

NICK KANE | JUSTIN ZAPPULLA

critical selling

How Top Performers **Accelerate** the
Sales Process and **Close** More Deals

WILEY

critical selling

How Top Performers **Accelerate** the
Sales Process and **Close** More Deals

NICK KANE | JUSTIN ZAPPULLA

WILEY

Copyright © 2016 by Nick Kane and Justin Zappulla. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the Web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: while the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books. For more information about Wiley products, visit our website at www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Kane, Nick.

Critical selling : how top performers accelerate the sales process and close more deals / Nick Kane, Justin Zappulla.

pages cm

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-119-05255-5 (cloth); ISBN 978-1-119-05257-9 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-119-05258-6 (ebk)

1. Selling. 2. Sales management. I. Title.

HF5438.25.Z37 2016

658.85-dc23

2015020838

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my beautiful wife, Megan. My true partner in life.
Your love, understanding, encouragement, and unwavering
support are what make everything work. I love you.
And to my brilliant daughters, Alaina and Aubrey.
Always remember the three things . . .
And lastly, to the memory of my grandpa, Richard Zappulla, who
inspired me to work hard, be kind, and always believe in myself.
Thank you. I am forever grateful.
—Justin Zappulla

To my amazing daughters, Alyssa, Emily, and Sophia,
I dedicate this book to you. Your smiles, courage, and enthusiasm
keep me motivated every day! Without your unconditional love
and support, this book would not have been possible.
Remember what I've told you since you were born:
You are destined to do great things in this life!
—Nick Kane

Acknowledgments

WRITING A BOOK is no small feat. It requires time, dedication, drive, and focus. The motivation for *Critical Selling* came from our desire to provide real, tangible skills, and best practices to all sales professionals who want to improve their performance in today's selling environment. This book was a team effort and there are many people we would like to acknowledge for their support, guidance, and hard work.

First, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the best team in the sales performance business, our colleagues at Janek Performance Group. Dana, Rudy, Amy, Mindy, Jerry, Brandon, and the rest of the team. Your unwavering commitment to supporting our clients in achieving their sales objectives is second to none.

Next, we would like to thank our confidant and "Chief Book Officer," Kelli. Your work is truly first class and your zeal, expertise, and insight were paramount in bringing this book to life. We can't thank you enough for the countless hours you invested with us over this past year!

It's important to acknowledge the outstanding publishing team at John Wiley & Sons. A big "high five" to Lia, Shannon, Deborah, Peter, John, Liz, and the rest of the team. Thank you for your

patience while guiding a few rookie authors through this process. All of you are true professionals!

Finally, we would like to acknowledge our first true sales family; thanks for giving two young kids an opportunity to be part of and help build a powerhouse sales organization. There is no question; the company changed the lives of thousands of sales professionals both in the United States and abroad, including ours. There was never a dull moment working side by side with who today remain some of our closest friends. Thank you to our personal mentors, Adam, Marty, and Mike. Your leadership and passion for sales excellence still live in us today!



Nick would like to personally acknowledge:

I would also like to acknowledge other people who contributed to this book. To my mother, Helen, and father, Mark, thank you for your wisdom, kindness, and courage. To my brother, Eric, and lifelong friend, Aviv, thank you for always being there for me when I needed you the most. To Brittany, thank you for your unconditional love, support, and all that you do. To my family in San Diego, Mila, Mike, Alex, Cindy, and Stella, thank you all for your kindness and encouragement.

Justin would like to personally acknowledge:

I would like to acknowledge the love and support of my family and those closest to me. I cannot thank you all enough for the steady and positive influence you've given me throughout my life, and this book would not be possible without you. Thank you to my mother, Debbie; my sisters, Alisha and Breanna; my Granny, Audrey; my uncle, Joe; my aunts, Rhonda and Carol; Jeff, Bob, Barbara, and Mark. I love you all!

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Introduction Critical Selling: Focusing on What Matters Most</i>	<i>1</i>
1 Selling to Today's Buyers: Remain Customer-Focused	13
<i>Recognize That Buyers Have Changed</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Use the Right Sales Approach</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Know How Your Customers Perceive You</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Become a Trusted Advisor</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Critical Selling: Lessons Learned</i>	<i>26</i>
2 The First Step Is to Believe: Change Your Mindset	29
<i>Mind Your Mindset</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Always Be Improving</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Stay Patient through Change</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Critical Selling: Lessons Learned</i>	<i>43</i>
3 Why Planning Matters: Determine Your Approach	45
<i>Understand That Planning Matters</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Think about Planning</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Set SAM Objectives</i>	<i>50</i>

	<i>Plan Ahead and Reflect After</i>	55
	<i>Critical Selling: Lessons Learned</i>	58
4	A Solid Opening: Connect with Your Customers	59
	<i>Plan Your Opening</i>	60
	<i>Master the Greeting</i>	61
	<i>Create Connections</i>	62
	<i>Deliver a Legitimate Purpose Statement</i>	65
	<i>Confirm for Feedback</i>	69
	<i>Close the Opening with Some Reflection</i>	72
	<i>Critical Selling: Lessons Learned</i>	73
5	It's All about Discovering: Get to Know Your Customers	75
	<i>Understand the Benefits of Discovering</i>	77
	<i>Ask the Right Questions</i>	79
	<i>Target the Six Critical Areas of Focus</i>	84
	<i>Listen Actively to Understand Your Customer</i>	90
	<i>Avoid Common Pitfalls</i>	98
	<i>Critical Selling: Lessons Learned</i>	101
6	Presenting What Your Customer Needs: Link a Tailored Solution	103
	<i>Take Advantage of Discovering</i>	104
	<i>Plan the Approach</i>	106
	<i>Tailor the Solution</i>	108
	<i>Ask for Feedback</i>	115
	<i>Strengthen the Solution</i>	117
	<i>Link Your Solution</i>	124
	<i>Critical Selling: Lessons Learned</i>	125
7	Leverage Momentum at Closing: Capture Customer Confidence	127
	<i>Summarize Where You've Been</i>	129
	<i>Gain Commitment to Move Forward</i>	132

<i>Define Next Steps</i>	134
<i>Confirm with Your Customer</i>	136
<i>Critical Selling: Lessons Learned</i>	137
 8 <i>Dealing with Objections: Return to the Land of Discovery</i>	 139
<i>Recognize Real Objections</i>	140
<i>Understand Why Objections Come Up</i>	141
<i>Be Prepared for Objections</i>	143
<i>Work through Objections</i>	146
<i>Maintain Goodwill and Ask for Feedback</i>	155
<i>Critical Selling: Lessons Learned</i>	157
 Conclusion	
Putting It All Together:	
Mindset + Practice + Process + Action	159
<i>Plan Each Sales Interaction</i>	160
<i>Connect and Reconnect</i>	163
<i>Ask Questions (and Listen to the Answers)</i>	165
<i>Adjust Your Attitude</i>	170
 Appendix	
<i>Case Study: The McCrone Group</i>	177
<i>Notes</i>	191
<i>About Janek Performance Group</i>	195
<i>About the Authors</i>	196
<i>Index</i>	199

Introduction

Critical Selling: Focusing on What Matters Most

IN A DAY and age when meeting or exceeding quarterly expectations is more important than ever before, it's no secret that companies are constantly looking for ways to improve sales performance. That's because sales are the lifeblood of any company, and so the importance of focusing on sales performance remains a top priority with everyone throughout the organization, from the C-Suite to middle management to sales professionals working in the trenches every day.

In order to survive in today's fiercely competitive global marketplace, it's critical to operate a high-performing sales organization that can outsell the competition. To do this, there is quite a lot to get right, including:

- The right sales strategy
- A compelling value proposition
- A well-defined sales process
- The right sales talent
- Effective sales tools

All of these things are crucial if an organization intends to keep firing on all cylinders. But where the rubber really meets the road in sales is in the real-world interactions between the sales professional and the customer.

The fact is that people still buy from people. Sales strategies, process maps, and clear value propositions are all important. But in the end, how each sales professional performs during the critical moments he has with his customers determines whether the deal is closed and the sale is won. It all comes down to execution.

Top sales professionals are always thinking about how they can better execute each and every sales interaction. They take the time to think about the most effective approach they can use with each of their customers. They keep abreast of the skills, best practices, and processes that produce the greatest possible results. And they look for strategic, concrete ways to improve their sales performance.

The Critical Selling framework we'll share with you in these pages is a proven, real-world approach that helps salespeople from all walks of life—any industry, any size company—flawlessly execute sales calls with customers in order to accelerate the sales process and close more deals. We've spent more than a decade conducting ongoing research and identifying best practices in order to develop world-class sales professionals. Our research has focused on two key areas: sellers and buyers. On the selling side, we have worked side by side with hundreds of sales organizations and thousands of salespeople to understand what it is that top-performing sales professionals do (and do better) that other reps don't to win more sales. On the buying side, we've taken a deep look at customers, examining how they investigate and evaluate products and services and how they ultimately make their purchasing decisions. The results we've uncovered have informed the approach outlined in this book.

As such, we know that this is an approach that succeeds in the real world. Following the skills, strategies, and best practices shared in these pages will help ensure that you are fully prepared to accelerate the sales process and close more deals.

One of the most apparent findings from the research we've conducted is that buyers are changing. Today's buyers:

- Are more educated about products and services, and about the selling cycle
- Conduct thorough research into product and service options—before ever connecting with a sales professional
- Bring higher expectations to the selling cycle
- Are becoming increasingly intolerant toward sales reps who resort to aggressive sales tactics
- Do not want to hear a “pitch” in lieu of a tailored solution
- Want sales professionals to bring valuable insights, ideas, and advice to the sales conversation
- Place a greater premium on time
- Have easy access to more alternatives and options

These important changes in customer behavior mean that sales professionals, too, must change. Today's top-performing sales professionals must adapt to busier, smarter, savvier customers, who come to the table with more demands and higher expectations. Those salespeople who embrace this changing landscape by fine-tuning their sales approach using the Critical Selling framework will achieve bigger, better, and more impressive results that bring more value to their customers and to their own organizations.

In the chapters to come, we'll look at specific strategies, skills, and best practices that, when fully embraced, will help today's sales professionals keep pace with tomorrow's customers. We'll also look at how to deal with common missteps. By embracing the approach found in these pages, you will learn how to:

- Accelerate the sales process by quickly discovering what is most important to the customer
- Create solid connections with customers and establish trust using effective relationship-building best practices

- Differentiate yourself from the competition by adding value, insight, and advice to the sales discussion
- Reduce the number of objections and effectively handle those you do receive, along with pushback from customers—at every stage of the process
- Close more deals by adopting a proven, research-based sales approach

Of course, you can't accelerate the sales process and close more deals if you're not building strong relationships with your customers. The fact remains that good sales is all about building good relationships. That happens if—and only if—you're able to establish credibility with your customers. Top performers are much more than order takers with a bright smile and a firm handshake. They're more than merely effective sales professionals. While they can recite product info, values, and benefits as well as—or even better than—anyone else, they know how to go much deeper in order to understand customer needs and to explain how their product or service is in alignment with those needs. They build credibility with their customers. They build relationships. In doing so, they become trusted advisers who know how to sell to today's customers.

Selling to customers will be more challenging than ever before. At a time when customers are better informed than in years past, they've more than likely done a lot of research before they've even thought about talking to a salesperson. As a result, sales professionals can't just assume that the selling conversation can start with a product demo or an introduction to the levels of service they offer—they need to understand where buyers are in their journey and meet them where they are. Today's savvy customers aren't looking for someone who will simply belch out a lot of specs and data about their product and then ask for a signature on the dotted line. They're looking for someone who can add value to the sales conversation by sharing insight and advice. They're looking for someone who can help them make an intelligent purchasing decision. They're looking for someone who has taken the time

to discover their needs. They're looking for someone who has evolved beyond order taker to trusted adviser.

So, in Chapter 1, we'll look at how to sell to today's customers. Doing so in a competitive, evolving marketplace requires creating an effective selling relationship that incorporates Critical Selling skills and best practices, all with an eye toward developing the kind of trust and credibility that allows sales professionals in any industry, whether B2B or B2C, to think, act, and communicate in a customer-focused way throughout the selling cycle. That's because, regardless of all the changes in the world of sales, the customer is still at the center of any successful sales approach. Top performers understand that they need to change if they want to keep up with the ways in which customers, too, are changing.

Of course, change doesn't just happen overnight. So, the first step in all of this is to embrace the change that is required. This means that sales professionals need to have the right mindset when looking to improve performance. They need to be all in when it comes to understanding, accepting, and practicing the Critical Selling framework. Being open-minded to change is critical when it comes to adopting the skills that allow you to continually improve your performance. We'll talk about this in Chapter 2.

In order to sell to today's buyers, top-performing sales professionals know that they have to deliver a differentiated experience and find unique ways to add tangible value throughout the buying process. But first, if you truly want to become a top performer, you have to believe in the process and make a commitment to it. You have to have the right mindset if you want to accelerate the sales process and close more deals.

That means you have to commit yourself to training and practicing. You need to be open to the possibility that there is always room for improvement in your approach to customers. That's not to say that the experience, insight, or wisdom you've gained during the course of your career is without value. Rather, it means that in today's highly competitive marketplace, it's important to recognize that customers are evolving and that, as a result, sales is

evolving. And so you, too, have to evolve if you want to keep up with your customers (and with your competitors). To do that, you need to believe that the process will yield tangible benefits—for you and for your customers.

In Chapter 2, we'll look at the importance of committing to and carefully following the Critical Selling framework. We'll discuss why top performers know that the key to securing more and better deals isn't about "always be closing" but rather about "always be improving." Why? Because best-in-class organizations—and top-performing sales professionals—know that practice is a key component to success.

Change can be difficult. Trial and error as you learn the process might feel clunky. But top performers know that believing in the promise of change, and in following the Critical Selling framework from start to finish, is crucial to making it work. Because the Critical Selling framework isn't a buffet. It's a proven, logical, and practical approach to accelerating the sales process and closing more deals while building credibility with customers and developing lasting, profitable relationships.

Incorporating strategies, skills, and best practices requires planning, which underlies the entire Critical Selling framework. Why? Because planning isn't one step you do at the beginning of the sales process and then check off your to-do list. Top performers know that effective planning matters at every stage during the selling cycle. They also understand that it is important not only to plan ahead for every call but also to reflect afterward. And they understand the benefits of planning and reflecting for each and every call.

Part of planning requires outlining the critical objectives for each call, and in Chapter 3, we'll look at the importance of setting objectives, how doing so helps salespeople better connect with customers, and how it helps accelerate the sales process. We'll also look at a variety of helpful tools and resources that can make planning work for you—and for your customer.

From planning, we move to opening. Solid openings don't happen by chance. They don't begin with a canned line or a

memorized script. Through our research, we have found that too many sales reps lean all too often on timeworn pitches when opening the sales conversation with their customers. On the other hand, we've also found that top performers understand the importance of crafting openings that are personalized for each individual customer.

Top-performing sales professionals understand that a solid opening requires specific, intentional steps, things to do in the first few minutes of the call that will set the stage—and the tone—for connecting with the buyer and building the kind of rapport that will put you on the right track to building stronger, longer-lasting relationships with customers.

Top performers understand the benefits of a good opening. They know that it's not about foisting their personalities upon the customer but rather about understanding the customer's style and adapting the conversation accordingly. Sales professionals who perfect the art of opening find that the rest of the selling cycle naturally falls in place.

In Chapter 4, we'll look at the elements of a solid opening. We'll look at how so many salespeople struggle with determining the right thing to say to the customer and with getting the conversation started on the right track, and we'll look at how top performers overcome those struggles in order to successfully open interactions with customers and quickly begin the rapport-building process. We'll also examine how delivering a Legitimate Purpose Statement helps you connect with customers, manage expectations, and successfully direct the sales conversation. We'll discuss the importance of confirming to ensure that you and the customer are on the same page. And finally, we'll look at best practices as well as common missteps in this stage of the sales process.

With a solid opening secured, the next stage in the Critical Selling framework is all about understanding. Our research has revealed that, unfortunately, too many sales reps gloss over this critical step in the selling cycle, sometimes out of haste, sometimes out of laziness, sometimes out of fear. But the discovering phase of the process is critical to understanding your customer and

building trust—and getting it right actually helps speed up the entire sales process.

Discovering what the customer needs and what drives his purchasing decision requires salespeople to do two things: ask questions and listen to the answers. Seems simple, but many sales professionals struggle with these two critical skills, for a variety of reasons. Getting this right is crucial, and doing so puts you in a position to connect with the customer, become a trusted adviser, and offer solutions that are tailored to the needs of the customer.

In Chapter 5, we'll look at what it takes to ask the right questions and to become a good active listener. We'll examine critical areas of focus that top performers key in on in order to build a solid understanding of customer needs. And we'll explain how getting the discovering phase right can be a key way to differentiate yourself from the competition. Finally, we'll look at what top performers do in order to get this step right—and where average performers get it wrong.

As we've seen (and will discuss further in the pages to come), today's customers aren't interested in being pitched. Although a lot of sales professionals want to move straight from opening to closing (that old "always be closing" mantra can be difficult to silence), that's almost always a grave mistake. And although a lot of salespeople spend much of their time on perfecting their pitch, presenting a memorized, generic solution almost never works the way you might like to believe it will. The key to presenting successfully is to share a solution that is uniquely tailored to each individual customer.

Top performers know that getting the opening right and getting the discovering phase right pave the way to making presentations that are well-aligned to customers and their needs. So, in Chapter 6, we'll look at how top performers tackle this stage, from planning their approach to tailoring the solution to asking for feedback. Top performers also understand the power of linking, so we'll discuss why linking your solutions to your customer's needs helps provide the confidence each buyer needs to make the purchasing decision—and to be comfortable with that decision. Part of that requires you to understand customer needs, and we'll look at how the critical areas