

THINKING ABOUT SELLING

**A behavioral model for enhancing
a salesperson's selling performance**

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife, Nina, and my two daughters, Eve and Darcie. They are the source of my greatest pride and are always in my heart.



Acknowledgments

I want to thank my partner, Marc Broxmeyer, who encouraged my efforts in this project. I also want to thank Steven Leeds, founder of the N.L.P. Center of New York. Steven gave me my first insights into many of the principles I used in this book. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Bill Oorbeek of The Oorbeek Group, Cliff Broder of Signature Bank and Jeffrey Meshel of Paradigm Capital Group, successful networkers who graciously assisted me in this endeavor. Finally, I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the salespeople at Bellmarc who filled out my questionnaire and participated in my workshops, and to the managers who gave me additional insights.

Author's Advice

Thinking About Selling is based on the responses of salespeople who filled out the questionnaire in the appendix at the end of this book. If you are seeking to improve your sales performance, I encourage you to complete those sections of the questionnaire that I identify at the beginning of each chapter before you read it. This will enable you to most effectively compare your own selling techniques with those of the selling model.



Author's Note

One of the great challenges facing an author in our current social environment is to avoid gender based language. I have chosen to use primarily the masculine pronoun but I recognize that salesmanship/selling is not an all-male enterprise, and I urge the reader not to take offense.

Furthermore, the reader should be informed that all sections titled "Implementation," structured in interview format, are taken from transcripts of actual conversations. All dialogue in this book is legitimate and genuine. However, in some cases conversations have been condensed from their original format, to preserve clarity and facilitate understanding.



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Introduction

I have been training salespeople since 1979. At that time my partner and I founded Bellmarc Realty, which has become one of the largest residential real estate brokerage companies in New York City. The firm's business model is somewhat unique in that our emphasis has been to hire people with no real estate experience and train them in the business ourselves. This training process has become the focal point of my role in the company. While a substantial portion of the salespeople who have completed this training do very well, some do not — they either continue to perform at marginal levels or leave the business after a disappointing tenure. I realized that something must be missing from the training course; I needed to find additional ways to help salespeople improve their performance. I composed an extensive questionnaire, which I gave to 20 successful salespeople working for my company. By evaluating their responses and using my own experience as a point of reference, I formulated conclusions that led me to develop a selling model.

I then used this model as the basis for a workshop series entailing four two-hour sessions: one per week for four weeks. At the beginning of each class, the participants were asked to fill in a portion of the same questionnaire I had given to the successful salespeople and then to undertake various exercises, which I will describe later. I have been conducting the workshops continually for more than four years.

My primary obstacle in these workshops was the resistance of some trainees to my methods. I was delving into psychological concepts that many salespeople found irrelevant. However, as salespeople became aware of certain behavioral patterns inherent in their selling strategies, I noticed that a significant mental shift occurred for many of them and that some displayed real growth in their subsequent sales performances.

But others showed no significant change. Their arms remained folded and their minds closed. I tried to get them to participate by asking them for advice. I validated their positions and insisted that I had no better answer than what they offered; after all, I know that many successful salespeople have strong beliefs that work for them but differ from mine. I prompted the arm-folders with one question though: "If you are making the income you desire, I commend you on identifying an effective selling strategy. If you aren't, what are you going to do?"

After conducting many seminars, I still saw a number of salespeople, particularly new ones, who were receptive to my ideas but still did not perform at a productive level. I decided to redouble my efforts by concentrating on these individuals through a series of four one-on-one sessions during which I could explore their particular challenges and confront my own potential shortcomings. These meetings were instructive and enlightening; they allowed me to develop additional principles that complement and bolster my selling model. I have also been pleased to see that in most cases the subsequent performances of these salespeople improved dramatically. I have included these insights in an additional chapter of this book.

CHAPTER I



Rules for Becoming A Successful Salesperson

To be a successful salesperson — that is, to make a profit — you need to follow guidelines that will make the selling process as effective and efficient as possible. This also requires fundamental principles that express the nature of what a salesperson should believe as the beginning point of his effort.


RULE NO. 1: ANYONE CAN SELL.

Many people believe that a great salesperson is born not made. However, every manager can recall a salesperson he believed to be inadequate and who surprised him with success. Managers also recognize that while many salespeople develop effective skills through their industry-specific knowledge, personality and temperament play a role as well. Thus, the first prerequisite in becoming a successful salesperson is that you must believe in yourself and your ability to succeed.

RULE NO. 2: THE KEY TO BEING A BETTER SALESPERSON IS TO GROW RATHER THAN TO CHANGE.

It is often maintained that to be a great salesperson you must change what you are doing. But the word "change" naturally meets resistance because it implies that you are doing something wrong and must now

behave differently. Even if you agree, you may subconsciously resist making adjustments, because to do so would be to admit that the rules that have guided your life don't work. I have therefore found that it is better to focus on your strengths and successes, and on your yearning to learn how to sell better. Learning adds information, which broadens your wisdom so that you can make better choices — not because you have to but because you want to.

 **RULE NO. 3: PAIN AND STRESS CAN MAKE A BETTER SALESPERSON. WITHOUT THEM, THERE IS NO SENSE OF URGENCY.**


For many salespeople, doing poorly naturally leads to increased anxiety. Some successful salespeople, however, are motivated by a sense of stress and urgency to achieve high levels of performance. If you are already stressed, is someone's saying "Don't get stressed" helpful? No. If anything, it adds to your stress because now you know that others are aware of your discomfort. But stress can empower rather than debilitate. When you're stressed, you dwell on the problem, focus on alternatives and analyze the consequences. Pain makes you run faster and think harder to overcome an obstacle.

 **RULE NO. 4: KNOWLEDGE ALONE ISN'T ENOUGH — YOU MUST BE ABLE TO IMPLEMENT WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED.**

A frequent problem experienced by managers (and I include myself as a sufferer of this dubious condition) is a tendency to talk at a salesperson rather than with a salesperson. Managers believe the key to creating a turnaround is to teach a salesperson what they know and to assume that this will enable him to accomplish the task at hand. Teaching does not, however, guarantee success. I have seen salespeople complete my

training program successfully and still fall on their faces. I have seen managers hold training sessions to deal with particular recurring problems only to find no meaningful change in subsequent production.

The truth is, you may have learned the material, but that doesn't mean you can place it in the context of your experience and beliefs. It's like holding a round peg in your hand but not being able to find the hole it's supposed to fit into. You have to figure out how to integrate information into your selling behavior. Theory is great, but it is not enough to gather knowledge from third parties or books — you must move from theory to practice.


 **RULE NO. 5: YOUR JUDGMENTS ABOUT THE WORLD LIMIT YOUR FLEXIBILITY. IF YOU CAN ACCEPT ALTERNATE POINTS OF VIEW, YOU CAN FIND NEW OPPORTUNITIES.**

One of the biggest reasons salespeople do poorly is that they lack the confidence to alter the way they look at the world. We are all products of our past experiences, which are the foundations for our values and beliefs. When a salesperson is presented with a world where his beliefs result in disappointing outcomes there is cognitive dissonance. The result is that the salesperson tries to justify the situation through statements like, "The buyers weren't serious," "There isn't enough good product" or "The economy is in the doldrums." Another approach is that he acknowledges his limitations by saying, "I just wasn't cut out to be a salesperson." These excuses assume that your beliefs and resulting behaviors are fixed and unalterable. Effectively you're saying, "The world is wrong or it is not right for me, but my beliefs are correct." This viewpoint becomes so embedded that it creates resistance to any other point of view.

Your real challenge is to become flexible so that you are open to new possibilities. Surprisingly, pretending can effectively do this. To

the mind, all experiences are real, even those that exist only in your imagination. Indeed, the subconscious is very receptive to exploring alternative behaviors through pretending since it entails no perceived threat.

To apply this concept to selling, it is appropriate to pretend that there is another point of view and then pretend that the other point of view really exists. The key is to create an uncertain environment in which new behaviors can be applied in order to gain additional insights. These insights can create new paths leading to new beliefs about yourself and the world around you. Pretending is an effective mechanism because you don't have to defend anything.


 **RULE NO. 6: IN ORDER TO GROW YOU MUST FIRST DETERMINE THE REAL ROOT OF YOUR POOR PERFORMANCE.**

Typically when a salesperson is underperforming, a manager will meet with him and ask why he isn't doing well. The presumption is that the salesperson knows what the problem is and how he can correct it. But the problem is often not what the salesperson thinks it is — he sees only the symptoms rather than the cause.

Let me clarify by an analogy: A building is on fire. What's the problem? To the observer it seems clear: There's a fire! But this isn't the real problem. It is only how the problem has expressed itself. The real problem is that there were oil-soaked rags in the basement. What would happen if the building owner acquired a new house and again left oil-soaked rags in the basement? The potential for a fire would still exist. To deal with the symptoms you have to address their underlying cause.

Your challenge is to dig beneath the surface to identify core issues, that will stimulate a sincere desire to address fundamentally unproductive behavior. You must become aware of why negative events are occurring, not merely the fact that they are.


For example, a salesperson often arrives late to her appointments. She ends up creating angry customers who don't want to work with her. The manager could say, "You must not arrive at appointments late!" The core issue, however, is why would she risk being late for a meeting she knew was important? They discuss this issue, and the salesperson describes how she packs her day so tightly with appointments that she finds her entire day in disarray if one of them runs longer than she planned. The problem is therefore that she is overbooked and needs to create a more effective means of accomplishing all the tasks she undertakes. The resolution they propose is that after every appointment she should allocate a half-hour for "strategy and development." During this half-hour she should write up the results of her appointment and plan the next step with that customer. The new behavior gives her breathing room between appointments, which she allocates productively. If one appointment runs late, she can compromise her "strategy" time, which is more flexible, so she can be on time for her next appointment.

 **RULE NO. 7: SALESPERSONS RARELY UNDERPERFORM OUT OF LAZINESS — IT IS MORE OFTEN A FUNCTION OF FEELING LOST, USELESS OR CONFUSED.**

Managers frequently say that the reason a particular salesperson isn't doing well is that he or she isn't working hard. But every office has successful salespeople who are not necessarily workhorses. Why is working hard, in itself, essential for success? I often hear answers like these: that hard work generates more experiences and thus more practice; or that hard-working salespeople are more likely to persist in resolving challenges which arise while serving customers. While these reasons are legitimate, I have rarely seen a salesperson refuse to perform the tasks necessary to complete a deal.


I often tell salespeople that using a bat to knock down a tree won't make the tree fall down. Hard work must be coupled with smart work.

The key is to devise an effective plan to accomplish a task and then follow it. You will want to work hard if you understand what to do and how you will be rewarded for your efforts.

 **RULE NO. 8: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS FAILURE.
FAILURE IS NOTHING MORE THAN FEEDBACK THAT
REVEALS NEW ALTERNATIVES TO ACHIEVING SUCCESS.**

Failure is only a judgment placed on the consequence of an action that is inconsistent with your expectations — it is a point of view derived from evaluating the event in the context of the moment. Another approach is to expand the time frame and view the action as just a scene in an evolving story. From this perspective, each step need not be judged as right or wrong but merely as part of the process of achieving a bigger goal. This minimizes the importance of events in the short term and allows long-term goals to become more prominent.

Each experience is part of your learning process. “Failures” are part of the process of taking risks and experimenting. No child ever learned to walk without falling. So analyze and acknowledge each event as merely a movement toward your objective, then figure out the next step in your journey.

 **RULE NO. 9: DON'T TRY TO CHANGE EVERYTHING.
CHANGE ONE THING AND THEN SEE WHAT HAPPENS.**

No story about success is so simple that it can be described in a single sentence. Rather, it is an accumulation of steps which leads to revelation and then invention. Depending on how much new information is received and how effectively it is implemented the process can be slow or quick. Eventually your inner light bulb will switch on — ideas will cascade into meaningful insights and you will start making progress.

There are some salespeople who compare this challenge to climb-

ing a mountain, in which the effort involves straining with each step. But there is no point in forcing yourself to climb faster or harder than is comfortable. It is better to travel a shorter distance, set up a base camp to rest and acclimate and then proceed when you are fully prepared to move forward.

I have found these nine principles to be effective in motivating salespeople to improve their performances. They create a foundation of positive perspectives that encourage action and risk taking. Some salespeople do not believe in these rules. They insist that you have to fix what is broken and lament your failures and losses. You will have to decide which rules produce the best results for you.



Selling Tips From Scooter

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, I OFTEN WENT TO NIGHT SPOTS WITH A FRIEND WHOSE NICKNAME WAS SCOOTER. SCOOTER WAS AMAZING. HE WAS NOT THE MOST HANDSOME GUY, BUT HE ALWAYS SEEMED TO CONNECT WITH THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE PLACE. THERE COULD BE A HUNDRED GUYS STANDING AROUND AND ONE GORGEOUS WOMAN AT THE BAR, BUT HE WOULD BE THE ONE TO GET HER ATTENTION. I FINALLY ASKED HIM HOW HE DID IT. HE SAID: "WHENEVER I ENTER A NIGHT SPOT THERE IS NEVER ANY COMPETITION. THE OTHER PEOPLE ARE LIKE TREES IN THE FOREST, JUST SCENERY. THERE IS NO ONE THERE BUT ME AND THE GIRL I WANT TO MEET. WHEN I APPROACH HER, I THINK TO MYSELF: THIS IS THE WOMAN I'M GOING TO MARRY. I MUST MAKE THIS WORK! WHEN I TALK TO HER, I COMPLIMENT HER AND I AM SINCERE. I REALLY CARE, AND I MAKE HER BELIEVE IT."

ONE DAY I WATCHED AS SCOOTER WAS REJECTED. HE LEFT WITH A SMILE ON HIS FACE. I WAS SHOCKED. "SCOOTER, WHAT HAPPENED?" I ASKED. "YOUR RECORD IS BROKEN!" HE SMILED AT ME AND SAID: "THAT'S O.K. I WOULD HATE TO BE MARRIED TO SOMEONE WHO DIDN'T LIKE ME."

SCOOTER DIDN'T REALIZE IT, BUT HE WAS TEACHING ME THE ESSENCE OF GOOD SALES. FIRST, YOU MUST BELIEVE THERE IS NO COMPETITION. YOU AND THE CUSTOMER ARE ALL THAT MATTER. EVERYONE ELSE IS JUST FILLING UP SPACE. SECOND, YOU MUST CARE. YOU KNOW THAT YOU SHOULD MAKE THIS HAPPEN AND THAT IT'S IMPORTANT TO YOUR LIFE THAT YOU DO. THIRD, YOU MUST VALIDATE THE CUSTOMER SINCERELY. FINALLY, IF YOU DON'T MAKE THE SALE ACCEPT IT AS BEING FOR THE BEST AND MOVE ON. YOU DON'T HAVE TO WIN EVERY POINT TO WIN THE GAME.

CHAPTER 2



The Qualities of a Successful Salesperson

When I asked my 20 top-performing salespeople to describe how they sell, as well to identify their strengths and weaknesses, they gave me an insightful and compelling list from which I identified the following qualities.

1. ATTENTIVENESS

A successful salesperson has incredible radar.

This goes beyond listening. You must understand and infer from the buyer's body language, facial expressions and manner of speaking, to achieve broader awareness. The successful salesperson focuses on gathering information all the time, and looks for clues that may have deeper meaning.

2. DEDUCTIVE REASONING

A successful salesperson seeks to infer the true meaning of the customer's words.

He will switch perspectives from his own point of view to the customer's. For example, a customer says, "I have plenty of time and don't want