UNLOCKS THE CRUCIAL PATH TO SELLING SUCCESS

SECRET COLLECTION OF SUCCESS STRATEGIES

Sandler Training
Finding Power In Reinforcement
# Secret Collection of Sales Success Strategies

## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prologue: Selling—Love It or Hate It?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success...It’s All In Your Head</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming the Negative Feelings of Rejection</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Things Salespeople Must Have</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Happened to the Motivation?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it Logic or Procrastination?</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Most Difficult Aspect of Selling</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Selling Mistakes that Cost You Sales</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Tough Qualifying Lead to Easy Closing?</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can You Shorten Your Selling Cycle?</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the Temperature of Your Prospecting Calls?</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “More Prospects” Paradox</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating Your Sales Message</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yesterday’s Accomplishments Won’t Guarantee Tomorrow’s Success</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Can’t Win ‘em All</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue: Aren’t You Tired?</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Success is the Result of Persistent Effort Skillfully Applied to Appropriate Strategies
Prologue

Selling—Love It or Hate It?

How many salespeople eagerly anticipate going to work day after day? How many truly look forward to calling a prospect or checking in with a customer? Not many!

Why is it that salespeople who were once enthusiastic about their jobs now view it as just a job—a way to make a living?

Why is it that the activities for uncovering, developing, and closing selling opportunities—that once provided both challenge and motivation—are now only wearisome tasks?

Is it the tedium of the work? Cultivate leads, make prospecting calls, check in with existing customers (who are always too busy to take your call), make more prospecting calls, schedule appointments (with prospects who are reluctant to meet with you), meet with prospects (and listen to their excuses and handle their objections), make more prospecting calls, attempt to track down prospects (who have apparently disappeared off the face of the earth), and—you guessed it—make more prospecting calls.

The list of activities may be a bit exaggerated (nobody really makes that many prospecting calls), but not too far removed from the week-in, week-out routine of many salespeople. While the activities still present a challenge, they provide little, if any, motivation.

Why?

Most often, it’s because salespeople lose focus on their ultimate goals and they neglect the pivotal element that facilitates the development of motivation.

What is the fundamental element salespeople are quick to abandon? It’s planning. More specifically, it’s developing and committing to a defined action plan for goal achievement.

If your daily activities aren’t guided by a plan of action that defines specific activities tied to specific goals, you may be
working hard, but you have no way of determining if you’re making progress...or falling behind. Instead of feeling motivated, you feel frustrated. It’s like taking a road trip to “somewhere” without a roadmap. You drive a considerable distance, but you don’t know if you’re closer to or farther from your destination. Perhaps, you’ve already passed it...and didn’t recognize it. So, you keep driving, in one direction, then another, wondering if the journey will ever end.

Without a plan of action, you find yourself jumping from one activity to another—few of which are actually completed. You feel busy; you look busy. But, you’re not investing consistent effort in any one activity. Consequently, you’re not creating consistent positive results from any activity. And that leads to more frustration, and eventually to the conclusion that you have to work “smarter.”

How do most salespeople attempt to work smarter? Rather than improving their skills and abilities with their existing tasks (which would be the “smart” thing to do), they add more activities to the mix. Then, they have more things to do than their limited time and energy permit. And, the results they obtain from the additional activities are minimal, at best, and often at the expense of accomplishments from other activities. Instead of accomplishing more and feeling motivated, they feel overwhelmed.

What happens when they feel overwhelmed? They begin to have doubts about their abilities, their previous decisions, and their futures. Doubts dampen their motivation and their enthusiasm for their work.

If you’ve been jumping from one activity to another, looking for a greater level of success, but rarely finding it, it’s time to change your strategy. A pattern of successful selling activities that not only provides adequate rewards for your efforts, but also provides the motivation to continually perform those activities, isn’t created in a haphazard manner. It’s created by working a plan that focuses on specific goals and identifies the key steps required to reach those goals.
Your time and energy must be invested in the activities that have a direct path to goal accomplishment. If you don’t perform some of those activities as effectively as your plan requires, you’re better off investing your time honing those skills rather than investing time and energy (and your hopes) in alternative strategies for which you neither have the time nor expertise.

If your sales career is beginning to feel like “just a job” or an endless road trip to “somewhere,” perhaps it’s time to revisit your goals and revise your plan for accomplishment to include only those activities that directly contribute to goal success. Then, make a resolute commitment to work the plan. You’ll find that the day-by-day progress (big or small) from working the plan will provide the motivation to continue the journey and begin to restore the enthusiasm you once had.
You Will Never Accomplish More than What Your Beliefs Will Allow
**Success...It’s All in Your Head**

Your mindset has more to do with your success than almost any other single element. There are plenty of salespeople who possess extensive product knowledge, have numerous influential business contacts, are well-spoken, and have appealing personalities, yet their sale performances are average... sometimes, only marginally acceptable.

Then, there are salespeople who have just enough product knowledge to get by, have few business contacts, don’t always articulate their thoughts in the most artful manner, and don’t have particularly sparkling personalities, yet their sales performances rank in the top ten percent.

How can that be?

Success in sales, or almost any endeavor, is not simply a product of one’s talent, education, personality, or contacts (although, those elements can surely help), but rather the result of one’s attitude—the natural tendency to have a positive outlook and maintain positive expectations.

But, it’s more than just being able to see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty. It’s the ability to see possibilities...coupled with the resolve to take the required actions to turn those possibilities into realities.

Some people will view a challenge, and after analyzing the positive and negative aspects of it, choose to focus on the positive. They see possibilities and envision success. The more they focus on the positive aspects, the stronger their belief grows about their ability to successfully meet the challenge. And, the stronger their belief grows, the more resolute is their judgment to take the actions necessary to achieve their goals. They press on, regardless...and they succeed.

Others, will view the same challenge and focus on the negative aspects—all the reasons (real and imagined) that the challenge can’t be met successfully. They only see limitations, and envision only failure. The more they focus on the negative aspects, the stronger their beliefs grow about the improbability of successfully
meeting the challenge and the futility of investing any effort in its pursuit. They give up, or at best, make a half-hearted effort...and they don’t succeed.

Your success is nothing more (or less) than what you envision it to be...and your determination to act in a manner consistent with that picture. If success has eluded you thus far, perhaps it’s time to change your picture, and then press on.
Overcoming the Negative Feelings of Rejection

There’s no getting around it...rejection is part of the selling experience.

Not every prospect you contact will want to talk to you. Not all of those who do talk to you will have enough interest in your product or service to grant you an appointment. Not all of those who do grant you an appointment will buy from you.

There’s nothing you can do about it.

While you can’t eliminate experiencing rejection, you can learn to deal with it. And, you can learn to overcome your fear of it. But first, you must identify what it is that you’re afraid of. Is it failure?

Everybody fails at something...at many things. Failure is simply part of the human experience.

And, success rarely comes without accompanying failures. Often, the greater the success, the greater the number of failures encountered along the way. Record-setting homerun hitters, for example, also have their share of strikeouts. Super Bowl Champion quarterbacks throw almost as many incomplete passes as completed ones. Grammy winning songwriters write numerous songs before one hits the charts, much less makes it into the top 10. In almost any endeavor, including professional sales, failure is just another stepping stone on the path to success.

You may never completely eliminate your fear of rejection, but, you can certainly learn to deal with it and minimize its negative effects.

How?

Put it in perspective. Rejection lasts but a moment, and then it’s over. Let it go! Dwelling on the disappointing experience serves no purpose other than to dampen your enthusiasm for meeting the next challenge. If a cold call uncovered a prospect who was interested in your service and was eager to meet with you, and subsequently bought your service, you would likely be enthusiastic
about making your next cold call. Should you be any less enthusiastic about making a subsequent call if the prospect had no interest, there was no meeting, and there was no sale? Of course not. There is no causal relationship between the two events. Each new challenge is just that…a new challenge.

Examine your self-talk. What do you tell yourself when you experience rejection? Are you telling yourself something like, “Nobody will listen to me” or “I’ll never be any good at this”? Blaming yourself for someone else’s thoughts and actions—lack of interest or inability to see the value in what you have to offer, for example—is counterproductive. Before you start “talking to yourself,” take a step back and analyze the situation from an objective position. Then, reframe your self-talk to something more positive. After an unsuccessful attempt to stimulate a prospect’s interest, for instance, rather than telling yourself, “Prospecting is a waste of time,” tell yourself, “I’m glad I didn’t waste my time with someone who isn’t qualified to become a customer.”

Analyze your actions. Rejection may be unpleasant, but that doesn’t mean you can’t learn something from it. Sometimes, the rejection you’re experiencing is a warning sign…an indicator of your need to change your approach, perhaps. Make sure that you are thoroughly prepared when you call on prospects and customers. Being thoroughly knowledgeable about how your product or service addresses their challenges, needs, and goals will reduce the chances of being rejected.

Understand your needs. David Sandler warned against using “selling” as an activity for getting your emotional needs met. You are much more susceptible to the fear of rejection if the objective of your interaction with your prospects and customers is to obtain their approval rather than their business. You must recognize that your self-esteem is not tied to your sales performance. It’s not tied to the number of appointments you schedule or the number of sales you close. You’ll have some good days; you’ll have some not-so-good days. Regardless, at the end of the day, your self-esteem is still intact.

Never make a call without doing your homework. Whether it’s a call to an existing customer or a cold call to a prospect, know what
you are going to say. Do the research and make sure your message is relevant to their situations. “Winging it” is the quickest route to rejection.

**Thoroughly qualify opportunities.** Before beginning work on proposals or presentations, make sure you have uncovered exactly what the prospects need and what they expect from you, whether they have the resources to obtain it and are willing to make the required investments, and how they will make their ultimate buying decision. Only then can you decide if you can put together a presentation that represents a best fit. Developing presentations **without** such information invites flat-out rejection or stalls and put-offs—a milder form of rejection.

Rejection is simply part of the sales game. Sometimes you have good experiences, sometimes you don’t. It’s not the experience that’s important. It’s how you think about it and how you react to it that determines if rejection holds you back or pushes you toward success.
Five Things Salespeople Must Have

While there are several factors that contribute to success in the sales arena, there are five things you must have in order to maximize your potential and the results you achieve.

**You must have a system**—a process for identifying, qualifying, and developing selling opportunities. Pursuing anyone who expresses a casual interest in your product or service is a poor investment of your time and energy. Even pursuing only those who have a real interest but not the wherewithal to buy it, or the ability to make a decision to buy it, is a poor investment of resources. In order to obtain the greatest return on that investment, you must be able to systematically qualify opportunities quickly using appropriate measurable criteria.

**You must have skill**—to implement your system. And, the most valuable skill is the ability to communicate: to get your point across—succinctly and meaningfully—using language appropriate to the situation; to ask meaningful questions that keep the conversation focused on topics essential to qualify the opportunity; and, to listen...really listen to not only understand the content of what the other person is saying, but the intent of their words, as well.

**You must have belief**—in yourself, in your company, and in your product or service. Because you can do no more than what you believe you can do, you must believe in your ability to tackle the job at hand and succeed to whatever level your skill and tenacity will take you. You must believe in your company’s intention to treat its customers fairly and fulfill its obligations to them. And, you must believe in the ability of your product or service to deliver to the customer the results promised.

**You must have the desire to improve**—even if you are at the top of your game. There’s a saying in the aviation world—*A good pilot is always learning.* The same concept is true in the sales world—A good salesperson is always learning...to be more efficient and effective: identifying, qualifying, and developing opportunities; representing his or her company; and serving
customers.

**You must have a 100% commitment**—to doing the very best job you can, and to providing the best possible service to your customers, your colleagues, and others who depend on you. Your personal value is not measured by the size of your paycheck, but rather by the quality of service you provide to others. When you are committed to providing the best service you can...all the people you touch benefit.
It Takes Action to Make Things Happen
What Happened to the Motivation?

Why is it that so many salespeople start their selling careers with a great deal of enthusiasm—truly motivated to grow, to succeed, and to advance their careers—and then, somewhere along the way, the motivation fades, and the “career” becomes little more than a job...a way to make a living?

What happened to the motivation?

Motivation is not a capricious feeling that comes over us when we least expect it or disappears when we most need it. It’s a feeling that begins, and is sustained, by a process which we control—a process that starts with, of all things, curiosity.

When you’re curious about something, like a new job, you want to know more. So, you seek out information—knowledge about the company, the products you’re selling and the customers to whom you’re selling them, as well as the competition you’re selling against. The more you learn, the more interested you become; and the more interested you become, the more you want to learn.

So, what brings this self-perpetuating cycle of growth and motivation to a halt?

At some point, usually around the one-year mark, you realize that you’re doing a fairly good job. You’re earning a living; you’re beginning to consistently make your monthly quotas; and you’re even giving advice to other salespeople. You still have the opportunity to participate in training and obtain additional education, but you don’t seem to feel the need. And, with family responsibilities, community activities, and of course, the obligatory (?) golf outings with your key customers, you can’t find the time.

Several years pass and the job has become just that, a job—something you have to do, rather than something you look forward to doing. Your five years of experience has actually been one year’s experience five times over. That’s because the moment you stopped learning, you stopped growing. And, when growth stopped, so did motivation.

So, how do you maintain motivation (or regain it if it’s slipped
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away)? You must continue to learn, to enhance your skills, and to gain knowledge about your company, your marketplace, and your products. When you continue to learn, you maintain interest, facilitate growth, and most importantly, perpetuate motivation.
Is it Logic or Procrastination?

On Monday morning, you look at your calendar for the week, and there it is, with a big red circle around it—a reminder that your territory expansion plan is due on the sales manager's desk by Friday morning. You’ve completed much of the preliminary work. But, you still have a dozen or so customers to contact, some figures to compile, and a spreadsheet analysis to prepare.

It would make sense to get the project finished, get it out of the way, and not have to worry about it all week. But, Mondays are especially hectic. You have a weekend’s-worth of e-mails to read and replies to compose; just as many phone messages to review and return calls to make. And besides, you have two pending deals to keep track of—deals you expect will close at any moment—and make sure they don’t get bogged down.

Without question, there are too many distractions for you to give your undivided attention to completing the territory plan. Logic would suggest that tomorrow would be a better day to finish it.

What happens when Tuesday rolls around? Tuesdays aren’t immune to phone calls and e-mails. And, you’re busy with other things. One of the deals you expected to close on Monday did indeed close. In order to ensure that the implementation of the sale goes smoothly, you have a number of follow-up activities to attend to. And the other sale you expected to close...you need to keep tabs on that, as well. It appears that there are as many distractions on Tuesday as there were on Monday. Perhaps, Wednesday would be a better day to finish up the territory plan.

You know where this is going, don’t you? Before you know it, it’s Thursday and you still haven’t finished the plan. Is Thursday a better day than Monday, or Tuesday, or Wednesday to complete it? No. In fact, it’s a worse day because now you’re under time pressure you didn’t have earlier in the week. Additionally, you’re frustrated and angry with yourself for putting the task off until the last minute.

The decision to postpone the completion of the territory plan from Monday to Tuesday, and from Tuesday to Wednesday was based
on the perception that each subsequent day would be less busy and would allow you to devote undistracted attention to the plan—a strategy which, logic suggests, would enable you to work more productively. But, was it logic, or was it procrastination cloaked by a self-serving perception?

The way you perceive the things around you has a direct bearing on the activities in which you choose to engage, which in turn, impacts your productivity. When you're making decisions about where to invest your time and energy, make sure that your perception of the situation reflects things as they really are...and does not distort them to support, at the expense of long-term productivity, a course of action that in the moment would be considered to be more desirable.
The Most Difficult Aspect of Selling

What is the most difficult aspect of selling?

- Accurately analyzing the growth potential of customers
- Creating an effective territory plan
- Developing an appropriate prospecting message
- Formulating meaningful qualifying questions
- Preparing responses for the inevitable stalls and objections
- Developing an effective plan to meet sales goals

While all of these represent a challenge of one sort or another, the most difficult aspect of selling isn’t included in the list.

After you analyze your market, develop a territory plan, develop and rehearse your prospecting pitch, formulate your qualifying questions, prepare responses to anticipated questions, and set some ambitious goals…you must take action.

And that’s where so many salespeople falter. They fail to take action—to implement their plans in a timely fashion. Some never get their plans off the ground.

Why?

The most likely reason is procrastination. Not the overt “I’ll do it tomorrow” type of procrastination, but procrastination in the guise of “fine-tuning” activities—tweaking the plan to get it “just right.” Double-checking territory figures. Rewriting scripts and questions. Recalculating numbers. The more tweaking they do, the more time they buy for themselves before they have to face the real-world challenges the plans address.

Not all “fine-tuning” activities are driven by procrastination. Some people have a need for perfection. They’re not ready to take action until everything is perfect…every contingency has been identified…every twist and turn predicted and appropriate actions planned. They put off implementation until everything is perfect. But it never is. So, the planning continues and the “doing” never begins.

Another reason salespeople put off implementing their selling plans is that planning and preparation are intellectual—“safe”—
activities. The results of their efforts are predictable…and they have complete control over the process. But once the planning and preparation is complete and they have to engage and interact with prospects, they no longer have complete control. The process now encompasses an emotional component—the potential for rejection. They put themselves in vulnerable positions where they have to deal with frustration, disappointment, and short-term failures. The process is no longer “safe.”

Selling success is the result of knowing what to do…and doing what you know. It requires action. It doesn’t require having a “perfect” plan, asking “perfect” questions, or giving “perfect” answers. Most often, “good enough” is, in fact, good enough. Putting yourself “in the line of fire” is what counts. Sometimes, things will go as planned; sometimes they won’t. But, as long as you’re in action, you’re in a position to make corrections when needed…and to succeed.
It’s Not What You Do That Counts; It’s How and When You Do It.
Seven Selling Mistakes that Cost You Sales

1. You don’t tightly target your prospects.
   When business is slow, the temptation to tell your story to whomever will listen is great. After all, talking to someone—anyone—is more productive than sitting at your desk waiting for a potential customer to call. Right?

   Maybe not.

   Be choosy about the people to whom you “tell your story.” Use your existing customer base to identify the characteristics of your best customers. With that information, develop a profile of your “ideal” customer. Then, search out prospects that most closely fit the profile. You may meet with fewer people, but you’ll close more sales.

2. You’re not sufficiently selective about the prospects with whom you meet.
   Expressing an “interest” in your product or service is not a strong enough reason to schedule an appointment with a potential prospect.

   Find out why prospects are interested and what sparked their interests before you schedule appointments.

   If prospects’ “interests” aren’t backed by recognized needs or desires for your product or service—now or in the immediate future—then there’s no compelling reasons to meet with them. The objective of scheduling appointments is to start the selling process...not to make friends or have pleasant conversations.

3. You don’t command control of prospect conversations.
   Prospects must not only have recognized needs or desires for your product or service, but they must be willing to discuss the reasons behind the needs or desires.

   To prevent the conversations from meandering in several different directions, make it clear at the time you schedule appointments that the primary objective of the meetings is to determine if your product or service is appropriate to meet the prospects’ needs, and
that the focal point of the conversations will be to explore and understand those needs.

4. **You’re not properly prepared for meetings.**
All too frequently, salespeople schedule appointments…and then forget about them until the day before the scheduled dates. For them, preparation is a last-minute activity often consisting of nothing more than a quick review of the notes from the original phone conversations when the appointments were scheduled…and perhaps a review of the prospects’ web sites, advertising, or marketing materials.

Can you answer the following questions about your next prospect appointment?

- What are the first three questions you’ll ask the prospect after you say, “Hello”?
- What questions will you ask to create rapport and get to know the prospect?
- What questions will you ask to explore the prospect’s need and home in on the underlying reasons for or events that precipitated the need?
- What commitment(s) will you ask for if there is a fit between what the prospect needs and what you can provide?

If you haven’t identified and rehearsed the questions you’ll need to ask to start the meeting, explore the prospect’s requirements, qualify the opportunity, and systematically move the meeting to an appropriate conclusion, then you’re NOT prepared.

5. **You neither establish credibility nor demonstrate expertise.**
When meeting with prospects, your job is to help them view their situations from different perspectives…and discover elements or aspects of their situations they didn’t previously recognize. To accomplish that, you must not only be knowledgeable about your product or service, but also about the specific reasons people would need it, the situations that would create the need, and the consequences of not adequately or appropriately addressing the
needs.

And most importantly, you must be able to ask questions in such a manner as to help prospects make those “discoveries.” Here’s an example:

When you asked your production manager to measure the injection pressure differential between the beginning and end of the production cycle and determine to what extent it contributed to the casting inconsistencies, what did he report?

Educating your prospects with appropriate questions that demonstrate your understanding of their problems or their needs and your grasp of what it takes to appropriately solve those problems or fulfill those needs is perhaps the single most important skill to master.

6. **You don’t ask “tough” questions.**

To thoroughly qualify opportunities, you must be able to identify core aspects of situations, define elements at the center of controversies, uncover root causes of problems, discover carefully guarded information, and obtain rarely volunteered commitments. You won’t be able to accomplish any of those tasks without asking tough questions.

And, you must be willing and able to ask those tough questions confidently and consistently, knowing that you may not like the answers you obtain...because they may serve to disqualify the opportunity. But, knowing sooner, rather than later, that continuing to invest your time will lead to a dead end will permit you to disengage and move on to seek out better opportunities.

7. **You rush to make presentations.**

Many salespeople are too eager to make presentations. They view them as opportunities to establish the value of their products or services by demonstrating their unique aspects. You can’t establish value, however, until you have determined which aspects, if any, are relevant to the prospects’ situations.

The real purpose of presentations is to confirm your ability to deliver the solutions prospects are predisposed to buy. How do
you know what prospects are predisposed to buy? You determine it by thoroughly qualifying the opportunities.

Until you have learned the specific reasons prospects would buy your product or service (rather than a competitor's), uncovered the resources they have available to make the purchases, discovered the criteria by which they will make their decisions, and (assuming you are willing and able to meet their decision criteria) obtained their commitments to make those decisions, you should refrain from making presentations.

Making presentations before thoroughly qualifying opportunities will almost surely guarantee that you leave those presentations not with decisions, but only prospects’ promises to “think it over.”
Can Tough Qualifying Lead to Easy Closing?

All too often, salespeople face a host of objections and delay tactics when they attempt to close a sale. It’s such a common occurrence that many sales training organizations teach courses on how to “handle” or “overcome” prospects’ stalls and objections.

The strategy for handling or overcoming them, however, usually comes down to a verbal wrestling match of sorts between the prospect and salesperson. The prospect states an objection; the salesperson responds with a clichéd statement; the prospect counters with another put-off; the salesperson offers another retort; and the contest continues until someone quits. The process is frustrating, time consuming, rarely productive, and completely unnecessary.

David Sandler advised that if you’re going to “fight” with a prospect, fight up front (before you invest time developing a proposal or presentation), not at the time when you’re trying to obtain a buying decision. The rationale for this strategy is twofold. First, if there’s a roadblock that will prevent the sale from closing within a timeframe consistent with your goals, or closing at all, it’s better to find out as soon as possible so you can redirect your efforts toward more viable opportunities. Second, if you wait until the end of the selling cycle, you’re less likely to maintain an objective perspective, and more likely to react emotionally to the prospect’s objections or demands as you envision the opportunity slipping from your grasp. And, reacting emotionally is rarely in your best interest.

By “fighting” up front, Sandler was referring to doing a rigorous job of qualifying the opportunity. That is, before you begin working on a presentation, make sure that you have thoroughly explored and addressed all of the elements that could give rise to an objection or a stall later in the process when you’re attempting to obtain a buying decision.

What should you “fight” about? Let history be your guide.

For instance, if you frequently have to chase prospects for their
buying decisions after you’ve delivered your presentation, find out early in the development cycle by when they will make their decisions, and time your presentations to coincide with those timeframes. If a prospect refuses to be “nailed down” to a specific timeframe, then perhaps you shouldn’t be nailed down to submitting a proposal or making a presentation. After all, if the prospect had any intention of doing business with you, why would he withhold from you his timeframe for making his decision?

Here’s another example. If, at the conclusion of your presentations, you are often pressured by prospects to make price concessions, you need to be more stringent discussing investment expectations before you begin working on those presentations. If a prospect won’t provide you with any financial guidelines for creating your proposal, then maybe you shouldn’t be creating one. After all, if you don’t have a number to shoot for, where do you aim?

Here’s a final example. If you frequently hear something like, “We’ve narrowed our choice to your company and one other,” followed by a request for one concession or another to sway the decision in your favor, make it a point to address the issue up front. Before you begin working on your presentation, ask your prospect how a final decision will be made if the choice comes down to two companies. If you’ve done a good job of helping the prospect define his problem to be solved or goal to be achieved, you’ve likely given him several reasons to choose your company. Nonetheless, you need to ask the question…and obtain an answer.

Review the objections and put-offs you’ve had to deal with in the past and make it a point to address the underlying causes of those hurdles with future prospects, up front.

If prospects are reluctant (or out-and-out refuse) to provide you with the information you need to develop relevant presentations and ward off stalls and objections, and you move forward anyway, you can count on having to “fight” later.

To avoid the fight, and to close “easy,” without having to clear hurdles and jump through hoops, qualify “tough.” Get the information—up-front—or get another prospect.
Can You Shorten Your Selling Cycle?

Almost all salespeople will agree that the shorter the selling cycle, the better.

Why?

Because long selling cycles have two negative consequences:

You’re less likely to be actively prospecting for new clients while you’re working on an existing opportunity. Consequently, your pipeline thins out, and if the deal you’re working on falls apart, you have fewer opportunities to fall back on.

The longer you work on an opportunity, the more emotionally tied to it you become, and the more likely you are to make concessions (which typically eat into profits and your commission) to keep it “alive.”

What are the reasons for long selling cycles?

For some salespeople, the amount of time it takes to secure an initial appointment with a prospect is excessive. For others, the amount of time spent defining and developing the opportunity is extreme. And for many, it’s the amount of time it takes to secure a decision after submitting a proposal or making a presentation that stretches the selling cycle beyond reasonable limits. (Can you relate?)

What can you do to close sales more quickly?

Here are five specific strategies to shorten your selling cycle:

1. **Don’t start the cycle unless there is a compelling reason to do so.** The initial contact with a prospect should focus on uncovering (or helping the prospect discover) Pain—a current or impending need or desire that can be fulfilled by your product or service. To accomplish that, you must have a prospecting message—30-second commercial, elevator pitch, or whatever you call it—that not only resonates with prospects, but also differentiates you from your competitors.

2. **Call at the top.** A big time waster for many salespeople is calling too low in an organization. They call on and attempt to develop opportunities with people who neither have final
buying authority nor play a significant role in the decision process. If your selling efforts must start at a lower level, it’s imperative that you quickly determine who controls the corporate coffers and who makes buying decisions. Then, you must make contact with them before you even begin to craft solutions.

**Deal with potential roadblocks early in the process.** If history and your experiences suggest that for a particular type of sale (perhaps defined by product, market segment, prospect profile, or implementation requirements) there are likely to be roadblocks to concluding the sale, bring up the potential roadblocks as early as practical in the cycle. Don’t wait for the prospect to bring them up in the form of objections or put-offs farther down the road. If there’s going to be a barrier to closing a sale, the sooner you uncover it and deal with it, if possible, the better. If the roadblock can be removed, you can continue the selling process. If it’s immovable, you can end the process, having wasted as little time as possible. Rather than waste time on a “doomed” opportunity, you can redirect your efforts to locating a more viable one.

**Disqualify opportunities as soon as possible.** Be as diligent qualifying prospects’ eligibility to become customers as they are qualifying you to become a product supplier or service provider. Have they explicitly expressed the need or desire to obtain your product or service? Are they in a position to invest the resources required to obtain it? Will they be able to make a buying decision in a timely manner based on criteria to which you have both agreed? Do their delivery and implementation schedule requirements fall within the range of your capabilities? If the prospect doesn’t measure up to your benchmarks, discontinue the process and find a prospect that does.

**Obtain firm commitments.** To keep the selling process moving forward, and the selling cycle as short as possible, each step in the selling process should lead to the next step in a predictable and mutually agreed to manner. If you expect your prospect to discuss a particular topic, share specific information, or perhaps, make a decision at the next meeting, then you must obtain his or her firm commitment to do so at the time you schedule the meeting. Failure to obtain such commitments will most often lead to the need for additional meetings, conversations, or correspondence...all of which only serve to extend the selling process.
If you start with the right people...for the right reasons; deal with potential problems in the early stages of the process; rigorously qualify opportunities; and ensure that you and your prospects are on the same page at each stage of the process, you’ll be able to complete the selling process in a shorter period of time...which in turn means more sales...and more commissions.
Selling is a “Contact” Sport.
What’s the “Temperature” of Your Prospecting Calls?

The temperature of your prospecting calls is determined by the temperature of the prospects you call.

David Sandler defined four “temperature” classifications of prospects—cold, cool, warm, and hot—based on criteria that suggest their degree of salability. Let’s examine each.

**Cold Prospects**

Cold prospects are prospects about which you know very little. Perhaps, nothing more than their names and locations. Technically, and more appropriately, they should be referred to as suspects. For simplicity, we’ll refer to all potential customers as prospects.

Suppose, for example, that you sell office furniture systems and you’ve driven past *ISO Technologies Corporation* several times. You know nothing about the company. *ISO* would be considered a “cold” prospect. The large single-story building could be a huge warehouse facility (representing little opportunity to sell office furniture)...or it could be filled with offices (representing a considerable opportunity). If, one day, you decide to stop in and find out what the company does and if they might have a need for your products, that would be considered a “cold” call.

**Cool Prospects**

A “cool” prospect is one for which, in addition to name and address, you have some other information about the company or individual. Perhaps you read an article in the business section of the newspaper about *ISO’s* plans to relocate the warehouse space in their current facility to an off-site location and convert the current warehouse space to offices. That information elevates *ISO* to a cool prospect. If you decided to call on them, it would be a “cool” call.

**Warm Prospects**

Let’s suppose that a current customer has connections with the
facilities manager at *ISO Technologies Corporation*. Your customer tells you about *ISO’s* pending warehouse relocation plans, supplies the name of the facilities manager, and recommends that you call him. The additional information (the name of the facilities manager) and the referral elevate *ISO* to a “warm” prospect. And, if you make the call to the facilities manager, it would be a “warm” call.

**Hot Prospects**

Sandler reserved the “hot” prospect classification for *existing customers*. Why classify existing customers as prospects? To remind salespeople that they should be working just as hard to keep their existing customers as they did to secure their business in the first place. He warned, “Your best customer is at the top of your competitors’ prospect lists.” He also suggested that salespeople should always be looking for ways to provide additional value to their customers. A strategy that will not only strengthen the relationships (and keep the competitors at bay), but also open the doors for additional business.

It’s important to recognize that the potential for doing business with *ISO Technologies Corporation* is the same whether they are initially classified as a “cold,” “cool,” or “warm” prospect. However, the ease (and probability) of making the sale (measured by time and effort required), increases with the prospect’s temperature rating. That is, in most cases, it’s easier to conclude a sale with a warm prospect than with a cool prospect. And it’s easier to close a sale with a cool prospect than with a cold prospect.

What should become clear is that the more information you have about a prospect, the easier it will be to close the sale if the potential to do business exists. With the amount of information available online, there’s no excuse for not knowing something about the companies you plan to call or the people with whom you plan to meet (which means you should rarely have to make a “cold” call).

Don’t limit your information search to the prospect company’s web site (although that can be quite helpful). But, also check trade journal and newspaper databases. Perform a search for articles by
and interviews of the company’s executives. The more you know about the company or individual you’re about to call, the more prepared you’ll be to ask intelligent and relevant questions, and the more meaningful the resulting conversation will be. By doing the research, you establish your credibility and differentiate yourself (in a favorable way) from other salespeople. Imagine, for instance, beginning a conversation with a decision maker by referring to three points he made during an interview with the local Business Journal rather than starting the conversation with the more common “Let me tell you why I called” approach.

By investing a little time to do the research, you can increase the temperature of your prospecting calls…and increase your chances of closing sales.
The “More Prospects” Paradox

Logic suggests that “more prospects” will lead to more sales. While that may be true for some salespeople, for many others, “more prospects” actually leads to fewer sales.

“Prospects” is undeniably the essential element in the sales process. However, the quality of the prospects and the pattern of interaction with them after the initial contact will determine if the sales process leads to closed sales...or closed files (and fewer sales).

What accounts for the difference?

It starts with the salesperson’s mindset. Some salespeople are of the mindset that “everybody’s a prospect.” These salespeople jump at the chance to tell their stories to anyone who will listen—voluntarily or otherwise...whether they’re truly interested or not. And, that mindset gives rise to two problems.

First, the salespeople spend an inordinate amount of time chasing prospects of questionable quality. Their quest being to convince those prospects that the product or service they have to offer deserves consideration. The more time they are in “chase” mode, the less time they have to develop and close sales.

Second, during the appointments they eventually schedule, they waste additional time attempting to “convince” prospects of the merits of their product or service. Their “convincing” approach (along with their “everybody’s a prospect” philosophy) fails to recognize the difference between a suspect (someone who may be curious about or have a casual interest in the product or service) and a prospect (someone who has a recognized need or acknowledged desire for the product or service).

Another element that accounts for the difference between “more prospects” leading to either more closed sales or more closed files is the process used to qualify and develop opportunities. The more structured (and perhaps stringent) the process of qualifying an opportunity, the more quickly suspects can be weeded out (wasting little time with them) and the more quickly opportunities can be developed and sales closed with qualified prospects. Salespeople
with the “everybody’s a prospect” mindset, however, are likely to have an extremely flexible selling process (which in some cases means no defined process at all).

If you want “more prospects” to lead to “more sales,” first, be more selective about the people you target as prospects and with whom you invest your time. Develop a profile of the “ideal” prospect derived from the characteristics of your most consistent and/or profitable customers and then target prospects that most closely fit the profile. Even then, when a potential prospect expresses an interest in your product or service, quickly determine if that interest is driven merely by curiosity...or an actual need or desire for the outcome your product or service delivers. Sometimes, it takes nothing more than a direct question like, “What specifically sparked you interest in...?” or “What are you hoping to accomplish by investing in...?”

Next, be more stringent in qualifying the various aspects of the opportunity. Prospects must not only have a legitimate need or desire for your product or service, but they must also have the wherewithal to obtain it. And, they must be in a position to make a decision in a reasonable manner and within a reasonable time frame—reasonable for you, that is.

When you focus your efforts on quickly identifying and weeding out suspects, and then use a selling process to methodically qualify the remaining prospects, “more prospects” will lead to more sales.
Communicating Your Sales Message

The first few moments of interaction with prospects are the most crucial. It’s in those instants that prospects form an initial opinion about the value of investing time, any amount of time, to speak with you. In the first 10 seconds of your interaction, prospects decide if you have something worthwhile to offer that is relevant to their goals or challenges...or if you are “just another salesperson” attempting to sell a product or service—someone most often dismissed with a “send me some literature” request.

What do you say in those first critical moments?

Communicating your sales message, and communicating it effectively, requires three closely related concepts working in concert.

What are these concepts? Stimulate... Differentiate... and Validate.

Do you say something that stimulates the prospect’s interest—grabs his or her attention? Do you make a provocative statement that gets the prospect thinking? Do you ask a thought-provoking question that serves as a springboard to a conversation? Or, do you recite a formulaic “commercial” that focuses the spotlight on your company, product, or service?

Prospects have heard all of the canned commercials before...and they quickly tune out anything that sounds like one. They don’t want to hear about your company or the products or services it provides...unless there is a clear connection between that information and a recognized need or relevant goal. You must make that connection first.

If prospects are going to invest even a few minutes to talk with you, the only thing they want to know is, “What’s in it for me?” How effectively you answer that question in a thought-provoking manner will determine if prospects grant you those few minutes.

Imagine a salesperson who sells solvent recycling equipment speaking to the CEO or CFO of a manufacturing company that uses a significant amount of industrial solvents in its fabrication processes. Which of the following statements is most likely to
stimulate interest and motivate the executive to have a conversation with the salesperson?

_It’s quite likely that as much as 90% of the amount your firm spends on industrial solvents and 95% of the amount spent to comply with regulations for the storage and disposal of used solvent is totally unnecessary._

Or...

_We are the leading U.S. manufacturer of fractional distillation solvent recycling equipment. We’ve been producing systems for industrial applications for over 17 years, and can configure effective and efficient turn-key solutions for any size manufacturing concern...including yours._

Did you choose the first? Doesn’t that statement, at the very least, arouse curiosity?

What about the second statement? The information may be important...but not until there is a connection to a relevant issue. (A connection the first statement suggests.) Until then, the information is just a collection of facts in which the executive is likely to have little, if any, interest.

Once a relevant connection is established, you must differentiate your product or service, not only from your competition, but also from any preconceived negative notions prospects may hold. How do you do that? Not by dwelling on the features and functions of your product or service, but rather by focusing on the beneficial outcomes your product or service produces. To illustrate that, let’s continue with the previous example:

_Companies often perceive on-site recycling initiatives to be expensive and complicated. Many are...but they don’t have to be. Unlike our competitor’s multi-unit systems with multi-step operations, our small-footprint systems are self-contained sealed units, designed for single push-button operation. The payback period for the initial investment is typically under two years. And, as I mentioned earlier, the subsequent savings on solvent costs are usually about 90%_
and disposal costs are typically reduced by 95%.

Next, you must validate the prospect’s recognition of relevance. Again, the focus is on beneficial outcomes for the prospect. Here’s what that might sound like:

Mr. Thompson, I don’t know if your company has ever seriously considered a solvent recycling initiative as a means of cutting costs and improving profits. But, let me ask you this: “Is it something worthwhile exploring? And, would it make sense to schedule an appointment where we could exchange some information and determine to what degree we could help you achieve the results we’ve helped other companies in your industry achieve?”

If eliminating unnecessary costs and improving profits are important, the CEO or CFO is likely to agree to an appointment.

If you want to get your message across in a meaningful manner—one that leads to an appointment rather than a request for literature—stimulate the prospect’s interest with thought-provoking statements, differentiate your offering in outcome-related ways, and validate the prospect’s recognition of the benefits of those outcomes.
Continual Success Requires Continual Growth
Yesterday’s Accomplishments Won’t Guarantee Tomorrow’s Success

Today, many salespeople find themselves operating in a more intricate sales environment. There are more players involved in the process of describing and defining the scope and requirements of the sales opportunity. Buying authority, in many instances, has been shifted “upstairs” in the organization where there are more players influencing the buying decision. Expenditures are being scrutinized more carefully by more people. And, delivery requirements are often more stringent.

In this more complex sales arena, the possibility for something to be overlooked and the potential sale to be derailed are greater than ever. Your ability to focus—and remain focused—is paramount. Your ultimate success depends on your ability to maintain a steady vision of your marketplace and your customers’ needs, and not be distracted by a variety of questionable possibilities (where you may not have the requisite knowledge, expertise, or deliverables) just because it seems like a good idea at the time.

Your success also depends on your ability to apply critical thinking to your prospects’ views of their situations, and then, using your knowledge and experience, analyze those situations and conceptualize ideas quickly and accurately. Today, being action-oriented is not automatically considered a virtue; your actions must be backed by accurate analysis and careful thought and planning.

In less complicated selling environments, many salespeople have been able to succeed by virtue of their personality traits or their technical expertise alone. But today, it is necessary to communicate with your prospects in a number of ways—face-to-face meetings, e-mails, phone calls, and group presentations—and you can’t rely on your personality or expertise to get by. The ability to express your thoughts clearly and concisely—verbally and in writing—is critical. Your careful analysis and recommendations are lost if you can’t communicate effectively.

The continuation of yesterday’s success in not guaranteed. To succeed in what is becoming an increasingly more complex sales
arena, you’ll need the skills to focus intently on your prospects and customers, accurately analyze their situations and relate their needs to your company’s core competencies, and effectively communicate the connections between those needs and your company’s deliverables. The greater the degree to which you hone those skills, the greater levels of success you will ultimately attain.
You Can’t Win ‘em All

How many times have you said, “Oh, well. You can’t win ‘em all”? It may be true that you won’t win all the sales opportunities you pursue, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t win them all. In the context of the saying, “can’t” is a destructive word. It implies that you are unable to win...that fate somehow won’t allow it. And, that mode of thinking provides a readily acceptable excuse for not being held accountable to the outcome.

If you don’t take responsibility for unsuccessful outcomes, but simply chalk them up to the notion that “you can’t win ‘em all,” then it’s unlikely that you’ll learn anything from the experiences. And, if you don’t learn anything from them, you’re destined to repeat them...which reinforces the negative notion. By allowing that manner of thinking (and justifying) to persist, it’s a short jump from “You can’t win ‘em all” to “You can’t win any of ‘em.”

So, what can you do to avoid coming down with “you-can’t-win-‘em-all-itis”? Approach every opportunity not only expecting to win, but prepared to win. It should go without saying that you must be thoroughly knowledgeable about your product or service. But, product knowledge is not enough. You must know enough about your prospects and the likely reasons why they would need your product or service so you can ask intelligent questions that help them connect your product to those needs.

Preparation means doing the research and then preparing and practicing asking your questions. It means mapping out your development process in advance so you can manage your actions and evaluate the results. And, it means identifying potential roadblocks and predetermining how you will deal with them should they occur.

Will preparation guarantee that you will win ‘em all? No. But it will guarantee that when you don’t win an opportunity, you’ll be able to identify the reasons why. And, knowing why will help you better prepare for the next opportunity and increase your chances of winning that one. So, even when you don’t win an opportunity, you don’t exactly lose, either.
Epilogue

Aren’t You Tired?
By David H. Sandler

Aren’t you tired of prospects who tell you one thing and do another...or sometimes do nothing? Why can’t they reveal their true intentions in the first place?

Aren’t you tired of prospects who don’t live up to their commitments? Why don’t they spend a little more time thinking about what they are committing to, so they don’t have to run and hide? Do they think that you’ll disappear and they’ll never have to face you again?

Aren’t you tired of prospects who change their minds, and instead of owning up to it, blame it on unavoidable circumstances? Don’t they know that at one time or another all of us have to face unexpected crises? If we delayed every decision because of an unexpected crisis, we’d never get anything done.

Aren’t you tired of prospects who say, “money’s no object” and act as if they can afford anything they want, and then when it comes time to make a decision, everything you recommend is outside of their budget? Why can’t they be honest up front? Do they believe that you’ll somehow manage to take advantage of them?

Aren’t you tired of spending time with prospects with whom you wouldn’t spend five minutes in a social setting? Why do they think their time is more valuable than yours? And, why do they take it for granted that you would even choose to spend time with them given the choice?

Aren’t you tired of listening to prospects’ stories about their past experiences, families, anecdotes, and triumphs? Don’t they know that they are not the center of your universe?

Aren’t you tired of scheduling appointments with prospects who have no intention of keeping them? Don’t they know that you value your time just as much as they value theirs?

And, aren’t you tired of prospects who are so self-centered that
they have no interest in creating win-win relationships, but only see themselves as winning if someone else is losing? Don’t they know that, eventually, no one will want to deal with them?

**Of course you’re tired.**

Yet, you carry on because you believe in what you’re doing. Because you believe “selling” is an honorable profession. So, you continue to set “stretch” goals that require you to expand your horizons, refine your strategies, and improve your skills. You continue to use available resources to face roadblocks head on and navigate around them rather than make excuses and look for reasons to retreat. You continue to wade through the myriad of wimps and whiners to find the prospects who need what you have to offer…and who want to become your clients. And even though you’re tired, you continue to chart your course, back it be unswerving determination, and achieve the success you rightfully deserve.