

STOP ACTING LIKE A SELLER AND START THINKING LIKE A BUYER

IMPROVE SALES
EFFECTIVENESS BY
HELPING CUSTOMERS BUY

Jerry Acuff
with Wally Wood



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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SECTION I

START WITH THE
RIGHT MIND-SET

CHAPTER 1

IF PEOPLE LOVE TO
BUY, WE SHOULD HELP
THEM BUY

The United States economy is about \$10 trillion, due in no small part to the fact that people love to buy. But as much as people love to buy, they also do not like to be “sold.” Few more profound things have ever been said or written on the subject than what sales guru Jeffrey Gitomer says in his *Little Red Book of Selling*.¹ “People hate to be sold but they love to buy.” When you buy a car, a television set, a computer, you don’t say to associates, friends, or your mother-in-law, “Look what the salesman sold me!” You say, “Look what I bought.” As a people, we Americans like to make purchases. We like going to the mall, getting a new car, buying a new house, or looking for a new TV. It feels really good when we buy something we want.

Yet while most people love to buy, buying from a salesperson is all too often an adversarial situation, and rarely is it much fun. Far too many salespeople *act* like sellers rather than *think* like buyers. The customer wants one thing; the salesperson wants another. The customer wants a particular car, but the salesperson would rather sell the model the dealer is pushing this month. The customer wants an inexpensive 28-inch color TV, but the salesperson wants to sell a 45-inch flat-panel set because it carries a higher commission. That attitude is not helping customers buy and is not customer-focused—no wonder most of us hate being sold.

Although some salespeople may realize a certain degree of sales success, most never achieve sales greatness because they don’t sell in a way that makes the buying experience positive. Unless you marry mind-set and relationship building with a good sales process, you’re unlikely to ever reach greatness in

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selling, and that's what this book is about—how to reach sales greatness.

The formula for sales greatness is simple: The right mind-set + A proven sales process + A commitment to building valuable business relationships = Sales greatness.

The negative attitude toward salespeople is as true in business-to-business sales as in consumer sales. Surveys find executives in industry regularly frustrated because salespeople often have difficulty communicating effectively; they lack adequate knowledge of the customer's company and business; they come across as too aggressive; and often they overpromise and under-deliver. It's no surprise that most businesspeople—including salespeople—have a negative view of selling. The facts speak for themselves.

Consider Valerie Sokolosky's recent experience. Valerie, the president of the Dallas, Texas, leadership development firm Valerie & Company, was in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on vacation with her husband. Eight years ago they bought two pieces of art from an artist who now has his own gallery in Santa Fe. Their first stop on the vacation was the artist's new gallery where they introduced themselves to the young saleswoman. "We told her we had two nice pieces of the artist's work. We'd stopped by to say hello to the artist and see his latest work. We were in the gallery for an hour, and all the woman could do was try to sell us more art. 'Well, what about this? What about that?' She never once asked, 'Where will it go? What is your style?' She just tried to push his new style: 'Isn't this wonderful? This would look lovely in your home.' She didn't know what kind of a home we had. As we walked out the door, she handed me their card with her e-mail address and said, 'Please send me a picture of your

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condominium so I can pick out art for you.’” She didn’t listen and she certainly wasn’t thinking like a buyer. She was acting like a seller.

I could fill a book with such stories since everyone has one. If you play a word-association game with “sales” or “salesperson,” the words people most often associate are: “obnoxious,” “aggressive,” “manipulative,” “insincere,” and the like. We tend to think of salespeople in terms of telemarketers at dinnertime, car salespeople, and pushy insurance reps. Based on many bad experiences, most of us believe salespeople are interested mainly in themselves and will do almost anything to make a sale. That you are reading this book suggests that you do not fit this stereotype . . . and if you embrace the book’s message, it is likely that buyers will not tar you with the stereotype once they deal with you.

Because most people hate to be sold (for good reason), generations of smart sales executives have thought about ways to overcome this aversion. They’ve developed all kinds of techniques to wear down prospective customers’ resistance and to manipulate those prospects into doing what the salesperson knows . . . or believes . . . or hopes will be best for them. “Buy my product; it’ll be good for you. Trust me.”

FOCUS ON THE BUYING, NOT THE SELLING

This book will not add to the mountain of advice on how to overcome customer aversion and maneuver prospects into committing to your product or service. Instead of offering yet another selling model, this book offers a buying model. My goal is

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to help sales representatives and managers understand and learn how to use a dramatically more effective sales process from beginning to end.

Much of what has been taught historically about the transaction we call a *sale* has focused on the sales side. Most traditional sales models—Integrity Selling, SPIN Selling, Strategic Selling, and the like—have focused on how you sell *to* people, what should happen to get them to commit to your company’s product or service, to convince them, to influence them, to persuade them—rather than show you how to walk through this process together.

Most of the traditional sales processes teach you how to make a sale. Nevertheless, processes alone will not gain you the credibility you need for prospective customers to see you as someone who brings value. If our goal is to sell more, we must be valued more and considered as credible, so that when we advance ideas, buyers really listen to us. The only way to achieve this is to have the right mind-set, incorporate an effective process, and understand the critical role of building relationships (Figure 1.1).

In this book, I focus on how you can make it easier for customers to buy. The distinction is that rather than something you are doing *to them*, this is something they want to do *for themselves* (although they may not know it at the beginning of the exchange). The only way they will want to do it for themselves is if they believe whatever you are promoting is a fit and is in their best interest.

In a perfect world, the most significant role, by far, that the salesperson plays is opening customers’ minds rather than closing them. Traditional sales techniques tend to show reps how to break into an already closed mind, which is hard, discouraging

Figure 1.1

A Buying Model Requires Mind-Set Sales Process Relationships

work. The chances for success are higher when you consistently open customers' minds by the way you deal with them, thus enabling them to listen to you differently.

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF SELLING

To think like a buyer, it is first necessary to properly define selling both individually and organizationally. Ask a hundred salespeople in a single company, "What is selling?" and the chances are you'll hear a hundred definitions: "Selling is solving problems" or "Selling is meeting people's needs" or (among the more academically inclined) "Selling involves the use of persuasive communication to negotiate mutually beneficial agreements."

This lack of consistency is a problem because what we think is crucial to the way we act. When an organization does not have a single definition of selling, its salespeople behave differently by their own definitions—not good for the salespeople and certainly not good for the company.

Worse, salespeople sometimes think they must do things on behalf of their companies that conflict with how they see themselves

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as human beings. They believe that to sell they must be pushy, and most of us don't want to be pushy. They believe they must apply pressure or perhaps be manipulative in some way, but most of us don't want to high-pressure or to manipulate people. Most of us would rather opt out. Interestingly, to succeed in sales, you don't have to be someone you don't want to be, but you do need to have passion, commitment, and curiosity. And it is far easier to be passionate, have commitment, and be curious when you are working with the right definition of selling and those beliefs drive your behaviors.

So we need a definition of selling that asks salespeople to do things that are consistent with the person they see themselves as being and still accomplishes the business goal. Years ago, I listened to a Nightingale-Conant tape series by Fred Herman, and his definition of selling has guided me now for over 20 years. Herman said that selling involves two intimately connected concepts: (1) *Selling is teaching*, and (2) *selling is finding out what people want and helping them get it*.

First, selling is teaching. In every successful sale, some education takes place; the prospect, and often the salesperson, learns something each party did not know before. Although most prospects and customers don't want to think that salespeople educate, ideally learning is one of the things that will happen. When it does, it just may trigger behavior change.

Teaching is not lecturing, mechanically delivering a core marketing message for your brand, or rattling off features and benefits. Think about the best teachers you had in school. I suspect they did not talk at you all the time. Great teachers are masters at involving their students, engendering interaction, and making them think. That is what great salespeople do—inform,

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involve, engage, and provoke thought. They connect with people, generate meaningful dialogue, and stimulate customers to open their minds in much the way an exceptional teacher connects with students.

Second, selling is indeed finding out what people want and helping them get it—much easier to say than to do. Remember that people buy what they want, not necessarily what they need (although the two may overlap). Do people know what they truly want? Most people have not clearly or comprehensively thought through their situation, or they may not even know exactly what is happening or available as a solution. They may think they want one thing when another product or service may actually meet their needs better.

One of my friends went into a new Apple store to replace a Macintosh computer. He had done some research and decided the new Power Mac G5 was the model he wanted. Before demonstrating any computer, however, the Apple salesperson asked several key questions: What do you use your computer for? Do you do a lot of graphics or work with several large files at one time? Several more questions established my friend's real need—and the Power Mac G5 wasn't it. The salesperson recommended an iMac G5. It would do everything my friend wanted to do (and considerably more), and the package was \$400 less than the Power Mac.

Because this salesperson thought like a buyer, she was able to help the prospect buy what he truly wanted and needed—not what he thought he needed. Simple, yet powerful.

So, what is selling? We accept Fred Herman's definition: "Selling is teaching, and selling is finding out what people want and helping them get it." We don't sell; we help customers buy.

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On an everyday basis, you are simply trying to see (step by step, side by side with your prospects) if and how your product or service (or both) is a fit for what they want. When salespeople genuinely believe this selling definition, it fundamentally changes how they approach customers. No longer do they say to themselves (or, by their behavior, to prospects), “I’m here to sell today” or “I have to make a sale today.” No longer should they have to say, “The number of calls today really matters.” They are now in the business of learning whether their prospects want or need what their company offers. And that’s it. Where that fit exists, salespeople won’t have to sell because customers will buy, and that is a far more powerful force than any slick sales technique.

The Holy Grail of selling is credibility, a function of expertise plus trustworthiness. Expertise reflects your knowledge, not just of your product but of your complete offering, your competitors, your customers and their needs, your customer’s marketplace, and more. You develop trustworthiness by relationship building and by what you say.

If prospective customers see you as credible, they are more likely to act on your suggestions and advice. They listen to you differently than if they see you as just another salesperson out to make a sale. They believe that you personally bring value to them. The only way to create this environment of trust and credibility is by thinking like a buyer rather than acting like a seller.

The very best salespeople do this by teaching and by helping people to discover what they really want. When they define selling and approach customers in this way, buying is most

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likely to occur. It isn't easy, that's for sure. But it works and it is honorable.

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One of the elements missing from most sales training or selling approaches is the central role that the salesperson's mind-set plays. Your beliefs drive your behavior. If you believe you are shy, you act like a shy person. If you believe you are outgoing, you will talk to anyone. If you believe you can never get a fair break, events and other people will conspire to hold you back. If you believe you can accomplish almost anything, you will. What you believe the selling process to be is incredibly important to how you sell—and most salespeople have not thought it through.

A sales representative must have the right mind-set to be truly customer-focused. You can't care about the sale. You can't focus exclusively on your company's goals. Unless you balance building the business relationship with representing your company's product or service, you won't achieve long-term sales success. It is not simply that salespeople don't think like buyers. They don't have a correct view of selling and are not focused on the relationship as a key part of the sales experience.

The salesperson's job is to help prospects understand their alternatives and then have a planned conversation with them about the product and how it fits into their current need, or unrecognized want, or both. Interestingly, once the customer recognizes a want and its ramifications, it is often one your product answers. For you, it becomes the "Aha!" moment that salespeople

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seek. Not only do you make the sale, but now you are trusted and valued, and the customer desires a professional relationship with you. (In Chapter 6, I discuss in detail how you can learn what people really want.)

You must have the right mind-set, a good process, and understand the critical role of building relationships—this book is designed to help you reach that understanding.

THE FIVE RULES OF BUYING

There are, I am convinced, five basic rules of buying:

Rule 1: You will sell significantly more *if you think like a buyer than if you act like a seller*. (I believe this so strongly, I paraphrased the rule for the book's title.)

Rule 2: The quality of your business is directly linked to the desire of your prospective customer to want to have a conversation with you.

Rule 3: The size of your business is directly linked to your ability to ask a customer questions that *engender thinking*.

Rule 4: High-pressure environments tend to create little exchange, which results in a lack of meaningful dialogue.

Rule 5: Low-pressure environments tend to create greater exchange and customer receptivity. (No-pressure environments create nothing; avoid them. There must be some pressure to move the customer forward.)

The paradox is that the less you care about the sale, the more you sell. When you genuinely care about the buyer, then you

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think like the buyer. You begin to understand what things are important to the buyer. You are curious to uncover how this buyer thinks and makes decisions—what is important to that person.

Remember that virtually everybody wants to find ways to achieve more, to be secure, to have a sense of belonging, to have excitement in life, to have more fun and enjoyment, to feel self-confident, to have more prestige, to be more influential—or all of the above. Most of the products and services that conscientious salespeople sell are solutions that bring someone an emotional or psychological reward. (I recognize that unscrupulous salespeople exist who peddle shoddy or harmful goods. They care only about themselves and routinely give the profession a bad name.)

The customers who want those things you're selling that help them achieve more, have more fun, be more effective, and the rest—want them only when you can actively engage them in the process. When they participate and you build a positive relationship, it is easier to identify their needs, even their unstated and secret needs. Without a valued business relationship, however, it is very unlikely you will get beyond the stated need.

WHY TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES LIVE ON

Thinking like a buyer seems so logical and works so well, it raises the question of why so many sales managers continue to train their sales staff in the traditional techniques of approaching prospects, negotiating sales resistance, overcoming objections, and closing deals.

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I suspect there are several reasons. Managers are doing what they were taught by their managers . . . they have an illusion of knowledge . . . the techniques *do* work some of the time . . . and the law of large numbers applies here.

Most sales managers come out of the sales department. As salespeople, they were successful—that's how they got promoted—and they were relatively successful having been taught by an earlier generation of sales managers. If doing what they did got them this far, why change? *Because the world has changed.* But most salespeople are not students of sales, they don't educate themselves about human behavior; it is easier for them to accept what someone says than to learn on their own.

They often have an illusion of knowledge from having studied books such as *Getting to YES* by Roger Fisher, William L. Ury, and Bruce Patton,² which teaches how to negotiate agreements without giving in; and *Getting Past No* by William L. Ury which teaches how to negotiate your way from confrontation to cooperation.³ (Thinking like a buyer changes the dynamics of any negotiation dramatically, by the way.)

The illusion of knowledge is simply a belief that this traditional sales technique works—and I know why. The illusion of knowledge is far more powerful than ignorance, because ignorance can usually be demonstrated and corrected with education. The illusion of knowledge is difficult to change because people believe that what they think is correct, when in fact it is wrong (or insufficient).

Finally, the law of large numbers can help traditional selling techniques. If you call on enough people, you will get some results. When you call on enough prospects, you will run into