



THE NEW
THINKING
ABOUT
FINDING
& KEEPING
CUSTOMERS

STOP SELLING

START
PARTNERING

LARRY WILSON
WITH HERSCH WILSON

Foreword by HARVEY MACKAY Author of *Swim With the Sharks*

Stop Selling, Start Partnering

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The New Thinking About  
Finding and Keeping  
Customers

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Larry Wilson
with Hersch Wilson

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Foreword

I have spent many years believing that there is nothing more important than selling. Selling is the catalyst, the spark that makes the engine of business run. Successful businesses come in all shapes and sizes, but they all have one thing in common: somebody is doing a good job of selling.

So, when I first heard that Larry Wilson's new book was called *Stop Selling, Start Partnering*, I naturally bristled at the very idea. Stop selling? Why not just close up the doors altogether?

My guess is that if you're reading this, you probably have a connection with selling. You may be a salesperson, or a sales manager, or someone who supports a sales organization. You might even be a buyer. In any of those positions, your first reaction to *Stop Selling* might have been the same as mine. Heresy, right? Goes against everything we believe about business, right?

But consider the source . . .

If you're in selling—or in business, for that matter—you've heard of Larry Wilson. His credits run for pages, but let me just run through the highlights: salesperson for over forty years, founder of Wilson Learning and Pecos River Learning Centers, author, thinker, creator. When it comes to

selling, Larry is the authority, as far as I'm concerned. He's "carried a bag" like many of us, calling on clients and looking for better ways to solve a customer's problems. He created Counselor Selling, the groundbreaking training program that transformed a generation of salespeople from the "find 'em, grind 'em" school of selling to the "win-win" approach. And in *Changing the Game: The New Way to Sell*, Larry introduced the key "Strategic Thought Processes" that can help sales professionals find success in a changing environment.

Because of his background, you might think Larry would be the last person to say *Stop Selling*. I know I did. But read further in the title: *Start Partnering*. With this phrase, Larry once again introduces salespeople and sales organizations to a new way to conduct business. And, once again, he makes a lot of sense for anyone whose living depends on successful interactions between a buying and a selling organization. And, to my way of thinking, that's every one of us.

If you don't realize by now that the business world is changing in fundamental ways, you probably won't want to read any further. But if you're like me—and most people involved with selling in any capacity—you are all too familiar with the fact that the old ways of selling, of dealing with customers, of just plain *doing business*, are out the window. Today's business environment calls for new ways to solve customer problems, to build the business, to find success. Salespeople are going to have to think and act differently. And, even then, the salespeople won't be able to do it alone: we'll need *selling organizations*, in which every employee is involved in the sales effort. That's a very different and expanded view of selling. And the reason why *Stop Selling, Start Partnering* is so important.

As usual, Larry's timing is impeccable. When Counselor Selling first hit the training world, selling was basically adversarial in nature. But for many of us out there making the cold calls, getting the rejections, slogging through the mud and mire of 1960s-style selling, we just knew in our guts that there had to be a better way. And along came Larry Wilson with the simple concept that *when I help others get what they want, I get what I want*.

That simple concept is more on the money now—in our era of complex business deals, high leverage financing—than ever before. Taking care of customers is still the golden rule of business.

I predict that the ideas you'll find in *Stop Selling, Start Partnering* will seem just as obvious in twenty-five years. Many sales professionals that I talk to today aren't having the fun they used to. They're finding the world of buying and selling to be tougher, less rewarding, and more stressful than ever before. They have that same nagging feeling that there *must* be a better way.

I think Larry Wilson has once again come up with that better way.

You may find the ideas in *Stop Selling, Start Partnering* to be provocative, challenging, and maybe even a little threatening. But I know you'll also find them to be refreshing, insightful, and life-changing. Give them a try—like anything new, they may feel uncomfortable at first, but when you start enjoying success as a result, you'll find them easier and easier to adopt.

As much change as we have experienced, the old saw is still true: "Nothing happens in a business until someone sells something."

I know that the ideas in this book can help you make

something happen. That has been—and is—Larry's genius. He clearly states what we are all experiencing on a daily basis, and prescribes a new philosophy that can take us where we want to go. But there are a lot of business philosophers out there—ivory tower types who presume to know what happens when it's the last day of the quarter and you're 10 percent under quota. Larry has walked in our shoes. He knows the pressure, the defeats, and the triumphs that are part and parcel of selling. And he knows what it's like to be CEO of a multi-million-dollar organization, too. This real-world experience comes through in his down-to-earth, ready-to-use techniques for elevating the way you approach the business of selling.

And, in the end, that's still the heart of any enterprise. *Stop Selling, Start Partnering* will help you take a fresh look at our selling activities, whether you are in the boardroom, face-to-face with customers, or anywhere in between.

—Harvey Mackay
Author of *Swim With the Sharks*

Preface



Stop Selling, Start Partnering is about thinking differently about customers and, as a result, creating new and more powerful relationships with your best clients. This book is based on the work we do at Pecos River Learning Centers, in which we assist buying and selling organizations come together in partnership.

In our work as a catalyst for partnerships, we use a process called the Strategic Partnering Process, a step-by-step approach that assists buyer and seller to understand the problems and opportunities they face. It also helps them to create the solutions that can result in significant competitive advantage for both organizations. We've organized *Stop Selling, Start Partnering* along the lines of the Strategic Partnering Process.

The first part of the book is the *situation analysis*, addressing such questions as: Where are we now? What is the big picture? What are the critical issues and implications of the current situation? Part II is "Imagining the Future." If we could solve the problems, handle the critical issues, create the perfect solutions, what would it look like? In this section, we describe our vision of the emerging relationships with customers and the selling organization that is being created to keep customers for life. In Part III, we explore the strategic abilities that will help us all be players with the customers and the organizations of the future. In the final part, "How to

Create a Partnership,” we’ll introduce tactics, a set of specific “tools” to use for creating and sustaining the customer relationships of the future.

Voices

In our work at Pecos River Learning Centers, we don’t teach as much as we listen; we don’t solve problems for customers as much as we “facilitate” teams of customers in solving problems for themselves. As a result, we constantly hear brilliant ideas, we have the opportunity to talk and argue daily about the future of work, business, and customers with individuals from all over the business landscape, from CEOs of *Fortune* 500 companies to sales managers and salespeople.

With these discussions often lasting long into the night, you can’t help but realize that there are a lot of passionate and creative people out there who are making the future happen today. Their beliefs and ideas form a large part of this book, and we wanted you to hear from them in their own voices. So we’ve included, verbatim, stories, observations, and comments from people like Lou Pritchett, former vice president of sales, Procter & Gamble; Mike Szymanczyk, senior vice president, Philip Morris; Jane Evans, vice president and general manager, US West Communications; Glen Grodem, president and CEO, Smith Furnishings; Jim DeLong, director of sales, Miles, Inc., Agriculture Division; Tamae Moriyasu, salesperson, Hewlett-Packard Company; and dozens of others.

You’ll find that these people are not “theorists.” They are out there making it happen, testing their creativity and courage against the marketplace and with customers daily. You’ll find agreement among them, and some disagreement, too. But they all have valuable contributions to make and they are all committed to the same idea: creating the future of finding and keeping customers.

Acknowledgments



Thanks for the Help!

There is a Yiddish saying, “Life is with people.” And so it is with business. Business is with people and writing a book about business has been an ongoing conversation with people from all over the country. These remarkable people would actually politely answer the 8:00 A.M. Saturday phone queries, “What do you think about this idea?” “What would you do if this happened?”

Many of these patient and understanding individuals were customers of Pecos River Learning Centers. They shared with us many of their stories and lessons learned as they create new relationships with their customers. In that light, we’d like to especially thank Lou Pritchett, former vice president of sales, Procter & Gamble, and Mike Szymanczyk, senior vice president, Philip Morris, for their guidance and support.

Many others were critical to the conjuring up and writing of this book. We owe them much: JoAnn Baldinger, who patiently proofed and edited the manuscript, and Lisa Etizone for her graphics and artwork. Carol Fletcher added her insightful and direct feedback. The irrepressible Ronn Lehmann always had ideas, humor, pep talks for the asking. Thank you to Harvey Mackay for his kind words and taking

the time from his hectic schedule to put them on paper. We owe many thanks to Tom Haller, who knows as much about selling and partnering today as anyone on the planet. Dan Bodelson knew exactly when it was the right time to have morning creativity meetings at the Santa Fe Ski Basin.

This book would not have been finished without the support of Jill Wenberg and Laurie Wilson. No matter how bleak things looked, how behind schedule we were, they both would fearlessly pop in to the office and ask, “Are you done with it, or what?”

We, of course, owe much to the Pecos River Learning Center staff. They were patient, supportive, curious, and always helpful. To Elizabeth Wilson, the president of Pecos River Learning Centers Inc. and Larry’s wife and life partner, we owe a special thanks. This book would never have made it past the idea stage without her support and guidance. She kept us focused on the project, kept our business successful, our employees happy, and our customers satisfied. Thank you, Elizabeth.

Finally, thank you to Jim Childs, our editor at Oliver Wight Publications, for his enthusiasm, support, and direction.

— Larry Wilson and Hersch Wilson

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Introduction



Finders Keepers, Losers Weepers



we are in the midst of a revolution. It is a revolution that is shaking the foundations of business. But this revolution is not just about the kind of large-scale change that you watch on the evening news. It is more dramatic. This revolution will forever change the basic and the most primal connection of business—the relationship between buyer and seller.

During this revolution, those organizations and individuals who can create new relationships with customers will find themselves with unimagined competitive advantage. Those who don't will lose.

Finders keepers, losers weepers. Those are the rules of this emerging new, challenging, and dramatically different game of business.

Revolution: *A complete change; the overthrow of a social system.*

The very idea of a business and selling revolution is personal to me—as it is to you. I've been a salesperson for forty-five years. It's true that the designation "salesperson" was long ago replaced on my business card with titles like "President" and "CEO." But what I do is sell.

My résumé is testament to this fact: I've sold everything from shoes to pension and profit-sharing plans. One fateful year in my early twenties, I moved up from selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door to selling the now forgotten (with good reason!) Crosley car, the only car ever made by a refrigerator company, a subcompact before there were subcompacts, a car so small and cheap that it was an open admission of poverty.

My first true career was as a life insurance salesperson and general agent. Those ten years taught me about selling and customers. That evolved into teaching others to sell, which eventually became Wilson Learning Corporation, the second-largest training company in the country by the early 1980s. In the last fifteen years, I've designed and sold high-end interactive multimedia software and founded and launched our latest venture, Pecos River Learning Centers. But when you boil it all down, I'm still a salesperson. I am still out daily with customers, trying to understand and help them solve their problems.

If you're like me, a salesperson, or a CEO, or anyone who works with customers, this revolution will change everything—our roles and the competencies we need to survive and succeed. This revolution will overthrow the beliefs we hold and the very nature of why we work. It is an exhilarating and scary time to be in business.

And, yet, we all knew that it was coming! Alvin Toffler has written at length about revolutionary change. His first big seller, *Future Shock*, described a future rapid transformation, a future that would completely tax our collective and individual capacities for coping with change. We all read it, agreed with it, and thought, "Yep, out there in the distant future, we'll definitely have to change."

“No generation has witnessed so many simultaneous changes that are interrelated and of a global nature. . . . On many, many fronts, we’re in for a couple of decades of rattling, shaking and reorganization.” — Alvin Toffler

Welcome to that future! It’s here. Whether we like it or not, Alvin Toffler’s gut-wrenching “everything-changing-all-at-once” future is upon us.

My first “stake in the ground” is that the consequences of this future for selling, for salespeople, and for all those who depend on customers for their livelihood are so dramatic and so overwhelming that all our cherished assumptions about selling and customers are up for grabs.

Some Things Never Change

But there is always a paradox. Amidst the revolution, with much changing all around us, one thing hasn’t since before the Industrial Revolution. It’s the simple, compelling purpose of a business. That purpose was best expressed by the preeminent Harvard Business School professor Theodore Levitt, when he wrote, “The purpose of a business is to find and keep customers and to get existing buyers to continue doing business with you rather than your competitors.”

Simple, powerful, and true, and more important now than at any other time in the past forty years.

My second “stake in the ground” is this: to survive and thrive in this business revolution will require everyone who comes to work to rediscover and hold on to that purpose as if

it were the most important part of his or her job description—that one objective that makes the difference between keeping a job or being let go.

Why? One of the driving forces of the business revolution is that the world has become astonishingly more competitive. If your company is like most today, you have more competition than ever before—and no doubt some of your competition is coming from overseas, from organizations you had never heard of ten years ago. If you're like many companies today, the products and services you offer, your benefits and prices, are matched point by point by those same competitors. The bottom line is that in the eyes of your customers there is not much difference between what you offer and what your competition offers.

More competitors, tougher customers—difficult business climate, no change in sight, just more “rattling and shaking.” The business of finding and keeping customers is now a very high-risk poker game, the consequences of a customer's deciding to go with you or with your competition are more critical to your business now than at any time in recent history.

Faced with this new environment, organizations are waking up and rediscovering that the purpose of *their* business is to find and keep customers. Executives and CEOs are realizing that their job is not to grow shareholder value or to do the fancy financing of mergers and acquisitions—but it is to sell, to find and keep customers. Selling is the highest business purpose of the organization. Selling is no longer a function within the company; it *is* the function of the company.