

WHAT SALES WINNERS DO DIFFERENTLY

by Mike Schultz & John Doerr

The surprising differences between sellers who win the sale and the second-place finishers.

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Report Summary

Standard solution sales methods aren’t working like they used to. Indeed, several prominent sources have pronounced that the era of solution sales has ended. We wanted to know 1) is this true and 2) if so, what’s working now instead. To find out, we studied what the winners of more than 700 actual B-to-B sales opportunities (from buyers responsible for \$3.1 billion in annual purchases) are doing to win the sale, and what they do differently than the sellers who come in second place.

We found:

First, solution sales is not, in fact, dead. It is still necessary, but no longer sufficient on its own. While fundamental changes to core concepts are needed, sellers and companies that dismiss solution sales outright place their sales success in grave danger.

Second, winners don’t just sell differently, they sell *radically* differently than the sellers who come in second place. And the winners sell differently in both surprising and fascinating ways.

Third, we compared our research to other popular research in the field of selling, such as *The Challenger Sale*. On perhaps some of the most important points, our research revealed opposite results. Thus, our advice is, in many ways, quite different.

Finally, we’ve outlined a model throughout this report that sellers and organizations can follow to sell like the winners.

Sellers Who Win Consistently Demonstrate Behaviors on Three Levels

Introducing the Three Levels of RAIN SellingSM

	MAJOR POINTS	INSIGHTS
LEVEL 3 Collaborate	Sellers who win: <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Collaborate with buyers by being proactive and responsive+ Collaborate with buyers to educate them with new ideas and perspectives and bring value to the table themselves	In Level 3, sellers drive demand, create their own opportunities, and become essential to the buyer. Through collaboration the buyer becomes a partner in the process, and owns moving the sale forward as much as the seller.
LEVEL 2 Convince	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Persuade buyers they will achieve worthwhile results+ Minimize the perception of risk by demonstrating experience, building trust, and inspiring confidence+ Persuade buyers they are the best choice	Level 2 minimizes losing to “no decision” and maximizes competitive wins.
LEVEL 1 Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Connect the dots: they understand buyers’ needs and craft compelling solutions+ Connect with people: they listen to buyers and connect with them personally	Solution sales is not dead, but it needs to change fundamentally; it’s no longer enough. Level 1 is simply the price of entry.

Key Insights

- + Fundamental changes to the solution sales premise include focusing on aspirations and goals, as well as afflictions and pain. Diagnosis of need is not as important anymore, but demonstrating *understanding* of need is.
- + Minimizing risk has risen greatly in importance and must become a core part of sales conversations.
- + Sellers who get to Level 3 not only win sales, but also tend to outperform sellers who don’t because they are able to inspire buyers, create their own opportunities, and drive their own demand.
- + Organizations that adopt sales approaches that encourage concepts of challenging and provoking customers—while at the same time discouraging solution sales approaches and dismissing the importance of building relationships—place their ongoing sales success at grave risk.
- + Sellers who connect, convince, and collaborate, and follow the advice outlined in this report, will not only win the current sale, but will also put themselves in an even better position to win future sales through repeat purchases (loyalty) and increased referrals.

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The New Revolution in Selling

From the late 1970s through the early 2000s, not much changed in the world of sales methodologies. Sellers could study and learn consultative and solution sales approaches, apply them well, and consistently produce excellent results.

Not anymore.

Driven by the Internet, the commoditization of many products and services, the aftermath of the Great Recession, and the radical intensification of competition in many industries, buying has changed. It's no surprise, then, that standard solution sales concepts aren't working like they used to. In fact, a recent article in the *Harvard Business Review* titled "The End of Solution Sales," ostensibly signaled the end of an era.

Yet while many sellers struggle and lose, others are winning sales, and winning them consistently. So we posed the question: *What are the winners of actual sales opportunities doing differently than the sellers who come in second place?*

To find the answer, we began studying individual purchases in industries with complex sales, such as technology, consulting and professional services, financial services, and industrial products. The results of this study

focus on more than 700 B-to-B purchases made by a broad sample of buyers. In aggregate, these buyers were responsible for \$3.1 billion in annual purchases.

Here's what we found:

1. Winners sell *radically differently* than the second-place finishers. In many ways, what sales winners do differently is both surprising and fascinating.
2. There's a specific combination of behaviors that sales winners do and outcomes they achieve that the second-place finishers don't.
3. Several key factors that set winners apart are rarely discussed in the world of selling. They now demand attention.
4. Solution selling is definitely not dead, but fundamental solution sales concepts need re-imagination and relabeling. And while solution sales concepts are necessary, they're no longer sufficient to win sales.

Before we share the specifics, it's important to note we did not have preferences for what the results would show. Our intent was to find out what's really going on and proceed from there. We expected the results would influence our thinking, our sales consulting, and our sales training process and programs, requiring updates and changes. And, indeed, this is the case.

We found three levels of selling behaviors and outcomes that set winners apart from second-place finishers.

Level 1 is Connect. Winners *connect the dots* between customer needs and their company's products and services as solutions more often than the second-place finishers. Winners also *connect with people*. They're perceived to listen and connect personally with buyers more often.

Connecting with people and connecting the dots—sounds a lot like relationship and solution sales to us. On its own, connecting used to be the crux of winning sales. Now it's the *price of entry*. Sellers who stop at Level 1 do

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Relationship and solution sales are far from dead.

not find themselves in the winner's circle nearly as often anymore.

While the popular thinking on the concepts needs to change in fundamental ways, relationship and solution sales are far from dead.

Level 2 is Convince. Winners convince buyers that they can achieve *maximum return*, that the *risks are minimal*, and that the seller is the *best choice* among all options.

Level 3 is Collaborate. Winners collaborate through behavior—they are perceived to be responsive, proactive, and easy to buy from (collaborative in *how* they work). At the same time, it's not just *how* the seller interacts; it's *what* they do. Buyers believe that the winners actually *collaborate with them* during their buying process (collaboration in the sense of working with the buyer to achieve a mutual goal). Indeed, the buyers perceived these sellers to be integral to their success.

Research from the Buyer Perspective

One of the interesting things about reading sales books and articles is that the advice often makes sense on its face, even to us after 50 collective years following the sales training world. While, with a few exceptions, most selling methods sound fine, the reality is that some of them are wrong, or at least wrong for certain businesses. But it's not easy to suss out the good advice from the bad.

Sales research methods often focus on asking sellers, sales managers, and leaders what the top performers do versus average performers. Unfortunately, people's perceptions of what they do and what they actually do tend to be quite different.

Our research looks at sales from the buyers' perspective. Our objective was to find the answer to the following question: What are the winners of *actual* sales opportunities doing differently than the sellers who come in second place?

This approach allowed us to get past people's perceptions of themselves and their colleagues, and concentrate on what actually happens in the field of play.

We asked buyers to consider recent major purchases and rate the winners (the sellers who won their business) and the second-place finishers. Our objectives were to see:

- + What winners do
- + What winners do more often than the second-place finishers (to understand what most separates the two groups)
- + What the buyers report that second-place finishers should change in order to make the buyers more likely to choose them

We also looked at the statistical key drivers¹ of buyer:

- + Satisfaction with the buying process
- + Likelihood to buy again
- + Likelihood to refer the seller

The first three categories are the keys to winning the current sale. They're what the sellers do to "win now" so to speak. The latter three help to win now, but mostly they are the keys to "win later."

Each of these six categories turned out to be pieces of a puzzle. When we viewed all six pieces together, an elegant and fascinating story emerged. Sellers could take a codified set of actions that made perfect sense to us in the end—though we didn't know what it was going to look like at the beginning—to maximize their current wins, and their ongoing selling success. We call this the Three Levels of RAIN SellingSM (fig. 3).

As you begin reading about the three levels, note that sellers should apply them not

¹ A key driver analysis is a statistical technique that identifies the factors most likely to influence a specific topic. For this study, we analyzed the key drivers affecting buyer satisfaction with the buying process, buyer loyalty, and likelihood to refer.

We learned:

- + What winners do when selling
- + What winners do more often than second-place finishers
- + What buyers perceive to be most important for winning their business
- + How sellers can best influence buyer satisfaction with the buying process, buyer loyalty, and willingness to refer



LEVEL 1



separately or in sequence, but as a combination. Applied in combination, there's a compounding effect as the various areas build on each other. At the same time, leave anything out and you introduce barriers to winning competitive sales and increase the odds of losing to no decision.

Level 1: Connect

Sellers who win connect. They *connect with people* and *connect the dots* between needs and solutions. This is a surprising finding—sort of. Given that the end of solution selling was announced in the *Harvard Business Review*, we expected to see that winners had abandoned solution sales concepts.

Not true.

In fact, the opposite was true. Solution selling is not dead. Not even mostly dead. But it has changed in two important ways:

1. It's *no longer sufficient by itself for success*, and
2. People need to *think of it differently* than they might have in the past.

While people define solution sales in a number of ways, at the core of the solution or consultative concept is connecting the “pain” of the buyer with the products, services, and overall capabilities of the seller as “solutions” (fig. 2). There's typically a heavy emphasis on the seller “diagnosing” the needs of the buyer.

The need for diagnosis implies that the buyer doesn't have a thorough understanding of why they find themselves in their current, undesirable situation or what to do differently. Through diagnosis, the seller figures this out like a doctor might with a patient who feels unwell, but who doesn't know what they have or what to do to get better.

These days, diagnosing needs isn't nearly as important as simply demonstrating understanding of needs. Of all the factors buyers experienced with the winners, “deepened my understanding of my needs” was 40th of 42 factors. Winners barely did it compared to the rest of the factors, yet they still won the sale.

The second-place finishers actually focused more often on diagnosis than the winners, yet they still lost. Situationally, diagnosis can be important. If, indeed, the buyer wants to make improvements but doesn't know what their issues are, diagnosis is necessary. But at a macro level, it's not nearly as important as it used to be.

However, while sellers may not have to diagnose as often or deeply anymore, they do have to demonstrate understanding of need. This is critical. The terms may seem similar, but throwing the “understanding” baby out with the “diagnosing” bath water is not a good idea.

Looking at the differences between the winners and the second-place finishers, “understood my needs” was the fifth largest gap (fig. 1). In fact, the winners demonstrated they understood the buyer's needs 2.5 times more often than the second-place finishers.

On top of that, of the 42 factors, buyers said “understood my needs” was the fifth most important factor that second-place finishers should change in order to win their business.

After initial sales conversations, the seller often summarizes their thoughts and an action plan in a document to the buyer. In one recent example we know of, the opposite happened. The *buyer* sent the *seller* a document outlining what they understood their challenges to be, why they thought the challenges existed, what they were planning to do, and what they wanted from a seller. The buyer had this prepared beforehand to send to sellers who passed the buyer's sniff test in a first call.

Sometimes a buyer's perception of what's happening misses the mark. In this case, it was thoughtful and on-target, so the seller didn't spend much subsequent time diagnosing needs. Rather, they focused on listening to the buyer, and talking with them about possibilities for how to move forward. While they didn't diagnose, the seller's eventual proposal communicated that they “got it” regarding who the buyer was, what they needed, and what they were hoping to achieve with an external provider. This turned out to be a very important decision-making criterion to the buyer, and the seller won the business.

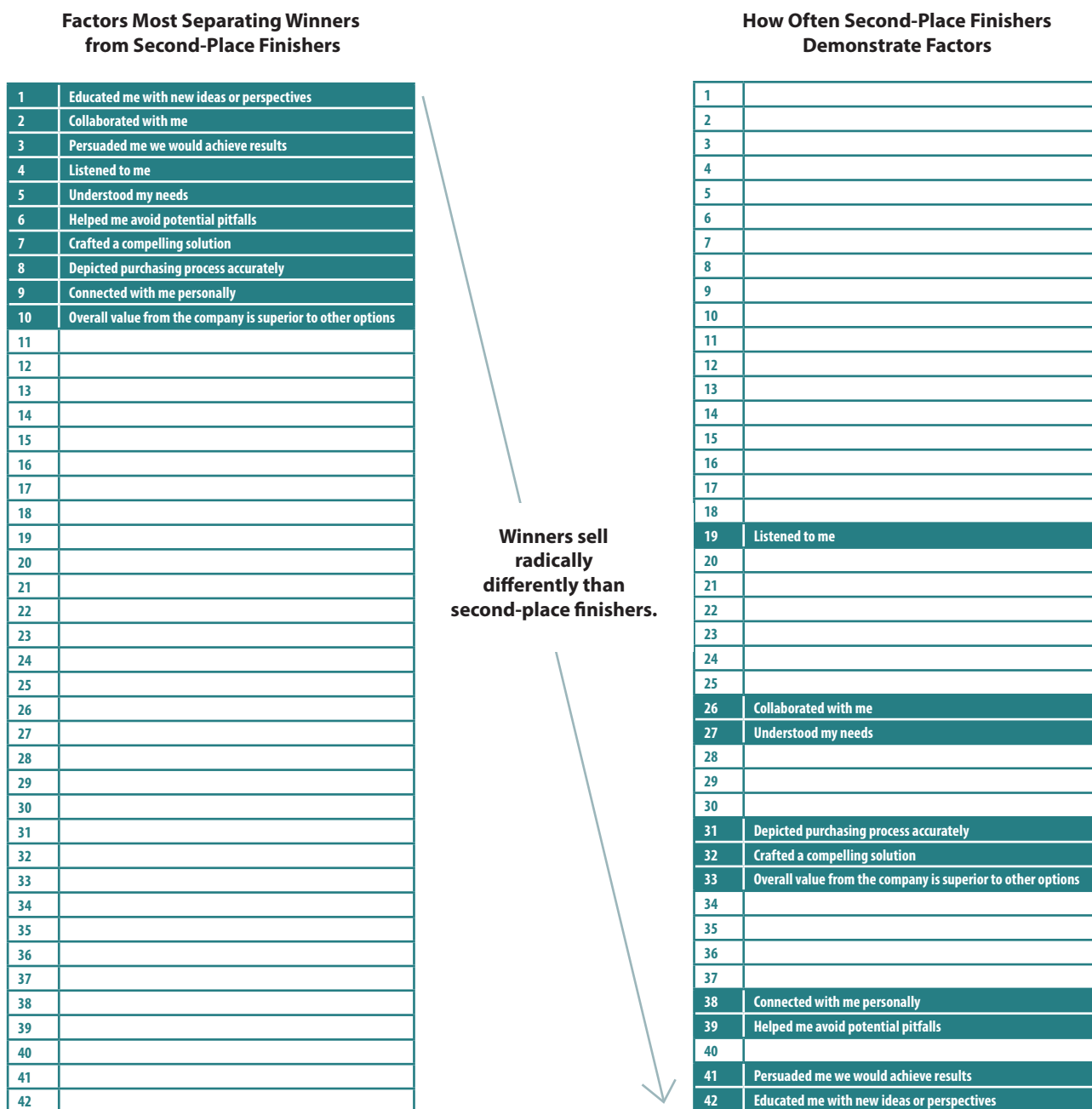
Winners demonstrated they understood the buyer's needs

2.5x

more often than the second-place finishers.



Figure 1. Differences Between Winners and Second-Place Finishers



Of the 42 factors studied, these are the top 10 factors that most separate sales winners from second-place finishers. In other words, the buyers reported that these factors represented the greatest gaps between what the winners did versus the second-place finishers.

Larger versions of the graphics presented on this page are available at www.raingroup.com/winnerfigures.

Here we show how often the second-place finishers demonstrated the factors on the left in relation to all 42 factors we studied.

Not only do winners and second-place finishers sell differently, they sell radically differently. The second-place finishers either do not have the skills to implement, or do not value, the concepts noted here in this graphic.



Sellers who win connect the dots, drawing clear parallels between buyer needs and how to solve them. This used to be enough for sellers to win. Not anymore.

However, while it's not sufficient, connecting the dots is still necessary for the win.

This isn't to say that the buyers have it all figured out all the time. But, with the Internet and other sources of information, buyers are typically further along than they used to be when they engage sellers.

It's much like when a person doesn't feel well these days. They often turn first to WebMD, Wikipedia, and Google to investigate. If need be, they find themselves at a doctor's office, but people are often much further along than in years past in their understanding of what might be going on.²

Another needed change in the solution sales concept is a shift away from the prevalent use of the words "problem" and "pain." These are the two most common terms associated with discovering a prospect's needs. These words all too often drive sellers to employ find-out-what's-wrong-and-fix-it thinking.

Let's say the buyer doesn't perceive anything—or anything important enough to act on—to be wrong. Soothe-the-pain sellers find themselves at a dead end. No problems to fix. Nothing to sell.

The sales winners, however, don't just focus on the negative, they focus on the positive. Along with having much richer sales conversations, focusing on the positive opens the door to significant opportunity to increase sales: *driving their own demand* (opportunity creating)³ versus reacting to demand (opportunity reacting) that comes directly from buyers.

The sellers most successful at creating opportunities focus much more on the positives—goals, aspirations, and possibilities achievable by the buyer, even if the buyer doesn't know it yet.

Sellers who focus on aspirations as well as afflictions are able to *directly influence the buyer's agenda* by inspiring them with possibilities they hadn't been considering, but should be. Indeed, opportunity creation is a core outcome of Level 3, but it starts in Level 1 with a shift in focus from afflictions-only to afflictions *and* aspirations.

Working in conjunction with demonstrating an understanding of needs is the seller's ability to craft a compelling solution. This was the seventh greatest difference between the winners and second-place finishers, and, according to the buyers, it was the third most important factor that the second-place finishers needed to change.

Together, "understood my needs" and "crafted a compelling solution" mean the seller connects the dots, drawing clear parallels between buyer needs and how to solve them. Again, this is part of the gestalt of mainstream thinking in solution sales. But simply connecting the dots is in no way sufficient by itself for sellers to win.

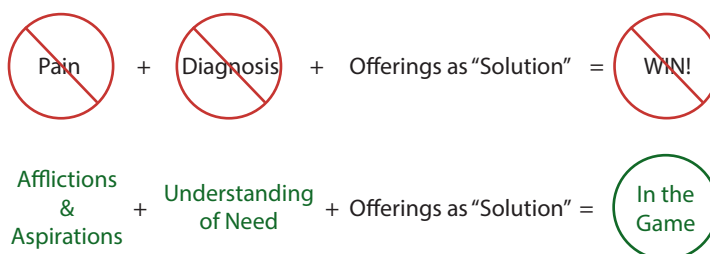
Imagine for a minute that someone is selling to you and you perceive the seller *doesn't* understand your needs and *doesn't* craft a compelling solution. Their chances of winning business from you are probably pretty slim.

Now consider that the seller connects the dots okay, but you perceive that they aren't listening to you and you haven't made any kind of personal connection with them. As long as *any other seller* meets the minimum criteria, you're not likely to buy from the unlikeable seller who isn't listening.

Sellers who do a good job connecting the dots and connecting with buyers haven't yet won the game, but they're in it (fig. 2). If they're in it to win it, however, they have two more levels to cover.

Level 1: Connect used to be enough. It's now the price of entry.

Figure 2. Changes to Basic Premise of Solution Sales

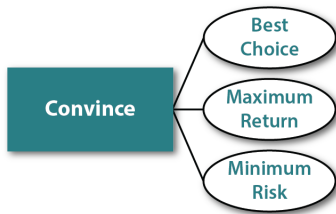


² Self-diagnosing buyers, like patients, aren't always right or complete in their diagnosis. When this happens, top sellers collaborate with buyers as a team to arrive at the right answers.

³ See "Creating Opportunities, Driving Demand" on page 9 for further explanation.



LEVEL 2



Level 2: Convince

Sellers who win convince buyers of three things:

1. The return on investment is worth it.
2. The risk is acceptable.
3. The seller is the best choice among the available options.

To do these things, the seller must be able to define and communicate the maximum return on investment, minimize the buyer's perception of risk, and differentiate from other available options.

By themselves these may not seem surprising. They weren't to us. But as we investigated further, we found 1) the sellers who won achieved these outcomes much more often than the second-place finishers, and 2) winners are much more attuned to risk than the second-place finishers.

In our sales consulting and training work, we've encountered surprisingly strong backlash from sellers against helping clients to set an agenda (versus just reacting to one), influencing the buyer too much, and using maximum persuasion.

Minimizing Risk

The following factors showed up as important in minimizing risk:

- + Provider is respected at my organization
- + Provider has experience in the specific area I have needs and in my industry
- + Seller was professional
- + Seller depicted purchase process accurately
- + Seller was trustworthy
- + Seller inspired confidence in his/her company
- + Seller helped me avoid potential pitfalls

These are all confidence builders. In other words, they're about minimizing the perception of risk.

Yet, in our research, the winners convinced, and they convinced with gusto.

Indeed, "persuaded me we would achieve results" was the third greatest difference between winners and second-place finishers. It's not that this is new; it's simply that the winners are doing a better job of it.

However, for every hundred times you find advice to "sell the ROI," you might find one piece of advice focused on minimizing the perception of risk for the buyer.

Forty years ago, marketers and sellers didn't focus as much on results and impact. The transition away from the features and benefits approach had just begun.

Fast forward to today, and every company's marketing and sales messages promise results—often wild results—as their first foot forward. Yet, while everyone is promising results, buyers regularly report disappointment.

In a study⁴ by Bain & Company, 375 companies were asked if they believed they delivered a "superior value proposition" to clients. Eighty percent said yes. Bain then asked the clients of these companies if they agreed that the specific company from which they bought delivered a superior value proposition. Only 8% agreed.

Buyers simply don't believe they get either what they expected or were promised by sellers. They've been burned in the past and are therefore skeptical of sellers and their claims.

Most every experienced seller has lost a sale to "no decision," where the seller believes the buyer was crazy not to move forward because the return on investment case was so compelling.

Sellers often say things to us like, "I can't believe they didn't see it!"

Oh, they saw it—and they got it—they just didn't believe it.

⁴ Allen, J., Reichheld, F., Hamilton, B., Markey, R. "Closing the delivery gap." Bain & Company, Inc., 2005.



Winners are more successful at minimizing buyers' perception of risk.

In these cases, the buyers typically perceive the risk of not achieving results as either too great (buyer: "this is impossible/improbable"), or they perceive the provider to be too high a risk (buyer: "this is possible, but working with this provider is a potential liability because of...").

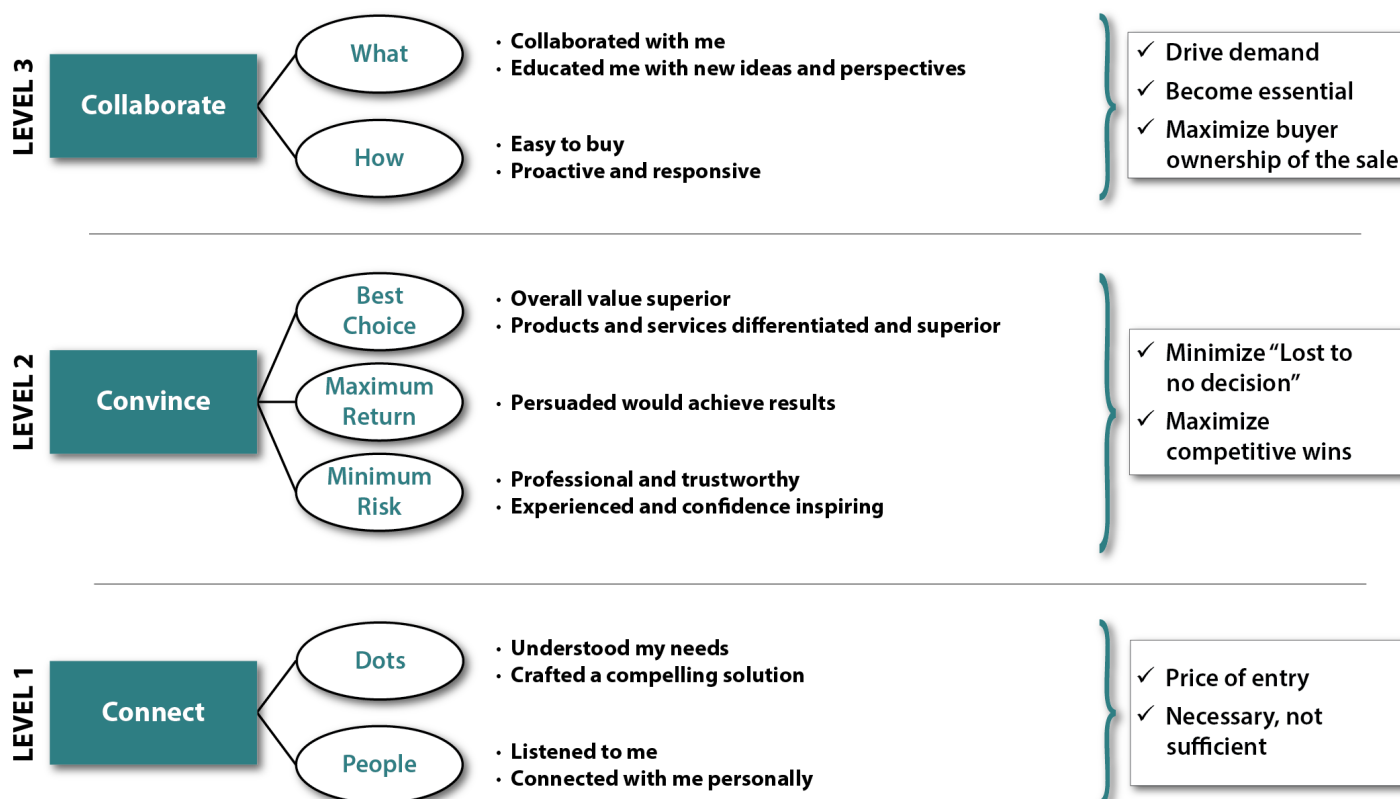
In other words, if the buyer isn't convinced of both maximum return and minimal risk together, the seller will lose to "no decision."

Now, assume there is a competitor. The seller not only has to maximize ROI and minimize risk, they also have to convince the buyer they are the *best choice* among all alternatives.

Winners were more than twice as likely to create the perception that the overall value they offered was superior.

And when a second-place finisher didn't create this perception, it was the number one most important factor they needed to do differently in order to influence buyers to select them. "Overall value was superior" was also a key driver of buying process satisfaction, likelihood to buy again, and likelihood to refer. In fact, "overall value was superior" was the only factor that was a key driver of all three, and a top 10 factor in all three of our major winner research categories.

Figure 3. Three Levels of RAIN SellingSM



When sellers follow the Three Levels of RAIN SellingSM approach, they achieve a veritable "fourfecta." They:

1. Do what winners do
2. Do what winners do differently than second-place finishers
3. Do what buyers believe is most important to win their business
4. Put themselves in a position to win later with maximum repeat business and referrals



TOP 2 THINGS buyers say winners do more often than second-place finishers:

1. “Educated me with new ideas or perspectives”
2. “Collaborated with me”

Now, the term “overall value was superior” to other options is open to interpretation. That’s the point! One buyer to the next might value one thing over another, and every buying scenario is different. When sellers figure out what buyers believe to be important and work towards that, they win more often.

The other two factors in the *best choice* category are “products and services superior” and “offerings differentiated from other options.” Does the seller build the product? No, but they are the lens through which the product or service strengths are communicated to the buyer. It’s also up to the seller to differentiate from the other options. When they don’t, they leave it to the buyer to interpret their advantages, leaving competitive differentiation to chance.

When sellers understand all three components—maximum return, minimum risk, and best choice—of Level 2 (“convince”), they take the groundwork they laid in Level 1 (“connect”) and turbo-charge their chances of a win.

Level 2: Convince stacks the deck of winning in the seller’s favor.

Level 3: Collaborate

This was unexpected. The top two things that winners do more often than the second-place finishers are 1) educated me with new ideas or perspectives, and 2) collaborated with me. At first blush, they might not seem to go together, but they do. These two factors both indicate that the seller, as a person, brought something worthwhile to the table.

Why unexpected?

1. Isn’t the word “collaborate” directly opposite in tone to “challenge” or “provoke”?
2. Collaborate is defined as “working together to achieve a common goal.” Wait, that feels like solution sales. Isn’t that dead?

We were quite surprised that these two particular points would separate the winners the most from the second-place finishers. These were the #1 and #2 gaps between the groups.

Regarding educating with new ideas: when the buyer believes the seller brings something new to the table, then, by definition, it’s not something the buyer was previously considering. When buyers perceive sellers as providing new ideas, sellers have a huge advantage. The right new ideas can shape buyer belief systems and approaches to action. This gives the seller tremendous influence.

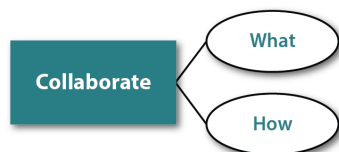
While educating about new ideas is in no way a unique advantage, it’s still uncommon. In fact, only 21.5% of buyers strongly agreed that the winners “educated me with new ideas and perspectives.” At the same time, only 7.4% of buyers strongly agreed that the second-place finishers “educated me with new ideas and perspectives.” So there’s room for almost all sellers to improve in this area. Those that do will reap the rewards.

It’s important to note, however, that the gap between the groups for the factor focused on “valuable” ideas or perspectives was not nearly as stark. It was 35th on the list separating the winners and the second-place finishers. There’s no question that bringing insight to the table that might not be new can still be helpful, but it doesn’t stand out as a factor that leads to sales wins. It seems buyers want to be surprised and inspired. If they’ve heard something before, even if it’s applicable, it’s not as impactful as something they perceive to be new.

The second most important factor that separates the winners from the second-place finishers was “collaborated with me.” We didn’t expect this factor to separate the winners from the second-place finishers more than all but one other factor, but it did. And the implications for selling shouldn’t be understated.

When viewed in the light of everything else, it certainly makes sense. The essence of collaboration is working together to achieve a common goal. Once the buyer sees the seller as an important member of the team, and sees moving the sale forward as a common goal,

LEVEL 3





the likelihood of buying in general, and buying from that seller, increases dramatically.

When a buyer sees a provider as working with them as a team to achieve common goals, it is extremely difficult to unseat that provider from the account. And this is the crux. This is one reason collaboration is at the pinnacle in Level 3.

Level 3: Collaborate makes the seller a key component of the buyer's success.

Creating Opportunities, Driving Demand

When we ask company leaders, “What’s your greatest opportunity for revenue growth?” they often say that if they could sell things proactively versus reactively to both new and existing customers, they’d have tremendous revenue growth.

On Relationships, Solutions, and Challengers

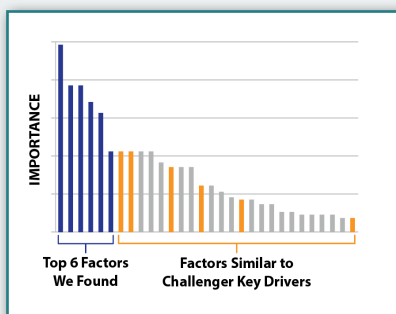
The authors of *The Challenger Sale* confidently declare “the end of solution sales” has come, and that “selling is not about relationships.” These declarations are, in fact, verbatim titles of articles they published in the *Harvard Business Review*.

Based on our research and our experience, we disagree wholeheartedly. Sellers and companies that dismiss core solution sales and relationship concepts place their sales results at grave risk. While our research findings and theirs share some similarities, so much was different that our recommendations differ from theirs in a number of essential areas.

For example, in our research, we tested six factors using language similar to that of the key drivers of buyer loyalty they tested in their research.

First, we wondered if their key drivers would match up with what we found winners do (fig. A). Turns out they didn’t. There were *other factors* that were vitally important.

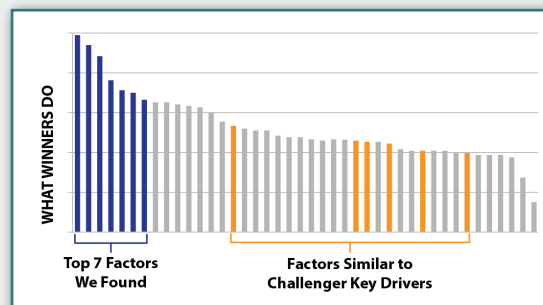
Figure B. Factors that Influence Buyer Loyalty



on page 4 of this report. But we found factors beyond these that were also important, so much so that if sellers ignore them, they place their likelihood to win sales in jeopardy.

Finally, in tone and interpretation, the words “challenge” and “collaborate” are more antonym than synonym. While we agree that sellers should ask tough questions, be comfortable with (and, if necessary, create) tension, and help buyers see new possibilities, doing these under the label of “challenging” can lead to an unproductive, adversarial dynamic with buyers.

Figure A. Factors Demonstrated by Sales Winners

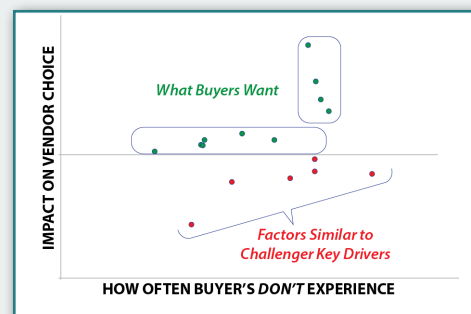


Next, we ran our own statistical key-driver analysis of buyer loyalty. We wondered if these would match up more closely, given that we, as they, were analyzing the key drivers of buyer loyalty as they relate to the selling process (fig. B). No match there. We found *other factors* were more likely to drive buyer loyalty.

Then we compared their key drivers to the top 10 factors in our study that buyers indicated the second-place finishers need to change to win their business (fig. C). Buyers found *other factors* more important to win their business.

This was all fascinating from a data perspective. Now, this is not to say Challenger’s key drivers aren’t reasonable. More often than not, they are. For example, several show up in our graphic

Figure C. What Buyers Want in Sellers



Larger versions of the graphics presented on this page, with notes on the specific factors tested, are available at www.raingroup.com/winnerfigures.



Three Levels of RAIN SellingSM

Level 1: “Connect” is the price of entry. When buyers perceive sellers don’t understand their needs and don’t have a solution that can help—and the buyer doesn’t like them—sellers don’t win.

Level 2: “Convince” increases wins. When sellers don’t convince buyers they’ll get a worthwhile return, the risks are acceptable, and they’re the right choice, the buyer might not buy at all, might buy much less than they should (or only be willing to pay less), or may select another provider.

Level 3: “Collaborate” is when the seller becomes a key component of buyer success. The sellers who are perceived as Level 3 collaborators, and who bring new ideas to the table and work with buyers as a team, will find themselves in the winner’s circle.

This is true across industries. Bankers have business clients who have checking and savings accounts, but who don’t have insurance, investments, or lending. Technology companies have a fraction of what they sell—and what buyers should buy—installed at their client sites. Professional services providers tell us universally that their greatest opportunity is to sell more to existing clients.

The main reason that buyers aren’t buying the additional offerings is this: it’s usually up to the seller to create these opportunities and drive the demand *themselves*.

For sellers, this means implementing Level 3.

In fact, sellers *can’t* drive demand without being proactive. They must take the initiative or the conversation never begins. They can’t inspire buyers unless they educate them with new ideas and perspectives.

Let’s say they do. When the buyer believes the seller is collaborating with them, the ownership of the idea tends to shift from seller to buyer. When that happens, the idea—previously not even in consideration—becomes an important item on a buyer’s agenda. This is critical for driving demand and moving sales forward proactively. And remember, this was a sale that *never would have been possible* if the seller didn’t implement Level 3.

Bringing It All Together

When we deliver this content in our conversations, seminars, speeches, and webinars, we find that two points bear special mention.

First, in this research we studied the behaviors that winning sellers demonstrate and the outcomes they’re able to achieve with clients. These are the things that they do. Companies often work with us to train their people in the sales skills and knowledge they need to become top performers. While people can surely be trained to have the capability to do something, having the capability doesn’t mean they *actually put their skills to use*.

Separate from skills and knowledge, there are specific attributes that drive salespeople to achieve. Thus, as you’re looking to build winning sales teams, make sure you help them to succeed in all three levels, but also work on hiring the right people and coaching them so they are most likely to *achieve on the job*.

Second, to the previous point, we’ve rarely seen major changes in seller behavior across selling teams without a strong coaching program. Creating Level 3 sellers typically requires coaching *and* training.

We’ve found those who apply the Three Levels of RAIN SellingSM as a systematic approach, and apply it well, not only see themselves in the winner’s circle more often, but also maximize client loyalty, and generate the most referrals.



Unleash the Sales Potential of Your Team with RAIN Group

RAIN Group is a sales training, assessment, and performance improvement company that helps leading organizations improve sales results. We've helped hundreds of thousands of salespeople, managers, and professionals in more than 34 countries increase their sales significantly with our RAIN SellingSM methodology.

We can help you:

Implement Sales Training that Delivers Real Results

RAIN Group's sales training system inspires real change and delivers real results that last. Our rigorous approach includes sales team evaluation, customized training programs, robust reinforcement, and coaching to help you and your team develop sales skills in each of the Three Levels of RAIN Selling, and maximize your results.

Grow Your Key Accounts

At most companies, there's a huge, untapped opportunity to add more value – and thus sell more – to existing accounts. We help our clients capitalize on these revenue growth opportunities. Whether it's simply increasing cross-selling and up-selling or implementing a major strategic account management program, we can help.

Identify Who Can and Will Sell with Great Success

Our assessments measure sales attributes and skills, identifying the factors that really make a difference in sales performance. Whether you're looking to hire someone who can and will sell, or looking to improve sales performance, we'll help you build the most successful sales team.

Implement World-class Sales Coaching

We coach salespeople, professionals, and leaders individually and in groups to achieve the greatest and fastest increase in sales results. And we train and certify leaders and managers in our RAIN Sales Coaching system. Often, it's RAIN Sales Coaching that truly unlocks the team's potential, and keeps them motivated to produce the best results consistently.

Find out more about how RAIN Group can help you unleash the sales potential of your team by visiting RAINGroup.com or calling (508) 405-0438.

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