

Book Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play

Transforming the Buyer/Seller Relationship

Mahan Khalsa and Randy Illig
Portfolio, 2008

Recommendation

FranklinCovey sales instructors Mahan Khalsa and Randy Illig offer a no-nonsense, emotionally intelligent approach to making selling easier, more professional and more fulfilling. Drawing on decades of experience in sales and sales training, they explain how to avoid the fundamental indignities of sales – countless cold calls and constant rejection – and replace them with a thoughtful, consultative methodology that helps salespeople, their companies and especially their clients. Khalsa and Illig contend that when salespeople forget about numbers and quotas and focus completely on client needs, good things follow for all. While this manual will most benefit business-to-business sellers of six- and seven-figure solutions, *BooksInShort* recommends its counsel to salespeople, sales leaders and persuaders in all fields at all levels.

Take-Aways

- Salespeople and clients often distrust and disrespect one another.
- Fix this dynamic by seeking “mutual self-interest.”
- Always put your prospects’ needs ahead of your own, and make it clear you do so.
- Know your clients’ values and priorities before saying a word about your “solution.”
- Stop cold calling. Get referrals. Chase far fewer but better qualified leads.
- Qualify opportunities and budgets; if they don’t fit, persuade the client to make changes or walk away.
- Know your client’s decision-making process and influence it in your favor.
- Strive to make sales presentations in person and with all decision makers present.
- Address all issues openly. Give clients everything they need to make an immediate decision right after your presentation.
- Talk price only at the end of the sales process. Make small price reductions in return for corresponding scope reductions.

Summary

Think Differently About Sales

Salespeople face suspicion and rejection daily. Clients often ask them to answer a ton of questions, reveal proprietary information, and spend hours and money on proposals for projects that may never occur – or for which they’ve already selected a winner.

The dynamic between sales and clients has to change. As a salesperson, start this change by thinking differently about your job. You don’t sell: You consult. Focus your efforts on your customers’ success. Never force a sale to meet quotas or numbers. Involve customers in evaluating whether your offering meets their precise needs.

Mutual Self-Interest

Change the sales-purchasing dynamic by earnestly seeking mutual self-interest. Acknowledge the truth of five “key beliefs”:

1. **“Consultants and clients want the same thing”** – Clients want solutions that address their issues or needs. Problems emerge when salespeople think they know a client’s problems or offer a ready solution. Clients don’t always know what they want and often can’t describe it. They block consultants’ access to the people who do know, or internal politics interfere or no one makes decisions. To win your clients’ trust and openness, focus on determining a solution that addresses what your clients need.
2. **“Intent counts more than technique”** – Your knowledge, expertise and “technique” don’t matter until you convince clients that you always keep their interests and needs foremost. Build rapport and trust by demonstrating your focus on your clients’ needs. Forget numbers. Take care of client concerns; your needs will take care of themselves.
3. **“Solutions have no inherent value”** – No one cares about your solution or listens to you unless it directly solves their problem. Your client might encourage you to describe your solution. You may ache to talk about it. Don’t. Learn about client challenges before you say a word about your solution.
4. **“World-class inquiry precedes world-class advocacy”** – Listen well, ask questions, and understand what your clients value and need. Discuss and explore their issues, challenges and opportunities. Together, describe the perfect solution with clarity. If your solution can’t deliver, bow out graciously – don’t wait until you’ve spent months and thousands of dollars on a proposal.
5. **“Methodology matters”** – A single approach can’t satisfy every situation. Therefore, address sales opportunities methodically. Aim for a balance of intellect and relationship building when pursuing deals. Reach clients with both your intelligence as well as your emotional awareness.

The “ORDER” Methodology

To “qualify, win and grow” new business and to execute a replicable sales processes, use the simple but powerful ORDER method:

1. “Opportunity”

Explore the Opportunity you offer with prospective clients. If their needs fit your abilities, make sure they have enough money. Qualify your prospect. Don’t “guess” what your prospect needs. In initial meetings, don’t talk about your solution. Listen to clients; get “all of their issues” on the table. Test by asking, “If you resolved all of these issues but nothing else, would that deliver on your needs completely?”

“Sales skills are life skills. What makes us better at sales makes us better in life. And vice versa.”

Take care not to hear only what you want to hear. Read between the lines, and when you hear anything that raises concern, treat it the way you’d treat a “yellow light” in traffic. Address the issue, ask questions and make sure you’ve mutually resolved the question before moving on. After you’ve discussed all the issues, work with your client to rank their concerns in order of importance.

“It takes some time to build a referral network, and it is worth every minute of the investment. People will call you and you will be able to make your sales goals with ease.”

If you identify 10 problems that the client needs to solve, about 80% of the value of your solution will come from resolving the first two. Quantify the value of your solution by asking “five golden questions” about the current problem:

1. “How do you measure it?”
2. “What is it?”
3. What would you prefer it become?
4. What is the “value of the difference” between what it is and what it could become?
5. How much value would you like to gain from this difference over “two to three years”?

“Helping clients succeed is...a powerful, if paradoxical, means of getting what we want.”

You may learn, for example, that the client’s wish for higher quality means achieving fewer defects. The client explains how many defects occur now and says the solution should lead to 50% fewer defects. You ask the cost per defect, and go through the math with the client to run out a projection looking at the next few years, so you can agree on a monetary range. Now you have a priority issue with an attached price that you determined with the client by using hard evidence.

“Having a credible referral makes such a difference in securing and succeeding with initial calls that it is worth considering not contacting a prospect at all without a referral.”

Find out why the client’s company hasn’t done anything about this problem. How does the solution affect other parts of the business or its systems? What barriers and obstacles prevented its resolution in the past? Past obstacles will resurface. Address them now, or find yourself –months into the process – dealing with a cancellation due to the rebirth of similar obstacles.

2. “Resources”

Find out if prospective clients have the resources to accomplish what they need. Salespeople sometimes spend more on the proposal process than client’s budget for a project. This happens when sales consultants don’t qualify their clients’ resources until the end of the process. Resources include the personnel and money the client can commit. Who will the client put on the team, what will those people do and to whom will they report? With such data, plus your knowledge of the cost and pain of the problem, ask what budget the client has ready. They will turn that question back to you. Talk about similar projects and give them a cost range. Ask if that range works for their budget.

“If yellow lights exist in the client’s mind, then no matter how difficult they may be, we want to bring them to the surface while we are present with the client.”

If they resist stating their range or saying if your range meets their budget, ask to speak with the person who can clarify that issue. If the top of their range falls below the bottom of yours, ask how they arrived at their figure. Find out why they seem unwilling to pay for the solution you’ve both agreed they need. If they can find the solution cheaper elsewhere, tell them they should. Offer to go through the competing firm’s proposal to make sure they haven’t missed anything. If you can’t convince clients to spend more, work with them to reduce the scope of the project, or assign more work to them and less to you. If you are unsure you can offer a solution for the resources available, don’t continue.

3. “Decision”

The qualifying process continues as you determine how and if the client intends to make a decision. Even with the opportunity and resources well qualified, deals often fail or are lost because consultants don’t find out early on who makes and influences decisions. Ask about the process: What steps need to take place for the company to make a decision? Ask questions to learn the identity of the decision makers and influencers at each stage. Do they really decide, or do they simply sign off on another person’s decision? Meet with every key decision maker, from the project manager to the CEO.

“It is almost always possible to get a referral if you are determined to do so.”

Your client will almost certainly deny your requests to meet with senior decision makers. Persist by explaining your intent – to deliver the best, most precise solution

possible. Tell them you'd rather not guess what their main stakeholders want. When they tell you the boss has no time to meet with you, agree – but say that a 30-minute meeting now will save a lot of time later. When they tell you it's unfair to your competitors, respond that they should allow the same access to any competitor who asks. When they say they'll pose your questions for you, politely insist you must ask your questions yourself to assess the responses, including body language. Ultimately, if your client won't offer access, decide whether to compromise and meet with only some of the decision makers, or go around them to get to the people you want. If nothing works, either walk away or decide to accept the risk of going ahead without these meetings.

“Don't go to the Exact Solution step without qualifying the client on time, people and money.”

You want to find ways to influence the decision-making process. For example, say that the client's process for choosing a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform involves meeting with you and six competitors, and then putting forward the top three. An IT “selection committee” reviews the three and makes its recommendation. Finally, an “executive committee” discusses the recommendation and “rubber stamps” it. You suspect IT will prefer a competitor's solution due to its popularity with techies and its ease of implementation. But you know that your solution is a better fit for the company's strategic and financial objectives. You might influence the client's process to change the order of the steps so the executive committee makes the initial recommendation according to business needs, rather than allowing IT to influence the decision based on technological concerns.

4. “Exact Solution”

If the clients “qualify” in opportunity, resources and decision-making process, arrange to present your solution and obtain a verdict from them. Win the contract and even expand the work by determining their “Exact Solution.” Present it in person; don't send a proposal in place of your presentation. Work to ensure that all decision makers attend and that you have sufficient time. Draft an agenda leading to a decision at the meeting's end. Know the decision or action you want the clients to make. Tell the clients you'd like to have their decision, yes or no, at the end of the meeting. Ask for their agreement either before or at the start of the meeting.

“You can build a referral network that will turn cold calls into warm calls and put you on the fast track to achieving your sales goals.”

Anticipate and confirm which items the clients need to see in your presentation in order to be able to make a decision. Address their needs and nothing more, but make sure you've covered them before continuing. Listen to questions carefully. Don't guess a question's meaning and don't jump to answer it. Understand “the real question.” Acknowledge objections by pausing in your presentation. Ask questions to understand objections; try to resolve them directly, right away.

“The more important it is to meet your numbers, the more important it is to stop concentrating on your numbers and start concentrating on the client's numbers.”

Your presentation ends when the client has no more questions and you've resolved all objections. Only now should you talk price. Find out by asking, “If the price were right, would you move ahead with us right now?” If yes, press on; if not, go back to resolving outstanding issues. Don't waver on your price – at least, not easily – and, then, only if you get something in return. If your client can't agree to your price, offer small discounts reluctantly and only in return for scope reductions, or the like.

5. “Results”

At the end of a presentation, if you get a no, find out the real reasons and move on. If the clients can't decide, press for the next steps and a firm timeline for a decision. If they say yes, lay the groundwork for a good relationship by anticipating challenges, discussing them, setting expectations and making sure the transition to implementation goes smoothly. Decide how you will “measure results” so you have evidence to prove your contributions. Obtaining future business from this and other existing clients costs far less than earning new business. Keep treating current clients like “prospective clients” so they don't turn into “former clients.”

Fewer, Better Leads

Instead of making cold calls, get referrals. Consider a policy of never approaching a prospect without a referral. Happy clients provide referrals, as do colleagues and friends. Pursue far fewer but better qualified leads, and pursue them thoroughly. Know about prospective clients and their firms. Know what issues they face and how your solution addresses those concerns. Plan meetings with prospects carefully, draft an agenda and share it with them. Practice how you will start the meeting. Know the outcome or decision you want before you start. Your quotas and numbers as a salesperson don't matter. Focusing only on client concerns will fulfill your needs.

About the Authors

FranklinCovey sales trainer **Mahan Khalsa** helped **Randy Illig** boost sales when he was CEO of an IT consulting firm. Subsequently Illig joined Khalsa at FranklinCovey. Together, they teach and consult about sales performance for global *Fortune* 500 firms.
