



H.A.N.D.L.E. Functions: Align



Aligning to your prospect's top priority is at the heart of The Priority Sale. In order to effectively align an organization, you must start with an individual, and the Align function of the H.A.N.D.L.E. methodology is all about the individual. This function requires your interpersonal skills, perhaps more than any other.

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INTRODUCTION

Aligned Priorities Close Deals

Aligning to your prospect's top priority is at the heart of The Priority Sale. In order to effectively align an organization, you must start with an individual, and the Align function of the H.A.N.D.L.E. methodology is all about the individual. This function requires your intrapersonal skills, perhaps more than any other.

In this course, you'll learn:

- How to identify potential priorities your prospect may have, via the threats they are facing
- How to establish trust through shared belief
- What to do once you have established shared belief

CONTINUE

WHAT IS IT?

What is "aligning with a priority," anyway?



Alignment is really about cooperation. Every single deal, large or small, requires the cooperation of both buyer and seller to happen. Your prospect's willingness to cooperate depends on how much they trust you to solve a threat they're facing. That trust is built first on a shared belief of the threat they're facing.

You begin the align function when you've gained access to a real decision-maker.

When performing the Hunt function, your goal was to gain meaningful engagement with a high-level decision-maker. Now that you've successfully completed that very difficult function, it's time to move on to the next, equally difficult function: finding their priority and positioning your solution as the way to achieve it.

You'll start with the insights you promised, then quickly pivot to establishing a shared belief. As always, remember that you're the helpful expert, here to help them solve a problem.



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WHAT IT'S NOT

It's not enough to have something in common with your prospect.

Let's think about the relationship we're building.

Alignment often gets mistaken for relationship-building. It's okay to think of them in the same light, but what is your relationship built on? Common interests aren't enough to make a deal. The relationship has to be rooted in a shared belief. The deal is made when that shared belief is in your solution to solve a threat they're facing.



Is it alignment?

Alignment can be incremental. Let's take a look at some of the benchmarks on your path to achieving full alignment.

Let's imagine that you're selling project management software. You presented your insights in an email outreach and got a meeting with Erika. First, we'll explore some of the things on her plate, then we'll think about some of the steps you might take to achieve alignment.



Meet Erika.

- Manages a team of 12
- Facing challenges with remote working

- Has been asked by the C-Suite to cut expenses by 10%

Unaligned

Shared Interests

It turns out that you and Erika attended the same university, just a few years apart.

Erika tells you about her favorite spot to meet friends before football games, one of your favorites, too.

On Your Way

Mutual Pain Points

You talk about the communication challenges that have come about with managing a remote workforce.

It's hard for a manager to trust that everyone is on the same page, and sometimes the work product suffers.

Erika nods along, genuinely but silently agreeing.

Getting Closer

Mutual Belief in a Threat

Budgets are tight, you say, but if we don't do something to reverse the tide, you could risk losing business based on sloppy work. If you think budgets are tight now, what will they be like when revenue is down even more? Can you survive that way, as a business?

Erika provides an example of how she had to intervene in a project before it went out the door, saving it from certain disaster.

True Alignment

Mutual Belief in a Relief to the Threat

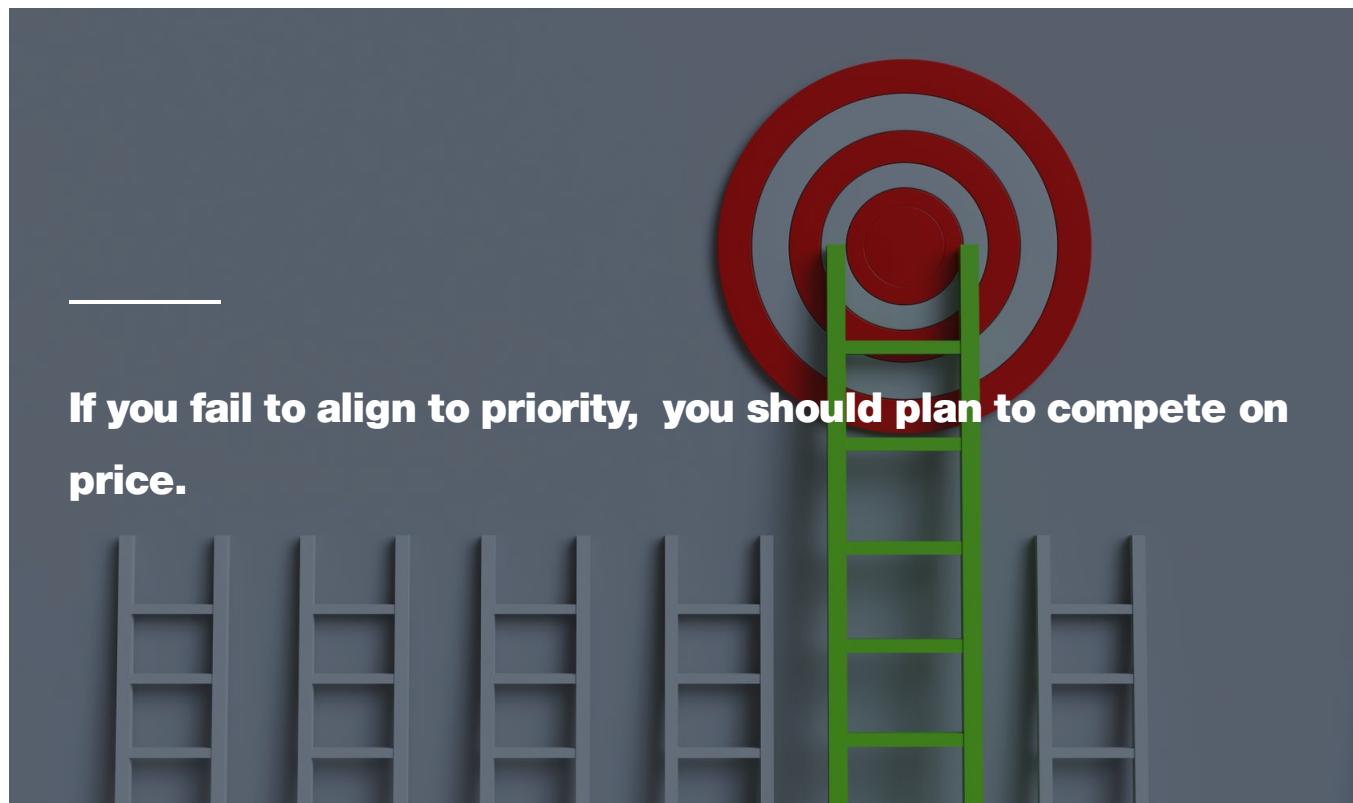
There are a lot of ways to cut expenses, but you can't sacrifice team communication. If you use this product, you'll be more efficient in other areas, getting the cost-savings you need, while improving the work product.

You and Erika look at the department budget and identify how you'll achieve it, together.



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WHY DO WE HAVE TO DO IT?



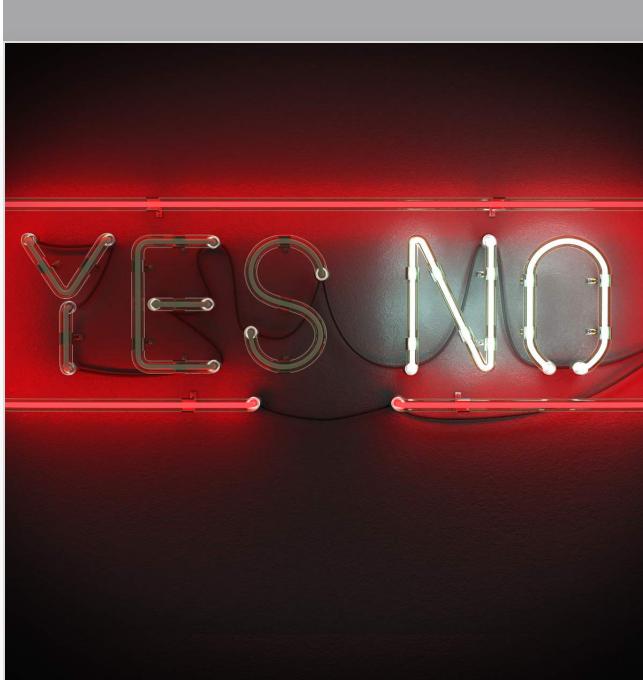
In today's companies, decisions aren't made in silos. This is evident by the growing size of buying committees. Modern sales aren't won or lost. They're won, lost, or put off for other competing priorities.

We know that in today's environment, no matter the state of the economy from year to year, only top priorities become deals. That means your competitors aren't your only competition anymore. You must be able to sell against competing priorities and also sell against the dreaded "no decision" to be successful.

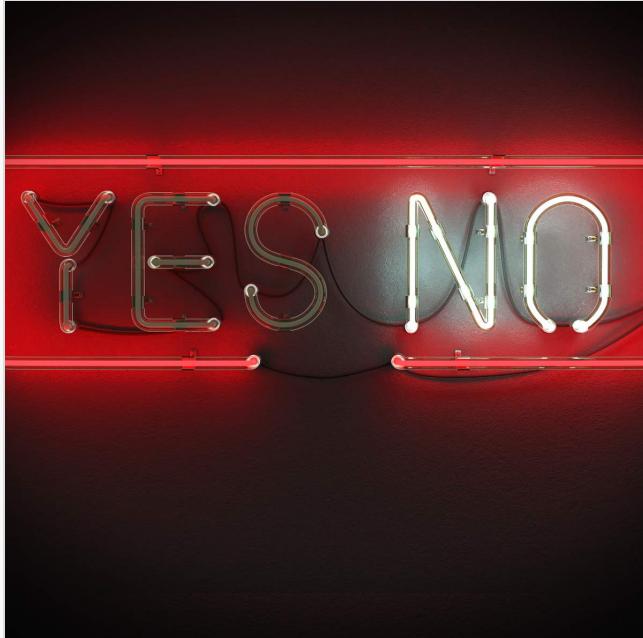
This starts with aligning to the priority of your high-level decision-maker, early on. If you wait to be brought in, or are dealing too low in the organization, there is only one remaining priority to sort out: price.

What does "no deal" look like today?

Polite though they may be, prospects have a million ways to tell you "this isn't my priority." Flip the cards to see some of the greatest hits.



"Call me next quarter."



"We didn't budget for it."



"Send me some information."



Complete the content above before moving on.

HOW DO WE DO IT?

This is not classic relationship building.



(But those relationship-building skills will come in handy.)

The first thing to know about the aligning process is that it's not a tool to manipulate anyone into doing anything they don't want. It's simply a faster way to find out what they *really* want and help them take action on it.

You got here because of successful hunting and having good insights.

Those insights need to mobilize now. We'll use a process that can happen over the course of a few seconds or a few meetings, but the result must be the same: an agreed belief that the priority you're going to solve for them is their top one.

The process works like this:

1. State a belief
2. Establish trust
3. Find the priority
4. Achieve alignment



We'll look at these each in turn in the following lessons, but this bears repeating: This is not a magical trick to get prospects to *change* their priority. You must be genuine. When you state a belief, you must believe it. When you establish trust, it must be because you're going to keep your word. When you find priority, you can't have forced it on them.

Let's look at these stages together.



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ESTABLISH BELIEF

To start, you must have a belief.

In any relationship, shared belief is a powerful way to build fast trust. It's why fans high-five each other at sporting events, or why strangers who own Jeeps wave to each other on the street.

And, indeed, these surface-level beliefs can help you in building your relationship with your prospect. But too often, they're mistaken for what really matters, what really closes deals: shared belief in a threat facing their business or their job.

Find a shared belief.



To find a shared belief, you must start with... sharing a belief. This may sound simple, but it's going against our biology, so it doesn't often happen. In fact, when we're in a selling situation, our instinct is to play it safe, don't offend. Unfortunately, that's the path to looking and sounding the same as your competitors. It's also the path to moving you down the priority list.

The point of sharing a belief is to get the prospect to think "Yes, I believe that, too." These beliefs should be focused on a threat they're facing. Effectively, the belief statement is "We believe this is the threat you're facing." Here are a few questions to ask yourself that will help you find some threats they're facing:

- What do I really wish they knew about this?
- What do I know that could really help them out, right now?
- What advice would I give someone just starting out in their position?
- What are the root causes of the problems they're facing, right now?

Take these answers and form them into a statement that starts with "I believe..." or "we believe..."

Next, turn the conversation to them.

Sometimes after hearing your belief statement, prospects will stop you to agree or to ask you to explain more. Most often, you'll get a silent agreement, the nodding of a head, or a pensive sound. You need to be ready to deliver a payoff to that belief and turn the point of view of the conversation from you to them. You only need to make that pivot once, because from here, it's all about them, not you. Here are three great ways to make the transition.

You deserve...

How does their future look without
this threat?

You shouldn't have to...

What are the consequences
of dealing with this threat?

You don't need to trade...

What are they putting up with,
because of this threat?

Get the Conversation Going. Deploy the "toss back."

So far, we've shared our own belief, and we've turned the point of view around to them, usually in just a couple of sentences!

The point of this interaction, though, is to start a conversation so we can achieve alignment.

One of the best ways we've found to quickly start that conversation is with what broadcasters call the "tossback." On TV, usually live TV like a news or sports broadcast, the tossback is a quick way for one announcer to indicate to the other that they're now responsible for talking. You may recall phrases like "back to you, Jane" or "Here to tell us more is Ashley."

You can do the same thing, using some different phrases. Try to keep them open-ended, so the conversation really begins. Asking "don't you think?" or "is that happening to you?" are good ways to get a quick "yep" and nothing more.

Here are some of our favorites:

- How is that impacting your business?
- What are you seeing?
- How are you guys dealing with this?
- What have your people been saying?



What if the belief doesn't stick?

Finding a shared belief may require you to toss out a few beliefs. In some rare instances, two or three are needed before the prospect latches onto it and says "yeah, that's me."

One of the best things about this kind of alignment is that you're weeding out the prospects that just aren't going to buy, right away, at this early stage. If you try two or three times, and nothing lands, then it's time to wrap it up and gracefully be on your way. After all, if they don't agree that they're facing the threats you're solving, then why on earth would they spend money and time fixing what they don't see as broken?

Establish Belief and Start a Conversation in Three Sentences:

1. Belief Statement

"We believe..."

2. Pivot Statement

"You deserve..."

3. Conversation Starter

"What are you seeing?"



Complete the content above before moving on.

ESTABLISH TRUST

There are two kinds of trust you're building throughout your conversation.

There are two kinds of trust you're building: trust in you, the person making the offer, and trust in the solution itself. You need to establish both to continue the sale.

There are two mistakes that are common when thinking about building trust.

The first is that a prospect who likes you is a prospect who trusts you. This isn't necessarily the case. Liking you is good, for sure, but it falls short of real trust.

The second common mistake is thinking that trust in you is equal to trust in your offer. That's not the case, you need both. It's very common for us to like – even trust – someone trying to sell us something, but we still do not make the purchase.

Trust begins in the primitive brain:

- Is this person or is this offer threatening? If not, continue.
- Do I like this person and this offer? If so, continue.

But trust ends in the rational brain:

- Can I compare where I am to where I will be, and do I believe it will happen?
- What are the scenarios that will prevent this from working and how can I mitigate that risk?

To build trust you need...

- Approachability – for the primitive brain
- Reliability – for the primitive brain
- Predictability – for the primitive brain
- Testimonials – for the rational brain
- Proof points – for the rational brain
- Case studies – for the rational brain

Trust is the bridge between belief and priority.



Throughout your conversation, reference your belief statement and circle back to the threat they're facing and how you'll solve it, together. Building trust is winning the primitive brain first, then the rational brain. When these two agree on the threat, you're very close to aligning your impact to their priority.

CONTINUE

ESTABLISH PRIORITY

Priority is the commitment to solve a threat.

There are two key components to this definition of a priority. You will need to work to achieve both:

1. A Commitment: We all have lots of pain points that we live with. We don't take action on them all. Only the ones that receive this commitment to take action to solve them can be considered priorities.
2. Solve a Threat: You and the prospect agree on the threat they're facing and the consequences of leaving it unresolved.

How do we do this in real time? Let's sell a car by aligning.

Here's where you can roll your eyes.

Yes, the used car salesperson gets a bad reputation for high-pressure, high-stakes tactics. But that sale doesn't have to go like that. Let's look at how aligning with priority can make this a better experience for buyer and seller.

Shared Belief



The salesperson approaches the customer on the lot. After greeting them and exchanging names, the salesperson says:

"I believe there are so many different cars because there are so many different people, but we often end up in the wrong one because we don't know how to look. You shouldn't have to do all the research to love what you buy. What are some things that are important to you in your next vehicle?"

Building Trust



For the next several minutes, salesperson and customer build a list of requirements together. Once they're finished, the salesperson asks: "A lot of people have things they just want or just won't stand for in a vehicle, no matter how silly or practical. Any of those we need to add?"

Aligning to Priority



With the list in hand, the salesperson says "Great, I had a couple of options for you, but I want to show the one that I think fits you best. Want to take a look?"

Even Used Car Sales...

In any person-to-person interaction, fast trust can be built by establishing belief, trust (in you and your solution), and priority.



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HOW DO I MEASURE SUCCESS?

How do you know you were successful in aligning with your prospect?

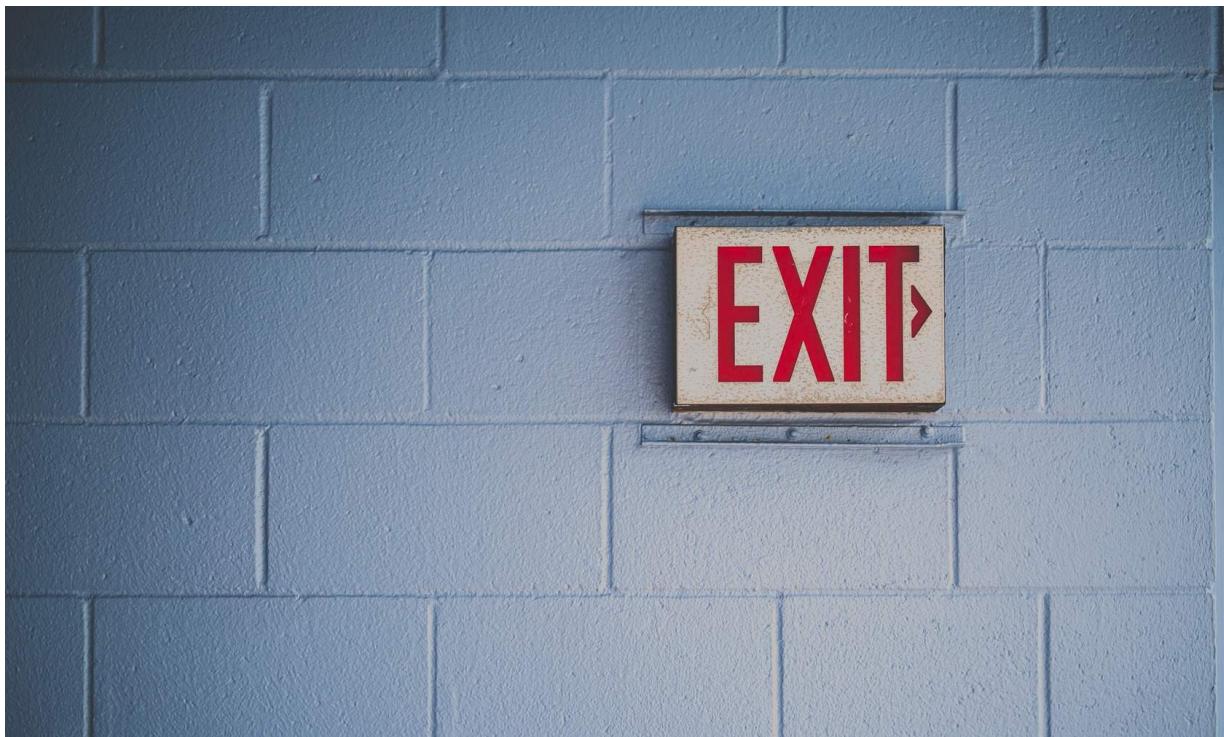


Here are some signs that you've been successful aligning with priority:

- The prospect makes plans to introduce you to other members of the buying committee.

- The prospect asks you for specific information about your conversation and states that it is for the purpose of sending it to others in their organization.
- The prospect starts helping you plan the rest of the sales project.
- The prospect starts helping you understand the obstacles that might get in the way of the sale.

The exit criteria for the Align phase is agreeing on the threat, having the commitment to solving it, and knowing what specific next steps you are going to take together.



What are they consequences of poorly executed alignment?

There are some hallmarks of when you're still not aligned with your high-level decision-maker.

Those are:

- A general request for more information, not specific to any one point, without any commitment to share it.
- An agreement on the threat, but not on the commitment to solve it. This usually sounds like "Let's wait until [some future time or event.]"
- Trust in you, but not the solution you're providing. This often manifests itself in lots of conversations that are often short and lead nowhere, like "Yeah, I've been working on them, but Nancy is on vacation and Mike won't budge yet. How's everything else going with you?"



If you haven't achieved the Align function in a few interactions, usually the first interaction, it's worth asking yourself just how much effort you want to spend aligning with this prospect. Is it truly worth it if they don't share your belief? Perhaps, but some honesty with yourself at this point could save you a ton of time and make you more productive by focusing on better prospects in the future.



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SUMMARY

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