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# What about the buyer's journey?

✍️ Bob Apollo



## About the author

Bob Apollo is the CEO of UK-based Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners, the sales and marketing performance improvement specialists. Following an eventful corporate career, Bob now works with a growing client base of UK and European-headquartered B2B-focused expansion-phase technology companies, helping them to find ways of systematically accelerating their revenue growth.

in the recognition that many deals are actually far less far advanced than the salesperson might have hoped or supposed.

## True mobilisers

Corporate Executive Board has revealed the results of a great deal of research into the second challenge – “Am I really working with a mobiliser who can make change happen within their organisation?” – in its recently published sequel to the *The Challenger Sale*, *The Challenger Customer*. In a nutshell, most salespeople gravitate towards sponsors they find easy to deal with, yet most true mobilisers are hard to convince but ultimately highly rewarding to work with.

Perhaps it could be time to take a look at your own sales process and pipeline stages, and to reassess your judgements about the effectiveness of your primary contacts in your prospects to effect the sort of change you are proposing to them?

When organisations talk about their sales process, they are usually thinking in terms of a sequence of sales activities, typically encapsulated in a series of pipeline stages, which are designed to move a prospect from first contact to a successful sale. There's overwhelming research to prove that having a formalised sales process has helped many organisations to improve sales performance.

## Blind spots

But if my recent observations are anything to go by, many well-established sales processes seem to have something of a blind spot when it comes to two absolutely critical elements of successful B2B selling:

1. What is the prospect doing and thinking at each point in their buying decision process? and
2. What can we do to recognise where they are and facilitate their onward journey?

It's all too easy to follow a prescribed sales process and fool yourself into thinking the opportunity is far more advanced – or your chances far more positive – than they really are. Moreover, relying on feedback from a single source without awareness of the behaviours of the whole decision-making team is equally dangerous, particular if your prime contact hasn't demonstrated an ability to mobilise their colleagues around the need for change or persuade them of the superiority of your approach to solving the problem.

In a world of increasingly well-informed prospects and consensus decision-making, the ability to

understand and influence the decision team's perspective is increasingly vital. But that is hard to achieve if the salesperson hasn't identified and engaged with all the key stakeholders, established their motivations, and worked out where they fit into the decision process.

## Antidotes

There are two obvious antidotes for these common sales challenges: firstly, base your pipeline stages and milestones around the typical stages in your prospect's buying decision process; and secondly, carefully and thoughtfully assess the credentials of your prime contact to determine whether they are a true mobiliser capable of leading their colleagues through the inevitable twists and turns of their decision journey.

A growing number of enlightened sales organisations have already recognised the benefits of redefining their pipeline stages around the key phases and milestones in the prospect's typical buying decision process, for example: unaware and unconcerned, initial interest aroused, establishing appetite for change, agreeing basis of decision, evaluating shortlisted options, negotiating and validating preferred solution, and confirming and approving final decision.

It forces an interesting inversion in the salesperson's thinking: from “What do I need to do to move this opportunity forward?” to “What does the prospect's decision team need to know and do before they can move forward?” and “What can I do to facilitate the process?” Unsurprisingly, taking the prospect's perspective often results