MIGHTY MANAGER

THE SALES SUCCESS HANDBOOK

20 LESSONS TO OPEN AND CLOSE SALES NOW

LINDA RICHARDSON

The Sales Success Handbook

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Contents

Sales Talk

Sales talk. What is it? It is more than you talking. Sales talk takes two. It is not a monologue. It is a dialogue. It is a customer-centered exchange of information that begins and ends with the customer whose needs must drive the conversation.

You have a sales approach you use consciously or unconsciously every day. How open are you to looking at your sales talk up close? If you are open, these lessons can help you assess yourself, spot your strengths and weaknesses, and change your sales talk. You will tap into your natural skills, leverage your knowledge, and sell more by creating compelling dialogues with your customers.

You are probably thinking, "But I already do all that." And it is likely that you do. But how are you keeping up with the changes that are occurring everywhere around you—with your customers, your competitors, your markets, and your own organization?

Relying solely on product knowledge or technical expertise doesn't work in today's environment. The Internet is a free and convenient source of knowledge, giving customers more information than ever before. Salespeople face a tough business climate in which they need to win all the good deals that are out there. In this environment, products—once the key differentiator—are the equalizer. Instead of talking about products, your role is to communicate a message in which you add value, provide perspective, and show how your features and benefits apply to and satisfy customer needs.

Most salespeople use a model for selling that has been the predominant model for decades. It primarily relies on the old, tried-but-*no-longer*-true feature-and-benefit focus. Too many salespeople tell their product stories too soon, without necessarily meaning to do so, and invariably talk from a generic product vs. customer point of view. When they ask about needs, they don't go far enough. When they identify a need, they *jump* to product, rather than *create a rich dialogue* to understand why, how, or when.

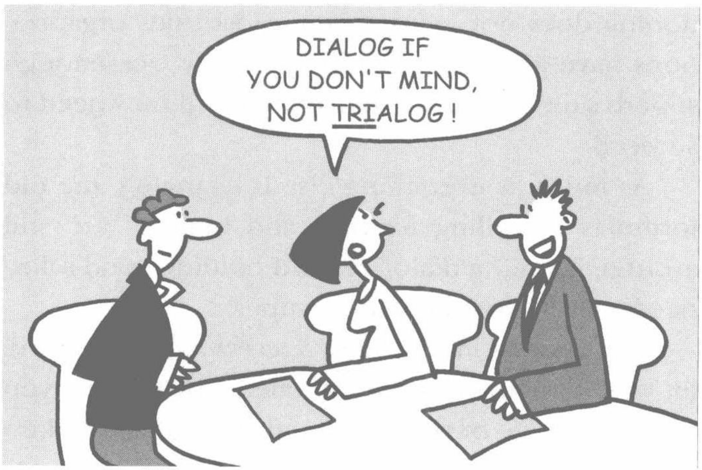
Selling today is more demanding. As business becomes more challenging, salespeople need a higher level of skill. My experience, in more than two decades of working with tens of thousands of salespeople in some of the finest organizations in the world, shows that at *best* only 30% of salespeople truly practice need-based consultative selling and no more than one third of those achieve trusted-advisor level with their customers.

The bottom line is that too many salespeople are still too quick to tell a product story. While most *think solution*, they *present product*. Because they tend to talk more than they listen, they create an imbalanced give/get ratio instead of a 50/50 dialogue. Overall, the level of preparation and questioning does not measure up. Most sales organizations have good salespeople, but they lack enough superb salespeople to drive the growth they need to succeed.

As much as everything else is changing, the old formulas of selling features and benefits are still around, blocking dialogues and holding good salespeople back from becoming superb.

The lessons in *The Sales Success Handbook* will let you tap into your natural talents by helping you take advantage of your personal strengths, build on them, and create Sales talk that sells.

"Check your sales talk. Measure your 'give/get ratio.'"


DIALOG IF YOU DON'T MIND, NOT TRIALOG !

~~Tell your story~~

Create a dialogue

If you were to ask 100 salespeople you know whether their approach was *customer*-centered or *product*-centered, what would they say? Few, if any, would boast about selling "a box."

Most salespeople believe that they know their customers' needs. They believe they are positioning solutions, not products. They believe they are customer-focused. These beliefs are the biggest obstacles keeping them from making the changes they need to make in their Sales talk.

Selling styles run the gamut. There is a sales style continuum. At one end of the continuum is generic product selling, basically a monologue, a "product dump." At the other end is consultative selling, an interactive *dialogue* that focuses on the specific needs of the customer. 100% on either end is impossible. All salespeople are somewhere in between.

Some salespeople are charismatic sellers who rely on their interpersonal skills and charm. Others are technical experts, substantive in content but weak in customer focus. There are the "killers," always rushing to the close, often at the expense of the relationship. These characterizations of sales types are extreme, but they set the context for thinking about how salespeople approach sales.

The majority of salespeople today use a combination of approaches. They want to be liked, they want to be credible, they want to close, *and* they want to meet the needs of their customers. But for most salespeople, this amalgamation has resulted in a *quasi-consultative* approach at best. While quasi-consultative salespeople identify customer needs and are productive, they fall short of what they could accomplish.

Salespeople who are at the consultative end of the continuum create efficient but robust dialogues with their customers that enable them to connect and learn more with each conversation. The dialogues are active, with balanced exchanges between the salesperson and the customer. What they do looks easy and sounds like common sense, but it is far from simple and it is not common practice.

The line between quasi-consultative selling and consultative selling is fine, but if all other factors are basically equal, the line means the difference between winning business or losing to a competitor.

It can be the difference between being viewed as a technical specialist and being a trusted advisor. With relatively equal competitors, it is the sales talk of the salesperson or sales team that makes the difference between winning and losing business.

Here are ways you can create a robust dialogue:

Assess your sales talk: How interactive are your sales dialogues? What is your give/get ratio?

Commit to do something different: Ask more probing questions.

Stop thinking in terms of educating customers: Think more about educating yourself about your customers.

"Increase your sales dialogue to increase your sales results."


WHATEVER
WORKS FOR YOU.
BE
PREPARED

~~Be prepared~~

☑ Always be preparing

Top performers treat preparation differently. They are always preparing—*before* and *after* each customer meeting.

How do you prepare? Do you think to yourself—what does my customer need, what can I position that will make it easy for my customer to say yes? Do you let ideas percolate in your mind so you can be creative and proactive?

Having a preparation strategy will *shorten* your preparation time and increase the impact. As you prepare, follow these three steps:

- Begin with **strategic preparation**. Think about your longer-term relationship objectives and then set your short-term immediate objective for the call. Make sure your objective is measurable, is achievable, and has a time frame so you can maintain momentum, assess the outcome of your call, and accelerate your close. Visualize the flow of your call and build in time for the customer to talk.

- Next, do **customer preparation**. Think about your customer's objectives, situation, needs, and decision criteria.
- Finally, focus on your **product/technical preparation**. Use your range of products and capabilities to meet your customer's needs. Plan the questions you will ask, anticipate objections, and customize your materials.

Most salespeople prepare backwards. They start with product/technical preparation. Beginning with strategic preparation will help you save time by letting you target your efforts and remain customer-focused.

To help you in your preparation, stay up to date on industry and company news. Leverage your team for ideas. Review your customer files so that you can build on any information you already have and avoid unnecessary repetition. Prepare the materials you think you will need and tailor whatever you plan to give to the customer to make sure it applies to the customer.

As you visualize your agenda for the call, make sure you remain customer-focused. Prior to the call, whenever possible, get customer input on your agenda. But even when you get input, always check your agenda to get the feedback you need to get buy-in, make adjustments, and go forward.

Here are tips to help you prepare:

Prepare for all customer calls: Set a measurable objective with a time frame for each call to help you maintain momentum and accelerate your close.

Tailor all material: Show your customer your focus is on his or her needs.

Visualize your call: Plan the flow of your call and build in time for the customer to talk.

"In preparing put first things first. Start with your objective."