Sales & Consequences

Tibor Shanto

www.SellBetter.ca

Table of Contents

Forward

Sales and Consequences

Unlike the old game show, in sales, it is for real; every deal has a real winner and that many more losers, to be specific, if three sales reps are bidding for a deal, one will win the other two will lose. What is also real in sales is that every action - or - inaction has real consequences, and this applies to the buyer as much as to the seller.

The significance for sellers is that they can dictate not only their own actions or inactions, but when executed well, the actions or inactions of the buyer. By executing this well, consistently and progressively, a good seller will dictate the consequences of their actions and their success.

Doing it well, consistently and progressively, requires not only hard work, planning and the willingness to abandon beliefs and adopt new practices that often may be completely foreign to the same seller the day before. What is not foreign to successful sellers is attitude, their willingness to try, review the outcomes, deal with the consequences, learn, and apply that learning in new actions, which bring new consequences.

The key is in taking action, executing. While one can argue that not taking action does have consequences of its own, progress is usually made by not only making decisions, but taking decisive action.

This book consists of 12 different looks at sales and selling. It takes into account that action without a plan, forethought and preparation is likely to lead to the wrong consequences and will not only result in lost sales, but in lost time, the most precious resource a seller has. Each chapter looks not only at actions that a seller can take or integrate into their selling methods, but also at the strategy behind the action.

Unlike a conventional guide, these pieces examine the big picture of B2B sales, as well as the tactical execution. This allows the reader not only to understand how to execute, but by looking at the underlying philosophy, readers can understand how to integrate it in to their current methodology.

Frankly, the goal is to get readers to look at and think about their selling approach differently, and more than just integrating into current methods, get the reader to adopt entirely new approaches. By doing so, they should realize new and better consequences from selling.

As always, I welcome your feedback, comments, challenges and descending opinions, you can reach me directly at Tibor.Shanto@SellBetter.ca, or through you favourite social media, see mine in the About Author section, take a look and lets connect.

What's in Your Pipeline?
Tibor Shanto
December 27, 2011

Price - What's in a Number?

Price will always be a key component of any sale, but it does not have to be the only factor in a decision, unless you as a sales person let it. Based on the studies you read, price can be as much as 40% of the final decision; and with certain individuals, it could go higher. However, when you step back and examine things, what is price?

At its most basic, it is the numerical value, nothing more. As with any number, there is no good or bad number, there is only the relative aspect it represents. It brings to mind the old joke explaining the concept of how numbers are relative by pointing out that three hairs on your head are relatively few, but those same three hairs in your soup, well. Just like +1 is not better than -1, they both represent a relative distance from zero; just as when it is zero degrees outside, it does not mean that there is no temperature, it is just a point between -1 and +1, slightly colder if you measure things in Fahrenheit.

It no different when it comes to the numbers that make up a price, the question of a good price vs. a bad price is not in the digits but in the relative value they represent. Which is why I continue to be surprised by both buyers and sellers and the relative importance placed on a set of digits with no context.

Now it is easy to understand why some buyers fixate on price long before they should. Some do it because they are price shoppers and feel that if they can get you to put a number out there, it is then just an exercise of them "beating" that number down. It would be interesting to learn who started this downward spiral, the buyers pushing on sellers, or a seller deciding to short cut the sale, "throw a discount on the table", in order to win the deal. In other instances it may be that the sellers and/or the buyer bring a consumer mind frame to a B2B playing field.

Others go to price because they really cannot differentiate between one product versus the next. In many cases, the top three or four products or offerings in a given space have 90% overlap in capabilities, and therefore seem indistinguishable to most buyers. In that scenario, which is more common than many like to admit, is it any wonder that price becomes the BIG differentiator. By the way, this is not something that is limited to "products" or to "commodities"; it happens to "solutions" sellers too. While there information abounds, the sales person still needs to play a key role in helping the client understand the "difference" and the relative value of their offering.

Avoiding the price trap takes work, but what in sales does not? Using our EDGE model, with the focus on ZONE Based Selling, provides a process and framework for managing this. At its core is a simple concept, make the discussion around numbers relative to the value to be realized, the impact you can deliver, not relative to the dollars invested or a competitor. As you would expect this involves two specific things that have to be executed in concert.

First, understanding the client's business and the value and impact that you can have on it; then developing questions that surface those factors, including follow up question to borrow beneath the veneer of knee jerk answers prospects may provide at the outset. It is often these secondary questions that get the buyer to really think through the issues. They may have been thinking about something in a certain way, and can respond to major aspects of the subject, but the follow up questions not only cause them to stop and think, but also put you in the light of a subject matter expert, and adviser. You can see the lights going on, "that's a different way of achieving..."

Second, as you Discover areas of mutual agreement/fit, quantify them. Quantify objectives and aspirations that present themselves in the process, especially potential positive returns. Don't hesitate to question how they arrive at certain assumptions or numbers. This will allow you to discuss price relative to returns the buyer has presented, not relative to price. Many people will "qualify", but you can do a lot more if you quantify, because you can now deal with real variables.

Quantify – Don't Qualify

Read The Article

Listen to the Podcast

For instance, you may be selling a true wireless solution connecting your teams in the field not only with one another, a scalable platform, which can at the same time communicate with systems back at the office, an ERP for example. Your solution offers seamless integration and delivers reduced errors, reduced time to orders and invoicing, eliminate lost orders, reduce the required level of inventories, increased the number of service calls you can do in a day, and other tangible benefits. You are competing with a supped up cell phone offered by one of the carriers, probably efficiently achieve some of the above, but not all, and would require both hardware and software upgrades as the buyers requirements evolve.

If a buyer looks at it purely on a price basis, the supped up cell phone looks attractive, based on outcome, impact, improved processes and other results, the seamless solution is better value, and will deliver more upside. It is up to you to manage the Discovery process to be able to Demonstrate Impact. By executing the questioning routine highlighted above, you can move the discussion from the cost bandwagon to the returns bandwagon. After all, what is better a $1 saved, or $3.50 return on a $2.00 investment? If you can demonstrate that this advantage will be in place for four years, you can contrast $4 dollars saved with $6 net return.

I am not minimizing the effort of taking the discussion to returns, but it is doable if you focus on their business from a business perspective, not an "I need a sale" perspective. It also takes the will, knowledge and calluses to resist giving a number before you can build context.

Recently I sat with a potential buyer, very early in the meeting she asked, "How do you charge?" I explained our two models (project or program). Remember we just got past the small talk. She followed up:

Buyer: *I need a number!*

TS: No problem let's look at what is involved, what we are looking to achieve, project/program – scope, and then we can talk numbers, after all how will you evaluate the "number", what will you compare it to?

Buyer: No, you don't understand, I need a number so I know what I am dealing with.

I was thinking I need to know what I am dealing with as well, but did not say that; what I did say was:

TS: OK, number 1, that's my number, number 1. How does that compare?

Now I am not advocating that people use this approach, I don't, but I had to make her understand that not only is the number meaningless, but there is also a risk that she is encouraging her people to sell on price. (No, I didn't get the deal, yet, I did raise my number once we defined her needs, and I do have a next step.)

Remember that price is relative; relative to the value the buyer is anticipating, the greater the value, the greater opportunity to base the sale on value not price; the level of value anticipated is relative to the way you sell it.

The Golden 1/3!

Here we are half way through Q1 2011, and if you believe some of the experts, half way to sealing the fate of your entire sales year. According to some, as a sales manager you should know by the end of Q1 whether you will make your year or not. Although not universal and with exceptions, how you execute and deliver in Q1 will heavily determine your year.

One of the challenges many sales organizations face is the "lull" experienced after the "year end sprint". With a focus on "closing everything we can", the last month of the year, and many managers looking the other way when their teams stop prospecting in favour of driving needed revenue, (all the while ignoring the fact that revenue comes from prospects in the pipeline). As a result, the year starts off with an insufficient pipeline, a scramble for prospects and a slow start to the year. Clearly the solution is to maintain a consistent level prospecting at all times of the year, to ensure a high enough level of prospects to ensure that you can deliver the required amount of revenue year round, (I won't get on my soap box here).

So where can you go to bridge the gap? You could go back to the well, see if you can do more business with your current base, this should be part of your routine, but it is also partially offset by churn and attrition in the same base.

You can go after new prospects, but remember you are looking for some quick cycles to overcome the slow start. You could do an analysis of accounts you have won, look for commonality, and then look for others who have similar situations; in fact you can use the process and format outlined in my book. While this a great start it does ignore a couple of segments of the market, one specifically important to the discussion here. We have since introduced a more complete tool that allows you to have a 360 Degree view of the opportunities regardless of how they ended. (Download your **"360 Degree Deal View"** here). Generally speaking opportunities that enter your pipeline end either as a win, loss or "no decision".

Let's first look the losses, a group worth approaching for the long term, but will do little to help in the near term, specifically opportunities you lost to competitors over the last 12 months. Assuming the product has a "life time" of 18 - 24 months, in most circumstances, anything less than 12 will be too early for a realistic near term closable prospect. I want to be clear, you should work these opportunities for the longer term, but we are looking for near term, you therefore, profile them, begin your campaign to win them when the time comes.

The other group missed by strictly looking at your wins, is the one to focus on when you are looking for opportunities with potentially shorter cycles that will help firm up the early part of your year. These are the accounts that ended in "No Decision" during the past 9 - 12 months. While it varies from industry to industry, these represent about a third of deals that start off as viable opportunities.

The reality is that a segment of this group were probably not real buyers to begin with. They may have been looking to see what's new in the market, satisfy a curiosity about their solution, or other reasons. But a good portion of the group were real buyers who did not complete the cycle for a number of reason. This could be a change in priorities, redirected budgets, alternative processes, etc. Depending on how far through the cycle you got, and how well you executed the discovery phase of the process, you could have a very good idea of why there was no decision. More importantly if you did complete the discovery, you should have a good understanding of what was driving the prospect to begin with, what their objectives were, and the impact of achieving or failing to achieve those objectives.

Given the nature of the economy today, it is common to rethink priorities and realign objectives based on perceptions and realities on the ground. This cuts both ways, just as they pulled the plug on the buy, they can just as fast refocus on priorities and be more open to completing the purchase than say nine, six or even three months ago.

The advantage is that you have already done a lot of the ground work, met the players, and shared ideas. By revisiting former prospects that ended in no decision you could have a distinct advantage. Not the least of which is that some of your competitors take a strictly linear and forward looking view of the market, rather than a 3600 view, which often allows you to be the only one engaged the "second" time around.

As people re-evaluate the economy, their opportunities, and other factors, they may more than ready to re-engage. With a more optimistic outlook, new budgets, buyers will be looking for people to help them jump start their plans.

One dilemma will be ensuring that this revisiting of "no decision" buyers does not replace the day to day prospecting we must all do. Based on your metrics and conversion rates, you still need spend time prospecting for new opportunities, these should be looked at as bonus opportunities, or clutch opportunities as described here. Again, the time for re-engaging these opportunities needs to be on top of, not instead of your regular prospecting.

Nor should it be restricted to early in the fiscal year, just like other opportunities, "no decisions" happen all the time. So make it a habit to review these at the start of every quarter. If you can re-engage with just one third of this group, and end up closing 5%, imagine the impact not only on revenue but also market share. So go ahead, see who said no, understand why, and then give them a call.

Implementation vs. Execution

This article was a finalist for Article of the Year in the 2011 Top Sales & Marketing Awards

Sales is a game of words and meanings; the words we use, how we communicate them, their interpretations by the receiver, directly impact the meaning others take away from our message. It all count in sales, and therefore has to be actively managed and results dealt with. This is why language is an important aspect of sales; further, a key attribute of a solid sales culture is a "common language." The key in sales is that the communications have to align with actions.

It is no surprise that people often hide behind words, or get very different results than they set out to achieve, based on what and how they communicate, then act. Case in point is how some in sales the words: Implementation and Execution.

Many companies implement things, be it software, process, training, a strategy, policy and more, only to find that they do not realize what they set out to do, or achieve results they were led to believe could be achieved by implementing one of the above. The specific reason is that they fail take steps and action that will make the implementation a success; in other words, they fail to Execute.

One national company "implemented" a new policy for 2011; each rep had to carry out four hours of outbound prospecting each and every week. It became a KPI, an element on the reps' scorecards. They got marketing to participate not only in terms of prepping leads lists, but also in developing campaigns to fuel the calls, and a host of other things. Based on stats and other inputs they were looking to generate a minimum of five new appointments a week, which would (could should) lead to the level of pipeline and sales they were looking to achieve.

Unfortunately, it did not take long, for not only the reps, but the managers, to begin to find exceptions. Two of the most popular songs on the hit parade were "I have a big deal I am working on, the proposal is due Tuesday, but I will start Wednesday", which manager can resist that age-old favourite. The other, "I have an appointment I have to get to, it is an important one". I am just relieved that no one has had the leads list eaten by their dog, although I am sure that will come after they read this article.

After 10 weeks of the program being "implemented", there has not been one week of full compliance, they have definitely seen improvement in activity and more appointments, but somewhat short of where they were looking to be by the end of Q1, given the headcount.

The company, like many who "implement" and fail to "execute", made a couple of key mistakes. First, they failed to get buy in from the reps, second, they failed to translate the implementation into an action plan, for both the managers, and the reps. Not surprisingly, these two are related and fixing one will go some way to fixing the other.

First, the people putting together the plan, be they the VP of Sales or Sales Ops, need to understand that just because it was conceived and makes sense, does not lead to it happening. When it come to activities, habit based activities, it requires much more than a sound plan, it requires a detailed action plan, and selling and support points for each step of the action plan. This leads to a disciplined approach, which will take time and effort.

Many sales leaders forget that we are not dealing with numbers, but with people's perceptions and habits. Let's face it, if they saw things as the VP does, there would be no need for the whole exercise. When trying to change people's habits, sales habits, it is no different from a smoker going "cold turkey", that's why they call it quitting the habit. Few can do it that way, most need help.

Simply telling a rep that they will make more money as a result of the "newly implemented" policy, is like telling a two pack a day smoker that they will be healthier once they quit, good luck with that. You need to find a specific motivation, an action plan, support, and yes, consequences for non-compliance beyond reduced income.

Where many fall short on motivation is putting too much emphasis on money, "if you get more prospects, you'll get more sales and make oodles more cash." The reality is, if they are an "80% of goal type" rep, which in many instances is deemed to be good, they are usually happy with the money they are making. If not they would have taken steps on their own to increase it, the fact that they have not is a clear statement that money is not a driver for them. You need to tie the effort required to change to something that is important to them. This will vary from rep to rep, but is usually tied to something personal, ego, or other non-monetary goal.

For example, one rep I know has made a commitment that he will not miss any of his son's hockey games, no matter what, and he works diligently to manage his calendar to meet that goal. One way to motivate him is to show him how the newly implemented policy will increase his ability to be at all the games. His execution of the plan is not the resulting appointments; it is the son's games. I remember that I was resolved never to go to a sales meeting and not be presented an award. As long as I was a rep I always worked to ensure I would be getting an award, be it for most deals, size of deal, top revenue, whatever, I was going to get one, and did. My director knew this and used it when I needed to get something done.

These are great "levers" for a manager to work with, it may take a bit to figure out what these may be, but if you are a real sales manager, interacting with and regularly coaching your team, it does not take long to understand and figure out where the button is for each of your team. That is the first step, engaging your team the same way as you would expect them to engage with their clients.

You can then tie this to a specific action plan; this action plan can be part of your ongoing (weekly) coaching with each team member. Rather than saying "right we're gonna do some prospecting now, 4 hours a week, 5 new prospects, no brainer, you'll make more money; off you go then". Break it down, knowing the desired results, knowing the person involved, likes dislikes, current habits, etc., create an ongoing plan. The plan needs to have a series of objective, clear and measurable actions, with deadlines; each step moving them towards the desired new habits.

Introduce the first element, get buy in, which means more than the person nodding and smiling. One way is to jointly or mutually create the objective; even something as simple as getting the rep to figure out how much time it will take him to generate five new appointments a week. More than getting agreement on the objective, the rep feels ownership when you leave it to the rep to come up with the action item. This allows you to set an agreed on timeframe, and measurable related to the objective. Again, it drives ownership by the rep, which is much more likely to succeed than an edict from on high. As they success with this step, you introduce another, each realistic, not easy, but doable; each moving towards the long term desired objective, each allowing the rep to own their progress, and drive mutual accountability.

This means the manager also has obligations, which is to coach on a consistent basis, if they do not, then the whole thing falls apart, and you experience what many organizations do, which is implementing something that does not get executed.

One last related point: Given the smoking analogy, the goal should be to avoid the whole need for changing the habit by adopting the right habits to begin with. If you don't take up smoking you will not have to quit. If you get people doing the right things to begin with, you will not have to have as many "change exercises", and avoid the friction and use the energy for the important things from the start, which still comes down to execution.

Time To Swap Rituals

rit•u•al
–noun – prescribed, established, or ceremonial acts or features collectively, as in religious services.

There is a ritual that can be observed in sales, it unfolds at the end of each month, and that much more so at the end of each quarter; much like "triple witching" on Wall St., when multiple contracts expire on the same Friday.

In sales it is the end of month or quarter corral, the "driving of the deals" to close the quarter strong. You hear managers across the land encouraging their teams to close what they can before the end of the quarter. Now I know there is sandbagging taking place, but with roughly only 50% reps making their quota last year, do they really need to be told to close it now? Maybe, and maybe that is why managers seem to tolerate discounts during these times, in fact some organizations create programs specifically to discount, especially during the year-end "witching hour".

I think we can all understand why it happens, companies public or otherwise, want to close the quarter strong and therefore drive those deals that much harder as the end of the month or quarter approaches. The question is whether it is a necessary ritual, or a financially sound ritual.

Right off the top I will tell you that it is not financially sound for two reasons. First, you never recover the discount offered to win the deal, and it increases your cost of sale, and reduces profits in the process. There is no two ways about it, it will increase the payback period on the deal, and establish an environment where the client will always expect a discount, especially at the end of the quarter or year, we have all been held hostage by clients who know the game. Why not, is that not what you are training them to do? Second, it creates a distraction of resources leading to inefficient use of those resources, human or otherwise, and inefficiency is not financially sound.

Let me answer the other question, whether it is necessary or not, and the answers is clearly not necessary; further I will argue that the same factors and actions that led sales organization to adopt and accept this ritual, can help you swap it out for another ritual. A ritual that is productive and profitable all at the same time.

I write about this now as a result of last week being end of Q1 2011, the first "triple witch" of the year of the "recovery". You heard sales types all over chanting the same incantation: "I can't meet this week man, I am busy closing", or some variation depending on the sect they belong to. Not to be provocative, but I always have to ask, "cool, what do you do the rest of the quarter?"

Don't get me wrong, I get the idea, the reason for the status quo, but what if you swapped out the end of quarter "deal drive" for another ritual, say the "Work Your Sales Every Day" ritual. This is not to say that you do the something every day, but that you do each day those things that move the sale forward in a logical, predictable and measurable way.

To do this you need to at least have a handle on two things, your conversion rates, or at least one key one, number of people you need to engage (by appointment or phone), to deliver the number of deals you need in a given month or quarter to achieve quota. Second, the length of time it takes you from initial encounter to close, that is, the length of an active sales cycle (not **client acquisition cycle**).

For the sake of example, let's assume the following facts:

"Average Sales Cycle":
8 Weeks

Average conversion rate from initial engagement to close:
1 of every 5

Monthly Quota:
4 sales

First fact, if nothing changes, I will need to engage with 20 potential buyers every month (4 X 5). Spread over the course of a month, it means I need to engage with one new potential buyer every day (4 weeks in a month, 5 days a week). Next fact, if I do not engage with someone today, the chance of me closing something 8 weeks from today have been tangibly diminished, in the neighbourhood of 20%. On the other hand, if nothing changes, and I do engage with a potential buyer today, the likelihood of me closing something in 8 weeks remains probable. Now some of you are thinking that since I only close 1 of 5, it may not be a close 8 weeks forward. But the reality is that if I engage someone every day, I will by those same odds close one of those five 8 weeks out, and if I did that every day, I will close one each week, and by extension 4 every month.

Now here is the rub, it really doesn't matter if 8 weeks out is the first day of the quarter, the 42nd day of the quarter, or the last. As long as I manage the inputs, execute my sale, based on the averages calculated based on my results to date, I will hit quota, regardless of which day of the quarter or month it is.

For me, I would much rather partake in the ritual of engaging with sufficient numbers of potential buyers on a consistent basis throughout the month or quarter, than to panic to close the quarter in the last week. First, if all I do the last week of the quarter is close, I am going to be behind, having dug my own hole by not prospecting that week. The other, is most commonly the only way to get a buyer to buy before their time is to offer a discount of one sort or another, which as stated above is not good long-term business.

It also leads to less frayed nerves, not having to go into a sprint at the end of the quarter, only to be knackered out and needing a rest at the start of the next; just look at the lull you witness in many instances after the end of quarter drive.

Join me now in adopting and embracing a proactive ritual that puts you in control of your success, rather than a reactive ritual based on catching up rather than moving forward.

Planning for the Obvious

Time is the great equalizer, every day we all get 24 hour, consisting of 60 minute no matter who or where you are. As we have spoken in the past, you can seek all the sage advice, old school, new school, school 2.0, or even the ultra-hip and modern social school, nothing will change the fact, you can slice and dice it, digitize it, but you can't manage it. Do what you will; it's still 24 hours, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year.

What you can do, is understand how much time you need to apply to which specific tasks. With that, you can then allocate the time needed to complete those tasks successfully on a consistent basis, and then spend the allocated time actually executing and completing the task at hand.

If you are in sales, it comes down the roughly 2,115* hours each year that you could spend actively selling, or what is traditionally called "face time". Needless to say there are others things that have to be done, but some things can be just as well done outside of hours where you can interact with real buyers.

* Based on 235 work days a year, and a nine hour workday. (I know sunshine, you work way more!)

Getting the basics done is simple, and based your experience and your track record to date; write down all the must do activities required to successful execute your sale. Just look at you last dozen or so successful sales and see what went into it, and mark it down. Then calculate how much time you spent on each of the captured activities during the sales cycle. Remember you don't have to get too granular, the details will vary. For example, when it comes to researching potential prospects, that would be part of the prospecting number, you don't need to break it out as separate activity. If you already have metrics in place, great, if not you will have to do some work, and start tracking key stats and conversion rates along the way.

If you do the above, you will have a snap shot of all activities you need to succeed, including new business activities, account management, admin, training, meetings, etc. This part is the easy one, where things break down is when people overlook two obvious things they deal with every day, but are never included by sales people in the above exercise.

One activity, and definite time consumer, is putting out "Client Fires". If you are in sales, you will need to deal with client issues. For most of us not a day goes by where we do not have to respond to some client situation, could be big, could be small, but it has to be dealt with. Sometimes it will eat up a few minutes, other days it can consume hours. The reality is that it will come, so you need to include it in your time allocation exercise, yet sales people never do. Somehow they feel that this is something that is relegated to being reactive, not proactive, mistake! More than any other aspect of time allocation this is where you benefit most from being proactive.

The challenge is that you can't know in advance when the fire will ignite, and what it will look like, how much time it will take to put out, but that is not an excuse for not allocating time to it. As above, you can look at your experience to date, (if you are new, talk to some of the tenured AND Successful sales people you work with), and from that surmise how much time on average per week is consumed by "putting out client fires". Take that time and make it part of your time allocation. For example, if you have to dedicate five hours a week to this, then set aside an hour a day in your calendar for this. If you don't, the fire will still come, you will still spend time responding, but the time you use will come from another activity and you will not have time to complete that task. Most sales people will steal it from the activity they like least, and for many that is prospecting; the impact of that is detrimental over time. More sadly, some sales people look for fires to put out, using this as a means of feeling productive while avoiding other key activities, like prospecting. They tell their managers "hey I know I didn't get around to prospecting this week, but hey, I saved two accounts".

Set the time aside even if you don't know when it will hit. If it comes in during a time you allocated to prospecting, simply switch the two around, and both will get done rather than just one. On those days where it doesn't hit the fan, great, you have an hour that you can get things done beyond your plan, bonus, more prospecting.

The other thing sales people do not make allowance for in their calendar is planning. Planning is key to success, especially if you buy in to the fact that sales does involve thinking, evaluating and adjusting based on market experiences. Yet again, few if any speak about planning when they discuss time and sales. Unless you are selling eggrolls at the mall, you need to step back regularly and think about your sales, ad plan on a number of levels. There is the tactical day-to-day plans, for me it is more like week-to-week; there is account planning; finally big picture planning. These do not have to be big chunks of time, especially the first two, but they do require time, unless you plan to execute your sale like a mouse on a wheel, doing, doing, doing without thinking.

The other benefit to doing the allocation exercise a couple of times a year is to help you stay on track. I often find when I work with sales people that when they are missing their numbers, it is accompanied by their time allocation deviating from their plan. Spending too much time on one task, while not enough time on the other. We can usually see improvement by helping them recalibrate and get back to the right amount of time on the right activity.

The little time it takes to do this exercise, with all its element, is a small investment compared to the success dividends it pays.

Long Live The Status Quo

Status Quo has been a central theme and concept in B2B sales since it has evolved as a craft. Over the last 20 plus years, people have taken camps on different sides of the Status Quo. For some it is the "competition", encouraging sellers to focus on the buyer's circumstance and market view rather than product. For others, the Status Quo has come to represent a segment of the market that is not ready to buy, and therefore can/should be overlooked in favour of those potential buyers who have declared their intent. This has become much more the case since the introduction of the marketing term Sales 2.0. Even more than before the words Status Quo have become synonymous with a complete lack of opportunity for sales people. They suggest that sales people focus on being "found" rather than spending time and resources on the Status Quo.

Some in the "Hey let's wait" camp, will tell you there is zero chance of closing a deal with a buyer labelled Status Quo, and wait for an event to change the buyer's mode, then make your move. Sort of like saying "Hey, there is an event on the next corner, I won't have to wait long till it gets here and I can act."

Ultimately how you chose to sell or not sell to Status Quo buyers is dictated by your outlook and attitude. Much like the glass scenario, if you see it as half full you will act differently than those who see it as half empty. In many ways it come down to the 80/20 rule, where 80% of sales people are reactive and will wait for things to be just so, or to come to them. While 20% will be proactive and cause things to happen regardless of the buyer's current perceived state, they will adjust their actions to meet realities, rather than wait for reality to change and suit their actions.

In the end, it all stems from the way one views and defines Status Quo. The problem with the those who avoid the Status Quo, and would encourage their disciples to do the same, that is their view and definition is wrong and out dated. They Describe the Status Quo as:

*Status Quo is when a buyer **perceives** the product or service they are currently using meets, or exceeds their needs and **sees no reason** to change suppliers.*

Nothing can be further from the truth, and nothing has damaged the success of sellers and by extension, the fate of their employers. The above outdated view of the Status Quo is defended by passive reactive sellers and sales experts who are either unable or afraid of selling to this group. Oddly part of the fear, the misconception, is as a result of their erroneous and outdated view and understanding of buyers they would classify as being in the Status Quo.

The reason this is a concern, is due to the fact that a vast majority of buyers are in the Status Quo, some put it as high as 80% of buyers, I believe it is closer to 70%-75%. The other groups being those who are actively looking 15%, and the group between the two, those described as being in the Window Of Dissatisfaction in the book I coauthored, 15%. Problem with the latter, is it's again, negative outlook, people buy for reason other than being dissatisfied, some see opportunity and want to seize it; the same reactive negativity that blinds them to the real state of buyers in the Status Quo.

In effect if you buy into the reactive and mistaken view of the Status Quo, you effectively abdicate 70% plus of the market to those of us willing to be proactive, roll up our sleeves and go for it. And while it may not always pay off immediately, remember, prospects are created, not found. It is in that creating that Sales 2.0 tools come in handy. However, if you can engage and end up selling just 10% of this overlooked group, and still get your share of the remaining two buyer groups, you could end up way ahead.

First thing though is change your view of Status Quo, and the opportunities it presents, to reflect facts, not to defend an outdated way of selling, and the residuals riding on it.
Let's start by accurately presenting the view of those in the Status Quo:

*Status Quo is **NOT** buyers who are **perceived** to be happy with their current solution and see **no reason** to change, but rather as buyers who have yet to be presented with a solution they perceive will improve or change their current circumstance, and as such see no reason to change. **Given the solution, a reason to change, they will change**.*

If you start by looking at the Status Quo as an area of real opportunity rather than no opportunity you could leverage the above quit profitably. To do that you have to have two things, first a real solution or product, and the ability to engage and create a response, create demand. The latter is not always easy when you venture into the Status Quo, you not only have to know the real challenges and opportunities potential buyers are facing, but develop a powerful means of raising them to the surface.

Remember, at the start of the process the buyer does not believe there is an alternative to their current situation, which is why they choose to tolerate the devil they know. This is why they rebuff the advances of sales people; especially buyers who have been through the ringer with sales people who over promise and under deliver. In order to break through the defensive barriers, the sales person needs to show the buyer that they understand the challenge, and have successfully addressed it in the past.

Now some will have you believe that a Status Quo buyer will not act until they experience an event that sparks their dissatisfaction. OK, consider this:

"Half of SAP users 'dissatisfied' with system performance".
This was the headline in a piece from Leo King, Computerworld UK, 22 March 11. It went on to say:

"Businesses running SAP often use the system as the backbone of their operations, and expressed serious concerns over the potential financial risks of SAP technical issues.

Nearly all businesses – 96 percent – warned that they faced financial risks if their SAP systems experienced performance problems. Over half said there was a "high risk" of such an event causing damage."
While that headline, excerpt and article, are certainly problematic for the software giant, it also presents serious problem for the wait and see crowd. Are these poor SAP customers not the "poster children" for dissatisfaction? Yet they are sticking with the Status Quo, because they Do Not Perceive A Better Solution, not because they are happy with the way things are.

It is also why some clients who have an optimal situation continue to search for ways to improve, and they buy not because they are dissatisfied, but because they have a strategy and know what they have to do to execute. A sales person, who is willing and knows how to engage with the above, will see the Status Quo, as a child would a candy store. The others who refuse to change their view of the Status Quo will continue to fight for scraps once the buyer declares his/her readiness. (No, that's not order taking; they still had to outsell the other waiter)

Change in itself is not the hard part, but the work that goes into understanding what the buyer's agenda is, why they don't believe better alternatives exist, and how to initiate the right reactions in the buyer. Instigating the same response from the buyer the waiters are waiting for, but earlier, without the crowd. (See Building The Better Question) The change has to occur in sellers not the buyers, because once the buyer becomes dissatisfied, and decides it is time for a change, it is too late, the only function you serve is to cut the price and take the order.

As mentioned above, change is hard for people, and that includes sales people. But not for everyone; back to the 80/20, there is that small minority that continues to challenge itself to improve, innovate, and take their game to the next level. The ability to look past dogma, the in view or royalties, and continue to look for a better way, even if it means abandoning outdated concepts or methodologies. This may be hard, but not impossible, consider the following.

On May 17, 2011, the results of a new study led by Harvard School of Public Health researchers, found that coffee can reduce the risk of certain cancers among men. The same institute that in 1981 found a links between drinking coffee and cancer. They could have opted for the Status Quo, but instead continued to challenge themselves to explore, evolve, grow and move on. Can you?

Death Of A Salesman 2.0?

Ah, the poor 21st century sales professionals, if he/she is not getting it from their manager, they are being squeezed by what he thought was a “loyal” customer, wringing yet another concession to ensure they keep the business. As if all that were not enough, there is always a sniper, pundit or sales expert ready to threaten their existence and value. One such "end is near" piece was on SellingPower.com, entitled "**How Many Salespeople Will Be Left by 2020?**"; according to which the species will be all but extinct by the end of this decade.

While I think it is important for experts and pundits to challenge sales people to stretch and evolve, to stay on top and ahead of evolving trends and technology, it is also important to keep it real. Since the advent of technology, especially from the start of the last century on, there has been a debate about the impact of technology on selling and sellers. The recurring prediction that sales people will be replaced or diminished in importance by automation, seems a favourite among some.

Technology no doubt brings levels of efficiency that will make selling different and impact the interaction between sellers and buyers. And while this discussion is important, it also needs to be real. It is important that we pundits help and contribute to the process of evolution, rather than impede or distract with outlandish statements that serve a narrow and self-serving agenda.

The piece starts and builds from a question asked by the author at Sales 2.0 conference, relating to acquiring books from Amazon.com, and interaction with Amazon.com staff.

For me, and for all professional sales people, the piece has some short comings, not the least of which are it fails to address or distinguish the real difference between B2B and B2C; it fails to differentiate between transaction – interaction – purchasing and selling.

If there is the dramatic reduction in the species that the piece suggests, it is almost certainly to come in the B2C camp, not in the B2B. Buying a book from Amazon is as retail as it gets, even more so than the drive through at SONIC℠. There is a great difference between selling and buying, and more so between buying/selling and fulfilment, which is what Amazon does when it comes to books. The book was sold by the author, publisher, pr firm, Oprah, and these days social media, but Amazon, they just delivered it. Most people these days will go in to B&N look at the book, compare and then transact using the fulfilment facilities offered by Amazon, There is no more selling by Amazon there than going to your local Piggly Wiggly® for a tube of toothpaste. Just look at how Piggly Wiggly® describes itself on their site," America's first true self-service grocery store, was founded in Memphis, Tenn. in 1916 by

Clarence Saunders." Not much new there, it has been going for 100 years; the store has just shifted to my screen.

As for the statement: "Gartner, a research organization, predicts that by 2020, 85 percent of interactions between businesses will be executed without human intervention. It is likely that of the 18 million salespeople in the United States, there will be only about 4 million left." Gartner quotes interactions not sales. EDI has been around for a long time facilitating interactions between business, with the victims being more inventory clerks than B2B sales professional. Even when you look at concepts like Vendor Managed Inventories, the reduction in bodies have been related to warehouses and accounts payable staff than in the sales people who sell the service to begin with.

While we are all impressed with Watson's success, that is a long way from creating demand, generating leads, dealing with all the variables that human interactions involve when it come to risk, money and emotion. I am not sure Watson answered complex questions as much as to chew through reams of data with breakneck speed. Dealing with a buyer afraid to pull the trigger on a change that is good for the company. Or responding and managing to emotionally based "objections", are the same as searching a database at any speed. For an interesting examination of this read a **Slate.com** piece: **Jeopardy, Schmeopardy, Why IBM's next target should be a machine that plays poker**. By Chris Wilson, Feb. 15, 2011
Another puzzling aspect to this is that the same people who seem to harp on relationships, and "people buy from people", seem to be the ones supporting the disappearing sales person view. I don't claim to be an expert, but how does Watson fit into the social selling world of the future?

An altogether more practical view of the issue was presented by Jeffrey Gitomer, in a piece in his July 5th edition of Sales Caffeine, in a piece titled "**Death of a Salesman! How alive are you?**" He not only distinguishes between retail and B2B, but expands on the impact on the economy should all these sales people disappear. Rather than discussing how we will be replaced by machines, he outlines the advantage and opportunities presented to B2B sales people in the future.

The reality is that computers will continue to replace transactions, order fulfilment, and other commercial interactions between companies; they will continue to bring efficiencies to selling in many forms, but when it comes to B2B sales, both for mission critical and discretionary offerings, they will remain a companion not a replacement. It is true that sales people, like the products/solutions they represent will need to continue to add increasing value if they are to remain in the profession. But for those who do, the future is more than bright, and more importantly rewarding. For should it come to pass that our ranks are reduced by 75%, the remaining 25%, to quote a friend "will not only be in great demand, but be filthy rich due to our abilities".

I know that as pundits it is our role to deal with issues in an exaggerated fashion to make an important point. To do that, perhaps the question leading to the premise of the article should have been: "How many conference sponsors have bought sponsorship online; how many of you have done that without speaking to a conference rep?"

Mine the Gap!

A couple of months ago in The Pipeline, I published a piece called **Long Live The Status Quo**, which challenged the way most people look at buyers commonly referred to as being in Status Quo Zone. The core of the argument being:

*Status Quo is **NOT** buyers who are **perceived** to be happy with their current solution and see no reason to change, but rather as buyers who have yet to be presented with a solution they perceive will improve or change their current circumstance, and as such see no reason to change. **Given the solution, a reason to change, they will change.***

One question that many had was how does one initiate the process of getting someone who is ostensibly "all set" to enter in to a discussion around buying something. The simple answer is you don't, or you can't. You have to let them get to that on their own. But you can do things to create an environment that will help them get there, you can do things that will get them to Engage, and then take them through the rest of the EDGE process:

You are all familiar with the old "Objects in motion tend to stay in motion…objects at rest tend to stay at rest." This is why the "let's wait" school fails; they see a prospect "at rest" and respond leaving it "at rest"; sure doesn't take long for nothing to happen, that's not selling. Selling be to understand which of the potential prospects "at rest", could be Engaged with and thereby set in motion. This can be done, but it takes work, it takes a tolerance to being wrong and CORRECTED, notice I did not say rejected. That is how most people see an initial negative response from a buyer, as rejection, rather than correction.

The work starts before you Engage, or even try, it comes in the form of understanding why you have won deals in the past; why you have lost deals in the past; and why some deals ended in No Decision, neither a win or a loss. Some have argued that you should focus only on you wins, which are important; but let's not forget that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." You need to look at the wins to better define what to look for in the future, but this may cause you to be slow in responding to changing trends. You need to look at your losses because they will show you what you can change in your game to lead to more wins. Lastly the "No Decisions" are key because they went some distance with you before things fell apart, you competition is likely not to revisit them for some time, which leaves you to explore how to possibly rekindle the deal based on what you are learning from wins and losses.

Armed with this information, you now should be able to list what issues people were looking to address when buying from you, what specific value they saw in you offering that made them act, (in exploring your losses you will also surface issues you missed or ignored that you should be incorporating into your discussions). With the lists completed, you can rank them, see where there is strong correlation, and where there is, you should rank those high in your plans for engaging a buyer. This should give you a list of topics a buyer will potentially be willing to at least talk about based on experience. This is what I call the "Dentyne approach", you know "four out of five dentists recommend". Well if four out of the last five shipping managers bought for specific reasons, addressing specific issues, delivered in a specific way, etc.; then it goes to follow that you have a good chance of engaging with the next shipping manager if you lead the conversation based on the list you created.

When you know what issues are likely to be on the minds of buyers, when you know where you have been able to deliver specific measurable and documented value to those buyers, (this is why you should always be collecting testimonials and case studies); you can start building a set of better questions. This in turn will help you take someone at rest and set them into motion, once in motion, you can move to selling them.

Given the solution, a reason to change, they will change.

First thing is to establish that the issue exists. Let me give you an example from my world. Having done the above work, I know that many sales leaders are looking for more prospects, more new revenue opportunities. Even knowing that, if I was speaking to a VP of Sales and asked like the "let's wait" crowd does, "Need a prospecting training program?" or worse "You need a prospecting training program". The answer is predictable, would not lead to Engagement or motion.

But if instead the discussion unfolded like this:

ME: George, I am curious, how much of your revenue comes from existing clients vs. new clients?
George: Just looked at Q2 numbers, about 85% existing, and about 15% from brand new customers.

There is your floor.

ME: And if we were to look at your plan going into 2011, what were the numbers you based your plan on?
George: We actually were looking to grow the base organically, to where it was about 75% of total revenue, and 25% would come from new sources.

There is you Gap, the 10% difference is opportunity to fully Engage and set things in motion. It all comes down to how you mine that Gap.

Mining the Gap involves a series of follow through questions aimed at getting the buyer engaged and thinking more deeply about the issue. By getting them to think about it, they will take on the issue. Think about it, the reason they are in Status Quo, despite their awareness of the issue, is that they have ignored it, buried it, "Status Quo'ed it", not because they are happy about missing their new business goals, but because they have yet to be presented with a viable solution, and have refused to deal with it. By mining the Gap, you not only surface the issue, get agreement that it is an issue, but can begin the process of Discovery as to the impact if it remains the same; or alternatively the possibilities if it were to be addressed.

<u>Given the solution, a reason to change, they will change.</u>

The follow ups:
Quantify – How do they arrive at the number/issues/thing being discussed? How do they measure things? Without understanding where the numbers come from, you could be walking on thin ice. This is even more important when you are dealing with things that are not always quantified. For example, if the line of questioning were around the quality and abilities of their front line sales managers.

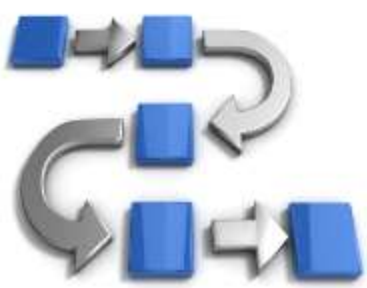
What do they attribute the Gap to? An easy way to ensure that you are on the right path with the right solution, but mostly it is to get them to think about it, if you don't get them to think about it, and leave them hovering on the surface of the issue, you're beat.

What is the upside, the IMPACT of closing the Gap, closing meaning achieving their original goal. Again, good way to understand their priorities, but also a great way to get them specifically articulate – Out Loud – the upside of success. Without that the effort and investment may not seem worthwhile, and it is usually the effort, not the money.

What is the IMPACT over time? Most solutions have a duration beyond one fiscal year, so when it comes to measuring ROI, ROE, it is important that they understand the full scope of the benefit. Using the example above, if each rep trained was to stay with the company 5 years, and as a result of the training they generated $10,000 per year, the total return per rep is $50,000, and any measure of success should be based on that figure.

Done right, you would find the Gap for each of the issues on your Dentyne list, and go through the Gap process for each of those questions before you even thought about closing or moving to the next step. The reality is that what makes the process a challenge for most is not the upfront work, which does take effort, but the ability and willingness to ask the penetrating questions that pierce the Status Quo, and lead to Engagement. As with most things in sales, it is down to the execution.

The Process Difference



A process generally describes the act of taking something through an established and common methodology, a set of procedures or steps, to convert it from one form to another, such as processing paperwork to get into collage, processing milk into butter, or in the case of sales, converting a prospect to a client. A process involves steps and decisions in the way you executed, usually unfolding as a sequence of events, (not to confuse things, not always sequentially).

Some have argued that the process one follows can be as important, if not more important, than the results or outcomes achieved through the use of the process. This is especially true when you need to achieve those results in an ongoing or continuous fashion, where the process needs to be repeatable and lead to the desired results consistently. Without understanding the underlying process, it is difficult to know how a specific set of results were achieved, or evaluate if and why they were good or bad. So, if we look at the desired outcome or result as the "destination", you can say that the process is the "roadmap" (GPS if you want to be appliance specific), that gets you there. The ideal is to be able to use the same "roadmap" for as many road trips as you want, with only a few variations or detours based on the desired "destination" or outcome!

Based on the above it is easy to see why people tend to talk about "a sales process", after all, as stated above, it is viewed as the process of converting a "prospect to a client". This may be conceptually or descriptively correct, but it is not exactly accurate if you have to sell for a living. Successful selling and execution is about process, but not a process. When, like many, you talk about "a sales process", you are misrepresenting what is involved and may mislead people. When speaking about it as "a process", you imply that it is somewhat linear and sequential in nature; this is far from being true or accurate.

Sales at its simplest, is a number of processes unfolding simultaneously, not always in parallel or in combination, and not always sequentially. It is easier to talk about a single sales process, but if you sell anything other than slices of pizza at the mall, you know that there are many moving parts, moving at the same time and usually in an unsynchronised manner. Each of these processes is a set of workflows; with contingencies driven by how each part of the sale unfold. Events in one process not only dictate which other processes will kick in, but when, and in what sequence. There is one process for identifying "suspects" and converting them to leads. You then have a process for nurturing those leads, another for converting a lead to an opportunity. Once that opportunity is qualified as a prospect, there is the process you go through to getting the prospect to take a viable proposal, and finally a process of converting the proposal to a closed deal, and client.

Based on how things unfold in any one of these stages, and remember that two similar sales could unfold in different ways and at a different pace. This is why when it comes to the overall sales process, repeatable does not equal identical each time it is repeated. Knowing how to balance and juggle the many moving parts based on the unique circumstances of each sale will determine you specific success. If you can accept this, you will give yourself an enormous leg up in sales execution and success.

Having a process is no guarantee for sales success, or superior selling every time, Execution is a big and equal component to sales success. But not having a process is almost always a guarantee of no sales success, even when you execute with gusto and focus, you are much less likely to succeed. One example is prospecting, specifically cold calling for appointments by phone. I know many think that this activity is extinct or obsolete, especially in these days of Sales 2.0; I can tell you it is not, and is still part of the tool kit for successful B2B selling. Those who say cold calling is dead, say so because they want to avoid it. They want to avoid it because they have no success in Executing it. Their lack of success can be directly attributed to a lack of process/methodology. Let's look at it more closely.

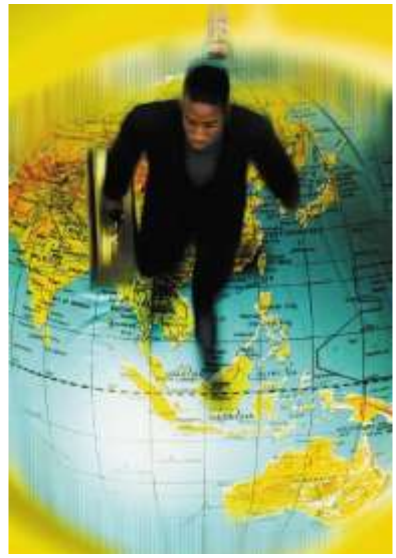
Talk to most people who don't cold call, or don't do well at cold calling, or don't like to, ask them why, and at the top of the list is fear of rejection. Why rejection, because they know it is inevitable. Yet rejection is no more prevalent in the cold calling phase of the sales than is in closing an engaged buyer. According to Sales Benchmark Index, "the median performance (across all industries) for B2B selling on the conversion metric for SQL (Sales Qualified Lead) to Close is 11-15%". Well people who use our cold calling process secure appointments with 16.6% to 20% of the people they speak to. Not that different, yet I have yet to hear a rep say "I don't want to sell to or propose for fear of rejection." Why, because they have a process to follow in selling to an SQL. They execute the steps, workflows, bring contingencies to bare when needed; use the process to evaluate situations and then respond in specific ways based on process and experience. We eliminate obstacles, or even prospects again based on the process or processes pertaining to the situation.

With an engaged buyer or SQL, you have a GPS that allows you to plan routes, react to detours and get back on track towards your destination in an efficient and timely way. Most cold call deniers lack a process. They do not have a roadmap, never mind a GPS, rejection is as inevitable as getting lost when you head somewhere you have never been without a roadmap and proper preparation.

Next time you face a challenge in your selling, especially when it is a recurring challenge, ask yourself which process needs to be executed, if you lack a process it is worth the time invested in not only creating one, but adhering to it, executing it and updating it on an ongoing basis. The investment will not only increase your sales, reduce your sales cycles, and if you are a company, attract a better quality sales force.

The Expert!

The conventional wisdom in sales is that the more trust you establish the more likely you are to succeed with buyers who "trust" you. Few would argue with the underlining premise, where chorus of options swells is when it comes to how, and when.



The two, how and when, are tied together because it is clearly easier to establish and build trust over time, assuming you get that time. The reality is that often sales people do not have the advantage or luxury of time needed to establish trust. They are regularly thrust into situations where they have had no prior contact with a buyer, but still need to build enough trust where the buyer will fully engage, and ultimately buy. So what is an average or slightly better, sales professional to do? There are a number of ways to go about creating, building and maintaining trust, depending who you read. Below is one I have used and have helped others to establish trust in a hurry rather than over time.

The proven methodology we use and recommend revolves around one key element, your ability to present and firmly establish yourself as an expert. So far so good, we get buy in from most sales people on this, but mostly in the wrong way and for the wrong reason. The big "wrong" or hurdle, is in the type of expert they profess to be.

The biggest challenge is that most sales people are in to being the expert; where we part company is when they hear me say that they need to be an expert in something other than the product or service they sell. Rather, we want them to be an expert in an area of specific concern to the buyer rooted in business not in product or deliverable. While many will say "exactly, which is why the product is important", the reality is that more often than not, the product or service we sell is part of an overall issue the buyer is dealing with. Your solution may be one of three or four things that make up the broad solution the buyer is seeking, by being an expert at only one, you bring little or limited value, and even if you were the recognised global expert in that area, you would still only address a part of the issue.

The expert you need to become is an expert that can address and resolve the overall issue, talk to the value, implementation and ultimate impact of what the buyer is looking at. Not just an expert on one element, especially when there are other "experts" in the mix.

If you can step away from your product and offering, and develop an expertise in the larger, business area the client is working through. If you think about why people buy, in general:

- Avoid or Mitigate Risk
- Financial
- Productivity
- Efficiencies
- Self Interest

Being an expert in how the buyer should deal with the above is the goal, you need to develop and present yourself as that kind of expert, not a product expert. As a product expert you limit yourself to a small component, a deliverable, not a solution. When you get the buyer to see you as the foremost expert in their business issue, you not only gain expert status, but also create a dependence from the buyer, who will take your expertise in that business area, and look to you as an adviser moving forward. They will look to you for further advice on "your area of expertise", but other related issue, which not only opens the door for your product, but also build trust for the current purchase and future ones.

Yes, the question is how? Well it does take a bit of work, but if you are engaged in your market, you are likely doing much of what needs to be done already, and can easily refocus and fine tune to leverage.

Take a look at specific buyers and understand what it is they are trying to accomplish. This should be done from their vantage point, their language and their filters. As an example, most people who engage with me are not looking for sales training. They are usually trying to address things like market share, competitive advantages and strategies, shareholder value, improved forecasting, many things that training impacts, but it is not about the training.

Similarly, with a buyer who is looking to gain productivity, while improving their company's environmental profile, information security, extend the life of an asset, and reduce receivable periods. Doesn't matter what the product is, if you can't relate to these issues, you will be relegated to product expert, not an expert who can help with their bigger business issues. Often the buyer doesn't look at it in terms of which product is delivering what, but rather who can help me address the issue on the table, be that pain or opportunity.

How do you get to where you can speak on these terms rather than product expert terms? Just look at what you buyers were trying to solve when you first engaged. Looked at where and why you lost, and where and why you won. You should also look at those that went to 'no decision", understand what they were trying to address when they began. There may have been "no decision" not because there was not a suitable product, but there was no suitable overall business solution, or at least there wasn't one clearly articulated. Look at deals you were involved in over the last 12 – 18 months, depending on the size, nature and length of your sales, since much of the data and info captured was based on your old filters, you will likely have to supplement this by interviewing buyers, their internal stakeholders from all three categories above. Focus on the big picture not the cogs. What were they trying to achieve, not so much how they achieved it. A picture should emerge, now you are ready to develop, formulate and present you specific and proven expertise.

Add to the above a healthy dose of information available to you in the social space, internal resources, i.e. speak to your CFO to understand their view of the world, and you'll forget product.

To validate that the process is working for you, just ask your client if they see you as a vendor supplier or advisor. If they say supplier, keep working. If they say adviser, keep working, but at least you are working as an Expert.

Strategic or Tactical Sales Training?

A lot of sales improvement programs start at the strategic level and go light on the execution, the tactical side – the "how do I do this?" While this may seem to be intuitively the right and noble way to go, in reality it yields less results than approaching things the other way around; that is leading with the tactical, the tactics of "how to…" Unless you run your sales force as a military unit - with all the command lines, discipline, and rules - you will always face the challenge around the balance between strategy and execution or tactical aspects of sales success. This challenge is even more pronounced with sales training or education, do you build your training around your strategy; or do you deliver training focused on the tactical aspects of driving that strategy forward?

While the logical answer may be a combination of both, my experience has shown that with few exceptions, when it comes to front line sales teams, it is more effective to focus on changing the tactical. Get them to change their tactics, this usually compels them to seek and implement a strategy in the process. The fact is that one can buy in to a strategy without changing their behaviour, leaving results the same; change behaviour – and you change results, which allows you to drive your strategy.

This has both to do with the nature of sales people and the way adults with day jobs (this would exclude the career students). Many sales people view strategy as out of their control or domain, unless directly tied to their day-to-day activities and rewards, they see it as just talk, and generally something for executives or leaders not for the frontline. While sales consultants spend a lot of time working with the leadership on strategies and how to implement them, there is an assumption that this will resonate with the frontline, who will buy into it and move forward. The missing piece is the fact that much of the output of this process is designed and presented for consumption by the executive, who see and define things in a way that is different than the way the frontline needs to relate to it, and make use of it.

This is a concept we are all familiar with when selling, speak the language of the audience you are addressing. Just as we recognize that we need to speak to a manager, a user, purchaser and VP in different ways, even when describing the exact same solution, the same is true for the sales organization. The VP of Sales will have a different view and a different need of strategy from the frontline rep, who in turn will have different tactical needs than the VP.

Consider many of the challenges faced by organizations rolling out CRM, getting low adoption, and by extension, low returns and advantages. The reason often given is that the CRM was sold to the leadership as a means of gaining greater control over and visibility into sales and the pipeline. No one would argue that this is a worthwhile endeavour, or the fact that most CRM's could do that, if there was enough of the right data. Many studies show that sales people were not told what is in it for them, how to use it on a tactical level in a way that helps them sell and gives management the visibility they require to monitor sales, market factors, and other elements they take into account in formulating their strategy for moving forward.

It is similar when it comes to training, while strategy is important to the sales organization, what sales people are looking for is a way to execute the sale in a way that helps their clients, themselves, and supports the organization's objectives and strategies. For the strategy to work, it needs to be executed, to be executed one needs to deal with the tactical aspects of the sale.

While it is not a question of one versus the other, it is a question of balance and what you are looking to achieve. Most sales leaders want their teams and companies to succeed, this is why they develop, hone and update their strategy in a dynamic way. While it is important to share that strategy with everyone involved, even customers, it is not, nor should it be, at the top of the frontline reps' priority list. The frontline reps' contribution to the success of the strategy is executing it, and that is what training should focus on. It is important for VP's and Sales Leaders to be aware of and involved in the tactical training of their teams, it is not up to them to go out and sell daily. In the same way, it is important for frontline reps to be aware of strategy, but core to their success and obligation to the company is the tactical execution; and that is what their education must focus on in order to meet their required contribution to the collective success.

Demo Is a Four Letter Word

This is not about bashing demos, but more about how many sales reps use, or misuse them, and the lost opportunities that result from the misuse. The fact is that many in sales love demos because they feel that it creates the sale for them; and while it would be easy to blame the rep, it is often part of the corporate approach. Many sales processes are built around the demo rather than discovering, deriving, driving and delivering value. Nothing is more of a throwback to feature based selling than selling by demo.

What differentiates a good demo from a bad one is the demo's timing and sequence in the sale. In most instances, a seller meets a prospect, they have the right title, a pulse, and agree that they have the time for a demo; once completed, they spend time and effort retrofitting the "needs" of the buyer to things that seemed to appeal to them in the demo. The net result is a longer sale, with more work, and generally reduced value for both the buyer and the seller.

The typical scenario is you get the opportunity to meet with a potential buyer, after a few obligatory questions, what most will consider and tell you are qualifying questions; three check marks, and a demo is offered up. All this before you have learned anything specific about the buyers requirements, objective, and here we are not talking about product objectives. We've all seen the example where the seller does not probe or explore beyond the obvious, beyond the range of their own product, after all, they took an appointment with a copier rep, so they must want a copier. Yet the buyer's objective could extend far beyond the obvious, and beyond the one demoed product, and to other potential services.

Rather than selling, this resembles more the routine of throwing enough demos against the buyers in the hope that some stick. This is especially worse when the demo consists of giving the buyer a free XX day trial. Same process as above, the variation is instead of just sitting through a 20-30 minute live demo, the buyer gets to test drive it for 14 days, then the rep comes back, sees if the buyer is ready to buy, if not, then they probe a bit more, hoping to uncover further information. It really needs to be the other way around.

I remember working with reps who would do the above, and when asked what they were hoping to get out of the exercise, the response was always a sales. But rarely did they have the results to validate the process. To be fair, the reps not only get pressure from their managers to provide demo accounts, but since the market has conditioned the buyers, they too want a demo before agreeing to exchange valuable insight.

A much better approach is to think of the demo as a closing tool, not a selling tool; a proof of concept that is the bow on the sales, rather than the heart of it. I remember selling information services, the market had been conditioned to expect a trial, and "then we can talk". The reps would return after the agreed on period (the better ones would actually call the buyer once, even twice during the period) to hear the buyer's verdict. I use the word verdict, because the decisions, and reasoning behind it was very much done behind closed doors, without the knowledge or input of the rep.

The preferred approach for me was to actually keep the product/service under wraps as long as possible, right to the end. The strategy was to spend time with the buyer, understand their objectives, buying criteria, buying process, qualify financially and agree on a solution. Once that was successfully completed, you could offer a demo under two specific conditions, first was that other than the demo, there were no barriers to the sale. That is if the demo did in fact demonstrate and address their criteria and delivered against expectations that were set, there was in fact a deal in place. The second was that if the demo validated 80% of the key criteria uncovered and agreed to, and there was a specific means of addressing the fifth, again the deal will happen. As stated above, the demo needs to be a proving point that seals the deal, not something that happens before any discovery or qualification takes place.

No doubt it takes work to do it the right way, but that is what selling is about. Furthermore, your close ratio on sales where the demo is the closer is always higher than when the demo is the "light show" before the sale begins. This is usually because the demo in the latter scenario often kills the opportunity, because it is not tied to any specifics driving the buyer; be that financial, productivity gains, efficiencies vis-a-vis time, individual interests or risk avoidance. It is a light show looking for an audience. If the demo is not directly tethered to the above factors and objectives, it is just a light show that requires you to work much harder as you now have to breakdown misconceptions, and still build the case for value.

There are a number of ways to uncover objectives and drive the value factors; we obviously like our **GAP Selling** approach. But real success lies in the sequence and execution, done in the right order the right way it adds value to all involved; wrong sequence just creates grind, risk, and lost sales.

Tibor Shanto - Principal, Renbor Sales Solutions Inc.

Tibor Shanto has been a sales leader for over 25 years, helping companies achieve and improve their revenue goals. Initially as a sales rep, then progressing to leadership roles with companies including Globe and Mail, Dow Jones, Factiva and Reuters. Tibor has been called a brilliant sales tactician, helping sales teams and organizations to better execute their sales process. As a principal with Renbor Sales Solutions, working with leading B2B sales organizations improving critical aspects of their sales cycle, including shorten sales cycles, increase close ratios, and create double digit growth through the execution of their strategy by using the right combination of strategic and tactical execution supported by metrics and our Follow-Through Action Plan.

For last nine years Tibor has worked with leading companies, helping them achieve sustained behavioral change and success, leading them to say: "We look forward to an ongoing relationship with Tibor, who for my money is Canada's number one sales trainer."

Tibor co-authored the award winning book on Shift!: Harness The Trigger Events That Turn Prospects Into Customers, (see below), and contributor to Office Technology magazine, The Huffington Post, Globe and Mail Report on Small Business, Today's Trucking, has appeared on Business News Network, CHCH-TV, and others.

Prior to Renbor, Tibor spent 10 years with Dow Jones; after launching their Canadian business and building a solid team and revenue base, with double digit CAGR, Tibor was appointed Sales Director for Canada and The Central USA. As Director of Sales Strategy, I developed a very forward thinking global Sales Training program and was instrumental in building their Client Solutions organization.

http://www.SellBetter.ca/Blog

@TiborShanto

http://ca.linkedin.com/in/tiborshanto/

www.youtube.com/sellbetter

www.facebook.com/Renbor.Sellbetter

gplus.to/TiborShanto

Tibor.Shanto@SellBetter.ca
Direct +1 416 822-7781
Toll Free (855) 25-SALES

Awards and Recognition:
Ranked 8th on the Top 30 Social Salespeople In The World – Forbes.com
Gold Medal Top Sales & Marketing Blog 2013 – Top Sales World Awards
50 Most Influential People in Sales Lead Management in 2013
Top 50 Sales & Marketing Influencers for 2013 – Top Sales World
Top 25 Sales Influencers for 2013– OpenView Labs
Top 50 Sales & Marketing Blogs 2012 – Top Sales World
25 Influential Leaders In Sales – 2012 Edition – InsideView
Top 50 Sales & Marketing Influencers for 2012 – Top Sales World
Top 25 Sales Influencers for 2012 – OpenView Labs
50 Most Influential People in Sales Lead Management in 2010
2010 Top 25 Sales Blogs – Top Sales World

We have been working with Tibor Shanto for a number of years, Tibor delivers practical and implementable skills based training that has directly impacted our results. Tibor took the time to understand our business and objectives and helped as develop a process which continues to help us improve sales and customer satisfaction. We look forward to an ongoing relationship with **Tibor, who for my money is Canada's number one sales trainer**. **Derek Clarke, Vice President of Sales, Braithwaite Technology Consultants Inc.**

"We started working with Tibor a couple of years ago; he has helped us in developing both a process for selling, opportunity management and related skills. One of the key factors in selecting Renbor Sales Solutions was Tibor's willingness to take time to understand how we work and tailor the program based on that. Once we implemented the EDGE process, Tibor worked with us in the months that followed to ensure it was working for us. This same type of follow up coaching also ensured that skills training was adopted and helping the sales team drive sales. I look forward to continuing our work with him. **Shawn Dearman - VP Sales & Marketing, Meyers Transportation Services & General Manager Mortrans Inc**

"Tibor managed to break down individual issues on my team that prevented people from reaching out and expanding their business. Since his integration with our team we have managed to add 2 of the top 20 firms in Canada in our vertical that we have wanted to work with as clients. We see Renbor as a business partner and look forward to continuing with other modules in their program." - - - **Warren Shapiro, Practice Leader, Brunel Life Sciences**

The real value of the program, as far as I am concerned, is the diligent follow-up coaching that has taken place, helping us to keep the momentum and address successfully the change management challenges inherent in driving a new sales approach. **Louise Villeneuve, Vice President - Business Development and Marketing, SCI Group**

"Renbor's approach and workshop was straight forward and practical, both our new and experienced account managers found it constructive, effective and easy to put into practice." **Clay Cocalis, VP Sales & Field Marketing TowerGroup**

The results from CCT Logistics' implementation of the "sell better program" have been superb! The program's understanding and structure of the sales process, with emphasis on cold call discipline, transitioning through to close, is unique because it creates internal visibility throughout our organization. **Ian Brooks, Vice-President Sales & Marketing CCT Logistics**

Tibor did a great job in working the 'price' issue that the attendees noted as the key roadblock to selling more fuel, by building in some sales techniques to promote all aspects of the fuel offer rather than dwell on price**. Bill Stait, Imperial Oil, Calgary**

Since implementing the training the volume of quality appointments has increased dramatically**.** I would recommend Renbor to any firm looking to improve your firm's ability to secure face to face meetings with prospects**. Jim Rovers, AFI International Group Inc., VP National Sales and Marketing**

"I would suggest that the training from yourself, played a part in getting the folks organized. The results of the training have been very beneficial in new sales captured during 2005." **Bob Meachen, North America Lubricants, ChevronTexaco**