

INTRODUCTION

My entire career—from age 11 when I sold greeting cards, to the present, has been in sales; I've never wanted to do anything else. I found the challenges and rewards of the sales profession so enjoyable that in 1985 I began professionally training salespeople. Training others has not only made me a better salesperson, but it's also been fulfilling to watch people become more effective at their profession.

Over the years, I've used and taught a variety of sales methodologies—feature-benefit selling, consultative selling, and relationship selling, among them—but I've always believed that there had to be an easier way to convey the steps necessary to make a sale, from prospecting to closing.

I decided to analyze all the great theories about sales, and reread many of the major books written about selling, motivation, and persuasion.

From such classics as Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* (1937), Elmer Wheeler's *How to Sell Yourself to Others* (1946), Frank Bettger's *How I Raised Myself from Failure to Success in Selling* (1947), Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936), and Dr. Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) to more recent sales books, including *Spin Selling* by Neil Rackham (1988), *Solution Selling* (1994) by Michael Bosworth, Rob Jolles' *Customer Centered Selling* (1998), and Sharon Drew Morgen's *Selling with Integrity* (1999), I read these books and many more.

What did I learn?

All are excellent books and provide good information, but they added to my concern that most of the modern sales experts, authors, trainers, and consultants—and I include myself in all four groups—have unnecessarily complicated the sales process.

The systems, processes, and techniques taught today are complex and difficult to learn and apply. This is in contrast to the books written decades ago, which, while lacking sequential steps and such essential techniques as qualifying the buyer, had simple approaches that were easy to adopt and use.

The Numbers Tell the Story

You don't have to look far for proof that something's not working in the sales industry.

Objective Management Group, Inc., the industry-leading sales assessment firm, has tested more than a quarter-million salespeople in all

ranges of experience and from every major industry. From 1990 to 2004, it compiled data and assessed sales capabilities with a predictive validity in the mid 90 percentile.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of salespeople, tested from 1990 to 2004, who fall into the various categories of performance.

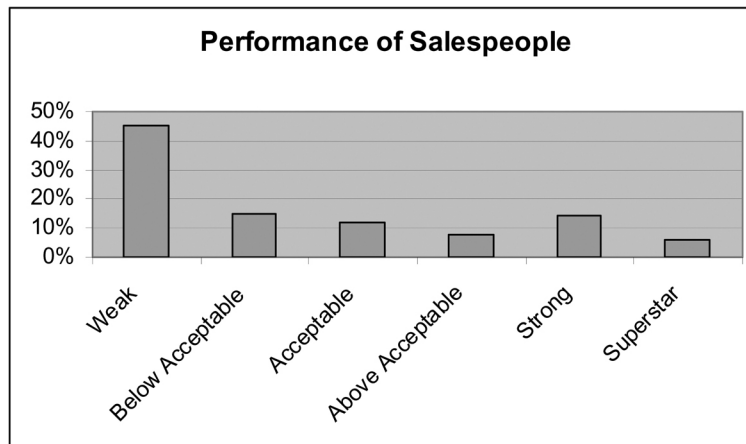


Figure 1

Testing, Testing, 1-2-3

Objective Management Group developed a battery of assessments to gauge the performance of sales personnel. In Appendix A, you'll find a chart showing the most common weaknesses—in skill sets and mind-sets—from which a majority of the sales population suffers. While the data indicates that 62% of all salespeople are rated “weak” or “unacceptable,” the primary issues for their poor performances can be corrected through more effective, targeted training.

These findings are consistent with conventional wisdom regarding the existence of an elite group (6% in this instance) of sales performers. But the percentage of unacceptable performers far exceeds the 20 percent that traditional thinking placed in the bottom group of performers.

The bottom line?

Ineffective salespeople—weak and poor performers—make up a whopping 62 percent of the sales population.

Does experience matter? Surprisingly not. Of the 62 percent of salespeople falling into the *Weak* and *Below Acceptable* categories, 26 percent have

been selling for at least 10 years; 44 percent have been selling for five years or more; 49 percent for at least four years; and 58 percent for at least three years.

What about training?

It is rare when a salesperson would be sent into the field without any preparation. The majority of salespeople in US Companies receive training from a number of sources, including in-house and third-party training; mentoring and coaching from their sales manager or another experienced individual in the company; and Internet-based and CD-ROM training. Sales professionals also tend to pursue self-improvement help. They read books by such experts as Tom Hopkins, Brian Tracy, and Zig Ziglar, and monitor trends and best practices from such industry magazines as *Selling Power*.

What Makes A Great Salesperson?

If experience and training—specifically, the sales training popular today—are not as influential as you'd expect, what predictors *do* impact a salesperson's success?

My research shows that the major differences between the top 26 percent—the successful sales professionals—and unsuccessful salespeople is limited primarily to hidden weaknesses, unconscious behaviors, and a lack of professional selling skills. As a result,

Good Salespeople Are Not Born. They're Trained.

Some salespeople are naturally gifted, especially when it comes to establishing rapport with prospects. However, don't mistake the gift for gab with the ability to develop a meaningful relationship. In fact, it's often more challenging to train an extrovert than an introvert to ask the right questions early in a relationship. Contrary to popular thinking, introverts make excellent salespeople, because they typically excel at listening, a great attribute in sales.

You can learn how to build rapport. How do I know? Because I did it. People skills did not come naturally to me, and I had to work hard developing relationships with prospects early on. (You'll learn ways to do this in chapter 6.) Even today, if I don't "turn on" my people skills, I will appear introverted, my natural state. However when I move into "relationship mode," people generally find me likeable, sincere, trustworthy and credible—important qualities to have early in and throughout the sales process.

most salespeople are unable to consistently and effectively execute their selling process.

Successful salespeople are confident in their abilities, understand the best ways to sell, and put those practices to work.

If you have the knowledge of how best to sell, but you fail to use your knowledge because you have too many hidden weaknesses—you will not be successful in sales.

Despite the fact that this makes plenty of sense, only 26 percent of us are “getting it.” I wrote this book to help salespeople get it and get it quickly.

Meet AIDA: The Foundation for the Sales Process

In the 1950s, sales professionals began using the industry’s first acronym to describe the components in the sales process: **AIDA**. To make a sale, you must first get the prospect’s **Attention**. Next you must generate your prospect’s **Interest** in your product or service; this builds the prospect’s **Desire** to buy. The last component is getting the prospect to take **Action**, or making the sale.

AIDA’s beauty is its simplicity. There are four stages, each of which is easy to remember. The problem is that AIDA is not a sales methodology. It lacks a process by which you move from attention through interest and desire to action. AIDA gives you the itinerary—the stops you’ll make along the way—but not the road map, or directions for how to get from point A to point B.

It was with the popularization of AIDA that the modern history of professional sales began. From the itinerary, sales pioneers created various road maps, or different sales methodologies, to direct the salesperson through each stage of the selling process.

Where Training Left the Tracks: The Six Major Sales Methods

Today, there are six major sales methodologies, and AIDA forms the foundation for most of them. A complete analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each system appears in Appendix B.

This quick review demonstrates how the progression of methodologies from AIDA improved, yet at the same time, complicated the sales process.

The first methodology to develop, **Feature-Benefit Selling**, presents product or service features as benefits to the customer. The salesperson's objective is to close after the presentation. In a perfect world, it would be a two-step process—presentation and close. However, the product-centered nature of the presentation creates many opportunities for the prospect to raise objections, which can turn the sale into an endless cycle of presentation, handling objections, attempt to close, and back to handling objections again.

An advantage of feature-benefit selling is that the salesperson needs only a thorough understanding of the product and its benefits, plus bullet-proof skill at handling objections. Its shortcoming is the leeway it gives the prospect in raising objections.

Consultative Selling evolved next, with the addition of the qualifying process. Here, the salesperson acts as a consultant, by identifying the needs and problems of the prospect, and then presents his product or service as the solution to those needs. Made famous in 1965 by its sale to Xerox, the proprietary consultative selling system, Professional Selling Skills, or PSS, reigned supreme until the mid-1970s, when another consultative selling system, SPIN Selling, replaced PSS. Both systems utilize questions intended to cause discomfort, or create pain, as the motivation to buy. (See sidebar A Painful Moment in Sales History.)

Through questions, the salesperson demonstrates the costs of not using his product or service, and then uses a features-benefit presentation to close the sale. Because consultative selling focuses on the prospect's needs, tremendous urgency can be created while presenting the seller as an expert. The major draw-

A Painful Moment in Sales History

In 1946, sales pioneer Elmer Wheeler introduced the concept of pain as a buying motive in his book *How to Sell Yourself to Others*. Of course, he wasn't suggesting a forceful sales presentation; rather, if you can get your prospect to understand the impact of *not* solving a problem, you've created urgency for your product or service. Looks like your high-school gym teacher had it right all along: No Pain, No Gain.

back is the methodology's complexity. Depending upon which consultative-selling system you're using, the number of steps range from five to twelve, and the approach is very difficult to learn and execute.

In the 1970s, Miller-Heiman created and wrote the **Strategic Selling** methodology to provide a standard nomenclature for sales to major accounts. These sales cycles were typically quite long and involved numerous decision makers, or stakeholders. Strategic selling places significant emphasis on research as the sales process begins. The concept behind the methodology is that the more you know about all of the people within the prospective account—their roles and abilities to influence the decision—the more likely you are to make the sale.

It can be hard to get the various people in the decision making process to provide information about the company's needs. While it provides the strategies for success, it often lacks the tactics to make the strategy work.

Relationship Selling relies on the salesperson's ability to develop a genuine (versus superficial) relationship with the prospect through a series of "get-to-know-you-better" meetings. The concept is based on the belief that people prefer to do business with people they like, so the goal is to make friends first and sales later. As with strategic selling, the sales cycle tends to be long, so if you have time sensitivity, relationship selling will not work. It's hard to sell while building a relationship.

In the early 1980s, Michael Bosworth wrote **Solution Selling**, a methodology based on consultative selling. Like its counterpart consultative selling, Solution Selling starts with identifying pain and stressing solutions over products. It was intended to be used with hard-to-sell products and complex sales, as opposed to the transactional nature of other products and services. It differs from consultative methodologies when the focus is on proof and value justification as well as developing solution visions. It is difficult to learn because, taught in the context of complex sales, application tends to be foreign to those who don't have those challenges.

In the late 1990s, Michael Bosworth and other notable sales-trainers/authors moved toward the final methodology popular today, **Customer-Focused Selling**. (Books on this approach include Rob Jolles's *Customer Centered Selling*, and Sharon Drew Morgen's *Selling with Integrity*.)

Customer-focused selling emphasizes the salesperson placing all of her attention on the prospect's buying criteria and processes. It is a non-manipulative sales process, whereby the salesperson responds to the prospect's needs. Of course, the advantage of this process is that the prospect feels as if he is in control, but therein is also the disadvantage. If the salesperson

is unable to regain control of the process at the appropriate time, she may lose the sale or be viewed by the prospect as merely a facilitator.

The evolution of the sales methods—from feature-benefit selling to the more complex systems that are popular today—has introduced good concepts and practices to move the process from attention through interest and desire to action. But that same evolution has unnecessarily complicated the process. The aforementioned systems require hundreds of hours of practice, dozens of unfamiliar techniques, the internalization of five to 12 steps, and memorization and understanding of countless terms.

That complexity is not a problem for the top 26 percent of sales performers, who will excel no matter what selling system they're using. However, what about the remaining 74 percent? For them, the six major sales methodologies are either too difficult to learn, take too long to implement, are ineffective and outdated, or are not used in the manner intended by their authors. The majority of salespeople will continue to struggle, as long as the approach is complex.

TIP: Successful salespeople will be effective with any system or approach they use, and the remaining 74 percent will struggle, regardless of the method, if the method is complex.

Putting Sales Training Back on Track

What is needed is a new model for simplifying the sales process: one that's easy to learn, easy to remember, and easy to implement. Most importantly, the new model must be more effective than the current methods, or it will be of little use.

Introducing **Baseline Selling**, the easiest and most-effective sales methodology you'll ever use. The metaphor? Baseball. The terms? Baseball. The Process? The one you've known since your first kickball game at age five. Get to first. Get to second. Get to third. Score. In the upcoming chapters, I'll show you how to score early and often, raise your batting average, and have fun doing it.

Baseline Selling is easy because it distills selling down to a four-step process. It's easy to remember because each step is the equivalent of a base in baseball. It's easy to implement because I've provided simple techniques

for running the bases that will work in every sales situation, every time. (Selling is selling, and anyone who tells you differently is trying to sell you on a more-complex system.)

But what about the effectiveness of Baseline Selling? Consider the results we've measured since introducing this method in our sales development business, David Kurlan & Associates, Inc.

Baseline Selling Gets Results

Two months after rolling out Baseline Selling to clients, we surveyed three random groups of 248 salespeople:

Group 1 = Salespeople exposed only to Baseline Selling

Group 2 = Salespeople exposed only to our previous methodology, a seven-step consultative selling program.

Group 3 = Salespeople that were exposed to both methodologies.

Baseline Selling proved 57 percent more effective than our previous consultative selling strategy in the participants' abilities to quickly recognize, remember, use, and get results.

The most dramatic difference was in salespeople's ability to remember and understand what the four steps represented. After only one day of training, 69 percent of trainees in Group 1 could recall and explain what each of the steps required, versus only 31 percent of the trainees in Group 2.

When salespeople are confident in their understanding of the system they're using, they will use it more consistently and they will sell more effectively. With only one day of exposure to Baseline Selling, 38 percent of respondents reported sales results directly attributable to the new method. One month after training, 76 percent of respondents said they could quantify sales results that came from the new process

Can you expect the same or even better results? Absolutely.

TIP: When salespeople are confident in their understanding of the system they're using, they sell more effectively.

Who Should Read This Book

This book is for anyone in a sales or sales-management capacity. It's also for company owners, marketing managers, and client-service representatives. Such service professionals as accountants, attorneys, engineers, architects, and consultants will also benefit from it. Basically, Baseline Selling is for anyone who works with customers in any capacity, because the four-base process can be applied to any customer interaction.

Whether your company provides a service, manufactures a product, or re-sells another company's products or services, you'll learn the skills necessary to sell in a simple-to-understand, step-by-step manner that anyone can follow.

What if your company already adheres to a more complicated sales methodology? The Baseline Selling system can simplify any current methodology you're currently using. By overlaying the concepts and process I describe onto your current system, you'll gain a better understanding of what your current system is all about.

Knowledge is power. A better understanding of your sales process gives you confidence, lessens resistance from your prospects, and ultimately produces more revenue for you and your company.

Through, not To

Salespeople who will be most challenged applying this or any selling process to their businesses are those who sell through others. These are the salespeople who call on distributors, brokers, channels, and Value Added Resellers (VARs). As a rule, these salespeople do not sell directly to the people who will actually purchase their products or services. Some of these salespeople often have "manager" in their title. For the purpose of this discussion I will refer to them as channel managers, in an attempt to simplify the many nuances of these roles.

Channel managers often make a significant mistake when attempting to adopt a selling process for their businesses. They typically see the people

they sell *through* as their customers, and start using the process on them. This is a mistake. In order to work effectively, any selling process needs to be used by the distributors, brokers, channels, or VARs on *their* prospects. This puts the channel manager in a training/coaching role rather than a selling role unless they are accompanying the reseller on a joint sales call. If you are a channel manager, what would happen if your resellers began using an effective process on their prospects? You would suddenly have more control over outcomes, something that may elude you today.

How the Book Works

In **Part One: Warming Up**, you'll learn the Four Bases of Selling, i.e., what each base is and what, in a nutshell, must happen to advance to the next base. In **Part Two: Getting to First Base**, you'll discover the simple, proven means of getting attention (AIDA) by prospecting and securing an appointment. As the most-challenging part of the sales process, I give considerable coverage to the obstacles you'll encounter in reaching first base and how to overcome them.

Part Three: Getting to Second Base presents the means by which you generate interest (AIDA) by determining your prospect's needs and problems, instilling desire (AIDA), and creating urgency. **Part Four: Getting to Third Base** covers thoroughly qualifying your prospect and your company to do business with one another. **Part Five: Running Home** drives the prospect to action (AIDA) with the easiest and most-effective close you'll ever use in sales.

For additional reference, you'll find a number of charts, definitions, and extra guidance located in the Appendices.

How best to begin improving your sales career? Turn the page and start reading.

BASELINE SELLING

How to Become a Sales Superstar
by Using What You Already Know
About the Game of Baseball

by
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DEDICATION

To my wife, Deborah, for her constant love, encouragement and support, and our son, Michael, for showing me that a (then) two-year old can do anything he is taught if the concept is simple enough. If it wasn't for Deborah's Tuesday night golf league, I may never have had the time to transport this book from my mind to my computer!

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I would especially like to thank my two favorite authors: Dan Millman for his time, thoughts and ideas and Guy Kawasaki for hammering home the message that this book had better stand out from the glut of sales books on the market today.

This book would be a collection of rambling thoughts and ideas without structure and consistency if it wasn't for the work of my editors, Malcolm Campbell of Walkabout Press and David Weintraub. Their never-ending questions and suggestions really turned this into a readable book.

Despite the cliché that states the opposite, people will judge this book by its cover so I would like to thank the staff at PENTA Communications, Inc. for designing a thoughtful, eye-catching, yet appropriate cover that accurately depicts the theme of this book.

FOREWORD

Baseline Selling -- simple, readable, practical, actionable – a Grand Slam.

What more do you need to hear from the person writing the Foreword. In a way, to say more is just getting in the way of you reading the book and making more sales. After all, being a former sales and marketing manager and now owner of my own business (always selling!), the last thing I want to do is get in the way of a method to help you generate more sales!

As luck would have it, shortly after Dave asked me to write this Foreword I happened to have dinner with a good friend and colleague Tina Sung. In our conversation she brought up the word “minessence” – the ability to take complex ideas from different sources and convert them into a simplified, practical technology that improves society. “Technology” is used in its broadest sense to mean a usable practical system. Though you won’t find the word in a dictionary, you will find a corresponding website.

Tina couldn’t have found a better description for what Dave has created. Dave’s highly usable and practical system for improving sales is drawn from the very best of different sales sources combined with his experience teaching and coaching sales. And he’s framed his approach so it’s both memorable and actionable – you can’t use what you can’t remember!

Having an edge in sales is always important and it’s even more so now that the playing field has expanded globally. Most companies have optimized themselves about as much as they can. Now is the time to grab market share. At Gazelles we’re pushing all our clients to get out there and sell, sell, sell.

And it’s useful to remember that you sell to people, not companies. Selling is still a people to people process requiring a person to make a

decision. As I read Dave's book I was reminded of many of the people fundamentals that tend to get lost in many formal sales methodologies.

If I say more I'll have to start quoting from the book. Turn the page and start improving your sales.

Verne Harnish, CEO
Gazelles Inc
Founder, Young Entrepreneurs' Organization

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