

FIVE

Selling frameworks and models



You'll have more fun and success when you stop trying to get what you want and start helping other people get what they want.

DALE CARNEGIE



ROADMAP

This chapter provides a review of the most common selling frameworks, starting with the older and more traditional models from where we obtained terms such as objections and closing (which are discussed further in Chapter six on Selling skills). It continues with a review of the core ideas in the more recent process or consultative models (that are more suited to the professions) such as Maister, SPIN®, Strategic Selling®, complex selling RADAR™ and behavioural science systems which often form the basis of commercial sales training courses.

Introducing the sales cycle

Selling professional services can be a lengthy process. The sales cycle (i.e. the time from initial contact to winning some work) can vary significantly. In professional services, the sales cycle spans from relatively quick (e.g. a few days between telephoning a solicitor and appointing them to take action on making your will) to extremely long (e.g. several years whilst a commercial organisation decides to appoint your firm as its auditors).

Research has indicated that, in commercial situations, it takes on average eight separate contact points and an average of 18 months to win work from a new client. So professionals who get frustrated when they don't win business straightaway can relax!

Illustration of possible range of contacts during a commercial client sales cycle

- Take a long term view and plan accordingly
- Have realistic expectations
- Not so different from a courtship – gradual development of mutual understanding and trust
- From general to specific interests to specific current need
- Meet for first time (at a networking event)
- Send information (general about the firm)
- Invite to a group event
- Send information (specific interest area)
- Meet or have lunch with others
- Send information (specific and topical issue)
- Invite to a joint hospitality event
- Send a proposal (very specific on particular need)
- Meeting/lunch

It is also important that you consider the importance of selling more work to existing clients which is faster and more cost effective to build your firm in the short-term. Chapter eight on Account management helps with strategies for developing more work from existing clients.

To help sales people to adopt a more structured approach to managing the sales cycle (some refer to this as the sales funnel – see the client relationship ladder figure in Chapter one) and moving it closer to getting the business, many frameworks have been developed. The ‘classical’ or stage models are probably what most people are familiar with and these models have given us much of our selling terminology with words such as ‘objection’ and ‘close’. However, more recent models use a more needs driven and consultative approach which is generally more appropriate for professional firms.

Classical models

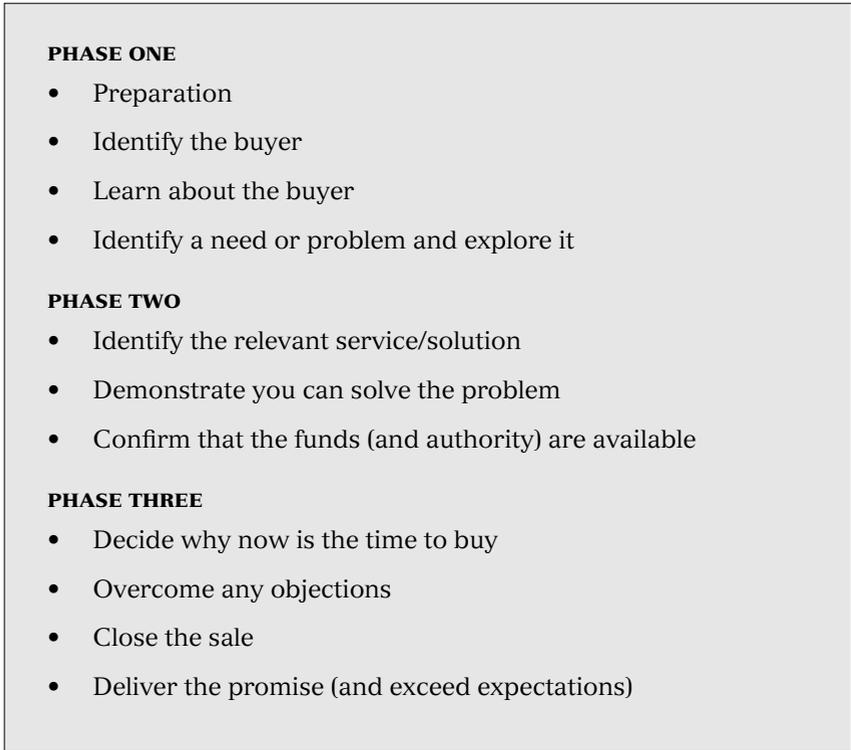


FIGURE 14: TRADITIONAL OR 'CLASSICAL' MODEL OF THE SALES PROCESS

This model and its many variants assume that you have completed quite a lot of research and preparation work and are already in contact with someone at the organisation!

Phase one starts with identifying the buyer. This is not always as straightforward as it may appear. It may take you some time to learn that your contact is not the actual buyer (see the decision-making unit in Chapter four) and even more time to identify and make contact with the correct decision-maker. There is then an implied research and rapport building stage where you learn about the buyer – both in their work capacity and as an individual. You should then identify a need – for without an implicit

or explicit need there is little point in proceeding. This is often where many professionals spend a long time going nowhere. They cannot see an obvious need for their particular service and are unable to explore whether there might be other needs that are relevant to their colleagues. It may also be necessary to invest time and energy in helping the client to recognise a need. Sales training should concentrate on the appropriate skills and techniques (research, questioning and probing, problem finding etc.) to uncover a need. The SPIN® model focuses almost exclusively on this aspect of the sales process.

Phase two starts with the matching process where, having found a need, you identify which package of services from your firm will meet those needs. It is rare that the solutions you have available match precisely what the client needs. Forcing your solution onto the client's problem is unlikely to be successful. You **MUST** focus on what the client wants and needs – not what you can most easily provide. A lack of lateral thought here can be an issue. A lack of integrity can result in the firm proposing solutions which do not really address the client's real needs (but serve the needs of the person selling to 'win new business'). However, a failure to properly match needs and solutions at this stage will make the remainder of the selling process difficult and may result in a dissatisfied client and no future business.

To demonstrate you can solve the problem, you need to persuade the client that you have the relevant skills and expertise. Some professionals may draw on case studies of past work or testimonials from other clients. Where trying to sell a new service this can be more difficult as there is no prior track record to lean on. In these situations you are asking the client to take an awful lot on trust – both as a firm and as an individual – and there is a large amount of risk involved for the buyer. It is therefore preferable to only sell new services to existing clients and focus on promoting existing services to new clients (this issue should have been addressed as part of your marketing strategy – which services to be sold into which market – see Chapter two). In this framework you are then required to ensure that funds are available to pay for the services although I would strongly recommend that this is something that is checked right at the outset.

Phase three addresses a common problem for professionals. The client has indicated a need and has accepted that your firm would do an excellent job but they fail to make the decision to confirm the instructions, so you reach an impasse. There are many techniques – some of which are not suitable for professionals – to address this issue which are covered in the next chapter. I would recommend, however, that during phase one you should have identified the reasons for a timely decision. Some of the techniques in the RADAR™ approach are focused on persuading the client that now is the time to make a decision and proceed with the sale.

Closing the sale (see Chapter six) requires asking the client for the business. Again, if a more consultative process has been followed this should follow automatically and naturally without having an uncomfortable question. Delivering the promise is sometimes overlooked as in the excitement of winning the business the professional fails to ensure that the service is delivered according to the client's expectations and the client is then quickly lost.

Skills and techniques to help you at each stage of this process are covered in Chapter six. Through experience I have learnt how this model can be adapted to fit more comfortably within a professional environment (see over):

RESEARCH AND PREPARE:

- Knowledge about your own firm
- Knowledge of the client organisation and industry
- Knowledge of the client's existing advisers
- Knowledge of the individuals making the purchase decision
- Initial ideas about likely needs
- Knowledge and ideas about how your firm could respond to these needs

ESTABLISH CONTACT AND BUILD EMPATHY:

- Persuade the client to allocate time to meet
- Provide an agenda
- Decide in advance what you hope to achieve
- Demonstrate an interest in the individual
- Concentrate on developing empathy and rapport
- Clarify the decision-making process at the client's organisation

EXPLORE NEEDS:

- Ask relevant questions
- Confirm your understanding of the issues
- Offer ideas and suggestions to gauge reaction
- Provide a reason to sustain the information exchange
- Identify any potential issues or constraints

AGREE THE NEXT STEPS

COMPLETE THE FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

FIGURE 15: MODIFIED APPROACH TO THE CLASSICAL SALES PROCESS

(© KIM TASSO 2000)

You will notice that this suggests an interactive process that is repeated, to some extent, at each contact point and does not indicate exactly where the process will end. This is because in professional services some sales cycles are short and some are protracted, so offering a series of activities that must be repeated as necessary is more appropriate. You might also need to repeat the process with each member of the decision-making process at the buying organisation.

Consultative or process models

Most professionals are more comfortable with what are called ‘consultative’ or ‘process driven’ models. In these models selling is replaced by a problem-solving approach which is more focused on the need for the client to find a solution, than the professional’s need to sell.

Maister

David Maister is a lawyer who has written many books on managing law firms and professional practices. He is now a professor at Harvard Business School and often-quoted and highly respected on a wide range of issues for professional firms and management of modern enterprises. His book *True Professionalism* should be required reading for all professionals and many larger management consultancies insist that their new recruits do so. Although I am a self professed fan of David Maister and agree wholeheartedly with his overall approach to management in professional firms, I have found his model of business development to be somewhat lacking in assistance when it comes to practical application in business development for the majority of professionals. However, it serves as a good model for many professionals:

Broadcasting – Marketing

Courting – Selling

Superpleasing – Quality and account/client development

Nurturing

Listening

FIGURE 16: MAISTER'S MODEL OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- 1** Ask your clients how you can serve them better
- 2** Invest heavily in your existing clients by demonstrating an interest in their affairs
- 3** Decide which new clients you would be willing to serve free
- 4** Design a package of activities to demonstrate that you have a special interest in the prospective client
- 5** Forget about talking about yourself and your company – the key is listening and your abilities to find out what the clients want

FIGURE 17: MAISTER'S MODEL

His model highlights some very important concepts: the need to listen, the need to continue to develop existing client relations and the need to identify ‘dream’ clients (see targeting in Chapter six). It is particularly suitable to firms where there is no formal marketing plan and where the partners are used to developing their own distinct practice areas, without much involvement from their colleagues elsewhere in the firm. So if there is little ‘corporate’ spirit at your firm his models will help individual professionals who are faced with developing their practice areas alone.

The SPIN® Selling Skills model

Huthwaite Research Group under Neil Rackman, a research psychologist, analysed more than 35,000 sales calls over a period of 12 years. The focus of the research was the use of open and closed questions (see Chapter six on Selling skills) in complex sales situations. The result was the SPIN® approach to complex sales, which is one of the leading sales training frameworks in the world. It provides a consultative and diagnostic approach to selling situations so that the problem becomes clearer and more significant and thus paves the way for acceptance of a proposed solution and its benefits. Professionals who are involved in commercial or public sector clients will find much value in the approach – although attendance at a SPIN® training course is recommended.

The approach describes the four stages of the sales call:

- 1 preliminaries;
- 2 investigating;
- 3 demonstrating capability; and
- 4 obtaining commitment

and provides advice and guidance for each. SPIN® describes the types and order of questions (**S**ituation, **P**roblem, **I**mplication and **N**eed-payoff) to be asked during the investigating stage to convert Implied Needs into Explicit Needs.

It addresses the common problem for many professionals of the prospective client agreeing to further contact without getting any nearer the prospect of a sale (a continuance being ongoing contact, whereas an advance gets closer to a sale) and provides strategies for dealing with such situations.

Further information about SPIN® can be obtained from Huthwaite International (telephone: 01709 710081, website: www.huthwaite.co.uk).

Strategic selling®

This approach was developed and recently refined by Miller Heiman. Although it is the basis of an intensive sales training programme there are many elements which can be considered separately. Overall, it is based on the decision-making unit concepts mentioned earlier (see Chapter four). They define a complex sale as 'one in which a number of people give their approval or input before a buying decision can be made'. The approach is based on these premises:

- **Premise 1:** Whatever got you where you are today is no longer sufficient to keep you there.
- **Premise 2:** In the complex sale, a good tactical plan is only as good as the strategy that led up to it. The approach provides a series of questions to help you work on your strategy:
 - 1 Analyse your current position with regard to the client and your objectives.
 - 2 Think through possible alternate positions.
 - 3 Determine which alternate position would best secure your objective and devise an action plan to achieve it.
 - 4 Implement your action plan (i.e. the tactics).
- **Premise 3:** You can succeed in sales today only if you know what you are doing and why.

Strategic selling® separates selling into two distinct components – strategic and tactical. The strategic element is closely aligned with marketing thinking in that it is concerned with getting yourself in the right place with the right people at the right time (see Chapter two). Inherently, it takes an account planning approach (see Chapter eight on Account management).

Strategic selling® then goes on to describe in some detail six key elements of a sale:

1 BUYING INFLUENCES

This relates closely to the decision-making unit (DMU) model examined in Chapter four. It requires you to identify those people in the various roles and the specific economic buying influencer (decision-maker in the DMU) for each particular sale (note that this implies, as the reality, that the decision-maker at an organisation may change depending on the particular circumstances or service being purchased). Like the DMU, the model considers the roles of users and technical buyers but also introduces the coach (your prime information source – someone within the buying organisation who will help you learn more about the buying organisation) which equates with earlier comments about sponsors.

2 RED FLAGS/LEVERAGE FROM STRENGTH

This involves undertaking a careful analysis of the client situation and identifying areas where problems may occur, as well as your key areas of strength. These potential problems may arise from, for example, weaknesses in your offering, weak links in the relationship, buyers with whom you are unfamiliar or competitor activity. For example, a red flag may be that you have no contacts with the individuals in a particular department of the client organisation and a strength may be that you have worked with a very similar organisation for many years and therefore have no learning curve and possibly some 'best practice' knowledge of their particular problems.

3 RESPONSE MODES

This is where you must anticipate the client's reaction to your proposals and to the implied need to change in some way – the term 'reality-results discrepancy' is used. Response modes include growth (We need this service to help us grow), trouble (We need this service because we must act to avoid a crisis), even keel (There is no need for this service at present), or overconfident (Everything is OK and there is no issue for us at present so we do not need this service). The model offers strategies to deal with clients in different response modes.

4 WIN-RESULTS

This relates to the point made frequently in this book that in the professions we are concerned with long-term relationships (satisfied clients, repeat business, good referrals etc.). Therefore, we must not compromise that long-term relationship to achieve a short-term sale with which the client is not entirely satisfied. In all situations there must be a win for the buyer and a win for the seller.

5 IDEAL CUSTOMER PROFILE

Closely aligned to the marketing process, this aspect encourages you to think about your ideal clients so that you avoid trying to sell your services to inappropriate clients or to anticipate problems in your current client portfolio. It helps you sort out the worthwhile prospects from the no-hopers, thus increasing your sales effectiveness.

6 SALES FUNNEL

The feast-famine cycle is a common problem for the professions – one minute you have far too much work and the next you have nothing. In Chapter one the client relationship ladder was shown and it was mapped onto the marketing, selling and client development processes. The basic idea is that to maintain a constant and even stream of new business you need to ensure that you have clients at each stage of the cycle. This approach offers a good approach to keeping track of the various sales opportunities within your organisation and managing future sales forecasting.

This approach has a range of excellent training courses from the basic concepts of selling, through planning strategies for particular complex selling opportunities onto approaches for dealing with major accounts (LAMP-Large Account Management and Planning). Professionals I know who have been through the course valued the structure it brought to the analysis of a selling situation and the concepts they could use to discuss live sales situations, but found the process (a variety of different coloured forms) to be somewhat burdensome.

RADAR™

Rick Page is founder of The Complex Sale Inc, which is well known for its range of sales training workshops. It is focused on selling solutions to multiple buyers in competitive evaluations (i.e. pitches and tenders) with an emphasis on competitive positioning, politics and power and team selling situations for winning new business. They have developed a specialist approach for professional service firms – in conjunction with a number of leading management consultancies to support their sales efforts – but we discuss here the general principles.

RADAR™ addresses the specific issues arising in team selling situations, provides 10 laws of team selling and explains the need for technique, talent, teamwork and technology. It offers an excellent individual development plan template.

The technique recognises the need for a good marketing strategy (see Chapter two) and there is much emphasis on understanding your ‘arsenal of competitive advantage’. It explains how advantages must be linked to the personal agendas of the right people. He raises an interesting point that “you don’t always need product or service superiority to win – but that you must have a greater understanding of the client’s business than ever before”. It suggests that the role of marketing and “product design” is to give a sales force as large an arsenal of advantages and benefits as possible.

The RADAR™ process (Reading Accounts and Deploying Appropriate Resources) offers six keys to winning a sales opportunity:

CHALLENGES	RADAR PROCESS
Value	1 Link solutions to PAIN (or GAIN)
Resource allocation	2 Qualify the PROSPECT
Competition	3 Build competitive PREFERENCE
Strategy	4 Determine the decision-making PROCESS
Politics	5 Sell to POWER
Teamwork	6 Communicate the strategic PLAN

There are useful strategies for linking solutions through urgency, differentiation, value and politics, awakening dormant pain and the ‘so what?’ test (see Features and benefits in Chapter six). A particularly powerful mechanism for separating strategic from tactical pain is the shark chart of the food chain of value. One observation is that pain does not come from the business problem itself but from the political embarrassment it causes, and there are suggestions for how to ‘peel back the layers of pain’.

The process prompts you to put aside natural optimism to take an objective look at the chances of getting the work and stresses the need for asking tough questions early to disqualify rather than wasting resources pursuing a ‘no hoper’.

Help in creating preference starts with a reminder of the psychological principal by Ries and Trout, that it is many times easier to help someone make up their mind in the first place than it is to change it. It advocates critical thinking into how your competitors will try to defeat you and counsels care in selecting the first point of entry (as you can’t go higher easily). Initially building rapport leads to credibility, which leads to trust and enables you to influence the evaluation process. There are some good examples of tackling the thorny problem of a constantly delayed decision. Ideas around power draw on lots of nuggets from other gurus (e.g. Covey, Mintzberg, Handy, Levitt etc) and addresses issues around shadow or invisible power structures and the value of reciprocity, social interaction, charisma and integrity.

There is a good dynamic strategic plan model (information, vision and mission, goals, objectives, strategy, tactics, plan test, execution, results monitoring) and a reminder from ‘Why CEOs fail’ that often they are from a marketing/sales background and fail to seek or deal with bad news (e.g. through a curbside review).

Developing and communicating the sales strategy is a stage that is often omitted but there are excellent strategies for execution and much pragmatic advice. The strategies are broadly as follows:

GENERAL CATEGORY	SPECIFIC STRATEGY	COMMENTS
Pre-emptive	Demand creation rather than demand reaction Ask for and seek an exclusive or sole source evaluation. Align yourself with a power partner. Walk away early	Winning the battle before it starts
Frontal strategies	Sell the product, proposal or company story	Only works when you have superiority
Flanking strategies	Change the pain, power, process, linking solutions or expanding the scope	Bringing your strengths against competitors’ weakness
Fractional strategy	Partnering Divisional Penetrate and radiate	Divide and conquer Appropriate for selling to Government
Timing	Delay Accelerate	

There is a good warning that the issues change in relative importance during a long sales cycle (screening, information and analysis, decision-making, acquisition and commodification stages) and the increasing interest in risk and pricing negotiations as the decision draws closer. To support the generic ‘opportunity’ strategies there are also ten strategies for focusing on the individuals involved in the decision-making process.

It touches on the use of C-Level (i.e. chief executive officer, chief financial officer etc) executive sponsorship as a passport to account management by focusing on issues of importance to them – strategic, political, financial and cultural and exploring the different distinctions between satisfiers and differentiators. It offers a useful set of eight goals for enterprise level strategy – penetrate, demonstrate, evaluate, radiate, collaborate, elevate, dominate and inoculate.

The approach has much of value to professional firms – although it lacks the rigour of an underlying process for opportunity or client management such as that in strategic selling described above. It is not an approach that I would recommend to a complete sales novice (they would gain more from a more basic introduction to complex sales) but for an experienced professional who is looking to improve their existing sales effectiveness it is ideal. The approach is invaluable to business developers who must manage complex sales to large organisations and to marketers who act as coaches to professional teams in tendering or who are faced with a major sale that has somehow become ‘stuck’.

Behavioural science systems

This approach emerged from research into client relationship management. The basic premise is that clients have four distinct requirements and each needs a different approach:

RELIABILITY

Emphasis on a consistent approach to quality, there is a fundamental belief that excellence sells itself.

TRUST BUILDING

Important where services are commoditised (i.e. little perceived difference between them) so the emphasis is on strong personal relationships.

BENEFITS

Focus on the positive aspects of your firm’s services.

SOLUTIONS

Appropriate when the client has unusual or complex problems and concentrates on the development of a partnership between client and provider.

It is interesting that many professionals adopt the reliability and trust building approach to selling, yet the benefits and solutions approaches often yield much greater sales success and client satisfaction. However, the different approaches have a part to play in different selling situations (e.g. with new or established clients).

Summary

This chapter highlights just a few of the many different models, methodologies and approaches that have been developed over the years to improve the effectiveness of selling. Many were not developed with the needs of a part-time salesperson who's main focus in life is in the production and delivering of professional services. Some of the approaches do not accommodate the need to develop an ongoing relationship that is so important to professional advisers. However, each model described here has something to offer the professions – either in terms of developing a better understanding of what the buyer is seeking, providing a pathway through the complexity of a long selling cycle or offering strategies to deal with common situations that professional advisers face. In my opinion there is no one overall approach that meets exactly the diverse needs of the professions in all the new and existing client situations they face. However, a professional who has received in-depth training in one approach will know where they are weak and will be better able to 'mix and match' concepts and strategies from other techniques more easily.