

1 *Selling ASAP*

If people like you they'll listen to you, but if they trust you they'll do business with you.

—Zig Ziglar

Research in client perceptions of the best salespeople—those who have earned the all-important *trusted advisor* status—concludes the following. The best salespeople have a good understanding of their clients' industries, ask great questions, are great listeners and “honest brokers,” and continually offer insights and solutions to their customers' business problems. Do your customers ask you for advice and respect your judgment about issues that extend beyond your professional expertise? If someone were to ask a group of your customers who they truly trust to provide ongoing solutions to their business problems, would you be on their list? Would you be in their inner circle?

With so many sales jobs available, why do so few salespeople succeed and so many others fail? What are the best practices in selling today? How can one obtain trusted advisor status in the eyes of the customer? These are a few of the questions that we attempt to answer as we provide a set of sure-fire recipes for sales success. This book is designed for people interested in joining the sales profession and for those who have had moderate success in sales but want to do better.

What Is Selling ASAP?

The title of this book is *Selling ASAP: Art, Science, Agility, Performance*. Some say that selling is the art of persuasion, but selling is both a creative and an analytical process. Creativity and spontaneity are keys to helping customers find better solutions to their problems. Deduction, observation,

and analytical skills are very important in professional sales, as they are in any science. The marketplace, business in general, and the sales profession are constantly changing, and creativity, critical thinking, and agility are needed to adapt to these changes. When selling is done ethically and sincerely, the salesperson becomes a trusted advisor to a client—a salesperson who listens, can be trusted, is objective, and can offer useful advice. *Selling ASAP* is a reflection of how selling is viewed today as both an art and a science, with an emphasis on practicing agility to enhance performance.

ASAP: Art

The first *A* in *ASAP* stands for *art*. Selling involves your unique style (art) of applying a systematic process (science) to understanding customers' needs and wants and matching the benefits of your product or service to their explicit and sometimes hidden (latent) desires.

Understanding How Buyers Buy

Understanding the uniqueness of each prospect/customer and how to adapt your communication and behavior to that prospect's preferences is the subject of Chapter 2. It lays the foundation for the rest of the chapters.

In order to motivate a customer to buy a product or service, you must empathize with the customer and understand how your customer's mind works. Take a moment to think about the reasons why *you* buy products and services. Are you always rational about your purchase decisions? Do you sometimes buy impulsively, based on emotion? Now think about the purchasing process as a salesperson. How do you appeal to your customers' sometimes rational and sometimes irrational desires to buy?

The focus of this book is on business-to-business selling—in other words, selling to not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. People who buy for organizations are often thought to be rational about what they buy, but they are people with emotions and impulses, just like everyone else. Skillful salespeople understand that in order to influence someone, they must be able to uncover the prospect's latent needs or wants and motivate the prospect to want to fulfill those needs or wants with the salesperson's product, service, and/or ideas. Skillful salespeople also recognize that the power of influence rests in the salesperson's ability to provide continuous

value to customers, engage in long-term relationships with them, and adapt to their changing needs and preferences.

The following chapter discusses the importance of knowing customers—from who they are to how they buy—as well as the psychology of human behavior as it relates to buying. We provide specific methods to help you understand the thought processes of your prospects and discern their buying preferences—things that are necessary for salespeople today if they are to succeed in sales.

ASAP: Science

The *S* in *ASAP* stands for *science*. Selling is a science because there are proven systematic methods that work. Selling revolves around the marketing concepts of segmenting and targeting potential customers, and then presenting your products or service to the right prospects at the right time. Chapters 3–8 uncover the science of selling. Each chapter builds on the previous one to delineate a scientific process that, when done correctly, will raise your probability of success in completing a business transaction and beginning the journey to a long-term, mutually beneficial business relationship with your new customer.

What Is Professional Selling?

Some people think of salespeople as being pushy and manipulative. To them, the word *selling* has negative connotations. It implies that someone (a salesperson) forces someone else (a prospect) to do something against that person's will. Some people believe that salespeople are fast-talkers with only one goal in mind: to take their prospect's money. People often say they feel pressured by salespeople, but think about that for a moment. When you last bought something from a salesperson, did that salesperson force you to buy it, or did you have an underlying need or want even before you interacted with the salesperson? Salespeople cannot force a prospect or customer to do anything; the prospect or customer must have some desire.

This book will demonstrate that salespeople who strive to build long-term relationships with customers cannot afford to be pushy, fast-talking, or manipulative. A focus on long-term customer relationships requires salespeople to adopt a lifetime view of their customers.

Taking a Lifetime View of Customers

Professional selling today requires taking a long-term view of customer relationships. The four facets of lifetime customer relationships are:

1. *Product holdings.* The products a customer has purchased and the products the customer currently has on hand.
2. *Product use.* How the customer uses the product and what value the customer derives from using it.
3. *Contacts.* The nature of the sales organization and the salesperson's contacts with the decision-making unit of a client-company over time.
4. *Events.* Occurrences in the life of the customer (e.g., birth of a child, new business opportunities, a change in competitive activity, etc.).

When salespeople collect and use information about these four facets of customer lifetime relationships, they are able to answer questions such as: How many customers have purchased product A? How many customers have purchased it more than once? What is the frequency of contact with customers? Which customers are most profitable? What events occurred prior to losing a customer? What customers purchase which products? What events typically precede purchases?

THOUGHTWARE

When salespeople can answer questions such as these, they put themselves in a better position to create, maintain, and grow lifetime relationships with customers. A key part of building customer relationships is, simply stated, truly knowing your customers. You must think of customers as partners in collaborative relationships designed for maximizing value to both the customer and you and your organization over the long term. Thus, you must develop *thoughtware* about your customers. Thoughtware represents the thinking process salespeople use as they continuously learn about their customers. For example, customers are often grouped by types of relationships, which provides the following advantages:

- Identification of significant events in the life of the customer.
- Avoidance of unneeded duplication of effort.

- Knowledge of loyalty patterns based on the type of relationship established with individual customers.
- Identification of cross-sell opportunities (i.e., finding additional products or services that can provide added value to current customers).
- Identification of up-sell opportunities (working with customers to upgrade existing products or services for the purpose of providing added customer value and solidifying relationships).

Customer lifetime value is not just a forecasting technique or a software package, but a way of thinking about and doing business with customers that emphasizes up-front preparation and profitable long-term relationships. Such long-term relationships are less costly than those formed under the traditional model, which emphasizes single transactions with customers and closing sales.

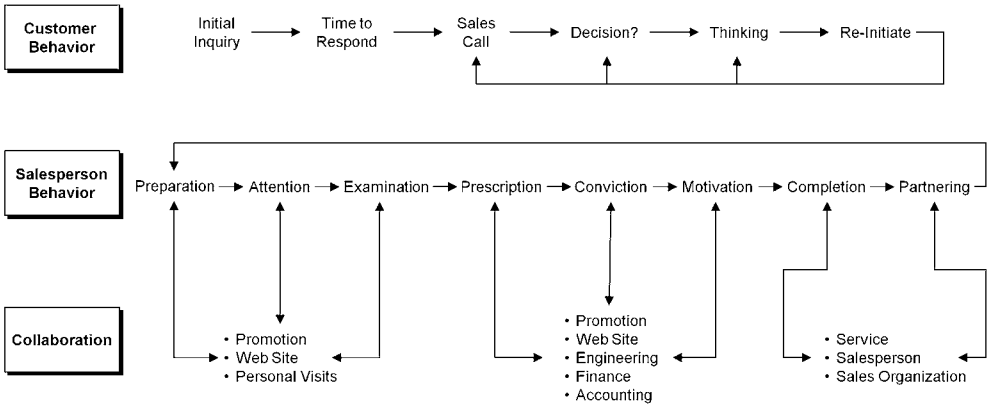
A Customer-Focused Selling Framework

Figure 1.1 demonstrates how salespeople interact both with customers and people within their selling organizations. The middle row represents the sales process. Briefly, the steps of the sales process are as follows:

- *Preparation.* How to identify prospects with a high probability of buying what you are selling, determine what they need and want, and why they need and want it.
- *Attention.* How to gain initial interest by making a positive first impression and getting the prospect to focus on your business proposition.
- *Examination.* How to ask the right questions in a powerful sequence to determine a specific customer's primary concerns (what the customer wants) and the customer's dominant buying urge (why the customer wants it).
- *Prescription.* How to present a solution that demonstrates your understanding of the customer's situation, problems, needs, and wants, which can either forge a new business relationship or strengthen an existing one.
- *Conviction and Motivation.* How to handle objections by effectively answering prospects' concerns and encouraging customers to purchase through the presentation of value.

- *Completion and Bartnering*. How to finalize the arrangements for the sale of a product or service that possesses competitive value in a manner that will delight the customer and lead to a long-term business relationship. [F 1.1]

FIGURE 1.1 A Customer-Focused Sales Framework



Here is an example of the sales process in action. A customer may tender an inquiry to the sales organization (e.g., a request for proposal, or RFP), or the selling organization may be proactive by engaging in marketing efforts targeted to certain prospects. An inquiry by the prospect may be answered by the salesperson, who initiates *preparation* activity, or by the promotion department, which sends materials via the Internet or invites the customer to peruse the sales organization’s website. Whatever the method of contact, the data obtained about the customer should be stored in the sales organization’s customer relationship management (CRM) system.

The sales organization can maintain communications with customers through face-to-face meetings, email, websites, social media, telephone calls, or regular mail. One goal of getting the customer’s *attention* is to learn more about their unique situation. The salesperson initiates an appointment with the prospect to undertake an *examination* of the prospect’s situation and to customize a solution that delivers value. Meanwhile, the prospect may be seeking more information from the sales organization’s website or from other vendors. The salesperson does more homework to develop a *prescription* for the prospect’s particular situation and makes a

sales presentation to show the prospect how the sales organization can satisfy the prospect's short- and long-term needs. During the presentation, the salesperson builds buyer *conviction* about the value of the product or service and *motivates* the prospect to begin a relationship with the sales organization (the step referred to in this book as *conviction and motivation*). Ultimately, the salesperson's goal is to *complete* a transaction and begin a long-term relationship with the prospect as a *partner* (the *completion and partnering* stage).

Sales organizations should utilize a Sales Force Automation (SFA) or Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to record all customer contacts so that various members of the sales organization (e.g., sales support) will have access to the information. Even when a prospect does not purchase initially, the sales organization should record all relevant information (name, method of contact, reasons for not buying, etc.) so that the organization's salespeople can use this valuable information in their attempts to create long-term relationships with other customers as well as with this one. Such business functions have been the hallmark of many marketing activities for decades. What is new is *how* salespeople are collaborating with each other, their customers, and other sales organization members to accomplish these marketing functions.

ASAP: Agility

The second *A* in *ASAP* stands for *agility*, a key component in selling today. Agility is dynamic, context-specific, change-embracing, and growth-oriented. Agility requires salespeople to be in continuous readiness for change.¹ In today's rapidly shifting business and customer environment, being agile is important.

The definition of agile is nimble, light and quick in motion, active and swift. *Agility* is defined as the ability to thrive in an environment of continuous change. An agile sales force is one that is quick to see opportunities, shrewd in developing short sales-cycle strategies, able to meet customers' individual needs, and capable, flexible, and fast at learning and unlearning. To become agile, you should strive to become as innovative as possible. One measure of agility is your ability to customize your product/service offerings to customers' individual needs, both in the first transaction and throughout the business relationship. Agile salespeople can differentiate

themselves to customers by integrating information from the sales organization and the business environment and garnering support from those in the sales organization.

The underlying theme of agility selling is the need to change and learn in order to stay up-to-date with changing market conditions. Salespeople must change what they do if they are to keep up with customers' needs and wants. Traditionally, salespeople have been responsible for activities revolving around the selling of products and services to customers. Today, however, the role of the salesperson is becoming much more broad as salespeople endeavor to incorporate a CRM focus.

Salespeople should not limit their thinking or their sales approaches. Agile salespeople continually analyze how things can be done better. A major challenge for salespeople is coping with information and making decisions in such a dynamic environment. How quickly can you adapt to a changing environment? Research shows that being "street smart" can facilitate selling in today's business environment.

Street Smarts

Salespeople who are street smart achieve a good fit between themselves and their environment.² Street smarts, also known as contextual intelligence, consists of the following skills:

1. *Adaptation.* Achieving of a good fit between oneself and one's environment. Adaptive salespeople are adept at reading prospects' underlying motives and goals, nonverbal cues, and emotions, and they are able to respond appropriately.
2. *Environment selection.* Choosing an environment that makes the most of one's talents and abilities. Salespeople have considerably greater control over their job environment than they might think. Choice of employer is one avenue of control. Choice of sales territory assignment can be another. Within a sales territory, salespeople can choose the customers on whom they want to focus.
3. *Environmental shaping.* Altering aspects of one's environment to bring them more in line with one's talents and abilities. Salespeople who can shape the values and priorities of their immediate supervisor, support staff, and upper management are in a position to be more successful than those who cannot.

Salespeople are boundary-spanners. You interact with people outside your company (e.g., customers and competitors) as well as with other employees inside it. As such, you are in position to gather information that can help your sales organization considerably in making managerial decisions. Through a prudent use of this informational power, you can impress management and significantly alter management's values and priorities. Also, because you interact with many customers, you are in a position to shape your customers' values and priorities. Two means for affecting customers' preferences are being prudent about what to say to customers and when to say it, and offering creative suggestions for how customers can solve their business problems.

Street smarts combined with agility selling can lead to improvements in sales performance.

The Four Os of Agility Selling

Today, more than ever, sales companies and individual salespeople need to be agile at both the personal and organizational levels in order to thrive in a world of continuous change. In his book *Business Blindspots*, Benjamin Gilad says:

Competitiveness is based on learning, which is based on the ability to listen: to customers, to consumers, to partners such as suppliers, or to competitors, to industry experts, and, most important, to one's own employees. The essence of this philosophy is so simple it is embarrassing. The competitive environment sends messages all the time: signals about change, trends, prospects, threats, and weaknesses. Early on, these signals are weak, ambiguous, and hidden. Tapping them and then learning from them is an art that requires open eyes, ears, and minds.³

One characteristic of agile salespeople is their ability to successfully disrupt the status quo—not necessarily causing chaos, but getting those around them to think outside the proverbial box. Agile salespeople must be skillful at implementing the following four Os:⁴

- *Observe.* Pay close attention to customers and competitors, and continually look for ways to improve individual and company performance.

- *Orient.* Think about how your observations will affect current and future business.
- *Opt.* Decide which issues to pursue, based on your observations, and how to pursue them with the appropriate support people in the sales organization.
- *Orchestrate.* Act! Don't procrastinate. Time is of the essence in agility selling. Often, major account salespeople are looked upon to orchestrate and lead the sales and support activities of the selling organization to anticipate and meet key accounts' needs.

In a business context, salespeople who can perform this sequence faster than their competitors become more attractive to customers and can achieve a competitive advantage. Too often, salespeople base their decisions on a limited, out-of-date knowledge base built on previous experience. In a fast-moving business landscape, this is a dangerous practice; what worked well last year may no longer be applicable today. You need to have up-to-date intelligence—that is, knowledge and experience—to use as the basis for your decisions.

*The Need for Speed*⁵

Speed in decision making is becoming vitally important. Response time is critical to customers and directly reflects how customers perceive an organization's customer service. Salespeople should aim at making their products/services more attractive to the ultimate judges—current customers and potential new customers. Every time a customer decides to buy something, a competitive assessment takes place. Customers do not necessarily take the lowest-priced product or service; rather, they look for what they *perceive* will give them the best value and/or best meet their short- and long-term needs. Every sale, therefore, is made against some competitive force. Just as profit can be a byproduct of success, rather than an end in itself, a salesperson's agility can have an impact on competitors, even when that is not the primary goal.

Agility is a concept useful to all salespeople. To be agile, you must be adept at identifying the different levels of change that will confront you. When facing change, be adaptable in such a way as to employ organizational resources to offer workable solutions to customers' business problems. However, you must also be agile in the sense that you are creative

in applying organizational resources, with speed, to customize solutions that solve short-term problems while simultaneously thinking of the longer term.

Customer Expectations

These days, customer expectations and preferences are ever-changing and ever-increasing. In particular, customer expectations are increasing in relation to salesperson knowledge, speed of response, breadth and depth of communication, and customization of information, products, and services. As customers expect more, successful salespeople are no longer able to use the first sales call to gather information that can be obtained using other readily available sources, such as what is in the public domain online. Technological advances have increased the expectations of customers regarding how—and how quickly—salespeople respond. Customers expect customized solutions and, indeed, co-created solutions that best meet their needs. These rising expectations are a part of increased market turbulence. Market turbulence is the rate of change in the composition of customers and their preferences. Sales organizations operating in turbulent markets are likely to have to modify their products and services continually in order for salespeople to adapt satisfactorily to customers' changing preferences. With rapid market change, salespeople face a constant challenge to learn new products, new sales techniques, and new sales strategies, and they may have to unlearn old sales strategies that are no longer viable.

In these changing times, you must ask yourself the following questions: Am I becoming obsolete in any way? Or could this be the time in my career when I am ready to embrace change and perform at a higher level?

Competitive Advantage

Agility is a way of competing. For firms to be agile, their workforces must be agile. For the agile salesperson, agility is not something that just happens. It is *made* to happen. Agile salespeople learn when they take time to examine how things are done, and they do not wait for problems to emerge or for customers to indicate they have changed their needs or preferences. Agile salespeople continuously reflect on what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. Such reflection becomes a behavioral norm that enables agile salespeople to question assumptions and seek out solutions to problems. Agile salespeople also recognize that agility is not the culmination of

a process. Rather, it is a process. Agility will always change because marketplace changes are always occurring.

Agility is a trainable skill. Salespeople can learn the types of change and how to respond proficiently. They can learn to offer, quickly, solutions to unanticipated change. Agility is based on knowledge levels, on a willingness to learn, and on various organizational support activities that should be forthcoming if the organization aspires to be agile. A fascinating aspect of agility is that its meaning is ever-changing. Agility is about responding to the unexpected with speed. Responding to the unanticipated requires unplanned responses that might extend the frontiers of sales practice.

Access to knowledge about customers and the business environment is a critical factor in developing agility. The knowledge stored in a sales organization's databases and in a salesperson's memory is the lifeblood of agility. A salesperson's ability to manage, analyze, and communicate information to customers is a base requirement for survival. But it is also a source of competitive advantage, especially if it allows salespeople to reduce the time needed to proceed from observation of problem situations to orchestration of customer-focused solutions.

ASAP: Performance

The *P* in *ASAP* stands for *performance*. You must consistently perform at a high level over a long period of time. Sales performance has been a requirement of the profession from the very beginning. What is different now is the multitude of ways in which sales performance is measured. Selling is not just about making sales or achieving a quota; it is also about an emphasis on continuous learning and on maintaining long-term customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. It is about becoming the customer's trusted advisor.

Measuring Sales Performance

Given the rapidity of change, the increased need for learning, and the need for building long-term relationships with customers, selling, in a sense, has changed. As sales organizations emphasize customer relationships, many aspects of the sales job—including customer satisfaction, sales growth, new product success, and profitability—are taking on more importance as salesperson performance measures. Table 1.1 lists some performance mea-

asures being used today by sales organizations. For sales companies that are learning-oriented, traditional outcome-based measures of performance, shown on the right side of Table 1.1, are inadequate.

Sales companies that measure results by employing only outcome-based measurements, such as sales volume, require very little monitoring of salespeople. Little managerial direction is needed, and the measures of results are straightforward. Such companies focus on the results of effort and wait for those results to send signals to salespeople about how they are performing. If the results are inadequate, changes are made. But these outcome-based measures are retrospective, providing little insight into what the salespeople can do *during* the sales cycle to advance the sale and build the business relationship. Thus, little learning occurs. For example, if a salesperson's revenue declines by 10 percent, what corrective action is suggested by the revenue decline? With outcome-based measures, the knowledge that sales are down is restricted to results; these measures reveal nothing about *why* sales are down. Alternatively, behavior-based measures (shown in the left column in Table 1.1)—such as depth and breadth of customer knowledge, new account generation activities, planning, decision-making, and new sales strategies—lead to improved results.

Ethical Codes and Performance

Surprisingly, selling *ethically* is a behavior that has received little attention from those who measure performance. Yet it is a critically important behavior that produces results over a long period of time. Integrity should be your hallmark. Regardless of the excuses salespeople may use to try to explain unethical behavior, there is no substitute for integrity. Developers of ethical codes should consider the performance dimensions for which salespeople are responsible. Standards of behavior concerning performance can be captured in the following three questions:

1. Does the behavior or result achieved comply with organizational standards of behavior as specified in the code of ethics?
2. Does the behavior or result achieved comply with professional standards of behavior as specified in an industry code?
3. Does the behavior or result achieved comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and government codes?

TABLE 1.1 Behavior-Based and Outcome-Based Sales Performance Measures

Behavior-Based Measures	Outcome-Based Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product knowledge • Company knowledge • Organizational commitment • Job satisfaction • Acceptance of authority • Acceptance of performance reviews • Risk-seeking preferences • Motivation • Planning • Sales call activity • Selling versus non-selling time • Selling harder • Selling smarter • Information gathering • Sales presentation planning • Participation in decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales volume dollars • Sales volume units • Gross margin • Profitability • Sales expenses • Percent to quota • Call frequency

Source: Adapted from Richard L. Oliver and Erin Anderson, "Behavior-Based and Outcome-Based Sales Control Systems: Evidence and Consequences of Pure-Form and Hybrid Governance," *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* 15 (Fall 1995): 1–16.

The Customer-Focused Salesperson

Salespeople who have a customer focus are willing to learn, manage what they learn well, and realize improved results, achieving customer loyalty. The core values of customer focus and knowledge management allow salespeople to provide better customer service, which results in greater customer loyalty, which results in improved dialogue, which results in even better customer service, which results in improved customer loyalty, and so on.

Customer loyalty provides tremendous benefits. One benefit is fewer customer defections, which means fewer lost customers. This also translates into your having more long-term relationships with customers. Both of these things help avoid some of the high costs of finding new customers. Another benefit of customer loyalty is the dialogue that opens between you and your customers. Improved dialogue enables honest discussion and

objective feedback from customers, which can help you improve professionally.

What Do You Need to Succeed in Sales?

Successful salespeople possess the following five traits: motivation to succeed, empathy, service motivation, conscientiousness, and ego strength.⁶ Each trait is briefly discussed below.

1. *Motivation to succeed (ego-drive)* is the first necessary trait for effective selling. Sales managers often rely too much on external motivation, for example by providing monetary incentives to salespeople. These are usually effective in the short term, but true motivation that causes individuals to excel comes from within. In the long term, what truly makes the difference is internal/intrinsic motivation. There must be an inner drive to be successful.
2. *Empathy* is the second element essential to sales success. Empathy is the ability to sense the reactions of other people and pick up the subtle clues provided by others in order to accurately assess what they are thinking and feeling. Selling, by definition, is an interpersonal interaction. The purpose of this interaction is persuasive communication. Consequently, you must be able to understand buyers—to feel what they feel, to think as they think—in order to sell well.
3. *Service motivation* is described as a motivational force that parallels ego drive. A service-motivated salesperson derives satisfaction from serving and receiving appreciation from others.
4. *Conscientiousness* combines a high level of self-drive with a high degree of responsibility. Conscientious salespeople are driven to accomplish goals and complete tasks as an expression of themselves. They are purposeful, strong-willed, and determined individuals. They practice self-control that results in actively planning, organizing, and carrying out tasks.
5. *Ego strength*, or resilience, is the degree to which an individual likes himself or herself. Successful salespeople have a high degree of ego strength. Failure does not destroy their positive view of themselves. A high degree of ego strength helps a salesperson endure rejection, and selling is replete with rejection. People who are attempting to

persuade other people are more likely to have their ideas rejected than accepted. That is why you must have ego strength. Understand that it is the idea that may be rejected, not you the person.

To truly succeed in a sales profession, you must evolve from being solely a person who possesses the key traits and has selling skills to becoming a trusted business advisor who knows how to sell. Today's sales professionals must have real business acumen. Not only must you know how to read a company's annual report, understand cash flow, and interpret acronyms, but you also must be able to translate this knowledge into an understanding of the business drivers needed to produce a significant return on investment (ROI) for your prospective client, while adding value to your prospect's business proposition.

If you're looking to position yourself above your toughest competition, read this book in its entirety as you continue your journey to true success in *selling . . . ASAP!*