

"FRESH AND PROVOCATIVE"

— MATT DIXON, CO-AUTHOR OF *THE CHALLENGER SALE*

GAP

like a benign tumor that poses no threat to one's health. If you want buyers to agree to purchase your solutions *now*, you must open their eyes to the malignancy. That is, you have to reveal the damage the problems are causing them today and the grave consequences that will follow if

SELLING

GETTING THE CUSTOMER TO YES:

HOW PROBLEM-CENTRIC SELLING INCREASES SALES BY CHANGING EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS, OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS, CLOSING AND PRICE.

KEENAN

TO SALES PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

Hey, salespeople, you guys rock! You are the extreme athletes of the business world. You only get paid if you deliver. You put anywhere from 40% to 100% of your salary on the line in commissions. There are no guarantees, and you shrug off the idea there should be. You suffer rejection and get pummeled with No's at the hands of rude, terse, and overwhelmed buyers. You spend weeks, months, and years working a deal only to lose it to the competition over a few dollars or an insignificant feature. You're constantly shadowed by overzealous managers pounding you about quota and the next deal. The life of a salesperson is tough, and yet you come back every day, ready to grind it out, looking to make your buyers' and customers' lives better.

It's because of my love for you that I created *Gap Selling* and wrote this book. *Gap Selling* is about making your life easier. It's about helping you understand that selling isn't as hard as we've been led to believe. Selling shouldn't be fraught with countless lost deals, fruitless price negotiations, prospects going dark, people ignoring your emails, and unpredictable sales pipelines. It's only like that when you're doing it wrong. When you're doing it right, selling is fluid, predictable, and efficient. This book is about helping you get there.

Gap Selling is going to take you on a ride, and for some of you it will be an uncomfortable one. It's going to challenge many of your entrenched beliefs and approaches to selling. It's in direct conflict with what we've been taught to believe for years, like:

- Relationships really don't matter
- People really do buy from people they don't like
- There is no such thing as "closing"
- You should never defend your product or price
- No one gives a shit about you or your product and service
- Pitching is not selling
- Selling to a customer's need is wrong
- and more

Almost all of the issues and challenges within sales are self-induced. We create the reasons the customer goes dark. We create the focus on price. We allow the customer to hold us hostage over an irrelevant feature. We allow the competition to swoop in at the eleventh hour. We create the situations where the buyer chooses to do nothing. We make it easy for prospects to ignore our emails, voicemails, and LinkedIn messages. These failings are almost always our fault because we haven't been taught the game of sales. We know the rules, we know the objective, but most of us don't understand the nuances of the game and it's costing us and the sales industry billions of dollars a year.

Gap Selling is going to teach you what the game of selling is all about and how to win. It's going to give you the practical advice and executable skills and methods to win more deals, shorten sales cycles, and avoid losing on price. It's going to show you how to get buyers to partner with you and be an integral part of the sale so they no longer go dark, avoid your calls, and put up unnecessary roadblocks.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I is devoted to teaching you the rules of gap selling so you can

approach every sale with the right mental framework and psychological insight. Part II will teach you the specific skills and strategies you need to play this game better than everyone else, from the steps of a killer discovery, to conducting a kickass demo, to avoiding pitfalls and diffusing objections. Part III will reveal the surprising ways gap-selling principles can be used to generate more productive prospecting so you can build a bigger, better pipeline faster. And finally, Part IV serves as a guide for sales leaders to build and manage a gap-selling environment, assemble a killer gap-selling team, and never lose another night's sleep worrying about making their numbers.

We've been playing the game too long without understanding the game we've been playing. You deserve better.

Are you ready to learn the game of sales? Good! Now, consider this the last day to sell the way you're selling. There is a better way.

PART I

KNOW THE GAME

Are you ready to learn the secret to the game?

CHAPTER THREE

THE CURRENT STATE—WHERE CUSTOMERS ARE

Have you ever watched someone close to you try to get a baby to eat something he didn't want to eat? Even the most easy-going baby will scrunch up his face like an over-baked apple after noticing even the tiniest portion of some food he's decided offends him, like steamed carrots or spinach. Most parents get that it's going to take some time for a child to develop a taste for certain flavors, so they're prepared to eat or toss whatever the baby rejects and try again another day. What doesn't compute, however, is when a baby turns his nose up at something he's been eating with pleasure for weeks. All of a sudden, mashed potatoes are poison. Again, to a parent it's confusing and surprising, but not a huge problem, until the kid starts reacting the same way to everything they put in front of his high chair. Then feeding time becomes a huge daily battle with a certain outcome: The baby is going to win. There's not much anyone can do to make a child swallow something he doesn't want to. It's one of the most frustrating rites of passage in a new parent's life.

The thing is, kids usually have very good reasons for behaving the way they do, even if they're pre-verbal or can't articulate them very well. If only they could tell us at an earlier stage in their lives, "Mom, Dad, I had mashed potatoes at daycare that makes yours taste like cement. Please, don't feed me this slop anymore until you learn to love salt and butter like I do." Problem solved and drama averted, because now we know exactly what reality our child is experiencing, how it affects him, and how it has influenced his thinking and perspective. That's vital information. In one simple sentence, he has given us the context and reason for his hunger strike, which means we can start figuring out a way to give him a reason to eat.

The thing is, this dynamic is not reserved for parent-child showdowns. Everything we do, whether we're six months old or sixty years old, is influenced by an invisible backdrop of events, feelings, and biases that affect the way we perceive the world and react to each other. They all play into the creation of our current state. Your customers have a current state, too, that includes everything we've talked about so far—their feelings about change, their intrinsic

motivations, the realities of their business, and the facts of their work lives. Their current state is the world they live in, their perceived reality. And when we salespeople understand our buyers' current state, we're in a much better position to effectively communicate, which also puts us in a good position to find solutions to their problems.

The Current State Runs Deep To put the rules of gap selling into play requires that you gain a deep comprehension of your customers' current state and the opportunities it represents for a better future state. It is critical to understand what is happening in your prospects' world today. The current state represents where the desire to change lives. The current state acts as the anchor, or the catalyst for change. Remember, we're talking about change, and you cannot influence change unless you know what's happening in your buyers' world. The more you learn about your buyer's current state, the greater you understand the changes necessary, and the more information you will have to close the deal. There is a direct correlation between how much a salesperson knows about their buyer's current state and the probability they will win the deal. The majority of the information and elements you need to influence the sale come from understanding exactly where your buyer is today, what they are dealing with, how they're operating, who's involved, why it's happening, the outcomes they're currently experiencing and more—all part of the current state.

Remember the headache example in Chapter 1? There were three potential current states suggested. If a salesperson is unable to ascertain whether her customer has a headache and that's all, or has a headache and has to get a half-million-dollar proposal done in 12 hours, or has a headache as a result of brain cancer, she will most likely sell to each of these people the same way, because to her, they all have the same problem—a headache. But as we've learned, that's not true. The current state is what lets us see not only the problem, but also the real issues for each specific buyer. The current state is the unique identifier for every prospect in your pipeline. It's critical to get as much current-state information as you can at the start of every sale. You will do this excavation of the current state during your discovery (details to come in Chapter 8). The current state is made up of five critical elements that help construct your understanding of your customers' world in a way that will help you help them manage the change they are about to experience:

- the literal and physical **facts** about your customer
- their **problems**
- the **impact** of those problems
- the **root causes** of the problems
- what effect those problems are having on your customers' **emotional state**

That's it. How clearly and thoroughly you uncover those five elements of your customers' current state will determine how you can provide value to your customers.

The Facts Gap selling requires you to know and understand more about your customer's world than what you're probably accustomed to. There is far more to it than what they reveal on their websites. Your goal must be to understand everything you can about what's happening in their organization as it relates to what you sell. What are the literal, physical things going on every day? It requires finding information you've never thought about looking for. You're going to need to go on a pure fact-finding mission. That said, you want to focus your investigation on the parts of the business your product or service could actually affect. It is a waste of your and your customer's time to explore problems that your solution can't resolve. You want to gather as much specific, *relevant* information as possible. We'll go over specific questioning techniques in Chapter 8 when we dive into the discovery process in detail. Suffice to say, however, that if you're selling project management software, it's probably not going to be a great idea to guide your buyers toward talking to you about their HR departments. Nor do you need to know about their competition, their sales, or their customers (unless your buyers' inability to properly manage projects affects their customers, in which case you *will* want to know all about their customers, too).

On the other hand, because you're selling project management software, you *do* want to understand the types of projects your customers have, the size of their projects, how many projects they do in a year, in what functional groups the projects occur, how many people are in the project management group, the success of their projects, the length of the projects, what types of projects they

manage, the output of the projects, how they manage resources, how they manage inventory, how they address change management, and how they handle approvals. Whew! That's a lot, right? But that's what you have to understand, and in many cases there will be even more to learn. The more information you have about your buyers' environment, how they do things, what's happening, how they're structured, the current approaches they use, and their methodologies, the better prepared you will be to drive the sale as it moves through the sales process.

Every customer faces unique challenges. No company's project management office, for example, is going to be the same. They will have different processes, different measurements, different structures, different people, different pain points, different outcomes, and more. By understanding the *unique* conditions of each of your prospects' current environment and their current state, however, you will be able to develop specific, customized selling strategies for each of the prospects in your pipeline. No two prospects will ever look the same again, and therefore never sold to the same again. And that matters.

The Problems People don't buy products—they buy solutions to their problems. If they can't recognize at least one clearly defined, measurable problem, your buyer will not buy. So, in order for you to sell your product or service, you must identify and prove the existence of a clear problem, or even a set of them. And the problems are there, embedded in every one of your prospects' current states. They are the outcomes of the current processes, the current organizational structures, the current software applications, the current employees, the current governmental regulations, the current economic climate, the current leadership, the current culture, and so on. It's your job as a salesperson to find them and understand the impact they're having on your prospects.

The Impact All the information you're looking for when you are fact-finding and problem hunting culminates or expresses itself in good things and bad. You may have found that the project management software company does a brilliant job managing their assets and that the process they use is best of breed and unparalleled in the industry. That's a good-looking current state. However, you may also learn that the way they manage time and change orders is cumbersome, inaccurate, and prone to mistakes. The impact of cumbersome, inaccurate, and

mistake-laden change order processes—the problem—is high cost overruns, which in turn reduces the capital the company has for additional projects, which in turn impacts their ability to invest in as many new products as they want to, which in turn reduces their ability to introduce new products in the market faster, which in turn hurts their ability to compete with their biggest competitor and grow as fast as they'd like. The problem is simple: high-cost overruns. That's the headache in this example. But all the shit that high-cost overruns affect is the impact, and that's what drives the sale. It's where the intrinsic motivation lives. High-cost overruns suck, but only as badly as the impact to the organization. If running over budget doesn't impact the rest of the business, then one could argue it's not a problem. Problems are only problems when the impact is negative and uncomfortable.

So, knowing the problem and the impact it's having matters. Keep this firmly in mind: You're never selling a product. You're selling the impact your product will have on your buyer's current environment. You're selling change.

The Root Cause Why do problems exist? Because something isn't working right. Something is creating a situation that is causing things to go wrong. Those "things" are the root cause, and it's what your product or service will eradicate if the prospect buys your product. If your car won't run (the problem), the root cause could be no gas, dead battery, or a broken starter. One problem, three potential root causes, each requiring a different solution. Once you know which root cause is the culprit, you'll know the appropriate solution.

There are root causes behind every one of the problems your customer is experiencing, and you have to understand what they are. For example, let's say you have confirmed that your customer's main problem is a lack of leads. What could be the causes? It could be the team doesn't know how to prospect. A lack of marketing. Poor marketing messages. Going after the wrong target market. Using ineffective marketing software. It could be any one of these, or something else. It's not enough to understand that the problem exists. You need to understand why it exists. That's how you demonstrate you can solve the problem.

Think about it this way: What's the only thing that could be more frustrating and painful than frequent heartburn? Going to five doctors who offer five different explanations for your symptoms and prescribe five different

medications, none of which work. The doctor who finally gives you an angiogram, confirms that your heartburn is a symptom of arterial blockage, and performs the angioplasty that permanently relieves your discomfort—the one who takes the time to figure out the root cause of the problem and eliminates it—is the one who will earn your loyalty and trust forever. You don't want to be like those other doctors, taking guesses and offering solutions that may or may not work. You want to be the astute, reassuring expert who knows how to solve the problem because you know why the problem exists.

The Emotional State Finally, as you explore your customers' current state and identify the inherent problems and opportunities, it's important that you stay attuned to their emotional state. Throughout the process, it's imperative that you take note of where your customers are coming from and how they're feeling as they describe their current state. Are they frustrated? Angry? Afraid? Remaining aware of your customer's emotional state will not only help you avoid the fear triggers we discussed earlier, but will help you deliver your advice and solutions in a way that your customer is able to properly hear and absorb.

Learning to deconstruct your customer's current state and use that information to their benefit is a skill that, once learned, will elevate your value and serve as an important differentiator between you and other salespeople. It's a process that takes concentration and patience, but provides extraordinary value to your customer and to yourself. Analyzing the factors causing your customer's current state gives you the key to figuring out how your product or service can help them, thus propelling them toward the better future state they want to achieve

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FUTURE STATE— WHERE CUSTOMERS WANT TO GO

As I've said, the future state is that place where your customers want to be—a happy place where your product or service has solved their problems and they are reaping the benefits. The future state is what draws your customer toward change. It's the vision your buyer has when they imagine their current problems resolved. When it comes to change, the current state represents the pain, and the future state represents the pleasure.

Your customers' current state maps their future state. Once you understand your customers' current state problems, you can start to work with them to paint a picture of what the future state could look like when those current state problems have been addressed. That's how you'll find the next piece of information you're looking for—the *opportunities*.

Let's say you were examining the current state of a hotel manager who is struggling to attract events and conferences (the problem). That's hurting the business' ability to meet revenue numbers (impact #1), and now he's getting pressure from corporate (impact #2). Employees are feeling disgruntled and leaving (impact #3), which is putting the business' reputation for customer service at risk (impact #4).

What would this manager's desired future state be? You can find out by asking these two questions: 1. What is the buyer looking to accomplish? and 2. What would solving these problems mean to their organization, their employees, and to them? The key to answering these questions is to have a conversation with your customer that helps them envision and articulate what their world would look like if all their current state problems disappeared. This way, you both can learn how addressing the current state could have a positive effect on them. For example, if you ask the right questions, the hotel manager might mention that he needs a more effective way to increase events and conference bookings (the problem solved), to get back to 20% growth (impact of solving the problem), in order to have a predictable, reliable corporate event schedule with 80% conference room utilization (impact). This would then let the company reach their profitability goals of 22% (impact), which currently they are not

meeting because of the lack of conferences and events.

By working to understand the customer's desired future state, you begin to build the gap. The future state acts as a contrast to the current state. Without the future state, it's difficult to calculate the value of the deal. Recall the headache example in Chapter 1 again. Being able to finish the proposal and earning a \$50K commission after winning the deal is the future state. Being able to cure the cancer and living 30 years longer, walking your daughter down the aisle, and having grandchildren is the future state. It's not enough to cure the headache. What's the desired outcome of solving the headache? That's the future state. And that's why it's so important.

Don't Forget the Emotional State While you're at it, you also want to understand how your customers will feel once their problems have been addressed. Why? Because getting people to imagine their emotions in the future, as well as bringing their dreams and desired outcomes into focus, will anchor them in that future. After all, it's a place where they will feel a hell of a lot better than they do in the current state, right? It's a place where they get to see the fruits of their efforts, where they could realize all of the goals they set for themselves or their organization. You want them to get a taste of what could be so that they're motivated to make the changes necessary to get to that future state. Solving problems isn't just about fixing what's wrong in the short-term, but helping people move toward their long-term dreams. The more concrete that future state feels, the more they're going to be willing to listen as you show them how your solutions can get them there for real. Then Selling Truth #5—Customers Do Like Change When They Believe It's Worth the Cost—will come into play. Once your customers believe that the benefits of the future state will outweigh the cost of getting there, the deal is done.

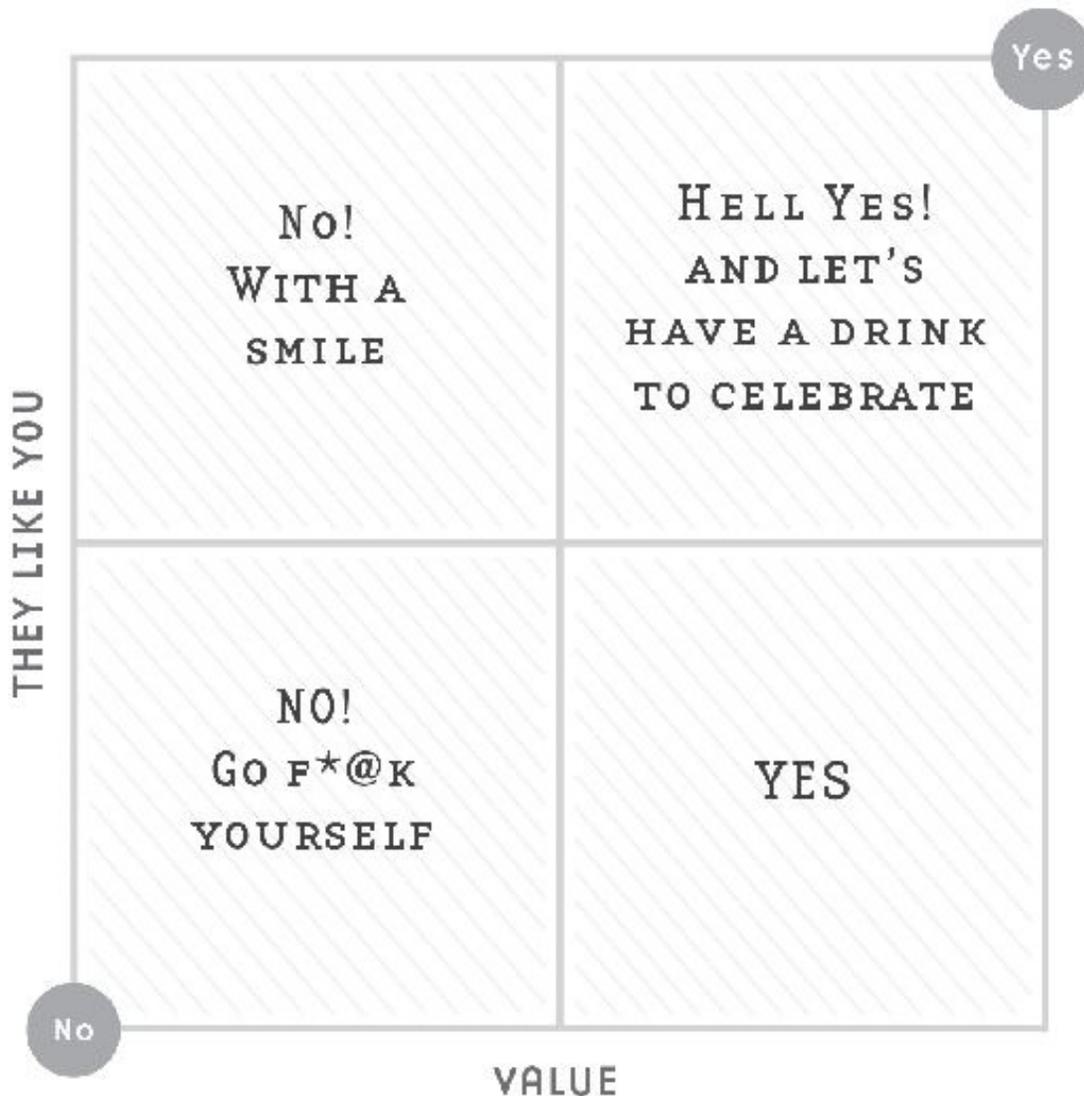
Establishing your customers' current state (pain) while anchoring them in the future state (pleasure) primes them to be open to, and even enthusiastic about, allowing you to help them plan for the journey that will take them across the chasm. As you help them see the gap they have to cross, they'll determine the value of filling it. I promise you, that value will be higher if you encourage your buyers to put themselves in the mindset of that future state, far higher than if you had simply exposed their current state problems and left them to wallow there. That's the magic of gap selling.

CHAPTER FIVE

RELATIONSHIPS DON'T MATTER (KINDA)

Ok, people, you've heard it your whole career: People buy from people they like. I call bullshit. And if you want to gap sell, you will too. It might not be a surprise to learn that of all the controversial things I've ever said in public, that's the one that's gotten the most pushback. Still, I stand by it. Stay with me here. I'll have you agreeing with me over the next few pages.

Don't Worry About Making Them Like You People buy from people they like. Willy Loman, protagonist of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, was sure of it. "It's not what you do... It's who you know and the smile on your face!"^v In Loman's world, likeability supersedes every other human quality. "Be liked and you will never want,"^{vi} he tells his sons, who take too long to recognize how horribly wrong he is. He clings to his beliefs even as he's forced to confront the reality that he's a failure and a fraud, even as his only friend in the world assures him, "When're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything? The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell."^{vii} Willy Loman had to learn the hard way, unfortunately, that likeability is no substitute for talent or expertise. *Likeability* gets you a handshake, a smile, and maybe a warm and fuzzy feeling. *Expertise* makes you money. Because you know who people do buy from? Those who provide value. I may not like you personally, but if you're selling something that provides value, I want it. You only have to look at all the book lovers that abandoned their local bookstores for Amazon, or the shoppers who started getting their groceries at big supermarkets instead of their neighborhood butcher and fruit vendor. The buyers knew they were hurting a business they liked, but the value they were getting from the other, bigger stores was too good to pass up. They valued convenience and lower prices over their personal relationship with their local shopkeepers. We do business with people we don't like all the time. You can see how people justify their buying decisions in the chart below:



Let's say you get a text from your former co-worker, Evan. He's selling an extra ticket to see Drake in concert tomorrow night and thought of you. This chart can predict how you'll respond (let's assume you're good for the money). If you think Evan is a cool dude and you like Drake, you jump on the offer. If you really like Evan but aren't a big Drake fan, you thank him for thinking of you and suggest another mutual friend. If Evan drove you crazy when you worked together but you're also crazy about Drake, you probably decide it's worth suffering through Evan to be at that concert. And if Evan drives you crazy *and* you don't give a damn about Drake, you say no, if you even call him back in the first place.

It's not that relationships aren't important. They are. After all, no one wants to do business with someone they can't stand. But it's not why people buy. With all

things being equal, buyers will go with whom they like, but rarely are all things equal. Buyers can respect and appreciate someone whom they don't actually like. Buyers want value and they find it in relationships with people whom they believe can solve their problems and improve their world.

What creates the types of relationships that generate value and drive you closer to the sale? Credibility. Every step you make in the gap-selling process is about building credibility and establishing yourself as a trustworthy expert.

Early in my career, I had a sales manager who told me there were two types of salespeople: the ones who were great at socializing and building relationships, and the ones who developed credibility. They were both great at their jobs, but the former would always have a smaller piece of the business than the latter. People want to go to hockey games with their friends; they want to *buy* from people who know their shit.

And if there's one thing I hope you've figured out by now, it's that gap selling is all about knowing your shit. And all of your customers' shit, for that matter. I've always said that the best salespeople could drop out of sales at a moment's notice and start a consulting company that caters to the field in which they sell. That's how much you should know about your customers' business. Your expertise and credibility are worth a lot more to your buyers than your quick wit, warm friendly manner, or tickets to the ballgame.

I get a lot of flak for challenging this bit of sales dogma, but there is evidence that I'm right. In an article for the *Harvard Business Review*, Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson, authors of *The Challenger Sale*, summarized research conducted in 2009 by the Sales Executive Council that studied the sales productivity of 6,000 B2B sales reps working in various industries across the country. They concluded that salespeople could be categorized into five different profiles: Relationship Builders (the people pleasers), Hard Workers (the grinders), Lone Wolves (the John Wayne and Clint Eastwood types), Reactive Problem Solvers (the dedicated firefighters), and Challengers. All of these types of salespeople have their gifts and could be effective, but the most effective consistently proved to be Challengers.

Challengers are defined as salespeople who are so knowledgeable about their customers' industry and organization, and as a result are so well respected, they can pretty much speak their minds at any time, and even push their customers to consider ideas that may make them uncomfortable. In other words, they are willing to challenge their buyers if it's in their buyers' best interest, and their buyers seem to appreciate it. The study revealed that Challengers held a full 40%

of the top sales spots, more than any of the other types of seller, and especially more than Relationship Builders, who only represented 7% of the high performers. Rather than putting their relationship with their customers at risk, Challengers' frank and assertive style actually seems to strengthen their relationships.

Now everyone knows that the economy was in the toilet in 2009 and the authors of the study wondered if maybe Challengers were merely the type of salespeople that buyers felt they needed in tough times to keep their ships upright. Perhaps once the economy righted itself, the Relationship Builders would get back on top and reclaim their mantles. But when the authors allowed for higher complexity and "solutions-oriented selling environments," Challengers continued to dominate. Like me, Dixon and Adamson insist that the findings don't imply that relationships don't matter. Rather, they suggest that it's the *type* of relationship that matters. Buyers want to have a good experience with their sales reps, but ultimately, they're looking for trustworthy advice and guidance. And when it comes down to it, even if they'd rather drink a beer with a Relationship Builder, they know it's the sales rep who is capable of telling them the truth, including things they'd rather not hear, who is probably giving them the best information and value.^{viii} Another study, conducted by Dave Kurlan, principal of Objective Management Group, reveals that salespeople who have a strong need to be liked actually hurt their selling efficacy. Let me state that again: *Salespeople who spend extra time trying to be liked—because, you know, people buy from people they like—hurt their selling efficacy.* Take a second to let that sink in. If you're trying to be liked because people buy from people they like, you're killing yourself. You're literally the reason you're not doing well. Kurlan claims that there are six core competencies in sales DNA, the first of which (and the only one relevant to our discussion) is: Doesn't Need Approval. When he dissected the data, salespeople who scored low on the first strength (meaning they *do* feel a need for approval) consistently fell in the bottom 25% selling percentile. In fact, 82% of the salespeople in the bottom quarter reported a need to be liked.^{ix} In a later blog post, Kurlan compared salespeople's need to be liked with their belief that relationships are important. Of the performers in the top 5% of sales percentile, 89% did not feel a need to be liked, and only 1% believed relationships were the key factor to closing business.^x How about that? It would seem that the less you worry about being liked and the more emotionally detached and fact-based you can remain, the more capable you are at objectively evaluating your customers' needs, offering

sage advice, and winning customer trust so they believe you are the right person to help them solve their problems, i.e., to buy from.

So, if gap selling puts a priority on building relationships based on credibility, not likability, and we're doing away with the tired, "Good selling is all about relationships" mantra, what could we put in its place? I think it's pretty simple: Be an expert, not a friend.

PART II

HOW TO PLAY

You gotta know how to play the game to win.

PART II • HOW TO PLAY

Part I of this book was devoted to defining the concepts of gap selling and helping you get your head in the right place to do it well. Part II is going to walk you through the execution, with all the steps and techniques you need to know to put those concepts into practice.

This would be a good time to take a pee break or to grab a Red Bull or a cup of coffee. When you get back, just turn the page.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GET THEM TO LET YOU HELP

Nothing we've discussed in Part I can happen unless you get this critical and fundamental premise through your head: Your number one job when selling is to get the customer, buyer, or prospect to let you help them.

All that time you're spending trying to get your prospects to take a call, take a demo, or take a meeting will be a complete waste if you don't do it in such a way as to make prospects believe that you have the expertise and credibility to solve their problem. No matter what you're selling, until you can get buyers to trust you enough to be vulnerable, open up, share information, offer you insight into their current state, and expressly *ask* you for your help, you will not make progress. Customers have to be ready to initiate and embrace this sales journey, or ain't nothing gonna happen.

What about bluebirds or inbound calls? Well, sure, you can sell to them without actively working to get them to trust you first, but that's because they've already figured out they need help. They may be totally wrong about the kind of help they need, but at least they are aware they need you and are seeking you out. You also have to consider that they wouldn't have reached out to your company in the first place if it hadn't done something to make them suspect your company might hold the answers they're looking for. Something in its content or on the website, or something your company said in an interview, an article, a speaking engagement, or even a simple Google search, spoke to them. Therefore, it's likely that your company actually did do the groundwork; you just didn't know it hit your mark. Regardless of where or how the lead came to you, outbound or inbound, once you start engaging with a prospect, they have to be continually willing to let you help them.

What about RFPs? Nope. Bidding on an RFP is not selling, it's participating in a beauty contest. The only thing a buyer who submits an RFP is paying attention to is which boxes you can check off of their list of requirements. You can't ask why, you can't make sure you understand their problem, and you can't make sure *they* understand their problem. They're not letting you help them. Consequently, as it relates to RFPs, gap selling can't help you. Traditional RFPs that don't allow for a solid discovery or engagement don't fall into the gap-

selling methodology.

From the very beginning, selling starts with establishing trust and your credibility. That's the only thing that's going to compel people to believe that you can help them. So every time you have contact with prospects, ask yourself: Am I selling to these individuals, or are they allowing me to help them?

Here's a good test: Do you hear them saying, "Yes"? Yes, I will share my numbers with you! Yes, I want to let you in on my issues! Yes, I'll tell you what's worrying me! Yes, I will put myself in your hands! If you're not hearing a resounding "yes," or your customer isn't demonstrating behaviors that lead you to believe they're heading in that direction, go back to Start (this is a game, after all). You simply haven't developed the credibility necessary to get your customer into buying mode. They have to be ready to go on this journey with you or you're going to invest a whole lot of time for nothing in return. Start all over and talk with the customer. Are they being open and forthright? Are you trying to understand their current and future states, or are you pitching product? If you're pitching product, prospects will be less willing to let you help them. If the prospect is not being forthright in giving you the information you're asking for, then they are not letting you help them. You have to fix this before you go any further. If you can't get buyers to let you help them, the sale is dead.

You're not going to be invited to help someone until you pull out all the stops with regards to your empathy, authenticity, expertise, and credibility. You have to convince your customers that you understand their world and their pain. They have to believe that you are there for them, not for yourself. Remember, no one gives a shit about you. Concentrate on bringing them value, and even if they don't like you, they'll buy from you.

It's not about pushing features and benefits—that's old-school selling. Gap selling is about establishing trust and revealing all of the knowledge you possess about your customer's space.

So how do you get people to let their guard down, admit they're ready for help, and then allow you to help them?

You put all the concepts we've already discussed into play.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCOVERY: KNOW YOUR CLIENTS BETTER THAN THEY KNOW THEMSELVES

Stop qualifying opportunities using B.A.N.T. Like everything else about gap selling, the gap-selling discovery takes a completely different tack from a traditional discovery. The first big difference you'll notice in this process is that it doesn't lead with B.A.N.T. to determine whether a lead is an opportunity. B.A.N.T. is bunk. To refresh your memory or for those of you who don't know, B.A.N.T. is an acronym for Budget, Authority, Need, and Timing. It's a tactical sales technique taught to salespeople to help them qualify an opportunity. The objective of B.A.N.T. is to keep salespeople from spending time on deals that won't close. The argument is, if there is no budget, if you're not talking to someone with authority, if there is no need for your product and the timing isn't right, then it's not an opportunity. B.A.N.T. is a perfect example of the type of tactical sales training that doesn't understand the game of selling and puts salespeople in a bad position during the sale. B.A.N.T. is outdated. It's self-centered. It's everything I've been telling you not to be.

Tell me this, Salesperson: Why should anyone have to spend one single minute convincing *you* that they are worthy of your time? That they are qualified to buy from you? What a joke! It's completely backward.

Maybe you're thinking that B.A.N.T. is actually in the buyer's best interest because it spares you both if you can determine ahead of time whether they're a good candidate for your product or service. But what you're missing is any understanding of human nature. Let's break it down: **Budget:** Traditional qualifying process says make sure buyers have the money before bothering to tempt them with something they can't afford. But I assure you, when prospects see enough value in what you're selling, they'll find the budget. Basing someone's potential to be a customer on their budget assumes the customer knows he has a problem and knows there's a solution available. In many cases, a budget is merely a starting point. Trying to qualify a deal based on a budget before you have identified the depth and breadth of the potential value is foolish, even suicidal. The most you'll pay for a pill that will make your headache go away is \$5... until you find out the headache is caused by a tumor and the pill

will make that tumor disappear. You didn't budget that 5 dollars, but now that you know you're gonna die without it, you're spending that 5 dollars in a heartbeat. To hell with the "budget." People find the budget for big gaps.

Authority: Unless you're selling a \$1000-or-less product, there is no such thing as a single decision maker anymore. According to Gartner (formerly CEB Global), as of 2014 there are at least 5.4 decision makers per B2B sale.^{xi} So what if the person you're talking to isn't the person who can sign on the dotted line? Whether or not your prospect has the authority to make decisions is immaterial if you make your case for value. If they believe you're offering value, and they're not equipped or qualified to continue the discussion, they'll introduce you to the appropriate person who is. I mean, if we're hanging out and you tell me that your smart, single, ski-loving sister lives in my city, I might ask you for her number. I'm not talking to her directly, but the potential for something good is there. I'd be a fool not to pursue the lead to see where it goes.

In addition, assuming that a person who isn't the final decision maker can't also be an influencer is foolish as well. Today, authority is a committee of influencers, champions, mobilizers, and more. Don't hang your qualification process on one individual.

Need: You might know the answer to this one by now. Gap sellers don't sell to need, they sell to problems. Just because customers don't *think* they need anything doesn't mean they actually don't. All you require at this point is a chance to prove that the problem exists; you can demonstrate the need later. It's your job to highlight a problem, and then help the buyer determine how big or small it is. The best salespeople don't rely on demand reaction, that is, selling something the customer already knows about, or selling to organizations that already recognize they have a problem. Instead, they leverage demand creation, seeking out the latent opportunities where customers don't even know they need help until someone comes along and points out how their company is at risk.

Demand creation is what happens when you call a ticketing company to ask if they've ever considered consolidating their ticketing and CRM systems into one.

And they say, "Nope."

And you ask, "*Why not?*"

And they say, "We don't need to. We send out emails to our customers and they're aware of all our shows, and our online ticketing system works great."

And you say, "*That's great! Hey, let me ask you though...when someone buys*

a ticket, how do you get their name registered in the CRM?"

And they say, "We type it in."

And you ask, "How many new people come to shows every year?"

And they say, "About 25% of our customers are first time buyers."

And you ask, "How many tickets do you sell per year?"

And they say, "About 100,000."

And you ask, "So you're manually entering 25,000 people into your CRM system every year?"

And they say, "Yeah."

And you ask, "And you pay someone to do that?"

And they say, "Yeah."

And you ask, "Well, how does this data entry clerk know she's entering the name of a first-time ticket buyer?"

And they say, "Well, she first does a cross reference with our current database to see if they've come to a show or not. If she doesn't see them in the database, she checks a box on the form, stating they are a first time ticket buyer."

And you ask, "Has she ever forgotten to check the box?"

And they say, "Yes, all the time."

And you ask, "And how do you market to these first-time buyers so they'll come back for another show?"

And they say, "Our marketing person sends out an email thanking them for attending and announcing upcoming events. We also send mailings."

And you say, "What if I told you I could create a system that automatically registered your customers into your CRM every time they bought a ticket, automatically noted that they were first-time buyers, and automatically sent those first-time buyers a thank-you email that offered them a discount on future events to encourage them to come back? Would that change your business at all?"

And they say, "Holy crap. You can do that?"

And you say, “*Maybe we should talk a little more.*”

Gap sellers never take their prospects’ word for granted when it comes to their needs.

Ever.

Timing: Timing will take care of itself. Timing is fluid and can change at a moment’s notice for a number of sales-driven reasons, including how well you sell and position your solution, in-house dynamics, and external factors such as the economy or a move by the competition. But again, just because a prospect doesn’t think now is a good time to buy doesn’t mean they’re right. If you can help them see that every day they don’t fix a problem it is simply compounding it in the form of lost money, lost time, lost efficiency, lost reputation, or lost something-else-important, they will decide *now* is the right time to make the bleeding stop.

Everything B.A.N.T. is designed to find out will be exposed during the discovery process. There’s no reason to use it to qualify your prospect.

B.A.N.T. is quite simply irreconcilable with the whole philosophy of gap selling, because . . .

Sales are not about you!

and

Sales are about your customers and their needs.

If you can get your prospects to let you help them, you're going to know if you have a qualified opportunity. Now, there are people who will argue that it is nuts to embark on trying to get prospects to let you help them if you haven't firmly ascertained whether or not they're qualified ahead of time. They're right. *I'm not saying you shouldn't qualify your prospect!*

I'm saying you should do it differently than B.A.N.T or any other approach. I'm saying you should use the discovery strategy outlined in this chapter, which doubles as a foolproof qualifying method because it's all about the customer, not you.

The Close Happens at the Beginning

Your product or service doesn't matter right now. For real. Everything you do or say at this stage of the game should be entirely focused on your customers, understanding their current state, and getting to the bottom of what ails them. Every step of the sale is contingent on you getting the right information via the discovery process. How you proceed during this moment will set the stage for success or failure. That's no exaggeration. The sale is won or lost during the discovery. If you don't get enough information, miss a few key points, misdiagnose the problem, incorrectly assess the problem, miss the customer's desired future state, miscalculate the gap—any of these and more can doom the sale. The sale is won at the beginning, not the end.

Remember that old adage, Always Be Closing? ABC—a vicious Alec Baldwin writes it on a chalkboard in the movie version of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, in the same scene where he barks at sales has-been Jack Lemon to “Put. The coffee. Down . . . Coffee is for closers only.” Yeah, well, that scene is a joke. In real life, closing isn't a thing. It's not something you do at the end of the sale. It's not something you do to a prospect. I'll say it again: You don't close prospects. This old idea that good closers are good salespeople is garbage, at least in the traditional sense. Closing skills like the assumptive close, the option close, the urgency close—all these close techniques are a waste of time. They only serve to put you first and aren't focused on the customer or prospect. To make things worse, they don't work.

In his blog post titled *Closing Techniques in Sales are Dead—Here's Why*, Chris Orlob, senior director of product marketing at Gong.io, published the results of an analysis his company did of more than one million sales calls. You

know what they found? Closing calls sounded essentially the same whether the seller made the deal or lost it. The discovery calls, however, showed enormous differences, particularly in what they call the “talk-to-listen ratio.” During the discovery calls that led to closed deals, salespeople spent more than half of their time listening while their customers talked. The opposite was true of discovery calls that led to missed deals. In those calls, buyers talked only 28% during the length of the call; the salespeople talked almost 80% of the time! Other data showed that “early in the sales cycle there is a linear relationship between the number of questions you ask and the likelihood of closing a deal.”^{xii} Did you get that? The number of questions you ask early in the sale cycle increases your chance of making the deal. The close happens at the beginning, *not* at the end. Gap selling is all about asking questions to get to current and future states. That can’t be done with just a few questions. Gap sellers will almost always ask more questions than people who use traditional selling techniques. They have to. Gap selling demands it and the data backs it up.

Remember, the key when discovering your prospects’ current state is to keep your line of questioning problem-centric (not product-centric) and to get your buyers to talk as much as possible. Invite your customers to engage with you and talk about their world, not yours. Show them you give a shit. You need them to open the door so you can do your initial exploratory work. They have to be willing to be vulnerable. Get them to open up so they can help you help them.

Know the Problem First, Call Second

As introduced in Chapter 3, your first step to discovering your customers current state will be to draft a Problem Identification Chart that lists all the potential problems you can solve, the various impacts these problems could have on your customers business, and their root causes. You have to complete this crucial preliminary work before you even think about approaching a prospect. You wouldn’t set out on a journey into the unknown without a map, or at least a well-charged phone loaded with a good GPS app. This chart will serve as your map as you travel through your customers world. Having identified all the possible problems your potential customers could be struggling with ahead of time, you’ll know where to target your questions. Writing this information down before you need it will keep you from asking vague questions and will make sure you steer your customers toward problems you can actually help them solve as you work to understand their current state.

Spending any time on problems you can't solve is a waste of your time. Do you really think that when the founders of companies are noodling around in their rented garage spaces or brainstorming at the bar that they talk about or write down on their blackboards or cocktail napkins the list of the features their products or services should have? Hell, no. They b*tch about the problems they hate, and then they write down how they're going to solve them. You need to have a founder's mindset when you think about why anyone should buy from you. You must be able to fill in the blank at the end of this sentence: "The reason my product or service exists is to _____." Do not pick up the phone or start typing an email to a customer without writing that shit down.

First, make a list of all the potential problems your clients could be facing that you could solve. As an example, I'll share with you a Problem Identification Chart centered on sales consulting. Use this to fill in with your own clients.

PROBLEM	IMPACT TO ORGANIZATION	WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THE PROBLEM
LOW CLOSE RATES		
DECLINE IN SALES		
WEAK LEAD GENERATION/ PROSPECTING		

Next, you're going to fill in the Impact column. What potential impact could all of those problems you just listed have on a customer?

PROBLEM	IMPACT TO ORGANIZATION	WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THE PROBLEM
LOW CLOSE RATES	High cost of sales, slow revenue growth, fewer customers, less revenue, less profitability, increased pressure on the base, wasted leads, lost opportunities, vulnerable to competition, etc.	
DECLINE IN SALES	Decline in revenue, lower margin dollars, cash flow challenges, inability to invest in product or other areas, layoffs, increase in cost of sales, increased competitive pressures, high turnover, etc.	
WEAK LEAD GENERATION/ PROSPECTING	Slow growth, missing quota, weak pipeline, increased cost of sales, pressure on marketing, infighting with marketing, not enough new logos, heavy dependency on the base, single threaded, increased pressure on close improving close rates etc.	

Finally, you’re going to list the root causes of all those problems. Remember, this is the column that is going to allow you to prove your credibility and expertise. As we’ve established, half of your customers won’t even know they have a problem. So right off the bat, if you can point an important one out to them, they’ll be impressed and start to consider that maybe they should listen to you. But, say you can not only identify their problem, but also identify and provide the solution. Now you’ve got cred. And you’ve also just positioned yourself—and the product or service you’re trying to sell—as an incredibly valuable resource.

PROBLEM	IMPACT TO ORGANIZATION	WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THE PROBLEM
LOW CLOSE RATES	High cost of sales, slow revenue growth, fewer customers, less revenue, less profitability, increased pressure on the base, wasted leads, lost opportunities, vulnerable to competition, etc.	Can be caused by weak sales team, lack of training, poor sales enablement, poor deal strategies, poor sales management, real product issues, lack of understanding of target customer, poor marketing, wrong target marketing, etc.
DECLINE IN SALES	Decline in revenue, lower margin dollars, cash flow challenges, inability to invest in product or other areas, layoffs, increase in cost of sales, increased competitive pressures, high turnover, etc.	Can be caused by poor sales management, lack of training, wrong product, wrong sales team with wrong sales skills, shift in the market, lack of process, poor forecasting, misaligned incentives and broken commission structure, weak culture, lack of planning, etc.
WEAK LEAD GENERATION/ PROSPECTING	Slow growth, missing quota, weak pipeline, increased cost of sales, pressure on marketing, infighting with marketing, not enough new logos, heavy dependency on the base, single threaded, increased pressure on close improving close rates etc.	Is the result of weak sales team, inability of team to diagnose the problem, lack of understanding of solution set and customer environments, poor marketing, no marketing, lack of understanding of the market place, weak value proposition, wrong sales team structure (farming and hunting at same time), compensation misalignment, etc.

Don't think you have to wait until you're in the thick of a discovery Q&A to start building a sense of trust and proving that you know as much about their industry as your customers do, if not more. Complete a Problem Identification Chart, and you will have already started to lay the groundwork ahead of time.

Now you're ready to start your discovery. Throughout it, you're going to be asking several types of questions: **Probing:** These are open-ended questions that press for specific details **Process:** These are open-ended questions that ask "How?"

Provoking: These are open-ended questions that gently push customers to consider their current state from a new perspective **Validating:** Not open-ended questions! Instead, these simply allow you to repeat information you gather back to your customer to make sure you've correctly understood everything they've told you.

1. Discover the Facts

You'll start by asking as many **probing questions** as possible, and as you note the answers, you'll continue to press for all the details your prospects won't likely think to offer up on their own. Your goal at this initial stage is to record all the literal, physical facts about the business and your customer. If your buyer is an executive director for a theater and you sell ticketing software, your discovery questioning might go something like this: *How many events do you put on? How many theaters do you cover? How many seats does each venue have? How many in total? What's the average number of tickets you process in a year? How many membership packages do you handle? What's the average nonprofit donation? How many people do you have working in marketing and the box office? Can you tell the difference between first-time ticket buyers and loyal patrons? Are ticket sales growing or decreasing? Do you sell out all of your shows? What's your show attendance rate? What's the average patron look like? What's their demographic?*

The number of potential questions you can ask is infinite.

Now that's the type of information you want, but you're not going to ask questions like that unless you want to sound like a CIA operative. No one likes to get the third degree. Instead, you're going to use what sales influencer and author Deb Calvert calls "command statement starter words": *"Tell me a little bit about the events you put on."*

"Help me understand . . ."

"Please describe . . . ?"

"Walk me through . . . ?"

So rather than ask, "How do you market to your buyers?" you can say, "Walk me through how you market to first-time ticket buyers?" Or, "Help me understand your ticket buyer demographic and how you capture it?" By asking questions in this manner, you're inviting much deeper and complex discussions that won't feel like interrogations. Keep this in mind as we go through all the

questioning techniques ahead. Every time you delve for information, it should feel like a friendly conversation. These formulations will help you avoid making your customers feel like you're badgering them, and instead give them a sense of control. Deb Calvert's book *Discover Questions Get You Connected* is a great resource.

Beyond probing questions, you want to ask **process questions** which try to get information on how your customers do what they do. For example, if you were to engage with a nonprofit performing arts theater that puts on plays and dance recitals, you might say (using command statement starter words, of course): *"Tell me about your ticket-selling process."* *"Share your process for marketing to current patrons."* *"Explain your process to identify your biggest donors and your smallest donors."* *"Help me understand your reporting process."*

Keep in mind, process questions are not just about the high-level answers, but the specific steps in how they do it. For example, if you asked a prospect to explain how they market to first-time ticket buyers, they may say they send them an email after the show, and then follow up with a flyer via snail mail. That's good information, but it's not at the process layer. The process layer explains the tactical details, like this: "We manually take the names from an Excel spreadsheet and Martin loads them into an online email application. From there we check the box "first-time ticket buyer" and then send them an email. We then print the names out and Jennifer hand-labels a brochure to each new ticket buyer. Next we . . ."

Notice the depth here. If your product makes this process easier, you should be salivating right now. Without asking these types of process questions, we can't learn how and where you can bring value. Asking process questions takes the discovery process to an entirely different level of insight.

2. Discover the Problems

After you've gathered all the facts of the current state and you completely understand what's going on in your prospect's organization, the problems should start to reveal themselves.

For instance, your customer has revealed that her company is spread out over four regions, each one run by a general manager. Upon learning that fact, you could ask how she gathers all the data from each region into one place: "We can't. At least not consistently." There you have it. Problem #1. Now keep asking questions, because it only gets better from here.

"So how do you create consistency within the sales team? How do you get a

bird's-eye view of how the team is performing?"

"We can't do that, either." Problem #2.

"Are you concerned about being able to hit that \$110M goal you have when you don't have a system that allows you to create an environment that ensures all your teams are executing at the same level?"

"Yep."

That's a big one: Problem #3. Keep going.

"You said you have varying levels of experience across your sales team. How does that affect your ability to make quota?"

"Sometimes we don't." Problem #4.

"How does it affect your ability to be predictable?"

"We're terribly unpredictable." Problem #5.

"If you're unpredictable, how do you plan?"

"It's really hard." Problem #6.

Ooh, look at all these problems this head of sales is facing! A salesperson who could fix these problems should be chomping at the bit right now.

At its best, this line of questioning can lead you to point out a problem that your customers might not have even realized they had. For example, let's say you're interviewing a perennially losing high school football coach, and through your examination, you find out that he is dealing with several problems: #1, the kids on his team are slow, overweight, and small; #2, this is his first year coaching football after having coached swim teams; #3, a lot of kids get hurt; #4, his team loses a lot of games. All of that is excellent information to have. But then you realize you've forgotten to ask for a basic fact: *"How many players are on your team?"*

"Twelve."

Using that information as a guide, it wouldn't take long to find out Problem #5, which is that not only does the coach lose games, he often has to forfeit because when two kids get hurt—and the kids on his team often get hurt—he no longer has the minimum number of players required to continue the game. What else does the number of kids on the team tell you? Problem #6, the coach is struggling to recruit. Then you might ask a final question: *"How many athletes*

choose not to attend your school because the football team is so bad?”

That’s not something the coach might have ever thought about, so he checks school enrollment and discovers that it’s down. And in the comments section of the forms where people can cite their reasons for choosing to attend or not attend the school, he sees Problem #7: A number of students indicated that their decision was influenced by the sorry state of the athletics department. See how discovery can uncover so many problems, problems even the coach or the buyer didn’t see?

During your discovery process, pay attention and look for holes that suggest potentially weak business processes and missed opportunities so that later, you’ll be able to suggest some alternative, better options. Understanding their business backward and forward is what will eventually allow you to show how your expertise in their field, and your experience with other customers, differentiates you from any other salesperson they could turn to for help.

Take note, because 99% of the time, it’s your product’s ability to improve upon that process that will reveal the product’s competitive value. Understanding your customers’ processes will also prove incredibly helpful when you run into customer objections, which we’ll cover in detail in Chapter 12.

Banish Open-Ended Answers

Something that is too often overlooked in traditional sales training is how to press your customer or prospect to be specific. Open-ended answers are unacceptable. Open-ended answers are unquantified answers. Vague answers. Answers that leave you guessing. “We’re not growing fast enough,” is simply not sufficient information for you to work with when you’re gap selling. It’s too open to interpretation. What is “fast enough?” Your idea of “fast enough” and your prospects’ may be totally different. Train yourself so that every time you hear a lazy, vague, open-ended answer like, “We need to hire more people,” or “I want to increase revenue,” you stop the conversation and ask the prospect to articulate exactly what they mean. You’ll probably need to help them along, maybe like this: Buyer: We’re not growing fast enough.

You: Define that for me? What does “fast enough” mean to you?

Buyer: We’re only growing by 22%. We need to be hitting 25%.

Ah-ha! Now you’ve quantified the problem. “Enough” is not enough. In this case “enough” is 3% more. You have to get people to be specific, because open-

ended answers don't tell you enough about the problem to help you devise a solution.

Every question you ask will give you more data that offers another chance to extrapolate the potential negative consequences that will impact your customers' environment if things don't change. Every answer will deepen your understanding of the current state.

Don't Just Find Problems—Hunt Them Down

If you prepare for your discovery with a PIC, you'll already know what problems your customer is likely facing before you write your email or pick up the phone. Maybe it's poor lead generation, or low conversion rates, or long sales cycles. Here's an easy one: more lost sales than they would like. In your initial communications when you're establishing a connection with your customer through emails and voicemails, take a moment to describe these potential problems and ask permission to give your customers some ideas as to how you might be able to resolve them. If they agree to continue the conversation, you'll know right off the bat that you've hit a nerve.

For example, let's imagine you want to engage with the hotel manager we used as an example in Chapter 4. Because of your preparatory work listing the problems, impacts, and root causes likely affecting your customers' current state, you already know ahead of time which hotel management issues you can solve. Let's say you chose low hotel occupancy as the problem most likely to apply to this particular buyer. Lead with that. If you are correct and it is in fact an issue your customer is dealing with, your customer will be eager to talk.

Now, as you engage the manager and build credibility, he invites you to dig deeper, which gives you a chance to learn he has additional problems such as difficulty attracting conference bookings, making revenue, pleasing corporate, holding employee retention steady, and keeping up customer service standards. You see that you're going to be able to fix almost all of those problems, too. Sweet! But hold your horses. Even if you're pretty sure you've got the answer to your buyer's dreams in your hands, now is not the time for the big reveal. Instead, you'll want to continue building that trust and taking every opportunity to show the depth of your knowledge about your customer's business. Patience is key. Don't rush to the sell. There will be plenty of time to sell. Go deeper.

3. Discover the Impact

Next, still without passing any judgment, you will want to continue asking probing and process questions to ascertain your customers' current state and find

out how the problems you've identified are affecting their business. You'll also want to follow up with plenty of **provoking questions** that will help your customers look beyond the obvious, to think deeper about the problem, or get unstuck from their routine. Provoking questions aren't just meant to challenge the buyer, but rather get them to think about their problems in new ways. Some provoking questions you could try: *What happens when you...?*

Has there ever been a time when...?

If you did X, what do you think would happen?

These questions are designed to challenge your customers to evaluate not just what is happening, but why it's happening. In this way, you're provoking buyers into thinking through a situation that may not be an issue yet, but could become part of their future state. And rather than risk having them feel like you're shoving their nose in their ignorance, you've done it in a way that allows them to feel like they discovered the root cause on their own, which means they'll be more inclined to fix it.

Guiding your customers to take note of the impact that various problems are having on their business isn't just another fact-finding expedition—it's going to force them to recognize the level of urgency with which they need to treat these problems. That's super important because you can point out all the problems you want, but until customers actually see how their business is being negatively affected, it will be easy for them to push the problems off to the side to deal with them later. Out of sight, out of mind, like a benign tumor that poses no threat to one's health. If you want buyers to agree to purchase your solutions now, you must open their eyes to the malignancy. That is, you have to reveal the damage the problems are causing them today, and the grave consequences that will follow if they aren't excised soon.

No one takes well to scare tactics, so you're not going to tell your customers any bad news. Instead, you're going to let them figure out the damage for themselves. Again, you're going to use command statement starter words: *"Tell me how this issue is affecting you."* *"Describe the impact it's having on your department?"* *"What are the consequences every time this problem occurs?"*

Let's say that during your conversation with the head of a ticket sales company, you uncover that they're having trouble regularly communicating with patrons. You should follow up: *"Share with me what's been the impact of not being able to regularly communicate with patrons?"*

Your buyer replies, “Sure. Our revenue is down by a lot.”

Hold it!

That is a classic open-ended answer, and as we’ve already discussed, there are no open-ended answers allowed in gap selling. So what do you do? You ask a clarifying question.

“Hm. What is ‘a lot’ to you?”

“Well, two years ago we were at \$4M. This year we’re barely going to clear \$3.5M.”

There you have it. The problem is lack of communication with patrons, and the impact of that problem is a half-million dollars in lost revenue. That’s a problem someone is going to want to fix.

Business Problems and Technical Problems

When it comes to problems, there are two types: technical problems and business problems. Technical problems are related to the technology or underlying processes that drive the business and assist in its operation. Technical problems prevent the business from operating efficiently:

A database that doesn't share enough information. An antiquated inventory management system. Ineffective reporting systems. These issues are technical problems. The impact of the technical problem(s) on the business is the business's problem. A database that doesn't share enough information (technical problem) forces the company to hire extra people to manually run reports every month, costing them an additional \$20K a month. That's a business problem. An antiquated management system that poorly tracks inventory in different locations (technical problem) causes the company millions of dollars per year in wasted inventory and \$3 million a year in lost revenue from not having the right products in stock. Those are business problems.

The thing is, most salespeople focus on solving the technical problems when it's the business problems that create a customer's unique buying motivations and lead to the biggest gaps. Your customer might reveal he has disparate systems that make it hard to share information across the organization (technical problem). Your software is known for its ability to share information seamlessly across the organization, so it follows that most of your prospects have this technical problem. The technical problem isn't going to drive the sale; it's the conversation starter. The business problem is what is going to drive the sale, so you need to understand it and how it uniquely presents itself within your buyer's company. No two prospects will *ever* have the same business problem. It's impossible. Your prospects can have the same technical problem(s), but never, ever, the same business problems.

Imagine you were selling a public safety software to a city's police department. A likely technical problem would be unreliable and incomplete communications between various chains of command. Yet, by asking the right probing and process questions in the right order, you could also discover that serious business problems resulting from the lack of communication are currently affecting not only the police force, but also the city at large—problems such as increased gang violence and a decreased conviction rate. The technical problem of not being able to communicate across various chains of command is inconvenient and frustrating; the severity of the business problem—increased gang violence and decreased conviction rates—is massive, and that is what will

drive the sale.

The business problem provides the motivation for change. You're looking for the "holy shit" of outcomes. It's not the tumor that motivates people to do whatever it takes to get cured. A benign tumor is annoying, possibly painful, certainly disconcerting. A malignant tumor, though? Most people would do whatever it took to get cured, because the impact—the business problem—could be fatal. And for many, it wouldn't be the disease that represented the worst problem, but the outcome of never seeing their spouse again, or never meeting their grandchildren. Your discovery process needs to open the door to that kind of OMG realization for your customers. Done right, it should lead you to uncover the big, unappreciated gap lying between their current state and desired future state. That's how you'll make the sale.

4. Discover the root cause

Your customers' problems didn't just materialize out of nothing. Now that you know what the problems are and you know the impact they are having on your customer, you need to make sure you and your buyer fully understand why they occur—their root cause. Often these will be technical problems, but not always. When you press your buyer to explain why his team is having difficulty connecting with donors, he might say that it's harder and harder to find someone willing to pick up the phone. And that could be true. But just in case there's more to the story, continue to use provoking questions. These are great for helping customers expand their purview. You could ask: *"Why do you think this problem is happening?" "How do you think your current processes are affecting this?" "How has the implementation of this product affected your business?"*

You always want to provoke your customers to think hard and differently about what's gone wrong.

Back to our floundering theater company. You found one problem—the theater company isn't raising enough donations through patrons because their outreach technology is ridiculously outdated and limited. You don't stop there, though, because you want to flush out every problem you can solve. You keep digging, and you discover that on top of that initial problem, the company doesn't have a system that can tell them who their first-time buyers and their repeat customers are, and therefore there's no way to market to them. That should prompt provoking questions, which might go like this: "What if you could see which customers were first-timers and which ones were repeat

attendees? What would happen to your business if you could get your first-time customers to return two or three times per year?”

The technical problem: Unsophisticated reporting system
Business problem: Can't market to people to increase repeat visits
Existential problem: The company isn't growing and could fold
Root cause: Disparate systems that require manual input and don't automatically communicate back with customers once they make a purchase
You see what I mean about needing to know your customers' businesses inside and out? Provoking questions allow you to identify new opportunities, develop the conversation, and position you as an expert. That recognition of your expertise is crucial. If you can confidently identify a problem, show a buyer that you understand the impact it's having on the business, intelligently articulate the root cause of the problem in industry terms, and offer yourself as someone who can create a perfectly tailored solution to that problem, you're golden. When you have a deep understanding of their world and the most up-to-date knowledge, you can reveal new options they might not have known existed.

While you're going through this discovery process, don't forget to pepper your conversation with plenty of **validating questions**. Validation is a common communication strategy promoted by psychologists to strengthen personal relationships. You could say you're using these validation questions to help strengthen your relationship with your customer by ensuring that they agree with the way you are interpreting their responses. They also keep you from making incorrect assessments about their problems. A validating question might be something like, *“What I hear you saying is that you could raise a lot more revenue if you had a pool of more people to sell tickets to.”* (Other validating questions could be, *“Am I understanding you correctly?”* or *“Did I get this right?”*) Asking a question in this way reassures your buyers that you understand their problems and their pain, and it gives them a chance to make corrections if you're at all off. In this way, you're both certain to be traveling along the same path, and you are more likely to agree on what the solution to this problem should be. Too often, salespeople leave meetings or discussions and find out later that they misunderstood what the buyer meant. Validating questions ensure you and the buyer are on the same page and that what you heard is what they meant. Always use validating questions throughout every sales call to confirm you're on the same page and before shifting to a new topic.

Conducting the Conversation

Until now, I've focused on choosing the right types of discovery questions. But while choice of words is supremely important, equally important to any communication is how and when you choose to talk. Consciously choosing how to modulate your voice, when to speak, and when to stay silent will matter just as much as the words you select. For this reason, I want you to pay close attention to two other ingredients necessary to a killer discovery: 1. Tone

Tone is fundamental to good human communication. The right tone is not only critical for getting people to trust you enough to give you the information you want to know, but also for getting them to hear you in the first place. Imagine you're sitting at your desk and your boss pokes her head in, saying, "Hey, I thought your presentation this morning was great."

And you reply, "*Really?*"

Or maybe you reply, "*Really?*"

Or perhaps you go with, "*Really?*"

Same word, tooooooally different tones, which means tooooooally different meanings. The first one, delivered with puppy-dog eagerness and a slight squeak at the end, expresses delight at the compliment. The second one starts and stops in the exact same vocal registry, indicating total surprise that your boss was happy with your work. The third, said with a kind of snarky question mark at the end, says without saying, "That's all you got?"

I would not recommend using the third tone when replying to your boss.

I'm not cautioning you about tone because I think you're going to be a complete jerk to your customers. Most of the time, I expect you will do your best to keep your tone friendly, warm, and engaging during the discovery. Things can get tricky, however, when you are forced to ask tough, sensitive questions. If your customer is responsible for creating and implementing the system that is clearly the root cause of the entire company's struggles, you're going to have to proceed extremely delicately. Even a confident tone could sink you. This situation would require a tone of humility, openness, and deference. Not everyone is good at that.

Hitting the right tone in the right circumstance is an art. If you do happen to find yourself frequently stumbling, it's probably because you're not in tune with your buyer's emotions. Improve your empathy, and you'll find it easier to hit the right notes that your customer needs to hear.

2. Timing

Timing matters. Just because you can ask a question, it doesn't mean you should. Remember, the point of the discovery exercise isn't to ask questions but to get information. Therefore, if you ask a question and your buyer is unwilling to answer it or provides you with a shallow, weak answer, you lose. You wasted a question. To sell better, you have to plot out your questions.

If you want to get better at selling, you gotta get better at asking questions. Learn to create a rhythm and flow in your questioning that takes your buyer on a journey. Ask the right type of question at the right time in the right tone, and you will be amazed at what you can discover about your customer. Once you get good at it, your destiny will be filled with informational gold.

Getting an in-depth understanding of your customers' current state through a robust discovery process is the only thing that will allow you to open their eyes to opportunities they didn't know existed and allow you to effectively sell to them.

The Opportunity: Qualified or Not?

When you are done with these four discovery steps—you understand the facts of your customers' business, you've identified their problems, assessed the impact those problems are having on the business, and pinpointed the root cause of the problems—you'll have qualified the opportunity. You'll know it's qualified because if you've done the discovery correctly, you'll easily be able to answer "yes" to these four simple questions:

1. Does the prospect have a problem you can fix?
2. Does the prospect agree they have a problem?
3. Does the prospect want to fix the problem?
4. Will the prospect go on a journey with you to fix the problem?

Answer those questions in the affirmative and you have a qualified opportunity.

Does the gap-selling discovery take longer than B.A.N.T.? Maybe a little. But when you're done, you'll find yourself in a far stronger position, and far closer to closing the deal than B.A.N.T. will ever get you at this stage in the game. Don't worry about the budget, need, authority or timing. That stuff will take care

of itself throughout the sales process.

Future State: Where Does Your Buyer Want to Go?

Get ready for a little bit of déjà-vu.

While you're digging to see the foundations of your customers' current state, you're also going to be concentrating on discovering your customers' desired future state—that wonderful place that will come into existence once they've solved all the problems that currently ail them. You do this by asking questions. If your customer is a theater company, you could ask: *“How would you like this system to work?”*

“How much time do you wish it would take?”

“How many more tickets would you like to sell?”

“How many more leads would you like to generate?”

“How much less time would you like your employees to spend on this particular issue?”

“How much more revenue would this represent?”

All of these questions are dedicated to quantifying where your customer wants to go. You want to find the literal, physical future state your customer envisions by asking open-ended questions and refusing to accept open-ended answers. Then you're going to want to find out how that future state would impact their business, pressing to make sure they can articulate the details. “Better efficiency,” is not a specific impact; “reducing turnaround by 20% and increasing production by 50%” is.

You should never be satisfied with the first answer you get. Without digging further and asking for clarification, there will be no way you'll be able to find out that a customer's headache is really being caused by a tumor, not by a lack of caffeine. This means that your customer's future state isn't just a place where the headache is gone, but a place where he lives to see his kids grow up, and to have grandkids, and retire by the beach, and everything else that goes with enjoying the rest of a long, successful, fulfilling life. Try to solve the wrong problem, and you could wind up leaving the customer to believe his problem isn't that big of a deal.

It's all about envisioning outcomes. If every problem on your customer's list were to disappear and you could implement perfect solutions, what would be the impact? Help place them in that frame of mind and imagine what that kind of

world would look and feel like to them—emphasizing that you’ve got the goods to make it a reality. You have to get your customers to buy into you. They’ll appreciate your insights, your ideas for improvement, and your solutions to their problems, but as the philosopher David Hume said, “Reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will.”^{xiii} Unless your customers feel strongly about the value of the change you’re proposing, they will not move closer to the sale.

At the beginning of this book, I assured you that you were not selling a product or service. I’m going to reiterate that point again. If you’re incapable of defining the outcome your customer wants, you’re stuck selling them your service, like consulting, or your product, such as SaaS application software, or dating software. But once you know the future state, you’re no longer selling a mere product or service; you’re selling a desired outcome. You’re selling your customer’s ability to reach a larger audience and increase the revenue of her organization within six months instead of two years. You’re selling the ability for customers to accelerate the growth of their organizations, stop losing money, retain clients, and become more profitable. You’re selling change. Positive, exciting, and desired change.

Have Patience

If it sounds as though discovering your customers' current and future states is a bit time consuming, you're right. You'll want to gather as much of this information as possible during the initial phone call or meeting, but it'll probably take more than just one interaction to get a good understanding of their current and future states. People are busy, time is precious, and you may not have the luxury of obtaining all of this data in one go. Plus, buyers won't always know all the answers and may need time to think about the questions you're asking. Getting a complete view of the current and future state isn't a static exercise; it can happen over time through various interactions. The key is to get as much as you can during discovery and in the early stages of the sales process, and then be on the lookout for more information as the sale progresses. Keep track of the information after each meeting. Use your CRM—it's going to be your best friend. No matter how good you think your memory is, if you're doing a proper gap-selling discovery, you'll never be able to recall all the data you collect. Document it in your CRM.

Remember, you're never truly done with discovery. As time goes on, your customer may bring other buyers into the game and when that happens, you'll have to engage in this process all over again. Trust me, you don't want to assume that a new buyer's current state and future state match the current and future state of your initial buyer. I learned that the hard way a few years back.

I had conducted a rigorous discovery with a director of sales for a change management training company. The buyer was extremely clear about her current state: The company wasn't meeting its growth rate goal, her team hadn't been able to hire the people they needed, she wanted to find a better way to move clients from trials to investing in full-blown campaigns, their average deal size was way too low, and she wanted to be able to land more large, high-value enterprise accounts. Based on that information, I had parroted back to her what I heard (the current state), what I thought the problems were (the problems), how they were affecting her organization (the impact), and why I believed she was having the problems (root cause). I then moved on to making suggestions about how I could solve her problems. She was thrilled. So thrilled, she asked me to share what we'd discussed together with her peer, another director of sales from a different group.

Operating from the assumption that these peers from the same company, in the same role, would be experiencing the same issues and therefore have the same current state and desired future state, I confidently laid out my solutions. And

Bam! The new buyer wasn't having it. Nothing I said resonated. I could feel the disconnect. I started to get confused. I got none of the positive feedback, confidence, and excitement I had gotten during my earlier conversation with her peer. The new director was asking me questions that had nothing to do with the issues initially discussed in the first meeting. This new director didn't see things the way her peer did *at all*. For every solution I offered, she pointed out a hole I hadn't filled. Her current state didn't look anything like the first buyer's, and she envisioned a completely different future state. In her mind, my solution wasn't a good fit for the company, and therefore, I lost credibility. When the first buyer told me to put everything on hold so she could talk things through with her colleague, I knew I'd lost the sale. It was brutal. I broke a cardinal rule: Never assume you know what your buyers are experiencing and what they want to achieve. In the end, I lost the sale and they stuck with the status quo which was unfortunate, because it was clearly not working for either of them.

Check Your Work With the CRM Challenge

I think it's become pretty clear to you by now that gap selling demands you get far more information from customers than salespeople traditionally ask for. Therefore, keeping track of all this information, from your buyer's physical and literal current state, to their unique problems, to the impact of those problems and more can be overwhelming if you don't take copious notes and store them in your CRM. To help make sure you've done this process correctly and have successfully clarified your customers' business problems, I've created the CRM Challenge, a foolproof way to ensure you've gotten the information you need, and to make sure that info is robust enough to assist you in selling to the gap.

Using a CRM isn't a new idea, but most salespeople don't go deep enough with it, entering only high-level information into the CRM, if they enter anything at all. For example, typical entries might be, "Customer is unhappy with the current product," or, "Customer wants to grow more," or, "Customer is losing to the competition." Could you get any more nondescript? If these were your customers and I read these entries aloud without telling you which opportunity I was reading from, would you be able to identify them? For most of you the answer is No, and that's a problem. The CRM Challenge is all about making sure you gather and document so much identifiable information about your buyers' problems that your discovery notes would make it crystal-clear which opportunity it was without you ever having to look at identifying data, or even the industry.

Can You Pass the CRM Challenge?

Get your sales manager or one of your sales peers to go into your pipeline and randomly pick an opportunity you're working on. Without sharing the name of the account, the buyer, or any other identifying information, ask them to read you the notes. Can you tell them which opportunity it refers to? Can you do that for all of your opportunities? If you cannot pass this test, you don't know enough to be gap selling and you've made your job a lot harder. Now you're in a bind. Your customers are moving forward on the sale, but now you're going to have to go back and get all of those important details out of them to make sure you know what's behind the sale, why they want to buy and their intrinsic motivation, thus slowing down the momentum of the sales process. It will be awkward but necessary because if you don't know what's important to your buyer, how will you close the deal? How are you going to get the customer to recognize your solution is the right solution? Without going back for that information, you won't. If you fail the CRM Challenge, it's a tell-tale sign you're selling your product, not selling to the desired outcome.

The CRM Challenge ensures that you're doing your discovery right and that you're getting all the information you need to properly move the deal through the sales process. If you've asked your questions correctly, the data you collect on the opportunity will be unique; there will be only one possibility of who it could be. No one company has the same problem or impact. "Not growing fast enough" means something different for everyone. The truth is, most people only conduct a discovery at very high levels, so by the time they're done, they don't really know their customer. They don't get enough of the current state and can't define it accurately enough to be able to come up with a custom solution. A gap-selling discovery ensures you can.

I'm often asked for a list of sure-fire questions people can ask to nail the discovery and get the right information out of their customers. The truth is, I can't give you one. I can explain the purpose of probing, process, provoking, and validating questions, but there is no gap-selling discovery script. Every seller is different and every situation is different. The thing to keep in mind as you're learning to do a good discovery, however, is that your goal is not to ask specific questions. It's to get specific information. For the purpose of this book, I've had to outline the steps of discovery in a linear fashion, yet in the real world it is anything but a linear process. You sure as hell don't want to sound like you're going through a checklist as you speak to your customer. This is a conversation.

Let me say that again: you're having a conversation, not an interrogation, and like all conversations, it's going to move forward and back and around, and many times your questions and answers will overlap. That's OK. You're not always going to get the information in a nice, neat order. The key is to ask, then listen, then ask, listen, ask, listen.

When you get this part right, your customers will work with you because they believe it will benefit them to give you all the information they can, and that's exactly where you want them. You should never be dragging anyone through a sale. Your buyer should be your partner. A gap-selling discovery process completely alters the traditional selling relationship. It used to be almost adversarial; you versus the customer. The gap-selling relationship is collaborative. The beauty of this is that there is never any reason for you to pressure a customer to buy anything, because by the time you're done with discovery, they'll be so aware of their problems, they'll be begging for your help.

CHAPTER NINE

IS THE GAP WORTH IT?

Once you know your customers' current state and future state, do the math.

Future State – Current State = The Gap

This is where you'll see why it's crucial to get specific details from your customers.

The customer wants 20% growth. She's at 10% growth.

The gap is 10% and \$110M in revenue – \$100M in revenue = a \$10M gap and Close rate of 35% – Close rate of 30% = a 5% gap and Average deal size of \$65,000 – \$50,000=a \$15,000 gap

You see? You're not selling a sales package consulting service; you're selling \$10M in additional revenue! You're not selling a shorter sales cycle; you're selling whatever a 5% increase in closing rates means to your customer.

Once you understand what you're selling, all you have to ask yourself is, "Is this gap big enough to warrant what it's going to cost my customer to change and get them to reach their desired future state?" You're making sure that the value of the outcome is worth shifting from where they are today to where they want to be tomorrow.

Well, would you pay \$100K for an extra \$10M? (The gap: \$9.9M)

Damn straight you would, and in most cases so will your buyers.

Would you pay \$100K for an extra \$1M? (The gap: \$900K)

That's not so clear-cut. The gap is not as big. Additional costs, the time to implement and process changes, one's comfort with the status quo, uncertainty that the new product can deliver, politics, or any number of issues can make a \$900K gap not seem big enough to be worth changing what they're doing.

And you know what? If it isn't, that's good to know, too. Look to widen the gap. Can you do more discovery? Can you ask more questions to uncover an additional impact of changing? It's often possible to widen the gap, and you should look for every opportunity to do so, but if you can't, that's a sign you need to get out and tell the customer you don't think you're the right person to solve their problems. Often customers will figure it out on their own, but ideally,

you will recognize the incompatibility before they will. With all the data you've collected, all your insight and knowledge of their desired outcomes, you should have a solid understanding of whether or not your solution will work for your customer. If you see that it won't, cut to the chase. Tell them you've concluded that there are better options for them, and then do everything you can to connect them to someone who really can help. Don't try to push through the sale when you know it's not the right solution for your customer. Don't waste time on a deal that probably won't close when you could be focusing your attention and efforts on deals that will.

Once you've done all the work of gathering your information, selling to the existing gap is a no-brainer. The problem with a lot of salespeople, however, is that all that preliminary work seems like too much. They want to close the deal fast and go right to closing questions. This doesn't work and gets you ahead of the buyer. I have done hundreds of discovery roleplays with salespeople, and inevitably they rush to the close. They ask a few high-level questions about the prospect's environment, the buyer's current product or solution for their problem, and then *boom!* They're on to closing questions, like, "If we could solve those problems, would you buy?" It's fascinating how we salespeople have been trained to hurry up and get to the close. Don't be. Have patience. Go slower. Focus on gathering as much information as you can about the world your buyer is struggling with and why they want to change. Remember, change is what this whole game is about.

Good salespeople are patient—they don't just have the patience for the work; they embrace it. They understand that the success or failure of the sale is deeply rooted in getting as much information as possible so they can clearly identify the gap. Great selling takes a maniacal commitment to doing the work and doing it well.

Do the work, pay attention to the details, and focus on the customer's needs rather than your own. Drill deep enough so that you know enough about your customer's organization that you can confidently and credibly offer near-irrefutable advice, insight, and direction. That is the most reliable formula for sales success. If your clients would consider hiring you as a consultant for their business because you know so much about what they do, how they do it, and what impacts their outcomes, you'll know you've perfected your technique.

CHAPTER TEN

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS' WHY

Manny checked his reflection in the mirror as he passed it on his way out the front door, and was pleased. He had not only remembered to pick up his tuxedo from the dry cleaner's, but it still fit even though the last time he'd worn it was eight years ago at his youngest son's wedding. He couldn't lie—he still missed the nightly ice cream sandwiches and weekly six-pack his wife had forced him to give up about six months earlier, but his deprivation was having an undeniably positive impact on his belly. Locking up behind him and heading toward his brand new Range Rover parked in the driveway, he grudgingly made a mental note to thank her for not giving up on him.

He slid into the driver's seat of his car and pulled away from the house, checking the fuel gauge to make sure he had enough in the tank to get him to D.C. where his wife was waiting to join him. Tonight was the biggest night of his life. Tonight, they were having dinner with the president of the United States. He still couldn't quite believe it. He hadn't started his business in the aftermath of the Great Recession with an eye toward riches or accolades, but because he found the work important and fulfilling. Yet in the years since, several of the innovations produced by his company had become indispensable to societies across the globe. He wasn't a household name but his products were, as was his charitable foundation. And now he and his wife were about to have dinner at the White House. Not bad for a guy whose high school class voted him "Most Likely to Join the Circus."

He was about a third of the way into his trip when he heard a loud pop and felt the car lurch. Firmly gripping the steering wheel with both hands, he fought the urge to slam the brakes and instead let the car slow down as it veered to the gravelly shoulder of the road and rolled a few more yards before finally settling in a shallow roadside ditch.

After taking a few minutes to catch his breath and count his blessings, Manny stepped out of the car. Walking around the front, Manny saw that his left tire was blown out, the dirty silver rim of the wheel kissing the oily wet cement still dark from the recent rain. Cursing, Manny started pacing maniacally, clutching his thinning hair. He had what he needed to fix the tire, but there was no way to

do the job without getting filthy. Even if he took off his shirt, his pants would be ruined. He couldn't show up at a White House dinner like that! His tuxedo suddenly felt like a straightjacket, and he yanked the jacket off, stopping himself only at the last second from slamming it into the wet ground and stomping on it in frustration. Grabbing his phone from his pocket, he quickly pulled up his rideshare app, willing it to respond faster to his vicious jabs. His heart sank. Every car was at least 30 miles away. He'd never make it in time.

Then, like a vision in a dream, a tow truck appeared out of the dark. Manny raced dangerously close to the edge of the road, frantically waving both hands over his head like a man drowning. With a squeal, the tow truck pulled over and came to a stop. A bearded, heavy-set man wearing a baseball cap clambered out of the driver's side and approached Manny, who was staring at him wide-eyed with his tux jacket loosely dangling from his hand dangerously close to the dirt, too shocked at the miracle to speak.

"Stuck?" The driver asked.

Manny nodded and finally found his voice. "Can you help me? I'm supposed to have dinner with the president tonight. I mean it. The president! Of America! In like, 40 minutes. This is the biggest night of my life. I can't miss it because of a blown tire. The rideshare company is useless; all the cars are too far away. I can't leave my car on the side of the road. Could you take me? Please? You're my last chance."

"Aw, man, that's rough," said the driver. He had a kind face. He looked over at the Range Rover, then back at Manny. "Yeah, I can get you there."

Manny's sigh of relief almost blew the driver's cap off his head.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God."

"It'll cost you a thousand, though."

Manny did a double take. "I'm sorry, what?"

"A thousand. That'll be a thousand dollars. For the tow and the ride."

"Are you kidding me?"

"I'm sorry, but no."

"But that's outrageous!"

"I understand why you'd feel that way, but I'm on my way to another call. Factor in the lost income and the extra time it will take me to get you to the city, plus the repair, and that's what it will cost for me to get your car off this road and take you to your dinner."

Manny leaned his head back to look up at the dark cloudy sky, knowing that every second he hesitated made it less likely he'd get where he needed to go on

time. The air smelled heavy and wet. More rain was coming.

He snapped his head down to look at the driver, and then, jutting his chin at the tow truck, he asked, “How fast can you go in that thing?”

The Value of a Desired Outcome

Under normal circumstances, in Manny’s world a tow truck was a tow truck was a tow truck, and at any other time if he had found himself stuck on the side of the road, he’d probably have held out for the cheapest offer that would get his car off the road and get him home safely. Even more likely, he’d have just changed the tire himself, because that’s all that was driving his desired outcome—the need to get himself and his car home safely. If it took twenty minutes, great! If it took longer, no big deal. And there’s the rub: If there’s anything about the sale that’s no big deal, the salesperson (in this case, a tow truck driver) is dealing with a small gap, which means anyone else can fill it.

But on this day, with the President of the United States, not to mention Manny’s wife, waiting for him at the White House, all tow trucks were not equal. On this day, his desired outcome was to put his car safely in someone else’s hands and get to a dinner in less than forty minutes with a clean tux. There was a massive gap between Manny’s current and desired future state, and that gap put a premium on what would ordinarily be a relatively simple, cheap, and mundane service.

That’s how the desired outcome affects the future state and the value of the gap.

Manny’s desire, his personal connection to the outcome of the future state, was the emotional crux of the sale. The sale was no longer based on whether the service or product provided was superior to any other; it was based on the salesperson’s ability to enable the desired outcome. Pay close attention: *The sale was no longer based on whether the service or product provided was superior to any other; it was based on the salesperson’s ability to enable Manny’s desired outcome.* Once the tow truck driver knew what it meant to Manny to get to that White House dinner clean and on time—i.e., Manny’s intrinsic motivation—the sale was almost a foregone conclusion. That’s the position every salesperson should be angling for, no matter how ordinary or obvious the sale looks on the surface. No salesperson should ever underestimate the value of their service or product to a prospect. You’ll always lose the sale if you assume you’re too expensive because that assumption will stop you from asking the questions that could reveal the true value of your product to your customer. No one would ever

pay a thousand bucks for a tow...until they wind up in a situation where they will.

How to Get to the Heart of the Matter

Your discovery is all about quantifying your prospects' current and future states. You are drilling down for definable, objective goals—an increase to 20% growth from a current state of 10% growth, for example. Once you know that goal, you have to wonder, though, why not some other goal? Why 20% growth? Why not 30%, or even 50%? Why not 5%? That subjective reason, that intrinsic motivation, is behind every future state. Is it possible that a client who wants to see a 20% growth rate just pulled that number out of the air as a reasonably attainable goal? Sure. More likely though, there is a strategic reason for choosing that number, such as hitting that 20% growth rate will meet their commitment to Wall Street or put them in a position to sell the company.

My interest in learning more about intrinsic motivation is what helped me beat out some of the industry's best-known sales consultants to land one of my favorite clients. My client and now good friend, Darren Gloster is COO and a director of ARMS Reliability, asset management company. This is a sophisticated way of saying that they help large asset-dependent businesses like utility providers or oil and gas companies proactively maintain and manage the machines, equipment, and software that allow them to operate with minimal cost, break-downs, and interruptions whilst maximizing safe, reliable, productive time. Darren is in charge of their global operations across North America, Europe, Australia and Latin America. At the time I met him, the company was entering the third year of a five-year plan that was contingent on a significant amount of ramp and growth. Unfortunately, their sales strategies weren't delivering the results they needed to meet their goals. They were growing, but not as fast as they wanted to, and Darren was concerned that their growth might even slow down. As he put it, "I had a gut feeling that we were going to hit our ceiling of growth, so we needed to continue to develop the skill sets and capabilities of the sales team that we had in place. We weren't going to get the sales results we wanted to achieve by not developing the team and sticking with the same strategies while expecting a different result. So, Darren started looking for someone to help improve their sales management strategies and teach them better ways to lead the team and improve everyone's forecasting accuracy and sales performance. He wound up screening four consultants, three of whom he found through their bestselling sales books. I was the last. Darren threw me into

the mix because he had seen me speak at a conference, and though that talk was centered more around personal branding and marketing, not sales—the emphasis of my first book, *Not Taught*—he liked my pragmatic content and entertaining delivery style. He figured it couldn't hurt to talk to me and see what I had to say.

Darren was taken aback at how our conversation differed from the ones he had with the other consultants. Since Darren thought he knew what his problem was, the other three were happy to let him tell them about his challenges and how he thought they should be fixed. But my gap-selling process took such a different approach that in Darren's words, it "kind of smacked me over the head." He offered to explain the effect of gap selling from a buyer's perspective, and why he decided to go with me ([A Sales Guy Consulting](#)). See the next page for what Darren said:

As a group of shareholders, we were doing well. But there was this five-year plan that we had drifted from. We had tried internally to reshape the business with new software and the addition of territories, but progress was slower than desired. Keenan was the first and only person who dug into the question, "How far are you from your goal?"

I knew the number. It was significant and we were 29% off our plan. But I'd never actually stopped to realize, "Holy shit, that is a lot of money! Perhaps we're not performing as well as we think we are."

And then Keenan did a great job of exploring all the issues, jumping from them to the business problems, and then from the business problems to the impacts they were having, to the root causes and back. He was all over the place, in a good way. You could tell he was in a zone, trying to uncover what was going on in our organization, why it was happening and how it was affecting our ability to hit our five-year plan. He almost didn't seem to care in terms of what we actually did. It was like, I don't really care what product or service you offer because selling to him is selling—you can apply the methodology or principles to anything.

The other important thing is that Keenan pointed out three things that I hadn't factored as potential problems or constraints for us. He thought our organizational structure—the way the team reported globally—was one of the main barriers to our future success and future growth. That wasn't on my radar at all. He honed in on our coaching process. And finally, he assessed that some of the people on the team might not have the ability to grow as needed. We would have to provide new skills, coaching, mentoring and training, and recast

the way we had always done things, to provide a new framework from which we could operate.

I was very focused on what I thought the problems were and what I thought the solutions were. The fact that he threw those things in and identified them as problems, yet the other consultants hadn't done that . . . it was a bit of a light bulb moment.

The other people were pandering on what I said the problems were. Keenan, on the other hand, put himself in the seat next to me and made me feel like I had a co-pilot who was going to make sure we landed the plane safely. He expanded my awareness of my own sales organization. He created an amazing level of credibility. I didn't feel like I was engaged in a sales call at all. It felt like we had already hired him and were collaboratively solving my problems. The experience was night and day from the conversations I had with the other consultants.

Darren had a goal but had lost sight of the path to get there. Gap selling allowed me to push all the distractions aside and show him exactly where things were going wrong and where he was headed if he didn't make some changes. (Look, there's that change word again.) Once you know your customers desired future state and intrinsic motivations, all that's left is to make sure they not only believe that that future state can happen, but that you can make it happen better than anyone else.

How do you get to the heart of that motivation? After summarizing everything your customers tell you about their current state and what they want to see in their future state, try saying this:

“Tell me a bit about what is driving this change.”

If you've been gap selling until this point, your customers will be honest with you. The answer you receive will give you a distinct and important edge over the competition by providing you with the last detail you need to perfectly customize and fine-tune your sale. It lays out a path to the close no one else will be able to see.

From this moment on, you will focus your sale on your customers intrinsic motivation because it's all they're going to be thinking about whenever they decide anyway. You might even consider thinking about your customers' future state as a three-part entity. For example, there's a technical future state: New software could increase the number of sales and make it easier for a company to engage with their customers, simplify and streamline the buying process, and

make it easier for the company to run reports. Then, there's a business future state: All those technical improvements will increase customer satisfaction, the number of orders will rise, and word of mouth will surge. Finally, there's the core of the future state: All of these improvements will enable us to beat the competition. Our stock price will go up. The board will be happy. Every step of the discovery process is equally important in leading you right up to this moment: When you can get to the heart of why your customer wants to buy, you get to the heart of the sale.

Drumroll, Please . . .

You know your customers' current state, future state, and intrinsic motivation. Now you have permission to start talking about your product or service! That's right, you finally get to pitch. You can start sharing information about what your product does. You can explain why your service is better than that of any other competitor on the market.

In other words, you can start selling!

Crazy, isn't it, how much later in the process you start to actually sell when you're selling to the gap? See, people following the traditional selling playbook usually start here. And it's why they fail. If you start selling too early, you'll miss all the important developmental work that makes gap selling such a winning strategy. You're launching the sale without a map. You won't know your customers' current state. You'll be blind to their future state. You'll be clueless about their intrinsic motivations. You won't have the information you need to properly navigate. Remember, people don't buy unless they are compelled to change. People are compelled to change by evaluating their current state against a potential or desired future state. That's simply how we make decisions. Therefore, as salespeople, we will be far more successful in influencing the sale if we are able to do the work for them. By making sure our customers have a crystal-clear view of their current and future states, we facilitate the process and increase the probability that they will change, or as they say in sales vernacular, that they will buy.

If you were to close this book right now, you'd miss out on a lot, but at the very least you would walk away with this crucial piece of knowledge: If you've ever struggled to close deals, or had a customer go dark, or thought you had the deal closed and all of sudden lost it to someone else, it's almost guaranteed that it's because you started a third of the way into the sales process instead of at the beginning. You tried to take off from the middle of the runway, which didn't

leave you enough room to gather the speed you needed to fly. Don't take shortcuts; they only lead to nosedives.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HOW TO DO A KICKASS DEMO

For many salespeople today, a product demo is the lifeblood of the sale. If the demo goes bad, it's almost impossible to recover. Yet, far too often I cringe as I watch salespeople butcher the demo. Inevitably, the buyer fades away, never to return. It doesn't have to be this way. The demo can be a salesperson's opportunity to shine and increase their ability to win the sale. But to do this, you have to crush the demo. Gap selling will make sure you do.

There are four elements to a kick ass demo. Get them right.

1. No discovery, no demo Given the in-depth nature of a gap-selling discovery, you may have already figured out that you should never, ever combine a discovery and a demo. For those of you who didn't, I'll say it again: You should never, ever combine a discovery and a demo. Let me be clear that I mean you need to schedule two different time slots on two different days. And no, splitting the demo into two sections, thirty minutes for discovery and thirty minutes for the demo, *is not* doing a separate discovery. The two serve completely different purposes and need to be treated that way. In addition, a robust demo is wholly contingent on a thorough discovery. You can't conduct a proper demo if you haven't asked all those open-ended probing, process, and provoking questions which will get you to the bottom of your customer's current and future states. You can't customize your demo unless you know what problems you are trying to solve. Remember, a discovery should answer the following questions: 1. Does the prospect have a problem you can fix?

2. Does the prospect agree they have a problem?

3. Does the prospect want to fix the problem?

4. Will the prospect go on a journey with you to fix the problem?

What this means is that sometimes you're going to have to refuse to do a demo even when the customer is eager to learn more about your product or service. I know that sounds crazy, but it's really important. Don't try to work around this rule and squeeze a discovery in during the first ten minutes of your demo, either

—you’ll short-change both of them. Instead, if a customer refuses a discovery, inform them that the demo is actually a two-step process, and that without a discovery, it’s impossible to conduct a proper, customized demo. And that’s the truth! A gap sales demo isn’t just a way for you to showcase your wares. It’s your chance to help the buyer see how your product or service will fit into their department or organization and make their future state better than their current one.

One way to get around a buyer’s reluctance to let you do a discovery is to schedule the discovery and demo as if they were one event occurring over a two-day period. Make sure to give yourself enough time in between the discovery meeting and demo (maybe three to four days), to process all the information you glean from the discovery so you can really think through the specific recommendations you will offer your customer to properly customize the demo.

2. No ifs If you have done a thorough discovery, you will know with great certainty what problems your customer is dealing with. That means there will never be a reason to say the word “if,” as in, “If you have this problem, then . . .” Or, “If you ever struggle with...” There is no “if” during a demo because *you’re supposed to already know!* If at this point you’re guessing at what might be troubling your customer and trying to demo features you think they might like or you think might be valuable to them, you have done a lousy discovery. It would be better to go back and get all the information you need before even starting, because if you move forward with a demo now, you’re not going to get the sale.

But what if you know the potential of your product, and you’ve seen what it can do for a business, and you want your customer to be aware that it can help them in a multitude of ways? Then is it OK to say “if?”

No! You’re not focusing on what the customer really cares about if you are presenting for every contingency their business could face. You’ll come off as unfocused, and your customer will feel overwhelmed. Probably bored, too. Maybe even irritated. It’s like handing a teenager two pair of cargo shorts, a bathing suit, and a wool sweater when she comes into your store looking for something to wear to prom. I mean, sure, one day it is possible she will need these items—summer and winter do come along, after all—but your customer is not in bathing-suit mode right now and quite frankly, it would be distracting and annoying to be asked to think about bathing suits when all you care about is

finding the perfect dress before 5 p.m. Saturday night.

Demo Challenge: Try to conduct your entire 45-60 minute presentation without saying the word “if.” If you succeed, you’ll have conducted a good demo.

3. **Stick to Six Features** Did you know you can use your iPhone as a level to make sure surfaces are straight? That you can give contacts unique notification tones so you can tell who texted you without looking? How about that you can take a photo without touching your phone by tapping the volume control on a connected pair of headphones? Even if you did, did any of those features make or break your decision to buy the phone? Probably not, because you are just like every other buyer in the world. A product may be jam-packed with features, but prospects that buy only do so because of a select few.

The point of your demo is not to reveal all of your product’s features and functions. It’s to reveal how well your product provides the solution to your buyer’s specific problems. While customers often have numerous wants and needs, there are generally only a handful of serious business problems that really matter to them. And since a demo should only be an hour long max, you want to be sure to give each of those problems the attention they deserve. If you’re trying to cram more than six features into your demo, there’s no way you can spend the appropriate amount of time showcasing each. It is always better to spend a lot of time highlighting one feature’s business value than it is to spend a little time introducing a whole bunch of features that may or may not be relevant to solving your buyer’s problems. Think quality, not quantity.

4. **Anchor Your Customer** Anchoring is a psychological term used to describe a cognitive bias that people use to make decisions. If your grandfather’s eyes bug out of his head at the idea of paying \$5.25 for a Starbucks venti salted caramel mocha Frappuccino, it’s because his reference point—his anchor—is a 10¢ cup of joe. Black. No sugar. And what the hell is a venti, anyway? You young people...

Grandpa is relying too much on the first piece of information he ever received—the cost of a cup of coffee back in the 1940s—to determine the value of a cup of coffee today. That’s his anchor. There are other anchors people commonly rely on, like the original price of a discounted item (which we think tells us

whether or not we're getting a good deal), or the purchase price of our own homes (which we think tells us how much our home should sell for later). All humans tend to make judgment calls based on the first piece of information to which they are exposed. Sometimes you picked up that information years ago, like Grandpa, and sometimes you just notice the higher numbers on a price tag. Regardless, when you task your brain with making a decision, it's going to glom onto that bit of information and elevate its importance, possibly at the expense of other pieces of information that might have greater relevance (like the fact that the price of the item is still 25% higher than you'd pay elsewhere).

All humans do this. So, when doing your demo, your goal should be to get your prospects to see your solution as the first and best solution to their problem so that it becomes the baseline against which they judge any other solution. You want your solution to become their anchor. You will do this by focusing their attention on the future state. Here's how: Throughout your presentation, after every feature demo ask your prospect affirming questions, like this: *"Can you see how this feature will improve your churn rate?"*

"Do you see how this will shorten data input?"

"Can you see how this will increase your conversions?"

For once, yes or no answers will be acceptable! Getting your customer to affirm the value of every feature you present anchors your prospects in your solution and its effect on shaping their future state. As you paint a powerful vision of the future, make sure your customers see the same one you do.

There's another benefit to asking affirming questions or anchoring: It confirms that you're hitting your mark. A good discovery should be enough to ensure that you target the right problems and offer solutions the customer will find valuable. But let's face it, sometimes we whiff. Maybe the customer's issues were super complicated, or we overlooked a key question. It can happen. Asking validating questions will help you catch your mistakes and give you a chance to gauge how well you're connecting with your customer. If you ask a customer if they can see how your solution will positively impact their business and they say "No," you know you've got a problem. Stop the demo right away and start digging for more information so you can get yourself back on track. Asking validating questions will ensure that all of the information you've gathered is accurate and true. They can save you weeks and even months of time trying to close a sale that, unbeknownst to you, went off the rails in the middle of your demo.

Start With Your Demo Map Remember the PIC (Problem Identification Chart)? Take a look at it again. Check the list of problems you've identified as ones that your solution can resolve, and organize them in order of the impact they are having on your customers organization from greatest to least. Big problems create big motivations to change. Little problems don't. Don't waste your time on little problems.

This list will serve as a demo map. If an issue or problem doesn't appear on the list, don't mention it. In this way, your buyers will receive a customized demo perfectly tailored for their needs, which will enable them to see exactly how your product or service can get them to their desired outcomes. Like a mirror in a dressing room, your demo should show customers exactly how your product is going to look on them.

It's ***still*** not about you!

Get it out of your head that the purpose of your demo is to show off all of your product's bells and whistles or to reveal all the cool features. As with everything about gap selling, the demo is not about you or your product. Customers don't care that your product can do a Boolean search faster than most, or that your product can record and segment multiple callers or voices into unique segments, or that your product can turn lead into gold.

Your customers do not give a shit about your product. What do they care about?

They care about how your product is going to solve their problems. That's it. That's *all*!

So, unless that Boolean search, call recording features or the lead-into-gold thing is going to help solve the problem(s) they told you they are struggling with, don't waste their time or yours talking about them or anything else that doesn't solve their stated problems.

Customers buy what they value. The more value you can create through your demo, the greater the probability that you will close the deal.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MOVE YOUR DEALS THROUGH THE PIPELINE

Predictability is one of a B2B seller's biggest concerns. It's the thing that keeps you sane when you've got thirty opportunities in your pipeline and your manager is demanding to know when each one is going to close. If you've established a predictable system, there's no need to sweat it because you know exactly when each of those opportunities will close. If you have no idea or you're only guessing, you're setting yourself up for chaos and trouble. The next three steps are designed to help you extract all the information needed to establish predictability by allowing you to plan ahead, keep your opportunities on track, and seal the deal every time.

1. Nail Down their Decision Criteria

One thing that you've probably noticed throughout this book is that much of the time when we're selling, we're actually double checking that our customers want what they think they want. It's not that they're stupid or not good at what they do; it's that much of the time they're too close to the problem. That's why being an industry expert is such a vital part of being a good salesperson. The longer you're in the field and the more people you meet and the more problems you help solve, the better you are at quickly identifying pitfalls and unintended consequences, as well as gauging how well your product or service will actually deliver the results your customers envision in their future state. By the time you get to this stage in the sale, you know their current state, you know their future state, and you know their intrinsic motivation. In other words, you know their what and their why. But if you want to keep your prospects moving through the pipeline and get to the next stage, you have to know their how.

So the next thing you're going to find out is their decision criteria. The decision criteria are the information and details the customer is going to use to decide which solution they are going to choose. Understanding your buyer's decision criteria ahead of time gives you amazing insight into what it's going to take to win the deal and how the buyer is looking at their problem and future state. The decision criteria are like a cheat sheet, and when combined with a

proper discovery, it is gold.

Hint: The decision criteria should align with what you learned in the discovery. For example, if a customer's decision criteria included how well the software integrated with SAP but you didn't uncover any need for SAP integration in your discovery, you missed something and you'll want to get on it immediately. Asking your buyer to outline their decision criteria is key and offers tremendous insight.

Learning the decision criteria normally isn't very difficult. Simply ask, "How are you going to decide what's the best solution for you? What will be the most important factors in helping you make your decision?"

If you were selling call recording software designed to allow sales managers to monitor and record sales calls so they can properly coach and train their teams, your customer might tick off the following:

1. Price
2. How easy it is to cut a clip out of a longer conversation and share it electronically
3. How well the annotation option works
4. User friendliness

With these answers, your customer is telling you what they believe is important. But remember, earlier they also told you something else—their desired future state. So now hold the factors they'll use to make their decision up against that desired future state. Do they align?

Keep this in mind: The point of this exercise isn't to confirm that your product or service can do the things your customer most wants it to do. Rather, it's to confirm that the criteria they value the most and are using to make their decision will actually get them the desired outcome they say they want. For example, the head of a theater company might tell you that one of the most important things she will consider when making her decision is if the software will be able to offer her members (season ticket holders) the ability to pick their own seats for each individual show as opposed to having the same seat for every show. But if earlier she informed you that the business problem she was trying to solve was how to increase first-time ticket buyers and her desired outcome in the future was to increase revenue through first-time ticket buyers, whether they became

members or not, why is a feature that allows them to pick their own seats for each show relevant to the decision? You'd need to find out.

Here's what you could say:

"I'm confused. You said growing revenue by increasing first-time ticket buyers was your most important priority, but some of the criteria you've said you're going to use to decide whether to make this purchase won't have any effect on increasing first-time ticket buyers. Did I misunderstand what you're trying to accomplish? Can you explain why these criteria are so important to you?"

You're not pushing back—you're protecting your client. Customers can completely undermine their future state if they base their decisions on the wrong criteria. Let's say good manners are normally a high-priority criterion for Manny, our stranded White House dinner guest, and let's say that instead of getting a polite tow truck driver, he wound up dealing with a real jerk. If in his future state he's eating roast beef with horseradish sauce in the First Family's Dining Room, his driver's manners shouldn't even factor into his thoughts as he weighs whether to pay a thousand bucks to the tow truck driver that promises to get his car off the road and him to the city in time for dinner. Think about it. His other options are 1. hold out for a cheaper tow or rideshare that will get him to dinner late, or 2. fix his tire himself, which will make him dirty *and* late. There's no contest. He can hold out for a polite tow truck driver the next time he needs roadside assistance; today, he needs to get where he's going, and fast.

Do yourself and your customers a solid and confirm that your customers' decision criteria are aligned with their own desired outcomes and objectives. If they're not, you need to be prepared to challenge them to make sure their reasoning is robust, or realign them if necessary—but not because they're taking a different path than the one you think they should. This is important: Your goal here should not be to steer them to where you think you have the best chance of closing the deal, but to make sure they have thought through why they want what they say they want. Make them own their decisions.

My Four Favorite Words

There's a reason I suggested you challenge your buyer starting with the words, "I'm confused. You said . . ." Those four words, in that order, are four of my favorites. They are *powerful*. I love using them to challenge buyers and prospects, which is exactly what you need to do when you spot inconsistencies

between what buyers say they want in their future state, and the methods, approaches, and decision criteria they're using to get there. Your ability to identify, call out, or resolve these inconsistencies is a measure of the added value you bring as a salesperson. You need to get good at it.

It's not always easy. Challenging your customers without tact, diplomacy, or grace can make them feel incompetent, inattentive, or insecure, which is not conducive to the collaborative, enthusiastic mindset you want your customer to have when you're gap selling. No one likes to be called out for their mistakes, but sometimes you have to do it. A doctor would never continue with ineffective treatments just because letting patients know it wasn't working would be embarrassing. Same applies here.

By prefacing your challenge with "I'm confused, you said . . ." you give buyers a way to save face. Those two words suggest you're inviting discussion, not indicting them or attacking them for being wrong. "I'm confused" (or "I was under the impression," or "I thought . . .") allows for the possibility that the mistake is yours. This gives you leeway to encourage introspection instead of defensiveness, and to engage in a discussion rather than a debate. Learning to identify inconsistencies between what buyers say they want and the decisions they make is critical to gap selling and moving deals forward. Starting with "I'm confused, you said . . ." before listing the inconsistencies or discrepancies you find confusing is one of the best ways to disarm your prospect, invite a discussion, and resolve problems before they start.

2. Know the Buying Process

The next question you want to ask so you can understand how to move the sale forward is, "Can you tell me a little about your company's buying process?"

This isn't about finding out what factors they are considering as they decide whether or not to buy. That's decision criteria, which we just discussed, and you should already know it. This question is literally about knowing all the steps your customers will have to follow before they can decide to buy. For example, their standard procedure might be to request an RFP from all their candidates, choose the three best, ask those potential providers to come in to the office and present in front of a committee, pick the winner from among those three, negotiate a contract, and then present the contract to the company CEO for signature. Another company might have to talk to HR. Yet another might tell you that they have two partners and they have to discuss the matter together before being able to move forward. Each scenario gives you a vastly different

timeline for how long it will take you to complete the sale, and each scenario also tells you whom you are eventually going to have to influence. Combine what you know about the 1. decision criteria with the 2. buying process steps to properly build your deal strategy. Maybe you know you don't provide RFPs, so you pull out of the sale right away. Or, maybe now that you know HR is going to be involved, you can prepare to get HR's current and future state when you get a chance. Or maybe you can ask for a meeting with the partners you haven't yet met.

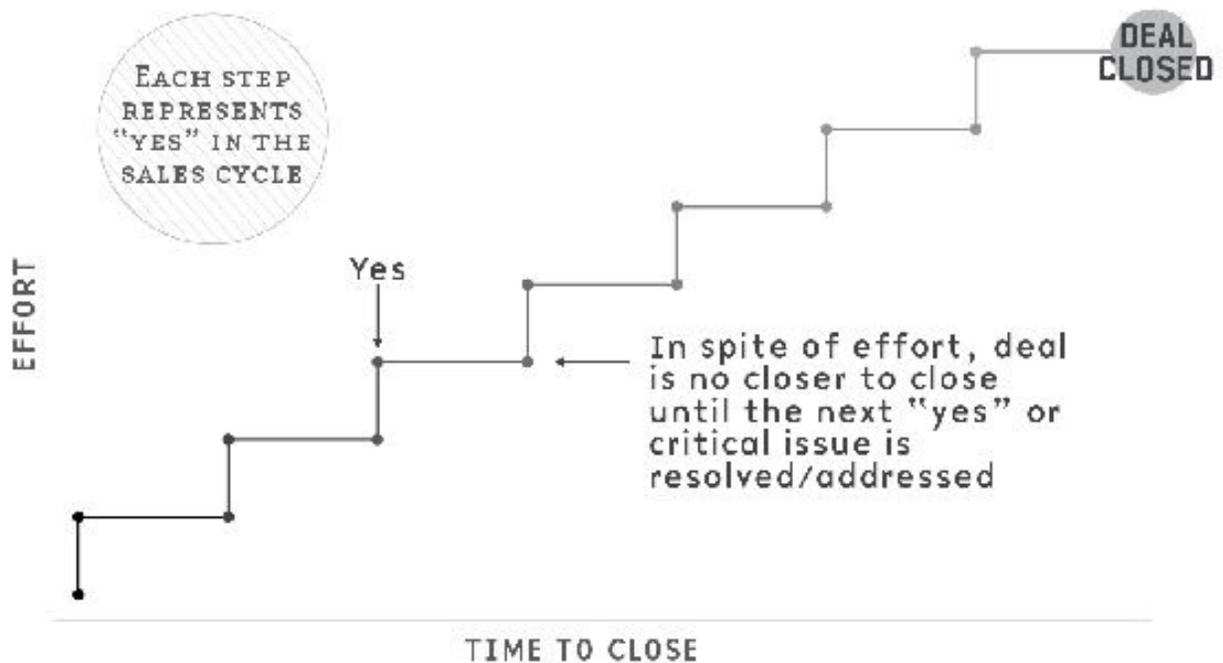
Knowing your customer's buying process is like getting a topographic map of the land. You already knew what direction you wanted to go, but now you can see where you might run into a steep valley, a hill, or a river. It allows you to be prepared for anything.

Many salespeople underestimate the importance of understanding customer buying processes. Yet nothing, and I mean nothing, can mess up sales more predictability than not understanding the buying process and who's involved. According to the folks at Gartner, who in addition to *The Challenger Sale* wrote the killer book *The Challenger Customer*, there are now 5.4 buyers in every sale.^{xiv} That's right, the average decision process involves 5.4 buyers! Can you see what kind of risk and unpredictability you're setting yourself up for if you don't know your customers' buying process and the players involved? Don't create problems for yourself. Spending extra time learning everything you can about the players involved in the sale and the process your customers will use to determine whether or not to buy will allow you to estimate how long the sale will take, mitigate risks, and most importantly, tell you who you need to engage with to get the deal.

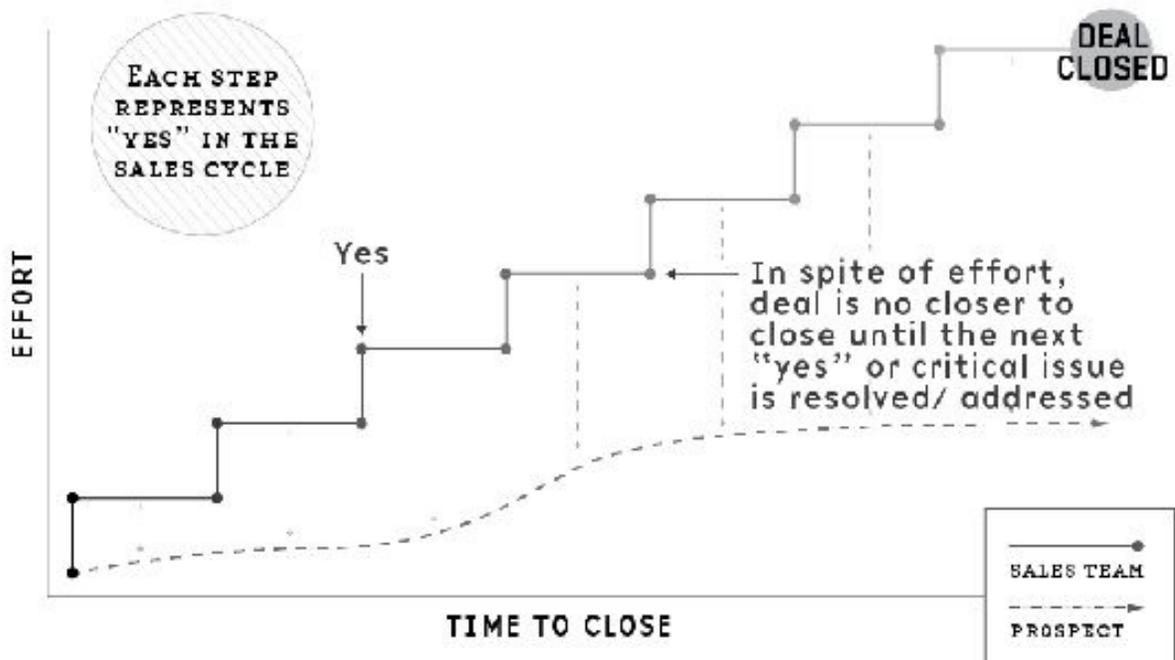
3. Focus on the Next Yes

If you've been in sales long enough, you know that a sales cycle is made up of a set of stages that allow us and our organizations to properly track our opportunities and gauge the probability of a close. Unfortunately, most of us are taught that sales cycles are linear. But that's wrong. It's a mistake that has caused many salespeople to exhaust themselves unnecessarily, and even wind up completely off track.

A sales cycle should actually look more like a rising staircase than a horizontal straight line.



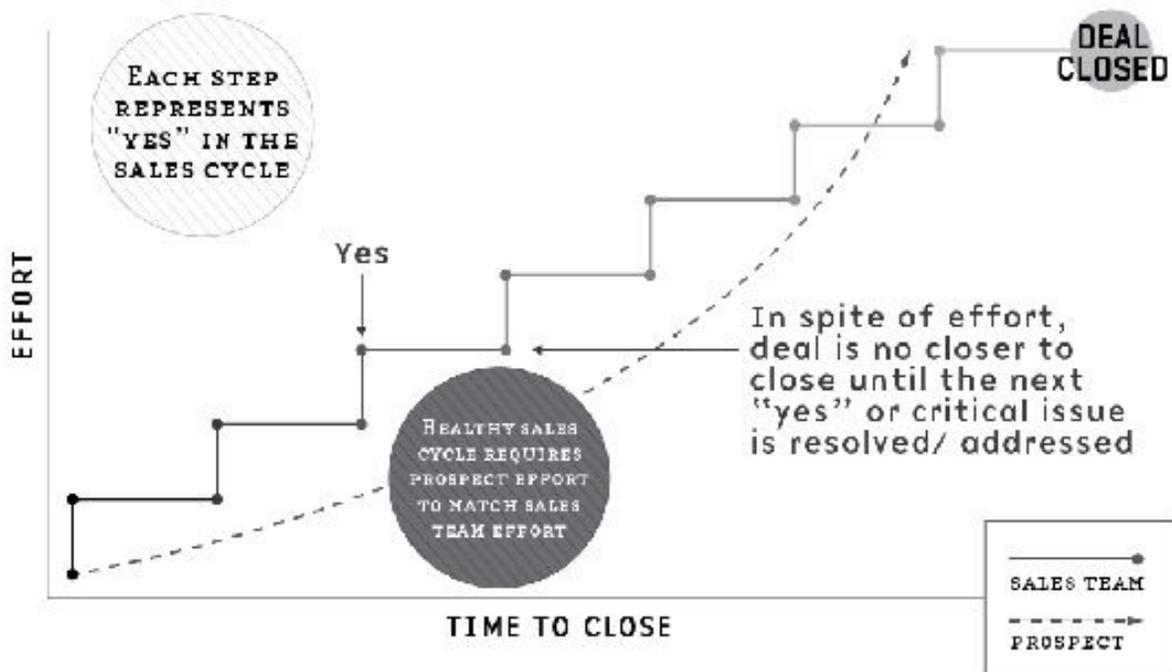
In a typical graph, the y-axis on a sales cycle represents how much effort a salesperson puts into the sale; the x-axis marks the time it takes to close. The problem is in many cases, the only person whose line is rising up the Y-axis is the salesperson's, while the prospect's efforts stay pretty flat, like this:



Salespeople tend to think if they're putting superhuman effort into the sale,

they must be moving it forward. Unfortunately, they're only moving it upward.

What makes a sale move forward? The word "Yes." Remember how we discussed that you have to earn an invitation to help the customer? Every single yes you hear from the customer is a renewed agreement to work with you. If you're not hearing yes," you're not approaching the close. Make no mistake, every yes you hear is a small sale. In fact, a sale is made up of hundreds of little sales conducted throughout the selling cycle. Early on, you'll want to hear the customer agree that yes, there is a problem and yes, he's willing to work with you to solve it. Once you move into suggesting a solution, you'll want to hear yes, the solution could indeed be a good fit for the organization. Later, if you know that the decision process included a meeting with the CEO, you'll want to hear yes, we'd be happy to set you up to meet with the CEO. If you know you can't make the sale without seeing product specs, you'll want to do what it takes to make your customer ready to say, yes, we'll send them your way. At each step in the sales cycle, you and your customers should be moving together toward whatever it is your customers say needs to happen before they can buy. If you're gap selling, they should be as invested in the process as you are. Graphed, a gap sale would look like this:



Note that as both participants move across the X-axis, they are simultaneously moving up the Y-axis. The closer customers get to buying, the more engaged they're going to be and the more willing they'll be to do the work necessary to close. If you're a car salesman, it's all well and good if customers call to talk

about cars they've seen online, but until they agree to come in for a test drive, you're spinning your wheels in place, not moving the sale forward. In this case, your focus wouldn't be on selling the car but on selling the test drive, because you can't close without it. You always have to have your eye on the next small sale and make sure you're providing enough value to compel your customer to say "yes" to it. If your customer resists, it's time to go back to your discovery and figure out what part of their current state, future state, or intrinsic motivation you still haven't learned.

Earlier we talked about how part of our jobs as salespeople is to protect our customers from choosing changes and solutions that won't actually solve their problems, might make them worse, or might unintentionally cause new ones. This often happens because people are too close to the problem and can't see the bigger picture. Salespeople can fall into a flip version of this trap, fixing their eyes on the close ahead and forgetting what they're selling to at the moment. Some of these people consider themselves good closers, but that's not something to brag about. Good closers are bad salespeople. Their whole focus is on the final big Yes. They pitch their story, show their wares, and then when they get to the end of the sale, they try to get their customer to make a decision. But by remaining fixated on a single big sale, they don't close all the small sales that need to happen to make the big sale fall into place. Good closers lose a lot of little deals within the sales process. As in chess, looking ahead helps you see patterns and enables you to prepare for eventualities, but you still have to pay attention to what's happening right in front of your nose and adjust to it. Every small yes moves you closer to the sale.

So checking off those three steps—nailing down the decision criteria, knowing the buying process, and focusing on next yeses (aka the mini-sale within a sale)—will all help to ensure that you can move your deal smoothly through the pipeline. But there's one more thing you need to remember.

You're Not the Customer's B*tch

Keeping the pipeline moving is crucial, but let me make this very clear: A good salesperson is a consultant, a collaborator, a partner—not a servant. You know what that means? The customer is not always right. In fact, customers can often be their own worst enemies. In general, successfully solving problems requires partnership and information sharing. It's a result of two or more people or entities sharing the workload and committing to the same outcome. That's why a balanced sales cycle shows both the client and the salesperson's line rising along

that Y-axis as the sale progresses.

It's not that you aren't going to work hard to make the sale. Selling to the moment takes attention, patience, and mental agility. It can be challenging and time-consuming; too many salespeople believe that the only way to move a sale forward through the pipeline is to cater to customers' every request or whim, or interpret their reticence to share information as a cue to double down on their efforts. That's wrong. Just as investors need to weigh their ROI (return on investment) when deciding where to place their money, salespeople need to consider their ROSE (return on sales effort) when judging where to target their energy and time. That often means learning to say no.

The more you value yourself, your knowledge of the space in which you sell, and your understanding of your buyers' problems, the more your customers will value you. A great salesperson isn't a gofer or a servant. A great salesperson is a skilled consultant and valuable asset. And you need to behave like one.

Here's the test:

- If your customer says jump and you ask "how high?"
- If the customer asks for a quote and you deliver it without asking why
- If the customer asks for a free trial but won't share their results
- If you meet all your customer requests but they won't meet yours
- If the customer expects you to change your business model to meet their needs and you do
- If the customer only likes you if you give them the pricing they want
- If the customer continually asks for things, but won't give anything in return

...you're the customer's b*tch. And you have to stop!

But:

- If you make it clear that you know as much or more than your customer about industry trends
- If you understand and can explain the nuances of solving the key problems associated with your products or services

- If you're as aware (or even more aware) than your customer of what the competition is doing
- If you continually provide relevant customer insights
- If the client can rely on you for direction and advice
- If you don't push products, services, or features and benefits
- If you have a strong social following because of your shared content
- If you are a relied-upon resource in LinkedIn groups or Quora
- If customers know you have the answers they need to solve complex business challenges

...you are an asset and a critical element to your client's success. Not their b*tch.

This isn't just a matter of self-respect; it's a mindset that will allow you to sell better. While the role of a skilled gap seller is to help the customer feel comfortable and in control, you should never actually lose control of the sale. And that's what you're doing if you become a subservient lackey. If all you're doing is what the customer tells you to do, you're not providing the expertise, professional insight, and guidance they need from you. Don't let your fear of losing the sale compromise the caliber of your work. That's what would turn you into a customer's b*tch. Instead, let fear be a guide. If you find yourself afraid of losing the deal, it's probably a sign you've lost control. If you're feeling fearful, it means you're not gap selling. If you're afraid, it means you don't understand where the customer is. It means you don't have the information you need to influence your buyers. It means you're at the mercy of your customers, and that's the beginning of the end. Why? Because when you're at the mercy of your buyers, they are no longer letting you help them. It is no longer a collaborative sale and those types of deals rarely close. Don't let fear enter the equation. Know your stuff and don't become the customer's b*tch.

The balance of power shifts throughout a sale. In the beginning, when you're first trying to get a prospect's attention, it's totally asymmetrical. You have no power and you deserve no respect. It is up to you to earn it. After all, unless the buyer called or emailed you first, you're the one interrupting their day with a request for attention, so you'd better be prepared to show that you're worth it. If

you follow all of the gap-selling techniques we've covered so far in this book, proving your value shouldn't be a problem.

However, once your customer agrees to go on this sales journey with you—once they start regularly saying “yes”—the sale should equalize into a partnership. And in partnerships, one person isn't doing all the giving while the other does all the taking. In a partnership, each person gives the other what they need to be and do their best. They mutually support each other toward success. So if you need a document or information that will help you do a better job for your customer and they refuse to provide it, you shouldn't just turn away and try to make do without. You should stand your ground and help them understand why it's in their best interest—why it will be useful to them—to help you. And if they make unreasonable demands of you, you're not required to oblige unless you know you're going to get something useful in return.

For example, let's say you're selling software and you have successfully worked through the discovery. Then, right in the middle of the solution stage, your customer informs you that she's definitely interested in your product, but before committing she needs a 90-day trial. You explain that your company doesn't do trials, and this is an unreasonable demand anyway. You start asking questions: What is she hoping to accomplish with the trial? How will a trial get her to her desired outcome? She's not interested in explaining herself and digs in her heels. This is how they do things at their company. No trial, no sale.

But you are not the customer's b*tch. You now have two options: 1. You can say no. Sure, that might scuttle the sale right away, but at least you wouldn't be on tenterhooks for three months scrambling to make sure that if she bails you can fill the hole in your sales projections. Or, 2. you can set terms. You could agree to a 90-day trial, *if*:

- The customer pays an installation fee
- The customer provides clear and measurable success criteria so you know what kind of metrics you're trying to meet
- The customer commits to purchasing the software if you meet that success criteria

In this way, you recalibrate the relationship to make sure that both parties are sharing equally in risk and responsibility. You're acknowledging an unreasonable demand, then turning it into a reasonable one.

This might come as a surprise, but customers often acquiesce in these instances. Just as higher prices often reflect quality and value, so does standing strong behind your product and principles. It can reaffirm your perceived value and make clients want to work with you more. Now, sometimes the customer will refuse, in which case you should tell them to pound sand. But be strong enough to explain yourself: “I get why you want this trial, but just because you want it doesn’t mean I have to give it. We need to be working together on this and if you can’t meet me halfway, we’re not right for each other.”

A sales relationship is like a marriage. You and your customer have to give and take as equals with an eye toward the same goals, or it just won’t work.

This advice doesn’t only apply when the customer is making unreasonable demands, by the way. For example, you know those times when you contact customers and they ask you to send them your pricing before you’ve had a chance to learn anything about them, or for them to learn much about you? They’ve never spoken to you, they’ve never met you, they don’t want to set up a meeting or a follow-up call to explain why they think they might need your product or service, they just want to see what it costs. You can and should say no. Gap selling is about building relationships and solving problems. You literally can’t do your job properly if you agree to let them determine your value to them based on nothing more than prices. You’re not McDonald’s serving exactly the same thing to every customer who comes through your doors.

The next time this happens, explain that you can’t send over pricing until you understand the customer’s organization, what problems he is trying to solve, and what he hopes to accomplish. You would never ask him to short-change his customers; you can’t agree to anything that would short-change yours. In addition, the value of a product or service can fluctuate dramatically depending on how desperately customers want to change their current state or ensure their desired outcomes. If there’s one thing we learned from Manny’s story, it’s that a price that seems exorbitant to a customer one minute can look like pocket change the next. It all depends on how what you’re charging weighs against the customer’s desired outcome. We’ll further discuss how to clear up stand-offs on price and other potential clogs in the pipeline in the next chapter.

PART III

GAP PROSPECTING

You gotta give 'em a reason...

PART III . GAP PROSPECTING

Now that you completely understand the gap-selling methodology and how and why it works, we're going to take a step back. Like, way back, even before the discovery process. We're going to talk about prospecting. Why? Because prospecting is everything. If you can't get prospects, you have no one to sell to and most companies and salespeople *suck* at prospecting. Their emails are selfish and all about them. Their voicemails are drab and don't offer anything compelling, and their social selling is obnoxious and intrusive. Too many of us are using old school me, me, me interruptive, valueless approaches to build our pipeline, and we're failing because of it. Gap prospecting changes all that. Why? Because gap selling isn't just a methodology for moving deals through the pipeline; it's a philosophy for engaging and influencing people, and therefore, it will improve your results in any environment where you are working to influence change.

Everyone should read this part of the book (even marketers could benefit from paying attention here) but it'll be of particular interest to outbound sales development reps (SDRs) and outbound account executives—those of you who have to hunt for your supper. You'll learn how to be an expert problem finder and avoid offering up the annoying things that offer no value. You'll see how focusing and targeting customers with gap-selling techniques will generate solid B2B leads, grow your pipeline, improve your engagement rates, and grow your customer base. Who knows—by the time you're done with these pages, you might even learn to love prospecting.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PROSPECTING: GETTING THE FIRST “YES!”

Most of what we’ve learned about good traditional prospecting is tactical: How to choose the right words for the opening sentence of your email. When to make that one additional call per day. How to target LinkedIn and Facebook groups. The secret to a great cold-calling script. Take a look at Jeb Blount’s *Fanatical Prospecting* and Mark Hunter’s *High-Profit Prospecting*, great books that offer excellent practical ways to prospect. Gap selling doesn’t replace these common and effective prospecting techniques; it adds rocket fuel to them.

When you build your prospecting methodology around gap-selling principles—by putting the customer first; by preparing to solve problems, not talk product; by coming ready to consult, not sell; by leading with value—people are simply going to be more willing to come to the table. They’ll agree to a meet for a phone call or reply to an email, not because you were so awesomely charming, but because you will have helped them see that it’s in their best interest to do so. Let me drop that again, because it’s so important: *Prospects will be more willing to meet with you because they will see it’s in their best interest to do so.* “Best interest . . .” That is our challenge—to get prospects to see that meeting with us is in their best interest. Unfortunately, most of us are not good at it.

On top of that, gap selling helps you target the right prospects, so instead of wasting your time chasing after random customers who will never give you the time of day, you approach people whom you’ve already researched and identified as likely needing your help.

Gap selling is all about unearthing the right information; you can use gap-selling principles to figure out what you’re looking for and set yourself up for success ahead of time. Think about the edge you’ll have over the competition if your prospects believe you understand their business and the challenges they face. Imagine how completing a Problem Identification Chart ahead of time could shape the assumptions you’d have about the problems they are dealing with and change the way you engage with them. I see the gears turning in your head. You’re starting to get it. It’s not about your product; it’s about being a problem finder and problem solver.

Why is Prospecting So Hard?

Two reasons. The first is that like every other working person in the twenty-first century, buyers are off-the-charts crazy busy. They're spread out in twelve different directions and everybody wants something from them—especially their time and attention. In one day, depending on their position within an organization, they could get ten calls asking for five minutes of their time, fifty emails asking for five minutes of their time, and a slew of Facebook and LinkedIn posts and DMs asking for—you guessed it—five minutes of their time. Do the math. Dozens if not hundreds of salespeople are asking for five minutes of buyers' time every week—and you're competing with all of them.

Getting inside the buyer's mind leads us to the second and perhaps more important reason why prospecting is such a universal challenge: Prospecting is the first yes. Whenever you ask someone to meet with you, to read your email, or to download your flyer, you're making a sale just like all the other small sales you'll make as you secure each next yes that leads to a successful close. But before you can get to those next yeses, you have to land this first one, even as you're competing against twenty other salespeople vying for the customer's attention. So, what do you do to stack the odds in your favor? You construct an offer that is more advantageous to them than any other one they hear, something that is worth their five minutes. That's why you have an advantage when you use gap-selling principles to prospect. With its emphasis on problem-solving, strategic planning, analysis, and collaboration, it allows your customers to see that you hold the keys to helping them achieve their goals and it differentiates you from your competitors who are intensely focused on pushing their products.

The rest of this section is designed to increase your chances of getting that most important first yes!

PART IV

BUILDING A GAP-SELLING TEAM

The leadership makes it stick.

PART IV . BUILDING A GAP-SELLING TEAM

Get ready to shift gears. You've learned the ins and outs of gap selling, you understand why it works, and you've mastered how to do it properly. Unfortunately, great salesmanship doesn't necessarily translate to great management. If you're a sales leader interested in implementing gap selling into your organization, how do you make sure your sales team understands what you're trying to do and commits to the gap? Even if you feel comfortable using gap-selling techniques, do you know how to use them to draw the best out of your team and make sure you consistently hit your numbers? Your mastery of gap selling is not just tied to how well you can execute it yourself, but also to how well you can teach others to execute it. If you are dependent on other people to help you hit your goals, then it naturally falls on you to guide and nurture those people into the best performers they can be.

While this final section of the book specifically targets sales leaders, I urge you not to check out if you aren't one yet. Aspiring gap sellers at every level will reap the benefits if they read and absorb the material in this final section of the book. First, it will prepare you for the day when you are in a position to share your knowledge with others. Second, it will show you what a healthy, thriving sales organization should look like so that when your gap-selling skills put you in high demand, you'll know what kinds of questions to ask potential employers to get them to reveal their selling philosophies, allowing you to be better prepared to evaluate whether they align with your own.

Great leaders get more out of people than they can get out of themselves. To be a great gap sales leader, you can't just throw a training methodology at your team and expect them to figure everything out on their own. It is the responsibility of sales managers to provide them with cover and support, to offer guidance, and to check the quality of their data so you can give them the best chance of delivering on their sales goals.

The best sales managers aren't just managers. They're coaches.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

Ultimately, to become a superstar gap sales leader you have to make sure that your focus is turned in the right direction. That is, outward. Just as gap selling isn't about the salesperson but about the customer, being a sales leader isn't about getting what you need out of your sales team but about providing what your sales team needs to get out of you. They need your guidance, your feedback, your direction and your inspiration. If you start thinking of yourself more as a coach than a manager, you'll put yourself in the right mindset to build and grow a winning gap-selling team. Coaches teach, train, and motivate, and they can even be hard-asses, but you know what else they do? On game day, they get out of the way. Trust has to go both ways.

In a sense, that coaching metaphor can be applied across the board. Just as you provide advice to your team, your team's primary function is to provide advice to its customers. Their job shouldn't revolve around pitching their own products and services, but on gathering enough information to be able to educate the customer, provide an in-depth analysis of their business' current state, and suggest strategies that could be put in place to move them to their desired future state. Business is tough, and people work hard. It goes a long, long way when they feel like they're in the expert hands of someone who cares as deeply about their business goals as they do. The thing is, your salespeople can't commit their focus to those goals if you're fostering a sense of fear and panic, or encouraging them to force a close to make quota, or making them feel like they have to cut corners to get the deal done. That's a traditional selling culture, and that sucks.

Encouraging a coaching culture instead of a selling culture falls on you. Therefore, make it a point to support your team's ability to sell to the gap every day. Reinforce that objective in every pipeline meeting and every interaction. Equip your team with all the support they need to be world-class change facilitators and indispensable assets to their customers. In a study released in their book *The Challenger Sale*, Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson of CEB (now Gartner) revealed that 53% of customer loyalty was not a product of customer service, as might be expected, but of the sales experience.^{xv} You hear that? More than half of a customer's loyalty is due to the work your team is

doing before the prospect even buys your service or product! They're not hooked by the company or brand, nor the product and service delivery, nor the value-to-price ratio. They're hooked by the sales experience. And there is nothing more effective for maximizing that sales experience than gap selling.

Successfully implementing gap selling starts and stops with leadership. It's your ability to reinforce the gap-selling principles via pipeline meetings, coaching sessions, the hiring process, and in annual reviews that will make your organization operate smoothly. Too often, sales organizations provide sales training but don't provide the follow-up support. Then they're confused about why the training didn't work. Gap selling is far more complex than traditional sales methods. It makes more rigorous demands on salespeople and requires too many subjective judgment calls for new gap sellers to be successful without sales management reinforcement. Without guidance and support, gap-selling techniques won't be fully absorbed or even worse, applied to your organization's procedures and collective mindset, and it won't work for your team.

The key to building a gap-selling organization is educating the team, hiring the right people and managing the team to the gap, to the current state, and to the future state. It's ensuring the team goes deep and gets a clear picture of where the customer is, what problems they're struggling with, why those problems are hurting them, why the problems exist, what the impact to the organization is because the problems exist, and finally, where the customer wants to go. As you challenge your team, you will quickly learn implementing it successfully requires repetition and reinforcement. As the sales manager or sales leader, it's your job to make it stick.

CONCLUSION

The day before I finished this book, I had a discovery call with a CEO that reaffirmed the enlightening, empowering potential of gap selling. It was my second meeting with this company. I had already spoken with the company's head of sales and she recommended that the CEO speak with me. He was willing although he didn't really understand why the call was necessary. Typical of most CEOs, he had already identified the challenges within his organization and implemented strategies to address them. He was confident that what he was already doing was working pretty well, and to be honest, as I listened to him list the results, I couldn't disagree. On the surface, it sounded like he had everything under control. But I kept the conversation going, digging in and asking as many questions as I could about the business, keeping in mind that he couldn't know what he didn't know. Something was compelling this man to continue talking to me even though he thought he had everything covered. Something still wasn't quite right. What was it?

Then I asked some questions about his growth strategies and demand generation. He said he had some ideas for that, and you know, they sounded like they would actually work. But as I kept pushing, all of a sudden it became clear that he didn't believe in his team's ability to sell his product efficiently and effectively. It happened when I started asking about the pipeline. How long does it take to close a deal? How long does a sales cycle take? Do deals go dark faster than you'd like? And as we started digging into the actual deals, it became apparent that his team was struggling with owning, managing, and successfully controlling the sale. They were constantly being surprised when deals dropped out. I kept going, asking about the size of the pipeline. It was only 50% of the goal. So even if he closed everything in the pipeline, he still wouldn't meet the goal. And that wasn't going to happen anyway—their close rate was less than 50%.

The more the CEO talked, the more it became clear to both of us that he not only had a lead generation problem, he had a selling problem. The team was too product-focused to sell the value effectively. They needed to do a better job of convincing the prospects that the problems they faced were real and that they mattered. And that meant the sales training he was using just wasn't doing the job. After a few more rounds of Q&A, I was able to pinpoint the reason—his

training focused on only part of his problem, offering only half a solution.

It was kind of magical. Within fifteen minutes, this man went from “We don’t have a problem,” to “Holy crap, we have a problem and my solution isn’t working!” That’s when I explained how gap selling works, and how it would solve the entirety of his problem, not only changing the conversations his team was having with prospects, but the entire culture of his organization. He was sold.

This isn’t the first time this has happened. Not long ago, I had another call where someone told me he loved what my company had to offer and wanted to work with us, but that he would have to wait until next year because of budget constraints. Undeterred, I asked him a few more questions and it didn’t take long for him to realize that the cost of waiting until next year was far greater than if he found the budget to hire me now. That is the power of gap selling. When I was younger, I would have lost both of these deals because I wouldn’t have known how to guide the sale over what appeared to be insurmountable obstacles. But by staying focused on the current state and having the patience to *stay* in the current state until I helped the customers land on their real problems, I was able to guide them to their desired future state, assess the gap, and lay a custom-made solution at their feet. It’s exciting for you and the customer because you’ve done the work together, and once you see the problem for what it really is, you can see the path to the future state—that happy place where the problem no longer exists

You know that feeling when you twist the final Rubik’s Cube face into place, or get to the next level of a video game? That’s what it feels like when you gap sell your way to closing a deal. It’s a feeling of pure elation and satisfaction. It’s not, *I sold a product. It’s YES! I can help! We can fix this!* You’re like the freaking Black Panther or Spiderman coming to save the day. And when you gap sell, you get to feel like this over and over, which in and of itself creates a lot more opportunities.

The selling game is hard, no doubt about it, but it’s doubly hard when you don’t know the rules. Now you do. Now you know that sales isn’t about selling stuff, but about facilitating change. You have the right tools and mindset to gain an insanely deep understanding of your customers’ problems, of what’s causing them, and of what impact they’re having on your customers’ current state. Now you know how to maximize your value, how to gain insight into your buyers’ world, how to assess the gap between their current state and future state, how to build credibility, how to influence the sale with your expertise, how to overcome objections and customer fears, and how to develop a sales partnership between

yourself and your buyer built on mutual respect. Now you know what to do *and* why you're doing it. You know the game.

No salesperson should remain stuck in a current state of useless pitches and boring meetings or watch hard-earned opportunities disappear overnight, never to resurface again. No sales leader should watch their team scramble frantically to close deals by the end of the quarter. That kind of selling and sales life just sucks. Gap selling makes things better. Imagine a future state where you're an influencer, not a clown, where the pipeline is full and predictable, and where you feel confident and in control of every sale. That future state is all yours when you learn to gap sell. This methodology gives you access to everything you need to know to play the game of sales well, and to win at every level.

TRAINING

A Sales Guy offers gap-selling training for B2B organizations of all sizes. To learn more or to book a gap-selling training, visit us at: gapsellingtraining.com.



PRAISE FOR GAP SELLING -----

"Hands down one of the most insightful sales books I've had the pleasure of reading. Welcome to modern day sales!"

– **Chris Nadeau, Sales Executive at Presence of IT**

"If my memory was erased and I had to start over in sales and I could only use one tool to train myself—it would be this book."

– **Casper Fopp, Chief Revenue Officer at Wondersign** *"From actionable tips and tactics to hiring gap sellers to managing gap selling teams, this book has everything you need to know about selling to the gap. Most salespeople would be better off reading this book 20 times than 20 sales books one time. More than that, this is a book for more than just salespeople. It's a book that can benefit marketers, customer success teams, and business leaders—it's a better way of doing business. Indeed, it's a book that I will read many more times over the course of my career."*

– **Caleb Malik, Sales Executive at SmartBug Media** *"Gap Selling isn't Gold... It's Pure Rhodium!*

The first thing I did when I finished Gap Selling was Google 'what is the most expensive metal?'. I found out that rhodium is the most expensive of all precious metals, currently trading at \$2,725 an ounce.

To give you a better idea of its cost, that's more than twice as expensive as gold and 154 times more than silver. To this day, when someone believes something is exceptional they say, 'It's pure gold'. Well in the case of Gap Selling, they would be about 2X off of their evaluation.

In my career, I've invested money in books, courses, conferences, and coaches. I now know that investing is a code word for 'wasted' because Gap Selling is top to bottom, front to back, 360 degrees the only book you need to read if you are in sales."

– **Ned Arik, Business Development Consultant at VertiMax** *"What 'Rework' did to how we think of work, Gap Selling is doing to sales. So perfectly fitting to borrow what Seth Godin said about 'Rework' to describe Gap Selling: 'IGNORE THIS BOOK AT YOUR OWN PERIL'."*

– **Aarathy Kulathunkal, Founder & CEO of Being Cloud, Ltd.**

"Gap Selling has opened my eyes and helped me view sales, prospecting, and closing in a totally new way! It's blunt, straightforward, and exactly what young sales guys like me need to navigate through the fluff of our current overwhelming digital world of sales content."

– **Ammon McKinlay, Business Development Manager at Bitwise Industries** *"Gap Selling is the breath of fresh air we as Salespeople know we need. We often feel the way we were taught to do things just doesn't apply anymore, but this confirms it. Keenan brilliantly breaks down the rules of the game we play, along with the practical steps to play it at the highest level. A culmination of deep knowledge across many methodologies, Gap Selling is an evolutionary bullseye of sales education. Like the Shark, Keenan's adapted a sales methodology perfectly suited for its environment. Problems, outcomes, current, and future states, change, emotions, why, why, and why again. Deals are won in discovery and 'no one gives a shit about you', so listen more, say less, define that gap and get that yes! Loved it."*

– **Greg Howard, Account Executive at Strongpoint** *"I thoroughly enjoyed Keenan's book, Gap Selling, which put into print concepts that I have been exploring with our sales team. I have been trying to change our 'show up and throw up' culture to one which identified value and communicated it to our customers. Keenan's gap selling techniques took this one step further with concrete examples and a path to action.*

Changing corporate culture is tough enough, but without a definitive roadmap, it is an impossible challenge. Keenan spends time discussing the thought process behind finding out where your customer's gap is (whether they recognize it or not) and then shows us the way to do something with that information. With great techniques from prospecting to customer interaction to managing the pipeline, there isn't one area of the sale that isn't covered.

Definitely a text that will stay on my desk for reference going forward."

– **Chris Abeles, Director of Business Development at Aspen Aerogels** *"Keenan's book, Gap Selling, rocked me in its simplicity and power. It will show you the core of sales—helping a prospect figure out the impact of their current state (CS) and the impact of their future state (FS). Keenan teaches how to diagnose that gap and leverage it to qualify/disqualify prospects, overcome objections, validate their decision criteria, hone in on what to show in your demo, etc. In fact, I am confident after reading this book, you too will believe that understanding how to diagnose the gap and leverage it in every part of your sales cycle is the only way to become a top performing sales rep."*

– **Zachary Bromberg, Vice President at MB Financial** *"Cover to cover, Gap Selling is a pure joy to read. It is more than a process or philosophy, Gap Selling is a way of life. It applies to every kind of selling situation at every stage in your career. When you are ready to evolve and make a difference, this is a must read! Buckle your belt, buttercup, Gap Selling is going to blow your mind!"*

– **Eric Dutton, Business Development Consultant at Coffey Communications** *"This is a no-nonsense approach to selling. Get ready to develop your skills of diagnosing your client's problems, digging deeper to know more about your clients, and making the art of selling change your new superpower. This book should be in the arsenal of anyone in*

business and in sales."

– **Tracy Kreiter, Director of Sales at Turf Valley Resort** *"Gap Selling is written with such passion, one can hardly read a page without feeling the vigor of Keenan's powerful and brave arguments. It is informative, engaging and above all desperately needed for salespeople. The breadth of references provided in the book gives you an instant clarity of thought. Some of the things Keenan laid out are really hard to disagree with, some of them made me go crazy as they challenged my fundamentals as a salesperson. It is the kind of book that you re-read just because you do not want to miss anything."*

– **Ameya Kapre, Head of Direct Sales at tNex** *"Keenan's informal style shines through in his book Gap Selling. The game of sales can be challenging. Keenan debunks ancient myths that salespeople have believed for eons. Not only does Keenan explain in great detail how to win at the game of sales he also gives the reader stories and scenarios that are relatable. I recommend Gap Selling to new and seasoned salespeople. This book unfolds the sales game and gives the reader the knowledge for their future state of success. Just like any game, you have to play in order to win. With Gap Selling knowledge your odds of winning are expediently increased."*

– **Melissa Morrisette, Owner & Designer of Morrisette Design** *"Gap Selling speaks loud and direct, I was midway through the book last week when an opportunity came to put into action what I had learned. In short, I was able to protect a placement fee that went well over budget because I was able to express how my chosen candidate would take them from their current state towards their desired state. By having all the revenue numbers given to me from my discovery, the CEO quickly agreed that the fee was warranted. Gap Selling is an enjoyable and easy to relate to read, regardless of industry."*

– **Kris Johnson, Founder of Epoch Recruiters** *"3 Cheers for Gap Selling—Gap Selling is an instant essential for the modern sales professional. Countless tips, new perspectives, and words of wisdom from extensive experience litter the pages of Gap Selling by Keenan."*

– **James Buckley, Enterprise Business Development Manager at Cirrus Insight** *"This book sets the Sales People apart from the Sales Professionals!"*

– **Kevin Sullivan, Sales Manager at Universal Field Supplies**

ALSO BY KEENAN:

*Not Taught: What it Takes to be
Successful in the 21st Century that
Nobody's Teaching You*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keenan is [A Sales Guy Inc's](#) CEO/President and Chief Antagonist. He's been selling something to someone for his entire life. He's been teaching and coaching almost as long. With over 20 years of sales experience, which he'll tell you he doesn't give a shit about, Keenan has been influencing, learning from and shaping the world of sales for a long time. Finder of the elephant in the room, Keenan calls it as he sees it and lets nothing or no one go unnoticed.

Keenan's passion for problem solving reaches well beyond the sales and business world. He is the celebrated author of [Not Taught: What It Takes to be Successful in the 21st Century That Nobody's Teaching You](#). The 21st century has ushered in the information age, and with it a new set of rules for success. *Not Taught* shares how the rules of the industrial age no longer work and that if you want to be successful, you must learn the new rules for success.

Father of 3 amazing girls, PSIA Certified Level 2 ski instructor (see, more coaching) and avid Boston sports fan, Keenan keeps crazy busy when he's not focused on A Sales Guy.

ABOUT A SALES GUY

[A Sales Guy](#) is the leading 21st century sales management consulting company. The world of sales has changed drastically and it's not slowing down. A Sales Guy understands these changes and is leading the way in helping companies leverage 21st Century methodologies, tools and approaches to accelerate revenue and reach revenue goals. A Sales Guy is an energetic, driven, innovative, intelligent management-consulting firm. A Sales Guy isn't your grandfather's sales organization. For more information on *Gap Selling* or other A Sales Guys Services, visit us at asalesguy.com.

CONNECT

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*To my three daughters, Kenna, Elle, and Ava, because you rock.
I will always dedicate my books to you.
You are the most amazing young women ever.
Watch out world, they're comin' for ya.*

SHOUT OUTS

Stephanie Land, you're a saint, and your work is unparalleled. You lived in my head for six months and came out unscathed; you are a true superhero. Thank you for pushing me, challenging me, and making sure I got it right.

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NOTES

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That's it.
Peace. I'm out.