

**Coaching You—In Leading-
Edge Sales Practices!**
A Psychological-Behavioral Approach

By

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Introduction: Coaching You—In Leading–Edge Sales Practices

Hello, my name is Dr. Tim McCarthy. I am a sales coach and psychologist. Although there is no formal field of “sales psychology,” for lack of a better term some have referred to me as a *sales psychologist*. In writing this book I’m offering you the same *personal coaching experience* I give to my clients as a way to help challenge and support you in your effort to improve your skills as a professional salesperson.

Leading–Edge Practices Represent The Future for Sales.

The basic point of this book is that there exists a tremendous opportunity for you to begin using skills today that are not widely used by others in the field of sales. Only a few salespeople and companies currently utilize these methods, which will likely within ten years become the norm rather than the rarity.

This book introduces you to these practices and profiles some of the model companies utilizing these methods so that you can better understand and apply them. Once you understand the power of these practices and the advantage they represent for you personally, you can begin to use them in the field. And if you are a sales leader, you can begin to implement them within your own sales organization.

Challenging Foundational Macro Sales Beliefs

One thing to clarify: These methods are not just a few canned “techniques” but rather represent an approach to sales that challenges the very foundational macro beliefs—accepted on a wide level by most people—about what it takes to be successful in sales.

The first, most important macro belief holding one back from higher performance is that *salespeople do not and shouldn’t really need* much training or coaching in how to sell. It is this minimalistic expectation that is reinforced throughout most of the business world: *Salespeople don’t need a lot of training or coaching, and they shouldn’t need it! They’ve been selling for so many years and that’s why we pay them the big bucks!*

As a psychologist and sales coach I see a direct relationship between performance in any field and the subconscious as well as conscious beliefs that

drive that performance. And I can tell you that the essential problem here is that this macro belief regarding minimal training for salespeople is so pervasive and severely self-limiting that it's responsible for most salespeople not getting what they really need to be more successful and results in them performing far below their true capability.

You Are Likely Underperforming in Sales

That's right, what I'm saying is that in all likelihood you personally are operating at a skill level in your sales approach that is far below what you are truly capable of. Think of it this way, salespeople are just like professional athletes, only denied the intensive coaching and training that is provided on a daily basis to all professional sports teams.

If you decide to utilize the methods presented here, you can easily improve your performance and increase your sales.

A Personal Game-Changing Advantage

This book will give you new ideas for selling and hopefully trigger new energy, enthusiasm, and a specific development plan—that you'll create—to improve your selling process through application of these new practices. Those who choose to diligently learn and apply these leading-edge methods will gain a tremendous advantage with far-reaching consequences for financial success. This advantage is potentially very great for you personally simply because so few currently employ these practices.

If you're skeptical about the validity of this proposed advantage, let me present some facts to support it. A Miller Heiman 2010 study found that only 4.6 percent of companies surveyed qualified as world-class sales organizations that consistently applied best practices in their selling approach in ways that were linked to revenue improvement.¹ That means 95.4 percent of companies and all their salespeople are failing to apply world-class practices that could improve performance! Wow, that's an astounding finding!

In addition to the advantage for you as a salesperson, companies choosing to install these practices within their sales force gain major strategic competitive advantage and accelerated sales growth.

Selling Is A Most Difficult And Complex Job

Let's take a look at why it might be that so few companies and salespeople are following world-class sales practices. In my opinion as a performance psychologist, it relates to deep-rooted, simplistic beliefs about salespeople and

what they need to be successful. First, let me say that salespeople generally are under-recognized for the role that they play. They have one the most difficult jobs in business. The art of selling is a complex skill encompassing multiple abilities: e.g. interpersonal skills, sustaining relationships, rapport-building, discovering needs, overcoming objections, communicating value proposition and competitive advantage, closing—all while maintaining a positive emotional state in response to rejection.

All of these are very complex skills going beyond typical production and management skills. The salesperson must be “on” throughout his or her entire day in every contact with customers. They must maintain an inner feeling of confidence and positive attitude even after being *psychologically rejected* by prospects, who may be disinterested, discourteous, and dismissive.

The Salesperson’s Job Is Most Important

At the same time, this job is actually more important than any other because the entire business depends upon the salesperson’s ability to drive revenue. The lives and paychecks of all employees in every company depend upon the salesperson’s ability to capture as many sales as possible for the collective good of the organization.

Be In The Top 5 Percent of Sales Performers!

Now, having established the level of complexity involved in the skills of selling and the immense importance of the professional salesperson’s job, it is quite shocking to see how little importance has been given in general to providing more in-depth, intensive training and coaching to salespeople. It’s no wonder that only 4.6 percent of companies qualify as world-class sales organizations. All of this supports the fact that you have a huge opportunity at this point in time to become one of the top 5 percent of sales performers, if you have the interest and motivation.

Use Sales Practices Of The Future Now!

If you want to become the very *best of the best*, then keep reading because you will learn things that will have a major impact on your career and life. Let me warn you, however, that it will mean approaching sales in a new light, which will require you to go out of your way to break the old patterns of a simpler, looser approach to sales. The good news is you will learn to approach sales from the most advanced viewpoints in the field. And you will gain the opportunity to use methods that right now only a small percentage of sales people and companies are using.

Nowhere is there more opportunity in business to make huge changes in one's life and personal income than in sales where the incentive-based compensation allows for faster speed in getting to higher income levels and life fulfillment.

A Coaching Book

This book is meant to be a *coaching book* that's quite different from other sales books that often have more of an academic flavor to them. The style, format, and vocabulary of this book are specifically designed to be more personal and conversational, as if we're just sitting across from each other right now in casual conversation. The book is meant to be brief, easily readable in a few hours, and written in a way that avoids extraneous fluff as much as possible. It's a coaching book with the aim to achieve maximum impact in helping you stimulate new thinking and new behavior.

Your Coach

So at this point I'd like to offer my help to you as your personal sales coach for the duration of the book. I only ask one thing of you, which is for you to remain open in your thinking and receptivity to new ideas that may challenge to the core your usual thinking about selling.

I think that we can accomplish some great things together and am excited about this journey aimed at new possibilities for you!

Obtaining Support From Your Sales Manager

You're welcome to accept and retain some or all of what you learn that might be helpful to you or your sales team. As a salesperson within a larger organization, you may learn ideas here, which ideally have the greatest impact if accepted by your sales managers and executives. This is especially true since these practices are best implemented with the support and facilitation of your sales manager and organization. So part of your action plan for follow-up in using what you learn here can be to pass these ideas on and solicit support for their implementation.

The relationship between you and your sales manager is a vital one and he or she can be your best support person for getting what you need to be successful. But remember, what we are doing here is expanding the traditionally accepted beliefs about what your managers and others in your organization may think you need to be successful as a salesperson. You will likely need to be persistent in educating them through this book or other means (see our website). An educative, sharing process has to happen in order to expand the vision of other managers within your organization. However, if their acceptance is less than optimal, there is nothing stopping you from incorporating these methods on your

own without their involvement.

Focus on Best Practice Companies

In this book we'll only focus on aspects of selling that are indeed *leading-edge best practices*, those that are currently under-recognized or underutilized by most salespeople and sales organizations. Only a small percentage of companies are employing these practices, yet they serve as best practice models. We'll discuss some of those companies, how salespeople use these methods in those companies, and the enormous impact it's had for them.

What Priority Areas Need Your Development?

It may be that you've felt some frustration or unhappiness with your sales performance and selling skills in one or more of the following areas: gaining the interest of new prospects, closing ratio, ability to differentiate your product or service, setting new appointments, motivating yourself to call on new prospects, overcoming objections, defending your value proposition with real, convincing proof, or meeting your sales quota.

The following *Five Key Leading-Edge Sales Practices* form the foundation of this book, all of which will be discussed in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

Summary

Five Key Leading-Edge Sales Practices

(1.) Evidence-Based Selling Using Customer Proof Data:

Let's take a more in-depth psychological-behavioral look at the decision-making process for new prospects. The truth is that their first intention is to dismiss you as quickly as possible—they're busy and they've been interrupted. They don't trust you or what you're telling them with the generalized statements made about your value proposition and the differentiation of your product or service. They don't believe you because you don't have enough compelling *proof data* to support what you're saying.

Of these five key leading-edge sales practices, this first one is the most foundational. And it's one of the most commonly neglected principles of selling in most companies. As a salesperson, you can talk until you're blue in the face to a new prospect but unless you give them real proof for what you're saying, the conversation will be over very quickly with one of a variety of dismissive objections: don't have the money, not the right time, etc. The prospect simply will not believe you without more evidence and they don't want to waste their time in talking with you. Who can blame them?

A great deal of emphasis is placed on this first leading–edge principle of evidence–based selling. We will focus on how to gather customer *proof data* to support your product or service differentiation and competitive advantage. The one and only thing that will cause new prospects to listen and stop dismissing you will be *evidence* to back up your communication of the value and competitive advantage you are offering. Best practice model companies such as Xerox Corp. and others have gone the extra mile by obtaining more convincing customer proof data. And you’ll be given new ideas for how to incorporate more *proof data* into your selling process for your industry and market.

No more will you have to sell without enough real proof data to back up what you’re saying! You’ll find your prospects will be much more inclined to listen to you and be open to discussion.

(2.) Designing Comprehensive *Standardized Best Sales Practices*:

Principles of Six Sigma/Lean are rarely applied to sales, yet are widely used for production and administrative process improvements. Why not for sales? Not applying these time-tested business principles to this vitally important function within business represents a huge, in fact mind-boggling failure when you think about it.

Having sales lag behind production and other business functions relative to disciplined process improvement efforts is an *Achilles Heel* for any organization. It contributes to widespread sales underperformance noted earlier because the level of development in processes for sales has not kept pace with other business areas such as production/administration. The sales function simply hasn’t received the same level of rigor in making intensive improvement efforts. The good news is, once again, this creates a performance vacuum of great opportunity for you personally as a salesperson, since you or your organization can build a selling process advantage by designing a highly effective set of *standardized best practices*, especially if those best practices heavily incorporate powerful proof data.

The heart and soul of Six Sigma/Lean rests upon the concept of standardized best practices developed after intensive creative brainstorming and improvement efforts to improve any specific process. These are uniform, standardized best practices that everyone can follow to ensure consistent optimal performance for all those engaged in a specific process. Selling is approached in most companies from a very loose standpoint lacking this higher level of specific process development and discipline. More recently, there has been a small but burgeoning interest in applying Six Sigma/Lean principles to sales reflected in a few books that have been written on this subject.²³⁴

However, these latter books address the broader aspects of selling and processes involved in it. Our interest here is much more specific to avoid any redundancy with the latter resources already available. It is centered only upon the most critical points of direct conversational engagement with the prospect. In particular it will focus on the single most important challenge for the salesperson, which is how to overcome disinterest and objections. It is the *what to say and how to say it* in overcoming objections and buying hesitancy by effectively incorporating powerful proof data with an overwhelmingly compelling value proposition and competitive advantage.

In summary, you will learn how to design standardized best practices by identifying existing best practices of other top salespeople and integrating these with newly acquired proof data. It will help you drill down to specific language/key phrases customized to help you at each step of greatest challenge in your selling process.

(3.) Engage In Ongoing Performance Skills Coaching:

This practice applies the time-tested principles of intensive, ongoing performance skills coaching used by multimillion-dollar professional sports teams but neglected by most sales organizations. In the field of business there has been a complete abandonment of the time-tested principles of *human performance skills coaching*, which are widely utilized by every professional sports team in existence today.

Performance in any field of endeavor requires a set of specific behaviors to learn and follow. And those behaviors are best mastered and learned through repetitive practice with the guidance of a coach who offers ongoing help and assistance.

No professional sports business would ever deny their people coaching because it would set the performance of the team way behind its competitors. So why in the world would a business deny more in-depth coaching to their most important employees with the most complex job of all? This is obviously a rhetorical question, since the logic is overwhelming. How much advantage does it give the professional baseball player to have a coach who helps him every day with batting, fielding, or pitching skills. Conversely, one has to ask how many potential sales dollars do you personally or your company lose from been denied more in-depth coaching? How much of a strategic selling advantage are you giving up?

In my work with client companies, businesses implementing all of these leading-edge practices often increase their sales 15 percent above and beyond the sales growth rate prior to implementing these methods. The Richardson Sales Group, well known for its pioneering work in sales coaching, helps companies develop a more structured, disciplined coaching process where sales managers and

executives become more involved and active coaches. And they have found that sales coaching has resulted in major increases in sales in client companies.⁵

(4.) *Coaching the Coaches (for sales managers and executives):*

A recent study indicated only 11 percent of executives rated their sales manager's skills as "strong" in coaching.⁶ Sure, we tell our sales managers to go out and "coach" their salespeople, but how effective are they and do they have a systematic approach? Do they motivate, inspire, and hold people accountable in a positive way? Well, the above study indicates that they aren't very effective. Coaching sales managers and executives to strengthen their leadership and coaching skills can really pay off in ROI. As an individual salesperson you can help support the request for improved training of your sales managers since the better at coaching they become, the more this will help you.

(5.) *Positive Accountability—Overcoming Sales Cruising and Call Reluctance:*

As a performance psychologist and sales coach dealing with a wide variety of businesses, I have become aware of a little known fact: *salespeople typically make far fewer calls to develop new business than anyone would ever suspect.* In a recent presentation for Professional Sales Association of Minnesota, approximately 60 to 70 percent of salespeople in attendance indicated that they made fewer than ten calls a week to develop new business. And those calls were actually "dials" having no direct conversation with the prospect. Such a low number of calls is very common when talking with salespeople across many industries.

The reason salespeople make so few calls is that it's human nature to do so. Making cold calls can be a quite unpleasant experience. It's one of the psychological-behavioral aspects of selling that customarily has not been given enough attention. The reality is that every professional salesperson does suffer from *call reluctance*. It's not whether one does experience it, because of course you will. But how does one manage it? Making ten calls or less a week will never result in aggressive sales achievement for you personally or your team. However, most salespeople end up a falling into a negative pattern of not making enough new business calls largely because of insufficient positive accountability.

The leading-edge sales practice of *positive accountability* helps salespeople better manage their own call reluctance by breaking down the psychologically difficult process of calling on new prospects into the *Three Key Sales Driving Behaviors of Dials, Live Calls, and Appointments*. And it offers a behavioral tracking system for you to be able to keep score of your calls on new business and to be held accountable in a more supportive fashion. This is the final leading-edge practice to be discussed because even if you develop all the proof

data in the world and a set of more effective standardized best practices, if you don't make enough calls, you won't increase sales and achieve your best!

End Notes

¹ 2010 Miller Heiman Sales Best Practices Study,
<http://www.millerheiman.com/Sales-Best-Practices-Study/2010>

² *Sales and Marketing the Six Sigma Way*, by Michael J. Webb and Tom Gorman, 2006

³ *Applying the Science of Six Sigma to the Art of Sales and Marketing*, by Michael J. Pestorias, 2007

⁴ *Six Sigma for Marketing Processes: An Overview for Marketing Executives, Leaders and Managers*, by Clyde in Creveling, Lynne Hambleton, and Burke McCarthy, 2006

⁵ See client results *Richardson.com*

⁶ EcSELL Insititutes's "Sales Management Study, Report 3" cited in Selling Power Sales Management e-newsletter, Sept. 15, 2010