

# SUCCESS GUIDE FOR MAXIMIZING B2B SALES



*by Mike Schultz & John Doerr*

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**Meet Joe.** He's on a mission to become a top-performing seller. Join Joe as he learns what he needs to do differently to win more sales and achieve greater financial success.

# SALES HAS CHANGED

In recent years, sales has changed more than it has in the preceding 30.

What changed? What's working now? Here at RAIN Group, we undertook research specifically to find out what separates sales winners from second-place finishers in major sales today. Because, in sales, second place is not good enough—the second-place finisher loses the sale. When we know what sellers missed that landed them in second place, we can help them move into the winner's circle.

For our *What Sales Winners Do Differently* research, we studied over 700 major purchases from the perspective of business-to-business buyers to find out what really happened in their buying experiences. These buyers represented \$3.1 billion in purchases.

In our research, buyers reported there are 10 behaviors that most separate sales winners from second-place finishers. These 10 are:

**10 ESSENTIAL SELLING SKILLS**

**MEET JOE.**  
He's on a mission to become a top-performing seller. Join Joe as he learns the top 10 things he needs to do differently to win more sales and achieve greater financial success.

**1. Educate prospects with new ideas and perspectives**  
Joe knows that buyers like sellers who bring value to the table, so Joe doesn't need to just sell—he needs to expand buyers' horizons and give them new ideas that can change their thinking.  
*Sales winners educate buyers with new ideas and perspectives 2.9 times more often than second-place finishers.*

**2. Collaborate with prospects**  
Buyers want to be part of the solution. Joe needs to work with buyers to develop solutions that achieve mutual goals.  
*High performers rate their processes to work collaboratively with accounts to co-create value higher than the rest.*

Group	Very Effective Process	Effective Process
High Performers	43%	8%
Others	17%	3%

**3. Demonstrate potential return on investment**  
Joe needs to paint a clear, persuasive, and believable picture of the results an investment will yield.

1. Educated me with new ideas or perspectives
2. Collaborated with me
3. Persuaded me we would achieve results
4. Listened to me
5. Understood my needs
6. Helped me avoid potential pitfalls
7. Crafted a compelling solution
8. Depicted purchasing process accurately
9. Connected with me personally
10. Overall value from the company is superior to other options

You can also learn more about these 10 selling skills by taking a look at our infographic. Feel free to print it out and keep it as a handy reminder of what you need to do to win the most sales next year.

In this guide, we'll focus on the top five things you need to do to maximize B2B sales. We include tips, scenarios, and examples that will help ensure you're interacting with buyers the way *they* want.

If you want to exceed your sales goals, it's time to move beyond the selling strategies of the past and master insight selling, collaboration, and more. But don't worry—we're here to help guide the way.

- Mike & John



# 1 EDUCATE PROSPECTS WITH NEW IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES

**Buyers want sellers who bring value to the table, so expand buyers' horizons and give them ideas that can change their thinking.**

## 5 WAYS TO USE EDUCATION AND INSIGHTS IN SALES

According to our *What Sales Winners Do Differently* research, the number one factor separating sales winners from second-place finishers is this: Sellers educated buyers with new ideas or perspectives.

In other words, the seller became known as a source of insight.

You can do this by sharing content such as:

- + Research
- + White papers
- + Articles
- + Videos
- + Webinars

The content doesn't necessarily need to be your own, but it must be worthwhile content containing insights that matter.

The mistake many sellers make is to just send the content. Don't do this. Personalize it to make sure the buyer knows you're focusing on them—and investing time and effort in them specifically.

This example below is a good example of the *Best Practice* approach, one of five approaches you can use to reach out to buyers using education and insights.

### PERSONALIZE MESSAGES FOR YOUR BUYERS

NOT PERSONALIZED

Sarah,  
  
Attached you'll find our newest white paper on open innovation. The companies that are using open innovation best are doing so in four ways: 1...2...3...4... Download now to have a look and see for yourself.  
  
I look forward to answering any questions you have.  
  
Dave

PERSONALIZED

Sarah,  
  
I saw on your website and in the XYZ news outlet that your strategy is to innovate, and you're studying everything you can to apply open innovation.  
  
Since ABC is a consumer products company, I've highlighted sections on pages 3, 4, and 7 for you on how you might want to consider applying open innovation based on the four open innovation best practices of leading companies.  
  
I look forward to discussing the ideas with you. How about Tuesday at...  
  
Dave



## FIVE APPROACHES TO USING EDUCATION AND INSIGHTS IN SALES

### 1. New Ideas Approach

With the *New Ideas* approach, your goal is both to introduce ideas and to work with the buyer to generate them together.

Here's an example for how you can use the *New Ideas* approach when developing an existing account:

*"I was talking with Gina and Rich about the XYZ priority we discussed a few weeks ago, and the conversation got pretty involved. Next thing we knew, we looped in Steve Smith, one of our leadership development experts here at ABC Company.*

*We were talking about a number of ideas that we thought could have a pretty strong impact on XYZ, but after a while, we realized that we really needed you—and perhaps someone like Sherry Jones at your company—in a meeting to see if the ideas are worth discussing.*

*I could get the team together here for a discussion and come see you in a few weeks. What are your thoughts?"*

The point here is that the conversation doesn't stop at sharing insights. You bring the buyer specific insights that can spark a collaborative discussion (see section 2 for more on collaboration).

### 2. Best Practice Approach

The earlier example about content Dave could share with Sarah is a good example of the *Best Practice* approach.

Here's another example:

*"I'm reaching out because we just completed a major study in XYZ that showed some interesting and surprising results. Of the top 10 most common leadership development initiatives, only three are having a major impact on business results.*

*If you're interested, I'd be happy to come out (or lead a call) and give a research briefing for*

*your HR and executive team. Do you think your team might be interested?"*

As a more advanced strategy, if you're working with existing accounts and you're willing to invest time and effort into expanding your business with them, you might suggest something like:

*"We've just completed a major benchmark study in the best practices in X. As you're one of our top accounts, we'd like to offer to compare your company to the best practices database and share the results with you."*

Of course, you can only do this if you have this kind of research available. If you're at a larger company, you might already have suitable research. If you're at a smaller company, perhaps talk to your president or the vice president marketing to get something underway.

### 3. New and Different Approach

With the *New and Different* approach, the idea is to talk about how something new and different on the scene is changing the game and can affect the buyer. It could be a new technology, a new method, or some other kind of innovation that buyers need to know.

Here's an example:

*"I'm reaching out because we discussed how employee retention at X% at the senior level is starting to become an issue. There are three things we're doing with clients that have been able to get it down to under Y%. Of course, we already work with you in one area, but the other two are new. We've been working with other clients collaboratively to create a "test kitchen" so to speak, to see whether we could get the ideas to work.*

*And they are. I think you'd find it pretty interesting to hear what we're doing and what's happening. It's possible you may be able to modify and apply some of the ideas."*

### 4. Straight Results Approach

The *Straight Results* approach focuses on some kind of outcome or return on investment.



See below for an example using the *New and Different* approach, but using return on investment as the focus.

*“The reason I’m reaching out is that, given the shifts in the market such as X and Y, we’ve been testing out some innovations in how we approach Executive Search in the Z area. A few of our other clients have allowed us to experiment with some new ideas that are quite different from the typical way of doing things and they are producing some surprising results.*

*Unwanted executive turnover in our test groups has dropped by 11%, the total cost of hiring new employees has dropped by 14%, and one client almost doubled their employee engagement measures in the span of about 18 months.*

*I thought you might be interested in hearing about what we’ve been doing and how it’s all panning out. Are you interested in discussing this?”*

## 5. First Step Approach

Perhaps one of the most overlooked ways to sell with education and insights is to invite people to an event focused around educating them.

In RAIN Group’s benchmark research study *How Clients Buy*, we analyzed 20 of the most common ways buyers find providers. Following referrals, the top ways buyers found providers included seeing them speak at a conference or event, or by attending an educational seminar.

Many sellers can create events themselves, or work in companies that run events of this type. As a seller, you can reach out to buyers and invite them to these events. This is a low-risk way for buyers to interact with your company’s content and expertise—and see what you can do.

Here’s an example:

*“The reason I’m reaching out is that we have a best practices retreat for CIOs on how to build and develop the highest performing technology*

*teams. Only 20 CIOs from companies with large tech teams will be joining.*

*I realize we have never met, but as a way of introducing ourselves, I’d like to invite you to join as my guest.”*

And, of course, during or after the event, you can engage buyers in discussion about applying the ideas.

Another *First Step* approach is to bring insights to the table and simply create a discussion around them. For example:

*“As a way to introduce ourselves, I’d like to share with you the results of our breakthrough research on XYZ.”*

Or,

*“As a way to introduce ourselves, I’d like to offer a discussion around industry trends with our VP of strategy and research.”*

The possibilities are endless, but the idea is to use the “stepping stones” principle of influence. Give buyers something low risk and potentially good return to respond to first. Once you get them to respond and start interacting with you, your chances of getting to the next stage in the process increase greatly.

While these examples focus on generating meetings, these five approaches can be used throughout the sales process to educate prospects and provide new insights and ideas. Do this and you’ll not only position yourself as a source of insight, but also find yourself winning more deals.



## 11 QUESTIONS FOR INSIGHT SELLING

Too many people think insight selling is about educating buyers through presentations. They're about half right, but without the other half, they're missing out on the full impact of insight selling.

The missing link is asking questions. Or, as we call it, inquiry.

Insight selling in any form hinges on the concept of cognitive reframing. Cognitive reframing refers to creating alternative ways of viewing ideas, events, situations, possibilities for action, or anything.

Here are 11 questions that can help bring insight selling alive in your sales conversations:

- 1. Why?** “Why is that your strategy?” “Why do you say that?” “Why do A versus B?” By asking why, you are asking buyers to justify something. If they can do so convincingly, then bully for them! But oftentimes they can't. Sometimes, when buyers respond to the “why” question, they give the insight to themselves. But even if they don't, that's an opportunity for you to help.

When you ask why questions, be careful not to put the buyer on the defensive. Deliver with a tone of inquiry and collaborative thinking, not of questioning their judgment.

- 2. How?** How do you see this all panning out? How do you think you need to proceed so this becomes a part of the culture? How might you avoid the common challenges like X, or Y, or Z that commonly crop up?

How questions get people thinking about reality. Sometimes they have strong reasoning for why to do something, but they don't have a strong plan for how to get things done. Ask how and you can spark insight.

- 3. What have you tried that hasn't worked?** This question will help you understand their thinking, and will help you see the gaps between what they know won't work, and what you know will.

- 4. Have you considered A...B...C...etc.?** You may find out they did, but didn't approach it right or didn't know about a new advancement in the area. Maybe they didn't know better options existed, and you can bring them to the table.

- 5. If I said I believe you might have under-invested to achieve this outcome in the past what would you say?**

When many buyers try to do something the first time, they look to cheaper options. Then those cheaper options fail.

This kind of question can push buyers out of their comfort zones. You challenge them, but not in a standoffish way. They might say, “Well, what should I have done?” Or, “The

ROI wasn't worth putting in more.” Most answers give you opportunity to bring insight to the table.

- 6. What will the impact be if you did this?** Answers here can show:

- a. They see the impact and why it's important (good!)
- b. Their perception of the impact grows as they think it out (great!)
- c. They see the impact as too small for action (you can show them it's bigger!)
- d. They don't know (you can help them figure it out!)

- 7. What will happen if you don't act?** Asking this question gets buyers thinking of the negative consequences of inaction. They may work it out themselves (We'll bleed cash! Turnover will be unsustainably high!) and their perception changes. Perhaps they need your guidance to see the negative consequences of inaction. Either way...insight.

- 8. What's possible?** What's possible for results? What's possible for action? What's possible for solution choices? Like impact, whatever you find here gives you the chance to then alter their perception.

- 9. How do you know that?** Buyers often give “facts” without foundation. Or, they may give facts with foundation that once was true, but isn't anymore. By asking for the reasoning behind a statement, you can help the buyer question the fundamental basis for their assumptions.

- 10. What do you think is missing?** This is the question that often gets a response of, “Good question!” Or, people get up on their soap boxes decrying what “should be” but isn't. Openings for insight all around.

- 11. The follow-up question(s).** Ask a question, and you may get a somewhat solid, somewhat thorough, and somewhat convincing answer. Keep pressing, though, and somewhat solid answers and arguments break down.



## 2 COLLABORATE WITH PROSPECTS

*Buyers want to be part of the solution. Work with them to develop solutions that achieve mutual goals.*

### 5 STEPS TO COLLABORATE WITH BUYERS

When buyers buy something, one of two things must be true:

1. They are required to buy—the buyer drives demand.
2. They want to buy—the seller drives demand.

In the former, they have no choice. Get sued, hire a lawyer. Buying = required. The lawyer doesn't need to convince the buyer why to buy legal services in general, only why to buy them from them.

In the latter, the buyer has a choice. Buying = desired. They don't need to buy, but if they want it badly enough, and have the money and authority to buy, they buy.

Since the buyer isn't required to buy when sellers drive demand, sellers must be able to take their priority of making a sale happen, and make it the buyer's priority to make a purchase happen.

It's not that easy, though, because you're nowhere near the buyer's priority list when you start.

The key to moving up on a buyer's priority list are desire and ownership:

**Desire:** They really need to want what you can do for them.

**Ownership:** You need to take something that wasn't even on their radar screen and get them to believe deeply, "I need to do something about this!"

Perhaps the most overlooked strategy for creating buyer desire and ownership is getting them involved in the selling process by inviting their collaboration.

Sellers who win the most sales collaborate with buyers almost three times as often as the sellers who come in second place. In almost every sales situation, collaboration helps.

Here are five steps to engage buyers through collaboration:

#### 1. Prepare Buyers to Collaborate

Set a meeting that opens the door for collaboration. For example, you can set the meeting with the stated premise of sharing some ideas you think may be worthwhile to a buyer, but the ideas aren't finished and you need their help to think them through. This opens the door for their involvement in the process.

Then kick off the meeting with the right introduction and expectations, including asking them to dive in with thoughts and questions at any time.

When you engage buyers, the idea is to invite them to be an active participant in





a process, not someone who listens to a pitch and then decides “up or down” on buying what you’re selling.

## 2. Wonder With the Buyer

When sellers create their own opportunities, they often err on the side of over-pitching. The seller pitches, hoping to inspire the buyer. The buyer sits there disengaged, even when the ROI seems huge.

The problem is often not in the impact the product or service can have on the buyer, it’s the psychological effect of not being involved enough in the discussion. Early on, ask the buyer to wonder with you about possibilities.

### FOR EXAMPLE, YOU MIGHT SAY:

- “ So it’s happened like this at our other two client sites. Given what we discussed so far, imagine for a minute you implemented something similar, and it’s six months from now. What effects do you think you might see? What would the impact be?
- “ You mentioned that A and B are not issues for you, but C and D are. Imagine for a minute that C and D disappeared as problems. What effects do you think you might see? What would the impact be?
- “ This is why we think it’s possible that you could increase revenue 20% by getting your marketing engine firing on all thrusters. We realize, however, that as much as most company leaders would want this kind of revenue increase, they’d be skeptical that it would actually happen. Why wouldn’t this work here? What would the roadblocks be?

Some sellers ask, when they hear us give this advice, “Doesn’t this introduce barriers to the sale?” It doesn’t. Odds are the company would want the improvements you say are possible, but they think the risks are too high.

Get them talking about the roadblocks in their way and you can address them. Allow roadblocks to remain hidden and skepticism to fester and the sale dies. You just won’t know why.

When buyers answer your questions, you can share stories of how the problems they see have been solved at other places. You can also ask them, “Let’s look at that last roadblock. How could we fix that?” Many buyers talk themselves out of the problems as they start to wonder about the solutions.

## 3. Ask Incisive Questions

If you created the opportunity and asked for the meeting, it’s up to you to set the table, set the tone, and define the platform and agenda for the discussion with advocacy.

But that doesn’t mean you don’t ask meaningful questions early in the selling process that force the buyer to think, that make the buyer uncomfortable, and get to the heart of issues. Examples:

- + Is inaction on the issue hurting your productivity and morale?
- + If you know that you need to do something about it, why haven’t you all taken action yet?
- + You took action and it failed in the past, but it seems like you’re considering doing something similar again. Why is it going to turn out differently this time?
- + When I’ve seen similar issues like yours, such as A, B, and C, it’s usually a recipe for big problems like X, Y, and Z to eventually crop up. But you don’t seem terribly concerned. Could you make the case for me that X, Y, and Z won’t happen here?

These questions are not puffball variety. They’re edgy. They’ll probably make the buyer uncomfortable. Good. If the buyer has great answers to your tough questions, answers that make you think, “Okay, you don’t need any help,” then good for you. Now you can move on to other opportunities. And good for them as you’ve helped them see why they’re in great shape already.

If they can’t knock your tough questions out of the park, you help the buyer see that the status quo isn’t good enough. This means action is necessary.

## 4. Shape the Path Forward Together

Most of us don’t only sell one offering. Many sellers have flexibility in the service or product package, delivery, and mix they eventually craft.



When the buyer has a hand in shaping the solution, they feel a sense of pride in ownership, and their commitment to seeing it come alive grows.

You might say, “Given what we talked about, I think it would work well to do A, B, and C here, but we have open questions about some of the details. You mentioned before that X might get in the way of implementation. How do you think we could get A, B, and C done so that X doesn’t get in the way?”

The buyer might respond with, “Well, it’s a sticky one. In my experience, the best thing to do is...”

Note, however, don’t just ask the buyer how to move forward without defining parameters, “What do you think we should do from here?” is too open-ended. They might not have a concept of what to do, and they might pick something that isn’t the best choice for them. It’s usually best if you give them a vision of what you think is the best path, and then allow them to shape it with you.

## 5. Give the Buyer Ownership of the Idea

Take, for example, the last point. The buyer might say, “The best thing to do is this...” You might already know that, but don’t say, “Yes, I’ve been thinking that for much of the meeting.” Do this, and you snatch the idea away from them and claim it as your own.

Instead say, “I think that’s a good idea. In fact, I bet it will work.” This way you allow them to keep ownership of the idea. When they own the concept, it increases their desire to see it through.

Collaborate with your buyers in the selling process. Not only will you get on their priority lists and shape their agendas for action, but the likelihood they’ll take that action with you will skyrocket.

Collaborate with buyers *and* with internal teams. Trust and internal collaboration lead to increased cross-selling and up-selling with prospective and current accounts. In fact, 69% of high performers report their ability to create “team-based approaches to working with accounts” as effective or very effective compared to 53% of average/below-average performers.<sup>1</sup>





## 3 PERSUADE PROSPECTS THEY WILL ACHIEVE RESULTS

*Paint a clear, persuasive, and believable picture of the results an investment will yield for your buyers.*

### 6 WAYS TO COMMUNICATE IMPACT IN SALES

Your ability to quantify the impact and paint a clear, persuasive, and believable picture of the results you can achieve for buyers is the foundation for how important it is for the decision maker to buy from you. If you don't show the impact, the initiative will fall to the bottom of the priority list.

Make the impact clear, and the buyer's perception of the gap between where they are and where they want to be grows to its widest.

Here are six ways you can communicate impact in sales and make the case for moving forward:

#### 1. Calculate the Business Impact

Each affliction that you solve and each aspiration that you help a buyer realize will ultimately have a financial impact. Simply put, make the business case for the financial effects of engaging your products and services whenever possible.

#### 2. Communicate Emotional Impact

Increased prestige. A more enjoyable day. Faster promotions. Ability to relax on the weekend. Enjoying your sparkling personality. Peace of mind. There are many non-financial influences on the sale that can tip the scales in your favor.

#### 3. Impact Compared to the Alternative

Not only do you need to know the impact of working with you, you need to know the

impact on the customer of working with alternatives to you. Perhaps your company offers better ROI, their products are inferior, or your service is better. Know the alternatives, and you can make the best case for helping the buyer to succeed with you.

#### 4. What Won't Happen?

Sometimes the prospect sees the positive impact of buying from you, but doesn't see any negative impact of not moving forward. The result can be a slow decision-making process. If this is the case, ask the buyer what won't happen if they don't move forward. By doing this, you probe for consequences of inaction, and move yourself higher up the buyer's to-do list.

#### 5. Build Credibility with Similar Impact

Buyers have aspirations and afflictions. You're selling what they need to help them meet their goals. The value proposition is clear, but they are still unsure. Sometimes buyers want to know if you've been there before. And, when you were there, what happened. In this case, share success stories and results you helped others achieve.

#### 6. Demonstrate Impact Tangibly

The more you can make the impact tangible, the stronger your case for impact will be. In essence, you need to paint a picture for buyers so they can see, as tangibly as you



can depict it, what is going to change for them if they engage your products and services. A before and after table or graphic can make all the difference.

Show the buyer a way to succeed more, solve problems, and make more money...suddenly they feel the stress drop away, are excited to make a difference, and anticipate greater success and worry-free weekends. You'll make the sale and you'll both be happier for it.

Fail to demonstrate the impact in your sales conversations, however, and you won't capture the buyer's interest and desire, you won't take him on an emotional journey, and he won't feel that it's important enough to put your agenda on top of his to-do list.

“*Demonstrating impact is about answering, ‘So what?’ If the buyer’s afflictions don’t get solved, so what? What won’t happen? Will they get worse? Will they affect the bottom line? Will they impact market share? How will they affect the buyer’s life?*”

## TELL A CONVINCING STORY

Not only do you have to show the impact of your solution—you have to persuade buyers you can achieve these results.

A powerful way to do this is through telling stories—Convincing Stories.

Every Convincing Story satisfies the same basic criteria and follows the same story format.

Essentially, every Convincing Story should answer three questions:

- + What do I want them to learn?
- + What do I want them to feel?
- + What do I want them to do?

The seven key components of the Convincing Story are:

### 1. Connection – Establish Credibility

Build rapport and establish credibility by demonstrating keen insight into the buyer's world. You can do this with an overview of industry trends influencing buyers, an overview of technology issues that change the game, or an overview of any relevant issue that gets the buyer saying, “This seller gets it,” or, “They get us.”

When we observe seller presentations, all too often we see that sellers and their products are positioned as the hero. This is a mistake. The buyer is the hero. Everything the seller does should serve the master of being relevant to the buyers, presented in their context, and focused on how to make them successful. With the buyer as the hero, sellers do a much better job connecting while they convince, ultimately persuading the buyer to take action.

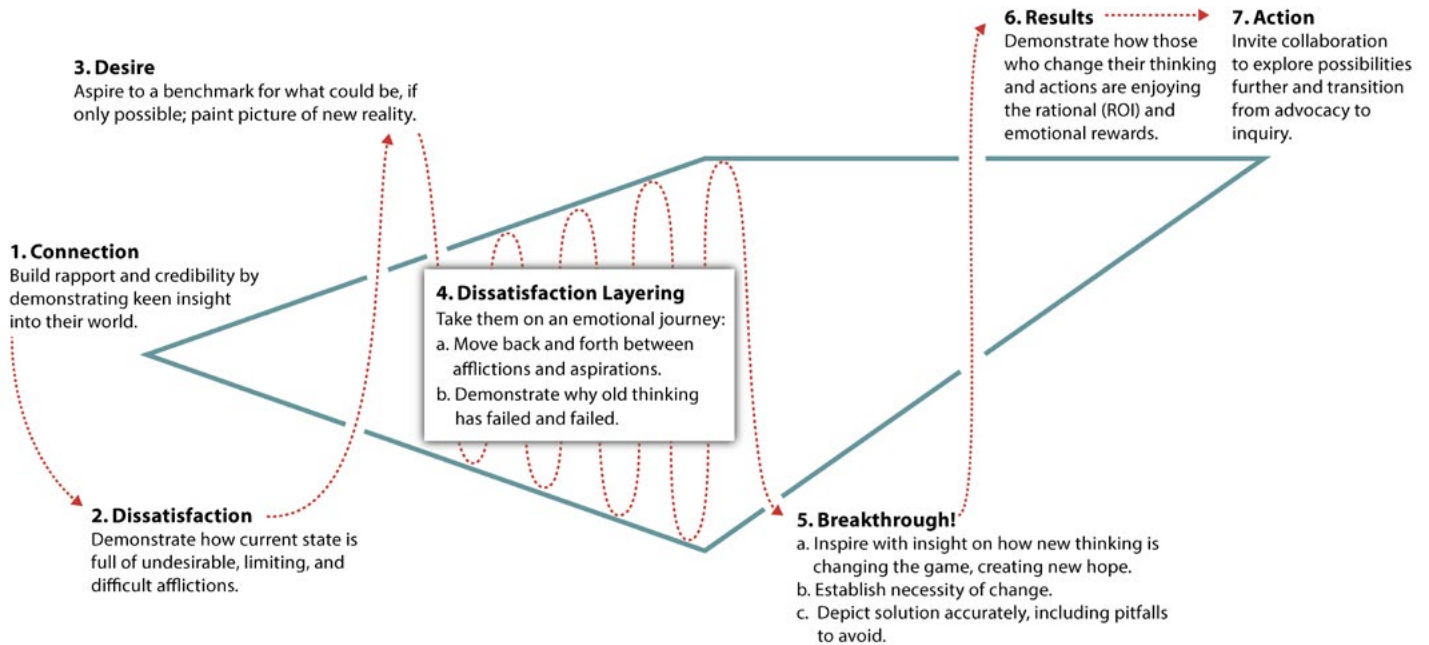
Once sellers connect with the buyer and establish they know what they're talking about, they'll get the buyer's attention and build curiosity in hearing the rest of what they have to say.

### 2. Dissatisfaction – Name the Adversary

Next, establish the current state and why it's not good enough. The heart of every action and change—and a key component of opportunity insight—is the buyer's desire to be in a different, new place. When you identify the current state and why it's unacceptable, you give the adversary a name. You put a target on its back.



## Bringing Insight Selling Alive - Telling A “Convincing Story”

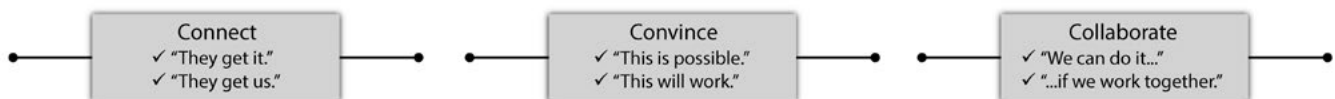


### Influence Principles:

At the heart of a convincing story is convincing, persuading, and influencing. Following are points from RAIN Group's 16 Principles of Influence and how they align with the framework.

- Likeability
- Attention
- Curiosity
- Desire
- Emotional Journey
- Scarcity
- Belief
- Justification
- Involvement
- Trust
- Stepping stones
- Envy
- Desire for inclusion
- Ownership
- Commitment

### A Convincing Story and the Three Levels of RAIN Selling:



The adversary can be almost any set of afflictions: lack of results, slipping market share, wasted time on work-arounds, ideas whose time has passed—anything. Insight selling masters don't just tell people what to run towards; they also give people something to run away from.

### 3. Desire – Establish the Destination

People have a natural tendency to drive forward. But if they don't know where they're headed, as they say, any road will get them there.

Your ability to establish the destination—to help the buyer imagine some specific

aspiration—is critical. Average sellers focus on establishing the path. They talk about the product: “This is what we do and the way we do it.” These are *how* messages. Nobody cares about the *how* until they feel the depths of the *why*.

The destination establishes—in RAIN Selling terms—the possible New Reality. What you get when you achieve the *new reality* is the answer to the question, *Why?* Answer powerfully enough and you establish the basic premise for any change, leaving behind a dissatisfactory current state in favor of a new, improved one.



## 4. Dissatisfaction Layering – Journey to the Depths of Despair

Simply suggesting, “Here’s where we are and it isn’t good enough,” isn’t, well, good enough. It’s too antiseptic. It doesn’t create the *intense feeling of desire* that’s so important for change, and so critical for insight selling success.

How you establish dissatisfaction and desire isn’t a linear process. To do it best, weave back and forth between the undesirable current state and desirable future state.

As you do this, describe stories of what companies (or the buyers themselves) have tried that failed. Describe (and later, overcome) common objections to moving forward. The net effect is that the audience feels the undesirability of the current state more strongly; they have been reminded that others have been trapped here have tried to get out, and couldn’t. Because people relate stories to themselves, they’ll feel trapped as well. They’ll feel the failure of others.

At the same time, you will remind them of the possible new reality that seems out of reach. By moving back and forth between the current state and the possible New Reality, you not only establish a very important rational gap (you’re here, but you could be there), but you also maximize the negative feelings associated with being in the bad place and stoke the desire to get to the good place.

## 5. Breakthrough! – Introduce a New Hope

Just when buyers feel resigned to continue on with life in the undesirable current state—where many (like them) are stuck—you show them a different path. A path they do not know about that others have taken to successfully climb out of the hole. A new hope!

When they see what others have achieved when they made a change, they’ll want to achieve the same. The concept is envy, and envy is a powerful emotion. Still, making the change a reality is not necessarily a slam dunk. If it were easy, everyone would do it. However, this is what you help people do—and what you have a track record of doing.

You can guide them around the many pitfalls that can get in the way.

This establishes you not only as differentiated (the best choice—the only choice!), but also as a straight shooter who’s on the buyer’s side. Do so and buyers will start to believe you and trust in you and the solution that much more.

Some sellers get this far but then don’t confront the harsh realities of what might go wrong. When this happens, buyers see the solution and understand that the ROI case is compelling, but they still doubt they can achieve it or doubt the seller’s motives if they feel like the seller is holding back. Sellers who are forthright convince buyers that their knowledge, collaboration, and trusted partnership in the journey is essential to their success.

## 6. Results – Communicate Results, Create the Feelings

The better you can build a custom ROI case and show previous similar results, the more confidence you’ll build that the buyer can achieve them, too. When you show what others have achieved, you strengthen the emotional journey because buyers will imagine themselves having achieved those same things. They’ll envy the results, and he again, envy is potent.

As much as some will argue to the contrary, business buyers, like consumers, buy with their hearts and justify with their heads. Selling an idea isn’t only about selling the numbers. Use the Convincing Story structure and you’ll give buyers the financial justification case they need for themselves and others with ROI. Also you’ll cause them to *want* the results and everything else your solution delivers all the more.

## 7. Action – Invite Collaboration

Every seller has been told to recommend action, specifically a next step, at each stage of the sales process. Scarce is the advice, however, to build in collaboration as an explicit step. When buyers feel that sellers collaborate with them, they are



much more likely to buy, and to buy from that particular seller.

Many sellers try to move too quickly to make a sale. Jumping from here to closing is a big leap. By asking only for a commitment to collaborate, you shorten that leap with a stepping stone that moves you closer to the sale, and increases its likelihood of happening.

Collaboration is a core component of insight selling and the Convincing Story framework. Collaboration involves the buyer in the story itself. When people are involved in something, they become invested in its success. The more they become invested in something, the more they take ownership of seeing it through.

Perhaps most importantly, collaboration creates shared experience. Shared experience leads to intimacy in the “I know you really well” sense. Intimacy is a pillar of trust. And trust is essential for buyers to take a leap of faith with you and buy whatever it is you’re selling.

There you have it: the elements of a Convincing Story, an essential component to persuading prospects.

Use the Convincing Story structure and you’ll achieve the three outcomes you need to sell: learn, feel, do.

## ***Use the Convincing Story structure and you’ll achieve the three outcomes you need to sell an idea: learn, feel, do.***

### LEARN

- + Current state is not good enough. It needs to change.
- + You “get it” and “get them” because, without even talking with them much and like reading their minds, you’ve described what their world is like.
- + Possible New Reality is much more desirable. The stakes are high if you can win this game.
- + The rational impact (the ROI) is clear.
- + There’s a path to get there, but it requires different thinking and action.
- + Do it right and results are achievable.

### FEEL

- + The depth of how undesirable their current state is. Its frustrations, problems, and difficulties.
- + The full desirability of the possible New Reality and everything that comes with it (e.g., money, success, attention, relief, happiness), even envy of those who have what they don’t.
- + Confidence that you, your offering, and your company can help them get the results.
- + Confidence that the result is achievable and, at the same time, worth the risk.

### DO

- + Collaborate with you to bring the New Reality to life.





## 4 LISTEN TO PROSPECTS

*Actively listen to buyers by asking engaging questions and following up with documents that demonstrate your understanding.*

### ONE THING TOP SALESPEOPLE GET RIGHT

In section 1 we shared the number one factor separating the winners from second-place finishers: Educated me with new ideas or perspectives. If, in each contact you make with buyers, you provide some sort of value, they will look forward to hearing from you and ultimately remember you by the extra value you provide.

Regrettably, salespeople, like most of us, have selective hearing and still miss two key points about these findings:

1. It is about the “value” you provide, and
2. Educating with new ideas and perspectives is about collaborating (see section 2 for more on collaboration) and does not mean lecturing and talking *too much*

And even though sales winners do educate with new ideas, they also “listened to me” (4<sup>th</sup> on the list) and “understood my needs” (5<sup>th</sup>).

And thus, when salespeople talk *too much*, they still generate too few customers. So why do those of us trying to grow our pipelines constantly find ourselves in this position? Perhaps because we do not understand why we talk too much. Let’s start there.

#### WHY DO YOU TALK TOO MUCH?

**I need to pitch my product or service:** Of course you do. How else will the prospect know

if you and your products are any good? However, at first, buyers want to know whether you are a good fit for working with them and they want to evaluate your level of technical competence. Remember, “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”

**I like to hear myself speak:** The buyer may even like the sound of your voice for a while, but after a few minutes, he or she may be looking for the door. If you look around the room after a while and the prospect’s eyes are glazing over, your melodious voice has lost its luster.

**I get nervous, so I talk:** If this is the case, explore why you are nervous. Are you uncomfortable starting new conversations? Are you uncomfortable talking to senior executives? Do you not know your products and services very well and the value they provide?

**I have no plan or objective:** There is a saying in sales: “If you don’t have a plan, stay in the car.” When you enter into a sales conversation and you are not sure where you want to go or what you want to accomplish, the conversation meanders every which way and ends with neither clarity of purpose, nor helpful action steps.

**I get distracted easily:** Much related to the previous point, if you don’t have a plan, you can’t be sure what you are trying to communicate. Thus, any new topic that gets introduced in the sales conversation can lead down time consuming and fruitless paths.

“Everything in moderation, nothing in excess.”  
- Socrates





**I don't talk too much; I am lively:** You may have a dynamic, effervescent personality that springs forth in every conversation. That's fine. You don't have to hide your personality; just learn to share it in easy to swallow doses. Your prospects will appreciate your liveliness even more.

These are just some of the reasons we tend to talk too much when we enter into a sales conversation. Other reasons salespeople talk too much are they don't like silence, they feel the need to cover perceived objections, or they simply have too much to say.

The key is for you to understand why you talk too much. That way you can develop a personal plan to cut down on the soliloquies.

## WHAT YOU MISS WHEN YOU'RE THE ONE DOING ALL THE TALKING

You may be thinking, "So what if I talk too much? I have a great product to sell (or service to discuss), and I know my stuff. Isn't it important for my prospects to know what I know so they can understand what I can do for them?"

Perhaps, but here is what you miss when you do *too much* of the talking:

**Opportunity to build trust and rapport:** Buyers tend to buy from people they like. They listen to people they like. They take advice from people they like. If you are doing all the talking, you will not pick up on the signals that indicate what is important to the buyer, besides your expertise or product. You miss the connection—the rapport that you can build. While educating with new ideas and perspectives does make a difference, you will get better acceptance once you develop that connection.

Plus, everyone loves to talk about themselves—to tell their story. If you do not give prospects a chance to do so, they often feel ignored, overwhelmed, and most importantly, unheard. This is not a very good way to start relationships.

**Uncovering needs:** When salespeople enter initial sales conversations, many have strong knowledge of what they can do for their prospects, but, understandably, only a vague notion of what the prospect truly needs. If

you are doing all the talking, you can only guess which components of your products and services will offer the greatest value for that particular prospect.

You miss the chance to craft something special for them. And if you don't know all the needs, you miss out on building larger solutions (and thus generating the most revenue possible).

## FIVE KEYS TO TALKING LESS AND GENERATING MORE CUSTOMERS

Assuming you would like to break the habit of talking too much, what next?

**Approach sales conversations like, well, conversations:** Before you engage a sales conversation, think to yourself, "If I needed to get a full picture of the prospect's world before going forth and building a solution for them, how would I approach it?"

Approaching the conversation this way versus thinking, "I am now selling a new client or customer," will help the conversation move along more naturally, keep you from talking too much, and help you avoid missing key signals.

**Balance advocacy and inquiry:** While you don't want to talk too much, you don't want to give the prospect the third degree with question after question. A good sales conversation should have the prospect talking more than you, but buyers are also looking for your insight. Just make sure you wisely and appropriately choose how much wisdom you impart, and how much air-time you take to impart it.

**Ask open-ended questions:** The goal is to get the prospect to start talking. So when you ask questions, avoid asking closed-ended questions like, "Do you do this or that?" Instead, ask questions like, "Tell me about what you do in this area." Or, "What expectations do you have?" Or, "How do you go about X?" Or, "Tell me about the most difficult aspect for you when you..."

You'll be surprised at how much you will find out, how much it will help you generate more clients and sales, and how much it will help you be the best provider for them.



**Become overly conscious of your air time:** If you've gone on for more than two minutes (yes, 120 seconds) without a very good reason, simply cut it off. Sometimes we head down a path and we think to ourselves when we start talking, "OK, I started discussing this and it will take me 10 minutes to explain...how did I get here again?!" Avoid letting this happen, but if you start down the path, get off as quickly as possible.

**Practice your conversations:** We heard recently from a participant in one of our sales training programs, "I hate role playing, but it was helpful and useful. I sure learned where I need to be careful in those conversations."

Nothing is better for getting good at something than practicing. Find a way to practice, and you'll find yourself talking and listening the right amount.

Take a tip from 2500 years ago and find the happy medium in your talking and your listening. Your prospects want a little of both.

## LISTEN ACTIVELY

While the heading for this is "listen actively," it could just as easily be, "listen, actually." Many sellers are too caught up in what they're saying or too focused on what they are going to say next. They're not only not *actively* listening, they're not *actually* listening. If your prospects perceive that you are not listening to them, building rapport will be virtually impossible. When you build genuine rapport with prospects, you may find that the buying process moves more quickly, you're able to uncover a deeper set of needs, and that more buyers end up choosing you.

*Tune in to what your prospect is saying. Tune everything else out.*





## 5 UNDERSTAND PROSPECTS' NEEDS

*Don't focus on needs diagnosis. Instead, make sure buyers know you "get" their goals, pains, and desires.*

### 21 POWERFUL, OPEN-ENDED SALES QUESTIONS

As noted in the previous section, broad, open-ended sales questions are great to get buyers talking and for helping us to find out what's going on in their worlds. They help us connect with buyers personally, understand their needs, understand what's important to them, and help them create better futures for themselves.

Following are 21 open-ended sales questions you can ask that will help you round out the picture of your buyers' needs. These questions are broken down into four groupings within the RAIN Selling<sup>SM</sup> Framework:

- + Rapport
- + Aspirations and Afflictions
- + Impact
- + New Reality

One thing to note about open-ended sales questions: they don't need to be complex. Often the basics are all you need.

#### RAPPORT-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

1. What's going on in your business these days? How have things changed?
2. What are you up to this weekend?
3. It was good to hear the short version of your background at the meeting, but since we're out for lunch, I'd love to get the long version. What's your story?

4. I have to say, I really like the way you don't just have your values up on the wall like every company, but you have all the comments from your team about what the values mean to them. How did you all come up with that? I'm guessing you learned a lot about your company and team. Anything stand out?
5. You mentioned you want to retire in a few years. What are you thinking of doing then?

#### ASPIRATION- AND AFFLICTIONS-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

6. Why isn't this particular technology/service/product/situation/issue working for you right now?
7. Many of our clients are reporting problems with areas A, B, and C. How are these areas affecting you? What do you think about them?
8. What's holding you back from reaching your revenue (or profit, or other) goals?
9. What goals and objectives do you have in general? For this area?
10. (Assuming they set the meeting) Why did you ask me to talk with you today?
11. (Assuming you set the meeting) As I mentioned earlier, I'd like to share with



you a few ideas that have helped our clients succeed in the X,Y, and Z areas. Before we get going, by the time we're done with this meeting, what else might you like to cover? What will make the meeting successful for you?

## IMPACT-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

12. If you could overcome these challenges, what would happen to your company's financial situation?
13. If you were to make this happen, what would it mean for you personally?
14. How would implementing these changes affect your competitiveness in the market?
15. How do you think the board of directors would evaluate the success of this initiative?
16. If you don't solve (insert the particular challenge here), what kind of difficulties will you face going forward? What won't happen that you want to happen?

## NEW-REALITY-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

17. If you were to wave your magic wand and it's three years from now, how will this all look different?
18. (In early sales discussions) You mentioned you're not having a good experience with your current provider. If you work with us, what are you hoping will be different?

19. (In later sales discussions) Given all we've talked about, what do you see as being different if we were to move forward together?
20. What does success look like for you... your business...this project...our work together?
21. If there were no restrictions on you—money, effort, political issues and so on do not exist—what would you change? Can you tell me why you say that?

As you ask any open-ended sales questions, bear in mind that the most difficult task is not sounding too contrived. While we've suggested wording here in this article, feel free to use the concepts, but make the wording your own when you ask the questions.

Sometimes all you need is to ask one question and your prospect will share with you all the information you need to help them. Other times you may need to ask a few, but make sure you don't overdo it. You don't want to make your prospect feel as if he is on the witness stand. While this article is about asking questions, don't forget that the most powerful sales conversations tend to balance inquiry (asking questions) with advocacy (talking, educating, giving advice).



In looking at the differences between sales winners and second-place finishers, "understood my needs" was the fifth largest gap.<sup>2</sup> In fact, winners demonstrated they understood the buyer's needs 2.5 times more often than second-place finishers.



## DIGGING DEEP INTO NEEDS WITH THE FIVE WHYS

If you want to be a trusted partner, helping your customers solve their most difficult problems and create lasting success, you have to solve the right problems.

Many sellers don't.

This is because they tackle and solve symptoms of a deeper problem, not the deep problems themselves. Getting to the root cause of problems is an essential component of a world-class needs discovery, as knowing the root causes will define your solution and the success it will have.

Enter the Five Whys.

The Five Whys is a root-cause analysis technique pioneered by Taichi Ohno of the lean manufacturing movement that helps business leaders to get past putting Band-Aids on the symptoms of a problem, and instead address the underlying causes, thus permanently solving the problem and creating a lasting new reality.

The Five Whys help you work with prospects to uncover the root causes of what is driving their needs, and craft the most compelling, powerful, and lasting solutions.

Essentially, the Five Whys allows you to get to the root of the buyer's problems. Without it, if you fix a symptom and not the underlying cause, much like a pulled weed with the root left in the ground, the symptom is bound to sprout up again. Fix the underlying cause of a problem at the root and you will see lasting improvement.

Here's how it works: when presented with a problem, ask questions that start with why. *Why did that happen? Why will this solve the problem? Why are things the way they are?*

For example, let's say a prospect says to you, "We need more training for our IT staff because we're receiving too many complaints about bad service."

Here's how it might go:

**You:** "Why are you are receiving too many complaints about your service?" (Why 1)

**Prospect:** "Because response times are slow."

**You:** "Why are response times slow?" (Why 2)

**Prospect:** "Because our staff always seems backed up no matter what we do."

**You:** "Why is the staff always backed up?" (Why 3)

**Prospect:** "Because requests come in that are deemed urgent that really aren't, and the ones that are urgent don't get immediate response. So we're always reacting like crazy every minute of the day."

**You:** "Why can't you differentiate between the really urgent problems and the not-so-urgent problems?" (Why 4)

**Prospect:** "Because we don't have definitions of what constitutes urgent, and we don't have a sufficient job ticket management system to help us keep it straight if we did."

**You:** "Why don't you have a job ticket management system that can help you keep it all sorted out?" (Why 5)

**Prospect:** "Because we looked at this two years ago and we didn't need it, but now we're twice the size and have so much more volume. No one's brought it up again with Jane, our COO, who makes the decisions about these kinds of things."

**You:** "Why hasn't anyone brought it up with Jane?" (Why 6)

**Prospect:** Silence.

**You:** "Is training for the IT staff what you need, or should you re-engage Jane about how a job ticket management system will improve response times and reduce complaints?"



**Prospect:** “Time to talk to Jane.”

**You:** “Then you need to get approval, and install the job ticket management system?”

**Prospect:** “Right again.”

**You:** “Let’s talk about what you need in a job ticket management system, then. We see three options. One is right, depending on a few factors. Let’s have a look.”

When using the Five Whys, do not stop at the first need you uncover and think you can fix it. Salespeople who are capable of getting to the bottom of things create stronger relationships, stronger foundations of trust, and are seen as problem solvers and change agents. In turn, this keeps the competition closed out and enables them to sell year after year.

When using the Five Whys in your sales conversations, keep the following in mind:

**+ Get agreement on the desired outcome.** Lack of agreement on the desired outcome happens often. Make sure you come to unambiguous agreement on the New Reality you are trying to create. Only then can you solve the right problems to get there.

**+ Involve the right team.** Make sure you have the right buyers and sellers in the room that can actually get to the root cause. If the discussion starts off with, “We need a new server,” you need to have the technical experts (yours and theirs) available who know what may be driving the perceived need for a new server.

**+ Employ good logic.** Don’t make specious cause/effect conclusions. Like a geometry proof gone awry, make one mistake in the middle and you can find yourself on the wrong path for the duration.

**+ Allow leeway to people as they try to answer, “Why?”** You will often find a number of possible root causes. You might not know the answer to why at first. Take care not to shoot early ideas down.

**+ Realize you might need a bigger process to uncover the root.** Sometimes you can’t just “come” to the answer, and you need to perform an in-depth analysis so you can understand what’s really going on.

If you employ the Five Whys you’ll know that, as you uncover needs and craft solutions, you’ll be addressing the root causes, solving problems effectively and for the long term.

## WHY? QUESTION STARTER IDEAS

If you’re keen to give the Five Whys a try and looking for a place to start, here are a few examples you can ask about your team’s sales success.

- + Why didn’t we reach our revenue goals?
- + Why is our sales staffing set at its current level?
- + Why haven’t we been able to implement [insert tactic or initiative here], even though we keep saying it’s a priority?
- + Why hasn’t [insert tactic or initiative here] worked as well for us as we might have liked?
- + Why haven’t we tried anything new or innovative in our sales process?
- + Why aren’t our messages resonating as strongly as they might?
- + Why are we (or aren’t we) launching sales efforts into new geographies, industry specialties, etc.?
- + Do we have a culture of sales success? Why is it like what it’s like?
- + Why haven’t we been able to penetrate our target accounts like we believe we can and should?
- + Are our competitors outmaneuvering us? Why?
- + Why don’t we sell at higher prices?
- + Why have we had more sales success in some groups and less in others?
- + Why isn’t our repeat business rate higher?
- + Why did we lose a customer (or set of customers) that we lost?
- + Why did we lose a big new business opportunity?



## PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

We said it before and we'll say it again: sales has changed more in recent years than it has in the preceding 30. In this guide, we scratched the surface of what you need to do to maximize sales and become a top performer. For some of you, this is exactly what you need to get you well on your way. But if you're a sales leader and want your entire team to:

- + Educate buyers with new ideas and perspectives
- + Collaborate with buyers
- + Persuade buyers you will achieve results

You need your team succeeding with insight selling. And we're here to help.

In *Insight Selling* by RAIN Group, we teach your team how to create conversations based on ideas, inspire with insights, and set your company apart from the pack.

Specifically, your team will learn how to:

- + Create conversations with buyers on the premise of ideas and insights
- + Identify buyers most likely to be receptive to new ideas, and position ideas based on buyer preferences
- + Use the concept of cognitive reframing to open executives minds to new ideas
- + Lead executive-level conversations that shape buyers' agendas for action

If you want to learn how to bring valuable insights and ideas to buyers, strengthen relationships, and win more sales, contact us to learn more about bringing *Insight Selling* by RAIN Group to your organization.

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Is online training more your speed? *Insight Selling* by RAIN Group is also offered as an online learning program for individuals and groups. Learn more here: <http://www.raingroup.com/insightsonline>.



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## UNLEASH THE SALES POTENTIAL OF YOUR TEAM WITH RAIN GROUP

RAIN Group is a sales training, assessment, and performance improvement company that helps leading organizations improve sales results. We've helped hundreds of thousands of salespeople, managers, and professionals in more than 34 countries increase their sales significantly with our RAIN Selling<sup>SM</sup> methodology.

We can help you:

### Implement Sales Training That Delivers Real Results

RAIN Group's sales training system inspires real change and delivers real results that last. Our rigorous approach includes sales team evaluation, customized training programs, robust reinforcement, and coaching to help you and your team develop sales and negotiation skills, and maximize your results.

### Identify Who Can and Will Sell with Great Success

Our assessments measure sales attributes and skills, identifying the factors that really make a difference in sales performance. Whether you're looking to hire someone who can and will sell, or looking to improve sales performance, we'll help you build the most successful sales team.

### Grow Your Key Accounts

At most companies, there's a huge, untapped opportunity to add more value—and thus sell more—to existing accounts. We help our clients capitalize on these revenue growth opportunities. Whether it's simply increasing cross-selling and up-selling or implementing a major strategic account management program, we can help.

### Implement World-class Sales Coaching

We coach sellers, professionals, and leaders individually and in groups to achieve the greatest and fastest increase in sales results. And we train and certify leaders and managers in our RAIN Sales Coaching system. Often, it's RAIN Sales Coaching that truly unlocks the team's potential, and keeps them motivated to produce the best results consistently.

*Find out more about how RAIN Group can help you unleash the sales potential of your team by visiting [RAINGroup.com](http://RAINGroup.com) or calling (508) 405-0438.*

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