody, if their eyes are moving from side to side a lot or they struggle to make eye contact, it may suggest they're feeling uncomfortable. The question is what are you able to pick up from that?

These days the ticket to the game is knowing your solution and how it will impact the business you're selling to. But I think great salespeople rarely focus on that alone, it's a given. They think about the people they're engaging with, because they recognise that is where the sale will be won or lost.

Cian: What other attributes make for a great salesperson?

Simon: They've got to be hungry to learn and have a 'never ever give up' attitude. It's 4pm on the last day of the quarter and you're short on your sales target. Great salespeople aren't thinking about the beer they're going to have at 5pm, they're thinking, "What can I do to make something happen?"

Cian: I think we all know salespeople who've done that, pulled out the miracle deal at the 11th hour, which becomes the stuff of legends.

Simon: That sort of behaviour is actually infectious. Until younger salespeople see other colleagues do it, they don't really appreciate the difference between achieving 90% and 120% of your sales target.

Cian: As more and more 'order-taking' sales roles become automated, commitment level may represent one area where salespeople still have an advantage over 'sales machines'? What about instincts, Simon, something that computers lack, how important are they for successful salespeople?

Simon: As a salesperson, you've got to trust your instincts and have a healthy degree of paranoia about everything that may go wrong. But in such a way that it's positive rather than negative paranoia. If you ever find yourself focusing on a single path to a deal, you're probably in trouble.

Cian: Can you expand on that concept a little?

Simon: You've got to be able to sense if something is blocking you, and what steps you need to take to overcome the blockage. Should you go around a particular obstacle to the sale and, if so, how do you achieve this without alienating key internal sponsors? These and many other instinctive decisions are necessary in every sales cycle.

Most of the time, when a deal doesn't happen it's a risk issue, but the customer will rarely spell it out to you that way.

- You need to be able to sense these things, to read between the lines.
- All too often, many new salespeople are single-point sensitive, with only one or two contacts in an account.
- They haven't honed their 'sales spider senses' and instead have happy ears on, believing everything their coach is telling them. Human nature is: when I hear good things, I continue to want to hear them and sometimes ignore what's actually happening in front of me.

Cian: Are there any other skills you believe salespeople need to develop or hone in the future?

Simon: I think selling your solution comes much later nowadays. Your entry fee to play is understanding your customer and their industry. That gets you in the door, but that's not the secret. The secret is having a point of view about their business. You need to understand the structure of their business, how it creates value for their customers, because that's what they're really in business to achieve. You need to understand all the stakeholders along the way, the entire value chain.

Imagine a retailer. You know sales and marketing are important for them. But you need to think about their employee experience. Because the people, the employees in an organisation, are what really makes the business tick. The better trained they are, the better motivated they are; the more they collaborate with each other, the more they'll delight their end customers. So you need to understand all of the pieces of the puzzle that make that business tick.

To get to the point where you're able to present a bigger picture or uncover a bigger opportunity, you have to have a point of view. You can't be afraid to challenge the customer on the way they do business. And you can't be afraid of them challenging you on your assessment of their business.

Cian: That's an interesting perspective Simon. If you don't mind I'd like to change tack for a moment. Would you be willing to share your experiences of losing a deal in your career and what you learned from it?

Simon: Sure. On one occasion I was involved in a deal with a big finance industry organisation. It was a franchise model and we had the fran-

chisees excited, we had headquarters excited, we had everything nailed. We were down to the final two vendors, had gone through the pricing review and at the final hurdle the CFO killed the deal, because he needed a CAPEX spend, not an OPEX spend. Our competition had a cloud solution, but also an on-premise solution, as their plan B.

I think what it came down to is: We didn't fully understand the financial drivers which were important to the CFO and CEO—how capital expenditure versus operational expenditure would actually impact upon the business. I firmly believe we had the best solution for the customer and the best solution for their franchisees. They all agreed, even their IT team were supporters, we had everything lined up. But we lost the deal, because we missed one critical issue.

Cian: So let me ask you Simon, in the context of the deal you just described, how important do you think it is for companies to analyse the deals they win and lose?

Simon: I think it's incredibly important to understand why you succeed and why you fail. By the same token, I think too many companies have a tendency to make the loss a witch hunt. If you have a culture where a loss review is actually about pointing the finger of blame, you'll never get to the truth. What you've got to recognise is: You've lost the deal, now you need to determine why. Are we missing capability? Did we not have the right resources involved? Did we not get to the right people?

Cian: And how should you find that out?

Simon: You could ask the account team, but let's be honest they'll usually tell you what you want to hear. I think the right answer is somebody outside the account team, usually further up the exec. chain, needs to have the conversation. Not that day, but a week or two after the loss has happened, they should sit down with the customer. And I think it's important to have a conversation where the premise is, "as a business we're all about continuously improving what we do. We respect your decision, but we've got to understand so we never make a mistake like this again". And importantly that conversation can often re-open the door six, 12, 18 months down the track.

Cian: Yes, I've seen quite a few examples of that happening.

Simon: The other thing is, if you just accept the assessment of the account team about why you lost the deal, you could go off and change a bunch of processes, which didn't actually impact the customer's decision at all. So you might end up making a whole bunch of expensive and time consuming changes, for no reason at all.

Cian: And you feel that responsibility rests with the sales management team then? To develop their people and recognise where those gaps exist and help bridge them?

Simon: Yes, and I think the culture of the business is important. If I beat up my sales managers for errors or mistakes, they'll beat up their sales reps and so on down the line.

- You have to start from the assumption that we're all intelligent people. We've simply got different levels of skills and experience.
- You've got to set up an environment where people collaborate with each other.
- Building regular Win/Loss Review cadences into the sales business enforces that collaboration. You need a safe place for people to mess up.

Cian: If your entire sales team were to read this interview Simon, what would be the three key lessons you'd like them to learn about becoming better salespeople?

Simon:

- First and foremost: Understand the basics and do them right. In order to close deals and achieve 100% or even 200% of your sales target, you've got to be doing the basics right every time. So get the basic stuff nailed and ensure that's what you come and do every morning.
- Second: Urgency. Never do tomorrow what you could do today. If you get to the end of a month or a quarter, and you've got a couple of days where you may not have a deal, use the time productively and just be absolutely belligerently focused on that.
- I think the third thing that I'd say to them is: Get in front of your customers as much as possible. Get to know them, get to

know what makes them tick. Understand who your key contacts are but broaden your network within the account also, avoid being single threaded. Most importantly remember every second you're with your customers, you can and should be building influence, trust and rapport.

They are probably the three immediate lessons that spring to mind.

Cian: Thanks Simon, some great tips there.

Simon: I guess the last comment I'd make is that the way to become successful in sales is by planning to be successful. If you plan to make 80% of your target, you'll probably get to 80%. Lift your eyes up and focus on what could be. Aim at 150% and then work backwards from that point to determine what needs to happen.

Cian: Simon, thanks so much for sharing your strategies and insights today.

Simon: You're very welcome.



Character trait: LONGEVITY

CHAPTER 10

What Sales Winners do Differently

In a world of continuous change and perceived product/service parity, sellers are the key differentiator.

Jill Konrath · Sales strategist, speaker and author

I'm sure you've met at least one star salesperson at some point in your working life. They seem to have the Midas touch when it comes to finding and closing big deals. They rarely seem flustered, attract the best and the brightest resources in the business and, more often than not, seem to come out on top.

In the software industry, where I spent most of my working life, the pressure placed on sales executives can be immense. Salespeople by definition tend to be goal orientated and often competitive. If you draw a line in the sand which equates to 100% achievement of sales targets, you can usually tell on past performance which salespeople will hit their targets and which will miss them. But simply hitting your sales target doesn't necessarily make you a sales winner, does it?

What are the other criteria or behaviours that separate great salespeople from the journeymen and women who make up the majority of the sales profession? That's the \$64,000 dollar question that recruiters, sales managers and everyone else has been trying to answer for years.

When the incentive is right and the motivation comes from within, it's amazing to see just how productive and creative really great salespeople can be. One of the most fascinating and rewarding parts of my job is speaking directly with key decision makers and finding out why they make the decisions they do. Why did they pick one vendor's product over another?

How did they differentiate between two very similar products in a particular deal? How often is it really all about price? Over the past four years, as I've sat and listened to these individuals talk, I've gradually formed the view that, far from becoming less relevant, the sales profession (at the top end of the B2B world at least) has never had a more important role to play than it does today.

What these decision makers told me invariably related to people, as much as it did to product or price. I took note of the specific behaviours, character traits and personal attributes that were consistent across many of the 'best of the best' salespeople I was hearing about. I compared these insights with the really great salespeople I had worked with during my own sales career and saw an incredibly close correlation between them.

In this chapter, I have distilled years of interviews, feedback surveys and customer conversations, coupled with my own sales experiences, into seven key learnings about what sales winners do differently. It was an arduous task and I'm sure I've left out some important points, but hopefully at least a few will resonate with you. These attributes, coupled with some of the other behaviours and character traits explored in this book, have helped me form a view of what great salespeople and great sales organisations can and should do, to differentiate themselves in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

But before we jump into the best practices, it's worth pausing for a moment to reflect on some of the negative feedback I received from customers and prospects, during these many Win/Loss Review conversations and, believe me, even Win Reviews can throw up some surprisingly negative feedback on occasion.

What sales losers do the same

- **They are unprofessional** – This is the single biggest criticism that I hear from customers during the Win/Loss Review interviews I conduct. Perhaps surprisingly, it often relates as much to those who won the deal as to those who lost. I once reviewed a deal where the customer was so unimpressed with the quality of the tender response they received, that they very nearly threw the bid out completely at the very start. The vendor ended up winning this deal, which was worth millions of dollars to them. As the old saying goes, 'For the want of a nail a shoe was lost...'
- **They are poor listeners** – This is a bad habit, both in life and in business. We were all born with two ears and one mouth for a reason, yet many

salespeople seem to enjoy the sound of their own voices so much, they refuse to keep quiet and let their customer speak. It's not talk-back radio; dead-air is not only allowed, but actually to be encouraged. Active listening is a skill that every salesperson should try to master, if they want to succeed in this industry.

- **They don't do discovery well** – Discovery, needs analysis, call it what you will; I believe this is one of the most critical steps in any sales cycle. It's your one chance to have a clear and unfiltered discussion with your prospective customer. The first real chance for them to assess you and vice versa.

Discovery requires lots of advance preparatory work, significant amounts of information capture, and some sort of data repository or CRM where you can put all that useful customer intel. I'm a firm believer in the old sales adage that 'customers will teach you how to sell to them' if you can just keep quiet long enough to let them.

- **They lack consistent processes** – Those who knew me during my own sales career might be rolling their eyes a little at this one. This was probably the area that let me down most in my early days. When I thought of processes, I considered them to be time wasting activities, which would drown you in paperwork and take you away from the customers or partners you needed to spend time with.

The mistake I made was not being able to distinguish between processes for the sake of processes, namely all those annoying compliance activities that are imposed upon you in many sales companies, and critical sales processes. Here I'm talking about having a thorough system of record, a robust account planning methodology, and a consistent and readily accessible sales process. Essentially, any and all processes which serve to reduce the risk and unknown elements in a sale, thereby increasing your likelihood of success.

- **They just don't care enough** – It's hard to fake enthusiasm, sincerity, and a genuine interest in the people you are dealing with. In recent years, I have a strong suspicion that humanity has developed a sixth sense. This new sixth sense also allows us to smell bullshit from a mile away, hear when someone is feeding us a line, see when someone is being less than honest, and feel when we are being taken for a ride. Prospective

customers can spot from a mile away when you're uninterested or un-engaged and, rest assured, they'll punish you for it every time when it comes to deciding who they want to work with.

Ok, that's more than enough negativity for one chapter. I'm sure you're itching to find out what the really great salespeople are doing differently out there every day.

What sales winners do differently

- **They are humble** – Despite their many successes, the best salespeople almost always place the focus on their customer. They don't make assumptions, they don't talk about their company, their solution or their experience in the industry until they have earned the right to do so. But it's more than just patiently waiting their turn to talk about themselves; they genuinely don't want to be put in the spotlight.

Great salespeople realise that putting the spotlight on their customer, their partners or their team is a far better and more productive strategy in the long run. Although the perception of salespeople is that they are often loud, brash and arrogant, what many decision makers are telling me is that the best are often quiet, considerate and very humble.

- **They are great listeners** – In my experience, most of the best salespeople have mastered the art of active listening. For those not familiar with this technique it requires 'the listener to feedback what they hear to the speaker, by way of re-stating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own words, to confirm what they have heard and confirm the understanding of both parties'.

Applied poorly, active listening can be awkward and stilted for both parties but done well, it allows a conversation to flow, while extracting really meaningful and valuable insights. Not only do they listen, great salespeople capture the insights the customer shares and use them to build up a complete picture of the organisation and key stakeholders.

- **They educate** – I'm constantly hearing senior decision makers say they are looking for salespeople to educate them, bring new ideas to the table and challenge the status quo. Although I firmly believe that the role of the salesperson remains critical in the world of B2B sales, I'd be the first to admit that it has changed significantly in recent years.

Prospective customers aren't looking for human brochures, parroting marketing messages and regurgitating sales scripts. They want to hear what else is happening in their industry, they want to be educated about new initiatives and challenged on their assumptions. The really great salespeople are the ones who act like sponges for useful information and take the time to add value at every step of the sales journey.

- **They make connections** – Let's be honest, lots of people can add value within a sales cycle and often the salesperson is not necessarily the one with all the answers. Many of the best salespeople have the capacity to spot a gap in their offering and find the right individual or partner to plug that gap. Even if they don't have the right solution, great salespeople still take the time to connect their prospect with someone who does and will often reap the benefits in a future sales cycle.

It takes confidence and a strong will to introduce more unknowns into a sales cycle, to share your IP with partners and potentially create more obstacles to progress the deal. The 'best of the best' instinctively know when to make these connections and invariably provide a much better and more rounded solution for their customers in the long run.

- **They have a high EQ, to complement a high IQ** – Great salespeople are incredibly attuned to the body language, facial expressions and non-verbal cues of the people around them. It takes a high level of insight and empathy to build trust and rapport with different stakeholders, from different backgrounds, with different wants and needs. The best sales professionals have an innate ability to meet someone, make a connection and then take the time to understand what makes them tick.

The ability to assess someone's level of engagement in a split second, to read the facial features of a senior executive or the body-language of a decision maker, to spot the junior person who despite their youth wields a high level of influence in the decision making process, these and many other emotional quotient characteristics, separate the good salespeople from the great salespeople.

- **They understand, manage and mitigate risk** – It's rarely about simply closing the deal for great salespeople. It needs to be about ensuring a great outcome for the customer, demonstrating that you've done this before, that you understand where the pitfalls may occur and that you

possess a safe pair of hands.

The best salespeople have realised that the reputations and sometimes even the careers of their customers are often closely related to the success or failure of key projects. This is a responsibility they take very seriously and, as such, they will emphasise to their customers exactly what steps they're taking to reduce any unforeseen risks in the project, ensuring the customer feels looked after and protected. Never underestimate the critical importance managing and mitigating risk can have in the final decision making process. Not to mention the impact it can have on your ability to easily win future business from the same customer.

- **They are great storytellers** – We've discussed the topic of storytelling in business earlier in this book, but it certainly bears repeating. The most successful salespeople always seem to be the ones with a vast library of customer stories and anecdotes, which they can pluck out to illustrate a point when needed.

Not only do they tell great stories, they actively collect them: War stories, anecdotes, customer testimonials, whatever they can get their hands on and then liberally sprinkle them into conversations. Make no mistake, the ability to tell stories in a business context is likely to be one of the most important sales skills to master in the next five to 10 years.

So What Can You Do?

1. Sit down with a blank sheet of paper and a pen, and then score yourself out of 10 against the seven behavioral traits I have outlined.
2. Before you focus on those areas where you scored lowest, spend a moment on the sections you scored well in. Ask yourself why you think this is an area you excel at, consider whether it's a conscious competence or something you were unaware of until just now? Make a conscious decision to improve even further in these specific areas and further differentiate yourself from your peers in the industry.
3. Now turn your attention to those areas where you didn't score so well. Be honest with yourself; are they things you don't feel comfortable doing or things you simply weren't aware of? My advice would be to pick a

maximum of two areas for improvement and write down what you are going to do differently.

4. Finally, I'd encourage you to think about customer stories, testimonials and anecdotes as little nuggets of sales gold. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, will be to start capturing these stories somewhere. Keep adding to this treasure trove and before long, you'll find yourself using stories in all customer interactions, to better illustrate your point and ensure what you say sticks in their minds.

Go Here And Read This

Seth Godin's book: *Free Prize Inside – The Next Big Marketing Idea*

Paul Arden's book: *It's Not How Good You Are, It's How Good You Want To Be*

Jill Konrath's book: *Agile Selling – Get up to Speed Quickly in Today's Ever-Changing Sales World*



CHAPTER 11

Pitch Perfect

Pitching, like self-defence, needs to happen automatically.

Matthew Michalewicz · Author, keynote speaker and serial entrepreneur


There's no such thing as a silver bullet in the world of sales, but mastering the art of pitching is as close as you're ever likely to come to receiving the keys to the sales kingdom.

Some readers may disagree vehemently with the statement I'm about to make, but I'm unapologetic in making this claim. Time and again in the post-sales interviews I conduct with senior business leaders, I get consistent feedback and this feedback has led me to conclude that:

In the vast majority of cases, the best product, the best service, the most experienced team, the deepest pool of resources, the most cost-effective solution, will all come a distant second to the best pitch. It's a hard and uncompromising reality of the B2B sales industry, but there it is....

If it isn't about the product or the price-point, the demo or legal, then how can we guarantee that our pitch comes out on top? In this final chapter, I'll explore some of the art and science associated with making great pitches and I'll unpack a set of pitching architecture you can adopt in your own sales opportunities.

How do human beings make complex decisions?

When it comes to pitching, the single most important concept you need  to understand is how prospective customers (colloquially known as human beings) actually make their decisions. We'd like to think they look at all of

the available evidence, weigh up the pros and cons and reach an informed decision, based on the empirical evidence at hand, but actually that's rarely the case.

People are emotional creatures and we invariably use the limbic or 'feeling' part of our brain when making decisions. We get a 'sense' of the people who are presenting to us, we seek connections and congruency between what they are saying and what we are 'feeling'. It might seem strange to use words like 'sense' and 'feeling' when talking about business decisions being made in the boardroom, but that's exactly the process that is occurring. Aside from the formal decision making criteria which may be articulated in a RFP document, prospective customers are considering a myriad other 'limbic' criteria:

- Do we like them?
- Do we trust them?
- Will they be good people to work with?
- Have they worked with someone we know who can vouch for them?
- Can they help us mitigate our risks?
- Are they credible authorities in their area of expertise?
- What will happen if we run into problems, how will they respond?

These, and many other unspoken criteria, play a vital role in the decisions that are made every day in the world of B2B sales. So in order to create an impactful and memorable impression, your pitch has to be capable of triggering some sort of emotional response and stimulating every single cerebral cortex in the room. The question is how do you do that?

The elevator pitch

Everyone in sales is familiar with the term 'elevator pitch'. It's a ubiquitous term tossed around liberally, with little understanding of what an elevator pitch really is and when or how it should be used. An elevator pitch, any type of sales pitch in fact, should be an honest attempt to engage, inform, excite and hopefully add value to your audience. Where possible it should lean towards simplicity. As the metaphorical elevator doors slide open, the recipient of your pitch must have a clear understanding of what you actually do and hopefully be keen to find out more.

Let me be very clear— *you are not trying to sell anything at this stage, you're simply earning permission to move to the next step.*

What do I mean by that? If you're embarking on a sales cycle and have the opportunity to provide a quick pitch to someone on your product or service, you need them to walk away with a clear understanding of what they heard and a burning desire to learn more. The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, yet unfortunately many salespeople, young and old, often stumble at this first hurdle.

In my conversations with senior decision makers across many different industries, they frequently say how confused or uninspired they were by the initial discussions they had with prospective vendors:

- I didn't understand a lot of the terminology they were using
- they talked to me about examples which weren't relevant to my industry
- they tried to pitch everything in their kit-bag, when I was only interested in one specific area
- they didn't take the time to understand my business and our needs, before presenting their solution, or
- as a group, we struggled to differentiate this vendor from the others we saw.

The seasoned sales professionals amongst you may well be shaking your heads reading this, wondering how salespeople could still be making these sorts of basic errors. Take it from me, these aren't just traps for new players, we've all been guilty of these sales crimes at some stage in our careers.

Too many of us default to our standard pitch, like throwing on a comfortable old T-shirt. We know these pitches backwards, we've given them a thousand times and, to be honest, it shows.

They are often drab, scripted affairs, devoid of any creativity, innovation or energy. Too often we pay lip service to the customer's problems and fool ourselves into thinking we've stood out from the crowd and told a worthwhile story.

Meanwhile our prospective customer has already mentally scrubbed us from their long list and moved on to the next supplier. The real problem is that the art of pitching has changed dramatically in recent years and far too many sales professionals still haven't caught up.

In the remainder of this chapter we'll discuss a couple of different ways to hone and craft your pitch and learn what not to do. Let's begin by looking at an example of how a pitch can go wrong...badly wrong.

Customer case study – XYZ Incorporated

A customer of Trinity's in the tech sector recently lost a significant piece of business, after months of resource intensive sales effort and an extremely expensive cost of sale. They have graciously given me permission to use their story in these pages, with the proviso that the name of their organisation and their prospective customer is altered. In this instance, the vendor ticked a number of key boxes which gave them the sense that they should win the deal:

- they had a strong track record in this industry
- they had an existing relationship with this client
- they wrote a solid tender response which was well received, and
- they had a good idea of the competitive landscape in the deal.

What this sales team failed to do, however, was adapt their pitch to fit their audience and reflect a clear understanding of the specific needs of their prospective customer. Unfortunately they also completely misjudged what phase of the sales cycle they had arrived at, believing they were early when in fact they were late.

Executive presentation: Timeline

1. They had one hour to conduct a pitch to the executive team, who they knew would be instrumental in the final vendor selection decision. **Tick tock.**
2. Of that precious 60 minutes, the first ten were spent on setting up and introductions. **Tick tock.**
3. For the next 20 minutes, the sales team talked about their own company. You know the drill:

*Our company goals, values and vision - the dreaded logo slide
- how many staff they had - how their team was structured
- where they were based geographically and what industries they played in.*

They did this in a misguided attempt to establish credibility and authority, both of which are of critical importance in a sale cycle, but neither of which should be prioritised over the customer's problems, needs or pain points. Unfortunately they also forgot that the majority of this information had already been covered in their tender response. By this stage even the sales team recognised their audience was beginning to get restless. **Tick tock.**

4. From 30 to 50 minutes into the presentation, they talked about how they saw the two companies working together. Unfortunately, they failed to present a compelling vision for how they could solve the customer's key business challenges and also failed to demonstrate they had developed a clear understanding of what a successful project outcome might look like for this customer.

The fact that their entire presentation was a monologue rather than a dialogue, with virtually no interaction with their audience didn't help much either. **Tick tock.**

5. The last ten minutes had been set aside for questions, but unfortunately, as so often happens, the first question turned into a discussion, which rapidly chewed up the allocated time. The customer enforced a hard-stop after one hour, to be fair to all the vendors, which created a rushed and uncomfortable close to the presentation. Almost mid-sentence the sales and pre-sales executives leading the pitch had to stop, shut down their laptops and begin packing up.

No proper conclusion, no real call to action, no structured close to the meeting. **Tick tock.....time's up.**

Sitting down afterwards for the debrief meeting with the key customer stakeholders, the feedback they provided was blunt and didn't make for pleasant hearing. Prior to the presentation, they were excited to hear what XYZ Incorporated had to say, and saw them as a legitimate contender to win their business. Afterwards, not a single person on the executive committee felt they were the right supplier to take the project forward.

I don't take any pleasure in relating this story. Having spent almost 20 years in the sales industry I recognise how hard it can be to find a qualified opportunity and get to the point of pitching for their business. Sadly, the lack of understanding of basic pitch architecture is often the difference between

a wonderful new customer relationship and pounding the pavement looking for another well-qualified prospect.

So let's take a few moments to explore the concept of pitching architecture in a little more detail, using three of the most frequent pitches most salespeople will encounter:

1. The elevator pitch
2. The evaluation pitch
3. The pre-purchase pitch

#1 - The elevator pitch revisited

As I explained earlier, your elevator pitch needs to be quick and snappy. The type of pitch you can deliver in less than two minutes, which will engage and inform your listener and give them a very clear understanding of your business. Let me give you my own elevator pitch as an example.

- Hi, my name's Cian. I'm the founder and CEO of Trinity Perspectives.
- We're a sales consulting and advisory firm specialising in helping technology and telecommunications companies better understand why they win and lose the deals they pitch for.
- We do this through a five-step Win/Loss Review program we've developed over the past four years.

Short, sharp and hopefully to the point, with minimum jargon, industry terminology or wasted effort. It took me quite a while to crystallise what Trinity does into a few short sentences, but it was a very worthwhile exercise. The usual response I get from people is, 'that's interesting, how exactly do you do that?' which leads to a more in-depth discussion, precisely the outcome you're looking for from an elevator pitch.

#2 - The evaluation pitch

If you are undertaking an evaluation pitch, you should be presenting a completely different set of information and insights. Evaluation pitches usually occur at the second or subsequent step of a sales cycle. They should be:

- relevant and tailored to the needs of the prospect
- focused on benefits and outcomes, rather than features and functions, and

- engaging to your audience, providing them with new insights or challenging existing perceptions.

An evaluation pitch should be structured based on the discovery meetings you've undertaken with a prospective customer. If you're responding to a tender, a portion of your evaluation pitch may be contained within your tender response document.

Recognise the importance that prospective customers place on seeing and getting to know the team they will be working with. Don't assume that the best tender document will necessarily influence the final outcome. It may help to make a strong first impression, on which you can build, but in my experience it's rarely a good barometer of the final outcome of the sale.

#3 – The pre-purchase pitch

Often this will be the final pitch you might make to a prospect, before hoping to close the deal. How should you construct your pitch at this late stage of the sales process? Hopefully you'll have already demonstrated the value of your product or service by now and shown how you'll address their business needs. At this stage of the sales process you need to start focusing on:

- presenting a compelling call-to-action
- explaining the specific steps required to proceed with the purchase process, and
- detailing what will happen next, focusing on logistics, timings, roles and responsibilities.

The pre-purchase pitch is a balancing act between demonstrating that you know what you are doing and not making any assumptions that the deal is actually done. In the B2B sales world, a buyer's remorse can be triggered by the smallest mistake or omission at this final step of the sales journey.

The recipe for a memorable pitch?

1. First you need to **develop a deep, almost telepathic, understanding of your target audience**. Who they are, what their industry is all about, their wants, needs and desires, what gets them up in the morning and what keeps them awake at night.
2. When you start to pitch, **establish your credibility and authority at the very beginning**. This one step, so often forgotten or ignored, will

determine the impact of your words and the weight they carry. For example, if I say, ‘hi, I’m Cian, a regular sales and marketing commentator in the media and an international keynote speaker’, you are much more likely to sit up and pay attention, than if I were to say, ‘hi, I’m Cian and I’m here to talk about pitching’.

3. Too often we take our own expertise for granted or feel uncomfortable sharing our experience in case people think we’re showing off. When you share a little bit of your story at the beginning of a pitch, you’re actually alerting your audience as to why they should listen to you and the value they can expect to gain from your insights.
4. **Harness the power of storytelling.** Human beings are hard-wired to listen to and learn from stories, as distinct from plain facts and figures. It fires up the neural pathways and ensures that your message will stick fast in the minds of your audience. Stories are a powerful way to normalise new content and translate theory into practice. It’s no coincidence that the very best pitchers are also master storytellers.
5. You need to **earn the right to talk about your company, product or service.** You do this by educating yourself in advance about your audience, and ensuring that what you say really strikes a chord with them. If you do that right, they’ll want to know more, because now they can envision themselves taking some action.
6. **Take the time to understand your ‘essence’.** I appreciate this might sound too ‘touchy-feely’ for many of you, but bear with me for a moment. If you can master the art of putting *what* you do in context by explaining *why* you do it, this will differentiate you from your competition more so than any other step in the pitching process.

So what exactly do I mean by your essence? Apart from the money or the job itself, what’s your ultimate mission, what motivates you, what gets you out of bed in the morning?

Prospective customers will be wondering:

- Why are you doing this and are you passionate about it?
- Do you enjoy and take pride in what you do?
- What will you be like to work with?

There are a couple of reasons we avoid this step. We think no one will care or it might be awkward to share this type of information. We can't summon sufficient passion and it seems fake or, worse still, we genuinely don't understand or haven't embraced our essence. Here's an example which forms part of my essence:

I believe sales professionals play a critical role in keeping the wheels of industry turning. I've spent the past four years focusing on ways to reduce the huge amount of wastage in the sales industry, help businesses better understand why they're winning and losing deals, and improve the negative perception of our industry.

7. **The secret ingredient: Find your hook.** It's not enough to have a great pitch, you've got to have something which is really unique and memorable, something which can cut through everything else. It might be an image, a quote or a shared vision of the future you present. Whatever it is, it needs to be so memorable that it remains imprinted in the mind of your prospect, long after your pitch is over. Unfortunately this secret ingredient is often left out of the perfect pitch recipe and it is these pitches that often fail to hit the mark with audiences.

In their excellent book *Stop Bitching Start Pitching*, Marty Kellard and Ian Elliot explain the concept of the hook as follows:

The hook has to be relevant. It must be absolutely integrated into and must spring directly from your answer to the question: "How can we help solve your problem?"

So What Can You Do?

1. Recognise the power of the pitch and start to hone it on the whetstone of the market.
2. Understand the different types of pitches that exist and the appropriate time to deploy each type.
3. Use the pitching recipe to help differentiate your offering from your peers in the market.
4. Learn to understand and embrace your essence; I can guarantee that sharing this with prospective customers and partners will help them relate better to you and engage with what you have to say.

5. Repeat after me: ‘The best pitch will almost always trump the best product or service’. Once you understand this, you’ll become a far better and more engaging sales professional.

Go Here And Read This

Matthew Michalewicz’s website: lifeinhalfasecond.com

Marty Kellard and Ian Elliot’s book: *Stop Bitching Start Pitching – The 9 Success Steps to Winning Business*

Seth Godin’s book: *Linchpin – Are You Indispensable?*



CONCLUSION

Finish with How

We are all inventors, each sailing out on a voyage of discovery, guided by a private chart, of which there is no duplicate. The world is all gates, all opportunities.

Ralph Waldo Emerson · 19th century American essayist and poet

I began this book by sharing with you my own personal *why*? That burning need I have to search for clarity and simplicity in the face of complexity; to strip away the unknowns from every sales cycle and expose the truth which lies beneath. It took me many years and a lot of soul searching to understand and eventually embrace my *why*?

Unfortunately, once I gained this sense of clarity, the hard work had only just begun because then I had to focus on my *how*.

- *How can I bring this idea to life and turn it into something real?*
- *How can I possibly compete with all of the seasoned sales experts in my industry and gain traction?*
- *How do I even begin to learn everything I need to know about social selling and social media, to help improve my personal brand in this crowded market place?*
- *How can little old me compete?*

And then the doubt begins to creep in. You begin to question your idea, to scrutinise it from all angles, to pull at the thread of the idea, in the hopes that it will unravel in front of you and save you all the time, trouble and

heartache of having to act on it and see where it takes you.


I've been lucky enough to train, coach and mentor sales professionals and sales leaders all over the world and to receive my fair share of training and personal development along the way. The biggest fear any coach or trainer experiences is the worry that once your students leave the room, all the new ideas, all the learnings and insights you have given them, will slowly evaporate and they'll slip back to their old, comfortable habits.

So now that you've almost reached the end of this book, I need to ask you:

- *How are you going to change?*
- *How are you planning to embrace an idea or concept that resonated with you in this book and put it into practice in your working life?*
- *How will you avoid defaulting back to your old habits and instead opt for the unknown, the uncomfortable, that which lies well beyond your current frame of reference?*

I don't know what your answer will be to these questions, but I'll tell you how I answered them all those years ago and how I continue to try and answer them every single day.

Action!

'Critical thinking followed by action' was the Dalai Lama's answer in  response to the question, 'What's the most important meditation we can do now?'

It's easy to procrastinate, to wait for conditions to be perfect before we set sail, to put something in the 'too-hard basket', before we even give it a try. The irony is, that after we take the first step to developing a new habit or attempting something we previously felt was beyond us, it is an incredibly empowering and energising sensation. Suddenly the task doesn't seem as confusing or as insurmountable, we gain a renewed sense of confidence, control and even self-worth.

In his inspiring and confronting book *Life in Half a Second*, Matthew Michalewicz explores the concept of goal pyramids as a mechanism to overcome the tyranny of *how* and turn seemingly impossible goals into achievable tasks and activities. He explains, 'The vast majority of goals get abandoned. It's not just about having a goal, it's about having a goal you're passionate about and committed to.' He goes on to say that those who write down their goals and share them with others have a much greater chance

of achieving them. And that those people who then break down their goals into a series of specific tasks and activities (a goal pyramid) have the best chance of all of success. Put simply:

Goals are just dreams with deadlines.

My advice, for what it's worth, is to forget about the dreaded *how*, at least initially, and concentrate instead on the far more important question...*why*? The answer to this question is what will inspire and sustain you to turn whatever action you take into a repeatable habit, until it eventually forms part of your muscle memory; your unconscious competence.

Understanding your own personal *why* will also help you stay on track when those nasty *how* questions rear their head and try to derail you from your goals. I wish you every bit of success with your sales journey and want to thank you for taking the time to walk a few steps down the road with me.

So What Can You Do?

1. **Take the time to discover (or re-discover) your own personal *why*?** Apart from the money or the job security, why do you do what you do each day, what lights you up, motivates or energises you, what is your higher purpose, your *raison d'être*?
2. **Protect and nourish your personal and professional brand.** Although you may work for many organisations during your career, you and only you are the custodian of your personal and professional brand. How you look after it may well determine the rest of your career.
3. **Above all else take action.** Whether you are a brand new salesperson, a seasoned sales professional, or a sales leader, believe me when I tell you, you still have a lot to learn. The B2B sales industry is evolving at a speed of knots. What a critical sales skill is today might be surplus to requirements tomorrow.

Your job is to stay vigilant and stay humble, to keep learning, and never rest on your laurels. If that sounds exhausting, then believe me, the alternative, bouncing around from job to job in an ever decreasing spiral, is far more exhausting and soul destroying.

4. **Don't give in to the fear, self-doubt, paranoia and stress.** At the start of this book, I shared with you the personal toll that stress had on me

for a large part of my sales career. Nothing we can say or do will change the innately stressful and occasionally panic-inducing nature of the B2B sales industry; it's how we react and respond to the external pressures that is the key.

5. **Strive to elevate the sales profession.** I firmly believe that sales can be the most fascinating, energising, rewarding and creative of career paths...or as an old CEO of mine used to say, 'It's without doubt the best job in the business'. But we all have a role to play in improving the negative perceptions of our industry, of elevating the sales profession to be on par with many other fields of professional endeavour. It is our collective responsibility to remain ethical, honest and authentic in the way we carry ourselves and strive to educate, inform and inspire the customers with whom we interact on a daily basis.
6. **And finally...please let me know how you get on?** If you embrace a particular idea or concept from this book and it proves valuable for you, I'd love to hear from you. If you ignore everything I've said, but find the work of one of the authors, experts or sales thought leaders to whom I've referred helpful, I'd love to hear from you. If you don't agree with my perspective or you fail to gain traction with a lesson you've picked up in these pages, I'd still love to hear from you.

Debate, discussion and occasional disagreement are all part and parcel of a good relationship and if you've reached this point in the book, then I'll hope you agree with me when I say...this is now a relationship!

I wish you the very best of luck and happy selling.

Cian





