



The  
**Top Sales Experts**

Share Their  
**Top Articles**

Volume One

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## Introduction

The Top Sales Experts team was initially formed to act as an adjudication panel, to judge the very best sales articles every week, for the "Top 10 Sales Articles" website.

The members, handpicked for their expertise in a specific sales area, are vastly experienced, globally recognised thought leaders and agents of change.

Additionally, they are all outstanding authors and regularly contribute their work to leading article communities, international business journals and online magazines.

The first volume of this quarterly initiative showcases examples of their work and amply demonstrates their enormous combined talent - they don't just judge, they can write too.

Editor

# 15 Tips For Writing Powerful Sales Letters (aka Salesmanship in print)

By Joe Heller

I've written this "how-to" article to give you a competitive edge when writing a sales letter. The following 15 Tips (and tricks) will give you everything you need to know to write killer sales letters. Enjoy and prosper -

A killer sales letter is written to accomplish one of three things.

# 1. Generate interest to qualify (or disqualify) a lead

# 2. Advance a prospect through the sales process

# 3. Secure TOMA [Top of Mind Awareness] for additional sales with your existing client base

Question -- What makes writing an effective sales letter so challenging?

Here are the top 15.5 reasons why people fail to write effective sales copy and what you can do about them.

1) No clear objective in mind before you sit down to write your sales letter -- In order to write persuasively you must have an end in mind, a goal for your reader. Ask yourself, what do you want the reader do when they finish reading your letter.

2) Lack of an attention getting headline or opening sentence -- You must hook the reader immediately with a captivating opener in order to get the reader to invest their valuable time to finish reading the letter. 80%+ of sales letters fail to generate attention.

3) Lead sentence fails to extend the theme of the headline into the letter -- You must bridge the reader into the sales copy once their attention is captured or risk confusing the reader and losing their interest.

4) Fail to write in a conversational tone -- Write like you talk. A letter should be a dialog between you and the reader. The reader should get a sense that you are genuinely concerned with their well being.

5) Copy is boring, fails to keep the reader interested -- You must develop a writing style based on your personality, not on antiquated High School grammar practices that are assured to put any reader to sleep. It's ok for your writing to fail grammatically as long as your don't lose the focus on your message.

6) Fail to use a proven writing format -- In order to be effective you must use an established formula for writing copy such as "story telling" or "problem -> agitate -> solution".

6.5) No bolding or underlining within the letter -- There are a number of things you can do to add emphasis to key parts of your sales letter to direct your readers attention where you want it to go. Emphasis also helps pull the reader into the letter.

7) Me focused, not reader focused -- Stop focusing on how great your product is... the reader doesn't really care. Will your product save money? Time? or generate revenue? Profits? Never forget your reader is tuned into WIIFM (What's In It For Me) when they read your letter. Always emphasize the major benefits your reader will receive from your product.

8) Nix the jargon -- avoid industry jargon or buzzwords and stick to talking about your benefits in plain English. Nothing will turn a reader off more quickly than using industry jargon you think they should know and often don't.

9) Use testimonials -- No matter on what stage you are in with your prospect you should always include testimonials. Testimonials increase your credibility and your believability.

10) Feature focused, not benefit focused -- You must keep the copy focused on the benefits your reader will receive by owning your product. Example: Your product is made from plastic (feature); you tell the reader that because your product is made from plastic (feature) it will never rust (advantage). Thereby, lowering replacement costs (benefit), eliminate corrosion (benefit), etc...

11) No bullet points or single sentence paragraphs -- There are two types of readers. There are those who will read the entire letter once you've captured their attention and then there are those who will skim your letter. You must be able to reach both reading styles. Bullets and single sentence paragraphs allow your reader to capture important benefits at a glance.

12) Long sentences -- In order to keep the prospects attention in today's busy world you must write in short sentences. Never use a comma. This includes using incomplete sentences [when necessary] in your letter copy in order to express your point.

13) Lengthy paragraphs -- Try to keep your paragraphs to 3 sentences (5 at the maximum). Even though you've captured their attention with your opening headline you must write for interruptions that will occur as they read your letter during a hectic business day. Complete your thoughts quickly.

14) Copy does not define next steps -- Now that you've got your prospect to read all the way to the end of your letter... now what? What actions on your part or theirs must take place? The "next step" is where you psychologically engage the reader into your sales process and tell them exactly what to do or expect.

15) Fail to use a "ps" to close your letter -- The "ps" is the second most read section of a letter. The "ps" is a great place to reiterate your #1 benefit from your headline or opening sentence.

15.5) Proof-read your letter -- always proof your letter two or three times. If you have someone else proof your letter, explain your goals to them. When they give you their critique, acknowledge their comments; however, any changes made to the letter are your decision alone. If you decide to proof your own letter let it sit for a few hours or a day, print it and then read it aloud to make sure it's conversational. Do NOT proof your letter with your word processor (unless you're an experienced editor); make your notes on the paper for easy review.

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One final note; in order to become a great writer you must become an avid reader of successful sales letters. I've developed a course you can invest in to help you write a killer sales letter on my site [www.TrustCycleSelling.com](http://www.TrustCycleSelling.com) and click on Sales Copywriting Advanced Tactics program to learn more. It's a great resource from my personal library for yours.

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# Selling Is Like Buying A Bathing Suit

By Kim Duke



"It's my least favorite season of the year, bathing-suit season. I don't know why we can't be shaped like all those eighteen year old boys they design those suits for." - Diane Ford

**S**hopping for a bathing suit is right up there on my Top 10 Ways to Torture Yourself. Why? Because finding something that is the "perfect fit" (and you know what I mean here- that somehow the Bathing Suit Fairy will magically take 10 pounds off your ass)

But you know what?

It is always worth the effort to find the "perfect bathing suit for you." Before I went to the Caribbean this spring I spent 2 hours with a sales girl who had a "behind" the size of an apricot. And she did offer expert advice and she reduced most of the pain from the mirrors!

And you know me - as I was twisting, turning, and sweating during the process I thought "I am going to turn this into an article someday!!"

Here's How Bathing Suits Are Like Selling:

- One Size Does NOT Fit All. In selling you need to smarten up. Quit trying to be something for everyone. Who is your target audience or better yet - WHO SHOULD BE your target audience?
- Tight Bathing Suits Are Too Constricting (GASP). That's right - sometimes you need to release clients that don't fit anymore. Perhaps they don't pay enough, or you just aren't getting the "warm fuzzy factor" anymore. Or perhaps they have outgrown you or you have outgrown them. Either way - respectfully release them.
- You Gotta Know Your Strengths Baby! Bathing Suits are all about marketing. Playing up your strengths and not focusing on your weaknesses. What are the biggest assets you bring to a client? How you can help them the most and does your marketing reflect this?
- Cheap Bathing Suits Look Cheap. You get what you pay for. Are you not spending money in areas that you REALLY SHOULD be? i.e. / creating an e-zine, follow-up with your customers, improving your product or service on a consistent basis. Obviously there are areas you want to save money; however, never should it be at the expense of your reputation or brand.

*Shopping for a bathing suit is right up there on my "Top 10 Ways to Torture Yourself."*

- Your Bathing Suit From 1994 No Longer Does It. Yes - your fancy schmancy logo from 10 years ago cost you \$500 to get designed. (Although let's be honest - someone you KNEW probably designed it for you!) But those days are over girl. Everything needs an overhaul every now and again. Even your business. What part do you need to throw out?

So what was the result of my bathing suit experience? I found 2 "smokin" bathing suits and I easily raised the temperature of the Caribbean water by at least 10 degrees. And in regards to my business - I have been doing TONS of traveling, working like crazy on products, carving and reshaping my products and services to all new HIGHS of DIVA-NESS!

Take a good hard look at your business under those HARSH LIGHTS and see what you need to adjust. Remember - you can keep tugging but eventually what doesn't work WILL expose you!

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Kim Duke, The Sales Diva, provides savvy, sassy sales training for women small biz owners and entrepreneurs. Kim works with clients internationally, showing them The Sales Diva secrets to success! Sign up for her saucy and smart FREE e-zine and receive her FREE Bonus Report "The 5 Biggest Sales Mistakes Women Make" at: [www.salesdivas.com](http://www.salesdivas.com)

# How to Read Your Prospect Like a Book!

By John Boe



**T**op salespeople and the most successful managers recognize the importance of nonverbal communication in the selling process and have learned to "listen with their eyes." They understand that one of the easiest and most effective ways to close sales is to be aware of their prospect's "buy signals."

Are you aware that your body language reveals your deepest feelings and hidden thoughts to total strangers?

Body language is a mixture of movement, posture and tone of voice. It might surprise you to know that research indicates over 70 percent of our communication is done nonverbally. In fact, studies show that nonverbal communication has a much greater impact and reliability than the spoken word. Therefore, if your prospect's words are incongruent with his or her body language gestures, you would be wise to rely on their body language as a more accurate reflection of their true feelings.

## Gain the Competitive Edge

Get started on the right foot. Research shows that we decide in the first few moments whether we like someone or not. Yes, we also judge a book by its cover too. There is absolutely no substitute for a positive first impression. Create a favourable first impression and build rapport quickly by using open body language.

In addition to smiling and making good eye contact, you should show the palms of your hands, keep your arms unfolded and your legs uncrossed.

Create harmony by "matching and mirroring" your prospect's body language gestures. Matching and mirroring is unconscious mimicry. It's a way of subconsciously telling another that you like them and agree with them.

The next time you are at a social event, notice how many people are subconsciously matching one another. Likewise, when people disagree, they subconsciously mismatch their body language gestures.

You can build trust and rapport by deliberately, but subtly, matching your prospect's body language in the first ten to fifteen minutes of the appointment. For example, if you notice that your prospect has crossed his or her arms, subtly cross your arms to match them. After you believe you have developed trust and rapport, verify it by uncrossing your arms and see if your prospect will match and mirror you as you move into a more open posture.

*Are you aware  
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If you notice your prospect subconsciously matching your body language gestures, congratulations, because this indicates you have developed trust and rapport. Conversely, if you notice your prospect mismatching your body language gestures, you know trust and rapport has not been established and you need to continue matching and mirroring them.

#### Body Language Basics

Be mindful to evaluate the flow of "gesture clusters" rather than isolated gestures taken out of context. Listed below are some important body language gestures that will help you close more sales in less time.

Body Postures: There are two basic categories; Open/Closed and Forward/Back.

In an open and receptive body posture, arms are unfolded, legs uncrossed and palms are exposed. In a closed body posture, arms are folded, legs are crossed and the entire body is usually turned away.

- Leaning back and closed = Lack of interest
- Leaning back and open = Contemplation and cautious interest
- Leaning forward and closed = Potential aggressive behavior
- Leaning forward and open = Interest and agreement

#### Head Gestures

- Head neutral = Neutral and open attitude
- Tilted back = Superior attitude
- Tilted down = Negative and judgmental attitude
- Tilted to one side = Interest

#### Facial Gestures

- Eye rub = Deceit, "see no evil"
- Eye roll = Dismissive gesture that indicates superiority
- Looking over top of glasses = Scrutiny and a critical attitude
- Nose rub = Dislike of the subject
- Hand or fingers blocking mouth = Deceit, "speak no evil"
- Chin stroking = Making a decision
- Thumb under chin with index finger pointing vertically along the cheek = Negative attitude and critical judgment

Are you missing your prospect's buy signals? As a professional salesperson you must continuously monitor your prospect's body language and adjust your presentation accordingly. By knowing your prospect's body language gestures you will minimize perceived sales pressure and know when it's appropriate to close the sale!

#### ACTION PLAN

1. Keep this article handy and read it again just before your next client appointment.
2. Before you begin matching and mirroring the body language gestures of your prospects, first practice by matching and mirroring family members, friends or associates.
3. During your appointment, make a mental note of your client's three most frequently used gestures.
4. Identify your three most frequently used gestures and work on eliminating any negative or intimidating gestures.

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John Boe

# The Changing Face Of Professional Selling

By Jonathan Farrington



**T**he traditional customer call once seemed indispensable to the selling process; the time and expense involved were just a basic cost of doing business. In recent years, however, the business community has come to regard the sales call as an expenditure for which there are substitutes.

For many companies telemarketing and direct mail have made the sales call a choice not an inevitability. This is not surprising when various studies suggest that getting one sales person in front of one customer now costs £500 (\$1000) - this cost has trebled since 1983. As a consequence professional salespeople have to be more effective than ever to justify the investment in a face to face effort.

In essence, we can draw several conclusions and taken together, these findings paint a picture of the current state of the sales environment.

Customer Focus Creates Competitive Advantage:

- The one term that sets top performers apart - customer focus
- Outstanding sales results depend on:
  - The ability to think from the customer's point of view
  - Understanding the customer's agenda, buying cycle and best interests
- Beyond a superficial reading of immediate customer needs, salespeople must gain a deeper understanding of both the buyer's long-term goals and the overall business climate
- At the heart of customer focus is the art of listening constructively - the best salespeople are masters at capturing information
- Customer focus means taking the customer seriously - to-day the salesperson who clings to the product orientation of a decade ago is losing ground
- As client companies branch into new markets and unfamiliar territories, they are demanding unique, flexible solutions from their vendors - customised to support specific goals

- Another myth which can be exploded is that whilst customers value flexibility, being too flexible can undermine the sales relationship. On the whole salespeople imagine that customers value a vendor's responsiveness above all. However recent research shows that their primary concern is reliability.

In summary, in order to maintain customer focus the best salespeople become facilitators, creating a partnership that extends the selling relationship within the customer's company. The motivation to achieve this should be strong - it costs five times as much to attract and sell to a new customer as it does to an existing one!

The right to do business has to be earned and never assumed:

Rather than doggedly asking for the business, the very best sales people work to keep the relationship moving towards a sale. They realise the need to identify how to turn their company's products into real solutions, which must meet specific needs. Unfortunately, our surveys confirm that the average salesperson drags the customer over old ground as much as 52% of the time - they are unable to provide continuous stimulation and never know when to treat an existing customer like a new one.

Conversely, exceptional salespeople only make such 'return' calls for 10% of the time. Above all, earning the right to proceed requires gaining the customer's trust and top salespeople work diligently to establish a climate in which the customer is willing to share information and feels comfortable doing so. The key here is integrity.

Customers are persuaded when they are part of the process and not part of the audience:

Sales success to-day demands a radical shift from the 'peddler' mentality of merely demonstrating products and expanding on their features. It requires treating the customer as a participant. More often than not, a 'flashy' sales presentation alone alienates rather than persuades

*When the buyer and seller act as partners, they are building a bridge to profitability*

The best salespeople regard the sales call as a two-way conversation - not a one sided pitch. They have developed active listening skills Average salespeople score fairly well in their ability to provide customers with facts and figures, but top performers dramatically outscore the rest when it comes to gathering information. In addition, how a salesperson collects information still distinguishes exceptional achievers from the rest of the pack. I.e. top performers ask better questions and as a result gain much better information. Essentially, they aim to engage customers in the buying process with questions that require thoughtful answers, that stimulate curiosity and that reveal the customers underlying needs

Businesses need to re-define selling and what constitutes basic selling skills:

In to-day's world of selling, there is less and less room for apprenticeship. Selling has become an exclusive club of highly skilled professionals where product knowledge and time management skills, for instance, are the cost of membership not leadership.

Ongoing research demonstrates that to-day's 'average' salesperson is just as effective as the high performer in explaining features and benefits effectively, relating a service or product to customer needs and closing a sale. But, above this Level 1 plateau of competence, the exceptional salesperson is busy defining the "basic skills of tomorrow".

Building an up-to-date foundation in sales competence does mean sacrificing some old notions of what it takes to succeed in a competitive marketplace. For example, a salesperson can no longer just “win by knowing”. Every company needs to test their assumptions about what skills really contribute to sales success. Too often operating on old sales theories means training and rewarding people to do the wrong things.

In summary: When the buyer and seller act as partners, they are building a bridge to profitability:

Successful selling is definitely not about the “hit and run” sale. Sales achievers regard their relationships with key customers as a partnership and cultivate it as such. When customers face tough business challenges and complex technological choice, they rely on sales people who can assist them in making the right decisions.

The primary objective of a sales partnership has to be, to create and sustain a mutually productive relationship, which serves the needs of both parties, now and in the future. The key word here is symbiotic. Partnership does not mean eliminating the tension between buyer and seller; it means that top-performing salespeople know how to strike a balance between achieving immediate results and developing the relationship fully.

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Jonathan Farrington is a globally recognised business coach, mentor, author and consultant, who has guided hundreds of companies and thousands of individuals around the world towards optimum performance levels, in his capacity as Managing Partner of [The jfa Group](#).

Recently, Jonathan formed Top Sales Associates (TSA) to promote the very best sales related solutions and products – the first initiative, “ [Top 10 Sales Articles](#)” launched in April 2007.

His popular and highly readable personal blog for dedicated business professionals can be found [here](#) and he also posts daily to a leadership blog for b5, [Leadership Turn](#)

In the autumn (fall) Jonathan will be launching another new initiative – “The Sales Practitioners” – more details soon!

## Passing the "Tell Me More" Test

By Jill Konrath



**E**stablishing a business relationship with a new prospect is a lot like walking on a balance beam. Every single move you make has consequences.

When you execute it flawlessly, you're in a perfect position for your next move. However, any misstep on your part sends you into recovery mode. Sometimes you're able to bounce back, but other times you fall off and are out of the competition. To make it even more challenging, stone-faced judges ruthlessly evaluate how well you execute each move and its level of difficult.

Sounds an awful lot like sales to me! The early stages of the sales process are fraught with difficulties. Prospects assess your every word to determine if it's worth their time to meet with you.

That's why so many sellers get excited when prospective customers say, "Tell me more." It means they've scored a perfect 10 on their first routine - one they've practiced and fine-tuned for months. Then, without thinking, they launch into their second routine. What they don't realize is they have to pass this "Tell Me More" test before they can advance further in the competition.

And it's so darn easy to blow it then.

Recently I worked with a large services firm. Like everyone, they're struggling to crack into new accounts. We worked on crafting strong value propositions, creating enticing voicemail messages and engaging customers in a discussion.

I could tell what they'd created would work. So I asked what they'd say if a customer said, "Tell me more." They replied ...

"Our company has been in business since 1997. It was formed by four separate firms - each with its own expertise in the communications field - that came together to address the greater challenges faced by global companies today. Since our merger, we've been growing at the rate of 28% annually, now making us the leading provider of these services in the country. We offer a full range of services for all your marketing and communications needs including."

They flunked. Nice answer, but not the right answer. It bores clients. It turns them off. They've heard it a hundred times before. It's all about you, you, you. They could not care less about your self-serving problem.

Okay. Now you're confused. The prospect wanted to know about your company. They asked you to tell them more. And now I'm saying don't. You're probably thinking it's rude not to answer.

I just had that same conversation with a Six Sigma consultant yesterday. He gets really excited when corporate decision makers say tell me more. It's a sure sign to him that they want to know all about his methodology. He responds ...

"The process we use to achieve these results involves pulling together a team of people from several different functions to analyze and address your critical business challenges. First of all, it's absolutely imperative to have senior level commitment in order to make this work.

"Before any session, I conduct thorough interviews with key executives and other stakeholders. Then, when we get together we use a variety of proven tools such as customer value mapping and process mapping, as well as a systematic, integrated tactical approach to help you achieve objectives..."

I yawned. My eyes glazed over. Because I hear things from the customer's perspective, it was painful for me to listen to. "Stop, stop," I cried. "It's not what prospects want to hear."

He was confused. They'd wanted to learn more and so he'd explained his process to them. But he was also a "root cause" kind of guy and, since the response he was getting wasn't spectacular he was open to suggestions. Here's what I told him.

When you're in the early stages of working with a prospective customer, the answer to "Tell me more" is not an overview of your firm. Nor is it a description of your process or methodology. Nor is it a request for more in-depth information about your products.

The people you're talking to are sitting at their desks struggling to get everything done with fewer resources and in less time. It's an impossible, never-ending task with no relief in sight. So that's what you focus on - the challenges or issues your product or service addresses.

In responding to them, your primary goals are to develop your credibility as someone who is intimately familiar with the issues they face and to demonstrate your ability to deliver results. You do this by:

- Expanding on how tough it is for companies to achieve their objectives using outdated systems or processes. Talk about all difficulties that arise, the bottlenecks and the workarounds, the frustrations. Mention the ramifications on other areas in their business.
- Sharing a story about a particular customer you recently worked with, how they were doing things when you initially started working together, the problems they faced and the impact of these problems on their business. Then briefly summarize the outcomes.
- Then you wrap it up by asking a question that engages your prospect in discussing the issue in greater depth.

*Your prospect is the ultimate judge of the effectiveness of your "tell me more" response. If you don't advance to the next step, your routine needs more fine-tuning*

For example, if you say, "Tell me more" to me, I'll respond:

"The biggest challenges facing sellers today is cracking into corporate accounts. Decision makers never answer their phone. They roll all calls to voicemail and they never call anyone back.

"You may have the greatest product or service in the world, but if your people can't get their foot in the door, it's all academic. Most sellers I work with are extremely discouraged. They've tried everything they know, but it's not working. I help them figure out what it takes to succeed in this crazy business environment.

How big of an issue is this for your company?"

That's what you need to say to pass the "Tell Me More" Test. Those words don't just roll off your tongue without thinking them through. You need to practice and prepare like everything depends on it - because it does.

Your prospect is the ultimate judge of the effectiveness of your "tell me more" response. If you don't advance to the next step, your routine needs more fine-tuning. When you do get that next meeting set up, you'll know you scored a perfect 10.

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Struggling to crack into corporate accounts?

- Check out [www.SellingToBigCompanies.com](http://www.SellingToBigCompanies.com) for more articles, podcasts, webinars and other sales resources. Sign up for the FREE ezine and receive a Bonus "Sales Call Planning Guide."
- Contact Jill Konrath author of [Selling to Big Companies](#), keynote/breakout speaker and a recognized sales strategist in the highly competitive business-to-business market.

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# The Five Most Common Mistakes

## Salespeople Make

By Dave Kahle

Over the decades that I've been involved in sales, I've worked with tens of thousands of salespeople. Certain negative tendencies -- mistakes that salespeople make -- keep surfacing. Here are my top five. See to what degree you (or your sales force) may be guilty of them.

Mistake Number One: Over concern with strategy instead of tactics

Gather a group of salespeople together around a coffee maker and listen to the conversation. After the obligatory complaints about all types of things, the conversation inevitably drifts to questions of strategy. How do I accomplish this in that account? How do I get this account to this?

In my seminars, I often hold a "clinic" where salespeople write down any sales-related question and submit it to the group for discussion. These questions are almost always related to strategic issues. In one form or another, they ask the same question: How do I achieve this effect in this account?

While this thoughtfulness is encouraging, it reveals an erroneous mindset. The belief behind these questions is this: "If I can only determine the right sequence of actions of my part, I'll be able to sell this account, or achieve this goal."

This, unfortunately, is rarely the case. These sales people, based on this erroneous belief, are looking for a solution in the wrong place. Almost always, the answer to the question is not a more clever strategy, but better execution of the basic tactics.

It is like the foot ball team whose players don't tackle well, miss their blocks, throw erratic passes, and fumble frequently. The solution is not a more clever game plan. The solution is better execution of the basic tactics. Learn to do the basics effectively, and the strategy will generally take care of itself.

The real problem with this over concern for strategy is that it seduces the salesperson's energy, substituting the pursuit of a better strategy for the real solution - better execution of the basics.

When I'm asked these "strategy" questions, I find myself asking the salesperson to verify the fundamentals. Have you identified the key decision makers and influencers in the account? Have you created trusting personal relationships with each of them? Have you understood the customer's situation at a deep level? Have you presented your

## Mistake Number Two: Lack of thoughtfulness

The typical field salesperson has, as a necessary and integral part of his/her personality, an inclination toward action. We like to be busy: driving here and there, talking on our cell phones, putting deals together, solving customer's problems -- all in a continuous flurry of activity. Boy, can we get stuff done!

And this high energy inclination to action is a powerful personality strength, energizing the salesperson who wants to achieve success.

But, like every powerful personality trait, this one has a dark backside. Our inclination to act often overwhelms our wiser approach to think before we act.

In our hunger for action, we neglect to take a few moments to think about that action. Is this the most effective place to go? Have I thoroughly prepared for this sales call? Do I know what I want to achieve in this call? Is this the person I should be seeing, or is there someone else who is more appropriate? Is it really wise to drive 30 miles to see this account, and then back track 45 miles to see another?

Customers these days are demanding salespeople who are thoroughly prepared, who have well thought-out agendas, and who have done their research before the sales call. All of this works to the detriment of the "ready-shoot-aim" type of salesperson.

On the other hand, those who discipline themselves to a regular routine of dedicated time devoted to planning and preparing will find themselves far more effective than their action-oriented colleagues.

## Mistake Number Three: Contentment with the superficial

There are some customers who have been called on for years, and yet the salesperson doesn't know any more about them today than he/she did after the second sales call. These are accounts where the salesperson cannot identify one of the account's customers, explain whether or not they are profitable, or identify one of their strategic goals.

Most salespeople have a wonderful opportunity to learn about their customers in deeper and more detailed ways, and often squander it by having the same conversations with the same customers over and over. They never dig deeper. They mistake familiarity with knowledge.

What a shame. I am convinced that the ultimate sales skill -- the one portion of the sales process that more than anything else determines our success as a salesperson -- is the ability to know the customer deeper and in a more detailed way than our competitors do.

It's our knowledge of the customer that allows us to position ourselves as competent, trustworthy consultants. It's our knowledge of the customer that provides us the information we need to structure programs and proposals that distinguish us from everyone else. It's our knowledge of the customer that allows us to proactively service that customer, to meet their needs even before they have articulated them.

In an economic environment where the distinctions between companies and products are blurring in the eyes of the customer, the successful companies and individuals will be those who outsell the rest. And outselling the rest depends on understanding the customer better than anyone else.

#### Mistake Number Four: Poor questioning

This is a variation of the mistake above. I am absolutely astonished at the lack of thoughtfulness that I often see on the part of distributor salespeople. Most use questions like sledgehammers, splintering the relationship and bruising the sensibility of their customers by thoughtless questions.

Others don't use them at all, practically ignoring the most important part of a sales call. They labor under the misconception

They are content to let their companies arrange for their training or development. And between you and me, they would prefer that their companies really didn't do anything that would require them to actually change what they do.

These are the most common negative tendencies that I see. It may be that you and your colleagues are immune to these dampers on success. Good for you. But if you are not immune, and if you spot some of your own tendencies in this list, then you are not reaching your potential for success. You have tremendous potential for success -- for contentment, confidence and competence -- that is being hindered by these negative behaviors. Rid yourself of these negative tendencies, and you'll begin to reach your potential.

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Dave Kahle is a consultant and trainer who helps his clients increase their sales and improve their sales productivity. Specializing in B2B sales, he speaks from real world experience, having been the number one salesperson in the country for two companies in two distinct industries. Dave has trained thousands of salespeople to be more successful in the Information Age economy. He's the author of over 700 articles, a weekly ezine, and six books. His latest is *10 Secrets of Time Management for Salespeople*. He has a gift for creating powerful training events that get audiences thinking differently about sales.

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## Why Is Everyone Buying Lists?

By Joanne S. Black

Companies that sell lists of sales leads promise that if you use their list, you'll gain instant access to the right person in your target company. These companies imply that with their list, you'll learn more about your prospects before you pick up the phone.

But, in fact, lists are not leads. Lists are lists. They may be a way for salespeople to find out who's who in a company and possibly even pinpoint the exact person they are looking for. But they don't guarantee sales.

Successful salespeople are "make-it-happen" people, and they know that if it sounds too good to

Make 100 calls, talk to 20 prospects, set 5 to 10 appointments, and close one deal. The actual results can be even more discouraging.

Even though the National Do Not Call Registry applies only to business-to-consumer calls, everyone has become wary of cold callers. To date, consumers have registered more than 58 million phone numbers on the registry, and organizations can be fined up to \$11,000 for each infraction.

There's a powerful alternative to "cold" prospecting: it's called referral selling. Think about the times you have received a qualified referral. That's a person who you want to talk to and who wants to talk to you. What percent of the time did you get a new client? If you're like most people, your answer will be a minimum 50 percent of the time, and more likely 80 to 90 percent.

## Get the Referrals You Want and Boost Your Sales: Five Tips

Define your niche and position yourself as the expert. Buyers will spend money on people with the expertise they need. Be specific.

Network like crazy! Your goal should be to attend at least one event per week where you'll have an opportunity to meet potential clients.

Translate what you offer into the business results your client will achieve. Be a "need to have" and not a "nice to have." Think of everyone you know as a potential referral source. It's not about who they are, it's about who they know. And you have no idea who they know until you ask.

Always get an introduction. When you are introduced to a person you want to meet and who wants to meet you, your call will now be HOT!

Take the first step... Build a referral system that will leave your competition in the dust.

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"Joanne Black is America's leading authority on referral selling and the founder of No More Cold Calling™. She is the author of No More Cold Calling™; The Breakthrough System That Will Leave Your Competition in the Dust from Warner Business Books. Her keynotes dazzle sales audiences with her innovative referral approach to selling."

Take the first step...

Build a referral system that will leave your competition in the dust.  
Call Joanne Black at No More Cold Calling™ NOW! 415-461-8763.

Visit Her Website: [www.nomorecoldcalling.com](http://www.nomorecoldcalling.com)

# The Half Truth of Cold Calling vs The Sales Ratios Revelation

By Steve Martinez



When my sales manager said “sales is a numbers game”, I should have beaten him with the lie then and there. Unfortunately, my first sale came directly from a cold call and I was convinced that cold calling worked. It only took one hint at success for me to believe in cold calling. You could say that I was cursed for the next few months and became a victim. Many of the old sales books fed my appetite for more sales calls and longer hours. Unfortunately for me, I’m not a math genius and couldn’t see the flaw in the formula. Perhaps there are industries where cold calling works. I just wasn’t in one.

My sales manager was right, “the more cold calls I made the more sales I made”. However, I was fighting a losing battle with time. There simply weren’t enough hours in the day to meet my sales goals. Fortunately, I began examining the sales numbers and noticed a more important equation in sales.

Revealing the Truth of Sales Ratios My sales numbers began to reveal my sales ratios and a pattern of success. The activity numbers indicated that certain markets and businesses produced substantial sales. These sales trends jumped out as a pattern I wanted to duplicate. My interest in what was working shifted my attention to monitoring the success ratios of my activities.

WOW, my sales manager was right! However, the truth is - the sales ratios are the numbers we must evaluate. Discovering the relevance of sales ratios and sales activities was the break through I was looking for. Once I learned the value and benefits of profiling sales ratios, cold calling didn’t make sense. Why should I follow the less effective random cold calling method when a more efficient formula produced greater results?

It was like turning on the light of truth to the dark world of sales. Instead of cold calling, I focused like a laser on prospects that matched a specific profile increasing my success ratio. If I was going to make sales calls, I would make them on prime prospects.

The Better Way to Prospect for Customers If you watch the television program Numbers, you know how the characters define profiles and patterns to find the right prospect or suspect. It is the same in sales and all the evidence is at our finger tips. Once we identify the clues of a prospect by the patterns of existing customers, we know where to find new prospects. Instead of random cold calling, we can focus on prime suspects for our business.

*Discovering  
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for*

To understand and determine your ratios for success, just ask yourself what percentage of existing customers have X? Your answers will reveal the important ratios. From this exercise you will identify a success pattern to duplicate in your prospects.

# What percentage of customers have X number of employees or members?

# What percentage of customers have X annual sales or income?

# What percentage of customers are in X industry or category?

# What percentage of customers are located in X?

# What percentage of customers have purchased X in X months or years?

This gets you started in determining your success ratios and stops the time wasted activity of random cold calling. As you add new ratios to this list, you will multiply your sales results. The great thing about using ratios is that once you identify the success pattern, there is industry information which will narrow your prospecting search down to who, where, when and how to contact them. Good Selling!

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Steve Martinez is the author of Sales Impactator a sales e-publication for success oriented individuals. As the President of Selling Magic, his company teaches business professionals how to automate the selling process, preventing sales people and business owners from experiencing the hard lessons in selling. Steve has consulted with businesses around the country sharing his 25 years of sales and marketing experience to eliminate sales failure. Steve uses his experience as a National Sales Manager and National Account Executive to share the real-world lessons in sales.

Visit his site: [www.sellingmagic.com](http://www.sellingmagic.com)

## Mirror Of The Mind

By Andrea Nierenberg



**H**ow often have you heard a supervisor or manager exclaim, "It's all about the bottom line. We need to do all we can to keep our customers," or, "Without the customer we are nothing." Both statements are true. However, while CEOs, presidents, and managers should focus on the customer, sometimes they can treat people inside the company as only a "means to an end."

What can a company do, so that employees have a greater sense of customer care? One key secret is for you to value, support and care for your internal people. We must treat them with the utmost respect, courtesy and interest, so that they in turn present these attitudes to the people doing business with you. Remember, these are the people who are serving and speaking to your "paying clients" every day.

The people you have on board are the competitive measure of what separates you from the others. Here are a few things to remember when communicating with them:

- Make contact on every level. How often do you go down to the trenches and talk to your front line people? Find out how they are, and learn what issues concern them. Ask them for customers' comments.
- Give your people a sense of ownership. This is empowerment. When people feel as if it's their own company, they'll work harder to provide better service. One way you can encourage them to work harder is with incentives built into the job. These can be rewards or cash bonuses. Remember, this applies to EVERYONE at your company. Often the sales people get the best incentives. However, the performance of the assistants and people in the accounting department impact the sales force, which in turn impacts the customer.
- Help them grow. Let your staff know that they have an opportunity to become better at what they do. Constantly be looking for ways to provide on-the-job training. Also, people grow when they feel that they are part of the decision-making process. For example, let them offer suggestions and new policy ideas. Remember, their suggestions may be a result of hundreds of conversations they have with customers. They could have information that would give you new ideas to increase business and save on costs.
- Everyone is a salesperson. While front line salespeople are normally in touch with the customers the most, it's my suggestion that everyone think of themselves as a salesperson. They should see the company like a human body. When every part of the body is well, great things can be achieved. However, a small irritation in the foot can cause a champion runner to stumble and go crashing down. Make sure to give your entire company a "check up."

*What can a company do, so that employees have a greater sense of customer care?*

One way to keep these ideas in mind is to think of how C.L.I.E.N.T.s relate to your employees:

C--Concentrate on employee needs; this helps customer needs

L--Listen to what employees say, and what they don't say

I--Invest in your people, and gain customer satisfaction

E--Excellence in everything

N--Nice people finish first; keep your people happy

T--Trust your front line by giving them care and power

Nurture everyone at your company, and greater customer care will be the fruit of your efforts.

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Andrea Nierenberg's networking advice has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. She is the author of *Nonstop Networking: How to Improve Your Life, Luck, and Career* (Capital Books), *Million Dollar Networking: The Sure Way to Find, Grow and Keep Your Business* and soon to be published *Savvy Networking: 118 Fast & Effective Tips for Business Success*. Ms. Nierenberg works with leading companies to improve interpersonal communications for management and staff. She offers keynote addresses and custom-designed programs on motivational techniques, networking tactics, and presentation skills.

Visit Her Site: [www.selfmarketing.com](http://www.selfmarketing.com)

# Best Sales Practices Research;



## Why So Many Projects Fail

By Jacques Werth

**T**he majority of SFA/CRM projects have failed because consultants are automating what they believe are the "Best Sales Practices" of their clients' salespeople. And, their clients believe it, too. However, the best practices that they have identified are largely fictional.

It seems obvious that if a company has their entire sales force doing what their top salespeople do, then it should greatly improve their sales productivity. Nevertheless, most companies that utilize Best Sales Practices Research are producing only small incremental productivity improvements - at best.

Current Best Sales Practices research begins with the assumption that the best salespeople are using the best combination of known sales techniques, in the right order, and they are aware of how they are applying those techniques.

The current research methodology, in most cases, is to interview the top salespeople to determine how they sell. Then, those top salespeople meet to combine their techniques in a logical order and agree on an outline of their best sales practices. However, the current assumptions are flawed. As a result, the research methodology selected is inadequate. In combination, they are producing flawed sales processes.

I have been researching the sales performance characteristics of the Top 1% of salespeople in twenty-three industries for over forty years. I started with the same assumptions about the best salespeople. However, I utilized a different research methodology. Rather than asking top salespeople how they sell, I observed them while they were selling.

I observed 312 of the top salespeople at work - the Top 1%, in 23 different industries - while they were prospecting and during actual sales appointments. I took accurate notes of everything they said and did. That research methodology quickly revealed the following points.

- Eighty-four percent (84%) of the top salespeople do not use many known "Sales Techniques" in any order. They do not meet with "Interested Prospects." They do not "Persuade and Convince" prospects to buy. They do not "Build Rapport." They do not "Identify Needs." They do not do "Great Presentations." They do not "Overcome Objections." They do not utilize any known "Closing Techniques."
- They seldom understand, or can accurately describe, what they are doing.
- Nearly all of the Top 1% have learned their sales practices intuitively. Because they have little contact with other top salespeople, no common terminology has been developed to describe how they sell.

*My new objective has been to determine what the Top 1% of salespeople are doing that the vast majority of salespeople are not doing*

- When asked, they make an honest attempt to describe their methods in common sales jargon. However, when observed at work, they are not doing what they have described during interviews.

Thus, I realized that interviewing the top sales producers and determining which known sales techniques they favored did not reveal what they were actually doing. Then, the focus of my research changed. My new objective has been to determine what the Top 1% of salespeople are doing that the vast majority of salespeople are not doing.

After each sales appointment, I interviewed the salesperson to learn why they did what I observed them doing. A correlation analyses of all that data determined their most common non-standard sales performance characteristics, techniques and attitudes. Then, I codified the order of those factors most frequently utilized by them.

Most of the top producers have developed entirely new sales behaviors, techniques and processes to take advantage of the technological, communications, psychographic, and business process changes in virtually every market. They have abandoned the basic premises of the seventy-year-old Needs Selling paradigm, including its modern incarnations such as Consultative Selling, Spin Selling and Solution Selling.

These discoveries revealed the most significant paradigm shift in the history of selling. It was the beginning of a new paradigm that we labeled "High Probability Selling." The process that we developed within that paradigm derives most of its power the following factors.

- A. The ability to devote most of the salesperson's time and resources to High Probability Prospects;
- B. The ability to forge immediate "Relationships of Mutual Trust and Respect;"
- C. The ability to obtain "Mutually Beneficial Agreements and Commitments."

The result is a step-by-step sales process that is radically different from those in use by the Fortune 1,000. It closely emulates the sales performance of the Top 1%. Therefore, it is highly effective. Almost any industry can benefit from this process.



## Snap Out Of It! 13 Tips For Breaking Out Of A Slump, And Getting Back On Track

By Colleen Francis

**S**ales people, who have a poor start at the beginning of a year, often find themselves struggling for the rest of the year to catch up. The good news is, whatever you're experiencing, we've all been there at least once. The bad news is, most of us don't know exactly how to snap out of a slump, and start making sales.

First – don't panic! If you're in panic mode, you can't be creative, and creativity is exactly what you need right now. Besides, just as dogs can smell fear in humans, prospects can smell desperation in sales people. If you panic, your prospects will sense that you're desperate, and they'll avoid you like last night's leftover Tuna Surprise. Just take a deep breath, stay calm and focus on what needs to be done.

Next, don't get down on yourself. Think about a time in your past when you were in a similar situation, and how you were able to climb out of it. Focus on that positive experience, instead of focusing on the negative.

Third, don't get angry. Anger will be misinterpreted by your clients, peers and managers as being emotional or out of control. When you're in a slump more than at any other time, you need to be totally in control, and assure others around you that you know exactly what to do. Whenever you find yourself becoming angry, try to be as honest as possible, and focus on solutions and options – not on laying blame. For more on this particularly prickly subject, see our article [Don't Get Angry – Get Results](#).

Last but most definitely not least, don't quit! The worst thing you can do during a slump is to stop trying. The Chicago White Sox were on the verge of a 90-year slump before winning the World Series last year. Yet during that entire period, their team motto stayed the same: "Win, or die trying." Guess it paid off for them in the end.

Remember: there could be an almost unlimited number of reasons why you're in a slump. It could be the economy, for example. But even in a poor economy, there are top performing sales people, and those who just scrape by. Admitting that your success is up to you is the first step in getting out of a slump, and getting your career back on track.

To help you snap out of a slump and get your year back on track, try some of the following tips, adapted from the strategies of the Top 10%:

### 1. Reconnect to your plan.

Review your goals and either recommit to the action plan you set for yourself at the beginning of the year – or create a new one! One client of mine recalculates his plan after every month he doesn't hit his quota, to ensure his quota for the next month includes both what he was supposed to do PLUS whatever he missed last month. This helps him redefine his actions and gain clarity on exactly how many calls he needs to make, meetings he needs to secure and business he needs to close to get back on track. If you had a really bad month, you could perhaps work your underage into the next 2-3 months to make it more attainable.

### 2. Get back to basics.

Once, after Tiger Woods had spent hours on the practice green sinking hundreds of puts, a commentator asked him why he was still practicing considering how consistent he had been. Tiger responded: "I don't like the way the ball is rolling into the cup." That's mastering the basics.

As Tiger knows full well, problems aren't usually caused by something complicated. They're usually the result of doing the simplest thing just slightly wrong. And more often than not, we know exactly what the problem is. In my experience, for example, slumps are almost always caused by not having enough qualified buyers in the pipeline – in other words, not enough prospecting. If you're in a slump, start by looking internally, not externally.

Remember that the slump is your slump, not someone else's. Be strong enough to realize this, and take corrective action.

### 3. Work smarter and harder.

Think of 10 things you could do this week to work more effectively. Then commit to working just a little bit harder until you're out of this bad spell. So you have to be out of "balance" for a short time. Would you rather that you're out of balance, or your checkbook? The choice is yours.

### 4. Get a coach.

Have someone you respect listen to your phone calls, watch you at networking events and evaluate your presentations. This could be a manager, a colleague, a friend or a hired gun. Whoever you choose, ask them to be honest with you, and when they are, do something with the advice they give you.

### 5. Coach yourself.

Video or audio tape your presentations and calls, and be honest with yourself. Would you buy from you?

*The good news is, whatever you're experiencing, we've all been there at least once. The bad news is, most of us don't know exactly how to snap out of a slump, and start making sales*

#### 6. Change your presentation.

Maybe it's time to turn your presentation style upside down, or inside out. What you're doing now obviously isn't working, so if you want a different result, you have to do something different. Try starting with the end, or in the middle. And while we're talking about change, everyone should read the cover story of the June 2005 issue of Fast Company magazine: "Change or die." It's an excellent article on why change is so hard – yet so necessary.

#### 7. Stay away from life suckers.

You know who they are. The one who lies in wait at the water cooler, just so they can whine, moan and complain to whatever poor, parched soul happens to wander by. The one lurking in the lunchroom way past 1pm to tell you about how nothing is ever right, and they're always getting the short end of the stick.

When you've slept only 4 hours, they were up all night. If you have a stomach ache, they've got near-fatal food poisoning. When you have a headache, you better believe they've got a migraine. Life suckers can't help you; they have problems of their own.

#### 8. Get to work earlier.

Yes, I know, you're already screaming at me: "Colleen, I need balance!" Not while you're in a slump, you don't. Right now, you're behind, and you need to do something about it. Only the mediocre use balance as their battle cry during a slump. So suck it up for this short period, and save the balance until you're back on top.

#### 9. Change your mood.

Listen to your favorite song, comedian or motivational speaker in the car on your way to your next sales meeting. This will help put you into an excellent, upbeat mood when you start your presentation, which will cause you to shine – and your prospect to take a shine to you.

#### 10. Change your environment.

This could be as simple as de-cluttering your office. It's impossible to feel fresh and excited about what you do if you can't see your desk. A chaotic work environment will make you depressed to be there, and if you're depressed to be at work, you won't snap out of your slump.

Changing your environment could also mean – gasp, yes, it's true! – taking the day off from selling! If you need motivation, go sit in a coffee shop or someplace with a nice view and read books and articles on positive attitude and self-development. If you need to be re-created, take a hike (literally), and then come back to the office re-energized and ready to take on the world.

Personally, I find that getting away for around 4 days (say, Thursday-Sunday, as I'm doing as I write this to you right now) can dramatically help me to create, re-organize and re-energize. It's also one of the best ways I know of to avoid another slump in the future.

11. Follow a leader.

Trail the best sales person you know on their calls for a day. See what they're doing differently than you, and how you can incorporate those ideas in your business. Note that this doesn't have to be someone from the office. You can learn a lot from watching sales people in other industries, too.

12. Take your boss to work.

Take your boss with you on calls for a week. This will force you to be more prepared and on your best behavior. You'll also probably receive more feedback than you probably want. Instead of rejecting this feedback, use it to be better.

13. Prove that money can buy a little happiness.

Buy something you can't afford. This is radical, I know, and not many of you will like this idea or think it's responsible of me to suggest it. But it works better for me than any other "counter slump manoeuvre" I know of, so I felt it wouldn't be right not to at least share the possibility with you.

Of course, I don't mean racking up all your credit cards to the limit buying gold toilets, and then spending the next twenty years paying them off at 21% interest. What I mean – and what I personally do – is book a first-class trip for 6 months from now. Then, I have to make more sales to earn the money to go. Or book a training class 9 months from now, and again you'll be motivated to sell more in order to pay for it. I don't know about you, but for me, the "coming into work early" and all the other hard tasks on this list get a whole lot easier to embrace when I know that I have a trip to Hawaii coming up in a few months, which I really don't want to cancel.

Having a slump is not the end of the world, so long as it's short, temporary and you know what to do about it.

Know what motivates you. Be disciplined – it's the one thing that separates the best from the mediocre – and stay focused on those activities that you know will pull you out of the slump. And remember to keep it all in perspective.

You are responsible for your slump, and only you can change it. But you can change it, and once you accept the fact that you can reverse your fortune, you'll already be on the road to recovery.

Believe in yourself. I know you can do it.

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Colleen Francis, Sales Expert, President and Founder of *Engage Selling Solutions*, since 2001. Colleen Francis is driven by a passion for people-motivating them to reach for the highest standards of success. Colleen trains sales and marketing professionals who want to strive to get to the top... and stay there. Her innovative, no-nonsense approach is based on applying what she has observed in her fifteen-plus years in sales - revealing the common business habits of the top 10% of sales performers in all organizations. Colleen's approach works, that's why New York-based *Sales and Marketing Magazine* has rated *Engage Selling Solutions* as one of the top-five most effective sales-training organizations in the market today, [www.engageselling.com](http://www.engageselling.com)

# Get Bad At What You Do



By Wally Adamchik

**L**eaders, sales manager, foreman, boss.... These titles (and others) describe that person who's responsible for getting a job done by directing others. The key point to remember is that, for the project to be completed correctly, more than one worker must be involved in the effort. Therefore, the leader must be able to successfully guide each participating individual through his part in the process.

Often, the person in this position has been recently promoted into it because of his proficiency at the task he is supervising. For example, a skilled, efficient carpenter who has provided quality work to clients and been an asset to the company is one day made Foreman; he will now supervise three other carpenters. No big deal, as he generally works alongside them anyway, setting the pace and taking corrective action right away if one of his crew makes a mistake.

*- the leader must be able to successfully guide each participating individual through his part in the process.*

Or, consider the accounting supervisor who is known for her attention to detail. Nothing got by her when she was a clerk, and now, nothing gets by her as a supervisor. Why? Because she scrutinizes every keystroke her team makes, virtually replicating their work. If she needs to put in extra hours every day to do this, she will--just to ensure everything is perfect.

And don't forget the crackerjack salesman who can sell ice to Eskimos. Recently promoted to sales manager he continues to sell rather than manage.

Get 'Er Done

This new leader is often cited for his ability to "make it happen." He directs his employees under the premise that close supervision is the key to success. But what happens when he's promoted again, and must oversee several teams? He tries to repeat his earlier success, but simply cannot be in three places at once. When he visits his teams, he jumps in to show "the right way to do it." The work gets finished correctly and the company is happy. The crew, however, may not be.

The fundamental problem is that these leaders, new to supervisory positions, fail to recognize they are no longer paid to do the work; they are now paid to see that others do the work. By jumping in and "helping," they fail to exercise guidance. And that brings trouble.

Bad Things Happen

- Poor morale: Most people want to do a good job and embrace the opportunity to make a contribution. When a boss fixes a subordinate's mistake, he sends the message that the employee is not capable of doing the work. When he follows behind, checking closely for errors, he's saying he doesn't trust the employee.

- Lack of training for subordinates: Crew members can't advance their knowledge or skill-level if the supervisor smooths over every incongruity. As much as the leader wants the work to be flawless, he must step back and let his team learn how to handle problems for themselves.
- New leader not meeting responsibilities: Anxiety about his team's performance distracts the leader from those tasks for which he must answer directly. He wastes valuable time double-checking work that's already done, while trying to tackle his own neglected In Box. The continuous combination of stress and long hours leads to exhaustion. Soon, he's burned out.
- Lack of growth potential: Some leaders m0 0.1n76Tmli evk tha, byr not

# A

## “Warm Calling” vs. “Cold Calling”

### Rant

By Wendy Weiss



**H**ad another conversation with yet another entrepreneur who told me he does not “cold call,” he only does “warm calls.”

I continue to be baffled by those who cut off possibilities with a semantic twist. “Cold call, warm call,” it’s simply a state of mind. Your mind. Your prospect does not make those distinctions. Just because you have designated a call to be “warm” doesn’t mean that the person you are calling thinks it’s “warm.” This “warm call/cold call” concept is a smoke screen that covers the real issue.

The real issue is controlling your message. The real issue is being able to communicate with a prospect so that they understand and resonate with what you have to say. The real issue is about having the skill necessary to communicate with a prospect under any circumstance.

Prospecting by phone, introductory calling as I prefer, is a communication skill. Like any communication skill it can be learned and it can be improved upon. The idea when introductory calling is to contact a qualified prospect and entice them with your message. You have a brief amount of time on the telephone to catch and engage your prospect. If you are not able to do that, the call ends without achieving your desired result. If you have the proper skills, however, it is possible to have extremely productive conversations with prospects no matter how you choose to categorize them, “warm” or “cold.”

*I continue to be  
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who cut off  
possibilities with a  
semantic twist.  
“Cold call, warm  
call,” it’s simply a  
state of mind*

The idea of a “warm call” is that you’ve had some prior contact with your prospect and that you have somehow “warmed up” the call. The prior contact might be with a letter sent before your call, it might be that you have encountered the prospect elsewhere it could also be that you have a referral.

All too frequently callers who use the “I only warm call” approach do not adequately prepare for their calls. Instead, they rely on the appellation “warm.” If you are one of these callers, stop right here and ask yourself these questions:

How many “warm” prospects have said “no” to me over the years?  
Would those calls have been more productive if I had been better prepared and more in control of my message?

Although you may have sent a letter, you have no guarantee that your prospect has read it. Although you may have met previously, your prospect may not recall that. Although you may have a referral that is no guarantee that your prospect will meet with you or have any interest at all in your products or services.

When you are on the phone with a prospect you must deal with them, where they are, at that particular moment in time. If your prospect hasn't read your letter, doesn't remember the person who referred you, or is simply having a bad day, that's out of your control. What is within your control when prospecting is to have honed your skills so that your message is clear and so that you can respond in any situation?

When you have skills, you know how to catch a prospect's attention, you know how to keep their attention, you know how to respond to questions and objections and you know how to ask for what you want. When you have those skills it's no longer about a "warm" call or a "cold" call, it's about communication, conversation and results.

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*Wendy Weiss, "The Queen of Cold Calling", is an author, speaker, sales trainer, and sales coach. She is recognized as one of the leading authorities on lead generation, cold calling and new business development and she helps clients speed up their sales cycle, reach more prospects directly and generate more sales revenue. Wendy's recently released program, The Miracle Appointment-Setting Script, and/or her book, Cold Calling for Women, can be ordered by visiting [www.queenofcoldcalling.com](http://www.queenofcoldcalling.com) Contact her at [wendy@wendyweiss.com](mailto:wendy@wendyweiss.com) Get Wendy's free Special Report, How to Write an Effective Cold Calling Script, at [www.queenofcoldcalling.com](http://www.queenofcoldcalling.com)*

# What is good customer service?

By Kevin Dwyer



**C**ustomer service is not customer satisfaction as reported by customer satisfaction surveys. Customer service, like a brand, is what the customer perceives and remembers of the service they received.

What a customer perceives is the service they receive is not necessarily the service they actually receive.

Several published studies reveal that the mood of the customer has a significant impact on the perception of the service received.

For example, if a customer has been waiting for a long time in a check-in queue, the perception of the friendliness of the person at the check-in desk deteriorates. Conversely, studies have shown that people waiting a long time for elevators due to the slow speed of the elevator have a better perception of the experience of waiting if there is some distraction such as a mirror in the elevator lobby.

Golfers who have had a bad day on the course are likely to have a worse perception of the service at the clubhouse than those who have had a good day.

What a customer remembers about a service is not just dependent on the usual suspects of first and last impressions. It is dependent on the "moments of truth", a phrase coined by Jan Carlson from Scandinavian Airlines.

For an organisation in the service industry, there may be twenty or thirty moments of truth in its provision of service. A moment of truth is when an interaction occurs between a customer and the service provider that can leave a lasting positive or negative impression on a customer.

Moments of truth in the hospitality industry, for example, will undoubtedly include, but not be limited to, booking the room, check-in, check-out, dinner reservations, dinner ordering, dinner presentation, eating (quality and quantity of food) and laundry receipt.

Understanding the moments of truth that are important to an organisation's customers by segment is the key to understanding what is good customer service.

Completing customer satisfaction surveys is not a reliable way of determining moments of truth for two reasons.

Firstly, the design of most satisfaction surveys is usually poor. They ask a series of questions which request an opinion on how well the service provider performed. The opinion is prompted by a question similar to, "The booking was handled with efficiency and attention to my needs" and the answers range from totally disagree to totally agree on a five point scale.

Surveys designed this way give a misleading view as they do not ask a question which seeks to understand the importance of the particular services prior to the request for an opinion.

A request for a response to a statement such as, "The booking process was very important to my level of enjoyment during my stay", prior to, "How well did we perform?", will at least make it clear whether the service we provided really mattered or not, independent of whether we provided the service well, or not. In most cases, only three or four of the "services" provided in a list of ten questions will actually be important.

The second reason why customer satisfaction surveys are unreliable is that even if they are designed well, satisfaction surveys tend to condition the recipients to give a response.

In a study reported in the Harvard Business Review in 1995, Jones and Sasser noted that customer retention levels of around forty percent correlated to an average rating of "satisfied" and did not reach 80% until the average rating reached very satisfied.

Mercer reported in a separate study that eighty percent of customers who churned from an internet service provider had responded that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their service.

Relying on customer satisfaction surveys to determine what good customer service is and how well an organisation has performed is risky at best.

Understanding what good customer service is begins with mapping a generic customer's experience and determining the moments of truth.

*What a customer perceives is the service they receive is not necessarily the service they actually receive*

It is insufficient, however, to only have a generic organisational view of the map. To make use of the map to improve customer service, the view of each significant target segment must be understood to ensure that appropriate service is given at appropriate moments.

Surveys of customers' actual experiences, asking them what has frustrated them in the past are an acceptable way to gather information. Using customer satisfaction surveys which only ask, "How well did we do?", are not.

Customer complaints are a source of extra material but given that only a small percentage of customers who are dissatisfied actually fill them out, they cannot be the sole source of information.

The employees of an organisation are also a good source of information to determine the moments of truth. Employees see first hand the body language, the tone and pace of voice and the circumstances that surveys will never see and that customers will sometimes not realise is happening.

What segmentation is used is naturally dependent on the nature of the organisation, its goal and the level of data it can collect. However, its ability to detect a particular segment and offer a differentiated service during the day-to-day course of business is the most important determinant of the nature and level of segmentation to use.

Determining, at each moment of truth, for each segment, what impacts on the customer's perception and memory of the service is the key to providing good service.

For example, in the hospitality industry, research by Liljander and Mattson revealed three personal factors (and the general environment) impact on perception of service.

The personal factors are:

- The level of concern shown for the individual customer
- The level of friendliness shown towards the customer
- The level of civility shown towards the customer

Having someone wait in line at check-in can cause a negative impression. Showing genuine concern at the length of their wait and helping to make the next interaction after check-in easy in a friendly and helpful manner can reduce that negative impact to zero.

By understanding what each target segment requires at the moments of truth relevant to the segment enables organisations to develop and execute plans to improve the perception and the memory of the interactions that are important.

Customers are then more likely to be genuinely satisfied and return.

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Kevin Dwyer is a pragmatic change management advisor and founder of *Change Factory*. He comes from an old school that experienced and led change first and learnt the theory later.

Kevin's interest in sales is in developing the reinforcing loops of corporate goal, strategy, marketing and sales tactics, KPIs, recruitment, career and competence development, coaching and counselling that influences more customers to move through their buying process with the selling organisation.

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