

LEAD,  
**SELL,**

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OR GET  
OUT OF

THE

**7** TRAITS  
OF GREAT  
SELLERS

**THE WAY**

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RON KARR

# 1

## The Case for Leadership

On October 1, 1989, my brother-in-law Dan resigned from his position as a junior partner at a well-established law firm. Upon hearing the news, I immediately called him to inquire whether he was crazy; he assured me that he was completely sane. I asked him, “Why on Earth would you leave this position when you’re on the fast track to becoming a senior partner?” His answer caught me by surprise.

My brother-in-law explained to me that he had a choice: He could continue working really hard and take only a small portion of the fees he brought in, or he could start his own firm, hire lawyers under him, and increase his share of the profits.

Dan knew one of the secrets of sales leadership.

### *The Leader’s Advantage*

You will make much more money through the efforts of others than you ever could make solely through your own efforts.

Most of the sales executives whom I encounter face the same choice that my brother-in-law faced—but don't realize it. They have not yet learned about sales leadership.

## **Beyond the Lone Ranger**

Whether you are selling an idea, professional service, or a product, you are probably hoping to sell more this quarter than you did last quarter, in less time, and at a higher profit. *You cannot do this on your own, if indeed you ever could.* To hit the targets you now face, you must build and sustain coalitions that will support you and act on your behalf. The “Lone Ranger” selling model may have worked in the past; in fact, many successful Lone Rangers were promoted to sales managers. Unfortunately, what made them successful as a Lone Ranger sometimes becomes their biggest obstacle to success as a sales manager—namely, their inability to get things done through other people.

Nowadays, whether you are a top-producing salesperson, a salesperson who's trying to improve, a sales manager, or a professional services provider, you should know that the “Lone Ranger” selling model is a concept of the past. To succeed in business today, you must leverage the support and help of others. This book will show you how.

## **Leaders Don't Puke**

Let's start with something you probably already know: Customers today don't want to be sold. In fact, the moment they feel they are being sold, they head for the hills—either by disengaging from the sales process or by simply ending the conversation, either audibly or

silently. What customers *do* want is help in making the right choices. They don't need you to puke up all the features that your products and services have to offer.

You may wonder why I use the word “puke.” Well, for starters, it's memorable. Members of my audiences tend to keep the “don't puke” rule in mind for a long time after I share it with them. Second, the word perfectly describes the basic problem we're looking at: When you puke up all the features you have to offer, you spray lots of junk around, you make a pretty big mess, and people try to avoid you afterwards. This idea of puking connects to one of the biggest mistakes that some salespeople make: They educate prospects, but don't sell very many of them.

### *The Leader's Advantage*

PUKE stands for: People who Utter Knowledge about Everything.

About 10 years ago, a prominent fashion designer was seeking advice on how to sharpen her sales skills; she came to see me. She brought along her portfolio, and I asked her to role-play a little bit, to let me play the buyer and in this way walk me through her sales process. She agreed and immediately launched into a little memorized routine. Without bothering to connect with me in any meaningful way or get any sense of what my priorities were, she immediately opened up her portfolio and went into a long, boring, and extremely detailed description of each of the designs in her folder.

I was being as patient as I possibly could—she was, after all, quite well known in her field. When she got to the eighth design, though, I said, “Stop.” Quizzically, she looked at me and asked what was wrong.

“Well,” I said, “just suppose that the first seven designs you just described didn’t work for me. Do you really think you would have had my attention by the time you got to the eighth design?”

She thought about that for a moment and then smiled sheepishly. She had made the classic sales mistake of believing that she was at the highest level of influence when *she* was doing the talking.

Actually, as sales leaders know, the opposite is actually true: The person speaking is generally at the *lowest* level of influence. Your level of influence rises only when the other person becomes engaged in the conversation and participates actively.

### *The Leader’s Advantage*

Even if customers are still looking at you as you speak, they are likely to shut down and stop listening when they decide you are trying to sell them.

If we are to have influence as salespeople and as leaders, we need two things from our prospects: their time and their attention.

When we start a one-on-one meeting with someone, the only thing we can be certain that we have is this person’s time. We have no idea whether we’ve got his or her undivided attention. If we’re doing all the talking, the other person could well be thinking about what else needs to be done today, what’s going to be on the menu for lunch, or when this salesperson is going to shut up. If the prospect’s mind is on other things while you’re puking your features all over the place, how much of your message do you really think will get across? And why does the prospect need to hear about your features, anyway? These days, thanks to the Internet, customers could read all about your features online if they wanted to. *They don’t need you to puke on them!*

I shared this lesson with the aforementioned fashion designer; she took it to heart and stopped puking everywhere. She started to meet her prospects, build up a little rapport, and find out what they were trying to accomplish in the market. Then she would review the one, two, or three designs that seemed most likely to produce the person's desired outcomes. She noticed a dramatic increase in interest for her designs, and she closed more business. She learned to do what sales leaders are supposed to do: help their customers get to the *promised land*—the place *they* want to go.

That's your job as a leader: connect with people and find ways to get them to the promised land. Your job is definitely *not* to puke all over potential customers; rather, it is to find out where the customer is trying to go. Identify the OUTCOME that makes the most sense for both of you, and then remove the obstacles in the way. Your job is to be creative and help customers find more efficient ways of doing things. Your job is to manage multiple constituencies and alliances, and to use those alliances to identify new and better ways of generating the desired results. Your job is to do what most salespeople *don't* do: *lead* the conversation with your prospects and customers about the results they need, the problems they have, and the obstacles they face. Solving these issues will lead them to promotions, increased business, higher profitability, higher productivity, enhanced competitive advantage, and a better quality of life.

### **The Job of Being a Sales Leader Never Ends**

Leadership selling is not restricted to the selling process. You have to excel at getting people to the promised land throughout your entire relationship with them! Once you stop acting as a leader—once you stop trying to identify the interests of the customer and build alliances on behalf of those interests—you can rest assured that your base of business will start to evaporate.

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### *The Leader's Advantage*

In today's economy, salespeople have to prove their value with every sale. They cannot rely on loyalty from past transactions. The result is they have to have a positive impact on the careers and lives of everyone with whom they connect, every time. Otherwise, they may still have great relationships but only a fraction of the business they need and deserve.

### **You Sell Ideas**

Like all effective leaders, top-producing salespeople sell ideas. They look for ways to find and improve the outcomes that their customers are seeking, and they start by talking about the “what.” *What* are customers looking for?

As a leader, you must determine the “what” before the “how”—the “how” comes second. Your products and services represent the “how,” which means that they are *not* what you should be starting the conversation with.

Read that again: *You should not start the conversation on your products and services*—even though you may have received vast amounts of technical training and even though you may know the “how” of your product and service like the back of your hand. If you start the conversation with the “how,” you will leave out the most important part of the conversation, namely, the *outcomes* you are going to produce together.

These may sound like obvious points, but the sad truth is that salespeople ignore them routinely.

Beginning with the “how” guarantees that your conversation will be short and will produce little to no forward movement in the sales process. You may not even be given the opportunity to

*discuss* the prospect's goals or the outcomes you hope to produce with him or her. Imagine how many sales meetings initiated by that fashion designer ended abruptly because of some sudden emergency that came up while she was soliloquizing about her many designs.

People tend to have very short attention spans these days. They have a lot on their mind, and the higher up they are on the food chain the less time they have for things that don't demonstrate immediate value to them. That's why we must prove in the first few seconds of a conversation that there is a reason someone should give us their undivided attention *and* their time.

Initiating a conversation by discussing the outcomes—as a leader does—makes all the difference when it comes to winning attention, winning time, closing more deals, expanding the size of the deal, and increasing margins. Launching the conversation in a different way allows you to lay the foundation for a value proposition that is second to none.

### **Lead with the Outcome!**

Immediately focusing on the “how” limits your conversation with a potential customer strictly to features—features that most customers will think—correctly or incorrectly—that they have heard and seen elsewhere. There is little or no room there for differentiation! By leading with the outcome—as a true sales leader would—you can expand the conversation to other issues, issues that involve a larger piece of the pie. As the conversation expands, more and more opportunities will become available. These opportunities can lead to the sale of other goods and services.

For example, let's say that you are selling pool products to a homeowner who wants a new pump. You might be tempted to start talking about the features of your very best pool pump. Suppose you

were to ask the homeowner what he or she would want from the new pump that the old pump didn't provide. The homeowner might think for a moment, then answer, "No downtime, better energy efficiency, and lower operating costs."

When you ask the potential customer to explain their reasons for wanting these features, you might hear a story of how the existing pump used to break down—typically on a hot summer day—and how the whole family would have to wait for the service rep to come and repair it. The use of the pool would be interrupted for days, and there would be a hefty repair bill to deal with.

Armed with this information, you can now talk about the *ideas and outcomes* that are most likely to make a difference to this buyer: Fewer breakdowns and lower bills! You could offer proof of your pump's energy efficiency and reliability, in the form of awards and articles praising its performance in these areas. You could then explain that your company offers a special extended warranty on the pump. This extended warranty is designed to reduce the risk of having downtime in the future, and it will also give the customer automatic top priority on service calls without costing a cent more on the repair bill.

You have just engaged your customer and secured his full, undivided attention; every point you make is now landing with impact. You have just dramatically increased your chances of getting the deal, and you've done so by talking about the outcomes first. You may even have added to the size of the deal by introducing other products that support the outcomes that the customer is trying to attain.

At the end of the day, the customer is not buying a pump at all. The customer is actually buying uninterrupted pool time, reduced energy costs, and a lower cost of operation. *Those are outcomes!* This is exactly what Hayward Pool Products, the number one manufacturer of residential pool pumps, trains its dealers to do. And that, along with a great product, is why they are one of the leaders in their industry.

## Why *Wouldn't* You Sell This Way?

For the past 20 years, I have been speaking to, advising, and coaching sales organizations of all sizes all around the world. Our clients have added at least half a billion dollars in incremental revenues by implementing this concept of leading with the outcome. In all of these situations, we never once changed the features of a company's product or service. We only changed the outcome.

You work for a company that already has a respectable product or service. If it didn't, you wouldn't be working there; the company would be out of business. The question, then, is a simple one: How do you communicate your value and differentiate yourself from the competition? The answer is just as simple: by selling like a leader does, by leading with the outcome.

Top-producing sales reps know that there is little competitive differentiation to be found in one's feature set. Those words may make marketing managers and technical departments cringe, but they nevertheless reflect the realities of the current market. Given today's astonishingly efficient information technology, the truth is that once you present a new feature, it will only take a short amount of time for the competition to find out what you're offering, reverse-engineer a competing offering, and start marketing their own version. How do you win that game?

## The Leadership Mix

True differentiation from your competition comes by providing what I call the *leadership mix*. This is the unique mix of your features, services, quality, delivery, and leadership.

### *The Leader's Advantage*

The leadership mix is what wins the game.

You need a different mix for each customer and each prospect. That means that no two sales you close as a leader are going to be alike, or even similar.

People buy for different reasons because they're seeking different *outcomes*. Our customers are looking to buy something that will support the unique *outcomes* that they are after. Leaders focus on the outcomes, and then they concentrate on the unique combination of features, services, quality, delivery, and coalition-building skills—the leadership mix—that will deliver the greatest value in achieving those outcomes. And that's not all! Leaders get people to experience those outcomes ahead of time, internally, before they actually occur. They use the leadership mix that they bring to any given situation as a tool—not simply for creating a single deal, but for establishing something much more important: a shared vision of the future.

### *The Leader's Wisdom*

“The future has several names. For the weak, it is impossible. For the fainthearted, it is unknown. For the thoughtful and valiant, it is the ideal.”—Victor Hugo

The mix you offer must become an offering in itself. Your sale can no longer revolve purely around features that people believe they can get elsewhere, or pricing that they believe they can beat by a tenth of a cent by shopping your bid around. The magic is in the mix!

Once you can do a better job of identifying a customer's desired outcomes, you can do a better job of creating the mix that will be perceived as most valuable in creating those outcomes—regardless of the dollar price that is connected to your offer. You can do a better job of persuading decision makers that even though they can get similar features from other sources, there is no other source that provides the same mix—the same comprehensive, multi-faceted plan for the future—that you do.

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To create this kind of plan, you have to engage your prospects or customers in conversations about what is or could be possible—even when there is no short-term need for what you are selling. That’s actually the best possible time to start making the sale! You’ll discover why later on in the book. . . .

Your job is to align your *purpose* (outcomes) with the *vision* (outcomes) of the customer. Outcomes revolve around needs, fears, concerns, and desires. So that’s what leaders talk about—not price or features!

### **Don’t Waste Time!**

Most salespeople usually don’t sell from a position of leadership, and, as a result, end up wasting not only the customer’s time, but their own precious time as well.

For instance, asking people what product or service they’re using in a way that does not connect to any possible customer benefit is a waste of everyone’s time. So is calling a potential customer and telling him that you will save him 10 percent, without even bothering to take the few minutes necessary to find out what’s important to him. Reciting a particular product’s list of features that your company drilled into you during product training—without having found any common ground with the prospect or customer—is a waste of everyone’s time.

You can’t expect to lead with any of these strategies because they don’t connect to anything that’s important in the customer’s or prospect’s world.

### **Leaders Don’t Get Sidetracked by Price**

People often don’t buy the cheapest service or product available. Have *you* always purchased the cheapest alternative? No! You know

you paid more for some items, based on certain issues and benefits that were more important to you—for whatever reason—than finding the item with the lowest price. When traveling by plane, some people pay extra for the benefits of first class; others don't. While some frequent flyers know they will have a good shot at upgrading to first class on a lower-fare ticket just before the scheduled flight time, others may pay the significantly higher fare simply to guarantee the first-class seat. It's that important to them. If you stop and think about it, you'll realize that there are lots of things in your own life that are far more important to you than getting the lowest possible price. For instance, buying name-brand products instead of generic brands, renting a high-priced apartment so you can have just the right view from your living room window, or buying expensive, front-row tickets to an NBA game.

### **“It All Sounds the Same!”**

One of my mentors, the late Bill Brooks, was a well-known sales expert and coach to thousands of salespeople throughout the world. Bill once told me that he and a colleague conducted research on thousands of buyers across all industries and asked them this question: “Why do you beat salespeople up on price?”

In essence, the answer they got from buyers was this: “Put yourself in my shoes. I sit here at a desk, meeting with several salespeople daily, and they all do the same thing. They brag about all the bells and whistles they have to offer. But at the end of the day, it all sounds the same! When you feel that the offerings are more or less the same, you move to the next step and qualify them on price.” For the sales leader, however, the discussion of price always comes at the end of the conversation—not the beginning! In fact, if the sales leader does the job right, pricing will be a secondary consideration when compared to other key factors in the buying decision.

Ask yourself this: What is the number one reason a purchasing manager would get fired? You may want to answer, “Paying too much for a product.” Wrong! A purchasing agent’s *first* responsibility is to keep the enterprise running efficiently and make sure it has the materials and services necessary to continue to supply its customers. If that supply chain is interrupted, the purchasing agent is out of a job. That’s the top priority!

Once purchasing agents feel that they have multiple sources and a low risk of interrupting the supply chain, however, they move on to their next core responsibility: to drive cost out of the system. *If you appeal to that instinct, you will lose!* Instead, you must build a coalition that is based on the purchasing agent’s primary responsibility, that which he or she shares with everyone else in the organization: keeping the enterprise running efficiently, so that it can satisfy customers.

When purchasing agents have access to multiple reliable suppliers, they will—if left to their own devices—put the squeeze on terms and conditions. To help offset this squeeze, you must lead by leveraging other relationships in the organization, relationships with people who can win by working with you, people who have a vested interest in the outcomes of your products and services. You must connect with the people whose careers depend on the results they produce, things like ease of use and zero-defect quality levels. These people must be in your “coalition of the winning!”

Your coalition might include the engineering manager, the production manager, the CIO, the CFO, the CEO—all of those players or someone else entirely. I don’t much care what each person’s title is. What I do care about is whether you are willing to do what leaders do—establish contacts at multiple levels in the organization.

### *The Leader’s Advantage*

If your coalition consists of a single person, you will lose.

Establishing multiple alliances and multiple points of contact is your best strategy for minimizing competitive pressures and bringing issues other than price to the forefront. This is what sales leaders do.

### **You Must Lead the Team**

Traditionally, sales executives were the main point of contact with the customer. Years ago clients generally did not interact with other members of a selling organization. Today, however, customers will inevitably communicate with any number of people in our organization. The question is whether we as salespeople are going to be able to manage those points of contact.

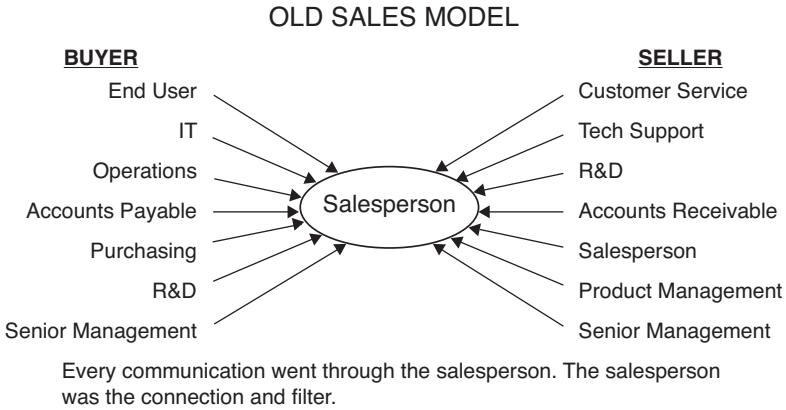
Customer service and technical support are interacting with your customers in an effort to support their needs. Members of shipping and billing departments are also talking to your customers and attempting to ensure that they receive their products in a timely and professional manner. Even prospects you have not yet closed business with are just an e-mail message or a phone call away from your support team. Face it: Other people are in this game with you!

Sales executives today need to lead the efforts of their own internal support team, and must also coordinate support of the various contacts on the buyer's side. The salesperson must be prepared to emerge as team leader in a flexible network that not only crosses departmental lines, but also crosses the line between the selling and buying organizations! You must master not only the art of winning the deal, but also the art of winning buy-in, internally, on behalf of your customer.

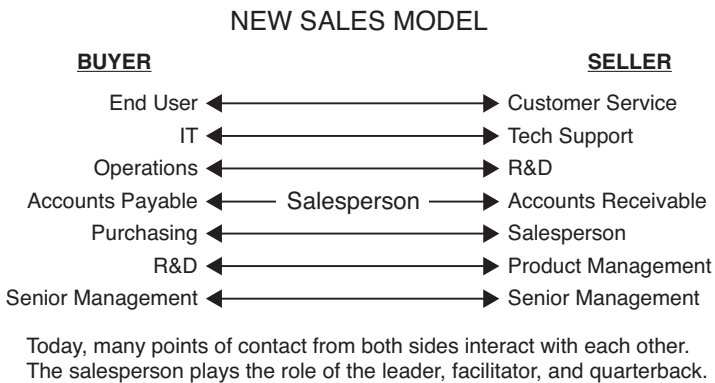
Believe it: Your success as a salesperson depends on your ability to build and sustain coalitions both *inside* and *outside* your organization. You must create and lead the coalition, no matter what you are selling.

Many salespeople try to push back against this leadership message, but the message remains relevant all the same to a broad range of

today's sales professionals. Even providers of professional services have to lead their internal support personnel. Your assistants and internal allies are all part of your team and, in a larger sense, your coalition. So, of course, are your prospects, customers, and clients.



**Figure 1.1**



**Figure 1.2**

The centers of influence both inside and outside your organization that refer new clients to you are also part of your team, your

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support network, and your coalition. *All of these people will only choose to become truly active and engaged members of your coalition if you make a conscious choice to take on a leadership role.*

All of these people are your critical business allies, and, today, your critical business allies must believe not only in your product or service features, but also in your mission and your capacity to inspire action in support of that mission.

In the next chapter, I'll show you what sales leaders believe about themselves, their mission, and the larger world . . . and how those beliefs support them as sellers.

# 2

## The Five Beliefs of Effective Leaders

The leadership qualities that any sales executive must possess in order to produce exponentially profitable results are rooted in five powerful beliefs. Although, strictly speaking, it may not be *necessary* to build all five beliefs into your life, choosing to leave even one of these beliefs underdeveloped means missing out on opportunities and, ultimately, leaving money on the table.

Take a look now at the personal beliefs that will allow you to implement the seven essential traits of sales leadership.

### **Belief #1: You Have Everything You Need**

You already have all the tools you need to make leadership selling a central reality of your life. Your job is simply to build on the qualities and resources that you already possess.

It doesn't matter what happened to you as a child. You are not missing anything. You can begin with what you have, and who you are, right here and right now. The sooner you accept this, the better

you will get to know the leader waiting within, and the faster and more enjoyable the process of adapting the seven sales leadership traits into your life will be.

## **Belief #2: You Can Improve *Any* Area of Your Life That You Choose**

Every great leader in human history has found a way to use the process of self-discovery to expand his or her personal capacity and sense of self. I mention this because, if you are like most of the people I work with, you may be tempted, in a moment of weakness, to avoid developing one or more of the traits you'll be reading about in this book. This is a choice you might make based purely on a preconceived notion that a given trait "doesn't sound like you" or "doesn't feel like you."

I realize that some part of what you will encounter in this book may not sound like you *yet*. One or more elements on the list of leadership traits may not feel like you *yet*. You may not believe that you are that kind of person *yet*.

Here's my question: Do you *believe* that you are capable of improving yourself in any area of your life that you choose? If you feel that you have already grown as much as you can possibly grow—and learned as much as you can learn—then you may as well put this book away now, because it is not meant for you.

Great leaders are always more interested in what they *don't* yet know than in what they *do* know. They realize that any hope for future success can only come from learning and implementing *new* strategies. They believe they can improve themselves in any area of their lives that they choose. For these leaders, knowledge truly is power, because they are searching constantly for new knowledge that they can *apply* in their lives, and *applied* knowledge is what leads to success. If you wish to follow in the footsteps of the great sales leaders,

you will need to make a personal commitment to learn and improve yourself in all of the areas we'll be discussing in this book.

### **Belief #3: Everything Is Possible**

I challenge you, from this point forward, to approach everything that may seem to you to be uncomfortable, unfamiliar, or difficult with the highest possible level of open-mindedness. Truly successful people find ways to abandon biases that hold them back. *They believe great things are possible. They assume things CAN be done.*

There's a catch, of course. To achieve results that exceed what you are currently experiencing, you must change your actions.' To make great things possible, you must be willing to revise your strategies, your level of intensity, and your focus. After all, if what you're doing right now were generating the results you desired, you would already be where you wanted to be!

#### *The Leader's Advantage*

You must grow as a person, and be prepared to do things differently, if you wish to sell more.

In the pages that follow, I will also be challenging you to learn about some new selling strategies and to give them an honest try. You may well trip and fall while trying out these new strategies; in fact, you almost certainly will. It's extremely rare to succeed at any given venture the first time that it's attempted. But when you encounter difficulty, you will pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again—just as you did when you learned how to ride a bike.

You may wonder why you need to go through any of the discomfort or pain of changing; actually, you don't. You don't have to believe

that whatever you want next in your life is possible. You don't have to grow. But you'll be happier in the long run if you do. Happiness *requires* growth, and growth inevitably involves pain. I've found that there are really two types of pain that are strongly associated with growth. It's important to be able to distinguish between the two.

The first kind of pain is the type that people generally try to avoid at all costs—that of arriving at a given point in life (for instance, the end of the fiscal year) and realizing that they have fallen short of a specific goal that they had set for themselves. That really *is* painful, since failing to meet a personal financial goal means that they did not support the goals and lifestyle that they had in mind for themselves!

The other kind of (more manageable) pain is one with which successful people deal regularly. It's the pain of trying something new and not really knowing how—or even *if*—it's going to work. This is the discomfort of unfamiliar effort, of figuring out what new steps you should be taking and then putting one foot in front of the other—even though it's a little unnerving to do so at first. This discomfort is similar to the minor aches and pains you get when you use muscles that haven't been used in a while; it's the pain of expanding your comfort zone. It's what you *should* be feeling on a daily basis.

The good news is that you get to decide which type of pain you will accept: the enduring pain of failure or the passing pain of change.

Sometimes, salespeople remain close-minded simply because they are afraid of trying new things. Open up your mind and assume the best. Allow yourself to venture forth into a new mindset and a new way of selling. *Start assuming that the best is possible!*

#### **Belief #4: Preparation Maximizes Your Potential**

To accept this belief, you must be willing to invest the time and effort necessary to do a better job of preparing yourself than the

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competition does. Having studied high achievers in all walks of life, I can assure you that all of them believe that preparation is an essential prerequisite to success.

***The Leader's Wisdom***

“Optimism is a strategy for making a better future. Because unless you believe that the future can be better, it’s unlikely you will step up and take responsibility for making it so. If you assume that there’s no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, there is a chance you may contribute to making a better world. The choice is yours.”—Noam Chomsky

A few years ago, I was working with Bud Howard, the then vice president of sales for Hertz Equipment Rental. Bud asked me the following question: “Ron, which do you think is most important: the will to win or the will to prepare?” I told him that I believed the will to prepare was far more critical to an individual’s success. You may want to win, but if you don’t do what is *necessary* to win, it will never happen. Both of us were on the same page; we both knew that preparation is the key to success in life.

This belief applies to almost any aspect of one’s personal or professional life. It is especially obvious in the world of sports. As a lifetime Yankees fan and a long-term season ticket holder, I’ve been privileged to see some of the most gifted and exciting baseball players of the past 30 years. There have been a lot of great players over the years who have worn the pinstripes, including the Yankee that long-term fans are most likely to idolize: Mickey Mantle. This Hall of Famer was truly a phenomenal player; as a kid, I used to get excited every time Number Seven came up to bat. Watching him hit those

trademark mammoth home runs is something I will never forget. And of course, Mantle did become one of the leading home run hitters in baseball history. Yet when I think about Mickey Mantle today, I do so with a feeling of melancholy; I can't escape the conclusion that Mickey Mantle never lived up to his true potential.

Yes, he was unlucky; he tripped in center field in the 1951 World Series and sustained a serious injury to his leg. But he had God-given talent on a baseball field—the kind that most mortals can only dream about. His strength, his ability to hit home runs of extraordinary dimensions, his speed—all of these things were off the charts. One in 10,000 major league prospects have Mantle's kind of ability.

Unfortunately, that extraordinary level of talent provided Mantle with an excuse to avoid preparation. Since he could outperform most of his opponents without much of an effort, he rarely made any. So the stories go, all too often his method of preparation consisted of a long night out partying and drinking and arriving at the ballpark just in time for the game.

### *The Leader's Wisdom*

“Don't be like me,” he said, addressing himself especially to children. “God gave me a body and the ability to play baseball. I had everything and I just . . .”

—*Mickey Mantle in a press conference after his liver transplant, as quoted in The New York Times, July 12, 1995.*

Now, consider another player in pinstripes—Don Mattingly—as an example of a completely different approach to the game. As a young prospect, Mattingly was someone whom most major league scouts would have assessed as having only average talent. He wasn't born with great baseball potential, and he didn't inspire the comparisons with legends like Babe Ruth or Jimmie Foxx during his rookie year

in the majors that Mickey Mantle did. In fact, Mattingly had to work hard in his early years to make the very most of his potential if he hoped to make it to the big leagues. Instead of taking his ability for granted, he made every effort to improve and expand on the talents that he was fortunate enough to possess.

In reality, most of us are Don Mattinglys—not Mickey Mantles. Despite the fact that Mantle set more records and had more impressive numbers, Mattingly managed to get more from his skills than Mantle did; he had a better work ethic and did a much better job preparing for a game. He was more invested in the process of expanding his talent, and he was less likely to coast.

As someone who saw both men play, the skill that each displayed was incredibly impressive; but skill will only get you so far. Before every game, Don Mattingly would take a tee and hone his batting skills by hitting the ball into the net behind home plate. He did this every day, no matter how hot or tired he was—even when he was hitting well over .300 on the season. He knew that daily preparation was the reason he was hitting so well. I never saw Mantle do that on a regular basis, and I doubt that anyone else did.

Imagine what Mickey Mantle could have achieved if he prepared as well as Don Mattingly. It seems possible that Mantle could have been the first to break Babe Ruth's career home run record—and perhaps even extended his own career. I run into a lot of Mickey Mantle types in the organizations I work with. When I meet a high achiever who has not yet learned the value of getting the most out of his or her talents, I feel like giving the person a Don Mattingly baseball card and telling him or her to take a cue from this professional preparer!

Top producers need to do more of what Don Mattingly did—practice. They need to hone their skills in order to achieve their true potential in terms of creating revenue, and they also need to practice to help the other members of their team. Their true value lies not just in the hard numbers they generate, but also in their ability to mentor others and enhance the skills of the team as a whole. That is true sales leadership.

A truly positive outcome depends on the whole package: skills, mindset, and preparation. I have known senior executives whose organization was better off once they fired these top producers. Although these executives might have experienced short-term setbacks as a result of the lost business, they felt that they would lose more in the long run as a result of actions and attitudes from the superstar that negatively affected the team as a whole. Time after time, I have witnessed the wisdom of such decisions pay off for companies.

Which kind of superstar do *you* want to be? Whether you are a Mickey Mantle with born talent or a Don Mattingly who's had to practice relentlessly and develop a fierce work ethic to deliver MVP results, my message to you is simple: You shouldn't put off practice and wait until you are in the batter's box, facing your first pitch of a real, live game to begin to develop your skills. Practice must happen—and happen often—*before* the game.

### *The Leader's Advantage*

Of course, when you practice, you must make sure you are practicing the right things. Practicing the wrong things for the sake of practice is deadlier than not practicing at all.

When the clock starts ticking, and you are in front of the client, it is game time! Are you truly prepared for the one—and possibly only—chance you may have with this person?

Here's another reason to practice. If you are not willing to sell yourself on change, then how can you convince your prospects and customers to do the same? *That* is what you are really selling: change. Not quality, not service, not increased market share—change. Think about it; if you want to push through a price increase, you are asking the customer to change, specifically to change his or her perception of how much they're willing to pay for the value you have to offer. If you are looking to sell more to an existing customer, you are asking that

customer to change his or her perception as to how much business you truly deserve. If you want the prospect to change vendors and buy from you, you are asking the prospect to change an existing set of procedures and routines to something that you believe will work better.

In order to get someone else to be willing to go outside of their comfort zone, you must exhibit the behavior first and make a habit out of getting out of your comfort zone in your own life! People will follow your lead if they sense that you are the kind of person who routinely prepares for and implements positive change in your own life. But if you can't show that you're that kind of person, people will be hesitant to follow you. You must move first. If you want to change the quality of the conversations you're having with your prospects and customers, you need to change the conversation you are having with yourself first.

### **Belief #5: Customers Come First**

Why does a focus on customers matter? Because no revenues or profits are gained—until a sale is made. Whether you are the owner of a company, a key executive, a sales representative, or a provider of professional services, your money is not truly earned until someone buys something.

Now, let's suppose that you're having a tough quarter and have fallen behind on some hefty bills. You're on your way to meet with a prospect who could ensure, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you will exceed quota this year—and allow you to pay all of your bills and then some. As you drive to the meeting, would you be thinking more about closing the deal . . . or about the needs of that prospect?

Real sales leaders adopt a *completely* customer-focused mindset. They internalize the same things customers internalize, worry about the same things customers worry about, and generally experience the same emotions their customers experience. Sales leaders live by this

commandment: Nothing gets sold if customers don't feel like their issues, needs, wants, and desires have been fulfilled. It's not about you; it's about them.

### *The Leader's Wisdom*

"A leader needs two things—a goal and to meet the needs of others."—Dr. Edward A. Ciccoricco

Good leaders do two things: They set goals that others can buy into, and they make sure that others' needs are met. Your own personal goal, on its own, is not enough to inspire another person! Your goal may be closing the deal, but if your customer has concluded that his or her core needs are not met by this relationship, then there will be no sale. There needs to be a mutual understanding, a connection that satisfies the needs of both parties.

During the 9/11 attacks, all U.S. aircrafts were grounded and the skies were closed for several days. Jumbo planes coming to the United States from Europe were diverted to Eastern Canada, and forced to land in communities where the number of local citizens was far outnumbered by the number of people on the planes.

Many of these townspeople only possessed the bare necessities. The unusual situation ended up revealing a lot about the values of the community. A police officer in Newfoundland was asked, "How did you deal with this disaster with little or no supplies?" He answered that no one had to be told what to do; the people in those towns simply donated whatever they had to the travelers in need. Some even shared towels when they only had one towel per family member to begin with. The police officer described the generosity as "a spontaneous combustion of caring." What a powerful phrase! Suddenly, people were looking out for each other. Suddenly, people who had been strangers to one another had powerful bonds connecting them.

What you can take away from that story is this: People tend to follow others when they feel that “spontaneous combustion of caring.” Leaders know this fundamental truth well. Influence and power only come from another person’s feeling that their basic needs, wants, and desires are being met. Your customers truly don’t care about your mortgage payments or career burdens. They want to know how you are going to make a difference in *their* lives. If they feel you are only out for yourself, you may still get the deal, but you will likely be missing out on all the potential business that is available. Dollars will be left on the table. Your prospects and customers need to see, touch, and feel that “spontaneous combustion of caring.” Don’t worry. When people genuinely have that feeling, you will get more from them than you ever dreamed possible.

### **Are You Ready?**

If you’re willing to accept these five core beliefs, you’re ready for leadership. You’re ready to start studying—and implementing—the seven traits of great sellers.

Read on.



# 3

## The Seven Traits of Great Sellers

I wish I had the opportunity to offer a personal word of thanks to each and every one of the sales leaders I've worked with over the years. These are the people who inspired the list of traits I'm summarizing briefly in this chapter, and expanding upon in the later chapters of this book. There have been thousands of leaders in my life, and I've learned so much from them that it took me years to identify the most important traits they all shared. If you're one of them, and you happen to be reading this book, you know who you are. Consider this chapter my "thank-you" message to you, and the rest of the book my attempt to pass along, and live up to, your example.

Here, without further ado, are the seven traits that the truly great salespeople I've worked with all had in common.

### **Trait #1: Visualizing**

Let's think about the word "visionary." It connotes the ability to perceive an outcome *before* it takes physical form—an ability to look to the future, to ask big questions, and set substantial goals. Leaders know how to visualize it (whatever "it" may be at any given moment);

they have a plan for their organization. In the same way, top producing sales representatives have a vision for the success of their clients and themselves.

The problem is that most people don't "visualize it." They check off items on a to-do list—usually, someone else's to-do list. They go through the day with a task orientation and never enter into a purpose orientation.

Your vision is your purpose. It should drive all of your actions. As a sales executive, your vision—and everything involved in it—must determine your actions on a daily basis. It must serve as the basis of all your conversations. So, ask yourself this: What is your vision? What is your purpose? You must become clear about your own purpose in life.

Leaders start with the end in mind. They visualize where they are going *first*, and then they operate from there. They don't make a long list of all their past experiences and use those as their guide to what should happen next. They learn from past experience, of course, but they are not prisoners of their experience. While events from your past may have been fruitful, they can also cloud your judgment of what can truly be achieved. Leaders know that visualizing their desired outcome is the essential first step to breaking down barriers to success. Then, they work backward in figuring out the actions required to achieve the end goal. They don't operate as they have in the past; they simply use selected methods that have worked before as tools for creating a new future. They use a clean slate to create the future they desire from scratch.

What is your vision? What outcome are you willing to think about and visualize? Whether it is supporting a certain lifestyle, ending a certain disease, or acting on behalf of some other worthy cause, you must be clear of the outcomes you want to produce in your life, and you must be willing to visualize them. If you cannot visualize your desired outcomes, then you are lacking the vision of a leader.

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It's extremely important to work toward goals that resonate with your passions and interests. Some people tend to choose goals that do not really connect strongly to a personal vision; they are deciding upon a goal simply for the sake of having one.

This may be difficult advice to follow, but it's important: Don't get distracted by money. Money, in and of itself, is not your vision. It is what the money will provide for you that imparts the motivating factor. You must visualize something that is going to drive you to the end and act as a magnet; so that when the forces of life come your way and throw you off the tracks, it will be easy for you to be pulled back on track, and keep moving toward your destination.

A CEO with whom I've worked for a long time poses an interesting interview question to every salesperson she considers hiring: "Tell me what you are personally committed to achieving in your life within the next 24 months." She's trying to find out whether the person she's talking to has a vision. The answer she gets tells her a lot about the person she's interviewing. If a potential colleague simply can't answer the question, then she knows she is not dealing with someone for whom vision is an important part of life. On the other hand, if the person instantly starts talking with energy and articulates a clear goal—one that can be visualized—she knows she's dealing with someone who has a vision and who would make an excellent addition to her team.

How would *you* answer her? Would you be able to? Do you have a vision?

Nobody can provide you with the vision necessary to motivate you. But once you have it—and the drive to make it happen—others can create the environment to help you reach your true potential.

Leaders know their own vision, and they are, by the same token, endlessly curious about the goals of others. Too many salespeople are so concerned with making the sale that they act solely on a task-focused basis; they go straight for the close, puking along the way,

and learning nothing whatsoever about the people to whom they're trying to sell. They spill their guts as to what their products can do, and even why and how they are going to make a difference in the customers' lives, all without asking their customers one meaningful question about what *their* vision is or what outcomes they are trying to generate. Before you start puking, find out what they are envisioning! Find out how the customer's desired outcomes can align with your vision. You cannot sell value without entering into this process.

## **Trait #2: Positioning**

You've just learned that sales leaders are purpose driven, not task driven. That means their focus is on end results. They work on purpose, and they begin doing so from the very earliest moments of the sales process. They know how important those early moments are, and they are purposeful when it comes to the very first impressions they leave with people. In other words, they know how to position themselves.

Solid positioning lays the foundation for the entire relationship to come, and it allows sales leaders to make the choices about how to move forward in the sales cycle that make the most strategic sense.

Most salespeople are too busy jumping through hoops to spend a lot of time thinking about positioning. They don't give a lot of conscious thought to the first impression they intend to leave. Sales leaders, on the other hand, position themselves powerfully in the minds of their customers as uniquely qualified resources who are capable of adopting a totally customer-focused mindset.

Determining the first impression they want to leave, and then leaving that impression and no other impression, is a big part of what

sales leaders do for a living. They know that the way they position themselves at the beginning of the relationship has a profound impact on where they end up—how fast they’re able to close the deal—how much they’re able to get for the deal—and who they have access to along the way.

This book will show you exactly what you need to do to position yourself strategically, as a leader, at the beginning of every sales process you undertake.

### **Trait #3: Building Alliances**

Building new relationships and alliances, and strengthening existing ones, is a major part of the leader’s job description. In fact, this is what leaders spend most of their time doing. They use relationships to accomplish their critical goals—and that means building bridges on a regular basis.

#### *The Leader’s Advantage*

Leaders reach out for a living!

The alliances that leaders form make it possible for them to leverage their personal influence exponentially, both in their own organizations and within the organizations of the people with whom they’re working. Truly great salespeople leverage their influence in exactly the same way so they can build constituencies on both the selling side and the buying side.

It never ceases to amaze me how often I run into salespeople who don’t much like building new alliances. They have eight or ten people whom they call on a regular basis, and they’re pretty comfortable

dealing with those same people over and over again. Typically, these people operate only at one level in the organization, and refuse to initiate contact at other levels. These are the salespeople who avoid finding new centers of influence, and potential contacts that could become their next qualified lead in a given company. These people are not sales leaders.

If you are looking to increase sales, you need to make contact with new people on a daily basis. You must constantly reach out to create new alliances with new people—alliances that align with your vision, alliances that harness the power of two or more minds to produce results that no member in the alliance could have produced individually. This is the concept behind every good team. When two or more people come together with their ideas and start to dialogue, solutions develop that would *not* have been created had it not been for the combination of ideas. For the same reason, you must also stay in contact with your base of existing contacts. You need to constantly widen your circle to attract a bigger piece of the pie and create better outcomes for everyone. This book shows you how to build powerful alliances and significantly expand your sphere of influence.

#### **Trait #4: Asking Good Questions**

Good questions are, inevitably, big-picture questions—questions that connect your vision to the prospect's world.

If, for example, you are a financial advisor, and your vision is to help your clients live the life they desire, then your first question should not be, “What are you currently investing in?” That kind of question won't win attention or time. The big-picture question that you want to ask will sound like this: “What are the three things you want your money to provide for you in the future?” or “Can you

describe for me the ideal lifestyle you want to live—now and in the future?”

The scope of the question determines the level of success that a sales leader is likely to attain. Of course, I am talking here about the *value* the question points toward. Great leaders use big questions to establish themselves as potential resources for their allies and to highlight the difference between where someone is and where that person is trying to go. They know that using questions to determine their allies’ desired destination is the key to identifying new opportunities. The more that a salesperson uncovers dissatisfaction with the status quo—through “issues questions,” which you’ll be learning more about later on in this book—the greater the zone of opportunity you will identify, and the more credibility you will establish as a leader in the relationship.

Leaders know that with the questions they ask they can control not merely patterns of conversation, but patterns of *thought* as well. They realize that the art of uncovering opportunities lies in analyzing—and acting on—the answers to their big questions. They know that clients and prospects will immediately judge the potential value of a salesperson by the conversations they initiate and the questions they pose. These questions determine your success in getting the deal, and perhaps more important, they determine how big the deal will be and how much residual income it will produce for you over time.

Power and influence come not from the statements you make or the claims you put forward, but from the answers you receive to the big questions you pose.

If you listen to the quality of the questions someone asks, you will instantly be able to tell whether he or she is task oriented or outcome oriented. A person who poses thought-provoking questions will always secure your time and attention—like Tim Russert, the long-time host of NBC’s news interview program *Meet the Press*, who

in 2008 passed away suddenly at age 58. His passing was a significant loss for many, including the people he made uncomfortable during interviews by posing tough questions. Tim made a career out of asking powerful questions. They may not have been the easiest ones to answer, but they provided the greatest insights into incredibly important issues, events, and people.

Do you want to learn how to ask such questions—powerful questions that will attract allies, lead you to exactly the information you need, and boost your career? Then, by all means, read on!

### **Trait #5: Creating Powerful Value Propositions**

Your *value proposition* is the tool customers use to decide whether or not you are going to get the deal. The simple formula for the value proposition is:

$$\text{CNC} - \text{CC} = \text{PV}$$

- CNC stands for Cost of No Change—that is, the cost of not accepting your proposal.
- CC stands for Cost of Change. This cost is defined in terms of the time, money, and effort it takes to acquire, learn about, and use your service.
- PV stands for Perceived Value.

The basic rule of thumb is that in order to acquire perceived value, the cost of no change (that is, the consequence of not accepting your proposal) has to be greater than the perceived costs of buying from you. For example, let's suppose your average sale is \$30, and let's say that you believe purchasing my book will help you close exactly one extra sale. The cost of no change (in other words, the loss of the potential \$30 sale) therefore outweighs the cost of this book (\$24.95).

Perceived Value Equation Example: CNC (\$30) – CC (\$24.95)  
= PV (\$5.05)

So you figure that there is a value of \$5.05. Now let me ask you this: Is \$5 really enough to prompt you to go online and order the book or to drive to the bookstore? Probably not! But what if I were to convince you that by reading my book you would increase your sales, not by \$30, but by, say, \$200,000? Now, the equation reads CNC (loss of \$200k in extra sales) minus the cost of the book and effort of acquisition (\$24.95 + effort). The perceived value stands at a gain of roughly \$199,975. Would you run to the bookstore or log on to an online store for \$199,975?

Perceived Value Equation Example: CNC (\$200k) – CC (\$24.95) = PV (\$199,975)

Maybe your answer was “yes.” But the reality is some people might *not* take action for that amount of money! If you’re a top producer making \$4 million a year, a gain of \$199,975 actually may not be enough to inspire you to take action. You may need to see a figure of \$500,000 or more before you start paying attention!

The point is people are only moved to action if there is enough of an incentive for them to do so. Of course, the right incentive is not always measured in dollars. It is the sum total of all types of measures people use to determine value. This book provides all the information you need on how to create and deliver powerful value propositions, based on both tangible and intangible incentives that motivate buyers to take action.

**Trait #6: Communicate Persuasively**

The best leaders communicate persuasively and inspire action in others. To put it bluntly, their message is more than the sum of its parts. They deliver their points with eloquence and style that is congruent—not just with the details of what they are saying—but with their larger purpose. When you communicate with congruence, you express a level of authenticity that immediately and positively impacts the people you are trying to serve—and makes *them* eager to connect with and serve you. People who cannot communicate with purpose and congruence seldom win many allies—and never make effective leaders.

Once, after I had given a speech in Chicago, the management team of the company that had hired me invited me out to dinner. During the walk back from the restaurant to the hotel, the vice president of marketing was complaining that she had written the best memo of her life to her sales people, but no one read it or acted upon it. I suggested that maybe it wasn't the best memo of her life. Don't get me wrong—the memo probably had killer content and ideas, but if no one read it or did anything with the information that was in it, guess what? It was not as valuable as she thought it was!

The same holds true for sales presentations. Salespeople spend so much time on developing killer presentations that have all the bells and whistles that they tend to ignore the essential question of how they will need to *deliver* the presentation for maximum impact. After all, what is your ultimate goal: creating artful presentations or closing sales?

A client of mine once did a needs analysis for a prospect, and developed a phenomenal PowerPoint on his findings. He spent two whole days developing an elaborate presentation complete with graphics, video, and lots of catchy typefaces. He went in the following week and gave the presentation. At the end, he asked how he had done. The answer: “You were phenomenal, but didn't you hear?”

We re-organized last week, and everything has changed. What you covered in the presentation really isn't that relevant anymore."

An effective sales leader would have started that conversation by asking, "Has anything changed since we last met?" That question would have looked past the details of the presentation and tied the discussion to the larger *purpose* of the meeting.

Things change daily—not just in your world, but also in your customer's world. You must communicate persuasively if you wish to be part of that change. You can get all the facts "right"—and still be hopelessly behind the curve when it comes time to inspire action. You can't research your way to persuasiveness, nor can flashy words and graphics close the gap for you. You must look closely at your strategies, your timing, your rapport with the audience, and your delivery style. In this part of the book, I'll show you the simple but incredibly effective strategies sales leaders use to energize their presentations and close more and bigger deals.

### **Trait #7: Holding Yourself Accountable**

The best leaders assume accountability for their outcomes. They are personally responsible for their own world and to the allies they attract. They never hide behind the organization, and they never make excuses—to themselves or anyone else.

CEOs sometimes tell me how frustrated they are with their employees not being accountable to the organization. I always answer that there is no such thing as accountability to an organization; rather it is *personal* accountability that matters. People are accountable to other people—not organizations. In fact, it all starts with responsibility to yourself. How in the world can you expect to keep commitments to others if you don't first keep commitments to yourself?

Leaders make promises to themselves first, and then follow through on those promises. It's their dedication to their own

vision and standards that make it possible for them to follow through when they make commitments to other people. This book gives you the tools you need to make—and follow through on—the critical commitments you must make to *yourself* as you build all seven of these traits into your career and your life. Here, you will take the action steps that make this book an ongoing resource in your life, not just a placeholder on your bookshelf.

If you follow the program, then you will join the elite few who make personal commitments and personally deliver on those commitments. The rewards you will reap will astonish you. In the final analysis, your *journey to sales leadership* starts and ends with your own personal accountability.

Are you ready to begin that journey?

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