

A Book Report on  
***How You Make the Sale***

*(What Every New Salesperson Needs to Know)*

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(Book Report by Gary Tomlinson)

## **Introduction:**

I titled this book *How You Make the Sale* because I believe you can sell the product that interests you to people you value while still maintaining your integrity, your sense of self, and your current wardrobe and personality. And while selling is difficult, it requires no super-human aptitude. Selling is a learnable skill, and I can help you learn it.

Selling is not a black art. You do not have to sacrifice a live chicken at the full moon to the god of sales quotas to make a good living as an ethical, principled salesperson. You simply have to listen, process what you hear, and match your product or service to the problem that brought the customer into the market in the first place.

You do not have to change your worldview to sell successfully. In fact, the more ethical and customer-focused you are, the more successful you will be in the long term. Sales people who value their customers and treat them with respect gain their trust and generate repeat business. And repeat sales to satisfied customers are the most profitable sales of all.

While learning the nuances of selling can be difficult, selling is not a science – rocket or otherwise. Selling is a *process* – a rather simple process, really – that moves logically from beginning to end in a series of eight predictable, easily identifiable steps. The steps are simply building blocks – each step builds upon the previous one as the salesperson and the prospective customer move together from their first interaction until the final sale.

*Selling can be learned*, and this book will help you learn it. This book will teach you how to name each step in the sales process and how to recognize where you are as you move from step to step. Let's get to work!

## **Chapter 1: Selling as *Service*:**

I'm talking here about selling as a service – that is, service to the customer. We are talking about a sales model – and a mind set – where the salesperson adds value by what he knows, what she can teach, and how he or she structures a sale to meet the customer's needs and solve the customer's problems.

Your role as a salesperson is to *serve* – to serve the customer, to serve the demands of the sales process, and to serve your own needs for significance and competence by being the very best salesperson you can be. This shift to a service mindset is an important and profound transformation. And it transforms not only your self-understanding, but also the buying experience for the customer, the customer’s long-term satisfaction with you and your products, and your success as a salesperson.

**More Products are Bought than are Sold:** The marketplace holds tens of thousands of products from which we choose every day. And more of those products are bought than are sold. For example, there are no salespeople in the aisles of the grocery store, but the customer still buys.

**Adding Value with Service:** How do salespeople add value? What is it they do that provides a service to the customer, and justifies the expense to the company of paying the salesperson, training the salesperson, and providing benefits, expenses, and the other perks that keep the sales force in the field? Here are the ways you can add value:

1. *Listen carefully to the customer* to fully discern the customer’s wants and needs.
2. *Clarify the customer’s wants and needs* both for yourself and (often) for the customer himself. It always amazes me how much the customer learns as we walk towards the purchase together. Clarifying is one service a professional salesperson provides for his or her customers.
3. *Determine the problem the customer is trying to solve*, so that he (the salesperson) can solve the problem in the most appropriate manner.
4. *Know your own (and his competitor’s) product lines* so completely that he can select – from among all the reasonable options – the product or service that best meets the customer’s needs and solves the customer’s problems.
5. *Present the solution so the customer sees and appreciates the benefits* of the solution, and understands why this solution is the best one for his situation.
6. *Help the customer complete the transaction* in other ways: creative financing, advocating for the customer with management, arranging delivery, and so forth.
7. *Follow-up after the sale* to ensure that the customer is satisfied with his or her purchase and to make any additional sales that would add additional value to the customer.

In each case above, the salesperson’s primary job is *servicing* the customer – doing whatever is necessary to help the customer meet his needs, solve his problems, and leave happy.

**Three Key Myths:** Let’s take a look at three key myths that can derail a sales career. These myths include:

1. Sales are about *making the sale*.
2. You have to “control” the customer to make the sale.
3. Customers “buy” your company, not you.

In many sales systems, the focus is on making the sale. I do not embrace that view. I believe the sale is a by-product of providing excellent service to the customers, solving the problems that the customer brings to the interaction, and asking for the business. All this nonsense about control assumes the customer is our enemy. The customer is not the enemy. You don't win if the customer loses.

People like to do business with folks they know and trust. If they don't know or trust anyone in a particular business, they seek referrals. (I'd rather work with someone my friend knows and trusts than take blind luck in a listing of salespeople!)

**Summary:** The key to success in the whole sales game is not mastery of hard-driving sales tactics. Nor is it some magic way to trick them into buying. The key to selling is learning how to: 1) listen carefully, so you can 2) craft a solution that solves the customer's problems and service his or her needs and then, 3) ask for the order. If you can master these three concepts, you can be a professional salesperson. Sales is service – and the more faithfully you serve, the more fruitfully you will sell!

## Chapter Two: How Buyers Decide to Buy:

The basics of consumer behavior and the buying decision can be summed-up in six words: *People buy to solve a problem!*

So, if people buy to solve a problem, then what constitutes a problem? Interestingly, a problem is anything the customer considers a problem. Some problems are real and some problems are perceived. Most problems are a mixture of real, concrete problems and perceived problems. Many problems contain an unarticulated *image* component. But the thing to remember is people always buy to solve a problem.

**The Salesperson's Role in the Buying Process:** Real, perceived, or mixed – the salesperson who offers the best solution to the problem gets the sale. Our job as salespeople is to understand the customer's problem and, perhaps, to help them understand their own problem better – to clarify it with (and for) them. Then we walk with the customer through the process of identifying possible solutions, evaluating the options, and selecting the option that best meets their purchase criteria.

**The Path to Purchase:** It's possible to map the stages consumers go through as they make a buying decision – there is a predictable way in which people move down the path to a purchase. The **Consumer Buying Model** looks like this:

**Step 1: Identify Need** – The prospective customer realizes that he or she has a problem. Our first job when we meet a perspective customer is to uncover the problem he or she is trying to solve.

**Step 2: Gather Data** – Once a consumer can name the problem, Step 2 is to move out into the marketplace and gather data. What products are available to

meet this need I've identified? Most of the time you meet prospective customers when they reach Step 7 (Visit Potential Sources) of the Consumer Buying Model, but it is not uncommon for them to appear during Step 2 (Data Gathering).

**Step 3: Clarify Need** – As the prospective customer gathers data, he or she gradually begins to clarify the problem to be solved. In other words, to become more precise about what is needed and why.

**Step 4: Identify Options that Fulfill Need** – The customer is learning as he goes – his task is to find out what specific products will meet his needs and solve his problems.

**Step 5: Develop Purchase Criteria** – Purchase Criteria are key purchase determinants that will drive the purchase. For example, “How much can I spend?” “When do I need to take delivery?” This step allows the purchaser to eliminate from the list of possible solutions all those that cost too much or take too long or – for whatever other reason – fail to meet one or more of the buyer's purchase criteria.

**Step 6: Identify Potential Sources** – Here the customer runs through a series of simple – but critical – questions: Who carries the products that are in my range of reasonable choices (and that meet my purchase criteria)? Where are they located? Is proximity an issue? Among my circle of acquaintances, who has a recommendation that I might follow?

**Step 7: Visit Potential Sources** – What is the feel of this place? Is this a place I think I could do business?

**Step 8: Interview Potential Salespeople** – More questions for the consumer to wrestle with occur when they start meeting salespeople: Is this person credible with me? Does she know what she is talking about? Does he seem to listen when I speak, or am I getting a canned spiel he uses on every customer? Do I trust this person? Do I like this person? Do we “connect”? Is this someone I want to do business with?

**Step 9: Select Preferred Outlet and Salesperson** – One final question – the one for which the customer has been preparing throughout the whole Consumer Buying Process: Of all the places I have visited, which product, which outlet, and which salesperson seems best able to help me solve my problem?

**Summary:** Customers go through more-or-less predictable steps in identifying their problem, and in seeking a solution to their problem. It is possible to make the stages consumers go through as they make a buying decision (Consumer Buying Process). Customers don't really buy products, programs, or services – they buy solutions. The salesperson with the best *solution* to the problem gets to make the sale. And the customer alone decides what the “best” solution is!

## Chapter Three: How Does a Sale Unfold?

In the previous chapter, we took a hard look at how consumers move through the Consumer Buying Model – from problem recognition and data-gathering to selecting a product, an outlet, and a salesperson that can solve their problem. In this chapter, we'll look at what happens in the sales process itself. Most sales unfold in a reasonable, logical, and more or less predictable fashion. A sale follows a series of discrete steps. These steps generally occur in approximately the same order. And – if you follow the steps professionally and focus on solving the customer's problem – you have an excellent chance of making the sale.

**The Sales Process:** Interestingly – despite all the variability in sales – there is a predictable way in which people move down the path to a purchase. There may be minor variations in the process based on the type of product, the nature of the buyer, or other factors, but the process remains remarkably constant across product categories, types of sales, and other variables. **The Sales Process** looks like this:

**Step 1: Research Prior to the Sale** – This step is transparent to the buyer – it happens before we ever meet him or her. Thorough research is critical to our credibility – and to our ultimate success as salespeople. In the *Research Prior to the Sale* step, we focus first on our own products. We learn all the features and benefits of our product. We understand the typical customer problems our product will solve, and learn how to present our product as the solution to those customer problems. It's a tremendous job because it takes a while to fully understand all the ins and outs of the product(s) we represent. And even when we have fully mastered the product(s) we represent, we have only begun our presale research.

We are selling in a competitive universe where customers have multiple choices to solve the problem or problems that sent them into the market. To be professional salespeople, we have to know our competitor's products at least as well as we know our own. Among the questions that drive our study:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the competitive product versus the product we represent?
- How do the competitor's salespeople sell – and how can we take advantage of that?
- When people buy from competitors, why (and how often) are they disappointed?
- When we lose sales to the competitors, why and how do we lose them?
- How can we mitigate against those ways in which we lose sales – what will our strategy be?

There's a long list of things we need to know, and going out to meet customers without knowing them is dangerous. Do your research prior to the sale!

**Step 2: Meet and Greet** – The Meet and Greet step is where the Path to Purchase and the Sales Process Model we are examining intersect. The meet and greet is where you begin to build rapport and credibility, so that the buyers will invite you into their decision making process. Here's where you sell yourself to the prospective customer – if they don't buy you, they likely won't buy your product. Meet and greet is the beginning of the sale – do it well, and you've got a chance. Do it poorly and the customer might still buy your product, but he or she will buy in spite of – not because of – you.

**Step 3: Discovery** – In the discovery stage of the sales process, you begin to wrap your mind around the prospective customer's understanding of the problem. Why is this customer in the market – what problem is he or she trying to solve? You discover far more than what the problem is, however. You discover how much urgency the customer has about solving the problem, who else is involved in making the purchase decision, and what budgetary constraints guide the purchase. The discovery step is where you begin to fully understand the problem and the customer's expectation of what it will take to solve the problem. Discovery is where you *name the problem*. And you can't solve a problem you can't name.

**Step 4: Features and Benefits** – In Step 4 you begin to talk about your product, program, or service. You detail for the customer the features of your product, and then bridge to the benefits that accrue because of that feature. You also need to get the prospective customer's agreement that the benefits you have detailed actually matter to the buyer. If we are to do features and benefits well, we will “talk about the product in a way that *matters to the prospective customer*.”

**Step 5: Making the Case / Presenting the Solution** – Step 5 is where we make the case that our product, program, or service can solve the customer's problem better than any other option available. To make the case well, we talk and – most importantly listen. We listen to the prospective customer's concerns and misgivings. We deal with those concerns and misgivings by addressing them, not by explaining them away. And – throughout the interaction – we “check-in” with the buyer to make sure we are speaking to their needs. The key to a successful sale is for us to make the case for our product so persuasively that the prospective customer buys from us.

**Step 6: The Objective is Objections: Dealing with Resistance** – Rarely is your sales life will the customer buy from you immediately after you make the case for your product. There will always be some objection – from “Let me think about it” to “Your price is too high” and everything in between. Do not panic.

An objection seldom means no. It most often means, “Tell me more.” An objection is usually a request for more information, so our job in Step 6 is to circle back to Discovery and determine what additional information the buyer needs. We meet the objection by providing whatever additional information the prospective customer seeks, and checking-in to see if we have addressed his concerns. Then we make the case once again that our product, program, or service provides the customer with the very best solution to the problem that sent them into the market in the first place.

Most people panic at Step 6. Objections are not an occasion for panic – they are an occasion for Discovery through probing and questioning. Once you discover the real barrier to the sale, you can deal with it and move on to Step 7.

**Step 7: Closing: It’s Okay to Ask for the Order** – In Step 7 you get to reap the rewards of all the work you have done in Steps 1 through 6. You’ve prepared well and met the customer in a way that built rapport and credibility. You’ve listened carefully and detailed the features and benefits of your product, program, or service. You’ve made the case that you can solve the problem, and you have overcome objections by circling back to gather more information. Now you get to ask for the order.

All you need to do to close a sale is to follow Steps 1 through 7 faithfully. Then – once you have flushed out and dealt with each of the objections – look the buyer in the eye and say, “Well, what do you think? Should we do business together? If you’ve done your job well, the answer, more often than not, will be “yes.” And if you get an objection at this point you already know what to do. Go back to Step 3 and discover what the issue is.

**Step 8: Following-Up for Ongoing Profitability** – This is the stage where you begin to really cash-in on all the hard work you did in steps 1 through 7. You’ve already done a lot of work to find the customer, to cultivate him or her, to build rapport, and to make the first sale. So mine the vein you are already working! Remember to service the heck out of this new customer, so that you don’t quickly lose the customer you worked so hard to gain.

**Summary:** Selling is a disciplined, step-by-step process. If you miss a step, you’re out. Selling is like baseball – if you miss a base in baseball you are out. If you skip a step selling, you are out! But you can also lose a sale by moving too quickly from one step to the next one in the sequence. Remember you have to earn the right to move to the next step. And only the customer can decide if you have earned the right.

## Chapter Four: Identifying Hot Buttons and Flagging Landmines:

As professional salespeople, we owe our potential customers the same amount of preparation that *they* put into their purchases. And we should *never* make them do our homework for us. Don't go in and ask the potential customer to "tell me a little bit about your company (advertising, product lines, etc.)." That's your job to find out that information beforehand.

**The Implicit Contract between the Buyer and the Salesperson:** There is a two-sided, implied contract in the relationship between professional salespeople and their customers. From the customer's perspective, the implied contract goes something like this:

*"If you will help me find the appropriate product and service to meet my needs, I will consider buying it from you. I am willing to answer your questions, but it's not my job to teach you my business, or to educate you on your competitors, their products, or the relative merits of their products versus yours. You get paid for making the sale; do your own work."*

This contract between the buyer and the seller also has a salesperson's perspective, and it goes something like this:

*"I'm happy to help you find the product and service that meets your needs and solves your problems. It's my job to sell my product, so you can expect me to include sale of my product in the solutions I propose, but if you out-and-out don't need my product, I'll tell you so."*

*I promise to listen carefully to your problems and your concerns, and to keep confidential all the information you provide me. I expect of you the following:*

- *That you will tell me the truth about your situation and your challenges,*
- *That you not waste my time and effort by engaging me just to fill out you need for "three competitive bids" when you have already made up your mind which supplier to use,*
- *That you will keep my information confidential, and*
- *That you will pay your bills – in full and on time."*

It's important for people to be clear with each other from the beginning of a relationship; clarity can save a lot of wasted time, false starts and – ultimately – frustration. So here's the bottom line: be clear about what you can deliver and ask the buyer to be specific about his or her expectations! Then be clear about your expectations of the customer. You have a right to your expectations every bit as much as the buyer has a right to his or hers.

**Identifying Hot Buttons:** In the language of selling "hot buttons" are the product attributes that excite customers and energize them about buying your product, program,



or service. These are the *sizzle* that goes with the *steak* of the product you are selling. In some cases the hot buttons are literal attributes of the actual product or service; in other cases they are the less tangible “coolness factors” associated with the product.

One of our jobs as professional salespeople is to know the general hot buttons for our product and for all of our product’s relevant competition. In the discovery portion of the sales interview our buyer will tell us the specific buttons that matter to him or her. Only when we fully understand our buyer, our product, and the competitive environment in which our product exists can we serve our customers by helping them make an informed choice.

**Flagging Landmines:** A sales landmine is a hidden piece of information that, when you stray across it, carries the danger that it might blow your sales opportunity completely away. Examples of sale’s landmines:

- A previous bad experience with the company you represent.
- A previous bad experience with the product you represent.
- Unarticulated loyalty to a competitor’s product or service.
- Embarrassing fact (for example, bad credit) that the customer does not want to reveal.
- Commitment to buy from someone else (the customer is using you as a second or third bid or estimate just to the keep the boss happy).

It’s important to note that an objection is not a landmine. Landmines are more oblique and harder to surface – which is why they are so dangerous.

## **Chapter Five: You Never Get a Second Chance to Make a Good First Impression:**

Like two great streams that flow along in parallel – finally converging to produce one tremendous river – the Path to Purchase and The Sales Process converge at the meet and greet portion of the sales process.

**You’ve Got to Care About Your Customers:** In every case, the first thing a customer looks for in a salesperson, is someone who authentically *cares* about them and about their circumstances. They seek someone they can trust, someone with credibility, someone who can partner with them in making the best possible solution.

Trust is the fundamental factor in the equation, and trust is built on a salesperson listening to – and connecting with – the customer. Credibility follows trust (no trust = no credibility), and credibility is built on a salesperson’s breadth of market knowledge. Neither trust nor credibility alone is sufficient – the two must exist simultaneously if a salesperson is to make the case that he or she is the best possible partner in making a

decision. To put it simply, *customers don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.*

**Where Are We in the “Path to Purchase”?** As a salesperson, it's critical that we *always* know where we are in the Path to Purchase, because where we are drives what we do next. By the time we meet and greet a customer, he or she is already well on the way to making a purchase decision. They are near the end of the Path to Purchase (Step 7) – one of the two streams that converge to create our sale. The other stream is The Sales Process, and we are much closer to the beginning of that process (Step 2).

**Our Challenge in the Meet and Greet:** Our challenge in the Meet and Greet, at the very least, is to address the three questions posed below:

1. How do I greet customers in a way that they *see me as a credible colleague*?
2. How do I *build rapport*?
3. How do I get customers to *invite me into their problem-solving process*?

These three questions are additive, meaning that question two builds upon question one, and question one and two support question three. Put differently, customers have to see you as a credible colleague (question one) before they are willing to develop rapport with you (question two). They must experience you as credible and have rapport with you before they will invite you into the process that solves their problem (question three).

**Greeting Customers So They See You as a Credible Colleague:** There are so many different types of people – with so many different styles of communicating and way of relating – that it may seem impossible to speak in general terms about how to present one's self as a credible colleague. It's not. Think about the questions you carried into your last interaction with a salesperson – questions you have had when *you are the buyer*. I don't know all of the questions you had, but I'd bet these were among them.

- Does this salesperson listen to me when I talk?
- Is this salesperson willing to get to know me before trying to sell me?  
Am I a human being, or just another “turn at bat”?
- Does this salesperson know what he or she is talking about?
  - Their own products and applications?
  - Competitor's products and applications?
  - The difference between – and similarities of – the two?
  - The advantages and disadvantages of each?
- Does this person move the process along at a pace that felt comfortable to me?

*Most* customers go into *most* buying situations with many of the same questions you take into your own purchases – including some or all of the questions above. To establish ourselves as credible, we have to generate favorable answers to these questions. That is, we must value the customer as a human being – as someone beyond just our next opportunity to make a sale. We must, for sure, know our stuff. And we must let the

customer set the pace of the buying experience. And – especially – we must *listen!* Let's look at these one by one.

**Building Trust through Listening:** Trust is one of the key dimensions of the sales process. Buyers rarely buy from sellers they don't trust. Trust in relationships takes time to build, and usually accrues when the salesperson demonstrates to the buyer that he or she can be counted on – that he or she can be relied upon to do some or all of the following:

1. Tell the truth – the whole truth – without shading it to advantage,
2. Listen carefully to the customer's problem(s),
3. Question closely to ensure he or she fully understands the customer's circumstances and buying constraints,
4. Respect the customer – the customer's desires and needs and constraints,
5. Educate the customer – if the seller knows things that will help the buyer make an informed decision,
6. Partner with the customer – so that both the buyer and the seller get a solution that works for each of them, and
7. Shape a solution that solves the customer's problem within the constraints laid out by the customer.

Clearly, all of these steps won't transpire in the first two minutes of the meet and greet. But the groundwork for all these steps can then be laid. It all begins with customer-focus and a willingness to listen to the problem or problems that brought the customer into the market in the first place. There are no techniques or tricks to facilitate the building of trust – rather, trust develops when we encounter our prospective customers with a focus on them, not us – an authentic desire to help them meet their needs and achieve the goals that brought them into the market. Let's take a look.

**It's Not about You!** Too many salespeople think that the Meet and Greet is all about them. The key to a successful meet and greet is not ingratiating yourself to the buyer, it's listening to – and caring for – the buyer. That is, don't act interested – *be* interested. Don't act honest – *be* honest. Don't act respectful – *be* respectful. Amazingly, if you move into the sales interaction with a focus on serving – not selling – the customer, these outcomes will occur effortlessly and as a by-product – you won't have to create them at all.

Selling is not about you – how bright you are, how cute you are, how manipulative you can be. Selling is about the customer – how carefully you can hear her, how well you can serve him, how faithful you can be in solving the problem that brought the customer into the market in the first place.

**Building Rapport:** Where trust is a foundational thing, rapport is less substantial and more fleeting. Generally rapport grows from *shared experiences, values, backgrounds, or interests*. Rapport is built – at least in part – on overlapping interests. Think of the folks with whom you have *rapport*. What central interests do you have in common?

Whatever it is, this commonality of interests is a major contributor to the ease you feel with each other – the *rapport* that sustains your relationship.

And it's the same way in sales. You don't have to lie to build rapport – you and your customer already have the most important commonality you could possibly claim. The customer has a problem that your product, program, or service might be able to solve. You are both interested in this deal, because – if he or she buys your product – you have both reached an important goal. You've made a sale, and they've solved their problem. This is enough commonality on which to start a relationship.

**Get Invited to the Problem-Solving Party!** *If* you establish yourself as credible by what you know and how you listen, *if* you develop a bond of trust between yourself and the client, and *if* you build an authentic rapport based on your shared desire to solve the customer's problem – if you do these faithfully and thoroughly – you'll get invited to help solve the problem. You've got to sell yourself before you sell your product. And – if you do – you'll get an opportunity to make the sale! Do all these things, and you are on the short list of salespeople invited to help solve the customer's problem.

**Cold Calling – A Special Type of Meet and Greet:** Cold calling is hard, hard work – it has a high rejection rate and requires someone with thick skin and a well-developed sense of self-confidence. Prospects are much more likely to act like jerks and treat the salesperson badly, and feel justified in acting this way because they have been interrupted in whatever they were doing to respond to the salesperson's call.

Prospects are also very impatient in a cold call – the salesperson has to “hook” the prospect's interest in the first thirty seconds (on the phone) or the first couple of minutes (in person), or the conversation will go no further. In some ways, the first few sentences of a cold call become like the headline of an advertisement – if the headline doesn't grab the reader, the game is over. If the first couple of sentences don't grab the prospect, the cold call is over.

There are no tricks to minimize the prospect's initial irritation. No one likes to be interrupted. The key to overcoming this irritation is to give the prospect a reason for the interruption – a benefit so important that the irritation is suspended or dissipates. And that's why cold calling salespeople almost always lead with the most astounding benefits of their product – to grab the prospect's attention. (Once you have the prospect's attention, the sales process is exactly the same as the one we have been describing.

**Schmucks:** Some people are jerks. Get used to it. Don't let it affect your interaction with the next customer. It's difficult to deal with folks like this. Here are several lessons I've taken away; perhaps they will be helpful to you:

1. Never say something to a customer that you wouldn't want repeated on the local television newscast.
2. Put it in writing – whatever “it” is.

3. Keep management in the loop – as soon as you realize that you might be dealing with a schmuck, let your manager know.
4. Refuse to sell them.
5. Don't let it get you down.

**Summary:** So there it is – Meet and Greet – the first face-to-face encounter in the sales process. This encounter is the foundation of all that follows. If it goes well and you build rapport, you'll get invited to the problem-solving party. If it goes poorly and the prospective customer does not trust you or find you to be credible, you'll be drinking alone.

## Chapter Six: Questioning for Results:

We absolutely need to know the answer to the question *What brings you here today and how might I be helpful to you?* before we have a prayer of helping customers find the product or service that meets their needs and solves the problem that sent them into the market in the first place.

**Differential Diagnosis:** A key skill taught in any medical school curriculum is the ability to do what physicians term *differential diagnosis*. That is, the ability to differentiate one disease from another, even if the diseases have the same set of presenting symptoms. And – to do differential diagnosis precisely – the critical skills are the ability to *question precisely* and to *listen carefully*.

**Where is Discovery in the sales process?** Discovery happens very early in the interaction between the salesperson and the prospective customer. Technically, discovery is Step 3 in the sales process. However, discovery often begins in the early moments of the Meet and Greet (Step 2). Our job in the Discovery portion of the sales process is to use targeted questions to identify the customer's problem and to determine what the prospective customer sees as the "best" solution for the problem.

**Question Types: The Difference – and Why It Makes a Difference:** There are two fundamental types of questions we use in sales: open questions and closed questions. Open questions are the "essay" questions of life – they require a paragraph answer. They often begin with words or phrases like:

- "Tell me about"
- "Explain"
- "What happened when"
- "Why"
- "How"
- "How do you feel about"

Open questions have several pluses: they get lots of information (some of it unforeseen), they get the customer to talk, and they provide a more conversational interaction than a

series of closed questions. So, why don't we confine ourselves to open questions only? Because open questions are not perfect. Open questions can take a lot of time, and they can be inefficient if you are dealing with someone who talks a lot. Furthermore some people can manage to answer even the best open questions with a grunt – leaving you no better off than if you had asked a closed question in the first place.

The best use of closed questions is often after you have gotten to know the customer – having already built trust and rapport. You can then use closed questions to quickly get specific answers to your questions.

The takeaway is: either type of question can be effective in helping you understand the answer to the key sales question: “*What brings you here today, and how might I be helpful to you?*” The fundamental issue is not what questions you ask, or how you frame them. The fundamental issue is this: do the questions you ask help you identify the problem the customer has come here to solve? If your questions do this, you're in business. And if they don't do this, then work on them. It's nobody's fault but your if you aren't ready with good questions in your first meeting with your customer.

**The Probing Question – So Easy it Ought to be Illegal!** Probing questions are used to gather additional information about a topic that is already on the table. The purpose of the probe is to encourage the speaker to keep talking or say more about the issue at hand. We (salespeople, doctors, therapists – anyone who listens for a living) often use probing questions to extend our understanding of the topic or to cast a wider net and keep reeling in information from the talker. Here are some sample probing questions:

- Are there other concerns you have about this?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- What else comes to mind?
- Is that all?
- Go on...
- Tell me more...

Remember: the focus of probing is to keep the other person talking, so you can gather more information and they can heighten their buy-in. Probing is also a useful way to clear up issues when you are unclear what the prospective customer meant by a comment – keep them talking and you will usually understand in time. Probing is a powerful tool: *When in doubt, probe!*

### **Some Sample Questions:**

#### **Category: Core Problem**

- What problem are you trying to solve with this purchase?
- Why did you decide to make this purchase now?
- If this purchase solves your problem, how will things be different?
- How is the current situation affecting your ability to get your work done?

- How do you hope that making this purchase will make things better?

**Category: Product Specs**

- What is the single most important way you want this purchase to improve on or be different from the product/service you now have?
- What is the single most frustrating thing about the product or service you will be replacing?
- How much output are you looking for from the new equipment?
- How much output are you getting from the old equipment?
- How is downtime with the old equipment?
- How much are you now spending on maintenance?
- What efficiency level do you have now? What do you want?

**Category: Competition**

- Who else are you talking to about this purchase?
- Have you had any previous experience with this seller?
- What other products are you considering?
- Have you had any previous experience with this brand/product line?
- Do you have references from or for any of the suppliers you are considering?
- Can I give you some references to compare with the others you have?

**Category: Price**

- How much is your budget for this purchase?
- Have you already committed the money, or are you just testing the market?
- How much did you pay for the item you will be replacing?
- How much is the current item costing you in downtime and maintenance?
- Where does price fit in the list of attributes that will help you make this decision?
- Have you considered total cost (downtime, maintenance, product life, hassle), rather than front-end cost, as a possible way to make the decision?

**Category: Buying Process**

- Who else will be involved in making this purchase decision?
- Will any end users of the new product be involved in the buying decision for the new product?
- Could I talk to some end users of the current product?
- When do you anticipate making the buying decision?
- What criteria will drive your purchase decision?

- If a committee is involved in the buying decision, would it be possible for me to meet with all of them?

**Summary:** It is critical to *know what you need to know* before you begin asking questions. Otherwise, you’ll miss a key piece of data and the sale will jump the track later on in the process. Don’t just wing it. Be prepared. Remember: good physicians always diagnose before they prescribe. And you can’t do a diagnosis unless you know what you need to know! It’s easier to *listen* someone into buying than to *talk* someone into buying.

## Chapter Seven: The Difference and Why it Matters:

Every time I teach selling the hardest concept for new sales people to grasp is the difference between features and benefits.

- A feature is an attribute of a product, program, or service.
- A benefit is a reason for the customer to care (and to buy!).

In almost every case – for almost every product – there are more features than benefits. And in every case without exception, salespeople are tempted to talk about features, while customers focus on – and buy – benefits. I remember the first time that I discovered the power of benefits in my own selling life. It was a major “ah-ha” for me to realize that – when I spoke of features – I was talking about my product and what mattered to me. When I began to talk about benefits, I was putting myself into the position of the buyer – talking about what mattered to him or to her and speaking to the problem he or she sought to solve. The shift in perspective may seem subtle, but the effect on the sales process (and my sales success) was profound.

**If it Doesn’t Matter to the Customer, it Doesn’t Matter, Period:** There is an easy way to discipline yourself to talk about what matters to the customer. Imagine that every time you talk to your customer they reply with a quick and pointed query: *WSIGAF?* “*Why should I give a flip?*”

We have to give our customers – for every feature we name – a good reason to “give a flip.” And the only reasons they are obligated to acknowledge are reasons that relate to the problem – real or perceived – that they brought into the sales interaction in the first place. Don’t talk about a feature if you can’t make it matter to the customer. Remember: If it doesn’t matter to the customer, it doesn’t matter period.

**The Universal Benefits: Key Things That Matter to Your Customer:** The universal benefits relate to money, power, prestige, self-understanding, fear, and the other core motivators that drive all human behavior. Here’s a list as I have been able to identify it:

Make more money  
Spend less money

Make a contribution  
Make a difference



Save more money	Be heard or valued
Have more money	Avoid Pain
Work less / fewer hours	Be vindicated
Save time	Be autonomous
Have more time off	Feel heard
Look good to others	Do competent / quality work
Be attractive	Get recognition / be a hero
Be part of a winning team	Play more
Work with folks I like	Have fun!
Learn something new	Serve God
Use new technology	Serve a higher-order goal
Be more productive	Look good to myself
Have fewer hassles	Be all I can be
Be safe	Reduce risk
Be secure	Be left alone
Save time	Minimize fear

**Learning to Bridge:** *Bridging* is an important skill in helping prospective customers understand how your solution fits their purchase criteria to solve their problem. Bridging is a useful antidote to our very human tendency to assume that a customer will automatically understand how a feature of our program, product, or service meets their needs and solves their problem(s). Customers regularly hear a feature, yet never take themselves to the core benefit that matters most in solving the problem they brought to the market in the first place.

How in the world do we bridge from an unsupported assertion to the detailed benefits that will solve the prospective customer's problems and make the sale for us?

**Proving the Feature:** We begin with support – the underlying facts or data that prove the feature. Anybody can say anything in a sales situation – in fact, they often do! It is detailed support that makes the feature real to the customer. Support is the key first step in concretizing and proving a feature so we can then bridge from the feature to the ultimate benefit.

**Making the Bridge:** Now we bridge. We take the customer's hand and walk him or her (metaphorically at least) from the feature, across the chasm of doubt to the benefit that addresses their problem. Our job is to take our customers and help them bridge from the features we enumerate to the benefits that solve their problem. We do that by a three-step process:

1. Name the feature on which you are focusing,
2. Support the feature with relevant facts and data, and
3. Bridge to the Universal Benefit by walking the customer over the chasm of doubt to the Universal Benefit(s) that address(es) the problem they are trying to solve.

**How do you bridge from the features you have memorized to the benefits the buyers care about?** A key component of making the case is the ability to bridge from a feature of your product to the associated benefit – the reason to care that helps solve the customer’s problem. In every case, you are bridging from the particular feature to one of the Universal Benefits. The question we are answering for the customer is WSIGAF? (Why should I give a flip about this feature? How does this feature provide a benefit that solves the problem that brought me into the marketplace?) Below is a model that you can use to successfully bridge a feature to a benefit:

1. Remind the Customer of the Problem that brought them into the market in the first place. *“You mentioned that XYZ was a major concern for you.”*
2. State the Relevant Feature that will solve their problem. *“This product has (state feature or features that address the problem)...”*
3. Use a Bridge Phase that will lead the customer from the feature of your product to the benefit that solves their problem. *“What this means to you is...”*
4. Lay the Benefit out in plain view so the customer will not have to leap to the benefit on their own. This means that you finish the sentence begun in Step 3. *“What this means to you is that you will have fewer hassles/save more money/etc.”*
5. Support the Benefit so that it is not an unsupported assertion. *“I have (provide examples) that prove this is not just my opinion, it’s a fact!”*

**Examples of bridging features to benefits:**

**Feature 1:** One feature of this product is \_\_\_\_\_(state benefit)\_\_\_\_\_ This feature yields \_\_\_\_\_(state benefit)\_\_\_\_\_, which can be especially helpful in helping you address \_\_\_\_\_(state problem)\_\_\_\_\_ .

**Feature 2:** You mentioned that you have been having a problem with \_\_\_\_\_(state problem)\_\_\_\_\_, and that you were particularly interested in \_\_\_\_\_(state benefit)\_\_\_\_\_. This product has \_\_\_\_\_(state feature)\_\_\_\_\_, which will deliver the \_\_\_\_\_(state benefit)\_\_\_\_\_ you were interested in, and help you address \_\_\_\_\_(state problem)\_\_\_\_\_ .

**Feature 3:** You mentioned that you have been having a problem with \_\_\_\_\_(state problem)\_\_\_\_\_. This product has \_\_\_\_\_(state feature)\_\_\_\_\_, which will deliver the \_\_\_\_\_(state benefit)\_\_\_\_\_ you were interested in, and help you address \_\_\_\_\_(state problem)\_\_\_\_\_ .

**Feature 4:** You mentioned that \_\_\_\_\_(state benefit)\_\_\_\_\_ is especially important to you. We can offer you \_\_\_\_\_(restate benefit)\_\_\_\_\_ because our product/service/program has \_\_\_\_\_(state feature)\_\_\_\_\_. And this \_\_\_\_\_(restate feature)\_\_\_\_\_ will yield \_\_\_\_\_(state benefit)\_\_\_\_\_, which will help you solve \_\_\_\_\_(state problem)\_\_\_\_\_ that you say is so important to you.

**Summary:** The features and benefits step is the one, single place where most sales jump the track. If you haven't questioned well in Discovery, that shortcoming becomes apparent at the Features and Benefits step. And – even if you have questioned well – the sales process can get off-track if you don't bridge effectively from the product attributes (features) you have memorized to the benefits that solve the customer's problem(s).

## **Chapter Eight: Making the Case / Presenting the Solution:**

The key to knowing how to proceed when solving the problem and making the case is to fully understand where the customer is on the Problem-Awareness Grid. (The Problem-Awareness Grid and all of its explanations can be found on pages 172 – 191)

Each quadrant, in the Problem-Awareness Grid, calls for a different strategy to make the sale. The four quadrants are:

1. **Quadrant 1** Has a problem and knows it (Negotiate / Solve)
2. **Quadrant 2** Has no problem and knows it (Wait / Build Relationship)
3. **Quadrant 3** Has a problem and does not know it (Educate / Raise Awareness)
4. **Quadrant 4** Has no problem and does not know it (Agitate / Create Doubt)

Once you know where the customer is on the Problem-Awareness Grid you can then proceed with your necessary strategy to make your case and to present your solution.

In my experience, making the presentation is the sales step that separates the *real* salespeople from the imposters. When *real* salespeople make a sales presentation, they are pulling together everything that has happened in the preceding steps: meet and greet, discovery, features and benefits – all of them. And the *real* salesperson's focus is on earning the customer's business by solving all of the customer's problems in the best way possible. Contrast this behavior with that of the imposter salespeople...

When imposters make a sales presentation, they are regurgitating a memorized spiel – they are “pitching.” Imposters want to sell the customer because selling is their job, not because they have any inherent interest in the customer or his or her problems. Imposter salespeople try to jam the customer's problem into whatever solution-box is available – they are more interested in the sale than in the customer.

**Making the Case: A Simple Six-Step Process:** Let's recap briefly: People buy to solve a problem, right? And we have spent the first four steps of the sales process understanding their problem, and earning the right to help them solve it. Our primary task in the early steps was to listen and build credibility; in Step 4 we actually began to talk about the product and service we bring to the market.

But all this hard work was only preamble – we were *earning the right to make our case*. We were earning the right to solve the problem. Now we have done that, and it's time to look at a simple process for making the case that we can solve the customer's problem

better than any other competitor. Here's the process; see how it applies to the customers you deal with every day.

### **A Simple Six-Step Process for Making the Case**

1. Restate the problem(s) you and the prospective customer have identified. Be sure to get the prospect to agree to your problem list by asking for additions or amplifications.
2. Deal with each of the problems you have identified in turn, and make the case that your product or service offers the best solution for each of the problems.
3. Always bridge from the features of your product to the benefits that matter to the customer and solve the customer's problem. Remember: customers don't care about facts per se, but they do care about solving the problem that brought them into the market. Be sure you *speak to the benefits that will solve the customer's problems*.
4. As you make the case that you have solved a portion of the customer's problem, repeat back anything you hear the customer saying about your solution. This will ensure that you have heard the customer correctly, and dealt with any concerns he or she might have.
5. Use tie-down questions (see examples below) to ensure that the prospect agrees with each part of the solution as you make your case. The goal is to tie-up all loose ends on one component of the sale before moving on to the next component.
6. Use a trial close (see examples below) to gauge the customer's receptivity to the overall case you have made, and to flush out any objections.

**Tie-down Questions:** Every time I see the phrase "tie-down question" my mind flashes to rodeo scenes. I imagine a cowboy leaping from a horse to secure the hooves of a steer with a short length of rope. While tie-down questions don't require rope, they serve a similar purpose to the tie used in steer roping. A roped steer is unable to wander off; the rope secures the steer and settles the "wander off" issue once and for all. Likewise, a tie-down question settles once and for all that the customer's issue has been tied-down. Because you have established that the issue is resolved, the customer is unlikely to wander back to the issue at some later point in the sale.

Tie-down questions are quite simple. The key thing is to remember to use them before you move on in making your case. Here are some tie-down questions I have found useful:

- Do you feel like what we have talked about will solve this portion of the problem?
- How does that sound? Does it deal with the concerns you have raised?
- Do you think this will work? Why? Why not?
- Has that addressed your problem? What questions do you have? Can we move on to the next issue?

**Trial Close:** A trial close is nothing but a tie-down question on steroids. A tie-down question addresses one portion of the case you are making (“Does this solution deal with issue X?”). A trial close, on the other hand, assesses the prospective customer’s response to the entire case you have made (“Based on what I have proposed, do you think I have solved the problem and hit your objectives?”).

Here are some common trial-close questions – use the one you most prefer, or create some that better serve your needs:

- What concerns do you have so far?
- Have I dealt with all the issues you brought to our meeting?
- What’s left that we haven’t addressed?
- How does that sound so far?

The trial close is an important part of making the case, because it helps you know where to go next. If your trial close works (that is, if the customer agrees that you have solved their problem) then you can begin to close the sale and nail down the follow-up. If your trial close flushes out an objection (and this is the most common outcome when you make a trial close) you can probe and deal with the objection, then circle back to a second trial close.

**Talking about Price:** Price is one of the places we all get hung-up as salespeople. Most of us, most of the time, don’t have the lowest price. And we don’t want to compete on price anyhow, because a *customer brought with a low price will be lost to the first supplier who comes along with an even lower price*. But it’s not like you can ignore price – in the end you are going to have to send invoices, and most rational customers want to know what is going to be on the invoice. So how do we talk about price without looking like a blithering idiot, or hurting our chances of making the sale.

Here are several pointers that I have found useful when talking price:

1. Don’t lead with price. If the price is beyond what the prospect thinks is reasonable, he or she will quit listening the minute you give a price and your chance to make the sale is finished.
2. Build value before talking price. A bad deal is a bad deal at most any price. Our first task is making the case is to make sure we have sold our solution to the prospect. Remember: people buy to solve a problem. Sell your solution thoroughly before you hang a price tag on it.
3. Make sure any price comparisons are apples to apples. It’s easy to get trapped when a prospective customer says, “But the last guy’s price was a third lower than yours!” Here is the place to make sure you are talking about comparable offers. There are many ways to get a lower price. Make sure the two offers are identical in warranty, terms, delivery, quality of product, advertising support, and any other attribute that weighs into sales in your industry.
4. Don’t apologize for your price. It is what it is. If it’s higher, you don’t have to call attention to it. The customer will notice on his or her own. Don’t

apologize – your product is worth what it costs. If you don't believe it is worth what it costs, then advocate for lower prices or quit. It is impossible to sell a product you don't believe in!

5. Make sure you continually point the customer back to you TVP. The TVP is the Total Value Proposition of the case you make for buying your product. It includes the price of the product, the reputation of the product and of your company as a supplier, the terms and conditions of the sale, and the opportunity to do business with you.

Talking about price is hard because it is a place we often get beat up in the sales world. The price discussion also offers you an opportunity to differentiate yourself from your competitors. You can make the case that you and your solution offer more than just low price – you offer best value. For most customers, in most product categories, most of the time, best value is what they are really after as they seek to solve the problem that drove them into the market in the first place.

**Summary:** If you have done a good job in the sales process, you always have one competitive advantage over other offers – yourself! The only way the customer can work with you is to buy from you. Your job is to be good enough to make him or her want to work with you – even if your price is higher.

## Chapter Nine: Dealing with Resistance:

Ah! sweet objections. Is there anything in all of selling that strikes more fear into the heart of salespeople? I think not. Remember, we're working with a disciplined process. You'll find objections highlighted as Step 6 – right after Making the Case. In fact, *Making the Case often causes objections to surface.*

Objections occur at this point in the sales process because, as you make your case, you are saying: "You brought me a problem and here is the solution for your problem. I have solved your problem, now buy from me." When you say this, customers often remember components of the problem not-previously identified; these neglected components of the problem become objections. I don't believe most customers deliberately withhold information just so they can object, though sometimes you'll be tempted to think that. Instead, the process of moving towards a decision causes the prospective customer to reexamine the problem. And objections emerge from this closer scrutiny of the problem.

Prospective customers object for one simple reason: they do not believe that we have fully solved their problem. A common temptation at this point is to panic. Don't give in – *an objection is not as big a deal as most salespeople believe. An objection is simply a request for more information.*

**A Simple Process for Dealing with Objections:** Dealing with objections is a skill – a skill that each of us can build through study and practice. An building the skill for dealing with objections begins with recognizing the six steps that take us from hearing an

objective through clarifying and addressing it, and then back into the sale we were making when the objection occurred. Here are the six steps:

1. Pause and take a deep breath – don't panic!
2. Restate the objection.
3. Clarify the objection by probing.
4. Answer the objection.
5. Get confirmation that you have dealt fully with the objection.
6. Transition back to the sales process.

Let's look at these steps more closely that will make the whole process more concrete:

**Pause and Take a Deep Breath:** This is the most important step. Take a deep breath. This is not the end of the sale. Here is a chance for you to demonstrate – once again – how customer-focused you are. Remind yourself that “*an objection is simply a request for more information!*” Remember that you don't win if the customer loses.

**Restate the Objection:** Repeat what you just heard the customer saying, softening the language if you think it will help the sale. For instance, a customer might say, “I've heard your quality really stinks!” You could restate and soften by saying, “So, you've got some concerns about quality?”

**Clarify the Objection by Probing:** Step 3 is the process is where you circle back to what you know about discovery and gather the additional facts you need to address the customer's objection. In the case of our prospective customer's concern about the quality of our product, here are some of the questions you might ask:

- What, specifically, concerns you about our quality?
- How do you think these concerns might play out in your use of the product?
- Do you have any data to support your concerns?
- Could I look at your data? We always like to see objective facts about our quality!
- What is/was the source of your information that indicated we have quality problems?

**Answer the Objection:** Now's the time to answer their question – directly and unambiguously. Provide supporting evidence (test results, lab reports, endorsements from satisfied customers) to buttress your answer. Make sure you deal with all parts of their objection. Don't ignore the part of the objection that you don't want to deal with, because it will not go away! In the example where our customer has raised a quality issue, it might sound something like this:

“I can appreciate your concern about quality – no one wants to change suppliers and then immediately have an issue with quality. I have some independent test

results that demonstrate our product is better than – or equal to – all its leading competitors. I'll be happy to get you those reports...

All that, of course is just laboratory stuff. You are probably much more interested in how the product performs in the real world, aren't you? (Customer nods) I can give you three references of people who use our product in an application very similar to yours. Why don't you call them yourself, and see what they have to say? You can be sure they wouldn't use the product if it didn't work, because they've got to make a buck just like you do." (Do not offer current customers as references unless they have given you permission to do this!)

**Get Confirmation from the Prospective Customer That You Have Dealt Fully with the Objection:** Ask the customer – in plain English – if you have given them the information to answer their question. Remember an objection is just a request for more information. If you address the question completely, the objection will go away. In our example here, the underlying question in the customer's mind is this: "If I buy this product, will I have problems with quality?"

So the question you want to ask the prospective customer is "Has the information I've given you put your mind at ease about the quality of our products? And has it eased your concern about the use of the product in the application for which you intend it?"

**Transition Back to the Sales Process:** Once you answer the question that led to the objection, you have earned the right to reenter the sales process.

**Probing to Flush out Additional Objections:** Customers almost always have objection, it's the nature of the business. The good news is this: now that you know how to deal with them, handling objection can become one of the ways you distinguish yourself from your competition. In fact, it's sometimes a good idea to *invite* objections so that they get out on the table early. Questions I have used to flush out objections include:

- What concerns do you have so far?
- Is there anything about this approach that bothers you?
- When you think about this solution, what are your first thoughts?
- When you think about this solution, what are your first concerns?
- Why might this solution not work in the situation you face?
- How have you seen solutions like this fail in the past?

In each case, I was prompting the prospective customer to get him or her to help me identify things that will ultimately come up as objections. Then I deal with the objections here and now, rather than waiting for them to catch up to me later. I am practicing preventive medicine – dealing with a minor issue now before it festers into a major illness later on in the sales process.



Objections do not simply vanish. Invite them throughout the process and deal with them as they arise. It will build trust and credibility on the customer's part, and it will make your job easier at the close.

**Phony Objections:** “Phony Objections” are one of the most difficult challenges in the sales world. In a phony objection, the customer – for reasons that are not at all clear to us as salespeople – will not reveal what is really on his or her mind. You can usually recognize phony objection in one or two telltale ways:

1. A phony objection will be impossible vague and amorphous, or
2. A phony objection will fly in the face of the data available and the case you have already made.

Phony objections could include any of the following:

- “I’m just not sure...”
- “Let me think about it...”
- “I need a couple of days...”
- “But what about...”
- “Let me as so-and-so”

When we encounter a phony objection, our first step is to treat it exactly like a regular objection. Use your six-step process that we just reviewed. Ask as many questions as possible to refine and clarify the objection so that you can address it in a rigorous way. Your questions might include:

- “What, exactly, are you unsure about?”
- “What is it that you need to think about?”
- “What will you know in a couple days that you do not know now?”
- “What information do you need that I have neglected to give you?”
- “Could you call so-and-so right now?”
- “What have I not made clear?”

If the customer persists in his or her objection, there are two final approaches to try:

1. “I’m confused.” In this approach, you look quizzically at the customer and say, “I’m confused...” Then you recap your conversation. You recount the fact that you believe you have solved the problem, and you close your conversation with, “Given all this, I’m confused about why you are concerned. What’s up?” And then you wait. If they clarify, solve the problem they identify. If they don’t, you can carefully move to Step 2 below.
2. “Something is missing here...” This approach to phony objections is a final step after “I’m confused...” If – after doing everything above – the customer persists in delaying the sale with excuses, you can just simply name what you see. It sounds something like this: “We’ve spent a fair amount of time together, and you said I had solved your problem with a solution I just

presented. Now you seem reluctant to make the purchase. Something's missing from this picture; what is it?"

Proceed carefully! And remember: you can't sell every customer. If you continue to be confronted with objections that fail the smell test, back off and let the customer go. If the objection is authentic, they'll return. If not, you've saved time to pursue other, more productive customers.

**Dealing with Objections on Price:** Customers often object on price – at least partly because price is the easiest part of the sale to quantify. Resist this temptation and cut price only as the last resort. There are several important reasons not to cut price right out of the gate:

1. **Price may not be the main objection.** It's merely the first objection. Get all the objections out on the table before you deal with any of them, or else you will have given away the store before you ever get to the main objection.
2. **Cutting price kills margins.** Anytime you are tempted to cut price, do the math. Ask yourself: "Is this deal going to pay out?" Then be careful before you move forward.
3. **Cutting price messes up the market:** Cutting prices for one customer will quickly lead to pricing erosion for other, similar customers. Pricing integrity is hard to maintain. But it's even harder to deal with all the issues that arise when price cutting is undisciplined and gets out of hand. Cut your price with fear and trembling – and only as a last resort.

**Bringing in a Colleague:** If you get in trouble, probe. If you stay in trouble, call in a colleague.

**Watch for "Buying Signs":** All the time that you are dealing with objections, you are also watching for *buying signs*. A buying sign is just that – a sign from the customer that he or she feels like you have made the case for your product, and your product will solve their problem. Buying signs can take many forms, but they often deal with price, financing, availability for delivery, options (as in fabric choices), and other things related to getting the product as *I want it, when I want it, where I want it, and the price I wanted*. Some typical buying signs might include statements or questions like these:

- Can I get one exactly like this but in a different color / fabric?
- When can you make delivery? Do you charge for delivery?
- What APR are you charging these days?
- Can you deliver it today?
- How much discount do you give for cash?
- How much "wiggle room" do you have in that price?
- How much will you give me as a trade allowance?
- I really like this one, but I have a better price from another vendor...

Whenever you hear buying signs, it's time to jump to chapter 10 and Ask for the Order! You may get an objection when you do this, but *now* you know what to do when the prospective customer objects!

**Using the trial close to transition back to the sales process:** A trial close is an attempt to see if we have solved the problem or met the objection a customer has raised, and to see if he or she is ready to move back to the overall sales process. Usually a trial close can be done very simply – with just a phrase or two. Here are some sample trial closes that have worked for me:

- Well, what do you think?
- So, how does that sound?
- Does what we have talked about deal with your concerns?
- With this as background, would you say I have dealt with your issue?

Trial closing is not especially complex. It's a simple matter of asking – either directly or obliquely – “Have I solved this part of your problem?” Once you have solved at least part of their problem, head back to the sales process, move logically through the balance of the sales process, and then ask for the order.

**Summary:** Objections are a good – not bad – thing. That doesn't mean they are always easy. An objection is almost always a request for more information. Put another way, an objection is a simple question. And the core question underlying the objection is this: “But can you solve this part of my problem?” Don't panic when you hear an objection! Just circle back to Discovery and begin gathering more data. And if you get in trouble, probe. If you stay in trouble, call in a colleague.

## Chapter Ten: It's Okay to Ask for the Order!

If you work the sales process faithfully, closing is the easiest step. Remember that selling is a series of commitments. If you get a commitment at each point in the sales process, you will have earned the right to close. The single best way to make a sale along towards a successful close is to *keep your commitments*: under-promise and over-deliver on every commitment you make. Do what you say you will do, when you said you would do it.

Selling is a two-way relationship. It is appropriate to *seek* as well as *offer* commitments – as an indication of reciprocity and goodwill between you and your customer. Listed below are the commitments made in the Sales Process:

### Step 1 – Research Prior to the Sale: (Salesperson's Commitments)

- To fully understand his or her own product, program or service.
- To fully understand all competitive products, programs, or services.

- To understand all applications and uses of each of the products, programs, or services, and all products, programs, or services that could be used instead of the salesperson's product...

(Customer's Commitments)

- None – no customer in sight. All of the salesperson's work in Step 1 is presale research.

## **Step 2 – Meet and Greet:**

(Salesperson's Commitments)

- To meet the customer and listen to his or her story.
- To be trustworthy.

(Customer's Commitments)

- To be trustworthy.
- To value the salesperson's time and not jerk him or her around.

## **Step 3 – Discovery:**

(Salesperson's Commitments)

- To question carefully and fully understand the problem.
- To value the customer's understanding of the problem.
- To address root causes, not symptoms
- To help the customer find the best solution to the problem.

(Customer's Commitments)

- To describe the problem as fully as possible.
- To disclose all relevant information the could impact the sale.

## **Step 4 – Features and Benefits:**

(Salesperson's Commitments)

- To speak only in terms that matter to the customer.
- To "bridge" each feature to a benefit that the customer cares about.
- To focus on features and benefits that solves the customer's problem.

(Customer's Commitments)

- To identify the things that matter and the things that don't matter.
- To assign some relative importance to each attribute of the problem, so the salesperson can know what matters most.

## **Step 5 – Making the Case / Presenting the Solution:**

(Salesperson's Commitments)

- To present an option that solves the customer's problem(s).
- To check-in with the customer and get a response while presenting the proposed solution.

(Customer's Commitments)

- To listen to the salesperson's proposed solution.
- To raise issues of concern in a rational way.

## **Step 6 – Objections: Dealing with Resistance:**

(Salesperson's Commitments)

- To listen to / value each objection – not to dismiss any objection out-of-hand.
- To probe and fully understand each objection.
- To respond professionally and in problem-solving mode to each objection.
- To check back to see if each objection has been fully addressed.

(Customer's Commitments)

- To raise objections as they occur, and not sit on or stockpile them.
- To raise the real objection and not jerk the salesperson around with phony objections / resistance to the sale.

## **Step 7 – Closing:**

(Salesperson's Commitments)

- To tell the truth.
- To make sure the problem is solved before trying to close.
- Not to use manipulative closes in reaching for the order.

(Customer's Commitments)

- To buy if the salesperson solves the problem in a way that works best for the customer.
- To tell the truth about reasons for not buying if the sale doesn't close.

## **Step 8 – Follow-Up:**

(Salesperson's Commitments)

- To keep all commitments made in closing the sale.
- To maintain appropriate contact with the customer after the sale is made.
- Not to use the customer as a reference without permission.

(Customer's Commitments)

- To keep all commitments made in the sale.
- To surface after-sale problems with the salesperson before escalating them up the management chain.

**It's Okay to Ask for the Order – Really:** You've solved the problem. You've earned the right to close. It's Okay to ask for the order – really! It's far simpler than you think. All you need to say at this point is: "*So, what do you think?*" And that's all there is to closing. If the customer is ready to buy, he or she will say, "It sounds good to me." Then you can write up the sale and move on to keep the commitments you have made in the sales process. If the customer is not ready to buy, the close will flush out an objection and you can circle back to deal with this new-found objection by probing and using the pointers we covered in chapter 9. Either way, the sale is moving forward.

**What Happens after the Customer Says "Yes"?** Our tasks immediately after the sale include:

1. Celebrating with the customer in his or her relief, and
2. Moving immediately to allay all anxiety (sales theorists call it "cognitive dissonance") that accompanies making a final selection from many competing options.

How do we celebrate? Easy enough – congratulate the customer on his or her choice, and assure him or her that you think they will "be very pleased with their choice." Then move immediately to allay any anxiety that could come up for the customer. We do so by using the *three R's of anxiety reduction*:

1. *Recap* all your agreements,
2. *Review* the benefits to the customer of decisions made (and how it solves the problem that brought them into the market in the first place), then
3. *Reduce* all commitments to writing.

Using the three R's will reinforce your customer's choice. Their post-sale anxiety bubble will deflate, and they will leave closing assured that buying from you was the best possible choice they could have made.

**Summary:** Follow the steps and solve the customer's problem. Probe objections so you can get at the core kernel that drives the objections. Then *ask for the order*, simply and in English. You'll be surprised how many sales you get!

## Chapter 11: Following-Up for Ongoing Profitability:

Follow-up is the last step in our eight-step selling process. It's also one of the hardest parts. This is not because follow-up is so difficult per se, but because it requires a somewhat different skill set than selling itself. Still, follow-up is all about solving

customer problems. And the salesperson who solves the prospective customer's problems – and keeps them solved – gets to keep the business.

**Reframing Follow-Up as the First Step in the Next Sale:** The sales process is more circular than linear (witness how we circled back to discovery and probed every time we got an objection). So follow-up can become the first step in the next sale. The key questions we ask ourselves are:

- What other problems can I solve for this customer? And
- What else can I sell this customer?

**Keep Your Commitments – The Cardinal Rule of Selling:** Keep your commitments. Do what you say you will do. Under-promise and over-deliver. Write it down! Written agreements solve the problem of assumption because they spell it out, in clear terms, who is going to do what, for whom, by when, using what resources. Put your agreement in writing. It will save a lot of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth on both sides of the transaction.

**Selling the New Customer to Internal Contacts:** Sell your new customer to any internal personnel who will serve the customer. Let the internal people know the value of the customer – how much the customer is buying initially, and their potential purchases over the life of the relationship. Help the customer service team *value* the customer – both for the business they do in the here and now, and for the business they could do in the days to come. Your job as a salesperson is to ensure that your customer's interactions with your company are smooth and without friction.

**The Relationship Web:** Just as you want to “sell” any new customers to the key internal service-people in your organization, you also want to sell yourself to multiple points-of-contact inside all your major accounts. The great advantage of building a relationship web with your customers is two-fold:

1. The web protects you from having only one point-of-contact with your accounts, and
2. The web give you many more sources of data as you seek to understand and solve the problems this customer has via your product.

Build that relationship web – it's good for you and for the customer.

**Making Common Courtesy a Competitive Edge:** Common courtesy isn't near as common as it used to be. Relate to your customers from a position of gratitude and you will make manners a point of competitive advantage for you and your products.

**Planning and Goal Setting – A Key to a Successful Life in Sales:** “If you fail to plan, then plan to fail!” It's that simple. Set specific goals and work for them – measuring your progress as you go. Among the plans you might need to develop – depending on the product or service you are taking to market – are:

- *An account plan* – how are you going to maximize satisfaction in – and revenue from – each account?
- *A prospect plan* – how are you going to develop new accounts to grow your territory and supplement those accounts that are losing market share and sales volume?
- *A territory development plan* – how are you going to generate the most revenue and profit from a particular sales territory?
- *A career development plan* – how are you going to manage your career and sell yourself (the only product you are always stuck with) to your management for promotion?

So attach your sales planning with vigor and tenacity: success to plan while you plan for success!

**Pay Attention to Customer Complaints:** Ignoring customer feedback is the very best way to lose a customer. Interestingly, customers often make an initial purchase from a new supplier using criteria that are somewhat different from the criteria that this same customer will use to evaluate an ongoing supplier. The differences can be summed up easily in two brief sentences.

- *Price, quality, and functionality get you in.*
- *Response time, service, and support get you out.*

Listen to your customers. They will tell you their problems. They will tell you how to sell them. And they will tell you how to keep them happy.

**A Successful Customer Relationship is a Marriage, Not a Date:** A successful customer relationship is like a *marriage*, not a *date*. Value your customers. Forgive them their foibles. Celebrate your mutual successes. And don't forget to say "Thank you!"

## Summary:

We don't *talk* our customers into buying. Rather, we *listen* our customers into buying. We find out their needs and wants and problems, their hopes and dreams and aspirations. We then tailor-make a solution, one that uses our products, to best meet their needs. It's as simple (and as difficult) as that.

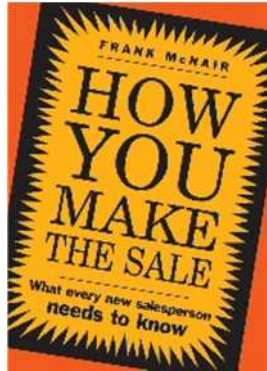
"Sell them every dollar of product and services they need, and not a penny more." The customer is not the enemy. We are in this together. And in the long view, we only win if they win. Now go out and make the sale!



## Message from Gary Tomlinson:

I hope you enjoyed reading this book report. It's important to understand that this book report should not take the place of you reading "*How You Make the Sale. What Every New Salesperson Needs to Know.*" And, McNair's book will definitely help you learn it. This is an outstanding book for any new salesperson who is excited about the prospect of meeting people who have a problem and hatching out a solution that fits them both. It's also an excellent book for sales managers looking for an effective teaching manual. And finally, this is a wonderful book for seasoned salespeople to relearn all the things they've forgot over the years.

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