

Petra Aba Asamoah

Foreword by Albert Ocran

SALES 101

What everyone should know about sales



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Dedication

To the memory of my Father – Dr Henry Ekow Christian. A father who gave everything for his children to have a good education.



Acknowledgements

To you, my reader – for making this journey as a writer worth it.

To my family – for the support and encouragement to express my ideas.

To everyone who has contributed to the Sales 101 by participating in the training sessions, book discussions or online discussions – thank you.

To my mentors – your place in my life,



Endorsements

“A fascinating insight on sales, well-articulated by one of the industry’s best in Ghana. A good read for current and aspiring sales persons”

Kobby Mensah, PhD

University of Ghana Business School, Ghana

“Petra was once frustrated with a sales process that needed addressing. Rather than shy away from that challenge, she has come through with this awesome book, for those who find themselves in the same challenge, to serve as a tool that will equip you for success”

Richard Akita

Life Performance Coach & author

"I enjoyed reading this book; it was very educative, insightful and provides useful guides to navigate the sales sector. This book is a first-hand book for the young and

upcoming professional. If you want to be successful in your business, I highly recommend this book to you!"

Chris Opoku-Agyeman, PhD

University of Akron, Ohio (USA)

"A truly enjoyable read. This is a book not just written or designed for the sales person but a book for all and sundry. The personal experiences shared in the chapters are laced with everyday life experiences. I'd call it personal, gripping, compelling and deeply inspiring"

Jerry John Sena Agbemabiese

Barrister at Law

"Sales and marketing rookies will save themselves a lot of stress by reading this book"

Theo Boateng

General Manager, Laundry Chief



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FOREWORD

"Everything you've ever wanted is on the other side of fear."

George Addair

If there is one skill everyone needs in their careers, it has to be the ability to sell. Whether we know it or not, we are always selling one thing or another. The pastor, the lawyer, the politician, the artist, the chef, the astronaut, the newscaster and the fashion designer are de facto salespeople.

So why do people fear sales so much? Why do we tend to be so paranoid about something we do daily? The answer is simple. Many people are unaware of what it takes to be a sales champion in their field. They see sales as the very difficult job of a professional sales department. That is why

this book *Sales 101* by Petra Aba Asamoah is a must-read for every professional and anyone with aspirations for a top position in their field. The truth is, as you climb higher in any professional endeavour, your success depends less on your technical ability and more on skills like selling, public speaking, managing people and negotiation, many which are treated in this book.

Petra Aba Asamoah is a consummate salesperson. She has the rare distinction of having transitioned successfully from the frontline sales role, through the middle belt of supervision to the executive level of strategy in sales, marketing and customer service. She brings this expanse of experience to bear in this her premier publication which is bound to be the first of many.

Sales 101 has the unique distinction of qualifying both as a sales textbook and as an everyday read for anyone seeking to improve themselves and advance in their careers. The writing style is simple, engaging and compelling. The writer borrows from practical experiences and liberally shares her frustrations and triumphs to help bring home the various lessons.

I tried to single out my favourite chapter in Sales 101 and I will tell you why it was a struggle. The ethical part of me was impressed with “Selling Responsibly” for obvious reasons. “Butterflies and Jitters” are a daily experience for even the most experienced salespersons. “Handling

FOREWORD

Objections” came across as the chapter that would heal many people’s biggest sales fear - rejection. I eventually settled on “A marathon and not a sprint” because it is one of the most powerful laws of progress in any venture in life.

A solid grasp of the foundational sales principles shared in this book will transform your career, increase your confidence and help you to seize your opportunities in life. I wholly and unreservedly recommend this book, *Sales 101*, by my friend Petra Aba Asamoah and prayerfully expect it to be a hugely successful publication.

Rev. Albert Ocran,
Pastor, Author and Executive Coach.



Introduction

A lot of what I know in sales I learnt the *hard way*. I got an opportunity in sales after being in a front-line customer service role. Even though I had some mentors in the company, I still had to learn to become *streetwise*, by doing and failing and trying and succeeding and trying again. My first steps were tough.

One fine day in 2015, I got a call from a lady who was trying to sell something to me. Her confusion and inability to communicate to me why she called, what she wanted, who she was and the inability to answer any of my questions, led me to a rant on Facebook about how salespeople and sales managers needed to get their act together. I bemoaned the fact that this young woman, aside from not being prepared for this sales call, obviously did not have a clue about the product she wanted to sell to me. A few days later, I had a “eureka” moment. It was not enough to rant, I decided I had to do something about it.

Marketing in general as a body of knowledge has received a lot of attention in terms of training and professional development. Unfortunately, I found that in my home country, Selling was rarely discussed as a skill to be developed and projected. There are very negative perceptions about people who work in sales-related roles so it was no wonder that finding information on sales training was difficult for me. But after my encounter with the young lady, I decided I wanted to do something about the situation.

Also, around the same time, I had been having conversations with friends of mine in the marketing fraternity who had been bemoaning the fact that self-styled experts were gaining ground in our space. Yet, we were not contributing much to the knowledge sharing and so we were giving up our space for those who were not qualified to speak on matters relating to our industry and profession to do so.

I struggled with this reality for a while. One of the issues that concerned me was if I had enough experience to share and if anyone would want to hear what I had to say. Thankfully, after a few days, I had convinced myself that it was okay to share whatever knowledge and experience I had to support other sales practitioners.

The easiest thing to do was to start on Facebook. So, I decided I was going to have sales-related discussions, my experience in sales, my struggles and my triumphs.

Voilà! *Sales 101* was born. I hosted a weekly discussion on my Facebook page, focusing on a variety of sales issues. Those discussions developed into articles I published on my blog, then they got developed into a training module and finally culminated into this book.

This book is meant to be a foundational tool for beginners starting in the world of sales but will also prove to be a valuable tool in the hands of the already established salesperson on their way to becoming high-earning, world-class salesmen and women.

When I started in sales, I wished I could lay hands on a book like this to launch me into the realities of this sphere of the working world, but alas I did not. I struggled quite a bit until I could make meaning of all the tough lessons and I have been able to bring them into this melting pot - a book.

My biggest lesson in sales has been the fact that I have learnt how to handle rejection and not be demotivated by it. I have learnt how to separate - *I-don't-want-to-buywhat-you-are-selling* from *I-don't-like-you-as-a-person*.

I have learnt how to separate personal from professional. I realized very quickly that in the business world, some

decisions are just *math*. The confidence and inner resoluteness to move to the next sales call when the just-ended one did not go so well. The strength of mind to keep trying even when the results do not look very

promising, but believing that the leads will convert to accounts...as you consistently work your way through the sales process.

It has been designed to be a *quick reference guide* for you especially on those days when you are just trying to figure out – *What should I do?* It draws on the experiences I have had whilst selling within a corporate, largely business to business (B2B) environment and the interactions that I describe are with individuals within corporations and were done within the context of their influence on the purchase decision.

In this book, although very little attention is given to retail sales or business to consumer (B2C) scenarios because the focus is on corporate sales, the experiences shared here can be useful to varied sales scenarios.

I agree with Zig Ziglar that we are *all in sales*, so this book will come in handy for anyone trying to sell just about anything - from Apples to Zebras.

I hope you will enjoy reading this book as much as I have enjoyed writing it and ultimately, it will contribute to making you a better professional.

Enjoy the read



Choice or Chance?

"Everyone is in sales"

Zig Ziglar

I did not *choose* my first sales job and it was not easy. There were times I hated it. Totally and absolutely hated it. I would wake up in the morning and not want to go to work. No way I was going back but I went back because I *had* to. There were those days I did not want to go back to work if it meant having to drive around the city of Accra through traffic, calling on prospects who were always too busy to meet you, when you *did not* have an appointment and sometimes too busy to meet you even when you *did* have an appointment. And there were those days you just did not make any progress...seemingly.

I started as a front desk executive in an airline ticket office and then was moved into the sales and reservations department. Selling airline tickets, a service, as a reservation sales agent over the phone or in person, was easy for me; I was good at being nice. I liked helping my customers make the right choices. I was discovering the world through the routes of various connecting flights and hubs. I interacted with customers and followed up on them to ensure they came back to pay for their tickets. Even when they said they were not going to fly with our airline, I still managed to remain pleasant and kept in touch for future business.

At my first appraisal, I was asked about my plans. I blurted out what I now realized was the most ridiculous yet audacious response: *I do not think I would be able to stay for more than 2 years in the company because what I am doing is boring.*

With the benefit of hindsight, I am so grateful that my supervisor, Mr Isaac Ashong, saw beyond my audacity to help me better explore my potential. That conversation ended up being what I needed to switch roles from reservations to sales. That is how I started in sales.

I was excited! I thought I was going to meet more people, and invariably experience more opportunities to use my abilities...and I felt it was going to be more fun. Even though it was a lateral move, it felt like a promotion

because now, I also had my own corner office with a view of the street - and I could look at the street vendor and sometimes the interesting chaos that rush hour traffic caused...I could daydream with no interruption. So I *thought*. I was in for a rude awakening!

First of all, I was introduced to report writing which hitherto was alien to me. All I had done as a reservations sales agent was sell tickets to walk-in clients and print a system-generated report that was submitted to my supervisor. Now I had to send in daily call reports. I had to send in so many reports - these reports were required daily. I had daily call plan targets. Then, I had to drive for long hours and get lost trying to find my way from one account to the other. The biggest part of my frustration was the length of time and the amount of effort it took for me to close a sale. Unlike being a front- line reservation sales agent, who customers walked *to buy* from, this time around I had to go *out* looking for business on my own. I started with no background in sales and just in-house coaching and company-specific training. All I had was a willingness to learn and work hard and having lots of hope that I would succeed.

So how did I fare in those first few months? I would say *abysmally*. I had no clear sense of what I was supposed to be doing: and I had become so used to sitting in my office and expecting customers to come to me that it was an extra effort getting out of my comfortable office into the heat of

the day...every day. There were days I felt I was just not making any progress: I still did not know what to do. It was a lot of trial and error and I was making a lot of mistakes and wasting time.

My salvation was a 'revolution' in the company. We went through a difficult patch where everyone had to push extra hard. Our Managing Director got involved in monitoring our sales activities and the sales team was reporting every week, aside from the daily reports. Oh, how I dreaded those meetings! I had to present all my prospects for the week and report on the activities of the previous week – to management. I was not expected to be seen in the office and I was made to understand that my desk work had to be done after work hours. Talk about pressure!

I had to report, line-by-line, on everything I was doing and endure a lot of questions about everything. Soon, I began to think about all the possible questions I would be asked and tried to address them in my reports. That did not save me from the avalanche of questions *and* follow up questions! At that point, I felt *sales* was the other name for *hell* – driving for hours, the heat of the Accra sun and the numerous one-way streets I was discovering, no real parking spots and just the mere frustration of being in an unfamiliar space and trying to *breathe*.

Some start in sales because *life* happened to them. Like I did. Youth unemployment in Ghana, like in many other African nations is a challenge. Finding a job within one's

area of passion or talent can be a herculean task and many are unable to overcome it. It is not uncommon to hear a young person indicate they will like to have “any job” when asked what they would like to do for work. It is not that they do not know what they want to do (which sometimes is the case) but, in a good number of instances, they simply want to leave their options open so they do not get disqualified from getting the available opportunity.

Unfortunately, this leads to having *square pegs in round holes*: we have individuals in customer service who have no clue how to be nice to people, just as we have nurses and teachers who have no compassion at all for the people they have been charged to serve. Even though I believe that customer service, teaching and nursing are skill-based roles, it will help to have individuals who want to be in these roles because of their desire to make a difference rather than simply for survival.

Survival – that was the most important thing on my mind when I was leaving university after my Bachelor’s degree. The first thing on my mind was to get a *good* job that paid me well enough to be independent. Once I was done with school, I immediately took up a paid internship at an NGO where I received a small stipend. That stipend was enough to keep body and soul together and I had a place to go to every day for five months whilst I waited for my national service posting. There, I learnt a lot about administrative

work. I also learnt how to manage small projects, respond to letters and to manage an office. I reported to Aunty Juliet, my immediate boss, the Administrative Secretary – a lovely, very experienced lady who was gracious enough to teach me.

Looking for a job can be a tough call and finding a job whether you like the role or not can be a blessing for many. That is how a good number of young people arrive in the sales department. By *chance*.

One of the earliest sales-related literature I found was *Sales Dogs* by Blair Singer (2001). It was an audiobook version that I purchased from a local book shop. I listened to it repeatedly. It was refreshing because it debunked the idea that all salespeople had to be ‘attack dogs’ to be successful. I was trying to discover myself in those early days and for a very long time, I focused on how my natural personality and disposition positioned me to succeed in sales. I was also trying to figure out what the gaps in my skills set were, so I could close them. I will briefly recap what I learnt from *Sales Dogs* and encourage you to find a copy of the book (audiobook, paperback or e-book).

First, Blair (2001) states that there are five ‘breeds’ of sales dogs: the tenacious Pitbull, the inquisitive Chihuahua, the Golden Retriever who “nuzzles” a prospect until they are chosen as the supplier of choice, the sophisticated Poodle and the Basset Hound who pushes on at its own pace an

establishes credibility. Like personality types, sales dogs differ in their uniqueness and strengths and each ‘breed’ needs to work to their strengths if they want to succeed.

For me, that was like hitting the jackpot! My eyes had been opened! I was not an attack dog. I was not the pushy- go-out-and-run-everyone over type of salesperson. I was calm and friendly, knowledgeable and personable. So how was I going to ensure that these traits worked to my benefit and did not end up as disadvantages?

The first step to success in any endeavour is knowing yourself and knowing what you can and cannot do. You must, with all the determination in your arsenal, focus on your strengths to succeed. As Plato said, “Man, know thyself”.

Another crucial point I gleaned from *Sales Dogs* is the fact that selling thrives on the natural personality of the salesperson. All salespeople, like dogs, can be taught the same *tricks* (Blair, 2001). The execution of the trick is what differs from breed to breed. Great training is key to the success of a great team. It becomes crucial to continually engage, train and coach the sales force.

Finally, I discovered the type of breeds I had in my team so I could manage the relationships with my colleagues - as a subordinate as well as in the position of the leader of the pack. The breed I found the hardest to manage was the poodle – the poodle looks wonderful on the outside, is

very concerned about their biggest weakness is getting results. Poodles are experts at manipulating the perception that they are performing when they are not. I used hardcore data to manage poodles. The golden retriever is the breed that resonates most with my personality and skills set. The retriever sells through extraordinary customer service and goes to great lengths to grant favours to their customers. The retriever focusses on building long term relationships with customers that yield repeat business and future referrals. The three other breeds are the Pitbull, the chihuahua and the basset hound.

Even though *Sales Dogs* was very useful, it did not answer some of the questions I had relating to my immediate environment and the context of working in Ghana. So I still had gaps to fill.

Selling is a skill. Even though some natural traits predispose some individuals to be natural salespeople, the art of selling must be learnt, practised and mastered. This is a fact I learnt, the hard way. Being nice was not going to produce the results I was expected to produce. I had to work harder.

A former colleague and friend – Isaac Fabio Wilson, a chartered accountant who later ‘converted’ into a salesman and led Delta Air Lines’ sales efforts in Ghana hit the nail on the head when I interviewed him as I work towards writing this book. He said:

"If you don't sell, nothing gets done: we don't have money to pay rent, we don't have money to pay bills, we don't have money to pay all the other departments.

They support but at the end of the day we need the salespeople to go out to get people to come, and it's that important. Getting the right people out there in the field is very important and I don't think there is anyone who leaves to chance any part of their livelihood that is the most important. Sales is very important and firms need to get the most qualified people rather than merely advertising for just anybody to join the sales team because of the idea that anyone can do sales. The fact that the person can come back with some sale doesn't mean they're doing well or they're doing the right thing. It is when the challenges start coming that you realize that these are people who may be either got lucky, were at the right place, met the right people at that time or used their connections to pull in the sales. When you have tough times, when the competition is tough, that's when you see that these people cannot perform. It's not that their performance is dipping but... it's just that they didn't have it in the first place".

Nothing more to add.

Sales 101 started because I wanted to solve a problem. After my encounter with a young lady who seemed ‘lost at sea’ trying to sell to me, I decided I was going to do something about it. It started with weekly Facebook discussions on sales. I later launched a blog, petraasamoah.com where I write, first about sales and then about a lot of other things that I feel strongly about. Some of those initial blog posts about sales are within this book or formed the basis for the initial ideas I have written about.

Through the demands of my work, I struggled to keep up the appointment every Friday and when I changed jobs in January of 2016, it was even more of a challenge. I moved into a new industry – media and took up an administrative role, which was not just different but required me investing more time. Plus, it was a start-up business, a story for another day.

So, I decided, that *Sales 101* had to evolve into something more sustainable and scalable. Two possibilities – a book and a training module. So here we are, the book! The training module started in April 2017 as a five-module training focusing on the basics of selling and it continues to evolve. The chapters of this book are modelled around the content of the training. The idea is that the book should be able to answer as many fundamental sales questions as possible.

Here is a list of frequently asked questions from our Sales 101 training sessions which are addressed in this book:

1. What is sales?
2. What is Sales NOT?
3. How do I approach a prospective customer for the first time?
4. Who is the right person to approach in the organization?
5. How do I start a sales conversation?
6. How do I communicate clearly and confidently?
7. How do I build my confidence?
8. How do I get the attention of my prospect?
9. When is the right time to make my next move after the first sales call?
10. How do I introduce myself, my company and my product?
11. What are the most important things to talk about when selling?
12. How do I convince a difficult prospect?
13. How do I handle customers who are not satisfied?
14. How do I close a sale?

15. How do I manage sales accounts?
16. What goes into prospecting and how do I go about it?
17. How do I maintain customers once I get them to buy the first time?
18. What is the difference between sales and marketing?
19. How do I get customers who are willing and able to buy?
20. What is the sales process?

If you are reading this book, you are looking for answers to these questions. While I am not presenting to you a sales encyclopaedia, you will find a good portion of your questions addressed in this book

