

"When you use *Stop Talking Start Selling* as a textbook,
your journey to sales success will happen faster and be more fun!"

- Tom Hopkins, Author of *How to Master the Art of Selling*

STOP TALKING START SELLING



DAVID CRAIG WHITE

YOUR PERSONAL SUCCESS COACH

www.davidcraigwhite.com

STOP TALKING. START SELLING.

By David Craig White

Written by David Craig White

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Ahornvaenget 9, 2680 Solrod Strand, Zealand, Denmark

www.davidcraigwhite.com

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Dedicated to my loving wife Mette, and my two boys, Alexander and William, with love.

'There are hundreds, if not thousands, of nuances in selling. Stop Talking Start Selling covers so much ground that I encourage you to view it as a textbook—a tool you will refer to over and over again. When you do, your journey to sales success will happen faster and be a lot more fun!' - Tom Hopkins, author of How to Master the Art of Selling

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Introduction

Eighteen years ago, I embarked on my career as a salesman. I was working as a cashier for the Royal Bank of Scotland in Manchester, England. I was nineteen at the time, and my only previous work experience had been as a checkout assistant at Tesco supermarket.

Working as a cashier at a bank might not strike you as being a sales job, but it was. I had to meet targets around the number of new accounts and meetings I made over

the counter each week. It wasn't exactly very challenging or difficult, but it was still selling.

Every Thursday evening, we would all stay late at the bank to do telephone sales. We would call customers who were overdrawn or those who had large amounts of money in low-interest accounts to sell them loans or savings accounts.

All of my colleagues hated Thursday evenings with a passion. I absolutely loved it.

There was just something about the buzz of picking up that phone and making a sale that got me going. I was hooked.

The branch manager was so impressed with my Thursday evening performances that she promoted me to a full-time sales advisor role. I was moved upstairs and even given my own office.

Life was good, and my parents were proud as punch.

Yet, a little over three years later, I declared myself personally bankrupt and quit the sales profession altogether. It was by far the lowest point of my career, if not my life.

I'd taken on my first business-to-business sales role just six months earlier. My inexperience, together with the false expectation that selling to businesses would be as easy as selling to consumers, brought me down to earth with a bump.

Today, I am a well-respected international sales trainer, personal success coach, and entrepreneur. I've trained and coached thousands of people in over 120 countries and spend my days coaching leaders and helping ambitious organizations build top performing sales teams.

During my sales career, I've closed thousands of sales and had the pleasure of doing business with global giants such as Boeing(TM), BP(TM), Siemens(TM), Kraft Foods(TM), Aon(TM), Fujitsu(TM), McGraw-Hill(TM), The Co-operative Group(TM), to name just a few.

I've also helped some of Europe's fastest growing start-ups generate millions of dollars in sales revenue, and expand into over 60 new countries, whilst successfully building and selling my first business on the side.

So, you could say, I've walked the walk.

In this book, I'm going to share with you some of the experiences, tips, tricks, and techniques that have served me well during my successful career in sales.

I'd like to save you the blood, sweat, and tears I had to go through in order to become a top sales professional.

I highly recommend you apply common sense before using anything I suggest. You, your company, prospects, and solutions all have one thing in common. They are unique.

Rigid methodologies are not my style because despite what you might hear, in sales there are no magic formulas that guarantee success in every company.

Some of the things I recommend will work the first time, others will not. I challenge you to thoroughly test the things that don't work first time to give them a fair chance. It's all too easy to dismiss something new and out of your comfort zone, and it will pain you, even more, several years down the line when you realize you made a mistake by doing so.

Finally, I will also recommend that you constantly challenge what *you think* you know. A flexible open-mind is more valuable than a decade of experience and rarer than a good cup of tea.

Yours Sincerely

David Craig White

Your Personal Success Coach

A Career in Sales

For as long as I can remember, millions of students around the world have worked crappy jobs, lived in debt, and studied long and hard to chase their dream of a career in their chosen profession. Meanwhile, many less educated people have been building healthy careers and gaining valuable work experience in the sales profession, while at the same time getting paid and supporting the economy.

Apart from a couple of part-time evening classes, I never went into further education myself. I never really had a clear picture of what I wanted to be, and thus had no idea of what to study. I suppose the fact I was already earning before I left

school had an impact on my decision too. I'd been working part-time on weekends as a post-room clerk for several months, and the lure of the full-time job and pay-packet that was waiting for me was hard to resist.

When I was younger, I never quite understood the concept of further education. I couldn't figure out why people would put in so much extra time, work, and money into something that offered no guarantee of employment or financial benefits upon completion.

As a 16-year-old, I was living the dream. I was earning money, living at home with my parents, had no commitments, and spent my weekends shopping in Manchester with my friends, buying new clothes, DVDs, and computer games.

By the time I started working in sales, I was earning even more, had my own car, and was out on the town three to four days per week enjoying the good life.

Aside from the rough learning curve that followed, I can honestly say that sales has been an amazingly rewarding career. It has, and still does open many doors for me, and essentially acted as a catapult to get me to where I am today.

Many people underestimate the critical business experience you gain when working in business-to-business sales. Learning how to sell yourself and your ideas are arguably the most important skill you can have in today's business world, especially if you have ambitions to be an entrepreneur.

10 Benefits of a Career in Sales

If you want to be good at what you do, one of the fundamental rules of success is that you have to love what you do.

I love selling. In fact, I am deeply passionate about the profession which is why I love teaching people about it.

What you don't know about me though, is that I actually worked in sales for almost three years before I even realized it was a profession, and only then did the love affair begin.

Before this, I just looked at all of my jobs as exactly that, a job. Something to put money in my pocket until I finally found a profession I wanted to do. Nobody ever mentioned selling when

the career counsellors came to my high school, so how was I supposed to know it was even an option.

After a few years, I was lucky enough to receive valuable sales training from someone who had a strong passion for sales. This not only changed my career but ultimately, my entire life.

Through my career in sales, I have come to realize and appreciate many of the commonly untold benefits of working in the sales profession, and I would like to share my top 10 with you now. Some you may know, some you may have forgotten, and others you may have never even considered.

(1) *You can get a job in the selling profession without any prior training, experience, or education.* That's amazing, isn't it? With no initial investment of time or money, you can get a job in a profession where you can earn more money than a Doctor.

I was once out of work for a week or so when I was younger, and my mother started giving me the 3rd degree. I bet her £10 I could go out, get the paper, and get an interview for a sales job before she got home from work. Within an hour, I had three interviews booked in for the following day.

(2) *You can earn as you learn.* With a bit of luck, the company you work for will provide some form of basic sales training. If not, you can always educate yourself with books, podcasts or free videos. If you wanted to study to be a doctor, lawyer, or even a builder, you'd have to either consider a part-time job doing something else on the side or an apprenticeship. Either way, you will spend years working for peanuts before you can start earning a decent salary.

In the profession of selling it does not work this way. If you're dedicated enough to learn the skills and techniques in your spare time while working a sales job, within six months you can be earning serious money.

(3) *When you work in the profession of selling you have unlimited earning potential.* Do you know of any other profession where that is possible? Sure, people who work in hard labour jobs like plumbers or builders can do double the

amount of work and make lots more money, but they're still limited by time. There's only so many hours in a day, and days in the week, right?

When you master how to sell, you can and will, multiply your earnings. Not only will your company be throwing pay rises and other additional incentives to keep you on board, but your sales results will snowball too.

The more sales you make, the more happy clients you will serve. The more happy clients you serve, the more referrals you will get. And this is just the beginning of the snowball effect. I used to pride myself in offering my clients the best service possible throughout the sale, and I would try to serve my employers in the very same way. Today, I run a consultancy that runs almost solely on my past clients and contacts and on the referrals they give to others.

(4) *When you're good at selling, you will never be out of a job.* Think about it, when the economy is booming, who do companies want most? And when the economy is dying, who do companies need most in order to survive?

Salespeople, right?

No economy could ever survive without salespeople, it's just not possible. You just need to look in any job section in a newspaper or website to see the number of sales jobs available compared to the other professions. Sales jobs are always available and good salespeople are always in demand.

If you can master sales, you will essentially make yourself recession proof and guarantee yourself work for life.

(5) *One of the things I've come to love about the profession of selling is that you never stop learning.* Even after 18 years in the profession, I can honestly say I learn something new every single day.

As you'll come to realize by the end of this book, there's a huge number of skills, tactics, and techniques to learn, and you won't be able to take them all in at once. In fact, I used to schedule a calendar reminder to read my favourite sales book at least once every year. You'll be amazed how many new things you discover even ten years later from reading the very same book.

(6) *You should also love the profession of selling because you get to face new challenges every day.* If you don't enjoy constant challenges, a career in sales is not

for you. If you do, then imagine how easy it is to get out of bed every morning, excited about what new challenges are waiting for you in the day ahead. It's truly motivational.

(7) *You have to love selling for the competitive buzz you get every day.* Whether it's competing with your colleagues, other teams, or even yourself, you cannot beat the motivational feeling of a good competitive environment.

There have been many studies done about how working in a competitive environment can bring the best out of people. It helps you stay on your toes, raise your game, and constantly work at improving yourself, which are all healthy for the mind.

(8) *Selling is one of the only professions where you can really fast track your career.* In my first sales job, I went from working as a cashier to being one of the key telesales reps within 12 weeks. I can also remember one time my younger sister got promoted to office manager for a small company just a week after she started, and that was with only six months prior sales experience.

I managed to go from being a failed, bankrupt sales loser, to becoming one of the most respected sales experts in Europe in less than ten years. Anything is possible in this profession, you just have to work hard and believe in yourself.

(9) *I'm sure you will agree that the freedom to be yourself is a fantastic job perk.* In most jobs, you can be yourself when you speak to colleagues, but when it comes to communicating with clients, you often have to pretend to be someone else. In the profession of selling, you do, of course, have to match your client's personas, but people buy from you because they like you, so being yourself and getting your personality across will ultimately increase your earnings.

(10) *I am writing this book, and deliver quite a lot of live training workshops from my home office in a small suburb of Copenhagen, Denmark.* I moved here in 2006 from the UK where I was born and raised. Since then I have conducted business in over 60 different countries and have thousands of students in 128 countries. Working in the profession of selling gives you the amazing opportunity and freedom to travel the world. I could honestly pack up my suitcase right now and go and sit on a beach in the Maldives and work, providing the internet connection was good enough of course.

Whether you run your own company, work for a large enterprise, or maybe even a small start-up, you will come across some amazing career opportunities in sales that can take you anywhere. With modern technology and your amazing selling skills, the world can really be your oyster.

Suited to Selling

All too often I have heard that you need to have the *gift of the gab* to be able to work in the sales profession. Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

Many people say this stereotype comes from back in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, a time when that's just how salespeople were, but sadly it is still true of some today.

There are some basic personal skills you need to either have or be willing to work on in order to be suited to work in the profession of selling.

(1) *You will need to be a good listener.*

Contrary to belief, selling is not all about talking, pitching your solution, and reeling off your fantastic list of features and benefits. It is, in fact, listening that is your best weapon.

Selling is not about you, it is about your prospects. In order to sell to people, you have to listen to them. You have to understand their pains and goals if you are going to be able to help them. Listening to people also develops trust, and trust is one the most important steps in any relationship.

(2) *You will also need to be resilient.*

If you do not have the mental strength to take rejection on the chin and bounce right back, you're not suited to work in sales. You have to learn to love being rejected. You have to treat rejection as the first no on the way to the final yes.

Some people crumble and fall apart when they get rejected, and it can take them hours to pick themselves back up and try again. When you work in the profession of selling, you're going to hear, 'No,' or, '*get out of my office,*' or, '*I'm not interested,*' or, '*Stop calling me,*' on a daily basis. Get used to it.

'It ain't about how hard you hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward; how much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done!' - Rocky Balboa

(3) *You need to be smart.*

You need to be sharp and intelligent enough to learn quickly and to act on the spot when you work in sales. As the old saying goes ‘You can take a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.’

In this book, I’m going to share many hints, tips, and techniques to help you get better at selling. Many will be new and out of your comfort zone. Others will be simple and easy to apply.

If you try to copy and apply everything I teach, it will sound and feel unnatural, and you will not use it again. You must learn to integrate my suggestions to suit your own personality and style of selling.

Being a good listener, being resilient, and being smart is a good fundamental base for being suited to selling. So, feel free to give your mouth a rest - your prospects will appreciate it.

The Characteristics of Elite Sales Professionals

Almost every sales team consists of a small number of poor performers, a majority number of average performers, and a small minority of Elite Sales Professionals. These high performing sales professionals are the ones who not only achieve targets but exceed them. And they do it month in, month out, without fail.

So, what makes this Elite few so much better than all the rest? What qualities do they have, or what do they do differently than everyone else?

There are some basic personal skills you need to have in order to be suited to work in the profession of selling, but these alone will not get you to the top.

I’ve worked with, managed, and coached thousands of salespeople over the past 18 years, and noted that the elite sales professionals do indeed always seem to share certain characteristics.

(1) *Elite sales professionals are always very competitive.* You will not find a top performer anywhere in this profession who is not extremely competitive. They are always either constantly competing with others or competing with themselves to keep pushing their limits to a higher level.

(2) *The top dogs are always super passionate about their profession.* Whether you work in a corner shop or play professional football, you have to be passionate about what you do for a living in order to perform at your best.

The Elite sales professional is passionate about sales, and usually about business too. They don't just see sales as a job, they see it as a true profession, and as a result, live and breathe it.

(3) *You also have to be passionate about the solution you are selling.* Top sales professionals refuse to risk damaging their reputation by selling something they do not believe in. Believing in what you sell is one of the key fundamentals of sales success. Without it, you will never be able to perform at your very best.

(4) *The Elite are always hungry for more.* It's not getting to the top that is the difficult part in any profession, it is staying there. Elite sales professionals never get tired of success. They are always looking for the next challenge. Sometimes this sees them leave great jobs where they are making great money because they know that success is not a bank balance.

(5) *Elite sales professionals don't want to reach targets, they want to exceed them.* They don't aim for 100%, they aim for smashing 100% to pieces. They see 100% as the minimum expected of them.

(6) *Top sales performers are like chameleons.* They have the ability to act and adapt to match their prospects characteristics. This could be something like their tone of voice or the way they sit. This adaption puts prospects at ease and makes them feel comfortable in the presence of the salesperson. It psychologically takes down the wall of resistance between buyer and seller and helps develop trust.

(7) *The true sales elite are very honest professionals.* They remain professional at all times no matter what the circumstances. They do this not only because they care about their personal reputation, but most of all because they care about their clients. This professional act of caring comes across in the way they speak with and listen to their prospects. It builds trust and makes the closing stage of a sale much easier, as well as increasing the chances of getting referrals and repeat business from the client in the future.

(8) *They're smart.* The elite learn quickly. They're constantly asking questions, and don't need to hear the answer more than once before it sinks in. They instantly take that new knowledge, make it their own, and start using it right away.

It's fascinating to watch when you put a sales champion into a new environment. They're like a sponge. They instantly begin to soak in everything around them, with a burning desire to learn as quickly as possible and be the best wherever they are.

(9) *Elite sales professionals are very proud individuals and perfectionists.* They care about what people think, and they are their own biggest critic. Whether it relates to their customer data, client proposals, or their desk, they always want things to be as perfect as possible. This ensures they keep a clear mind and reduces the chances of mistakes being made. It also ensures they give their clients excellent service.

(10) *The true champions treat problems as challenges.* So, when things go bad, it motivates them more than ever. Whether it's the latest economic downturn or a new competitor in the market, all champions want to do is get better and win more than ever before.

(11) *Elite sales professionals radiate confidence.* Their answer is always something like; no problem, sure thing, I can do it, we'll be number one, that's easy, let's do it. They never doubt themselves or their ability to do anything, and they truly believe they can achieve anything they set their minds to. They understand their internal communication to themselves is their biggest influence.

(12) *Top sales professionals are always very well balanced.* This helps them structure their day, manage their pipelines, get home in time for tea with the family, and get plenty of sleep. This balance is also very important when dealing with prospects. There can sometimes be a very thin line between building rapport, and being too friendly with your prospects. You need to keep that relationship balanced so that you can ask for the business when the time feels right, without it feeling awkward. I like to describe it as the Jekyll and Hyde characteristic. They are fully aware of the cutting edge needed to switch from consultant to closer.

(13) *Most of the top sales elite want to be able to afford the best things in life for themselves and their families.* But don't we all? Well yes, of course, we do, but not everyone. Some people have a different idea of the best things in life and say things

such as, *'I just want to have enough money to get by, and give my family the basics that they need'*.

The difference between these people and the top sales elite is that the elite doesn't want the basic things in life: they want the best. They don't want a semi-detached house, they want a detached house. They don't want a holiday in the Canaries, they want to go to the Maldives. They wouldn't even consider staying in a three-star hotel, they want four stars, at very minimum.

Some people would say this is being greedy, but those people are usually the average performers. There is absolutely nothing wrong with only wanting the basics in life, but there's also nothing unhealthy about being driven to want the best.

(14) *One of the most important characteristics of a true elite performing sales professional is that they are humble.* Despite being super confident, wanting the best in life, and always being at the top, the elite remains humble and critical of themselves. They admit to being wrong and work hard at making their imperfections right. Without this crucial characteristic, all you would have is a selfish, spoilt movie star, who will eventually come down to earth with a bump.

(15) *Last and certainly not least: every top sales performer, the champions, the elite, the best, always follow the instruction manual.* They never skip parts of the sales process and always earn the right to close by listening and building a strong value proposition that makes closing sales a piece of cake. They are always working on perfecting the small steps in the sales process and so should you.

So that's it, that is all you need to be one of the elite sales professionals of your industry. It's by no means an easy task, but nobody ever said it was.

The Definition of Selling

There must be a million different definitions of selling. We have our own definitions, those from others we like and agree with, and we, of course, have plenty of ridiculous ones. For me;

'Selling is the act of helping and sometimes persuading people to invest in a solution you believe they can get value from.'

When you work in the profession of selling you're very often acting. This doesn't mean you have to be a fake person. In fact, one of the most wonderful benefits of working in the profession is the freedom to be yourself.

Think back to an event in your private life when you met some people for the first time. Maybe it was meeting with the in-laws or your first day at a new school or job. Do you remember how you acted in that scenario? Did you act in the same way you do in the presence of your family or friends? Of course not.

It's human instinct that makes us hold back our personality when meeting people for the first time. We fear running in, being ourselves, and making a bad first impression. Instead, we remain reserved until we feel comfortable in the environment and only then do we begin to relax and let out our true selves.

In the profession of selling this is the perfect way to be. As we'll discuss later in this book, people buy from people they like, but people are also very quick to judge others based on their first impressions.

I've often seen or heard people use the term 'exchange of services' or 'exchange of items' when they define selling. But that is like saying the checkout assistants at the local supermarket are all salespeople.

Taking money in exchange for an item someone just selected themselves is not selling. It's just completing a transaction, or order-taking, as we call it in the sales profession.

Sometimes people make their own decisions and other times they need help and persuasion. But, unless they need help or persuasion, it's not selling.

I've also heard people use sayings such as, '*He could sell a colour TV to a blind person,*' or, '*She could sell ice to an Eskimo,*' when describing someone they see as a 'good' salesperson.

Selling something that offers no value to someone is not professional selling. It's the exact kind of behaviour that has tarnished the profession for many years, and in my opinion, is nothing short of theft.

I've worked at places where railroading prospects into buying at all costs were considered acceptable, and I'll admit to having done it myself in the past too - but it is not okay.

Today I will urge you not to take this approach. It will ruin your personal reputation, and you will not go home feeling good about your day's work.

If you think being a good salesperson is selling anything, anywhere, and to anyone, I recommend either a change in mindset or a change in career.

To be a truly world-class sales professional, you have to be an honest and trustworthy individual with strong morals and integrity running through your veins. This is what will guide you to long-term success.

Defining Leads, Prospects, and Opportunities

When you work in the profession of selling, you're going to hear the words leads, prospects, and opportunities being used a lot. You will also find it common for companies to have their own definitions, most of which are the cause of ongoing confusion.

Below I'll share my personal definitions of these three elements, along with a simple, clear explanation for each one.

(1) A Lead is a Potential Prospect.

A lead could be anyone such as a person who downloaded a free trial from your website, someone who gave you a business card at a trade show, or the name of a company generated by marketing.

I describe these as leads, because until you engage and qualify them as needing your solution, they may only be as useful as a contact name and number pulled from a telephone book.

Even if these targets have the same demographics as most of your clients, it does not guarantee they have a need for your solution. So, you could also say a lead is an unqualified prospect. Simply put, a lead is nothing more than a piece of data.

(2) A Prospect is a Potential Opportunity.

Prospects are leads you've qualified, meaning you've talked with them and confirmed they have a basic need for your solution. But they're still not what I like to call hard qualified, which makes them an unqualified opportunity.

Let's pretend you sell mobile phones to businesses and a lead calls asking if you have any of the latest smartphones in stock. You engage in a dialogue, confirm you have the phones available, find out a little about what they have now, and learn how many new phones they need and what tariff they're looking for. At the end of the call, you have enough information to send out a detailed proposal, and you agree to speak to them again next week.

Sounds promising, right?

In a common scenario like this, most average salespeople would create an opportunity, mark it as hot, and schedule a follow-up call to close the deal. But in reality, it's nothing more than just a good prospect.

Let's jump to the final element to find out why.

(3) An Opportunity is a Potential Client.

Potential clients are hard-qualified prospects. In this stage of the sales process, you should not only know if your prospect has a need for your solution, but you should also know other key facts about them to understand the opportunity better.

These facts include but are not limited to the following:

(1) How Much of a Need They Really Have.

You need to be sure you have asked enough questions to uncover if your prospect sees your offer as a nice to have or a need to have solution.

(2) Current Supplier Terms.

You will also need to discover if they are still under contract with another supplier. If so, what are their terms, when does their agreement expire, and have they checked their opt-out clause or cancellation terms?

It's a painful experience to close a sale only to discover the client's cancellation period has expired. Trust me. I've been there more than once.

(3) Competitors.

You need to know if your prospect is speaking with your competition. If so, you should speed up the sales process and avoid them closing the sale before you do or before your prospect goes into procrastination mode because they have too many options.

You will also gain the upper hand over your competition by planting seeds of doubt in your prospects mind about their weak spots.

(4) Decision-Making Process.

You will be unable to forecast accurately without knowing the finer details of the decision-making process. You will need to know what the process looks like, who is involved, and how long it typically takes.

(5) Delivery Dates.

This detail is often forgotten. Asking your prospect when they need to get delivery of your solution is advantageous. It will give you a strong idea of how much urgency there is to get the transaction completed.

(6) Your Value Proposition.

You must ask yourself if you can demonstrate that your product or service will meet the client's requirements and solve a business pain – and that your value proposition is strong enough for them to justify the investment required?

These are just a few of the facts you need to know to qualify a sales opportunity. There are many more facts to consider, some of which I will cover later in the book.

The Sales Process

Whether you sell insurance, cars, or software, you will (or should) be following a process.

Despite how complicated some companies make the sales process, it consists of just four key stages, each containing many small steps, which can vary depending on your business.

In my experience, most companies either misunderstand and overcomplicate the sales process or underestimate its importance.

You should treat the following sales process like your sales navigation system. It's a simple guide with checkpoints that will lead you to your end goal.

Stage 1 is Prospecting.

This is where you source and engage leads to discover if they have any basic needs for your solution(s).

Stage 2 is Qualifying.

This is where you try to dig deeper into the needs of the prospect by asking lots of questions. It's also known as the discovery stage.

Stage 3 is Presentation.

This is where you present a tailored solution to your qualified prospects, focusing on how your solution can help them fulfil a need or solve a pain.

Stage 4 is Closing.

This is everyone's favourite. The close of the sale normally includes asking for the business, overcoming objections, and negotiating pricing and contract terms.

Depending on where you work and what you're selling, the sales process may differ a little. For example, if you're selling pens or something of a similar low cost, you might not need to go through a detailed presentation to make the sale – but I do want to communicate something crucial to you.

You must treat every single one of these four stages as being of equal importance. That is critical if you are going to succeed in the profession of selling, because the biggest reason sales opportunities don't convert into closed sales is because the salesperson either skips or poorly executes one or more of the stages.

If you're poor at prospecting, you'll create bad prospects that cannot be qualified. If you're poor at qualifying, you'll create low-quality opportunities that turn into nothing. If you're poor at presenting, you'll waste 90% of your real opportunities – and if you're poor at closing, being good at everything else is pointless.

When I ask most salespeople what area of sales they would like to work on, they usually say closing; however, in nine out of ten situations, it always turns out to be something else that is causing the frustrations around closing.

I always use these four stages as a basic tool for highlighting personal development needs in sales training. Most salespeople are good at one or two of the stages, but very few are masters of them all.

By simply rating yourself on a scale of one to ten in each of the four stages of the sales process, you will immediately isolate a focus area or two that you can work on.

Why not take five minutes to yourself now to do the exercise before reading on, and take a small step towards sales process mastery?

CHAPTER I

Prospecting

Finding new potential clients that have a need for your solution is one of the most challenging tasks faced by any salesperson, entrepreneur or small business owner.

Prospecting is the first fundamental stage in the sales process. The effectiveness of your prospecting efforts will have a direct impact on your sales results and on your success or failure in the profession of selling.

Poor prospecting is by far the number one reason start-up businesses and sales rookies fail every single day. It's also the number one reason why salespeople lose motivation and leave the sales profession altogether.

There are many methods of prospecting for new clients, but you need to discover which one is most effective in your line of business.

One of the first and most important decisions you will need to make is whether you will take the quality or quantity approach. As a rule of common sense, the lower the value of your solution, the higher the volume of leads you need to generate to make enough sales.

Many companies use a combination of marketing and sales to generate leads these days. Activities include emails, cold-calling, trade shows, advertising, and even good old-fashioned, door-to-door canvassing.

The newest method of outbound prospecting is known as *inbound marketing*. This trend typically relates to the generation of leads by using blog posts and other types of content as bait.

Many foolish marketers claim that inbound marketing has removed the need for salespeople. I'm not entirely sure what they think happens to the inbound leads if there's nobody to call them. Maybe they close themselves?

Inbound marketing does an excellent job of grabbing the attention of a prospect. It makes a sales person's job easier as it breaks down the first wall of resistance, but the selling still needs to be done.

For me, inbound marketing is much the same as advertising on a billboard or a website. A piece of content just replaces the advert. I like the idea, but in my experience so far, the inbound leads created by this method are often much weaker than those generated by cold-calling.

You will be more successful in sales if you can master the art of prospecting using a variety of approaches. I always warn my clients that relying solely on any single method is nothing short of business suicide.

You may have already found ways of generating leads, maybe via your website, word of referral, or by attending trade shows. Making contact with these leads is often referred to as *warm prospecting*, but as you'll discover from experience, this does not necessarily mean these leads are of a higher quality than the ones you could generate from cold prospecting.

With recent advancements in technology and the internet, many businesses have found more efficient methods of prospecting, which has reduced the need for cold-calling.

But this does not necessarily mean cold-calling is dead.

My question for any existing business that generates warm leads from excellent modern tools is to consider what would happen tomorrow if that method of prospecting were no longer available or doubled in cost? How then, would you prospect for new business?

You should always be skilled in two, if not three methods of prospecting. The business world and your potential clients are constantly changing, so you must be prepared to adapt if you want continued success.

Rather than maintaining a strong belief that inbound prospecting has killed the cold-call or vice versa, use your energy to put together a killer strategy. Design one that mixes the vast range of prospecting tools you have at your disposal, so you are one smart step ahead of the future and better equipped than your competitors.

Vertical Prospecting

Before you even consider picking up the phone or buying any lead lists, you need to sit down and construct a picture of who your ideal clients might be. You don't need an accurate picture; you just need a batch of ideas to get you started.

This pre-prospecting research will not only save you endless wasted hours, but it will also help you avoid quickly killing the team morale and motivation.

Individual prospect demographics can range from simple ones such as gender and age to more business-to-business related demographics like departments or job titles of contacts, industry types, or number of employees in a company.

By running through simple demographics and eliminating the ones that are irrelevant, you should end up with a smaller set you can work with, and this is where vertical prospecting comes in.

Vertical prospecting is a method of running targeted campaigns on a particular industry or demographic set. If you're launching a new product or service, this is one of the most efficient ways of discovering your ideal target audience quickly.

Let's say you started a business offering debt collection services. There are millions of potential businesses around the world who could benefit from your services, but if you only have a small sales team, it's not going to be possible to get in touch with them all. In today's business world, you cannot afford to play the trial and error game, so here's what you do:

First, get your team together and share thoughts and ideas about what potential prospect demographics you think have a need for your services. Depending on the size of your sales team, you should aim to put together two or more different verticals such as:

- (1) Businesses with under 10 employees in the IT industry.
- (2) Businesses with 15 to 25 employees in the IT industry.
- (3) Businesses with under 10 employees in the design industry.

Once you have selected your verticals, you will need to get hold of the data. There are lots of free and paid sources available where you can find customised lead data based on certain demographics.

Whichever supplier you choose, always be sure to request a sample of the data to make sure it is not out-of-date. You should also check how many duplicates are in a

list too; for example, there may be multiple contacts from the same company in the same list.

Once you have the data, it's time to start prospecting. Depending on the estimated length of your sales cycle, you can test different vertical campaigns against each other on a daily or weekly basis. You could spend one day or week prospecting on vertical A, and the next day or week prospecting on vertical B and so on.

This strategy enables you to quickly see which verticals perform best and which ones don't. With a bit of luck, you may get success across multiple verticals. Keep digging into the data and tracking everything, because your best verticals are not always the ones that convert into the most sales, but the ones that result in the most revenue.

There are so many different vertical campaigns you can try, and sometimes it can take years before you finally discover your perfect prospect demographics. The key, in the beginning, is not to find the perfect one. You should aim to find one or more that work for you and start growing your revenue.

Vertical prospecting is also a brilliant method of keeping you motivated in sales. It allows you to master your tailored pitch by using it on every call, while at the same time, offering a motivating variation when testing different verticals.

I don't believe the days of cold-calling or email blasting from the yellow pages or other generic and non-targeted lead lists are dead, but they are limited. These methods are often only profitable for large businesses selling to the consumer masses or those selling high-value products or services where one sale may equal an entire monthly target.

Some of the most successful prospecting campaigns I've been involved with, or I've seen work the best, have been ones that were put together using vertical prospecting. No matter who you are or what you sell, identifying your ideal clients is crucial for your future growth.

How to Warm Up Your Cold-Calls

It pains me to hear the words, *'Can I speak to the person in charge of the marketing department?'*, or anything similar coming from the mouth of a

salesperson when cold-calling. It tells me that either the person is lazy, untrained or working for a company that doesn't provide them with the right sales tools for the job.

When you call and ask for the name of the person you want to speak to, it makes you an easy target for gatekeepers who screen your calls. Even if you ask politely for an email address, you'll most likely end up with one beginning with info@, that results in a failed contact attempt and a waste of your time.

The good news is that this method of fishing for prospect information is becoming obsolete. Today's search and social crazy internet world have made warming up your cold-calls a whole lot easier.

My favourite tools for finding relevant and up-to-date contact information about warm or cold prospects are online search engines and LinkedIn(TM). If you can master a few basic tips and tricks for using them, you'll be able to find valuable information about almost every single one of your prospects in a matter of seconds, and totally free of charge.

For example, let's say you wanted to reach a marketing manager at a specific company. Simply navigate to a search engine and type the following:

"Company Name Marketing Manager"

By enclosing the search phrase within double quotation marks, you will search explicitly for search results where these words appear together on the same page.

If you are unable to find any useful results, I recommend you play around with the search terms a little. For example, you could search for the word *Director* instead of *Manager*.

The top results from these searches will often include links to LinkedIn(TM) profiles, where the selected words appear in what is called a meta description. This is a snippet of text from the web page indexed by the search engine.

Before you start jotting down all of the contact names, consider these two things:

- (1) The pages indexed by search engines are not updated every day and could take a few weeks to update in some circumstances.
- (2) The meta description taken from the LinkedIn(TM) profile can show both past and present jobs.

This means your next step is to confirm whether any of these people still work at the company.

For speed, I always right click each link and open each one in a new tab to quickly review all of the profiles.

Each profile usually provides you with a wealth of useful contact information. Even if one of the contacts are no longer at the company you searched for, it's likely they moved on to a similar role at another company, making them another potential prospect and a perfect addition to your prospecting list.

So, through some straightforward generic online searches, you can discover the names, job roles, and multiple other contacts to ask for when you start making calls, which will heavily increase your chances of reaching them.

It's important to know that unless you have a decent number of contacts on LinkedIn(TM), you may not be able to view all of the information on some profiles. The only current way to do this is by upgrading to a premium account or by growing your network.

I recommend spending one to two minutes maximum using the same process to locate direct numbers, email addresses, and other relevant data before you start making calls. If it takes longer, pick up the phone and ask for the information. Don't fall into the trap of spending half your days searching online for contact data. It will cost you time, money, and maybe your job.

But let's say you're dealing with a tough secretary who won't give you the information you need, or maybe you are working on a vertical where you have more time to conduct pre-prospecting research.

If you want to locate a direct email address for someone, there's a stack of online tools available for this. I'm not going to name any of them because they'll be out of date by the time I finish writing this book, so let's stick with using a search engine.

The first thing you want to figure out is the format used in the email address of the company where your contact works. Most of the time, it's just the same as the website address, but with some larger businesses, it can be different. In the case of my company, you can simply go to my website and guess my email will end with the address *@davidcraigwhite.com*, which is exactly what you need.

You now copy and paste “@davidcraigwhite.com” into the search engine using quotation marks to ensure accurate results, and this should pull up any other email addresses indexed on the search engine containing this text. What you are looking for is another email address for anyone else in the same company, because this will give you the structure for everyone else’s email, including your contact. For example, it could just be the first name only such as *david@davidcraigwhite.com*, or it could be first initial and last name like *dwhite@davidcraigwhite.com*.

There’s an enormous amount of information and prospecting tools available at your fingertips these days, so there’s only a small number of acceptable excuses left to be calling without a contact name. Take some time out to do a little research into what other tips, tricks, and tools are out there because it can save you a lot of personal time and frustration.

How to Handle Rejection in Sales

When you work in the profession of selling, you must become immune to the word ‘no’. Sometimes new salespeople enter the profession without any advice or expectations about how much they will have to handle rejection in sales, let alone how to deal with that rejection.

If you don’t have a strategy for handling rejection in sales, you are destined to suffer. Selling can often be about 99% rejection and 1% acceptance. Maybe that doesn’t apply to all sales positions, but I’ve certainly worked at places where it has.

There are two core ingredients to the secret sauce of dealing with rejection. Number one is having an awareness of the rejection. Number two is learning how not to take rejection personally. If you take rejection personally, you’ll never succeed in this profession and will likely spend your days being either upset, depressed, or infuriated.

Sales is a numbers game, that is a fact. Some businesses believe in driving in as many leads as possible and closing at a low close ratio, whereas others prefer to go for the quality over quantity approach. But regardless of which approach your company takes, you’ll always be dealing with more ‘noes’ than ‘yeses’.

My former boss Raj Singh once told me, *‘You should treat every “no” that you receive as being one “no” closer to getting your next “yes”’*. I was an

inexperienced sales rookie at the time, making over 100 cold-calls a day in the business-to-business (B2B) telecommunications industry, so hearing the word 'no' became familiar fast.

In that job, we had a rule. For every 100 prospects we contacted, we would make at least one sale. Those were the numbers, and that was how I became immune to the word 'no' and stopped taking it so personally. I saw every rejection as positive because it was one more 'no' I could cross off my list, which increased the chances I would get the 'yes' on my next call.

So, if you're a salesperson, ask your manager for the average number of calls it takes to make a sale or book a meeting where you work. If you're a sales manager, you should ensure that you have the answer.

Like many things in life, dealing with rejection is much easier if you set expectations from the get-go. If you communicate and set expectations accurately, things work much better. If people know what to expect, they won't get frustrated as easily or lose motivation.

Knowing how many calls or meetings it takes to close a sale not only sets expectations, it also helps you quickly evaluate whether you're doing things well or not.

If it takes an average of 100 calls to make a sale at your company, and it's taking you 300 calls, it's easy to isolate the problem and ask for help. Naturally, if you're new to the company or new to the profession of selling, you won't instantly start closing at the same rate as everyone else, but your manager should be able to give you a good indication of their expectations so you can work on them.

Another great motivational way of dealing with rejection is to do your calculations based on a financial figure. For example, if you know that each sale you make is worth £1,000, and you know how many calls it takes to make a sale, then calculate how much each call is worth to you.

If every sale you make is worth £1,000, and it takes you, on average, 50 calls to make a sale, then each call you make is worth £20 regardless of whether you get a 'yes', a 'no', or a 'maybe'.

Treating rejection as a challenge is also another great strategy used by the best. It keeps you motivated and builds an inner strength that will serve you well as a salesperson and as a human being in everyday life.

How to Develop Self-Confidence

One of the most important skills you must have when working in the profession of selling is self-confidence. You must first and foremost believe in yourself, and you must also believe in the products or services that you are selling. You must.

If you lack self-confidence, it will not matter if you are selling the best or the worst products or services in the world. Your results will be average at best.

Some people think it's not possible to develop self-confidence and claim it to be some sort of genetic thing, but let me assure you that nobody on this planet came out of their mother's womb, looked around, and said, *'Hey, what's up people?'*

You become self-confident when you become good at something. Let me say that again, and I want you to write it down and remember it because it's important. You become self-confident when you become good at something.

To get good at something, you have to do it over and over and over. Repetition equals mastery. Mastering any skill, whether it's taking free-kicks, cooking eggs, or cold-calling, is only ever achieved when you keep practising.

If you want to master sales, you need to put in the activity levels required. Making 30 calls a day might get you to mastery in 20 years, but it will do nothing for your confidence in the short-term. Making 100 or 200 calls per day will get you to mastery and build your self-confidence much faster.

I am not one of those productivity freaks who keeps preaching at you to make more calls; far from it. I strongly believe in taking time-outs to review your performance by recording and listening to your calls so you can isolate and correct your mistakes. But if you're not putting in the right amount of activity in the beginning, you're either never going to improve, or it's going to take you a long time.

Apart from repetition, knowledge about your product is also a powerful self-confidence booster. Product knowledge gives you the belief that you can answer your prospects questions and overcome any potential objections they might have.

The only warning I would give you about becoming a product expert is to make sure it does not come at the cost of you being a sales expert. Product knowledge without sales skills guarantees average results.

I've already touched on this a little before, but experience is also a confidence booster. My version of experience is not how long you've been doing something; it's how much effort you've put into doing it. You can gain just as much experience in one year as someone else gains in ten.

I've met plenty of sales veterans who have worked in sales for more than a decade and are not half as skilled as rookies who have been in sales for little over a year.

Don't ever let anyone say that you don't have enough experience for any job – just tell them experience is not about how long you've worked, it's about how hard you've worked. I'm pretty sure they'll like your confidence.

I also want to give you another strategy for building self-confidence, which is a little different, but it works if you're open-minded. It's an approach where you take the confidence you felt in one experience and transfer it to another.

Think about a time in your life where you felt super confident about something. Maybe it's a skill you have now, or maybe it's something you were really good at when you were younger.

Now, close your eyes for a few seconds and recall that memory, thinking about where you were, what you were doing, what smells were in the air, and what you could see and hear. Really take yourself back into that zone.

Next, I want you to focus on your physiology in that moment of supreme confidence. How were you standing, what were the thoughts running through your mind, how were you breathing, what words were you telling yourself?

If this exercise went as planned, you have now put yourself in a physical and mental state of confidence, and it's this memory and condition you should focus on before you pick up the phone in times of self-doubt. Just take a few moments to focus on that feeling and bring it into your calls.

When you already have some confidence, and when you are doing well, you sometimes need an extra kick to keep you going – and there's nothing better than

kicking someone else's backside. Of course, I'm not talking about physically abusing your colleagues, but I am talking about competing with them.

If you're a salesperson, then I hope your manager is already setting up internal competitions for you. If not, don't worry because you can create your own competitive environment. Take a look at the person next to you, or maybe even the one who sits above or just below you in the sales charts. Then ask them, in front of the entire office, how it's going to feel to be eating your dust this month.

It's what I like to call *Going Public*, and it's the biggest driver you can give to yourself. There should always be a bit of friendly banter in every sales office, and the top sales professionals love it. In fact, by doing this you will probably force them to raise their game too, but the important factor is what it does to you. By going public, you have made a commitment, and by making a commitment, you have added pressure on yourself to be number one for the month.

This skill of generating your own competitive environment is crucial if you have any plans on being a top sales professional. Not only will it come in handy when you're trying to reach the top, but it will be a significant motivator for you when you get there.

I used to ask myself what drives top athletes like Ryan Giggs, Tiger Woods, Michael Johnson, and others who have been winners time and time again, to keep competing. How do they motivate themselves to keep winning when they've already demolished the competition?

The truth is they never stopped competing, and they excelled because they made themselves the competition. The real reason top athletes stay motivated is they are constantly trying to better themselves and reach the next level. If their performance drops, they see it as a defeat and strive to get back to peak performance. That is how a winner gets to the top and remains motivated to stay there for years and years.

You are your best competitor, and by constantly evaluating and measuring your performance, you can set standards to meet your personal best. So, why not make those standards so high that nobody can match you.

Your Call Objective

I once coached a German gentleman who struggled to get any results despite his high activity levels. He wasn't sure what the problem was but did say that he felt more like a customer service agent than a new business salesperson. We agreed to review a few of his calls to try and isolate the cause.

He was calling inbound leads who had requested a free trial of the company's software, and his opening line went something like this:

'Hey, I was just calling to check in and see if everything was okay with your trial and to ask if you needed any help or had any questions at all?'

This was obviously not the reason for his call. He merely said this to be polite and to build rapport. People usually do this when they fear rejection.

If your job is to make sales, the objective of your call is to qualify if your prospect has any needs for what you're offering and then get them to commit to the next steps such as attend a follow-up meeting or call with you or sign a contract.

Before you pick up the phone and speak to a prospect, you need to have a crystal-clear picture of what you want to achieve by the end of the call. It takes just a couple of seconds, and you'll probably be working with the same objective for most of your calls.

In a book I once read, I heard a presentation expert say, 'To be able to start a presentation, you have to envision the ending'. This advice also applies to your sales calls. You have to picture where you want your prospects to be by the end of your call or meeting.

Depending on your role, your end objective might be closing the sale, booking a meeting, or sending out an information pack. But your overall goal usually includes something else needed to achieve it. If you're cold-calling, it should almost always be to qualify if the lead has any needs, whereas if you're going to a final meeting, it might be to present your solution, overcome any objections, and close the sale.

Of course, you don't want to call your prospect and tell them you'd like to qualify and close them, but you can always find an alternative way to say pretty much anything. For example, one of the account managers I used to coach came up with the following alternative:

'Hello. I am calling as I noticed you downloaded our free trial and I wanted to ask a few questions to see if this is something you can benefit from or not and if so, we can set-up another call to discuss further.'

He then moved straight into the qualifying questions, which helped him get rid of the weak leads faster and prioritise the good ones.

So, if your call openings make you sound like a customer service agent, or if you open your follow-up calls with lines like, *'I was just following up on our last call'* or *'Just checking in to see how things are going'*, take some time to write down some powerful alternatives to ensure you reach your objectives more often.

Gatekeepers

The most common problem salespeople have when cold-calling, is dealing with gatekeepers.

Gatekeeper is a word used to describe a person who controls access to something. In sales, it's used to describe a receptionist, switchboard operator, or personal secretary, because they control access to your contact person.

Part of a gatekeeper's responsibility is to protect the time of the company's employees by filtering sales calls. When you dial the main switchboard number and ask to speak to your contact by their name or job title, you can expect to be interrogated by a gatekeeper. It's sometimes a little like getting through the border control officer to get into the United States.

I had the pleasure of dealing with gatekeepers during my first business-to-business sales role in an extremely competitive telecommunications industry. My role was to book meetings for the regional business development managers, and my days consisted of hard-core cold-calling, so I became well acquainted with gatekeepers.

They blocked my cold-calls and follow-up calls, screened my emails, and did everything else in their power to stop me from doing my job and reaching my contact. It was a never-ending battle.

After making more than 8,000 cold-calls during my first three months, the gatekeepers started to get the better of me. A short time after, I quit my job, declared bankruptcy, and walked away from the sales profession altogether.

Thankfully, I returned just a few months later, and the rest, as they say, is history.

The gatekeepers were just as ruthless on my return, but my previous experience had helped me develop a tougher mental attitude. However, it was not until later in my career that I realised some of the biggest mistakes I made when dealing with the gatekeepers, and started coming up with better strategies.

Befriending the Gatekeeper

The strategy of befriending the gatekeeper is nothing more than a reverse psychological trick designed to manipulate gatekeepers into doing something they should not do.

When I first received training in the art of dealing with gatekeepers, there was a huge focus on the importance of befriending them. I still see many sales trainers recommending the same approach today. They'll tell you to be polite, get their name, and tell them the compelling reason for why you are calling because people like to buy from people they like – but let me tell you a story about a guy named Jonny who was the master of befriending the gatekeepers.

I started on the same day as Jonny at the telecommunications company I mentioned earlier. He was a charismatic and friendly chap of Greek descent with a strong cockney accent and a classic suave Greek appearance. Jonny was well liked in the office and had previous industry experience. Hopes were high for him.

If there was one thing Jonny was brilliant at, it was building rapport with the gatekeepers. Without a word of a lie, he used to take them out on dates. He would woo them with his charm on the phone, take them out that same week, and really take the cold out of cold-calling.

Jonny was such a smooth talker. He knew the name of the gatekeeper at almost every company he called and would speak to them like they were his friends about all sorts of rubbish for a few minutes every time he called. I always remember feeling very envious, wishing I had the same ability.

Despite his extreme ability to befriend the gatekeepers, it turned out that Jonny was booking more dates than meetings, leaving him consistently at the bottom of the sales charts, which eventually cost him his job.

As awesome as Jonny was at building rapport with and befriending the gatekeepers, his efforts had been a complete waste of time.

Most sales trainers who preach the befriending strategy, fail to take into consideration quite a few crucial factors.

In my experience, there are three types of gatekeepers:

(1) Scarecrows

(2) Bouncers

(3) Parents

Scarecrows are typically switchboard operators who are merely there to direct your call. They may ask you one or two questions, but this is only to announce your call or log you into their system. You will typically find scarecrows inside of larger organisations, and with the right mindset, they will cause you no problems.

Bouncers, frequently called receptionists, are semi-protective gatekeepers typically found in small- to medium-sized businesses. Their job role includes a variety of administrative tasks, including taking calls and messages for people. Some bouncers are easy to bypass, while others can be hardcore. I often find it depends on how competitive their industry is and on how well their day has gone. Friday afternoons tend to be an easy ride, whereas Monday mornings can be a nightmare.

Parents I describe as the personal assistant or secretary. You'll typically deal with parents if you are trying to reach senior decision-makers inside of large organisations. I would also describe the parents as the real gatekeepers and probably the only ones worth befriending. If you're not on good terms with them, or if you don't follow their procedures, you're going to find it hard to reach your desired contact person. A parent will often have a personal relationship with your contact person, so find out what calls your contact will take and what calls they won't. Some parents will also control your contact person's diary and know where they are every minute of every day.

If you're calling larger organisations, it's likely you will be dealing with scarecrows or parents, whereas if you are calling small- to medium-sized businesses, you will likely be spending most of your time dealing with bouncers.

My recommendation is to avoid wasting your time befriending scarecrows and bouncers. They often have little or no influence with your contact person, and as

Jonny found out, befriending them can have the opposite effect. His approachable nature enabled gatekeepers to take advantage of what he offered. They reversed the reverse psychology on him and made him feel bad about asking them to put him through to his desired contacts – and for that, he lost his job.

Your Gatekeeper Mindset

‘These are not the droids you are looking for.’

If you’re not familiar with the above quote, it’s spoken by Obi-Wan Kenobi, a character in the 1977 movie, *Star Wars*. He says it after being stopped by stormtroopers who are looking for the droids he is transporting. Obi-Wan uses his mind tricks to convince the stormtroopers they do not need to ask further questions about his droids so that he could move along. (I recommend finding the film clip on YouTube(TM) for the full effect.)

If you can apply the same strategy with gatekeepers when trying to reach your contacts, you’ll be amazed by your hidden Jedi powers.

The term *Gatekeeper* is often so hyped up that you can easily find yourself locked in a constant battle with your mindset.

The worst thing you can do when calling out is always to expect the gatekeeper to try and block you. This assumption will put you in a negative frame of mind and will also come across in your communication. You’ll either sound insecure, edgy or a bit of both.

A well-trained gatekeeper can sniff a vulnerable salesperson out in a heartbeat, and you’ll be sending an email to the *info@* address before you’ve had the chance to give the reason for your call.

Even if you know the likelihood of getting through is small, you need to believe you should be put through and that your call is important. But most of all, you need to come across like you expect to be put through.

It wasn’t until later in my career that I realised I had developed a powerful unconscious strategy to bypass gatekeepers which had been working flawlessly.

The Three-Question Thank You Technique

The *Three-Question Thank You-Technique* is my secret weapon for disarming gatekeepers. This technique alone, if mastered, will make your investment in this book worthwhile.

After making thousands of cold-calls, I began to get a little sick and tired of repeating myself, so I decided to investigate why.

The first thing I noticed is that the gatekeeper often made me repeat everything I said when they answered the call. The conversation would typically start something like this:

Me: *'Hello my name is David White, and I'm calling from the company On Air Telecom. Can I speak to Lee Lomas, please?'*

Gatekeeper: *'Yes, can I ask who's calling, please?'*

Me: *'Yes, my name is David White.'*

Gatekeeper: *'And which company are you calling from?'*

Me: *'On Air Telecom.'*

Gatekeeper: *'And what is the call regarding?'*

Me: *'It's regarding your mobile phone contracts.'*

Gatekeeper: *'No thanks, we're not interested.'*

Within 30 seconds, I had repeated my name, my company name, and quite often, the name of my contact person.

I realised I had delivered my information far too quickly, making it almost impossible for the gatekeeper to process it all at once, so I decided to try the strategy of giving it in slower, smaller chunks.

I figured that if I called and started by asking for the contact person I wanted to speak to, the questions about my name and company would naturally come afterwards.

The results were instant. I no longer had to repeat myself on every call, and immediately, I felt less frustrated. But this change in strategy also highlighted something even better.

I had realised a strange sense of hesitance or a lack of confidence from the gatekeepers when I entered my calls in this new way. It was almost like they feared me a little. I was no longer trying to explain what my company did, and I was getting put through to my contacts at a much higher rate.

I realised that the gatekeepers seemed to have an unconscious psychological rule that asking two questions was okay, three were borderline nosey, and anything over that was close to being rude.

And then I put two and two together. The gatekeeper's primary role is often to be the professional forefront of their company. They take calls from everyone, including customers, business partners, board directors, and other people.

So, when I was calling without any introduction and just asking for the name of the person I wanted to speak to, the gatekeeper had no clue if I was a salesperson or a member of the board; hence, the hesitancy and lack of confidence I had noticed.

There was also a couple of other subconscious elements to this new winning strategy too:

(1) I'm British, so I use my manners a lot. Saying good morning or good afternoon, and using please and thank you are natural to me. I discovered these manners were having a magic effect with gatekeepers.

The use of 'good morning' or 'good afternoon' at the beginning of the call ensured I did not sound rude, especially considering I had stopped introducing myself by name right away. Saying 'thank you' at the end of each response also acted as a psychological message that I now expected to be connected.

(2) I'm naturally confident and straight-talking, and as I already mentioned, confidence is critical in sales. By sounding a little authoritative when asking to speak to your contact person, you'll make yourself sound like someone of importance and increase the likelihood of being connected. Just be sure to remember your manners – confidence can easily be mistaken for arrogance.

So, with this new approach, my cold-calls were beginning to sound more like this:

Me: *'Good morning, can I speak to Lee Lomas, please. Thank you.'*

Gatekeeper: *'Yes, can I ask who's calling, please?'*

Me: *'Yes, my name is David White, thank you.'*

Gatekeeper: *'And which company are you calling from?'*

Me: *'On Air Telecom, thank you.'*

At this point, most gatekeepers will put you through, especially if they're just busy switchboard operators (scarecrows) who want to direct your call with speed so they can take the next call or carry on with their other tasks.

With bouncers and parents, the conversation may continue to the defining question, *'And what is the call regarding?'*. Here, you need to come up with a short and vague response. I found that if you come up with a technical or confusing answer, you get connected right away.

So, rather than saying my call was about their mobile phone contracts, I would just say, *'It's about the renewal of your subscription, thank you'*; or, *'It's regarding a new batch of 5210s, thank you'*.

Below is a list of examples of alternative responses for different types of businesses.

Example A: *'The call is regarding your online marketing spend.'*

Replace with: *'It's regarding your CTR, thank you.'*

Example B: *'The call is regarding your website SEO.'*

Replace with: *'It's regarding your Metadata, thank you.'*

Example C: *'The call is regarding recruitment services.'*

Replace with: *'It's regarding an employee matter, thank you.'*

Example D: *'The call is regarding website hosting.'*

Replace with: *'It's regarding your VPS servers, thank you.'*

I recommend you put time aside to come up with a variety of potential responses based on your own business. You should then spend a day or two putting them to the test.

Your toughest challenge when applying this new strategy will be breaking the habit of introducing yourself at the beginning of every call. You have most likely been

doing this for a long time, so it's an unconscious habit. The only way to truly break a habit is to replace it with a new one and practise it until it sticks.

So, with the combination of this *Three-Question-Thank-You Technique* and your new Jedi mind powers, you are guaranteed to see a substantial difference in your connection rates, resulting in more conversations with your contacts and fewer headaches due to the gatekeepers.

Truth or Screen: How to Detect Gatekeeper Lies

Regardless of how well my gatekeeper strategy works, you're still going to have to accept that you won't get through to your contacts every time.

There will be times when your contacts are unavailable, on another call, in a meeting, away from their desk, or out at lunch.

Based on my own experience of making more than 100,000 sales calls during my career, there's a 50/50 chance the gatekeeper will lie to you about the availability of your contact.

I've witnessed plenty of comical moments where the gatekeeper has failed to adequately mute their phone while quietly asking my contact person if they wanted to take the call. It's infuriating when the gatekeeper says your prospect is out and you know the person you want is right there.

But you must not let this get to you. Instead, have some fun with the gatekeeper and see how good you can get at lie detecting.

I will reiterate to you though that your mindset is crucial when it comes to handling gatekeepers. If you believe they're lying to you every time, you'll frustrate yourself and make mistakes.

Mistaking a lie with an honest answer is easy. The truthful reasons for your prospects unavailability are usually the same reasons used by gatekeepers when lying to you. People are also very convincing liars when they do it often enough.

I discovered the following signs that gave me a good indication of when a gatekeeper was lying to me.

- (1) The gatekeeper takes all of your information and immediately confirms your contact is unavailable without checking.
- (2) The gatekeeper insists on taking a message multiple times, despite you having said you would call back.
- (3) The gatekeeper will pause, say 'ermmm' or clear their throat before answering.
- (4) The gatekeeper asks you to repeat your question and is still slow to respond to it.
- (5) The gatekeeper contradicts themselves by telling you various reasons for the unavailability of your contact.
- (6) The gatekeeper tries to connect you to your contact but then comes back and asks what the call is regarding.

All of the above signs may indicate you have blown your cover and the gatekeeper knows it's a sales call. These signs are not bulletproof, so don't jump to conclusions too quickly.

The most efficient way of detecting if the gatekeeper is lying to you is to master some immediate questions in response to their reasons for your contact's availability.

So, if the gatekeeper tells you that your contact is unavailable and asks if you can call back later, you could respond by asking any one of the following questions:

'Are they in a meeting?'
'What time are they free again?'
'Is there a better number to reach them on?'

Alternatively, if the gatekeeper tells you that your contact is in a meeting and constantly asks what the call is regarding, you could respond by saying:

'What time does the meeting end?'
'Do you know what the meeting is about?'
'Don't worry about it. I will call back later.'

You may feel like some of the above questions are a little rude and intrusive, and indeed they can be. But if you can adjust your tone of voice, select the right questions, and use your manners, you can ask almost anything without it coming across in the wrong way.

My personal favourite is always to ask if I can be transferred through to the contact's voicemail, especially if I get told they are on the phone. This one always catches the gatekeeper off guard if they're lying.

What you should be listening out for is the gatekeeper's response to your questions. Some liars react angrily when challenged, while others will be more nervous and start to show some of the signs I mentioned earlier.

I always recommend logging every call you make in your Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system along with call notes, no matter how short. If your role includes making hundreds of cold-calls and handling gatekeepers all day, you should be making a quick note to remind yourself of the reason given for why you did not reach your contact such as Contact in a meeting, asked to call back tomorrow. This task may seem tedious, but it's smarter than calling the same company every day and listening to the same lie about your prospects unavailability.

Once it becomes apparent you're not going to get through a gatekeeper, you have two options.

- (1) Give in and move on.
- (2) Get creative with ways to reach your contact.

If you're working in a role where call volumes are high and deal sizes are small, I highly recommend moving on. It's easy to get stuck calling the same carousel of low-quality leads if you don't learn how to let go. Alternatively, if you make less than 50 calls per day and work with bigger deal sizes, it's time to master some creative ways to bypass the gatekeepers.

Seven Ways to Avoid Gatekeepers

The strategy of calling the same company every day in the hope a tough gatekeeper will connect your call is like banging your head against a brick wall. If it's blatantly obvious you're dealing with a highly skilled gatekeeper, then change your approach.

I've tried, tested, and witnessed some crazy techniques for beating the gatekeeper during my time, but it's often the simple or creative ones that work best. Below I will share some of these with you.

(1) *Pay Attention to Detail.*

I'm often in disbelief at the lack of attention people pay to the resources and details available to them. A thirty-second online search or a glance at the *About Us* or *Contact Us* pages on your prospect's website can sometimes give you access to the direct number of your desired contact person. And for heaven's sake, if you have been in an email dialogue with them, check their email signature for their direct contact details.

(2) *Call When the Gatekeeper is Not There.*

Most gatekeepers work a standard shift such as 9am to 5pm and take their lunch at the same time every day. You'll find that calling early in the morning, late in the afternoon, early in the evening or during typical lunch hours can be the perfect time to avoid the gatekeeper.

(3) *Always Ask for a Direct Number.*

If you have already had a brief conversation face-to-face or via telephone or email with your contact, don't forget to ask them what the best direct number is to reach them.

I also recommend asking gatekeepers for the direct number of your contact person too. Most salespeople are too afraid for fear of being cheeky, but you'll be surprised at how many times you get it if you ask.

(4) *Avoid Sounding Like a Salesperson.*

I've already covered many of the basics such as not introducing yourself in full when calling and being short and vague about what your call is regarding, but you must also avoid other cliché sales habits too. Saying such things as '*Hey, how are you doing today?*' when you enter the call is one that automatically triggers the suspicious '*what are you after*' signal.

(5) *Try the Wrong Number or Department.*

If you want to avoid the gatekeeper, don't call the main switchboard. When you can, locate the number of specific departments such as accounts or technical support. Next, call them, apologise, and say that you're not sure you reached the

right department. Then tell them who you're trying to reach. It's a simple technique with a very high success rate.

I would advise you to avoid trying sales or customer service departments. Salespeople know exactly what you're up to, and customer service representatives are always likely to transfer you back to the switchboard.

(6) Leverage Email and Social Selling.

I will dive deeper into these topics later in the book, but creating a consistent strategy for emailing and messaging your contacts, and following or tweeting them on various social media platforms is eventually going to get you engaging directly with your contact.

(7) Get Referrals.

Getting a personal referral from a mutual friend or acquaintance is the easiest route to direct contact. Search your network for anyone who works at the same company as your contact person or knows someone who does. Even if your buddy just knows the kitchen assistant, it's an excellent way to connect directly and avoid the gatekeeper.

Consistent Prospecting

One of the most common reasons skilled salespeople deliver average results is due to inconsistency in their prospecting strategy. It's all too easy to slack off on the cold-calls when you've achieved your goals, but to achieve steady results, you must prospect consistently.

To be an elite performer in any profession, you must keep working hard on the fundamentals. As I mentioned earlier, to get good at something you must do it over and over again.

I've seen so many new sales hires slog their guts out working night and day to achieve their sales goals. As soon as they do, their prospecting work rate drops, and they wonder why their sales results suffer the following month.

I remember coaching a salesperson a few years back who was struggling with his performance. He had been with the company for around 12 months, and it had

taken him ten months of blood, sweat, and tears to reach his target for the first time; yet, he found himself struggling to hit his numbers once again.

I asked him what had changed recently, but he could not put his finger on anything specific, so I asked him to go back to the period just before he reached his target for the first time, and we found the ‘Aha’ moment. It turned out he had made a change in his prospecting strategy during the month he hit his sales target and had automatically associated his success to his excellent new strategy, so he continued using it.

As it turned out, his new strategy had nothing to do with his results. It was merely a coincidence that he had reached his target the same month he had started using it. His results had come from his hard work and consistency in the previous months.

If you’re working with sales cycles of 30-days or less, you’ll see the results of your prospecting efforts 30 to 45 days from now. A month or even a week of lazy prospecting will always result in at least one below par month in your quarter.

In my experience, most good salespeople can recover from one bad month in every quarter by putting in a little extra work. However, if you’re working with longer sales cycles, a lack of consistency in your prospecting activity is risky business.

It’s hard to isolate the cause of low performance when you work with sales cycles of 60 or more days. It’s hard enough to try and remember what activity you were doing last week, let alone last quarter. Worst of all, even if you’re willing to change your behaviour, you’ll have to wait a long time before seeing any positive results. In today’s fast-moving business world, few employers can afford to run the risk of more than six months of underperformance, so you may find yourself looking for a new job.

Many busy sales leaders often put this inconsistency down to laziness. However, I believe it’s more often than not due to lack of motivation. Too many people work towards short-term goals without linking those goals to something bigger. This mindset will almost always result in a ‘Done that, what’s next?’ type of attitude once people eventually achieve those goals.

Short-term goals result in short-term motivation, and if your short-term goals don’t link in some way to your bigger, more important long-term goals, you’ll find yourself always seeking new challenges and lacking motivation.

Email Outreach, Voicemail, and Social Selling

On top of your activity levels, you must also create a consistent strategy for how you prospect, including a process for reaching out to your contacts using a variety of channels. The depth of your process will, of course, depend on how much time you can afford to allocate to each prospect.

I'm often baffled at the lack of variation and creativity in the prospecting methods used by many salespeople. These methods are frequently one-dimensional and repetitive such as only cold-calling or spending 90% of the time sending emails or messaging via social media platforms. In today's modern age, if you want to reach people, you stand a much better chance of getting their attention when you diversify your prospecting activity.

As a salesperson, you should see yourself as a branding tool. You need to put yourself out there. I'm not saying you need to become a video superstar or create a weekly podcast, but you do need to overcome your fear of approaching people via multiple channels.

You need to call your prospects, leave voicemails, send emails, follow them, connect with them, tweet them, retweet them – do whatever it takes so they remember your name.

Please avoid the mistake of confusing persistence with consistency though. As much as I appreciate a tenacious attitude, it's important you do not become an annoying pest.

Your prospects are busy people. They could be in the middle of any of a million things when you try to reach them. They may spend a lot of their time in meetings or travelling for business or working on projects that require complete focus. They will also have a personal preference for how you approach them.

For example, I'm the worst person to try and cold-call. I'm a busy entrepreneur with an endless list of things to do, and talking to you is not one of them. I will need to see some potential value first.

Even if I did like taking cold-calls, I'm a hard man to catch, and my schedule is inconsistent. Sometimes I'm consulting for a client onsite for days, in which case, it would be highly unprofessional to take calls when my client is paying the bill. Other

times, I spend blocks of hours building out presentations or writing content, during which I remove all distractions including my phone.

My situations are probably not much different to your prospects, which is why you need to be patient, and focus on consistency, variation, and creativity to reach them.

Prospecting via Email

The benefit of email is that you can reach a lot of prospects in a short space of time without too much rejection. The drawback is that nobody responds.

Okay, maybe that's not entirely accurate, but any email marketing company will tell you that the average click-through rate (CTR) on emails is no higher than 2%, so it should not be your sole strategy for winning customers.

I always used to send an email before calling my prospects. My objective was to provide a tiny snippet of what I could offer and see if I could extract a direct number and suitable time to call.

'Dear (First Name),

I've recently helped (Known Name) decrease the drop-off rate and increase order values on their website, and I wanted to investigate if I could help you do the same.

What's the best time and number to reach you on for a quick call?'

Too many people write cold prospecting emails that pitch too much. They blabber on with a long-winded introduction to who they are and what they do, and then somewhere in the dense forest of words they usually ask a closed question such as, ***'Do you have time for a quick call?' or 'Does this sound like something of interest?'***

Your prospect only cares about what value they can get from your solution. If you don't get that message across in the first sentence, your email will be thrown in the junk mail with the rest.

I highly recommend testing your emails. You need to measure which ones perform best in your sector. If you work with international markets, you should also pay close attention to which emails work best in each country. I've seen the most

spammy-looking emails get insanely high open-and-click rates in one country, and get reported for spam in another.

Your emails should also be saved as templates so you can send them at the click of a button. It pains me to see salespeople sit for 15 minutes composing long, dull emails for each prospect. It's nothing more than an unproductive waste of time.

There are a lot of options these days for sending out emails. It can be a time saver to send them out in bulk, but I recommend chunking your campaigns into small batches.

I didn't have any marketing support in my sales days, so I sent out all of my emails manually using templates. My goal was to ensure my email would potentially still be fresh in the prospect's inbox by the time I called them.

I would calculate how many cold-calls I could make that week, line up my list, and send emails only to those prospects I could reach. It kept me pretty safe from getting put on any spam blacklists, and it also gave me a perfect opportunity to test my different templates.

The only time I recommend sending mass emails is during the holidays. The amount of direct line and mobile numbers you can pick up from people's out of office replies is golden.

Once I had sent my initial emails, I would start dialling. I would never mention on my calls that I had sent my prospect an email though unless I was asked to submit one by the gatekeeper.

I find that too many salespeople use irrelevant facts to try and build rapport with their prospects. Saying that you're calling to follow up on the email you sent is a poor way to open a call.

If I failed to connect with my contact person, I would always try to leave a voicemail, followed instantly by one of my email templates.

Subject Line: Missed call from David Craig White

'Dear (First Name),

I just tried reaching you via phone. What's the best time and number to catch you on?'

By now, my prospect has received an initial outreach email and a voicemail both communicating the same message; and they also have my *Missed Call* email – three seeds, planted.

Voicemail

In my experience, most people hate leaving voicemails and choose not to do so. The reason most salespeople hate leaving them is because they don't prepare for what to say and end up mumbling a lame pitch, which makes themselves cringe.

The common excuse salespeople use for not leaving voicemails is that nobody ever calls them back. But how can prospects call salespeople back if the prospects don't know how to reach them?

If you're not leaving voicemails because nobody ever calls you back, you're missing the point. Voicemails are just another simple way of planting your name in the mind of your prospect.

Your voicemail message needs three simple elements.

- (1) A short introduction to yourself and your contact number.
- (2) A message with a tiny snippet of the value you can offer.
- (3) Repeat your short introduction and your contact number.

'Hello, this is a message for (Contact Full Name). My name is David Craig White from David Craig White International, and my contact number is (state number slowly and clearly).

I've recently helped (Known Name) recruit seven new developers and reduce their recruitment costs, and I wanted to investigate if I could help you do the same.

If you could return my call or reply to my email with the best time and number to reach you, it would be much appreciated.

Once again, my name is David Craig White from David Craig White International, and my contact number is (state number slowly and clearly). Speak to you soon. Thank you.'

I don't recommend leaving too many voicemails or emails in a short space of time. You need to create a consistent follow-up process that avoids annoying your prospects.

The only time I would recommend persistent follow-up is when working with short sales cycles and dealing with inbound leads who are usually well educated with your solution, so they tend to move faster. It's also likely they are speaking with your competitors.

When working with cold outbound leads, the frequency of your follow-up activities should be adapted to your sales cycles. If you're working with sales cycles of 30 days, contacting someone every day is too much, but every week may be too little. If your sales cycles are seven days, calling every day or two is probably adequate.

I always try to work with the rule that no prospect with potential should be left completely untouched for more than 14 to 21 days. Even if you're just sharing your latest blog or product updates with them, you need to stay fresh in their minds.

Social Selling

The term social selling is consistently misused and misunderstood by both sales and marketing professionals globally. Social media platforms should not be used to sell.

The usage of social media platforms as a way of engaging prospects is not new. I was using LinkedIn(TM) more than ten years ago to successfully reach new prospects.

Social media is another great way of planting your brand in your prospects path. By simply looking at their profile or connecting with them, it increases the chances they will look at your profile and thus, look at what you do. The same applies when you follow them on the likes of Twitter(TM) or any of the others social media platforms.

You'll get much greater success in connecting with your prospects if you mix social selling with your email outreach, cold-calls, voicemails, and other prospecting channels such as events and webinars.

When working with 30-day sales cycles and selling to marketing executives, my follow-up process used to look like this:

Monday: Cold Outreach Email

Tuesday: Cold Call + Voicemail + Missed Call Email

Friday: Cold Call + Missed Call Email

Monday: Cold Call + Social Follow

Wednesday: Cold Call + Social Media Outreach

Friday: Cold Call + Missed Call Email

I would simply rotate my activities to ensure I was hitting my prospects in as many different ways as possible. I would also ensure I was mixing up which days I was trying them. It's not the smartest approach to keep trying people on the same days every week.

The better you get at mixing your prospecting activities, the sooner you'll start reaching people. Just remember to keep both your messaging and your frequency consistent on all platforms.

CHAPTER II

Qualifying Your Way to Sales Success

Welcome to the most important chapter of this book and the most critical stage of the sales process. If you master the art of questioning and qualifying your sales prospects, it will go a long way to making you an elite sales professional.

Too many salespeople make the mistake of rushing through this stage. They judge the quality of the opportunity based on the great rapport they built with the prospect or based on how excited their prospect sounded in the first conversation.

Don't fool yourself like many salespeople do.

The qualification stage of the sales process is the most comprehensive. You must engage your prospect in a conversation, uncover their basic needs, ensure they are the right person to speak with, ask about budgets and timelines, and dig deeper into buyer motives to discover the real drivers behind your contact's decisions and much more.

If you fail to qualify your prospects thoroughly, the consequences are severe. You'll waste time with weak prospects, be unable to forecast accurately, and miss vital information that will cause you to lose good opportunities.

The worst part of inadequate qualification is that it can lead to poor performance, and you'll waste a lot of time trying to fix it by focusing on the wrong areas.

Whenever a salesperson requests a coaching session with me to talk about closing, it almost always ends up in a discussion about how to qualify better and get more control over their opportunities.

In my days as a sales leader, I once evaluated a list of almost 200 lost opportunities from my team. I wanted to generate a drop-down list with the most common reasons why we lost opportunities. The top five reasons were as follows:

- (1) Poorly Qualified (62%)
- (2) No/Low Budget (18%)
- (3) Unknown/No Reply (9%)
- (4) Lost to Competitor (6%)
- (5) Project Postponed (5%)

I firmly believe that poor qualification is still the biggest problem in the sales profession today, and it's an expensive one.

In this chapter, I will go in-depth on how to pique your prospect's interest and begin qualifying instantly. I will introduce you to some old and new questioning techniques, focusing not only on how to use them but also when to use them for best effect.

I will also dig into important topics such as how to spot buying signals, how to reveal real buyer motives and how to uncover decision processes, timelines, stakeholders, and much more.

By the end of this chapter, you'll have the techniques and strategies needed to create robust sales pipelines that will result in a predictable source of revenue and a feeling of complete control.

Features, Benefits, and Outcomes (FBO)

When I started as an untrained salesperson back in the late 1990s, the best way to sell was to reel off the long list of features included in your solution. This approach worked well until the global financial crisis of 2008.

Said to be the worst since the great depression of the 1930s, this crisis fundamentally changed the way companies made purchasing decisions, and it also changed the sales profession forever.

An impressive list of features was no longer enough to win the deal. The quick and easy sale became like an urban myth, and pushy sales tactics were no longer as effective.

Luckily for me, I'd been training myself not to use a list of features to sell my solution long before the financial crisis of 2008 happened. In fact, I can honestly say that during the entire crisis, I made the most money of my sales career.

I was working for a leading supplier of digital publishing software at the time. Our solution was impressive, but it required an investment of a minimum of £2,500 in a market where smaller players were offering solutions for £99.

The only way to compete and prove your worth against low-quality competition is to sell value. You must focus on what value your clients will get from investing in your solution. You must move away from selling features and benefits, and start selling benefits and outcomes.

To make this shift, you need to start with a basic understanding of what features, benefits, and outcomes are, so let's look at what I refer to as FBO.

(F) A feature is what something is, such as a software or one of its different elements. Your nose is also a feature of your face.

(B) A benefit is what something does, such as software that converts PDFs into digital magazines, or your nose that allows you to smell things.

(O) An outcome is what happens as a result of the benefit. Converting PDFs into digital magazines might increase your readership, and by smelling smoke from a fire, your nose could save your life.

An outcome is essentially the value your solution offers, which is what you should be talking to your prospects about.

Many salespeople struggle to kick the habit of talking about features and often get benefits and outcomes mixed up.

An average car salesperson would typically sell me the idea of a brand-new supercar by saying it has an impressive amount of horsepower with a top speed of something ridiculous that enables it to travel from 0 to 60 in 3.3 seconds.

That salesperson would be quickly stumped if I asked why they were telling me this.

Selling benefits may be enough to get you in the door, but if you or your contact need to sell your idea to a senior executive, you're going to need to talk about the value they will get.

Ideally, you'll talk to your prospects about the ultimate outcomes of investing in your solution, but I will get back to that later in the section on buyer motives.

I highly recommend you put some time aside to work on listing your features, benefits, and outcomes. It's likely you have developed a habit of selling features and benefits – and habits are difficult to break.

Consider creating a spreadsheet with three parallel columns across the top, titled features, benefits, and outcomes, and begin with listing all of your features. You'll then need to write down the benefit of each feature before finally writing down the outcome(s).

This exercise will help raise your awareness of the differences between benefits and outcomes but will do little to break your old habit

To break any habit, you must replace it with a new one; to create a new habit, you need to practise and rehearse using something like role-play activities, and then apply the new habit in a live environment with your prospects.

Almost every salesperson I've met sells using features and benefits. The faster you can break this habit, the sooner you can start selling value and closing more sales.

Open the Call and Interrupt the Pattern

Reaching your desired contact person can be a rare occurrence in a regular sales day. In my experience, you'll connect on average with two contacts out of every ten attempts.

Most salespeople are unprepared for the rare occasion they reach a contact. They stutter, panic, and dribble out whatever blurb comes to mind, killing the call before it has begun.

A call usually starts with a courteous greeting and introduction such as, *'Good morning. My name is Sarah from the company Big Ideas Ltd'*.

It's at this point, in nine out of ten cold calls, that salespeople act like salespeople. You might feel the need to say something cliché like *'How are you doing today?'* or even worse, to start pitching, which is precisely what your prospect will be expecting you to do.

At the beginning of every cold call, there's always a wall of resistance that exists between the buyer and seller. You'll need to break this wall down before you can engage your prospect in a valuable conversation.

When you reach a prospect for the first time and they realise you're a salesperson, they may not say it out loud, but they're certainly always thinking, *'Ughh, another sales call'*. They then immediately go into what is known as a pattern of thought about how to get off the call.

A quick online search for how to get rid of sales calls delivers more than 48 million results indicating how common this *pattern of thought* is amongst your prospects.

You're going to need to break this pattern of thought to avoid your next words falling on deaf ears, and you can do so using something called a Pattern Interrupt. I learnt about this technique when training as a Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) practitioner where it's used to help change a person's negative state.

I'm positive you have been in a situation where you forgot what you were doing or saying for a moment because someone or something interrupted you.

For example, if someone smashed a glass behind you right now, you'd most likely lose track of where you were in this book, leaving your brain momentarily free to focus on something else.

Pattern interrupts don't need to be complicated, and you can get as creative (or not) as you like. Below you'll find six example ideas for pattern interrupts you can integrate into the beginning of your cold-calls to break your prospects negative state of mind.

(1) *Mention Something Familiar.*

Mention a familiar name like the person who gave out your contacts details or the name of someone you know who works at their company.

(2) *Mention Something Company Specific.*

Refer to a recent blog post, newspaper article, or something else related to their business.

(3) *Mention Something Personal.*

Refer to something from your contacts LinkedIn(TM) profile such as past jobs, shared contacts, relevant job responsibilities, or a great article they posted recently.

(4) *Say Something Funny.*

Say something like *'I know what you're thinking right now - "Oh another annoying sales call," but if you give me 30 seconds, I'll give you a reason to think otherwise'*.

(5) *Do Something Strange.*

Open your call with your greeting, and then add a moment's silence, before asking if your prospect can hear you okay.

(6) *Do Something Simple.*

Asking if you caught your prospect at a bad time is probably the simplest pattern interrupt you could use, especially if your prospect answers with an abrupt tone. Many prospects will immediately shift their pattern if they sense their tone has come across as rude, even if they meant it to do so.

Personally, I like to use this last one, because it's easy to use, requires no pre-call research, and shows respect for the prospects time. I do, however, frequently get asked (and challenged) on what the difference is between asking if you caught your prospect at a good time or a bad one.

To be perfectly honest, there's not much difference, but I would ask you to consider two questions before deciding which to use.

(1) Is it ever a good time to receive a sales call?

(2) Do you want your prospect to be fully focused on the call?

I find there to be a slight psychological advantage to asking if it's a bad time because human nature tends to prompt us to say 'no'. I also prefer talking to my prospects when they are not engaged in other activities.

By doing this, you're leaving yourself open to the 'Yes, it's a bad time' response. This reaction may be genuine, or it may be a way of your prospect trying to get rid of you.

Respond with an apology for the interruption, and ask when a better time might be. Your prospects will then respond in one of two ways:

(1) They will ask what the call is regarding in a pleasant tone, in which case, I refer you back to the gatekeeper technique of being as vague as possible before asking again when a better time might be.

(2) They will ask what the call is regarding in a direct and maybe abrupt tone, in which case, proceed with the call as if your prospect had given you permission. A direct persona-type prospect will often appreciate you cutting to the chase, which will also help build instant rapport.

Where possible, always try to get a specific time for when to call someone back if the timing is wrong, and be sure to ask for the best number to reach them directly.

Your Opening Statement

Once you've managed to break the thought pattern of your prospect away from trying to get you off the call, you have a brief window of opportunity in which to pique their interest.

Your opening statement is critical. It's your one chance to make a good first impression, so you must make it count.

The objective of your opening is to state the reason for your call and to pique your prospect's interest enough that they want to hear more. The shorter you can make your statement, the better.

I would like to stress that this is not the time for your elevator pitch. Save the pitch for the presentation stage. Otherwise, you'll have nothing left to present.

I would also like to stress the importance of not insulting your prospect. This point may seem obvious, but it's a common mistake made by many salespeople in their attempt to pique a prospect's interest.

Below are a few typical examples of opening statements that run the risk of insulting your prospects.

(1) *'The reason for my call is that I noticed the SEO on your website isn't great and wondered if you wanted some help with that?'*

(2) *'The reason for my call is that we offer a leadership program to help you do a better job of managing your employees.'*

(3) *'The reason for my call is that I noticed the search function on your website isn't working too well, and we offer a much better solution.'*

All of the above statements may look and sound innocent to you, but when you're on the receiving end, they seem like an insult. If I strip a few words from each statement, you'll notice a trend:

'the SEO on your website isn't great.'

'help you do a better job of managing your employees.'

'the search function on your website isn't working too well.'

They sound like insults because they are.

Another reason not to use such an approach is that it's likely your prospect already knows about the flaw you're pointing out.

Consider how it would make you feel if you were walking down the street knowing you had a rip in your top, and some unknown person pointed it out before recommending a different more expensive line of clothing to avoid that happening again.

Would you consider buying from that person, or is it more likely you'd consider punching them in the face?

An effective opening statement should always include at least one benefit and outcome of your solution, which is typically complemented by something catchy.

Below I will provide a few examples of some solid opening statements, but as usual, I urge you to be creative with your own. Where possible, make them relevant to the vertical(s) of your own prospects.

The Competitor Statement

‘The reason for the call is we’ve been helping (competitor name), reach more highly qualified candidates, so they can cut recruitment costs and improve their brand reputation.’

In the above example, I use the name of a competitor, the benefit of reaching more highly qualified candidates, and the outcomes of cutting recruitment costs and improving brand reputation to pique the prospect’s interest. It’s simple, short, and effective.

At the end of your opening statement, you want your prospect to either think or ask, *‘How do you do that then?’*. Don’t worry about telling your prospect who you are, or what you do at this point. Instead, tease them into wanting to hear more.

The Big Brand Statement

‘The reason for the call is we’ve been helping (Big Brand Name) increase their social reach and generate more inbound leads.’

The above example uses the name of a big brand, the benefit of increasing social reach, and the outcome of more inbound leads to pique the interest of the prospect.

If you’re working with both small and large businesses, it’s worth considering either not using a big brand name or mixing it in with a less well-known name to avoid frightening the smaller businesses away.

You might say, *‘The reason for the call is we’ve been helping the likes of (Big Brand Name) and (Small Brand Name) increase their social reach and generate more inbound leads.’*

The more you can relate to your prospect’s business, the more effective your opening statement will be.

The Marketing Trick

‘The reason for the call is we’ve been talking with (Big Brand Name) about increasing their social reach and generating more inbound leads.’

The above statement is useful if you do not work with any big brand names yet. It follows my rule that you must never lie, but bending the truth is just business.

So rather than saying *‘we’ve been helping (Big Brand Name)’*, you say, *‘we’ve been talking to (Big Brand Name)’*. Naturally, you need to have spoken to that specific big brand name first. Otherwise, it’s a lie. But you can easily get a big brand on the phone for a quick chat – even if it’s just with an information collector.

The Power House Statement

'The reason for the call is we've been helping the likes of (Competitor Name) and (Big Brand Name) reduce customer churn and increase their recurring revenue.'

If you really need to impress a prospect, combining the name of a competitor and a big brand name makes a powerful statement that can prove difficult to ignore.

In the event you have no competitor or big brand names to use, you can always go with a more generic approach.

The Generic Vertical Statement

'The reason for the call is we've been helping companies in the (Relevant Vertical) sector improve their website SEO and massively reduce their search engine marketing spend.'

When using the above statement, your prospect will sometimes ask which companies you have been working with, so I would recommend having a couple of appropriate names at hand.

If you only have small names to mention, be upfront with your prospect. Tell them you've recently started out in their sector, so you don't have any recognisable names yet. The best policy is honesty.

If you have no clients at all, don't worry, I've got you covered.

The Generic Job Title Statement

'The reason for the call is we have a solution that helps (Job Title) like yourself automate the process of creating new users so that you can spend your time on more important tasks.'

Whichever statement(s) you choose to work with, remember to include your benefits and outcomes and make them as robust and relevant to your prospect as possible. Telling a webmaster, he can increase sales will be much less effective than telling him he can reduce downtime.

Your Opening Question

Picture yourself in an interrogation room with your prospect. When you begin to talk, there's a big bright spotlight shining on your face, making you sweat. The only way to get that spotlight off of you is to get your prospect talking and point it at them.

After you pique the interest of your prospect with your opening statement, you should immediately follow up with a question.

The opening question is where most salespeople commit sales suicide. They ask questions such as, '*Does that sound of interest to you?*', or '*Would you like to hear more?*', or '*Have you heard of us before?*'.

If you ask a closed question, you're giving the prospect no choice other than to answer with a 'yes' or 'no'. Regardless of which response your prospect chooses, the spotlight turns right back on you.

You must avoid questions that start with *do*, *does*, *would*, *could*, *can*, or any other that gives your prospect the option to give a one-word response, especially if it's a '*no*'. They are conversation killers.

You'd be surprised at how many salespeople use these closed-ended questions and complain after their calls that their prospects were stubborn because they only gave one-word answers.

Your opening question should be open-ended. Questions that start with *how*, *what*, or *which* will help put the spotlight on your prospect and keep it there for a short while.

Your opening question should also be clear, easy to answer, and not too intrusive. I recommend against starting with open-ended questions that begin with a *why* because despite being very powerful, they are often too abrupt to be used so early in a conversation.

You should also put some thinking into where you want to go with your opening question. There's little or no value in asking something that is completely irrelevant to the topic you wish to discuss.

If I, for example, were to cold-call a prospect about sales training, I might open by asking how they are currently training their team. This question opens the topic I wish to discuss and is the first step of qualifying if the prospect needs my services.

Below I've listed some random examples of opening questions you could consider using. Naturally, you'll need to customise these to suit the solution you offer and your style of selling.

Personally, I like to give my questions a slight mask of innocence by starting them off with *'I was just wondering _____'*, but you can decide if that works for you.

'How are you currently driving traffic to your website?'

'How much focus do you have on your social media accounts?'

'How do you currently cross-sell products to your customers?'

'How much time do you spend on sourcing candidates each month?'

'How do you train your new employees at the moment?'

'What solution do you have in place for managing support requests?'

'What methods of online payment do you accept?'

'What process do you have in place for handling customer complaints?'

'Which CMS platform do you use?'

'Which platform do you use for employee onboarding?'

Put some time aside to write a list of your own. Think about what your solution does, and what question you could ask first to begin qualifying if your prospect has a need for what you offer.

For example, if you offer a solution that helps customers improve employee morale, start by asking how much focus they have right now on improving employee morale.

If you provide a solution that helps companies automate a process, start by asking how much time your prospect currently spends on that process.

The quality of your opening question will dictate how the rest of your call is going to go. If you open with a random question, the rest of the call will go the same way. But if you start with a well-structured question, you'll have a well-structured conversation.

Before you progress further, be sure to get a sanity check on your opening statement and question. Read it aloud to yourself a few times, and ask a colleague, manager, or friend to read it through and role play with you. And finally, put it to the test in a live environment.

I also highly recommend you write down a few variations of each statement and question, print them out, and keep them by your side until you're reciting them off at an unconscious level of competence.

I've never met a salesperson who liked sales scripts, yet they are so fundamentally important in the learning process. Even the world's greatest actors need scripts, and using them will speed up your learning process tenfold.

How to Overcome Phone Fear

Once you've prepared, drilled, and rehearsed your opening statement and question, it's time to pick up the phone and put it into action.

Cue: the sound of a fast beating heart.

Whether you're new to sales or a seasoned professional, you may not know it, but it's very likely you've experienced phone fear.

As the moment comes closer to when you need to pick up the phone, your heart begins to beat a little faster, your bladder gets conveniently weaker, and your thirst for coffee, or any other activity that will help prolong that terrifying first call, become all too frequent.

Salespeople experience phone fear when they first start in the profession, when they start new jobs, and when they've not picked up the phone for a while, especially when it's to make a cold-call.

The experience is similar to the feeling you get when slowly climbing the track to the top of a huge rollercoaster ride. Sadly, not everyone finds the drop exhilarating enough to jump on again.

I can remember at least two occasions during my career where new salespeople went for their lunch breaks on their first day and didn't return.

Fear will either kill you or empower you.

Phone fear, like any other fear, is nothing more than adrenaline. The same adrenaline that Usain Bolt uses to make him the fastest man on the planet, and the same adrenaline that every other top athlete experiences before a race, fight, or game.

If you watch someone like Usain Bolt before a race, you'll see exactly how he handles the build-up of adrenaline. He relaxes his body, lifts his head high, takes deep breaths, and goes into a trance of focus. It's like he holds the adrenaline back, and then 'bang' he unleashes it at the sound of the starting pistol, and there's no catching him.

The faster you pick up that phone, dial that number, and make a connection, the faster you get rid of phone fear. There's just something about making that first call which releases those butterflies a little and makes the next call much easier.

If you get a gatekeeper or a rude prospect or a voicemail machine, don't stop; keep dialling while you're in the flow. Spending ten minutes between calls to doodle will not help you, it will only increase the tension.

If you can't get past phone fear, you'll never succeed in sales. All you need is the guts to dive in and take action without the fear of failure. Just relax, lift your head high, take deep breaths, zone in, and dial.

How to Make a Good First Impression

You get only one chance to make a good first impression, so you better make sure it's a damn good one.

When you interact with your prospect for the first time, their brain will process the way you look, feel, sound, and smell.

Based on their past experiences, their brain will then come to a quick conclusion of what to make of you. If you're lucky, those past experiences will be positive. If you're not, you better come up with something interesting or funny within thirty seconds.

In fact, the sad reality is that your prospect may have already judged you before you even picked up the phone. People have all sorts of limiting beliefs installed in their systems, and these are again a result of their past experiences, many of which they've never challenged.

You'll encounter prospects who claim to hate salespeople. They may have already labelled you as the scum of the earth, but this is typically a generalisation due to a bad experience with another salesperson or from a story they once heard.

I remember a good quote on first impressions from the British-Canadian journalist, Malcolm Gladwell who says, *'We don't know where our first impressions come from or precisely what they mean, so we don't always appreciate their fragility'*.

As a coach, I will always have my clients challenge their own limiting beliefs. But as a sales professional, your only line of defence is to leave your prospect with such a good first impression that they give you the benefit of the doubt.

Below I will share my recommendations for improving your chances of making a good first impression every time.

(1) *Be on Time.*

You would be extremely annoyed if you sold your solution to your prospect, and they did not pay their invoice. Likewise, your prospect will be anything from slightly irritated to furious if they go out of their way to meet you, and you fail to turn up on time.

(2) *Be a Tone Clone.*

You'll build instant rapport with people when you match their tone. Pay attention to the speed and depth of your prospect's voice from the get-go, and go out of your way to match it as accurately as possible. It's not about the words you say. It's all about the way you say them.

(3) *Dress Appropriately.*

Whether you're meeting a prospect face-to-face or via webcam, be conscious that the way you look has a significant impact on the first impression you give.

Think of how you would react if you saw someone wearing a baseball cap on their LinkedIn(TM) profile picture. It would sadly leave an instant impression of unprofessionalism that would be hard to change.

I purposely use the word appropriately because just like with your prospects tone, you should also try to match their dress code too. You must disguise yourself as one of them as best you can.

Obviously, you can't predict how your prospect will dress, but applying common sense will give a better idea. Wearing a suit and tie may be ideal when meeting bank managers, but it may not work very well if you're trying to sell to construction workers.

If you're unsure and it's an important meeting, drop the receptionist a quick call the day before you meet and ask them politely for a rough idea of the company dress code. Be sure to remember to bring or send a small token of thanks for their help afterwards.

(4) *Apply Humour.*

A smile is contagious, but laughter is bonding. If you can make your prospect laugh within the first couple of minutes, it will go a long way to cementing a blossoming relationship.

I'd recommend against randomly sharing jokes, and instead, stick to making witty comments. Most people appreciate a dry sense of humour more than they do a joking clown.

(5) *Use Manners.*

I strongly detest and would never consider buying from a person without a basic level of manners. Using please and thank you will cost you nothing. Not using them, will cost you the sale.

(6) *Shut Up.*

Most people hate the sound of their own voice when you ask them to listen back to it, and yet so many of them drown out their prospects openness to talk with their babbling insecurity.

Open the call, deliver your short opening statement followed by an open question, grab your pen, and shut up and listen. The less you talk, the more rapport you'll build, and the more you'll learn about your prospect.

Micro-Pitching

When it comes to breaking bad habits, there are not many that are tougher to break than micro-pitching.

Micro-pitching is the habit of pitching your solution at multiple points during a conversation. It usually starts with you asking a question, which your prospect answers. You then match one of your features or benefits to that answer and tell your prospect all about it.

Here's how a live example I heard a while back started:

Salesperson: *'What do you do to drive traffic to your website at the moment?'*

Prospect: *'We mainly spend money on search engine advertising.'*

Salesperson: *'Great. The reason I asked is that we have a licensing agreement with XYZ Ltd, which enables you to get star ratings and can increase your CTR by up to 17%.'*

Prospect: *'Oh right, interesting.'*

The conversation continued with the same flow and the prospect requested an email with some more information before escaping from the call.

It's common that some salespeople use the same approach when handling objections too, ultimately leaving them unresolved.

Some people micro-pitch because they've been poorly trained, whereas others do it because they're not comfortable asking questions.

The urge to micro-pitch often comes from your healthy passion for your solution. The excitement to tell your prospect how you can help solve their pains or achieve their goals proves hard to resist.

The last thing I want to do is kill your passion, but I do want to persuade you to use it when the time is right.

Micro-Pitching is a killer. It kills conversations, and it kills presentations.

Your prospects want to feel like they're in a dialogue with a professional consultant who cares about their business and wants to understand and help with their challenges.

When you micro-pitch, it not only becomes incredibly tedious for your prospect to listen to, but you begin to sound like a stereotypical salesperson from the 60s.

Not good.

Instead, I want you to picture being a soldier at war trying to get to the front line with a limited amount of ammunition. The front line is your presentation stage, and the ammunition is the contents of your presentation. If you start firing too early, you're not going to be of much use on the front line if you've used all of your ammunition, right?

The faster you understand that the best method of selling is by not selling, the more successful you'll become in the sales profession.

Ask questions with the purpose of collecting the valuable information you're going to use to deliver your compelling presentation when the time is right.

You'll only be able to break the habit of micro-pitching if you replace it with a new one. I highly recommend pinning a very visual sticky note or poster in your place of work to remind you to shut up and save the pitch for the presentation. It will make you much more efficient on the front line.

How to Deal with 'Not Interested'

The time is going to come when either the gatekeeper or your contact will tell you to stop calling or take them off your list. You could, of course, apply the *Boiler Room* approach and say, '*No problem, I'll take you off of my list of people I made rich today*', but that's not going to achieve anything apart from a few laughs in the office.

A request to stop calling someone is not a real objection as such, but you should handle it in the same way. You should always try to discover what the real reason is for someone telling you they're not interested. This feedback can be critical in helping your company identify the best marketing sources, resulting in better quality leads for you.

You'll hear the line, '*We're not interested*', from both gatekeepers and your contact person. Unless you're 100% confident the gatekeeper is passing the message directly from your contact, challenge it.

The gatekeeper is not hired to make business decisions. Their roles are usually to handle calls, relay messages, welcome visitors, assist callers with questions, and perform other general administrative tasks.

Naturally, stating these facts will not help your cause, but being polite will usually come as a pleasant surprise to most gatekeepers as they often spend their days getting abused by cold-callers.

You should make the gatekeeper think the call is about to end before calmly and innocently asking, '*Before I go, could I please ask why exactly it is that you're not interested?*'

On most occasions, the gatekeeper has used the 'not interested' blow off as a strategy to get rid of you and will not have an answer, which may result in them becoming a little snooty and refusing to give a reply.

This response enrages many salespeople, and they will try to get revenge using all sorts of childish tactics. In my younger days, I once ordered a skip to be delivered to the front parking spot of a company in the name of the gatekeeper. I also had a colleague who once did the same only with a large batch of pizzas.

As amusing as these pranks were, I know today that they were foolish and immature. I learnt my lesson when I made the stupid mistake of calling the gatekeeper the day after the skip stunt to ask if she had received it okay. She tracked back the call, and our managing director was on the sales floor within the hour. He didn't seek out the responsible person as he knew our team spirit was better than to snitch on each other, but he delivered a quote I have remembered every day since:

'It takes years to build a good reputation, but it takes one stupid mistake for someone to destroy it'. - Raj Singh

In today's social world there's no room for such foolish mistakes. Social media platforms can destroy your reputation within an hour.

Getting into a fight with or getting revenge on a gatekeeper is nothing but wasted energy. Like you, the gatekeeper is just doing their job and trying to protect the company's employees from being bombarded with sales calls. Your time will be much better spent trying to find a direct route to your contact.

If your contact person is the one hitting you directly with the 'not interested' response, your strategy for what to do next will depend on the scenario.

If the blow off comes during your first dialogue and before you even get the chance to explain why you're calling, consider throwing them off by using a little reverse psychology. Ask them if you did something wrong. If this fails, try a confident response such as telling them if they give you two minutes, you'll change their mind.

If you know for sure you're speaking with the wrong person, politely thank them for their time, get off the call, and do a little digging for a more senior contact person. Never take 'no' for an answer unless you're dealing with the right person.

You may also reach your preferred contact and receive the 'not interested' response, even after you have explained why you're calling. Take the knock-back calmly and continue to ask your first couple of qualifying questions to try and uncover what they have now. The answers may give you a better sense of why they are rejecting your approach.

If you're getting hit by 'not interested' responses on a frequent basis, it could have something to do with the industry you work in or the quality of your call opening.

Some industries can be tough. I started off my business-to-business sales career trying to sell mobile phone contracts and constant rejection was just a part of my day. It's such a competitive space where companies are always fighting each other for business. It meant I was always just another cold-caller. The second I mentioned anything to do with mobile phones, the answer was no.

The best thing you can do is stay calm and be unlike other cold callers. If you can stand out, you'll get more opportunities to speak to people than your competition, but it takes patience.

There's plenty of other scenarios where you'll get rejected by your prospects, and each one will have its reason. The more aware you become of those reasons, the better you'll become at handling them.

Consider taking some time to write down all of the potential reasons why a prospect would reject you, and then strategize how you could handle each different reason to get the best out of the situation.

Here are some common scenarios why your prospect may have decided they are not interested before even speaking to you.

- They have recently signed with another supplier.
- They have looked at pricing on your website.
- They have heard bad things about your company.
- They have no need for your solution.
- They have used all of their budget.
- They have no authority.

- They have no time.
- They have had a bad morning.

Some of these reasons you can work with, but others you can do nothing about. The worst thing you can do as a sales professional is to chase deadwood.

I've also noticed that time is a brilliant healer in sales. You can call a prospect one day and get an abusive rejection, but if you call back a few weeks later, you can close a deal.

If you learn to have empathy for your prospects situations and do not take their rejections personally, sales will become easier.

Handling Requests for Information

'Could you please put that in writing for me?'

Gatekeepers, information collectors, and even your primary contacts will often request further information to be sent via email. This request is mistakenly seen by many salespeople as a signal of interest or even a major buying signal.

In fact, a request for further information is the most widely used friendly way for a prospect to avoid having to tell you they're not interested.

Some prospects will agree to almost anything to get rid of you. They'll even agree to have a follow-up call or face-to-face meeting, despite having no intention of turning up.

I've met countless amounts of salespeople who were brilliant at sending out high volumes of information emails, booking lots of meetings, and creating impressive pipelines; but I've never once seen this remarkable prospecting turn into equally impressive results.

You must treat every request for information with caution.

The most common response I hear to requests for information is when the salesperson says, *'Sure, what would you like me to send you?'* I've never really understood the objective of this response, and I've also never seen it work.

The most effective way to handle a request for information is to accept it and carry on with the conversation.

‘Of course. I can send you the information via email. What solution is it that you currently have in place for security?’

You should aim to get your most fundamental qualification questions answered every time. At least this tells you if it’s worth spending time sending out further information.

As usual, it’s important you have your ears tuned into your prospects tone, because it’s common to be hit with a request for information when you catch someone at a bad time.

Don’t be afraid to say something such as, *‘Jenny, I sense that I caught you at an inconvenient time. Would you prefer that I give you a call later this afternoon or tomorrow morning?’*

Now, there are, of course, some scenarios where a request for more information is valid. For example, if you sell products or services that are incredibly complex, visual, or technical, then a request for information may make sense. In this case, it may be a good idea to consider sending the information in advance of your call.

On the other hand, if you get a request on the back of a conversation or presentation about your solution, it may be a smokescreen. The best strategy here would be to follow the objection handling process that I give you later in the book.

You’ll never be able to avoid sending emails. My recommendation is to avoid sending a barrage of information that confuses your prospect. If your website, product brochure, or video provides a simple and understandable explanation of your solution, send them a link. Otherwise, send them a simple email template with your opening statement, like so:

Dear (First Name),

Thank for you taking my call today. As mentioned, we’ve been helping (big brand name) improve organic traffic and increase online sales revenues, and I wanted to discover if this was something we could help you with too.

Our website or product brochures are complex, so it’s best we have a brief chat first to see if you even have a need before spending time on it.

Let me know the best time and number to reach you, and I will send across a calendar invite. Thanks again.

The most important rule to remember when sending out information emails is that you will get very few people calling you back. You must always remain in control of the sales process by setting concrete next steps with the prospect and executing on your follow-up calls.

How to Handle Stubborn Prospects

Regardless of how good you get at building rapport, you're always going to come across prospects you just don't hit it off with. You know the type; the ones who answer your open-ended questions with one-word answers or the ones who don't even pretend to find your bad jokes funny. You just know within seconds of the conversation that it's not going to end well.

Most salespeople crumble when they meet such prospects. They keep asking questions, getting the same one-word answers, and exiting the conversation at the first given opportunity.

So how should you deal with these prospects? Are there really humans on our planet that are this rude and miserable?

There could be several reasons why a prospect comes across as stubborn or rude when you call them. Every prospect is a unique individual with their own beliefs, personalities, and experiences.

You could call someone who has a belief that all salespeople are the scum of the earth. You could reach someone who's having a terrible morning, or you could be the sixth sales call they have received today. You simply don't know.

I remember a scenario when I came across one of these stubborn prospects. I was trying my best to keep the conversation going, but in the end, he was so abrupt that I just came straight out and asked if I had said or done something wrong.

It turned out that he had tried contacting us three weeks earlier, but nobody had gotten back to him, so he ended up buying from a competitor. This poor service had annoyed him. He no longer needed our solution, but rather than just telling me, he let the conversation drag on to avoid conflict.

In the end, I apologised for the poor service, and we had a pleasant conversation. It didn't take much effort, and that hopefully changed the prospect's perception of our company.

If you feel like you have come across a stubborn prospect, start by asking if you caught them at a bad time. It not only shows respect but should also break them out of their negative state. If not, I recommend doing as I did and ask if you have said or done something wrong. Directness can often be your quickest route to the truth.

Prospects can also be stubborn if they don't have the budget. They may get nasty and rude because they don't want to admit they can't afford your solution. These prospects will also talk negatively about your solution to avoid telling you the truth.

There is no single magical ingredient to dealing with stubborn prospects, but there are a few tactics you can use to make it easier.

(1) *Change the Day.*

Calling your prospect on another day will provide you with a better indication of whether they always come across as stubborn or if you just caught them on a bad day the first time.

(2) *Change the Gender.*

I've often seen remarkable success with having a team member of the opposite gender to the previous salesperson call the same prospect.

(3) *Change Yourself.*

If you're making assumptions that your prospects are rude just because they sound a little abrupt, then your beliefs and experiences may be limiting your performance.

You must teach yourself to work with facts rather than your gut instinct. In my experience, a stubborn sounding prospect can always be won over if you have good people skills and give them a chance.

The more adaptive you are to your prospects, the more success you'll have as a people person, and you may then be surprised at how many of those stubborn, rude prospects turn out to be really nice people.

How to Build Trust and Rapport

A quote from an old English hymn writer named Isaac Watts says that '*Learning to trust is one of life's most difficult tasks*'. It's quite true, isn't it? The majority of life's most painful stories always seem to involve someone being hurt by someone they trusted.

People get married, and yet so often, people cheat and destroy the ultimate bond of trust a human can make. Business partners grow companies together only for one to get greedy and try to steal from the other and destroy a long-lasting friendship. Even your friends and family can undo a lifetime of trust in a single moment of selfishness or anger.

Trust is fragile. It's very much like your reputation. It takes a lot of time and effort to build, but you can destroy it with one simple act. Therefore, it's so important that you master the skill of building trust with your prospects, but you must be genuine. If you try building trust using tactics alone, your prospects may not see or hear it, but they will feel it.

Remember again that every individual you interact with has limitations when it comes to their beliefs and experiences. Think about how hard it is for a prospect who has had a terrible experience with a salesperson to trust another one.

When it comes to building trust, the most common mistake I see salespeople make is when they spend the first five minutes of a call trying to find some common ground; and then spend the rest of the call talking too much and continuously trying to build that rapport.

It's okay to speak of the weather, the weekend's football, or something else to break the ice at the beginning of a call, but it's nonsense to continue trying to build that rapport throughout the call using the same technique.

Your prospect is not going to buy from you because you support the same football team, and they're also not going to buy from you if you chit-chat too much either.

You build trust and rapport with people by being genuine and by making a conscious effort to understand and care about their needs.

If you're like most salespeople I know, your first error is that you talk too much. I can't begin to tell you how frustrating this is for your prospect to have to endure. It does nothing to build rapport.

When you really focus on asking meaningful questions, shutting your mouth, and listening and demonstrating to your prospect that you care about their needs, the trust happens naturally.

You can enhance this further by maintaining eye-contact when face-to-face, providing verbal 'yeses' or 'okay' signals when over the phone, and by repeating back and sometimes breaking down what your prospect has told you.

Having a genuine respect for your prospects time is another crucial step to gaining their trust as well. At the start of any call or a meeting, thank everyone for attending before communicating how long the meeting will last, making sure everyone is still okay with it. If you show people respect and courtesy, it goes a long way to building trust.

I listened back to some call recordings a few weeks back and heard one salesperson perfectly demonstrate what you should not do, and another do the complete opposite.

In the first recording, the prospect was several minutes late, and the meeting was scheduled to last 30 minutes. The salesperson was smart enough to double check their prospect could still attend for the allocated time. Luckily, the prospect confirmed they had a ten-minute gap before their next meeting.

The salesperson had heard this but had not listened because the call ended 50 minutes later. The prospect was very engaged until she realised the call was easily going to exceed the agreed 30 minutes, after which, her enthusiasm faded fast.

In the second recording from another salesperson, I witnessed almost the same scenario. The call was delayed 12 minutes due to problems getting into the online meeting software, which meant the call should last 48 minutes rather than an hour as the prospect had another meeting scheduled.

The key difference this time was that the salesperson had listened. He not only checked at the beginning of the call if it was best to reschedule, but he even stopped 5 minutes before the time was up to ensure the prospect had a little buffer to make their next meeting. On this occasion, the prospect was so engaged that he

gave permission to continue, and the call lasted 20 minutes longer than originally scheduled.

The most efficient way to build rapport with your prospects, though, is by persona matching. When you speak in the same tone as someone, you instantly begin building rapport.

I would say persona matching is the best secret weapon most salespeople fail to use. You can have all of the best sales techniques in the world, but if you're a fast talker and you're dealing with a slow, analytical thinker, you're instantly going to create a personality mismatch and will unconsciously not get along with each other, without knowing why.

So next time you interact with a prospect, pay attention to and match their tone. Show them respect and focus on being a genuine human being with an interest in helping your prospects, and the trust and rapport will happen naturally.

Fear of Questioning

A common trend among salespeople is the fear of asking the prospect too many questions. Most have had one or two isolated incidents where a prospect has refused to answer any questions, often wanting to know how much something costs first.

I'll be straight with you here – if your prospects don't want to answer your questions, it's very likely they don't have the budget for your solution, or it's because you're dealing with the wrong person.

Naturally, this may not always be the case. Your prospect may stop wanting to answer your questions because your questioning skills need a little work.

If you ask amateur sales questions such as *'What's your budget?'* or *'Who's the decision maker?'* too early in the conversation, you're going to put your prospect into defensive mode because you're being too pushy.

However, the biggest reason why most salespeople don't like asking too many questions is that they don't want to come across as being rude or nosy. This is a psychologically limiting behaviour that will hold you back if not overcome.

Some people are great at asking the soft qualifying questions about the prospects biggest challenges, current solutions, and what they are looking for; but when it comes to getting deeper into the real buyer motives or decision processes, they often get very uncomfortable.

You must overcome this fear if you want to succeed in sales. There are only a small number of prospects who will object to the many questions you ask, most of which, do not qualify anyway.

If a prospect interrupts you to ask if you can just give them a price, be confident and calmly explain that you need to ask them a few questions before discussing pricing to ensure you match them to the correct solution. If they still object, bid them a good day and move on to the next call.

You'll gain much greater value from asking a lot of questions than you will by asking too few in an attempt to avoid annoying people. Remember that questions will help you build trust and rapport, and will help you better prepare for your final presentation.

Naturally, you should adapt this advice to your business, your sales cycles, and the potential scenarios you come across. If you're working with longer sales cycles, you could easily spread your questions over a couple of calls. Alternatively, if you sell low-cost products, your questions will not need to be so deep.

Foolish Assumptions

When you walk into a conversation with a prospect you're sometimes armed with so much information about them, it's a little freaky.

I'll admit to feeling a little like an online stalker at times. We often look for our prospects social media profiles to try and learn as much as possible about them before calling.

You've probably seen the classic quote from Benjamin Franklin floating around the internet that says, '*Failure to prepare is preparing to fail*'.

I agree that preparation is key in sales. However, I have my own saying that '*Too much information is . . . well . . . too much information*', and I also believe that the power is not in the information, it's in how you use that information.

Gathering lots of information about your prospects can not only be time-consuming, but it can also affect your sales calls. What you do not notice is when you start reviewing your prospects online profiles, you start to make all kinds of subconscious judgements about them, which can often lead to you making a lot of foolish assumptions that will harm the qualification process.

I was listening to a young lady making some live cold-calls about six months ago. She had been struggling to convert her high call activity into enough meetings but couldn't figure out why.

She was struggling with gatekeepers a little because of her lack of experience in that area, but the main issue was her opening statement, which went like this:

'The reason for my call is that we offer an eCommerce tool, and I can see the current solution on your website does not work very well, so I was wondering if you would be interested in checking out our solution?'

The two most foolish assumptions you can make when calling a prospect are as follows:

- (1) Assuming the prospect is not aware of the problem.
- (2) Assuming they care about it.

You could be calling someone regarding a problem they have known about for a long time. Maybe they don't have the resources to fix it or maybe they're making so much money that they don't care. You just never know.

There's nothing more irritating than someone coming along and telling you about something you already know. It will do nothing to help you convince your prospect to speak with you about a solution.

I had a scenario the other week where a young salesperson was calling out to local businesses, offering SEO optimised websites. He called a prospect with a similar approach, saying the prospects website was poor in the organic search results and was also slow before asking who had built the site. It turned into a very awkward conversation when the prospect said that his best friend had built it for him just a couple of weeks earlier.

Making assumptions about your prospects is foolish. It limits your vision to a level that makes it almost impossible to qualify your prospects efficiently, and it can kill your cold-calls in a heartbeat.

So rather than making foolish assumptions with the information you collect, use that information in a much smarter way.

If you know a prospect has a website with poor SEO, then ask them questions to discover who did their website, how old it is and how much they know about SEO.

I would always try to structure my questions around the topic I wanted to cover and get to a point in the conversation where the prospect was admitting to me they were unhappy with their current solution, which gave me the perfect opportunity to come up with a one.

When you start asking questions before assuming anything, you'll notice a powerful difference in the way your sales conversations go.

One Question Please

Another questioning mistake to avoid is asking more than one question at a time. I know this may sound like common sense, but you may do it without even knowing.

It often happens when you ask a question you're uncomfortable with or if you don't get a quick response or when you're a little anxious about speaking to a prospect.

I worked with a company a few years back, and we came up with a simple questioning strategy where the sales reps would ask the following three questions as part of the qualification strategy.

- (1) *What are you doing to drive traffic to your website?*
- (2) *How much are you spending on that per month?*
- (3) *What are you doing to convert that traffic into paying customers?*

Because some of the reps were afraid of asking the question about how much the prospect was spending, they would often package that question in together with the first one.

They would ask; *'I was just wondering how are you driving traffic to your website today, and roughly how much are you spending?'*

When you ask more than one question at once, you'll often only get an answer to one of them, meaning you'll potentially have to ask the uncomfortable question again, or you'll bottle it and skip it all together.

You'll also risk confusing your prospect by asking too many questions at once, and on top of that, you could end up skipping too far forward in the conversation and potentially missing opportunities to delve deeper into their answers.

Your questions should always be asked one at a time in a slow and clear tone, and they should have a meaningful direction that is relevant to the topic you want to discuss.

Log Everything

When I was a young, inexperienced, and stubborn salesperson, I used to hate using CRM systems. I hated always updating records and would tell my manager that I was supposed to be a salesperson, not a data administrator.

I used to think that logging activity was just a way for my manager to spy on me, making sure I wasn't slacking off.

Today my opinion on data couldn't be more different. You could say I am a bit of data freak. If you don't keep an accurate database of your activity, leads, prospects, and customers, you're severely handicapping yourself and missing opportunities.

I once started working with a new client, and one of their new salespersons struggled, but my client couldn't figure out why. When I sat down with the new employee, it turned out she used to call leads non-stop in her previous role, but in this new role, it didn't make any sense.

The recommended average number of times to try and reach a new prospect at this company was around 6 to 8, unless it was a big brand name. When I asked this new salesperson how many attempts she made, it was more along the lines of 20 to 30.

Not only was she new to this company, but she was also working on a new vertical, and it was obvious that this vertical was not going to work at this company due to the number of attempts needed to reach a contact.

So, this poor girl was thinking her sales ability was holding her back, her confidence was on the floor, and her job was on the line. But if she had logged all of her calls, or if her manager had better data guidelines in place, all of these issues could have been flagged much earlier, and the entire situation would have ended much differently.

Without logging calls, how would you know how many calls it takes to make a sale or book a meeting? Without logging details about your calls, how would you remember what was said and agreed upon in a particular call when you follow up? Without logging call attempts such as no dialogues, left voicemails, or gatekeeper call screens, how would you know when to stop wasting time on a stale lead?

The answer is simple. You wouldn't.

Poor data management can also make you, your colleagues, and your company look unprofessional. I remember working late on a Friday some years back when I was a sales leader. It was almost 7pm when a phone started ringing behind me. I'm not one who can sit and let it ring out just because it's out of office hours, so I picked up.

It was an angry customer. His paid profile page had started displaying adverts like it does when you're a non-paying customer, and worst of all, the advert related to one of his competitors.

I apologised, calmed him down, and asked for a minute so I could review his account and find out why. I could see his account had expired the previous day but could see absolutely nothing else.

All customers were usually on an auto-renewal, but this particular account had expired despite him wanting to renew. There were no notes or activity logs to give me any idea why, so I tried to reach the account management team, but everyone had left for the weekend. I ended up in the embarrassing situation of having to tell the customer that I had no clue why his account had stopped.

I also did not have the privileges to amend his account as it was not my department, which meant his profile page would be displaying adverts for the rest of the weekend until the offices reopened.

I had emailed and sent a text message to the account owner, and he replied to me the day after to say he had reactivated the license. He also said he had been calling

and emailing the client for weeks due to an expired credit card but had not had any response.

By simply logging those calls or tracking those emails in the CRM, I could have explained the situation to the customer, and he could have updated his payment details right away. His account would also be activated, and it would have avoided both me and the company looking like a bunch of unorganised amateurs.

There's an enormous amount of value in logging data. You should be logging all calls, and emails and meetings as well as adding notes to every single activity you make. It will save you time, provide marketing with lead feedback, and give you an indication of whether things are as they should be. It's crucial.

Regardless of how good you think your memory is, when it comes to qualifying hundreds of prospects, you do not have the ability to remember all of the valuable information you collect during your calls, emails, and meetings.

Without taking notes either during or after your calls or meetings with your prospects, you're completely defeating the purpose of qualifying them in the first place.

You should think of your role in sales like that of a defence lawyer. When you get a new potential client, you do a lot of investigation by asking questions to build a case file. This case file is then what you use to mount your defence.

From the very first moment you start handling leads, it's critical to take notes and start building your case file.

And don't be afraid to let your prospects know that you are or will be taking notes either. It's a fantastic way of building trust because it shows you're paying attention to what they're telling you.

When you take the time to remember the small but important facts your prospects share with you, it can really help you to deliver personalised and on-point presentations and close with empathy.

There's no excuse for not logging your activities. It takes a matter of a few seconds with most of the user-friendly CRM platforms. It may seem like a tedious and time-consuming task, but spending a mere 10 seconds to track or log each activity usually only counts for less than 20 minutes per working day.

You should look at your activity logging as a great investment, 20 minutes per day in exchange for some of the most crucial sales data anyone could ask for. You need to know how many sales you need to make to reach your goals. You need to know when to stop wasting time on dead leads. You need to help marketing figure out what lead sources perform best so they can invest in better leads and help you make more sales. That is why logging everything is crucial.

Open Multiple-Choice Questions

Another unconscious questioning habit to avoid when qualifying your prospect is asking them open multiple-choice questions. This habit occurs when you ask a good solid open question and then convert it into a closed question by adding some options at the end.

You may ask your prospect a good solid open question like *‘How are you currently promoting your business at the moment?’*; but if you suggest a couple of options at the end by saying something like, *‘Are you using things like banner advertising or search engine marketing?’*, then you have essentially converted an open question into a closed one.

In my experience, when one of the options you mention are correct, most prospects will confirm which one(s) and offer no further details.

This scenario results in you having to quickly think of what question to ask next, and potentially also missing out on any additional information the prospect may have given if you had allowed them to answer by themselves.

Many things can drive unconscious habits. The key to overcoming them is to become aware of them, and then create a more powerful alternative habit to replace them. If you ask good open-ended questions, put your hand over your mouth if you need to, or figure another effective way to stop yourself and kick the habit.

I once suggested a salesperson make a small amendment to the list of questions he had written down on his desk. At the end of each one, I suggested he just add the words SHUT UP in capitals.

Just remember whatever solution you use; good habits are created the same way as bad ones; by applying them repeatedly.

Your Questioning Strategy

In my experience, most salespeople don't have any structure, process, or general meaning behind the questions they ask at the beginning of a conversation with a prospect. Most ask cliché rapport-building questions to try and make friends and bond with the prospect because they think that is what is key.

Wrong!

The truth is, your prospects are sick and tired of having the same cliché bonding and rapport sessions with salespeople. It's old school, it's boring, and it's obvious.

When I ask most salespeople if they have a set list of questions they need to ask a prospect, they usually rely on one of following instead.

(A) Their natural rapport building skills.

(B) A checklist of things they need to qualify a lead in or out.

Let's talk about the natural rapport builder first because I do love these people. They often believe they are so gifted at having conversations and getting along with people that they don't need a plan, structure, or list of questions.

Sadly, this delusion leads them to failure.

In my experience, natural rapport builders start every conversation randomly, and if their call starts randomly, they end it randomly, making it difficult to achieve their call objective.

If this sounds like you, pay attention.

People will buy from you because they like you, but that does not mean they will buy just anything from you. If you rely on your natural rapport building skills alone, it will make life very difficult when you need to qualify out the leads who have no needs, no budget, or no general interest at all.

You need to have structure and strategy when it comes to questioning. It starts with knowing your call objective, but it also goes with your key qualifying criteria.

I highly recommend that you spend some time to write down a basic list of essential criteria your prospect needs to meet to qualify for your solution, and then write down a list of questions you need to ask to uncover that information.

Be aware that the first draft of your criteria list may be long and excessive.

What you need to do with your first draft is separate the nice-to-have from the need-to-have criteria. You must then focus on the criteria and questions that identify if a prospect needs what you have, and separate those things from all of the other more operational type questions.

It's important your conversations with your prospects do not sound like interviews. You could ask one hundred questions if you tried, but most of these would be pointless if it turns out the prospect doesn't have a primary need for your solution.

Narrow down your main qualification questions for the original call to just four or five if possible. The answers to those questions should give you the information you need to decide whether or not to continue qualifying the prospect.

For example, if I were to sell SEO services to someone, I would look for prospects with websites that have poor SEO.

I would avoid the mistake of making foolish assumptions that the prospect does not already have a solution or that they value SEO, and instead start by asking questions about what tools or processes they have in place for SEO, how well they rank, and then maybe ask how important getting organic traffic is to them.

Within just a few simple questions, you can quickly uncover if a prospect already has something in place, and most importantly, if they see value in the potential outcome you can offer.

So, focus on the fundamental needs of your prospect first, and ask all of the other questions once you sense the prospect needs what you offer. It will save you endless wasted hours on talking with prospects who don't have a need for your solution.

The Power of Closed Questions

I talk a lot about the importance of using open-ended questions to get detailed responses from your prospects to avoid them killing the conversation with one-word answers.

In fact, most sales trainers and experienced sales pros will teach you that using lots of open-ended questions is the recipe for sales success, but I'd like to go against the grain and teach you about the power of using closed-ended questions too.

I've already mentioned how closed-ended questions can be used to get confirmation on a meeting time or date but closed-ended questions are also perfect for isolating and making a key point at the beginning of a conversation too.

Let's say I'm selling CRM software, and I know my prospect is a large organisation who uses a CRM more suited to small businesses. I know they are going to be struggling or missing out badly in some specific areas, but I can't and don't make any foolish assumptions. I also don't want to risk insulting the prospect and losing the opportunity by making this point myself.

I need to ask a set of questions that will get my prospect to make this point for me, and that's where both my questioning strategy and the usage of open- and closed-ended questions come in.

If I have done a little homework on my prospect, I will already know what CRM they have in place and have a good idea how many users they have, but using this information right away would both be a mistake and a disadvantage to me.

I, therefore, start the conversation by asking what CRM platform the prospect currently uses, and how many users they had on that platform.

This information provides me with an opportunity to make a strong point that using so many users on a small business CRM is surely not optimal, but this approach would likely build up resistance between myself and the prospect.

Instead, I will use a closed-ended question to clarify what has been said by the prospect in a way that will hopefully get my point across. Sometimes just repeating back what was said and adding silence at the end is enough to make my point, but sometimes I will need to adjust my tone.

If I asked the closed-ended question, *‘So just to confirm, you have 150 users working on the Zebrasheet CRM platform?’* and asked it in a shocked tone of voice, this may make my point.

At this stage in the conversation, I’m not looking to have the prospect admit they know they are using the wrong CRM platform, but I do want to make sure they are psychologically telling themselves they know it.

By just repeating back what a prospect said using a closed-ended question, I can turn on a light bulb in their head and have them realise something obvious.

If the prospect did not have a light bulb moment, I would tailor my questions around the weaknesses I know about in their current solution, again avoiding forcibly making my point.

It’s quite common that most small business CRM solutions lack a comprehensive reporting functionality, and even though I know this, I would maybe ask the prospect how they measure their call activity, pipelines or commissions.

In my experience, most companies using inadequate CRM platforms end up pulling data into a spreadsheet from a variety of different sources such as the CRM, phone system, and other software, which usually results in a time-consuming process that still delivers limited data.

This direction might mean I get the opportunity to use a closed-ended question such as, *‘So you have someone spending 30 to 40 hours per month pulling this data into a spreadsheet, and it’s still not entirely accurate?’*

At this point in the conversation, I’ve hopefully made my point by asking the right questions and repeating back information shared using closed-ended questions – without having to push my opinion. This approach makes it much easier for me to come forward with a solution.

Closed-ended questions are just as powerful and useful as open-ended questions, but only when used in the right way and at the right time. My favourite part about them is that they avoid potentially insulting or building up resistance with prospects, and they are ideal for developing trust and rapport as they demonstrate your excellent listening skills to the prospect.

In the great words of the sales legend Tom Hopkins: *‘If you say it, they doubt it, but if they say it, it’s true’.*

If you can put your words into your prospect's mouth, they will sell themselves on your solution.

Effectively using closed-ended questions takes practice. You'll want to avoid sounding stupid by repeating back exactly what your prospect says, so always give yourself a second or two to think about how exactly to repeat back or paraphrase what was said to add as much clarity as possible and make your point.

How to Handle Premature Pricing Questions

Despite how well you prepare your questions for qualifying a new prospect, you're always going to come across that one who asks about pricing early in the conversation.

Too many salespeople fail to prepare for this situation, which often results in the pricing discussion taking place before the prospect has any idea of the value on offer.

It's a tough decision whether or not to discuss pricing early on with a prospect because it depends on the solution you're selling, the length of your sales cycles, and on the type of prospect.

There's been psychological studies that prove it's better to receive good news before bad news, because humans often struggle to get over the bad news if it comes before the good.

Not discussing your pricing until you present the value of your solution is the ideal strategy; but if you refuse to give pricing, you always risk a prospect walking away from a conversation because they assume your prices are expensive.

There are typically two types of prospects who bring up pricing early in a conversation.

- (1) Prospects who have little or no budget
- (2) Decision-makers who don't like to waste time

Of course, you don't want to frighten anyone off by refusing to give them an idea of pricing, but at the same time, you do want to qualify out those prospects who ask because the budget is an issue.

I always recommend using the price range response as a first strategy. When your prospect asks about the price early on, you tell them that your solution ranges between your rock bottom price to your highest price. You then tell them you'll be able to give them a more concrete idea of the exact investment required, but you need to ask a few questions first.

I would say the most important part of this strategy is that you do not get diverted into discussing the pricing in more detail at this point. You must stick to your questioning and qualifying strategy, and discover if the prospect has any needs for what you have. If you let the prospect take you off your strategy, you'll very often never recover and will end up concluding the call without having reached your objective.

How to Crush Your Competitors

Regardless of how often you come up against your competitors, there's one common mistake you must avoid. Do not ever attack, criticise, or say negative things about them. It's unprofessional, and it's a tried, tested, and failed sales strategy. The more attention you give your competitors, the bigger problem they become.

I'm not advising you to pretend your competitors don't exist; I'm just recommending you avoid talking about them when you speak with a prospect.

You're going to come across prospects who are either already using your competitor's solution and others who are considering it at the same time as your own. You'll also come across competitors trying to take your clients.

How you deal with each of these situations is very different. When you're working to pull a prospect away from the competition, you need to be strategic and go in with either something of a unique value or a huge discount.

You will, of course, need to ask the prospect your standard qualifying questions to ensure they have needs, but you'll also need to ask them questions about their current solution.

Too many salespeople still make the mistake of going in aggressively when it comes to pulling a prospect away from a competitor. This aggressive approach is often

due to their passionate belief that they have a better solution for the prospect. Sadly, that passion can quickly turn into frustration when the prospect doesn't instantly believe them.

I would again advise you to show professionalism and patience with your competitor's clients, just as in any other situation. Someone using a competitor's solution is likely to show you more resistance than a regular prospect because they know your end goal.

Here is a list of questions you can use to disarm your competitor's clients and softly qualify them at the same time.

'What solution do you have in place today?'

'How long have you been using it?'

'What do you like most about it?'

'What made you choose that solution in the first place?'

'Have you managed to achieve those objectives so far?'

'Who made the decision to invest in the current solution?'

'If you were the CEO of (Competitor's Name), what would you change about the solution or include in future updates?'

These questions will uncover how happy your prospect is with their current solution and give you a sense of how open they are to discuss an alternative.

It's important not to be too pushy if you can hear the prospect is happy and not interested in a move. It's much more powerful to leave the prospect with a professional impression of you and your company, so you're first in line when your competitor upsets them.

When a competitor is trying to steal your clients, you must first ask yourself whether you have treated this client well or not. Have you offered them excellent service or just taken their money and abandoned them?

Setting up simple reminders to say a quick hello to your clients every couple of months will keep a large proportion of them loyal, and you can even automate the process if you don't have the human resources.

Sadly, most companies or account managers either don't have the knowledge or can't be bothered to set-up courtesy calls or emails, and have to deal with the constant threat of losing clients to their competitors.

The advantage you have against the other sales professionals who are trying to take your clients is that they are probably doing everything I'm advising you not to do.

They'll likely be aggressively pursuing your clients and attacking your weaknesses in a desperate and unprofessional manner.

If you've served your clients well and have a solid solution, your clients will defend you. However, if you've abandoned them and failed to create a lasting relationship, you'll be in trouble.

The dazzle of added features and benefits or the smell of cost savings is always going to catch the attention of a certain number of your clients no matter how you treat them. This is where you'll need to defend yourself.

To handle this scenario, you'll need to put your emotions to one side and ask your client to do the same with the cost savings or the new features and benefits on offer from the competitor.

You must firstly communicate how sad you are to hear the client is considering an alternative solution, but bite your tongue and communicate that you understand it's just business. You must avoid appearing to be defensive and remain calm and professional.

Your next step will be to ask your client for a few minutes of their time so you can run over a brief review of their account. Your goal is to re-qualify their needs to see if anything has changed since they first became a client.

By qualifying your client like a new prospect, you'll not only highlight any new requirements they have, but you'll also remind the client of their reasons for selecting you in the first place.

Your end goal is to have your client re-evaluate if the new features and benefits or cost-savings on offer from your competitor are worthwhile when compared to the potential headache of switching suppliers.

Remember that your job is just to ask the right questions and not to force your opinion. The psychology behind great questions will always outweigh the forceful persuasion of an elevator pitch.

If you come up against your competition when hunting for new clients, your strategy will naturally need to be adapted. I mentioned earlier that the more attention you give your competitors, the bigger problem they become. In my

experience, most salespeople get defensive and start pitching all of the reasons why their solution is better than others when they hear that a competitor is involved.

This approach will get you nowhere. It makes you sound desperate and tells the prospect you're afraid of your competition.

I will again repeat that your strategy should be to remain calm when your prospect mentions the competition. Shock your prospect by doing the opposite to what they expect by praising your competitor, before flowing smoothly into your qualification questions.

The best form of attack is not defence. It's confidence.

You must also be prepared for prospects hijacking you by asking what makes you better than such-and-such a competitor down the road. Be humble and again compliment the competitor mentioned; even go as far as to say they have a similar solution.

You should then consider telling your prospect that rather than boring them with a list of reasons why they should choose you, it would be much more efficient if you asked a few more questions to find out if any of those reasons even matter.

Whether your prospect is asking you about your competitor, your pricing, or even the technical aspects of your solution early in a conversation, you must learn to park these questions to avoid losing control of your call or meeting.

Here are a few one-liners you can use to park questions and shift the focus of your conversations back into the qualification process.

(1) *'I know them well, and they have a very competitive solution too, but I would rather ask a few questions to find out if we can help you before I try to compete for your business.'*

(2) *'I could easily list a number of unique features and benefits that we offer, but I'd rather avoid that until I know if they would be of any value to you first.'*

(3) *'I honestly can't answer that question until I understand your needs first because, in my experience, not all clients are the same.'*

Regardless of how good you get at parking your prospects questions, you'll eventually have to go head-to-head with your competitors, and your best weapon is to master how to plant seeds of doubt around their weaknesses.

If you know your competitor is expensive, it will do you little good to simply point this out to your prospect, and it will potentially make you appear defensive and insecure.

Alternatively, if you asked your prospect in a slightly concerned tone whether or not they have seen the pricing model of your competitor yet, it will bring that weakness to their attention.

It can also be a great advantage to put together a list of your competitor's deficiencies in preparation for this conversation. Rather than telling these weaknesses to your prospect, you can take a more consultative approach and give them a list of recommended questions they should ask your competitor.

In the event your prospect seems keen to go with your competitor, your last-ditch approach may sound something like the following:

'I know them (competitor) well, and they have a great solution too. All I would ask before you decide to go with them is to ask them a few questions about some critical areas of their solution. Do you have a pen handy?'

I recommended you to create a spreadsheet earlier in this book with a list of the features, benefits, and outcomes of your solution; and I would now recommend you add a fourth column to that spreadsheet named Qualifying Question. You then need to think about a question you could ask to qualify whether your prospect has a real need for each particular feature or not.

Let's say you know one of your competitors is weak when it comes to data protection. Before using this as an advantage, you'll first want to discover if it's relevant or not for your prospect, so you could just ask your prospect how important data protection is for them.

If you then receive a positive response that it's important, you should then recommend they ask the competitor in question about how they handle data protection.

This strategy may sound crazy, but the reverse psychology this has on the prospect, and the panicky response they will get when asking your competitor these questions, will put you in the driver's seat for winning the prospect's business.

I would go as far to say that 80% of your prospects won't even bother calling your competitor to ask these questions if you master the art of planting seeds of doubt in their heads about your competitor's offerings.

Just remember, when you stay calm, cool, and professional, you demonstrate an air of confidence to your prospect about you and your solution – and confidence sells.

The Rebound Technique

Another way of parking questions is by using what I like to call the *Rebound Technique* which is a well-known questioning technique that's been around for years.

Also known as the *Porcupine*, *Hot Potato* or *Reverse*, the *Rebound* is a valuable questioning technique you can use as a sidekick to your open-ended questions.

The basic concept is to answer questions with questions.

By using this questioning technique, you can keep rebounding the spotlight off yourself and back over to your prospect. It's also great for buying you some time to think about an answer, for getting clarification on things, and for when you're trying to get a commitment.

A classic sales closing example would be if someone asked you a clear buying signal question such as *'Do you have a blue phone cover in stock?'*, to which you would reply with *'Would you like that to be in a dark or light blue?'*

The idea with the above example is that the prospect has now committed to a specific product and is closed. I often find that salespeople both abuse and misuse this technique, and I would like to help you avoid doing the same.

Using the rebound technique as a closing technique should only be done when the timing is right. It's not going to work very well if you sell expensive solutions and try closing too early.

If you were in the closing stages of the sales process when selling a new car and the prospect asked if the alloy wheels as shown on the display model are included in the price, you could say, *'If I can add the alloy wheels to the deal, are you happy to go ahead today?'*

However, if you used the same technique with someone who had just walked into your showroom for the first time and asked the same question, they would most likely laugh at you.

I've also heard some people make absolute fools of themselves by responding with ridiculously obvious rebound questions too.

I once witnessed a member of my team receive a call from a new prospect who asked if the currency choices on the website were in US dollars or Australian dollars. The salesperson tried to use a rebound question by asking what currency the prospect would like them to be in, which was obviously not a choice.

Thankfully the prospect responded by laughing and saying it would be nice to have that choice and asked again for the answer.

The most powerful time to use the rebound technique is when you need to gain further clarification into why your prospect is asking a specific question.

Many of your prospects will likely be too polite to get straight to the point about certain topics, so they will ask you a question that tiptoes around the issue.

For example, if my wife needs me to pick up the kids on one of her scheduled pickup days because her boss or one of her colleagues ask if she can swap shifts, I will always get a message asking how my schedule looks on that particular day.

What she really wants to ask is if I can pick up the kids on that day, but to get to this point I always need to respond with a rebound question which is typically 'What makes you ask my dear?'

It's not always this easy to spot when a prospect is not asking you what they really want to ask, but I find if you practise using the '*What makes you ask*' rebound question enough, you'll become more comfortable and skilled in using the technique.

You should avoid overusing the rebound technique though. If you do it several times in the same conversation, it will become evident and irritating to your prospect and lose its effectiveness.

I've used the technique so much on my wife that it rarely works anymore, and she has become better at using it than me.

This is probably one of the best and most efficient questioning techniques around. You, too, should consider practising it at home on your family and friends and test how well it works.

How to Spot Buying Signals

Knowing how to spot a buying signal is crucial when you work in sales. Your ability to detect them can be the difference between closing a quick sale or losing the sale altogether.

In my experience, and to be brutally honest, most salespeople have no idea of what a buying signal is.

If you do not know how to spot a buying signal, you'll miss opportunities to close sales. Alternatively, if you misidentify a non-buying signal for a buying signal, you could lose the sale altogether by trying to close the deal too early and frightening off your prospect.

A buying signal is a verbal or non-verbal sign your prospect sends, which indicates they might be ready to buy your solution.

When I ask my students for an example of a buying signal, they almost always come up with the same one. They believe that when a prospect asks about the cost of your solution, it's a strong buying signal. Sadly, this is inaccurate.

There's a thin line between signals that say, '*I'm ready to buy*', and those that say, '*I'm interested*'. When a prospect asks about the cost of your solution, it's usually just a signal of interest.

Think about it. Unless you're a wealthy person, you always need to know the cost of something before you consider buying it.

A real buying signal usually comes in the form of a question from your prospect which positions them as the owner or user of your solution.

For example, if you sell furniture and someone enquires about the delivery times, that is a buying signal. If they were not interested in buying, they would not be asking about delivery.

If you sell mobile phones and someone emails to enquire if you have a specific model in stock, that too is a strong buying signal.

In both of those scenarios, the prospect has already decided in their mind that they are going to buy your solution. You know this because the questions they asked are only relevant if they owned the solution.

Another classic example of a buying signal is when a prospect asks something about the terms and conditions of an agreement. If your prospect asks about terms in a contract, it's time to start closing.

Naturally, you may want to use the rebound technique to ensure they have no objections about the topic in question, but if not, you should waste no time moving forward.

If a prospect calls you back and starts a conversation by saying, '*I just had one last question*', what your prospect is really saying is that they just have one last question before going ahead.

In my experience, prospects who come back to you are usually ready to go ahead, especially if they are using the above line.

When a prospect asks about how long it takes to get started with your solution or what date you can start the work, this too, is a major buying signal. So, questions about delivery, start dates, or completion dates are all buying signals.

Another great one is when prospects ask about additional costs. They may ask about expenses for delivery, or the added costs of renewal, upgrades, or other services. When asking these questions, prospects are picturing themselves as the owner or user of your solution and have therefore already mentally bought what you're selling.

One of the most obvious buying signals is when your prospect asks about payment methods. They may ask if you accept credit cards or if you offer finance options. These questions are the easiest buying signals to spot, and you should never lose a sale after being asked this type of question.

As I already mentioned, asking rebound questions such as '*what makes you ask?*' or '*when would you like delivery?*' or '*which do you prefer?*' will help you quickly

transition from buying signal to closing the sale. Just be careful not to act too soon and ensure you have covered all other steps in the sales process.

Avoid Pass Questions – Drop the Jargon

Another unconscious habit I've become aware of over the years is the increased usage of company jargon and industry buzzwords.

It's easy to take for granted what you know, and it can cost you dearly. If you talk to your prospect like they have the same level of knowledge as you do, you risk making them feel stupid.

You can also make your prospects feel inadequate and uncomfortable when you ask them what I like to call *Pass Questions* too. These questions could include the jargon or buzzwords I'm talking about, but they could also be questions your prospect can't answer for other reasons too.

I find this happens with salespeople who sell technical products such as software, hosting services, or medical equipment.

It's easy to get so engulfed in your work that you begin to assume the world knows what you're talking about when they haven't the foggiest idea.

I remember trying to give my Dad instructions on how to send me the website address a few years back. I asked him to send me the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) so I could take a look. I was rather taken aback when he asked me what a URL was, especially given he had been a computer user for two decades.

Some prospects will feel you have the upper hand if you know they have little or no knowledge of the solution they're interested in, so they will try and sound savvier than they are. These prospects can easily trick you into using jargon, buzzwords, or pass questions.

I used to try and talk about computers like I was an expert when I was a young teenager. My Uncle Brian used to build them, so he taught me a thing or two. I remember going into a computer shop once and asking the shop assistant about a new PC that I saw on offer in the newspaper. I told him my old machine was getting a little slow and noisy and I wanted something more powerful.

I felt in complete control of that conversation until he asked me what kind of processor I had in my current machine. I didn't have a clue, which made me feel stupid and vulnerable. Needless to say, I said I would take a look around and get back to him.

Just because your prospects show an interest in or maybe even already own something doesn't mean they know everything about it. Think of how many people own a car but have absolutely no idea about what engine they have in it.

I speak from lots of experience when I tell you that nine out of ten people will never raise their hands to ask for clarification on something they don't understand. I've seen this in sales dialogues with prospects, and I've tested it with people in a live audience when I'm giving a presentation. It's easy to tell if people need clarification in a face-to-face environment, but it's impossible when you're selling over the phone, so be cautious.

Next time you're qualifying a new prospect, be sure to simplify your questions and avoid using technical terms or industry buzzwords. A prospect will never feel insulted if you ask them how much they know about something before discussing the topic, but they will disengage with you if you make them feel stupid and vulnerable.

Carrying Bad Karma

One of the worst mistakes you can make in sales is to carry bad karma. Working in sales includes a lot of stress and rejection and it's easy to let it get the best of you. It can start off with just one bad call that can quickly turn into a deep, dark, and lonely place.

Carrying bad karma, taking rejection personally, and allowing the pressure of sales to get to you is what can quickly bring you from being at the top of your game one day to being at the bottom the next.

Bad karma is what kills confidence, and confidence is the number one ingredient you need to succeed in sales or any other profession. We've all seen plenty of examples of some of the world's top athletes going from hero to zero in a short space of time.

I see this with salespeople all the time. They can be pumped up and confident one minute and wallowing in self-doubt the next.

You'll have to deal with feelings of insecurity and self-doubt at some point in your career in sales, but what will separate you from the rest is how you fight back from it.

I challenge you always to remind yourself that you never become bad at what you do overnight. Every day you are a day better than yesterday. The only thing that changes is your mindset.

I was so aggressive when I was a young and inexperienced sales rookie. I used to cold-call like an animal. I didn't take rejection personally. I didn't care about it at all. I would just keep ploughing through my calls like a bull. But unsurprisingly, I became tired and eventually started to slow down. It was only then when the constant rejection and my lack of results became clear.

I realised I was carrying bad karma. All of that rejection was unconsciously affecting me. I was not only taking it into all of my calls, but I was also bringing it home with me. My mood was dark. I would go home in a sour mood and snap at the slightest thing. Getting out of bed for work back then was a struggle.

I can't for the life of me remember the person who helped me get out of that mindset – the one person who told me I was carrying bad karma throughout all of my calls. But whoever it was, I'm forever grateful. From that very moment, after hearing those words, my prospecting results and attitude completely changed.

It's easy to carry bad karma through your calls without being aware you're doing so. You have one of two calls that go badly, and before you know it you're accepting that it's just going to be a rotten day. The reality is that if you were aware of bad karma, your bad day would have stopped after your first bad call.

It's all about your mental mindset. If you tell yourself that you're going to have a bad day, you'll have one.

I used to do what a lot of salespeople do today and vocally express my feelings in the office after the call was disconnected. You may think this is a good strategy to help get it out of your system, but it does not help; it elevates your negative mood just in time for your next call and does the same to your colleagues too.

If you have a bad call, take a deep breath, smile, and continue to your next call. If that one goes bad too, grab a coffee or get some fresh air.

Most importantly though, you must put yourself into a peak positive state before your calls. Maybe you like to get pumped up before you start calling or maybe you like to relax. Whatever you prefer, spend just a couple of minutes helping yourself get into that state before you start dialling by listening to music, reading or sitting in silence.

The more consciously aware you become of your mindset, the more control you'll have over it and the less stress you'll create for yourself.

The 1 to 10 Questioning Technique

“On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate this book so far?”

The *1 to 10 Questioning Technique* is a handy option when qualifying your prospects, especially when you need to get them to give you honest answers.

Many salespeople know this technique because it's an easy one to remember, and they've probably heard someone use it in the past. The downside, as with the other techniques, is that many salespeople misuse it.

The most common mistake when using this technique is to use it too many times in the same conversation. I often hear salespeople using it several times with the same prospect, especially when presenting their solutions.

The worst habit you can fall into is asking *‘On a scale of 1 to 10, what do you think so far?’* at multiple times of your presentation. It will quickly become obvious and irritating to your prospect.

You must learn how to use a variety of different questioning techniques to avoid using the same ones all the time. The broader your questioning toolkit, the less likely it will be that your prospect will start picking up on your methods.

Not many of the questioning techniques I teach are new. Most are decades old. What I've discovered though is that many of the techniques become much more powerful when used in the right way at the right time.

The 1 to 10 Questioning Technique is perfect to use either when you need to get your prospect to answer a tough question or when you need to isolate some concrete numbers.

For example, rather than asking your prospect how happy they are with their current supplier, you could ask them how happy they are on a scale of 1 to 10.

Alternatively, if you wanted to get a concrete idea of how much time your prospect spends on a particular task, you could ask them how much time on a scale of 1 to 10 they use on that task. Then convert their answer into a percentage because 20% of someone's time sounds a lot more severe than two out of ten.

Here is an example of how using the 1 to 10 Questioning Technique together with the closed-ended questions I mentioned earlier combine to make a powerful statement without you having to state the point;

You: *'On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being all and 1 being none, how much time are you spending on this task at the moment?'*

Prospect: *'I would say maybe a 3 or 4 out of 10.'*

You (in a shocked tone): *'So you're saying that you spend 30 to 40% of your time on this task alone?'*

It's a notable example of how much more powerful a technique becomes when used at the right time and in combination with another technique.

Once again, I will urge you to put time aside to write down a couple of variations of this technique for your business, and then test them live with your prospects to see which works best.

The No Way Out Technique

Another classic useful questioning technique is what I like to call the *No Way Out* technique. I learnt this one years ago from Tom Hopkins, who calls it the 'Alternate Advance'.

It's perfect for locking prospects into selecting one of two options, and for avoiding classic responses to your questions such as these:

'No.'

'I'll call you back.'

'I'll need to get back to you on that one.'

'I'm not sure yet.'

'We need more time to think it over.'

Now you could try asking more open-ended questions to avoid these responses, but sometimes you need to be more direct to help your prospects make decisions and speed up the sales process.

Let's say I was trying to sell a solution to help get traffic to someone's website. I might typically ask a question like this:

'I can see you're using search engine marketing, so I was wondering if you needed any help getting more traffic to your website?'

This approach may sound okay, but it gives my prospect the option to shoot me down with a 'no thanks, goodbye' response. But with a slight shift in my approach, I could instead say the following:

'I can see you're using search engine marketing and just wanted to ask if getting traffic to your website is your key focus or is converting that traffic into leads more important?'

What I've done here is lock the prospect down to choosing one of two options to avoid the 'no thanks, goodbye' response.

You'll also find that even if none of the two options you present are relevant, your prospect will tell you what is important, simply due to the way you framed the question.

The most classic use of this technique is to lock your prospect into a date for a meeting or follow-up call. I constantly hear salespeople asking suicidal questions such as *'When can I call you back?'* or *'Can I give you a call you back next week?'*

When you want a commitment from your prospect, you must take it with a firm hand. You must avoid asking for permission or giving control of the sales process to your prospect.

Instead, try asking something like; *'Does later this week work for you or is it best we speak again early next week?'*

You must not doubt the outcome you want. You need to assume it's happening and your prospect will follow.

You could also use this when trying to get decision makers involved in the sales process too. Most salespeople are afraid of asking if they can speak to the decision makers and at best, may hesitantly ask if it's possible to speak with them directly.

The direct sales professional will instead ask something like; *'Is it best I speak to your CEO directly or should we all jump on a call together?'*

Now, of course, this doesn't always guarantee you'll get the decision maker on the call, but it's ten times more effective than asking for permission.

Once again this is another technique that can be combined with others to increase its effectiveness. It's also another example of a technique that is more powerful when used at the right time.

A perfect example would be combining it with the rebound technique as part of a test close. For example, if a prospect sent you a buying signal by asking what payment options were available, you could rebound using a No Way Out question and say, *'We can offer either payment upfront via credit card or monthly instalments, which do you prefer?'*

As usual, I recommend you write down and test a couple of examples of this technique with your colleagues and then test it with your prospects, again, remembering not to use it more than once or twice in any single conversation.

Buyer Motives

Before you can become a master of sales, you must understand the real reasons behind why people buy. You must also learn to uncover the emotional *why* behind the reasons.

When I ask my students to define the word motive, they usually correctly describe it as your reason for doing something. What they forget to add though, is that it can also be your reason for not doing something. You're either motivated to do something or you're not.

There are two motives that drive people to make any decision in life: pain and pleasure. You're either driven by moving away from pain, moving towards pleasure, or a mixture of both.

It sounds simple enough, but the challenging part comes when you're working with a balance of both. You could be balancing pain versus pleasure, pain versus pain or pain and pleasure versus pain and so on.

Regardless of how hard or easy a decision may be, there's always a motive behind why you choose to do what you do.

Take, for example, what motivates you to put clothes on before leaving your home every morning. This decision is most likely highly driven by the avoidance of pain, which could come in the form of embarrassment or a chill on your privates. When compared to the warmth and comfort of wearing clothes, the naked option stands little chance of winning.

Just think about any time in the past where you had a decision to make. It could have been moving to another country, stripping down to your shorts or bikini in front of a group of strangers on the first day of vacation, or quitting a job, or something similar.

I always like to use the example of stripping down to your shorts or bikini on the first day of vacation. If you're a pale, white, out-of-shape British person like me, then stripping down in front of a pool or beach full of strangers isn't always a simple decision.

This classic scenario usually puts the painful embarrassment of showing your body against the pleasure of getting a beautiful golden tan. On most occasions, the pleasure wins, but it depends on the scenario.

There are always other factors that can drive a decision one way or another. For example, if someone had a bad experience of being bullied in school when they got dressed, or if they have a large birthmark on their body, this could easily swing a decision so that the pain outweighs the pleasure.

If you think about this from a buyer's perspective, it means every scenario is unique. It also means you need to stop thinking about your prospects like a contact at a company you want to close, and more like a unique individual.

Believe it or not, your prospects don't make buying decisions because of what's in it for their company. They're driven by what's in it for themselves.

The 3 Stages of Motive

It's important to understand that the motives of pain and pleasure can both come in three stages.

- (1) Past
- (2) Present
- (3) Potential

You could be dealing with a prospect who has experienced pain or pleasure either in the past or the present or is thinking about what potential pain or pleasure could occur if they make a decision.

Now each one of these stages could easily outweigh the other, depending on the circumstances. But it's common that pain or pleasure in the present can be the most powerful.

Let's go back to pale British me on the beach for example. I'd say I have an average body, so my level of discomfort when taking off my clothes is on a small scale. The same applies to the pleasure motive because I'm a married guy with two young kids. It's not too often I run around half-naked showing off my tan, so my pain/pleasure motives are evenly balanced.

But when we look at this same scenario using the three stages of motive, the decision may start to get a little easier because I then balance the immediate pain in the present of taking my clothes off now, against the potential pleasure of getting a nice tan in the future.

This decision for me is usually always an evenly balanced one, and because I'm not ashamed of my body or too bothered about the opinion of others, I usually just strip off and jump in.

But the second you added or changed the stage of motive, the decision could be entirely different. If I were a single guy in great shape, my motivation for getting a great tan would be much stronger, and I wouldn't even think about any pain.

On the other hand, if I put on a lot of weight and felt ashamed of my body, I would keep on my clothes because the potential pain of the present would be much stronger than the potential pleasure.

Believe it or not, this is what you are working with every time you deal with a prospect; therefore, it's critical to get down to an emotional level of questioning with each prospect. Everyone has hidden pains and pleasures, and they might be the deciding factor behind whether or not your prospect says 'yes' or 'no' to your proposal.

Questions to Uncover Motive

You need to overcome your fear of getting down to a personal level with your prospects to uncover their motives. This is because they're unlikely just to come out and start telling you about their past or present problems.

Most salespeople use the strategy of asking opening questions like '*What is your current biggest challenge at the moment?*' to uncover some pain. But like many other sales strategies, it's cliché and overused.

Ninety-nine percent of salespeople end up talking to prospects about the exact same challenges, giving you a chance to stand out by talking to them on a deeper level about their personal problems or goals.

To get deeper, you'll need to begin using what I like to call *Impact Questions*. You should integrate these into your overall questioning and qualifying strategy to ensure you not only uncover your prospects needs but discover just how serious those needs are.

This will also help you save wasted time working on prospects who have a need but don't have the motivation to make a decision right now.

There are two types of impact questions.

- (1) General impact questions
- (2) Personal impact questions

Once you've qualified a prospect enough to uncover that they have a basic need for your solution, you should then ask them a general impact question.

General impact questions usually focus on the knock-on effect that something is having or will have on your prospects department, website, or business.

For example, if a prospect is having problems with high shopping cart abandonment rates, you could ask what impact that is having on their business.

You should consider the position of your contact person before deciding what area to focus your impact question on. If you're dealing with the business owner of a small company, talk about the impact on the business.

Alternatively, if you're dealing with a mid-level manager in a large corporation, focus on the impact on the department or team.

Your prospect's answer to your impact question should give you a reliable indication of how much of a need they have. Pay close attention as usual to the tone and choice of words in their response.

If you sense urgency, remember to use closed-ended questions to highlight the pain or pleasure at stake before proceeding onto a personal impact question.

By asking your prospect what impact the particular problem or potential pleasure could have on them personally in their role, you'll potentially take your conversation to an emotional level.

If you're dealing with a prospect who has a real need, maybe you'll discover that they work sixty-hour weeks for a boss who breathes down their neck all day; or maybe they are seeking a promotion and your solution could help them.

I also find that if you're talking about pain, this can be the perfect time to ask what happens if this problem continues. You then need to shut up, let this question sink in, and wait silently for your prospect's response, no matter how long it takes.

If you have a prospect with a deep emotional need, you're no longer talking about offering a solution to make their company's life easier or making their boss richer. You're talking to them on a personal level about improving *their* life.

This is what will make you stand out from other salespeople, and this is what will have your contact person pushing your solution so hard that you'd think they were the one getting a commission from the sale.

There are so many people stuck in jobs that they hate and you'll never motivate them to invest in your solution if you do not tap into their personal motives. I guarantee you that if you start practising and applying these impact questions,

you'll instantly improve as a salesperson, and sales will also become a little more interesting for you too.

How to Uncover Decision Processes, Timelines, and Stakeholders

Forecasting sales results accurately is every sales manager's nightmare. I sat down with one of my clients a short while back who was new to the sales management role in his company. He had asked specifically for help in sales forecasting.

We sat together for three hours and I shared my recipe for sales forecasting success based on my experience as a sales leader which consisted of the following:

- (1) Tracking past historical data.
- (2) Understanding how each team member typically forecasts.
- (3) Looking at how the individual performed in the past month.
- (4) Reviewing the age of the opportunities in the forecast.
- (5) Considering how consistent each team member usually was.

And I topped all this by insisting he bear in mind that most salespeople commonly overestimate, so he should deduct 20% off of his overall forecast once he had done the math (or maybe I should have called it science). By the end of the session, my client appeared to need a stiff drink.

Now, my strategy for accurate forecasting for his team would have been different had he been in a position to change his CRM platform and the processes involved, but most sales managers don't have this luxury.

Forecasting can be one of the most frustrating and stressful parts of working in sales. It's often like science to try and estimate if a deal is coming in at all, let alone when it might come in.

The reason for this is that 99% of salespeople fall short when it comes to uncovering the decision-making processes inside of their prospects companies.

Some salespeople are afraid to ask, some ask in bizarre, uncomfortable ways, and others are too lazy.

Without knowing what the decision process looks like at your prospect's company, it's impossible to estimate when they will close, what hurdles or objections you can expect, or what concrete next steps you should start preparing for and agreeing on with your prospect.

Thankfully, I've formulated a strategy for uncovering this vital information so you can start getting better control of your sales pipelines without even mentioning the word decision.

Firstly, you must stop waiting until the end of the sales process to uncover the decision processes. It's like an unspoken rule that the discussion about decision processes, timing, and stakeholders comes as the last step, which is a big mistake.

When you ask your prospect about the decision-making processes after you have presented your solution and costs, they know what you're doing. This strategy often results in evasive and sometimes misleading answers from your prospect as they would rather avoid dealing with the awkward situation.

It's no wonder most salespeople feel uncomfortable asking questions about the decision. It's a lose-lose situation. You know why you're asking, and your prospect knows too.

Asking at the end of the call or process also ruins a strategy I will give you later in this chapter for setting concrete next steps.

Rather than asking the decision-making questions at the end of the sales process, you need to ask them once you have qualified that your prospect has a real need for your solution.

Depending on the length of your sales cycle, this could come in the middle of your first call or at the beginning of your presentation. The timing immediately disarms them, as it feels like part of the qualification questions you've been asking; thus, increasing the chances of you getting honest answers. It will also help you find other people who should attend your presentation.

For the sake of clarity, here is the order in which the steps of this part of your sales process should look.

- (1) Qualification Questions
- (2) Impact Questions

(3) Decision-Making Questions

(4) Presentation

(5) Objection Handling

(6) Pricing/Negotiation

(7) Closing

Now you need to work on how you word these questions to avoid them sounding obvious or awkward. You can do this by using three straightforward and efficient *Process Questions*.

I often hear salespeople ask questions such as *‘Who else is involved in making the final decision?’* and *‘How long will the decision take?’* to try and uncover the decision-making process.

These questions are not only blatantly obvious but also potentially fail to reveal other vital information about the decision-making process.

The first process question you should ask instead is as follows:

‘What does the internal process look like inside of your company for investing in a solution like this?’

You can word the question in a variety of other ways to match your scenario, as in this example.

‘If you like what I show you today, what does the internal process look like inside of your company for investing in a solution like this?’

This initial process question is designed to be broad, and will hopefully have your prospect give you a detailed response about any usual and unusual steps in their decision process. You may also discover from their response that they are not familiar with the process. This could be a sign that they lack authority, are new to the company, or have never invested in a solution like yours before.

If you’ve come across specific processes within your industry, this would be a good time to mention them. For instance, if the terms and conditions of your agreement always ends up being quizzed and amended by legal teams, double-check to see if you can expect this with your prospect.

As soon as you’ve received and jotted down the details of the response, move on to the next process question.

‘And who else, apart from yourself, is involved in that process?’

No matter how far down the decision-making chain your contact is, it would be stupid at this stage to make them feel worthless. By simply using the words *‘who else, apart from yourself’*, you’ll ensure they still feel like a valuable part of the process.

You have now hopefully got the names of everyone else who needs to be involved in the final decision and what part they will play.

Again, I recommend you bring up any people or departments that are usually involved if your contact person does not mention them, especially if you’re selling high-value solutions to large corporations. Missing a minor detail like the quarterly board meeting that needs to take place before sign-off can result in a radically different timeline.

Once you have uncovered the internal decision process and parties involved, all that is left is to discover the timeline by asking this question.

‘And how long does this process typically take?’

Asking these three simple process questions will ensure you get all the decision-making information needed to help you gain complete control over your sales pipeline and forecast your results with pinpoint accuracy.

Your Closing Statement

Once you have qualified the needs of your prospect, uncovered the decision-making processes, and hopefully found a strong motive, you’ll be in a position to get a commitment on the next step(s).

Whether your aim is to book a second call, schedule a meeting, or close the sale, you must show no hesitation when the time is right.

In my experience, this is the stage of the call where most salespeople fall short. If you fail to prepare what to say at the end of your calls, you may as well not pick up the phone in the first place.

When the time is right, you need to ask for commitment, and this is what I call your closing statement.

Just like your opening statement, a closing statement needs to be short, direct and focused on the benefits and outcomes on offer to your prospect.

For example, if I have a prospect who can save time (the benefit), which they can use to chase their desired promotion (the outcome), and I want them to commit to a final presentation, my closing statement may sound as follows:

‘Mr Prospect, thanks for answering all of my questions today. I know it can feel like an interview sometimes, but it’s important for me to make sure you have a need for what we offer, which seems to be the case.

If I can show you how our solution can help you save up to 40% of your time so you can focus that time working towards that promotion you were talking about, is that something you’d be interested in looking at further?’

As usual, I will then apply sales silence and be quiet until the prospect responds, because he who speaks first, loses.

If you ask for any form of commitment and then interrupt your prospect before they can answer, you’ll potentially miss the opportunity and may never get it again.

If there are two things I can teach you about closing, it’s that silence is golden and that if you don’t ask, you won’t get.

Concrete Next Steps

In my experience, most sales calls end with an agreement between the buyer and seller that one will send the other an email. Either the salesperson will email more information to the prospect, or the prospect will email (or get back in touch with) the salesperson.

The salesperson will usually, then, either spend weeks trying to get back in contact with the prospect or sits patiently, wondering when they will hear from the prospect again.

This is when the sales process dies.

It’s critical in sales to have both call structure and call control. Far too many salespeople worry about appearing pushy when asking for a commitment on the next steps, and it results in the prospect taking complete control over what happens next and when.

If this sounds like you, it's time to take back that control. You need to stop asking weak questions such as *'When is best I call you back?'* and start telling your prospect when you'll be calling them.

You need to boss this part of the call if you want to stay in control of the sales process. You'll only succeed here if you're assertive.

If you've done your job thoroughly enough, then dictating the next steps should be easy. I mentioned previously about an additional advantage of uncovering decision processes earlier in your calls, and this is where it applies.

If you have asked about how the decision-making process works, your prospect should have already told you most of the next steps, so all you need to do now is repeat those next steps back to your prospect and add the rest. An example might sound like this:

'I guess the next steps then are that I will send you an official proposal later today with a breakdown of the investment. You'll then present that to your manager for approval in your weekly meeting on Monday next week, and providing you get the green light, the proposal needs to go via your legal team which you said typically takes around three days. Does that sound about right?'

Assuming I get confirmation on this, I will then tell the prospect I will call them on Tuesday of the following week to hopefully discuss start dates and onboarding.

By asking the decision process questions earlier, you get valuable information from your prospect, which you use to your advantage to confirm concrete next steps, ensuring you keep complete control of the sales process without having to be too bossy.

Purposeful Mistakes

Another great technique to use in the latter stages of the sales process is to make a purposeful mistake.

I discovered this technique by occasionally making accidental mistakes when confirming details back to my prospects. I noticed that sometimes the prospect would correct me quickly, whereas other times they would just go along with the incorrect information.

The *Purposeful-Mistake* technique can be a terrific way to either test close if your prospect is ready to proceed with the sale or check if they are misleading you. The idea is to make an error about part of the details your prospect has provided when you repeat it back to them to see if they correct you.

For example, if you sense your prospect is trying to postpone making a decision, you could repeat back everything they have told you about what happens next and make one or two mistakes. If they correct you, it's a good sign they're telling the truth. If they do not, you should ask them to confirm again what value they see in your solution or ask them what potential hurdles might stand in the way of them investing in such a solution.

A good example of using this technique as a test close is by confirming back dates or numbers incorrectly. If a prospect tells you they need a solution in place by the 1st September, confirm this back to them later in the conversation as the 1st October. If they say they need twenty users or licenses, confirm it back as thirty.

The ideal outcome of making these purposeful mistakes is that you take the prospect from a mindset of considering your solution; to wanting it. If you can take a prospect from requesting a quote for twenty licenses to correcting you by saying *they want* twenty licenses, it has a powerful psychological effect.

Another excellent example is to make a purposeful mistake in your official proposal for a client. I again discovered this one by making an accidental mistake once and having to call the prospect back to apologise.

Making an error in a proposal gives you a great reason to call your prospect back before the agreed date, and again has a powerful psychological effect that often creates more urgency in getting the contract signed. An example error could be something like an added feature or number of licenses included or even the price.

There are some rules you should apply when doing this to protect yourself and avoid being unfair to your prospects.

- (1) Ensure you can honour the mistake you make.
- (2) Ensure your proposal is valid for a limited period of time.

Personally, I only ever used this technique on prospects who were quite obviously not being honest and upfront with me or ones that were playing me off against the competition.

By calling and apologising for the mistake, you'll often come across prospects who will point out that your proposal is legally binding. This is where you confirm they're correct, and remind them that the proposal is only valid for a specific number of days. If this does not create urgency, nothing will.

Following Up

Following up is another one of those topics where no magic answer works for everyone. To make it even more complicated, knowing when to follow up with a prospect isn't even something you can work out based on mathematics either.

You should decide on when to follow up with your prospects based on the answers to the following three questions.

- (A) How far into the sales cycle are you?
- (B) How qualified is the prospect?
- (C) Are there any competitors involved?

For example, if you work with an average sales cycle of thirty days and you have an opportunity that has been open for twenty days, you should look at how far in the sales process you have come. If you have only had one call with the prospect and have not yet reached the presentation stage or sent out a proposal, it's probably a good sign that you need to follow up today.

I always recommend looking at the age of your sales opportunities when reviewing your sales pipelines. I used to teach my team members to ask themselves if there was a good reason for why certain opportunities had exceeded the average time it usually took to progress a sale. I taught them that if they could not come up with good reason, to get on the phone to the prospect and ask them.

You'll also find that you'll need to shorten the frequency of your follow-ups when your competition is involved because you can be damn sure your competitor will be doing the same.

You'll find that prospects who are speaking to multiple vendors make decisions faster for two reasons.

(1) If your prospect has taken time to find your competitors, they have taken time to research your solutions too. A well-educated prospect will often always make a faster decision.

You can try to get confirmation of this fact by asking your prospect about how long they have been looking for a solution.

(2) If two or more salespeople are chasing the same opportunity, you can be sure your prospect will want to get the sales process over and done with as soon as possible.

Shopping around for the best price or product can be a draining and time-consuming process, and the more salespeople involved, the more follow up calls the prospect is going to be receiving.

There's a delicate balance between being the pushy salesperson who loses the opportunity by calling too often and being the one who loses by being too nice.

The better you qualify your prospect and the more consistent you become in uncovering the decision-making processes, the easier it will be to decide when to follow up.

The Buying Zone

Timing is everything in sales. You can call a prospect one week, and they will put the phone down on you, and you can call them the next, and you'll close a sale.

One of the reasons for this is that situations change. Maybe your prospect did not need your solution last week, but this week they read an article or saw an event that convinced them they did.

If you've worked in sales for any length of time, I'm sure you or someone in your team have made a sale to a prospect that one of your colleagues had been calling for months without success. More often, this comes down to the timing rather than the ability of the salesperson.

You'll also come across prospects who sound red hot when you first speak to them and cold as ice or impossible to reach the next.

The *Buying Zone* is a term I use to describe a period in which your prospects are in a psychological state of mind where they're ready to invest in your solution. But this zone does not last forever. It can last for days, hours, or even just a matter of minutes.

If you sell low-priced solutions, it's likely that your prospect can make a decision the same day; but if you fail to capitalise on this and take too long to follow-up, they will either buy from your competitor or decide not to buy at all.

To give you an example, I walked into a sport store a couple of months back to buy a new pair of football boots. I knew what make, model, and size I wanted because I had seen them on the internet, but I wanted to ensure the fit was comfortable.

The service I received was so slow that I walked out without the boots and ended up buying a different pair from another store a few weeks later. I can also remember times in the past where I ended up not buying anything at all due to the salesperson being poor at their job.

I've sold multiple solutions to thousands of companies around the world and can tell you from experience that if you give your prospects too much breathing room, they will always convince themselves why they should not invest in your solution.

When you reach the point in the sales process where your prospect is in the buying zone, you must complete the transaction before that time zone expires.

You can discover if your prospect is in the buying zone by asking how they heard about you, listening out for early buying signals and asking how long they have been looking for a solution. Prospects in the buying zone will often try and rush you through the sales process, send lots of buying signals, and will often come from specific sources such as customer referrals or paid marketing.

I will again stress to you the importance of never letting a prospect rush you through the sales process, but I will also warn you that prospects in the buying zone are like an endangered species – when they're gone, they're gone.

Contact Roles

One of the most expensive mistakes you can make in sales is not to involve the key decision makers until the end of the sales process. If you take a contact with little

influence in the final decision all the way through the sales process, you end up relying on them to sell your solution for you internally.

To avoid this mistake, you must do three things.

- (1) Always collect or ask for the job title of your contact.
- (2) Always ask your contact who else is involved in the decision.
- (3) Get those other people involved in the sales process before delivering your final presentation.

There are typically five common roles that your contact will play. However, this will depend on the size and complexity of the companies where they work.

(1) *The Information Collector*

The information collector typically plays a minimal role in the final decision. They are often assistants, juniors, or inexperienced employees who have been given a task by an influencer or decision maker to collect information about a particular solution and compile a list of suppliers along with their features and pricing.

The information collector can and will cost you a lot of lost sales if you fail to identify them early in the sales process. It's at this stage you should use them to collect intel on the company, project, and most importantly, on the other people involved in the final decision.

You must also handle them with care in order not to make them feel like you're pushing them out of the way, because although they may not control the decision much, they can influence what suppliers end up on the final list for consideration.

An information collector is usually easy to spot. They will often have all of their questions ready to ask, and will typically not be able to answer the more detailed qualifying questions.

By asking why they're looking for such a solution or digging into the impact questions, you'll expose their lack of understanding and knowledge of the project.

Using LinkedIn(TM) to check out their profile, job description, and length of time at the company is also an effective way of evaluating how much influence they may have in the decision.

(2) *The Internal Influencer*

Also known as the 'Inside or Internal Champion', the internal influencer is the most common contact you'll deal with, especially if you work in business-to-business sales.

The internal influencer does not always play a big part in the final decision, but they can play a vital role in helping you win the sale.

An internal influencer is often a trusted employee such as a manager or department head, but they can also be employees who are not in a management role, such as a person with knowledge of working with a solution like the one you offer.

The internal influencer will more often than not be able to answer most, if not all of your qualifying questions. They will have a more detailed insight into the project and the company's goals, giving you the advantage of qualifying the opportunity thoroughly.

Just as with the information collector, you must be careful not to make the internal influencer feel offended when you try to bring the decision makers into the sales process. Unlike the information collector, the influencer can influence the final decision a lot, even if they don't have the last word.

(3) The External Influencer

An external influencer is someone who represents your prospect but is not an employee of their company. The most common examples you'll come across will be agencies and consultants.

A large company may outsource purchases to an external influencer to save time and cut costs, whereas a small- to medium-sized business may do it due to a lack of resources.

The number of businesses outsourcing work to external influencers has been on the rise for many years, so it's important you learn how to work with this kind of contact and use them to your advantage.

If you come across a prospect who works through an agency or a consultant, it's essential that you gain an understanding of the role they play. It's also important to build a healthy relationship with them as they can often also introduce you to other prospects.

Just like the internal employee, the external influencer is often a trusted advisor. They might be paid to test products or conduct market research on suppliers of services. They could be a long-term supplier or could be hired because of their expertise in a specific field. Either way, if they're paid to do a job, they must be trusted and respected by the company hiring them.

It would be wrong to assume that every agency or consultant is an influencer because some are nothing more than information collectors. You'll find that agencies or consultants who are paid to conduct research will be more than happy to pass on the details of the decision makers once they have done their work, whereas others may rely on a commission once the purchase is complete.

External influencers can either feel like a brilliant help or a complete roadblock. There have been times where I've made the right choice in cutting out the middleman and others where it was a big mistake.

The recommendation from my experience is to get to know exactly how the external influencer works. You need to know if the client pays them a monthly retainer or if they get paid on a project by project basis. I also found that if you have or can create a reseller or partnership program that incentivises the external influencer when the prospect chooses your solution, it can help quite a lot.

(4) Part of the Decision-Making Team

The contacts who are part of the decision-making team are those who can play a significant role in the decision but can't give the final yes.

In an ideal situation, you'll get to present your solution to everyone involved in the decision-making process, but this is rarely the case. Some decision makers are control freaks who often become bottlenecks, whereas others trust their people more and do nothing but sign-off on purchases over a certain limit.

You should always treat every member of the decision-making team the same as you would treat the final decision maker because they can often sign the paperwork without further approval.

(5) The Final Decision Maker

The final decision maker could be a company CEO, Managing Director, Financial Director, or it could even be a board of directors who meet once a quarter to make a batch of decisions.

As I mentioned already, the final decision maker may not know anything about the solution and may not look at anything other than the investment needed. You'll find decision makers inside of larger organisations have less interest in the detail than those within smaller businesses.

This is why it's important to uncover the decision processes and stakeholders as early as possible in your conversations. If you discover that the final decision maker will review the purchase at some level of detail, then you need to make sure they attend the final presentation to influence them as much as possible.

The better you become at asking about and uncovering the roles of your contact, the more transparent the sales process will become to you and the more you will learn about how organisations work.

A.T.D.

When I used to work as a sales leader, my team members would know what to do when I would respond to their questions or complaints by yelling the letters A.T.D. back at them.

They knew that somewhere they had missed an important piece of information that gave the answer or response to their question because they knew that A.T.D. stood for Attention to Detail.

Sales is a high-pressure and fast-paced profession. You're often running from meeting to meeting, responding to emails on the fly, and trying to rush through your call list to keep up with your workload and achieve your target. But when you rush, you make mistakes and can miss the important detail that can cost a sale.

Here are a few real examples of scenarios where I or my team members failed to pay attention to detail resulting in varying consequences, ranging from wasted time to lost sales.

(1) I used to come into the office at 4am in the morning to call Australia from Europe. One week I found it impossible to reach people, only to find out the time zones had changed in Australia the previous week, meaning everyone had already left for the day.

(2) One of my sales team members was frustrated at the end of the month because she could not get hold of their team's best opportunity. I reviewed the notes on the account and could see the contact person was on vacation for three weeks.

(3) I once lost a sales opportunity because the prospect surprised me at the last minute by going with the competitor. I later noticed I had made a note after my first call that the prospect had told me they had been speaking with multiple suppliers. I had forgotten.

(4) I once had a team member needing to close just one final sale to hit her personal target and take us to the team goal. She had been trying to call and email the prospect all day without success and left the office feeling defeated.

When I took five minutes to review the contact information I realised the contact had a mobile number in his email signature. I called him, explained the situation, and we had the signed contract within the hour.

These are just a few of the many simple mistakes you can make when you don't pay attention to detail. So next time you feel rushed or stressed, and you're struggling with a certain situation, just whisper the letters A.T.D. to yourself and think about what piece of information you could have missed that might have caused the problem.

Objection Handling

Throughout the sales process, you'll have to handle a variety of objections from your prospects. They will tell you they're not interested, they're happy with what they have, your pricing is too high, your solution does not meet their standards, and so on.

I find that most salespeople are poorly prepared for handling objections. They react defensively, drop their price, and go on an offensive pitch of features before they understand the objection.

The most important thing to understand is that an objection is not a rejection. When a prospect objects it's usually nothing more than a request for further information or clarification on something, but it can also just be because your timing is off.

I love handling objections, and with the right understanding and strategy, you can too. But to do so, you must first have the following three components in your sales toolbox.

(1) *Product and Industry Knowledge.*

You need to be sharp when it comes to your product knowledge because although you don't use features to sell, you still need to know what features can help a client solve a problem or reach a goal. And when it comes to industry knowledge, you, of course, need to know the key strengths and weaknesses of your competitors and understand how the industry works, so you come across as a knowledgeable expert.

(2) *Good Questioning Techniques.*

You need good questioning techniques because questions buy you time and help you get to the root of what your prospects are telling you and can also help you go directly from handling the objection to closing the sale.

(3) *Confidence.*

You must feel confident in yourself to handle objections effectively. A solid knowledge of your solution and industry combined with your good questioning ability will go a long way to giving you the confidence needed. But experience is also vital.

Luckily, you don't need to be a 15-year veteran in sales or objection handling to be confident at something, but you do need to have done it over and over and over again. Practice makes perfect.

Many salespeople mentally give up when they hear their first objection, but as soon as you realise that objections are a sign that your prospect is interested in your solution, the better you'll become at handling them.

An objection can be a sign of your prospects rationalising their decisions with logical thinking, which means you're entering the final stages of the sales process, so it's important to stay calm, slow down if needed, and smoothly guide your prospect to sign on the dotted line.

The Three Types of Objections

I have discovered over time that objections come in three forms as follows:

- (1) Smokescreens
- (2) Real objections
- (3) Brick walls

The smokescreen is by far the most common objection you'll come across. It's a false objection used to disguise the real one.

An example of a smokescreen is when a prospect says your solution costs too much or when they tell you they're not interested.

The best way to quickly judge if you're dealing with a smokescreen is to ask yourself if there is a reason behind the objection. For example, the reason behind a prospect saying your solution costs too much could be that they don't have the budget; it could also be that they don't see the value.

The same goes for when a prospect tells you they're not interested. There could be a huge number of reasons behind this objection ranging from them having a bad day to having recently purchased another solution. You just don't know.

When you fail to spot a smokescreen, you end up wasting a lot of time and energy trying to overcome the wrong objection without coming any closer to making the sale.

Another classic example of a potential smokescreen is when a seemingly hot prospect starts nit-picking at the small details of your solution, such as the features and functionality. You may find that despite your suggested workarounds, the prospect just claims it's not sufficient and walks away from the deal. In reality, there was probably another reason for why they did not go ahead with your solution.

The most significant objections you must overcome are the real ones. Thankfully there are a small number of real objections compared to smokescreens, so unless you offer a weak solution, you should be able to master overcoming all of them in a short space of time.

When handling objections, it's important to pay particular attention to your prospect's tone. If they move fast and aggressive, you do the same. If they move

slow and cautious, you move slow and cautious, remembering to speed up again when you've overcome the objection.

Objections can relate to time, cost, service, features, and many other areas of your solution, which is why you need to master how to handle them accordingly, and why your product and market knowledge needs to be sharp.

You'll also come across objections you cannot overcome. These are what I refer to as *Brick Walls*. An example of a brick-wall objection would be if you worked in real estate and had a prospect who wanted to buy a house, but had no money and could not get credit from the bank. There would be very little you could do about this situation, and the likely outcome would be that the sale wouldn't happen.

The best salespeople will always try to find workarounds to make a deal happen. However, it's important not to frustrate yourself with brick-wall objections by trying too hard. You can try to find your way over, under, or around a brick-wall objection, but do not waste your time and energy trying to break through it, unless it's worth a substantial amount.

If you come across a brick-wall objection at the end of the sales process, it's very likely you failed to qualify your prospect efficiently, so rather than getting frustrated with your prospect, learn from your lesson and move on.

I witnessed a classic example of this a few months back when role-playing with a team of experienced salespeople for one of my clients. I knew the client offered a software solution that didn't work on Mac computers without having to install a Windows operating system. For some companies, this workaround is no problem, but for most, it's a complete brick wall.

Not one of the salespeople asked me about what computers my company worked with as part of their qualifying questions, and as a result, I hit them with the objection after 15 to 20 wasted minutes of the call, and there wasn't any reason to continue.

I strongly recommend you write down as many of the common brick walls you know about that can kill a potential sale, and ensure you're raising these potential objections as part of your early qualifying questions with new prospects. It can save you a lot of wasted time and frustration.

The 6 Step Objection Handling Strategy

When prospects raise objections, it either means they're interested in buying, or they're not interested in buying. Your job is to figure out which one quickly.

Most salespeople have no strategy for handling objections. They panic, drop their price, get defensive, spit features, and lose the sale.

I handled thousands of objections during my sales career and developed a natural instinct for separating the real ones from the smokescreens. This is mainly due to the masterful strategy I picked up very early in my career from the book, *How to Master the Art of Selling* by Tom Hopkins.

There are six fundamental steps to this objection-handling strategy, and if you master them, you'll have the answer for every single objection your prospects throw at you, whether it relates to budget, features, or competitors.

(1) The first step is to listen to and digest the objection. A reactive response will get you in trouble. You must pay attention to the speed, tone, and words coming from the mouth of your prospect; and then be comfortable taking a moment to digest what was said and plan your response.

If a prospect tells you they're interested in your solution but comments that it's rather expensive, your natural reaction may be to assume that price is then an issue. You may be tempted to ask your prospect for their budget or start *Discount-Hinting* at this point, but this approach will put your prospect in complete control.

If you listen carefully and digest what was said, you'll be surprised at how quickly you can pick up on certain signals telling you that price isn't the issue.

(2) Next, you must use the closed-ended questioning technique and repeat back or paraphrase what your prospect said. The purpose is to demonstrate excellent listening skills and give your prospect a chance to elaborate on the objection. You'll again need to apply a few moments of silence after repeating back the objection, especially if it doesn't make much sense.

You'll also have to handle long-winded objections from some prospects. I highly recommend using the option to paraphrase rather than repeating in these cases. A prospect may tell you they've reviewed the contract terms, sat down with

colleagues to discuss, and can't justify the investment in your solution at this moment in time. When you master how to listen, digest, and paraphrase, your response may be to say something like, 'So you're saying you can't justify the investment due to the contract terms?'.

What you've done here is taken a step towards isolating the exact objection. It's highly unlikely a prospect would spend time reviewing contract terms before they decide if they can justify the investment, so if you get a 'yes' response to your closed-ended question, you can then move on to step three.

(3) Once you've isolated the concern, you need to dig deeper by asking open-ended questions. For example, my natural response to the objection used above would be to ask, *'What part of the contract terms are you concerned about?'*

If the prospect responded saying they are concerned with the upfront payment, you could then respond by asking, *'Would it help if I split the initial investment into two payments?'*

You must never try to handle an objection before you know the exact details. You may need to go back and forth with open- and closed-ended questions before you move on to avoid wasting time trying to overcome smokescreens or brick walls.

(4) Once you have a positive response to your open-ended question(s) and know you're handling a valid objection, you must now provide an answer to the objection.

Your answer may be to explain that you'll need to get approval from your finance department on the new payment terms, or if the objection relates to another concern you may need to explain how something works or how you handle a particular scenario.

The two most common mistakes salespeople make at this point is providing detailed and boring answers and assuming they've overcome the objection if the prospect seems happy.

(5) You must confirm your prospect is happy with your answer by using the *Heat Check* technique. A heat check is a simple open-ended question which gets your prospect to confirm they accept your answer.

You should avoid using heat checks such as *‘Does that sound okay?’* because ‘okay’ may not be enough to overcome the objection. You must get solid confirmation that your answer is accepted.

I recommend using heat checks such as these.

‘Will that work for you?’

‘Does that erase your concern?’

‘Is that a workable solution?’

Depending on the nature of the objection, you may be able to use a test close and get the prospect to accept your answer and give you a commitment at the same time.

For example, when your prospect says upfront payment is an issue and you confirm you can check with finance to get instalments approved, this gives you the perfect opportunity to ask this question.

‘If I can get these new payment terms accepted, are you happy to go ahead?’

Alternatively, you could be a little less direct and ask your question this way.

‘Apart from the payment terms, was there anything else you had any concerns about?’

(6) Once you have a positive response from your heat check, you must move on and talk about the next steps swiftly.

You may find that using deflection tactics make the transition away from talking about an objection easier. Changing the topic by asking your prospect if they’ve looked over or thought about something else such as their preferred start date, tariff, or payment method is usually an efficient strategy.

Dancing around the objection to try and reassure your prospect of your answer can also have the reverse effect. You risk raising suspicion that you’re hiding something, so provide your answer, get acceptance, and move on.

With these six simple steps, you can isolate and handle pretty much any objection your prospect comes up with and take them quickly into the closing stages of the sales process, but you must be aware of the serial objector.

Regardless of how effective you become at handling objections, you’ll always meet prospects who have a new objection for everyone you overcome. It can be easy to

get frustrated when dealing with these serial objectors, especially if you feel like you're close to concluding the sale – but beware.

Serial objectors will always find a new objection no matter how well you handle their last one, and this is because they may have no intention of buying.

By mastering objection handling skills, you'll find it easier to filter out these time wasters, but until you do, be on high alert for prospects who raise more than two objections at once. If your gut tells you that you're dealing with a serial objector, don't be afraid to take the direct approach and say,

'I sense you're not entirely happy with our solution at the moment, and if that is the case then please just let me know, and we can maybe discuss it again at another time in the future'.

In my experience, this approach will provoke a defensive reaction from prospects with no intention of buying your solution and will extract the real objection from real prospects.

In the following pages, I'll provide you with some word-for-word responses to some of the most common objections you'll face, but you'll need to do more than simply read this book to become great at handling objections.

I highly recommend you practise objection handling in real time as much as possible either via role plays or live calls. Theory will not condition your instinct to respond to live objections, but action will.

How to Handle Price Objections

It pays to prepare well for objections around the price of your solution. These objections can come in a variety of forms at any time in the conversation with your prospect. If you handle them well, you may win the sale. If you handle them poorly, you lose money either by losing the sale or by winning it at a heavily discounted rate.

The following suggestions will give you a solid foundation of how to cope with each one.

'It's too expensive.'

It's pointless expressing your personal opinion about why your solution isn't expensive. Your prospect doesn't care about your opinion. Repeat back and paraphrase the objection by saying;

'So, you think the solution costs too much?'

When your prospect confirms, you may be tempted to ask something like 'Compared to what?', but you must remember to isolate the objection before handling it.

Instead, you should ask;

'When you say that you think it costs too much, is this because you don't have the budget, or because you don't see the value in our solution?'

If you've done a poor sales job, the prospect may confirm they don't see the value. Otherwise, they will confirm they do not have the budget.

If budget is the issue, you should move right into answering the objection by offering a solution such as extended payment terms or a delayed start date before confirming the terms on offer, then checking if they are acceptable and talking about next steps.

The payment terms solution, of course, only works when you have payment terms as an option. If not, you'll most likely have some different options available. Knowing what options to play and when to use them is key to your objection handling success.

'We don't have the budget.'

Your prospect may come right out and say they don't have the budget from the start. I find this to be one of the most common objections salespeople struggle to handle, but it typically means your prospect either doesn't have the budget at all or doesn't have the budget right now, so you should ask the following question.

'When you say you don't have the budget, do you mean that you do not have the budget at all or right now?'

In the event your prospect says they don't have the budget at all, you could be dealing with a brick wall, or you may just need to work more on selling the value of your solution. Many prospects will say they do not have the budget if they're

uncomfortable with the size of the investment, especially if your solution is new to them.

The most common response will be that your prospect confirms they don't have the budget right now. This objection is often very valid, so it's important not to press your prospect to the point of no return as you may be only dealing with a temporary brick wall.

Before you begin brainstorming ways to get around this objection, ask your prospect more about how and when their budgets get allocated. You may discover potential solutions such as split payments or ways to dip into the budget of another department.

Listing your options such as instalments, lower deposits, or delayed first payments is a good way to prepare yourself for handling objections about pricing. It will also steer you clear from offering discounts too early, which may be your prospect's objective.

'We're happy with what we've got.'

It's common for a prospect to tell you they're happy with what they've got. They could be referring to existing software, an agency, or a certain process they already have in place.

This objection is commonly used very early in the dialogue to try and get rid of you. It's essential that you do not go into objection handling mode so early in the conversation. Instead, work on parking the objection and respond positively, saying something like, *'That's great to hear. What solution do you have in place at the moment?'*, and continue with your planned qualification questions.

You may not always get away with parking the objection, so here is a word-for-word strategy I used a while back when someone said they were happy with their current provider.

Prospect: *'Thank you for the call, but we are happy with our current provider.'*

Me: *'So your current provider meets all of your present needs then?'*

Prospect: *'Yes, thank you.'*

Me: *‘Can I just quickly ask, what do you like best about them?’*

Prospect (after a long silence): *‘We have a long-standing relationship with them, so they know our business very well’.*

Me: *‘So it sounds like knowing your business is a crucial advantage for any provider then?’*

Prospect: *‘Yes, absolutely.’*

At this point in the conversation, it was clear the prospect was happy with their current provider, but this didn’t mean they weren’t open to better options; so, I decided I had nothing to lose and said:

‘If I told you I’d spent the past ten years working with clients from your industry, and combined that with my unique benefit in this situation of being able to bring a fresh approach, would that sway you to take a little more time to consider what I can offer?’.

The prospect turned out to be too comfortable to pull away from the competitor in the end, but I did manage to overcome their objection and persuade her to give me the opportunity to present my solution which was my initial objective.

My approach may seem a little direct, but with tough objections like this one, you’ll sometimes need to really sell yourself and express an extreme level of confidence to get a chance. So long as you remain humble at the same time, you’ve nothing to lose and everything to gain.

When and How to Discuss Pricing

When and how to approach the topic of pricing with your prospect varies depending upon the length of your sales cycles. If you work with cycles of less than 30 days, it’s likely you’ll discuss pricing in detail in your first or second dialogue. If you work with cycles longer than 30 days, you should avoid discussing pricing in detail until the second or third conversation.

Regardless of when you plan to discuss pricing, your prospect will almost always ask about it before you’re ready. When this happens, you must remember to use the price-range strategy I mentioned earlier in this book to avoid discussing in further detail.

Above all, there are three things you must do before discussing pricing in any detail with your prospect.

- (1) Know exactly what your prospect needs (qualify them).
- (2) Present your value presentation (communicate outcomes).
- (3) Convince yourself your solution can offer substantial value.

If you fail to qualify your prospect thoroughly before discussing pricing, you leave yourself open to objections. Depending on how complex your solution is, you may also risk overloading your prospect with so many choices they can't make a decision.

There are studies which prove that if you present someone with too many options, they're likely to either select the choice which is most comfortable or avoid making a decision at all.

Think about that. If you're trying to pull your prospect away from a competitor, towards a new way of working or maybe even towards your highest priced solution, what's the most comfortable decision they could make in those situations? It's definitely not switching suppliers, trying something new, or selecting the most expensive option – so be careful.

If you sell a solution with too many options to choose from, you must add more qualifying questions to your list to make sure you're crystal clear on exactly which solution your prospect needs when it comes to discussing pricing. It's your job to choose and your prospect's job to decide.

By investing more time in qualifying your prospect, you won't only know what value to focus on during your presentation, but you'll hopefully also be able to narrow your offer down to one or two choices when you discuss the final investment required.

You should also remember to use the term *investment* rather than the *cost* or *price* of your solution because the money is just a small part of the overall investment.

When presenting your recommended solution, it's important to mention all of the unique and valuable services included, such as free training and upgrades, a personal account manager, onboarding, and support. These things may be crucial to your prospect, but more importantly, they make your package seem a lot more

comprehensive which takes the edge off the financial investment that comes at the end.

In a nutshell, you must prepare this process.

- (1) Know what solution(s) you're going to offer your prospect.
- (2) Tell your prospect what solution they need (do not ask).
- (3) List every valuable extra included in the package.
- (4) Tell your prospect the financial investment required.
- (5) Ask them how that sounds (heat check).
- (6) Shut up and remain silent until you get a response.

Remember that the heat check followed by the silence is crucial at this stage of the sales process. Whoever talks first loses.

This is your only chance to get an honest response on how your prospect really feels about the required investment, so pay acute attention to every detail in their response and remember that the same words can mean opposite things when said in a different tone.

Coffee – No Sugar

Rather than enjoying the moment of silence after asking your prospect for their thoughts on the investment, you may feel the urge to throw in a little sweetener to try and ensure they respond positively.

But not everybody needs sugar in their coffee.

You may feel the need to say something like *'but we are flexible'* or *'we might be able to offer a discount if you go ahead today.'* You may also say things like *'it would usually cost'* before telling your prospect the financials.

By adding sweeteners, you're sending a message to your prospect that you're either desperate for the sale, insecure about the price, or both. The worst-case scenario is that you do this to a prospect who is interested in buying, but they either become suspicious and walk away or hustle you down to your rock bottom rate.

If you have a habit of discount-hinting too early in the sales process, your prospects will take advantage of you, and your earning potential will be limited.

Not all prospects expect or ask for discounts. I guarantee that most don't have the cheek to ask. But when they do ask, it's important to start closing if the timing is right.

A prospect who asks, '*Is that your best price?*' either has an objection or is ready to buy and is starting the negotiation process with you. Your job is to figure out which one.

I always like to respond with a rebound question such as '*What makes you ask?*', because it puts the prospect on the spot and will often get you to the truth.

Alternatively, you could start asking some test close questions, such as which package the prospect wants or what date they want to start. These questions will give you an instant sense of how serious the prospect is about going ahead.

So just remember next time you get that urge to drop in a little sweetener, it's an expensive mistake made by weak, insecure salespeople who are desperate for the sale.

CHAPTER III

Sales Presentation Mastery

Salespeople around the world have been delivering amazing presentations for decades. Amazingly boring presentations that put prospects into comas and kill enthusiasm faster than a poor DJ at a family wedding.

I *cannot* express to you just how frustrating it feels to sit through a dull long-winded corporate sales presentation. In my opinion, delivering such dull presentations is one of the biggest sins any sales professional can make.

You can't bore your prospect into buying your solution. If you want to win more clients, it's time to bring your presentation skills into the 21st century.

It's not enough to just showcase your company, your solution, and all of its shiny features and benefits. You need to communicate value.

Your sales presentations need to be well-structured and planned, and be engaging and tailored to your prospect and how your solution can help them achieve their desired outcomes.

You need to make your prospect feel like you've just presented them with the perfect solution to make their jobs easier and their goals seem more achievable.

In this chapter, you'll learn how to transform your dull, repetitive sales presentations into persuasive masterpieces that will help you take control of your meetings, communicate the core value of your solution, and gain commitment from your prospect.

Kill the Demo

The first step you must take is to stop referring to your presentations as demos. When I think of the word *demo*, I think of someone on a promotional supermarket stand trying to entice me to try the latest sausage, cheese or wine on offer, or someone doing the hard sell on a shopping channel like QVC.

I frequently see *Request a Demo* on websites, and hear business development managers booking *demos* with prospects, or having *demos* as a part of their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), but if you work in new business sales, your job isn't to deliver demonstrations.

By referring to your presentations as demos, you'll also set the wrong expectations for your prospect. I constantly hear account managers complain that they're unable to ask too many questions in a demo meeting because the prospect did not have enough time and was expecting to see a detailed demonstration of the solution.

I can also think of no better way to bore yourself to tears than by delivering the same mundane demonstration, time and time again. It can be great practice when you're first learning about your solution, but after a while, you'll begin to lose enthusiasm.

Presentation Problems

There are three problems you must consider when planning your sales presentation, all of which, if ignored, can kill the sale.

The first one is that your prospect will usually do one of three things following your presentation call or meeting. Contrary to belief, they will rarely go running to their boss for approval and are more likely to do one of the following:

- (A) They will go for lunch.
- (B) They will go home.
- (C) They will carry on with their daily tasks.

The second problem to consider is how much of your presentation your prospect will remember in the following days or weeks. Although the human brain is capable of processing millions of bytes of information at once, it distorts or deletes a huge portion of that information and remembers only the highlights.

And last but not least, the third and final problem is that decision-makers avoid sales presentations like the plague. They're either far too busy or like me, they've witnessed one too many painfully boring ones.

Unless you're selling to small businesses or offering premium-priced solutions that directly impact top-level executives, you will usually find yourself presenting to influencers or people who are part of the decision-making team at best.

This means you'll have to rely on your primary contact to do the selling for you, which is precisely why your presentations need to be short, persuasive, and memorable.

You must avoid long, complex presentations that delve into the details of your solution and present as you would to a decision-maker. By focusing on communicating the benefits and outcomes on offer, you will make it easier for your contact to relay the most important information to the decision-maker.

Six Steps to Excellent Presentation Meetings

Just like with a cold-call, your presentation meetings need to have a structure. This structure will help you control the meeting and will take you to the chequered flag if done correctly.

I've witnessed time and time again the scenario where the salesperson loses control of the meeting within a few minutes, allowing the prospect to drag them round in circles from one topic or feature to the other while the clock ticks down.

It's common to see salespeople run out of time and be forced into either rushing the commitment stage or having to try and schedule yet another meeting.

If you have structure, you have control, and in my experience, there are six steps to an excellent presentation meeting:

- (1) The Agenda
- (2) The Qualification Recap
- (3) The Brief Company Introduction
- (4) The Presentation
- (5) The Wrap-Up
- (6) The Commitment

How to Control Your Meetings with an Agenda

The beginning of every meeting should start with an agenda. It's good manners, it sets clear expectations for everyone, and most importantly, it puts you in complete control.

Your agenda should cover the following:

- (1) The scheduled duration of the meeting
- (2) The attendees participating
- (3) The content you'll be covering
- (4) The objective of the meeting (for both parties)

Naturally, you don't want to sound like a robot by jumping straight into an agenda, so take a few moments to say hello to everyone and thank them for attending.

Remember that you may be meeting people for the first time, so it's important to get across that sparkling personality of yours.

In the event you are doing a remote conference call or online meeting, I recommend checking that everyone can hear you clearly and see your screen if you are screen sharing.

In my experience, there is always someone who is either late or has problems accessing online meetings, so it can pay to schedule your meetings to last ten minutes longer than needed.

Once you have the greetings and technical issues out of the way, you should check the time and ensure everyone is still okay to attend the meeting for its full course by saying something like this:

‘Okay, so the time is 13:06 and we scheduled 60 minutes for today’s meeting, which means we should be finished just after 14:00. Does that still work for everyone?’.

It’s critical to know if you’re going to have to cut your meeting short so that you can trim your presentation. The last thing you want is to run out of time before discussing the commitment and next steps, especially if your objective is to try and close the sale.

Next, you should ask everyone attending to introduce themselves briefly. This is especially important for online meetings where you can’t see the attendees. I once assessed an entire online meeting where the account manager communicated with one person throughout, only to discover right at the end that the managing director was also on the call.

Every attendee in your meeting, whether they’re a decision-maker or not, has the potential to hijack the sale. You must engage with everyone to reduce the chances of this happening.

You just need to say;

‘Before we get started, can I just check who else is attending today?’

You’ll find that each attendee will usually introduce themselves and their roles, or your primary contact will do it for them.

Once you have everyone’s attention and know who is present, you can take them through the agenda. This is where you start taking complete control of the meeting by telling everyone in an orderly fashion exactly what will happen next. Here is a word-for-word example of how this could sound.

‘Okay, so I’d like to start off today by running briefly over what was discussed in our initial call, mainly so that everyone else who was not present knows why we are here, but also to dig a little deeper into some of the areas.

I will then give you a brief introduction to myself and our company, so you know who you are potentially going into business with before presenting how our solution can help you increase productivity and reduce the amount you spend on freelancers.

After the presentation, I have put aside time for any questions you have, and if everyone is happy, we can discuss the next steps.’

You should also remember to ask your prospect if there is anything else they would like you to cover in the meeting. This ensures your agenda doesn’t get interrupted and also gives the prospect back a little feeling of control. Just remember to stick to your schedule and cover any topics your prospect wants to discuss at a time that works best for you.

I highly recommend where possible, providing your attendees with the agenda in a visual form, whether that is a slide in your deck, a description in your calendar invite, or a printout if you’re meeting face-to-face. Visuals are a great way of grabbing everyone’s attention and settling down the room.

The Qualification Recap

The second step in your presentation is the qualification recap. You must run over and double check all of the information you gathered in your previous conversations with your prospect. This is important for a few reasons.

(1) Things can change. If you’re meeting two or three weeks after the initial discussion, your prospect might have changed roles, found some alternative solutions, acquired tasks with a higher priority than making a decision on your solution; or in the worst case, they might have found employment elsewhere. You just never know.

(2) A recap is also essential to get new attendees up to speed. It’s not uncommon for people to attend meetings without knowing why they’re present. You may also find that new contacts will challenge the information your primary contact has given you. This could be due to a difference in opinion or because they have more knowledge on the subject.

(3) In my experience, most salespeople book a meeting without having qualified the prospect efficiently, so the recap will give you the perfect opportunity to dig deeper into the key challenges or goals faced by your prospect.

You should be spending at least ten minutes, if not longer on the qualification recap. If you've not yet asked the *impact* or *process* questions to uncover your prospects motive and the decision-making aspects of the opportunity, now is the time.

When you present your solution, it needs to relate back to everything your prospect has told you. You'll need to link the benefits and outcomes of your solution to your prospect's needs.

The deeper you dig, the closer you'll come to uncovering the more powerful emotional motives that will shift your prospect from seeing your solution as nice to have, to seeing it as a must.

I recommend that you fully qualify your prospect in advance of your presentation meeting. This groundwork will allow you the time to craft a presentation that influences your prospect on a level beyond the flash of your features and benefits.

If you work with sales cycles shorter than thirty days or sell low-cost solutions, this strategy may not be possible or optimal. However, if you sell high-value or complex solutions, there is much more at stake. Preparation is the fuel to readiness.

The Brief Company Introduction

Upon completion of your qualification recap comes the company introduction. This is where most salespeople choose to dazzle the prospect with impressive statistics about their number of clients, impressive office locations, and pie charts showing their growth in revenue and employee numbers.

I've experienced this one stage of a presentation to take as long as 25 minutes. Most prospects are polite enough to sit through the bravado with a smile on their face while their enthusiasm dies with every minute it drags on.

Your prospects are dedicating their time to finding out how you can help them solve their problems or achieve their goals. Respect that, and give them a brief introduction lasting somewhere between two to five minutes maximum.

Your company introduction should create a personal connection between you, your company and your prospect, and the best way to do this is by using stories.

So rather than boast about why you're so awesome, tell your prospect how you started out, tell them a funny story about your CEO or talk about your key vision and mission and why it matters. Show them pictures, faces or even better, play them a cool short video testimonial of one of your customers saying exactly how you helped them solve a particular problem.

I also urge you to start with a short introduction about yourself too, especially if you're presenting to multiple people. If you're using a presentation deck, put in a picture of yourself and share a small insight into you and your background and maybe even why you chose to work where you work.

Make yourself a unique memory to your prospects rather than just another corporate bore. Your prospect will remember an engaging story more than a dreary list of statistics.

I've found from experience that a brief company introduction works best for most prospects, but you must remember to consider your audience and adapt to their needs. In certain parts of the world, some prospects may request the corporate drool I am telling you to avoid, and it may also be worth including when presenting to larger corporations.

As with everything in sales, it's about tailoring your approach to the unique prospect in front of you and not using the same rigid approach for all.

How to Prepare for Your Presentation

Once you've stripped your prospect bare of everything you need to know about their pains or goals, it's time to put that information to good use.

Your sales presentation is where you'll put forward your recommended solution for your prospect's situation, remembering to make it short, persuasive, and memorable.

You should decide in which method to present based on the circumstances. In general, I find technology to be a distraction that can remove an element of the

personal connection from a meeting. However, there are times where technology can be a powerful ally.

If you're sitting face-to-face with one or two individuals and don't have much to show, consider leaving your laptop in your bag. Alternatively, if you have more than two people present or are holding an online meeting, a presentation deck is recommended.

Many people think of *Death by PowerPoint* when they hear the words 'presentation deck' or 'slides'. If you're one of these people, I suggest you search for Don McMillan's *Life After Death by PowerPoint video* on YouTube(TM) to educate yourself on the subject.

Using a presentation deck is a highly professional and recommended weapon to support you with your presentations, but only if done the right way. Here are a few pointers to consider.

- (1) Keep your slides clean and simple.
- (2) Use black text on a white background where possible.
- (3) Use single words or short quotes and avoid long sentences.
- (4) Use high-quality images and avoid cliché stock photos.
- (5) Avoid too many detailed pie-charts or graphs.
- (6) Avoid using too many flashy animations or transitions.

You must ensure there is a purpose to every slide you include in your presentation. Personally, I like to use very simple slides with memorable images that increase the chance my audience will remember a particular point, and I also use them as prompts for myself to talk about a specific topic or tell a story.

The more complicated and flashy your presentation, the bigger the risk that something will go wrong. Other considerations to remember when preparing your presentation are as follows:

- (1) *The Internet Connection.*

Personally, I create my presentation deck in the cloud and then download it offline. I then switch my machine into flight mode to present, which avoids any annoying or embarrassing pop-up messages interrupting my presentation.

- (2) *The Flow.*

It's important to time your spoken words with the transition of slides to enable a smooth delivery. This is why I avoid using flashy transitions and always bring along a wireless presenter. If you have to walk to your laptop or click five times just to move to the next slide, you'll kill your flow and irritate your audience.

(3) *Your Timing.*

It's important to rehearse and calculate how long your presentation will take, remembering to factor in time for dialogue. I find that writing a word-for-word script in the speaker notes and placing discrete markers on a few pages to let myself know where I am in my presentation can help ensure I keep to the schedule.

(4) *Your Speed of Tone.*

When rehearsing and delivering your presentation, it's important to maintain a good rate of speech. Speak too fast and your communication will be lost, speak too slow and your audience may become disengaged. I recommend recording yourself and having a friend or colleague give you some feedback so you can adapt if necessary.

(5) *Your Focus.*

You must not allow your presentation deck to distract you from communicating with your audience. I've seen so many presenters spend more time looking at their screen than the people in front of them. You must make eye contact if you're presenting face-to-face, and you must pretend if presenting remotely. Talk to your audience, not to your screen.

(6) *Preparation Time.*

Putting together a presentation can be a lengthy process, but spending too much time on doing so may not be feasible. In an ideal world, you'll tailor your presentations to the unique needs of each prospect. In the real world, you'll probably not have this option. If you have little or no preparation time, I recommend building two or three ready-made templates to suit your most common types of prospect. Alternatively, create one presentation with a few customizable slides you can edit quickly before a meeting.

(7) *Mental Preparation.*

With so many practical things to remember, it can be easy to get a little nervous before delivering a presentation. Just bear in mind again that all you are witnessing is the build-up of adrenaline which, as I mentioned earlier in the book, you can use positively to pump yourself up and enhance your performance. However, you may

prefer to feel in a relaxed mood before starting a presentation, in which case I recommend you think about what you usually do to relax and spend a few minutes doing exactly that.

A positive state of mind will enhance your performance and increase the chance of winning the sale, so whether it's reading, going for a walk, relaxing to classical music or rapping to Eminem, always put a little time aside to get yourself into a peak state.

How to Present Your Solution

The way you begin the presentation of your solution can have an enormous impact on the engagement of your prospect. If you jump straight into the detail of your solution, it will feel too much like a clichéd sales pitch, and you may instantly disengage your prospect.

Your presentation shouldn't feel like a pitch. It should feel like a relatable journey your prospect knows well. This is your opportunity to demonstrate just how well you understand your prospects needs and present them with the perfect solution.

The key ingredients to an excellent presentation are as follows:

- (1) The usage of the pain and pleasure motives of the prospect.
- (2) The usage of story (customer cases or personal examples).
- (3) Brief explanations of your solution focused on the benefits and outcomes it brings.

In her TED Talk back in 2011, the queen of presentation design, Nancy Duarte, brilliantly explained just how to deliver a presentation that moves your audience emotionally and breaks down resistance.

Nancy accurately points out that you'll always encounter resistance from your audience, and to break that resistance you need to move back and forth between the reality of how things are today (the what is) and the picture of how things could be if they buy into your idea.

Translated into the sales world, what Nancy describes as the 'What is' and 'What could be' are the pain and pleasure motives of the prospect. The classic sales

presentation usually follows more of a pleasure, joy, and ecstasy strategy, which is why it often feels too much like a pushy sales pitch.

Ideally, you should present your idea using the following structure.

- (1) Talk about the pain or goal your prospect faces today.
- (2) Talk about the pleasure of overcoming that pain or achieving that goal.
- (3) Show or tell a story of a customer who faced and overcame a similar challenge.
- (4) Briefly explain how your solution helped.
- (5) Repeat the above steps.

The number of times you repeat the above steps will depend on how detailed your solution is and how much time you have. Ideally, you'll run through these steps at least two to three times minimum.

How to Begin Your Presentation

Getting your presentation off to a smooth start is crucial. You must find a way to instantly engage your audience to ensure they pay close attention to every word you say.

Just like the way to Rome, there is no one way to start your presentation. I'll share my personal favourites so you can choose which ones work best in your line of business.

(1) *Start with a Story.*

Starting with a story is a great way to engage your audience instantly. You could tell a story about the problem facing one of your customers before they invested in your solution or even smarter, use a fictional character but base the story on your prospect's journey. I've found that playing a customer testimonial video can be a great way of storytelling. This way you also don't need to worry about memorising it all.

(2) *Start with Something Funny.*

By telling a funny story or joke, or by showing a comical image that represents your prospect's current situation, you can really lift the room and build instant rapport

with your audience. Just remember not to become a comedian. One joke is a laugh; two is a crime.

(3) *Start with a Quote.*

If you can find a quote relevant to your prospect's current scenario, pop it in your opening slide in big, bold writing, and talk about how it relates to the situation. My personal favourite is to use a quote from the prospect. I take a ridiculous number of notes when speaking to my prospects, and very often I like to write down powerful statements they tell me about their current scenario. By using your prospect's own words, you'll instantly kill resistance, grab your prospect's attention, and may even get a little smile.

(4) *Start with a Statistic.*

If you can find a compelling statistic that again relates to your prospect's scenario or a common challenge faced by others in their industry, then use it. You could use a financial number, a percentage, or a clean graph on your slide in big fonts. Just remember not to include too much, if any, supporting text. It's much better just to put the statistic on the slide and explain the meaning behind it yourself to ensure you maintain connected with your audience.

(5) *Start with an Emotional Picture.*

You need to get your prospect emotionally connected to your presentation and displaying an image is a great way to do this. By showing a picture that triggers an emotional reaction, you'll instantly put your prospect into that state. If you want them to feel frustrated, show them a picture of an extremely frustrated person. If you want them to feel joy, show them an image of someone looking joyful followed up by a short story or opening point(s).

Let's say you're presenting to the CEO of a Fortune 500 company who's struggling with their work-life balance. If you know they have a family, you could start by showing a picture of a happy family, or sharing a story about a retired person talking about how not spending enough time with family is their biggest regret; or you could start with a picture of a drained and stressed looking person. All of which should generate an emotional response.

You should always leave a moment of silence to allow your prospect to digest the image, quote, or story. Silence will further empower the emotion and keep your audience engaged.

If I were presenting to the CEO mentioned above and decided to show a picture of a drained and stressed person, I might talk about how CEOs are working 70-hour weeks, drowning in employee issues, drained by endless business travel, and plagued by the guilt of not spending enough time with their family.

I may then use statistics or headlines from a reputable source that supports my facts or talks about the impact this is having, such as what percentage of CEOs reported to have suffered from mental illness or stress during the past 12 months.

Once you've painted a painful enough picture, you should then progress onto the pleasure of how things could be. You may use a success story of how another CEO who suffered from the same issues managed to turn things around.

You'll then move on to explain how they managed to do this. Naturally, your solution should be at the core of the recipe, but remember to stay humble at the same time. One way of doing this is to give praise to the other factors that were required from the customer to achieve this success, such as their willingness to get out of their comfort zone.

You should be careful not to be too vague when explaining how you helped your customer solve a particular problem, but at the same time, you should avoid going into too much detail. There is a fine line between making something seem so easy that it sounds unrealistic, and making it seem so complicated that it sounds unachievable.

If you're selling software, you may feel the need to log in and start showcasing your solution live at this point. But this can be a grave mistake. Demonstrating software in the middle of a presentation can cause all sorts of problems. Your software may take a while to load, the internet connection may be poor, or your prospect may start focusing on and asking if they can see all of the exciting nice-to-have features staring them in the face.

The biggest problem of showing your solution in too much detail at this point is that it removes the build-up of suspense you're trying to create with your presentation. You want to create a sense of excitement about the solution by showcasing a small glimpse, almost teasing your prospect. By showing them everything, you risk losing your flow, running out of time, and giving your prospect no reason to continue the conversation any further.

You may feel that your solution is so good that demonstrating it live will close the sale, but if this were the case, you wouldn't be reading this book, because your job would be obsolete.

Remember that you're supposed to be presenting in the same way you would to a decision-maker, whether they're present or not. The time for demonstrations should come later in the sales process. You must first convince your prospect they need your solution.

Rather than show a live demonstration, use screenshots, short videos or simple explanations that paint a picture of how it works. You'll find that even if you demonstrated your solution live, you usually show the same areas every time, so why not just grab a screenshot and avoid the risk of technical hiccups.

You may also wish to use customer cases in your presentations too. However, a common grumble I hear among sales teams is that they lack such materials, with the marketing department often the scapegoat. But a customer case study is just a story, and you do not need a PDF, website, or piece of printed material to tell a story. You probably have more compelling stories in your head than your marketing department could put together in a year. Use them.

As you move through your presentation, it's critical to ensure your prospect is still engaged and get a sense of how they feel about your solution. You can do this by asking heat-check questions.

The most natural heat-check question you may be tempted to use is to ask if your prospect has any questions so far. This will lead to little or no engagement. You must ask open-ended questions that force the prospect to participate in the conversation.

I recommend creating no less than two checkpoints in your presentation where you'll heat check. You should also memorise and use at least two different heat-check questions to avoid your prospect picking up on your strategy. Here are a few examples to choose from;

'How does that sound so far?'

'How do you think this will fit in with your current processes?'

'Which area do you think you could get the most value from and why?'

'How do you think this will help you with (state problem or goal)?'

'Which part do you like best and why?'

Remember also to include those small involvement questions where possible, to psychologically put your prospect in the driver's seat and test if they're primed for the close. Here are a few examples.

'Who will be handling this area of the solution?'

'Which option do you think would work best for you?'

'How many users do you think you will need?'

'Who do you think will need to go through the training?'

If you have multiple people attending, it's a good idea to make sure they're all engaged and not sitting with crossed arms and unanswered objections. Bring them into the conversation by calling their name and directing one of your heat-check questions at them.

The worst possible mistake you can make throughout your presentation is to talk too much and forget to engage your audience. Sadly, the presentation stage is where this error occurs most, but you can resolve this by getting into the habit of always asking two or three heat-check questions in every presentation.

How to Wrap Up Your Presentation

Once you have your prospect sitting on the edge of their seat, feeling emotionally dizzy by the journey of pain, pleasure, and stories you have taken them on, it's time to bring down the curtain on your presentation.

Every great presentation ends with a powerful and memorable ending. In the digital world, this is what a marketer or copywriter would often refer to as your call-to-action. I like to refer to it as the presentation wrap-up.

The wrap-up is where you outline the important parts of your presentation in a short sentence or two, and put your prospect in a position where they're ready to talk about commitment.

If you study some of the greatest speeches of all time, you'll notice they all have certain trends or structures in common. When you evaluate the wrap-up of these speeches, repetition of words is usually always present.

They don't necessarily repeat the same thing multiple times, but they do replicate the structure of the sentence as you will see in these examples.

(1) Martin Luther King: *'Let freedom ring from the mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.'*

(2) Malcolm X: *'They're not going singing 'we shall overcome'. They're not going with white friends. They're not going with placards already painted for them.'*

You should try to apply this in your presentation wrap-ups if possible. And unless you're selling more of an idea than a finalised solution, you should also list all of the benefits and outcomes your prospect will get when they invest in your solution, remembering to touch on any emotional motives uncovered earlier in the sales process.

The advertising legend David Ogilvy once said, *'Unless your advertising contains a big idea, it will pass like a ship in the night'*. The same principle applies for your presentation wrap-up too. You need to communicate your big idea in one clear, concise wrap-up.

Your wrap-up should also include the other key selling points included with your solution such as free support, training, onboarding, and product updates before telling your prospect the investment required, asking how that sounds, shutting up, and waiting for their response.

Both your presentation and wrap-up should also be designed to answer any potential objections you can expect too. It's better for you to bring up an objection before your prospect does.

Here is an example of a solid-sounding wrap-up.

'So just to quickly recap, this is an all-in-one hosted software suite to help you measure and improve the performance of your team, resulting in you saving time by avoiding the tedious processes and manual reporting you use today and increasing employee motivation.

It will integrate seamlessly with your current HR and CRM platforms, saving you time and ensuring you can start getting instant value from day one. Everyone, including your senior directors, will be able to see that - meaning - you get instant results and complete transparency which will hopefully reduce the pressure from above.

The reporting functionality also means you can automate the processing of reports and even assign performance recognition badges to save you and your team time, and motivate your employees the minute they achieve significant milestones.

You'll also get completely free product updates for 12 months as well as a personal account manager to ensure you and your team get the best out of the solution.

The agreement is for 12 months with payment required upfront, and the total investment required comes to a total of £3,500 per year. How does that sound?'

In a nutshell, your presentation wrap-up is the icing on your cake. It should move your prospects emotionally and prompt them to take action. When done right, it should move your prospects from considering your solution to wanting it. It's what I like to call closing with discretion.

The wrap-up is one of the most important areas of your presentation, and you must dedicate some time to getting it right. I recommend writing it down word for word, reading it aloud, and maybe even recording yourself or role-playing with someone if you're serious about getting it right. Mastery is obtained by doing.

CHAPTER IV

Closing & Negotiating

Welcome to the fourth and final chapter of this book. By now you've hopefully already picked up enough new knowledge that you'll see an impact on the quality of your sales pipelines.

But sales pipelines do not close themselves.

In this chapter, I'll focus almost purely on the art of negotiation and very little on closing. You shouldn't expect to find too many closing techniques or hacks because the majority out there are outdated, ineffective, and unnecessary.

If you apply the qualification strategies I've shared in this book and can deliver even a half decent presentation, you've already done the hard work. All you need to do now is finish the job.

How to Get Commitment

The sixth and final step of your presentation is, without doubt, the most important. It's where you must get the commitment from your prospect.

Most salespeople are too afraid to ask for the commitment. They fear ruining the rapport and frightening off the prospect. In fact, most end meetings with a verbal agreement to conclude the next steps via email, followed by sheepish questions like, *'When can I call you back?'* or *'Is it okay I call you next week to follow up?'*

If you use any of these strategies, you'll lose control of the sales process. As a result, you'll engage in a classic game of cat and mouse chasing your prospect for their decision.

Not good.

Whether the objective of your meeting is to get a signed contract, verbal agreement, or schedule another meeting, you must not end the meeting without getting the commitment on two things.

(1) You must get a commitment that your prospects see the value in your solution. The value on offer must outweigh the financial investment required for the sale to happen

If you've used heat-check questions throughout your presentation, you should already have a notion of whether or not your prospect sees the value, but you need to confirm this again once they've heard the financials involved.

As mentioned earlier in the book, you must always ask your prospect, *'How does that sound?'* after presenting your pricing. This is the only chance you'll get to assess how your prospect honestly feels about your solution. You must ask the question, shut up, switch on your senses, and wait patiently for a response.

Pay particular attention to how quickly or slowly your prospect responds, to the speed and general feel of their tone, and pay close attention to the words they use. At the same time, you must beware that the same words, said in a contrasting tone, can mean entirely different things.

For example, if your prospect responds with a slow *'Hmmm, yeah. It looks good'*, it could be cause for suspicion. Whereas a prospect using the same words in a faster, more positive tone should give you a more optimistic feeling.

In my experience, most prospects will give a positive response to your heat-check question at the end of the presentation. They will tell you your solution sounds great and has some really nice features and so on.

But *nice* doesn't sell things.

Remember your prospect would often rather deceive you than risk hurting your feelings by telling you that your solution stinks, so regardless of the response you receive, challenge it.

If you get a negative response, challenge it. If the prospect sounds unsure, then state this to them by saying, *'You sound a little unsure?'*, followed by silence. This will usually prompt the prospect into elaborating a little.

If you get a positive response, challenge that too. In fact, challenge it just as much, if not more than a negative response. Below is an example of how such a conversation might sound.

You: *'How does that sound?'*

Prospect: Quickly responds with, *'It sounds really great.'*

You: *'What part, in particular, do you see the most value in?'*

Prospect: *'We love the online editor.'*

You: *'How will that help you specifically?'*

Prospect: *'It just makes the process so much faster.'*

You: *'So it will save time and increase productivity?'*

Prospect: *'Absolutely.'*

This approach may frighten the life out of you. But it's all just part and parcel of getting total confirmation that your prospect honestly sees the value in your solution.

(2) Once you're positive your prospect has no issue with the financials and sees the value in your solution, you must now get a concrete commitment on the next steps.

As mentioned earlier in the book, providing you've asked about how the decision process works, your prospect should have already told you most of the next steps.

The second your prospect confirms they see the value, you must go into an assumptive closing mode and take complete control over the final part of the meeting by using the information they've given you to get the commitment which may go as follows;

You: *'That's great news. I guess the next steps then are that,*

(1) I'll send you the written proposal via email later today.

(2) You'll then present that to your boss on Monday next week.

(3) Assuming he approves, you will need to get that signed off by your finance director, which you said usually takes around seven days.'

So, we should hopefully have approval on the proposal no later than a week on Monday then, does that sound about right?'

Prospect: *'Yes.'*

You: *'Great, I'll give you a call on Tuesday then to make sure that we are on track and hopefully start your onboarding process. Does the morning or afternoon work best for you?'*

It's critical that you're assertive when confirming back these next steps and do not allow your prospect to dictate what happens next.

At this point, your prospect may try to stall by saying, *'We'll be in touch when we've made the decision'*. There are two potential ways to handle this.

(1) Hit them with a quick rebound question such as asking them *'What makes you say that?'* in a slightly shocked tone. They will then usually either explain why or withdraw their suggestion and agree to your proposed follow-up date.

(2) Ask if they're saying that because they're concerned about something happening that may interrupt the approval process.

Regardless of how flawlessly you've executed the sales process, I find there are always potential curve balls that can stall the decision, so I recommend asking your prospect if there are any potential hurdles that may interrupt the process, regardless of whether they try to stall or not.

How to Get the Signature

If the objective of your meeting is to close the sale, then you must ask for the sale. This is, without doubt, the most nerve-wracking moment of the entire sales process.

You may find yourself paralysed with self-doubt, fighting with the internal voice in your head asking, 'But what if they say no?'

Only a calm and confident head will get you past this mental block, but a closing checklist may also help. There are two types of these closing checklists.

- (1) A checklist for your eyes only.
- (2) A checklist you run through with your prospect.

The checklist for your eyes only may typically include the internal steps you go through to close the sale to ensure your deal gets approved by your manager, along with some closing techniques to assist you with getting the job done.

However, a checklist you can run through with your prospect is by far the best option. This checklist is otherwise known as the contract, or even better named as the paperwork.

If you turn up for a meeting with the objective to close the sale but do not bring along the paperwork, you can walk away at best with the dreaded verbal confirmation your prospect will go ahead.

Having worked in new business sales for so many years both as a salesperson and manager, I can assure you that an opportunity sitting in the *verbally agreed* stage is the most dangerous of all.

Sadly, a verbal agreement isn't treated in the same loyal way as a gentleman's agreement was back in the 19th century. For the sale to be considered closed, you must get it in writing.

If you're meeting face-to-face, bring the paperwork or order form. If you're meeting online, ensure you have the paperwork ready to send and complete in a digital form.

The paperwork is by far the best weapon to pull out when it's time to close the sale. As soon as your prospect gives you the commitment on the finances involved and the value they see, respond by saying something like this:

‘Excellent, that’s great to hear. If it’s okay with you, I’d like to quickly run over the proposal to make sure we’ve covered everything you need, and not made any mistakes.’

At this point, you should begin running through the entire proposal, confirming such things as the selected package, included features, number of users, payment terms, contract start dates, and anything else you need to fulfil the paperwork.

When this is done, confirm with your prospect that they’re happy with everything, and instruct them on what they need to do to go ahead, whether that’s signing on the dotted line or replying to your email with acceptance. Your confirmation could be worded as follows:

‘Great, well if you’re happy to proceed then all you need to do is respond to my email with the words, “I agree” and we can get your account set-up right away.’

The above strategy may be too long-winded if you work in transactional sales. If this is the case, I would advise you to get on with it and ask, *‘Would you like to go ahead?’* as soon as your prospect confirms they see the value, or skip asking and just use an assumptive closing question along the lines of these examples.

‘Would you like to pay via debit or credit card?’

‘Which address would you like your product shipped to?’

‘What start date would you like me to put on the paperwork?’

‘Who should we contact regarding onboarding?’

Whether you work with transactional sales or not, the importance of sales silence at this point is more critical than ever. There is nothing more painful than witnessing a salesperson close a deal, only to talk themselves out of it because they couldn’t shut up.

How to Negotiate Mutually-Beneficial Agreements

When you heat check to see how your prospect feels about your solution or when you hand them the pen to sign the paperwork, there’s a chance they may catch you by surprise and begin to negotiate.

When I started building my first workshop on sales negotiating, I was surprised by the high volume of courses and workshops that were available.

The biggest shocker though, was discovering that they were almost all designed for two scenarios.

- (1) Negotiating pay rises with your employer.
- (2) Negotiating terms and prices with a supplier.

It made me wonder if sales prospects were better trained in the skill of negotiating than most salespeople.

It made a lot of sense when I thought about it. I've been in and witnessed many negotiations during my career, and they almost always end in one of two ways.

- (1) The customer wins the negotiation, and the sale is closed.
- (2) Nobody wins the negotiation, and the sale is lost.

The salesperson rarely wins both the negotiation and the sale.

Whether you love it or hate it, if you want to be a world-class sales professional, you're going to need to get good at negotiating mutually beneficial agreements. This means closing sales that are good for you, your company, and your clients. You must always aim for a win-win situation for some important reasons.

(1) If you charge your clients a high premium for an average solution, they will have zero tolerance for any imperfections. As a result, your customer service or support teams will dislike dealing with your clients, who in return, will become dissatisfied.

(2) If you give a hefty discount to win new business, your client will come to expect the same when renewing or buying from you again. This will infuriate your account managers or retention teams and make it impossible for you to make any real profit from repeat business. You'll also run the risk of your client spreading the word of what a great deal you gave them.

(3) In my experience, the clients who pay the least are almost always the worst. They're resource-heavy, resulting in your company making little profit from the initial sale. These clients often also expect the same service levels as your enterprise customers too.

When dealing with these high-maintenance clients, your tolerance levels will quickly dissolve, especially after they've paid their invoice. The client will justify their high demands due to the premium investment they made, and you'll justify your refusal to meet these demands due to the heavily discounted rate they negotiated. Either way, both parties will justify their actions in a way that doesn't relate to the other, and the relationship is doomed from the beginning.

It's important to always look at things from your client's point of view. You may feel like they paid a ridiculously low price, but maybe they never really had the budget for your solution in the first place, so the investment to them was a big one.

Mutually-beneficial agreements are the key to creating long-lasting relationships with your clients. They result in happy customers, motivated employees, and higher revenues.

Negotiating with Children

Since becoming a father for the first time back in 2010, I can honestly say my sales and coaching skills have been put to the test on a whole new level.

I remember being in a negotiation scenario with my son Alexander back when he was five years old. He was going through a testing phase, and I had been strategizing with my wife the night before about how we could best handle his temperament in certain situations. The following evening, I got the chance to apply that strategy.

We've always had a set bedtime routine in the evenings with Alexander. We aim to have him ready and in bed by 7pm, which means we've to get things rolling by 6.30pm to leave room for the explosive reaction to come.

Part of our new strategy was to give Alexander a short pre-warning five to ten minutes before the bedtime routine was to begin, and this was where I began.

On this particular evening, Alexander was happily playing with his toy trucks in the hallway. I approached and gave a pleasantly toned warning. *'Five minutes before it's time to start getting ready for bed Alexander,'* I said.

'FIVE MINUTES? THAT'S NOT MUCH,' he yelled.

Luckily Alexander wasn't quite at the age where he fully understood time, but he was at the stage where he would negotiate everything.

'Okay then, you can have two minutes,' I said, knowing full well his response would be to negotiate an extra minute or two more. As expected, he settled for three minutes and continued to play.

Phase one complete.

I had successfully managed to negotiate an agreement seven minutes better than I had aimed for, and had more importantly avoided the explosive tantrum we had come to expect.

Bravo, Daddy.

Also knowing that three minutes feels more like thirty seconds in a child's brain, I let Alexander play for a couple of extra minutes before approaching him again.

'Okay, Alexander. It's time to go to the bathroom now,' I said, to which I got a super aggressive *'NOOOOOO!'* in response.

I took a deep breath, smiled and calmly knelt down to his level and in a low tone said, *'Hey listen. We agreed on three minutes before, and I've allowed you almost ten.'*

'Ten,' he said in shock. *'Yes,'* I replied. *'Okay then,'* he said, and off we walked to the bathroom to get ready.

I looked over to my wife with a huge smile and said, *'Did you hear that? I'll be using that one again next time.'*

The negotiation was complete, both parties were happy, and I had a recipe for success – or so I thought.

A couple of days later I found myself in a similar situation. Alexander had just started playing with his building blocks in the living room, and I calmly walked in fully prepared for action and gave him his ten-minute warning.

Only this time, there was no further negotiation. Alexander smashed his building blocks to pieces, sending them flying across the living room floor, and he spent the next ten minutes kicking and screaming.

So here we have a story of two similar negotiations, approached with the same strategy, but with two different outcomes, like a story with two morals.

(1) Every negotiation is unique. There is no one winning formula to ensure you win every negotiation on your terms. You can master tips, tricks, and techniques, but the outcome is often never the same.

(2) Emotions drive decisions. If you've been in sales for long enough, you've probably witnessed a prospect get angry after you've told them the cost of your

solution. This emotional response can often come down to the expectations they had about the cost. Maybe they had seen a lower price on your website or just made a foolish assumption. You never know.

There was one small critical difference in the two almost identical scenarios I just shared about Alexander. In the first negotiation, I approached Alexander after he'd been happily playing for some time with his trucks. He would have liked to play a little longer but had no big plans.

In the second negotiation, I approached him just a few minutes after he'd started to construct something with his building blocks. This time he had expectations of playing a little longer and maybe building whatever he had planned to completion. I then came along and destroyed those expectations, resulting in the emotional reaction that essentially ended the negotiation.

Sure, I could have avoided or stopped his emotional outburst by offering him a better deal, but the result would have been a tired and grumpy child in the morning. The child wins the negotiation, and Daddy wins the sale, but it's a bad deal for both parties in the long run.

When reality doesn't align with our expectations, we often react in an emotionally negative way. It's a common human error you'll need to navigate around with your prospects.

So next time you enter a negotiation, have Alexander in mind and remember to treat every situation as a unique one and control your own emotions so you can stay calm and work your magic.

Negotiation Cultures

I was lucky enough during my career as a sales professional to win clients in over 60 different countries. I've also trained and coached thousands of people in 128 countries and worked with a variety of international sales teams in various industries.

This experience taught me many valuable lessons about how important culture is when negotiating. Certain nations have particular negotiation cultures and so do some companies.

For example, when selling to many of the African nations, you should always expect to negotiate. It's almost customary to do so. I've also experienced the same in the Arab countries as well as India, Pakistan, Italy, and a few others.

Many people fail to respect cultures, including many companies and their salespeople who attempt to break into international markets.

Whether you're selling on the international market or locally in your own country, you're going to be dealing with prospects from a variety of cultures. There are no guarantees the person you're trying to sell to was born in that country, so their negotiation style may be driven by another culture much different to your own.

I learnt from my own painful experiences how adaptive one needs to be when negotiating in different cultures. In the beginning, I would take my prospects low starting point in the negotiation as an insult, get all emotional, end the call, and close the opportunity down as 'lead lost, no budget'.

Heavens knows how much business I lost back then as a result of my immaturity.

I've also had the pleasure of working with some of Europe's fastest growing start-ups too and witnessed how quickly a culture of heavy discounting can be born, and how costly it can be.

The culture of winning new clients at all costs in the start-up phase is a lot of fun, but the negotiation culture of heavy discounting is an expensive and hard habit to kick.

There's certainly no mistaking why companies such as Apple(TM), or Tesla(TM) are so successful in winning and retaining clients despite fierce competition from lower-priced suppliers. They do this by offering high-quality products and services, and by almost always maintaining a strict pricing policy.

Tesla(TM) CEO, Elon Musk, hit the nail on the head in 2016 when he'd heard some of his salespeople had been offering discounts on new cars. In a company email, he wrote:

'If you can't explain to a customer who paid full price why another customer didn't without being embarrassed, then it's not right.'

I couldn't have put it any better myself.

I used to give a very similar message to my teams when I was a sales leader, and I stick by it today. A seemingly harmless discount can appear worthwhile when it gets you above target. But when that one client starts spreading the word, it can quickly become a costly error.

I remember one of my past employers created a win at all cost strategy to get the top ten brand names on board in particular verticals. In one of those verticals, we won one of the UK's biggest retailers at a heavily discounted rate.

I also remember the day the second biggest brand in that same vertical was about to become a client at full price, until they brought up the fact they knew how much the other client had paid us.

That one discount alone cost the company thousands in lost revenue – and that was just one example. So, beware of how much culture influences your negotiations, and discount at your own peril.

How to Spot a Negotiator

There are lots of signs that signal the beginning of a negotiation, and it's important you become aware of these to avoid treating them either as an objection or rejection.

In my experience, the signs commonly used by the prospect to try and negotiate a better deal are as follows:

(1) The prospect may send you clear buying signals. A well-oiled negotiator knows how the sellers brain functions. They know that if they send you enough buying signals, you'll smell the sale, and the discounting will begin.

During my live sales negotiation workshops, I often show a picture of a cute fluffy teddy bear. The bear is meant to resemble that fluffy feeling you get in your stomach when you think you've hooked a prospect who sounds ready to buy. What usually happens, as a result, is you drop your guard, and start to throw in some free extras because you're so happy. By this point, the prospect has you in an entirely vulnerable position.

You must pull yourself together next time you feel that fluffy feeling. Your prospects flirtatious buying signals can be nothing more than a way of buttering you up to see what deal they can get. Don't fall for it. Burn the bear.

(2) Another common negotiation sign is when your prospect raises objections. The most obvious example might be when they say something like, '*We feel the price is too high*' or '*We've got a better price somewhere else.*'

Nonsense always.

If your prospect has a better price somewhere else, why are they still talking to you? Use the objection handling strategy to isolate the smokescreen, and progress to handle the real one. This statement is often nothing more than a shakedown to get a better price.

(3) I've worked with a lot of software companies during my time, and another common smokescreen objection which can signal the start of a negotiation is when a prospect starts to nit-pick about certain missing features.

The average salesperson usually has a good comeback. They promise to speak to the development team to get the feature in the next release or come up with a perfect workaround. Smart enough, but a complete waste of time.

When your prospect starts to nit-pick, especially on multiple occasions, use the objection handling strategy to isolate the smokescreen again. More often than not, these missing features are of little value and the prospect won't be able to explain why they're of any importance.

Remember though, if the prospect raises objections about anything that puts them in the position of being the owner of your solution, it's a buying signal. It's not the start of a negotiation.

If the prospect is at the stage where they're reading the detailed terms of your offer, there's little need to negotiate, unless you're negotiating *brick-wall* objections such as strict company regulations about payment terms, property right issues or something similar.

There are, however, certain exceptions to this. From time to time you'll have to get approval on your sale from people who have different motives than your primary

contact. As frustrating as this can be, you must stay calm and treat these people with respect.

An individual in a financial department has one goal – to save the company money. If your sale needs approval from someone in finance, it's often because it exceeds a certain amount. So, when your prospect tells you they need approval from finance, be prepared to negotiate, because this is often why these processes are in place.

Another common hurdle in the approval process can come from legal departments whose common goal is to protect their company from making bad or risky deals. In my experience, getting past the legal department can either be a breeze or an absolute nightmare.

Some legal teams will request a detailed list of large, small, and sometimes strange contract amendments, whereas others will request few to none. In my experience, most of the changes are negotiable. I had a new client query fourteen different areas in my contract not long ago, and I agreed to amend just two.

You must not allow yourself to become overwhelmed when dealing with finance or legal departments. A defensive and argumentative response to innocent requests will get you nowhere. You'll find that some people just need educating in how your solution works. I once had someone from a legal team request that his company get exclusive rights for the software they were about to purchase. I had to explain to him they would have to buy our company before I could request such a change.

If you can make the required legal changes, then do so. If you can't, then explain this to them in an unemotional way. A stubborn, inflexible approach to contract negotiations is a winning strategy for losing the sale. The signed contract is too close.

(4) When a prospect tells you specifically how much they have to spend, this is commonly a bluff. In my experience, if the prospect says they only have £200 to spend, they most likely have 3, 4 or even £500. The figure given could either be an estimate of what they feel your solution is worth, or a rough calculation of what the prospect estimates to be a good starting point in the negotiation.

This is again a buying signal, and with a little creative thinking, you should be able to handle it without trouble. Sadly though, it's all too easy to give in and close a quick and easy sale, and that's usually what the average salesperson does. The

prospect wins, and the sale is closed. This is a result of fear. You fear if you don't give in and let your prospect win, they will walk away and all of your hard work will have been for nothing.

What most salespeople fail to consider is how much time and effort the prospect has invested into the sale, and how badly they may want your solution. By the time you've reached the final stages of the sales process, your prospects have often invested just as much, if not more time than you have in getting the sale approved.

On top of the time spent talking with you, your prospect may have dedicated hours to researching and testing solutions, getting budgets approved, coordinating with other team members and stakeholders, and much more. Trust me; they won't walk away if they want your solution. If they do, it's because they didn't see the value in the first place.

If your prospect tells you they only have x amount to spend, repeat it back and paraphrase where possible. Then hit them with any of the following questions where applicable.

'Will it help if I can spread the payments?'

'How about starting on the lower package and upgrading later?'

'When will you get more budget allocated again?'

'Which other departments could benefit from the solution?'

'What do you suggest we do now?'

Most importantly, you must be prepared to walk away. The idea of doing so at this stage of the sales process may seem outrageous to you, but unless you can learn to hold your cards tight to your chest, you'll never win a negotiation and will leave money on the table every time you close a sale.

(5) The smart, direct, and fast-moving negotiator will almost always ask, *'Is that your best price?'*. This is a huge buying signal.

A quick rebound question like, *'What makes you ask?'* is a smart response when followed by silence. The question will often prompt your prospect to explain exactly why they asked. Here are some examples of typical responses I've witnessed.

'Because that's what your competitor offered me.'

'I feel it's too expensive.'

'I'm just asking.'

Either way, you've isolated the real objection and will have a better idea of how to proceed.

(6) Another strategic approach used only by master negotiators is to ask for more than they need. These negotiation Yodas know perfectly well how to tap into the average salesperson's emotions. They do it by creating excitement.

And they create excitement by requesting your biggest package with the most number of users, or whatever other add-ons you have, resulting in a potentially huge looking sale.

The prospects objective is to see how flexible you are with negotiating the pricing. Their strategy is to get you excited by the potential size of the sale. They will then negotiate the best deal for that package before dropping down to a lower option.

To avoid this situation, you must ensure you're the one recommending which package your prospect needs. If they start asking about a higher package, beware of the dollar signs that may cloud your judgement and re-qualify the needs of the prospect. It will serve you well to treat every prospect with a cautious and somewhat pessimistic approach.

(7) Another common sign of a prospect who is negotiating is the constant mentioning of your competitors. These prospects will often not be rushed into making any decisions and will be sure to let you know they're speaking to your competitors. You must not allow the name dropping of your competition to trigger your discount mode.

I refuse to enter negotiations with such prospects. In my experience, they often end up being poor clients with no loyalty who will do the same again next year. Focus on your solution, and treat the prospect as if the competition was not even involved.

In the event you do enter into a negotiation with these prospects, be sure to give them a buy-right-now-at-this-cost ultimatum to avoid them playing you against your competitors.

(8) You'll be blown away at how easy it is to make friends when you work in sales. And you'll also be blown away at how quickly those friends want something from you too.

Getting too friendly with your prospect will make negotiating difficult. Your prospects know that if they get friendly with you, it's more likely you'll give them a good deal.

If you fail to draw the line between your personal and professional relationships, you're asking for trouble. I genuinely believe most prospects are just being friendly, without an agenda. However, there are always a small few that ruin it for others, so stay on your guard.

(9) A common tactic used by the smart negotiator is to play the *lack of authority* card. This strategy can be utilised by both decision-makers and non-decision makers.

If you've not already uncovered the stakeholders involved at this stage of the sales process, then you've got your work cut out for you. I won't suggest a strategy for this scenario. I'd rather have you struggle, feel pain, and be motivated next time to qualify using the process questions covered earlier in the book. I believe it's called being cruel to be kind.

You're in serious trouble if you enter a negotiation with a non-decision maker. If you're lucky, your primary contact will help you. If you're unlucky, they will play you.

It's easier said than done but try at all costs to negotiate with the decision-maker directly. I suggest you all get together on a call, communicate via email, text, chat – whatever – so long as you negotiate with the right person directly.

When you negotiate via a go-between, it prolongs the process, gives more power to the decision-maker, and leaves you in the dark about how your opponent is feeling emotionally. It's important to know if your last offer enraged them or not before making your next move.

If you know or have a suspicion you're already dealing with the decision-maker, this could be the start of a negotiation, or it could be a stall. A prospect who feels pressured into making a decision may pull the *'I-need-to speak-to-my-partner'* card as a way of buying more time. This is good. It tells you their brain is in full working order, and they need a little time to ensure they're not making a rash decision.

If you're selling a fluffy nice to have solution, you may be in trouble here. If you give your prospect time to process their decision, it's likely they'll disappear, never to be seen again.

But if you believe your prospect can get value from your solution, and you feel you've done enough to earn the right to ask for the business, grab their tail and pull them back in.

Ask them a question such as, *'Apart from the final sign-off, is there anything else that's stopping you from going ahead today?'*

What you want to do now is take them through those commitment steps again, ensuring they see value in your solution. If you sense pricing is the concern, bring it up. Ask them if the payment terms are in line with their company policy or expectations.

There's plenty of ways to fish out the real objective behind the 'lack of authority' card, but if you truly know you're dealing with someone who can sign off, it's time to get cheeky.

The best and most direct way of cutting to the chase is to say, *'You're not saying that just to get rid of me are you (First Name)?'*

You must say this in a direct yet friendly tone, and it must be followed by instant silence, so you can monitor how your prospect responds and decide on what to do next.

Most salespeople fear using this approach with gatekeepers, let alone decision-makers. They fear the stakes are too high at this stage of the sales process. I can tell you from personal experience though, I have used this approach time and time again during my career, and it separates the real prospects from the potential time wasters every time. Your prospect will likely respond in one of three ways.

- (1) They will laugh and likely begin to negotiate.
- (2) They will innocently and repeatedly confirm they're not trying to get rid of you, which often signals guilt.
- (3) They will respond angrily, and the call will end shortly after, in which case, they just saved you some valuable time.

Fear will hold you back in sales, and in life. If you lack the confidence and ability to call your prospects bluff, you'll lose the negotiation every time, even if you win the sale.

If there's one strong belief you should have when negotiating with the decision-maker, it's that if they're negotiating for your solution, it's because they want it. So, learn to negotiate with confidence, and use fear to your advantage. In the words of Harvey Specter from *Suits*(TM), '*Play the player, not the game.*'

How to Handle Beliefs and Emotions

I listened to a call recently where the prospect was ready to go ahead but only on the condition that the contract terms were adjusted to be more like other modern software providers.

The prospect was referring to the 12-month commitment and upfront payment terms required. He not only wanted a month to month contract but wanted to pay in monthly instalments too.

The salesperson was stumped. He knew there was no chance in hell his manager would approve this but didn't want to tell the prospect through fear of losing the sale.

The salesperson did well to remain composed and asked some questions to try and isolate the objection, but this was always going to be tough due to a couple of reasons.

(1) The salesperson had not picked up on the fact that he was not dealing directly with the decision-maker. By carefully listening to the way the prospect was wording his terms, and that he was bringing these up on a follow-up call, I could hear and feel he was the middleman.

By not dealing directly with the decision-maker, the salesperson also now had to contend with an emotional middleman who was trying to do the negotiating without any power. This scenario can often make it very difficult to resolve the situation.

(2) The second issue was that the hidden decision-maker obviously had a firm belief about how software terms should be, which was made clear in the hard tone in which his objection was relayed.

Challenging people's beliefs can be a dangerous game. If not done with a cautious and professional approach, the emotional reaction will make negotiating impossible. As a coach, I challenge people's beliefs on a daily basis. It's often not an easy job, and can sometimes take multiple sessions to achieve, but the breakthrough session always makes it worthwhile.

In my experience as a salesperson and as a coach, strong beliefs often come out of fear. So rather than trying to challenge the belief of your prospect, try to investigate into its root cause.

When the prospect and salesperson have opposing beliefs, it usually ends up with locked horns. The salesperson pushes their belief on the prospect to try and change their belief, but the prospect just pushes back. This often ends in an emotional battle of beliefs between two sides that refuse to seek to understand each other.

As a sales professional, you must learn to respect the beliefs of your prospect and control your own emotions. You can only influence someone when you try to understand their version of reality.

So, if a prospect comes up with an objection which is clearly a strong belief, demonstrate your good listening skills and show empathy in your tone. Ask questions to get the prospect to elaborate on where their belief comes from, and dig deeper into the past to try and source the root cause.

A prospect who fears a 12-month commitment could have been stung in the past, so listening to you ramble on about why you have 12-month contracts in place isn't going to change their belief. But maybe offering customer references or referring to your credible investors will act as a more important safety net.

Another common root cause of beliefs can be word of mouth. Try and think of how many products you wouldn't consider purchasing, purely based on the word of someone else. For some people, this belief could be one driven by a parent, whereas others could be driven by something they halfway read once in an online forum.

Whatever the belief, and however deep the root cause, you must put your views aside, respect those of your prospect, and master your strategic questioning technique to learn how to influence people to your way of thinking.

When to Begin the Negotiation

Most negotiations happen at the end of the sales process either when you discuss pricing or after you send a proposal. As a salesperson, you can be ready for these negotiations by preparing your responses and learning new techniques, but this will only work to a certain extent.

The ultimate preparation is understanding that the negotiating begins from the first contact you make with a prospect and ends when the customer pays their invoice. You must negotiate until the money is in the bank.

Too many salespeople make the mistake of leaving themselves short at the negotiation stage. They hint at a discount too early, offer the best deal in the first proposal, and genuinely think that honesty is the best policy. A prospect who knows what they want will begin to negotiate early in the sales process. These negotiation masters are great at being your best friend, tactical in how to ask for various pricing options, and ruthless when it comes to finalising the deal.

As already mentioned, some prospects will push you for pricing information early on, and others will start to nit-pick at your missing features. These tactics are often just all part of their game plan to weaken your defences.

Most salespeople fall for these tricks time and time again, feeling almost guilty and obliged to give the prospect the best deal possible to get them to sign a contract. But the negotiation doesn't always end here. I've witnessed plenty of scenarios where a signed agreement was in place, and the invoice sent, but the negotiations were not yet complete.

In larger organisations, there's often a lot of departmental structure and policies in place. Sometimes your primary contact knows how to navigate these, other times they don't.

I once spent several weeks chasing an unpaid invoice from a well-known brand in the United States, only for their accounts payable to attempt to renegotiate the payment terms when they finally bothered to respond.

There's been a lot of press over the past several years about how larger organisations take advantage of the smaller ones when it comes to buying services from them. A lot of it criticises these organisations, and as a salesperson, I can honestly say it used to drive me crazy, until one day I decided to put a stop to it by playing them at their own game.

That large organisation I mentioned earlier were already ten days overdue on their payment when their accounting team said to me, *'Unless we can pay with American Express, you'll have to resend your invoice and go through the 45-day payment period again.'*

I took a deep breath, remained calm and built up the courage to say, *'If you can't pay via a debit or credit card today, we will have to deactivate your services right away'*.

It was incredible how quickly someone just so happened to find a Mastercard(TM) that could be used right away, despite claiming in our previous conversation they didn't have one.

To succeed at every level in a negotiation, you have to be prepared to lose the sale. If you do not stand firm with your terms, people will take advantage of you, and you'll never fulfil your financial potential. Start every sales conversation with negotiation in mind, and you'll outwit even the best negotiators.

Part of your preparation for negotiating is your qualification strategy. If you follow the guidance in this book, you'll always qualify the real needs of your prospect, and fully understand how important those needs are, giving you the upper hand every time.

If you allow the prospect to bully you into rushing through the sales process and skip these crucial qualification steps, you'll be left butt naked with no defence.

There are no fast, easy sales. You must follow the same rigid steps of the sales process every time, to ensure you're ready for every negotiation scenario.

The Happy Medium

Whether it's Dell Boy from *Only Fools and Horses* negotiating the best deal on some dodgy briefcases, or Martin Luther King negotiating for civil rights, there's always been an unwritten rule that a negotiation can be agreed when both parties meet in the middle.

Maybe it was my mother always taking me to flea market sales on a Sunday, or maybe it was something else, but I always knew from a young age that if I wanted £5, I should ask for £10.

When I was around ten years old, I used to go sifting through the stinging nettles of our local golf course every weekend to find the stray balls, which my best friend Sean and I would go and sell to a wealthy guy who lived on the estate around the corner.

After just a couple of negotiations with him, we learnt pretty quickly to sit down and calculate what he would offer us before knocking on his door, so we could better prepare for the next negotiation, and meet somewhere closer to the middle.

So, if there is an unwritten rule that all negotiations should end in the middle, and a ten-year-old boy can master how to use it to his advantage, why is it that most salespeople fail?

To find out your average order value, calculate the amount of revenue you've made and divide it by the number of deals. To calculate your happy medium, you need to work out the middle ground between your most expensive solution and your least expensive solution.

For instance, if your most expensive solution cost £50 per month and your least expensive cost £20 per month, then your happy medium is £35 per month.

I've done this exercise with almost every client I've worked with, and never once has the average order value been close to the happy medium. In fact, it instead always seems to land on the middle ground between the happy medium and the least expensive solution – and this is for one reason.

Almost all salespeople start at the happy medium because they're afraid of trying to sell their most expensive solution for fear of frightening off the prospect. As a result, the prospect always gets a great deal at a rate 25% lower than it should have been.

Start High. End Happy.

As a manager, I always used to teach my sales teams to negotiate with everything apart from money. *'If you can do that,'* I told them, *'you'll increase your order values.'*

It's easy to forget all of the different negotiation tools at your disposal, but discount seems to be the only tool most salespeople have ever been taught to use. It's crazy.

Negotiating is like a game of cards. You or your company get to choose those negotiation cards. Then you need to keep them close to your chest and use them if and when needed.

Apart from cost, think about what other elements of your solution you can use as a negotiation tool. What options can you offer your prospect that doesn't cut into your profits?

It's not always easy to think out of the box on this one, so let me throw a few ideas your way.

(1) *Payment Terms.*

Most companies offer the option to pay upfront, monthly, or quarterly. You may also have the choice to offer 30-, 45- or 60-day payment terms. Or you could offer the option to delay the invoice being sent, thus offering a free period of usage.

One of my favourite and probably one of the most effective strategies is the option to provide a discount for upfront payment. To make this work though, you must increase your pricing by 20% if the prospect wishes to pay monthly. This way you do not lose 20% of your profit if they pay upfront. So, if you offer a solution that cost £600 per year, quote your prospect that figure and if they ask to pay monthly, increase the cost by 20%, making it £720 per year, totalling £720 per year. You'll find that most prospects will choose to pay upfront to save the £120.

While we are on the subject of monthly and annual pricing, I would like to highly advise you to avoid using the method of quoting monthly figures to your prospect if you require a 12-month commitment with an upfront payment. Misleading your prospect will only infuriate them and potentially lose you the sale.

If you require such terms, you must state your price annually. Do not tell someone it's £10 per month if they must pay £120 up front.

(2) Contract Length.

If you sell a solution that requires a period of commitment, play around with this, and consider adjusting your price to reflect the duration of the agreement.

For example, if you have a prospect who doesn't want to commit to a 12-month contract, offer them a 3-month option with a substantial hike in the cost. You'll find that most prospects will reconsider the 12-month commitment rather than throw money down the drain.

Some prospects will also have a fear that their price will increase in the second year of their agreement. You may feel obliged to add a term in their contract that promises this won't happen because you can smell the sale. However, offering a 24-month package to retain the same rate is a much better option that will satisfy the prospect and result in an ideal win-win scenario.

(3) Features or Packages.

Most prospects want the best package with the most features, even if they do not need them all. Be sure to use the option of moving your prospect either up or down in the package options, or consider stripping out some key features to test their resolve on the cost.

For example, if your prospect tells you they can't get the budget approved for your most expensive solution, suggest they start on the lower option with the possibility of upgrading at a later point but be sure to mention what they will lose in painful detail.

If you're in the particular scenario where you can add or strip out certain features, take early notes about which ones your prospect needs for the solution to be of most value to them. You can then use this feature as a winning card in the negotiation stage if and when needed. An Application Programming Interface (API) feature could be a great example if you sell software, removing the option of a huge range of integrations that save time and increase efficiency.

(4) Human Resources.

If you provide resources such as free or premium training, technical support, or customer success programs, use them to your advantage. Your business should be set up in a way that it can sustain providing every new client with these services, but be sure to check your house rules.

You'll be amazed at how much your clients value having access to training and support to help get them started with their investment. Your human resources can be the golden ticket to winning a negotiation and retaining happy clients. People still value human interaction with their suppliers a lot, so don't underestimate this winning card.

There's likely a host of other great ace cards you can offer your prospects, so take some time to sit down with yourself or your colleagues and list them all. The more cards you have, the more flexible you'll seem to your prospects, and the more win-win negotiations you'll achieve.

It's also critical that you always remember to get something in return from your prospect when negotiating. It could be something small like a testimonial for your website, or something much more valuable like a signed agreement by the end of the week.

I like to call this the *If I Can* technique.

So, if your prospect asks for a concession, you respond by saying something along the lines of this example.

'If I can get that approved for you, are you happy to go ahead?'

You must always ensure any discounts or special agreements you make have a deadline. I've also found that having a non-disclosure term in your proposal that states your prospect can't disclose the discounted offer to anyone is a brilliant psychological trick that creates urgency by making your offer appear unique.

By listing all of your ace cards, hopefully, you'll come up with a new set of negotiation tools and your list will open your eyes to the huge amount of potential revenue you're leaving on the table with every sale you make.

Your ace cards are not only negotiation tools. Many of them are potential add-on options that you should include in your proposals for those prospects who need them.

If you keep starting your negotiations at the happy medium, going in with your typical no-frills, medium-sized solution, you'll never make any money and will be poorly positioned to negotiate. You need to tailor your solution to fit the needs of your prospect, so it gives them maximum value.

I am not suggesting you boycott your integrity, and I am not going to contradict my definition of sales either. Selling is the act of helping and sometimes persuading people to invest in a solution you believe they can get value from, and I am positive you believe the large proportion of your prospects can get value from much more than you're offering them today.

If you believe your prospect can value from your most expensive solution with all of the add-ons, you're doing both yourself and your prospect a disservice by not offering them these options.

Your proposals should also include your preferential terms, too, such as upfront payment, a 12-month commitment, paid premium support, and upgrades. If you honestly believe this is what will bring great value to your prospect, why would you not offer them?

If you want to increase your sales revenue and be perfectly positioned to enter a negotiation with anyone, you must start high so that you can end the negotiation happily.

Even if you have to negotiate with your primary contact, their CEO, and the Finance Director, by starting high, you'll ensure you have acres of space to be flexible enough to close the sale and still make a good profit.

You must block out the fear that your prospect will run away if you offer them your most expensive solution because if you don't try, you'll never know. The truth is, one or two of your prospects may run off, but the amount of additional revenue you'll make from those who do not will far outweigh the loss.

Practise, Learn and Succeed

So that's it. Now you know everything there is to know about how to become an elite sales professional and be more successful than you've ever imagined.

It takes a flexible, ambitious, and determined individual to succeed in sales, and those in sales understand that the pain of failure is just part of the journey to the top.

Sadly though, your brain will only retain a tiny proportion of what you've learnt in this book, so you must pay me to be your personal success coach to get full value from your investment.

Only joking.

Although I would love to have you as a client, there is another way to get maximum value from this book.

The tips, tricks, strategies, and techniques I've shared with you are the result of many years of learning. I made the very same mistakes as you when I started out in sales, and it took years of practice, execution, and failure to get them right.

Like you, I took to reading sales books to fast-track my skills, and it worked, but only after I had returned to my favourite books time and time again.

This book, like any other, will be as useful as a chocolate fireguard if you read it just once because you'll retain very little of the value it offers.

My final recommendation to you is to schedule a calendar reminder for this time next year, to pluck this book from its dusty place of rest, and read it all over again. I'm sure you'll be pleasantly surprised at the amazing new content your more experienced sales brain will rediscover.

Thank you once again for investing your time into reading my book. I sincerely hope it finds its way onto your favourites list, and I hope you'll recommend it to others.

So, until this time next year, I wish you all the success in your career, and I will leave you with my favourite words of wisdom to remember: *You're Good. Get Better.*

Yours Sincerely

David Craig White

Your Personal Success Coach

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About the Author

David Craig White is an international sales trainer, entrepreneur and personal success coach, who has mentored and coached thousands of people in more than 120 countries.

David was born in 1980 in Manchester, England. He started his sales career in 1999, working as a bank cashier. After struggling financially through his 20s, he was declared bankrupt, and left the sales profession altogether.

David returned less than 6 months later, and went on to be one of Europe's leading sales professionals. He emigrated to Denmark in 2006, where he helped some of Europe's fastest growing start-ups break into international markets and generate millions of dollars in sales revenue.

In 2009, he founded Advertiserbay(TM), the first online marketplace for buying and selling online and offline media spaces. The business was acquired in 2012, after building a strong online brand and attracting over a thousand clients.

Today, David leverages two decades of sales and leadership experience to drive his passion in helping others achieve personal success. He excels in empowering people to deal with stress, limiting beliefs, people problems, and that fragile work/life balance, enabling them to realize their dreams and live fulfilling lives.

Learn more today at: www.davidcraigwhite.com