



Your Guide to Insight Selling Success

by Mike Schultz & John Doerr



RAIN Group

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why Insight Selling Matters	1
What Is Insight Selling?	2
Attributes of Insight Sellers	4
The 3 Cs of Insight Selling	6
Insight Sellers Connect	
Insight Sellers Convince	
Insight Sellers Collaborate	
11 Questions for Insight Selling	16
19 Insight Selling Mistakes to Avoid	18
Transform Your Sales Team	20

WHY INSIGHT SELLING MATTERS

In the past several years there's been a bit of a gold rush around the term "insight selling." Research from a variety of sources, including RAIN Group, has confirmed a simple fact: buyers buy from sellers who are sources of ideas. So now everyone's doing it.

This isn't necessarily a new concept. The whole industry of management consulting has been in the business of selling ideas for more than 100 years. The rest of the industries, however, have recently jumped on the bandwagon.

The idea of insight selling goes like this: sellers provide insight into how a business can be successful—they can give the ideas away for free—and they can bank on buyers buying their widget in the process.

It turns out this works. It is, however, easier said than done.

The cold reality is that most sellers don't bring new and valuable ideas to the table. Buyers see through thinly veiled product pitches presented in a teaching wrapper. Sellers have to be better than this if they want buyers to say something like:

I'm pitched ideas all day by sellers who think they were the first person who tried that on me today. However, this one that just came by—they really got me thinking. I think they have something worthwhile to offer.

What does the buyer and seller interaction look like—what does the seller need to be like—to be able to produce this effect?

We cover this in great detail in our book, *Insight Selling*. You can learn more about the book and purchase a copy by [clicking here](#).

The rest of this guide covers the highlights and key takeaways from our book, so keep reading to learn how to do insight selling right.

- **Mike & John**



Watch [this video](#) to learn more about how the shift in value has moved from the product or service you're selling to the value **you** provide buyers.



WHAT IS INSIGHT SELLING?

Think about someone you seek out when you're working through a challenge.

They help you think things through and see what's important. They ask the right questions. They listen. They don't just give you answers—they help you come up with them.

And yet, they're not afraid to tell you what they think, share their ideas, and take a stand when they feel strongly about something.

People like this make us better. They help us see what's possible. That's why we get so much from interacting with them. That's why we seek them out again and again.

The sellers who are winning major sales these days are starting to look just like these people.

With the rise of the Internet, today's buyers have a lot of information and choices, but they don't necessarily have more wisdom or confidence. They need people to share ideas and help them think these ideas through.

Yet this is where so many sellers are struggling, falling short and losing, while a select few are getting it right and winning.

How do we know?

We studied 700 business-to-business purchases from buyers with \$3.1 billion in purchasing power. Our goal was to find out what the winners of actual sales opportunities do differently than those who come in second place.

We weren't looking for any strategy or tactic in particular. All we wanted to know was if there were commonalities among sellers winning sales, and the differences between the winner group and the close-but-no-cigar group.

INSIGHT: WHAT SALES WINNERS DO DIFFERENTLY

The top three things sales winners do most differently from second-place finishers are:

1. Educate me with new ideas and perspectives
2. Collaborate with me
3. Persuade me we will achieve results

The common thread? They're all about ideas.

Education is pretty straightforward in this regard. When sellers educate with new ideas, they bring ideas to the table directly.

Great collaboration often inspires ideas. In fact, there's plenty of research to suggest that great ideas come from collaboration because the ideas can mingle and swap.

Finally, "persuade me we will achieve results" is about belief in the ideas and their merits.

When sellers employ insight selling, which we define as "the process of creating and winning sales opportunities, and driving change, with ideas that matter," they're finding themselves in the winner's circle more often.



TWO CATEGORIES OF INSIGHT SELLING

There are two types of insight selling: opportunity insight and interaction insight.

BUYERS WERE 3X MORE LOYAL TO SELLERS WHO PROACTIVELY BROUGHT OPPORTUNITIES TO THEIR ATTENTION.

1. Opportunity Insight: Focuses on introducing a particular idea that is geared to lead to a sale. To do this, sellers must bring up the idea proactively. It's the rare buyer that calls and says, "Hey, do you have any new ideas for me?" It's up to the seller to create the opportunity and communicate it so that the buyer says (or thinks), "Very interesting. I didn't know that was possible. If it works, it'll be a huge win."

Opportunity insight also creates customer loyalty. While researching our book, *Insight Selling*, we found that buyers were three times more loyal to sellers who proactively brought opportunities to their attention. Educating buyers not only shares the seller's expertise, but also demonstrates the seller's willingness to collaborate with the buyer. In fact, that's the second type of insight selling.

2. Interaction Insight: Provides value in the form of sparking ideas, inspiring "AHA!" moments, and shaping strategies based on interactions between the seller and buyer. You're not just there to sell them something; you're there to shape ideas and inspire changes that could benefit their business.

Much as a trusted colleague might help you come up with your own ideas, so does the savvy seller who practices interaction insight. These sellers help buyers think outside the box by asking tough questions, pushing them out of their comfort zones, and challenging their assumptions. When they do, buyers often come to insights on their own. The net effect is that the buyer wants to keep that seller around. To do that, they buy from that provider more often.

Opportunity insight and interaction insight work together to build customer loyalty and earn repeat sales. Whether presenting the buyer with a new opportunity, or simply collaborating with them, insight sellers drive change with ideas that matter.



Listen to my podcast, [Buyers Want and Need Insight from Sellers](#), to learn how I discovered the importance of providing insight to buyers in my own sales efforts. - John

FROM NEIL RACKHAM'S FOREWORD TO INSIGHT SELLING

I ask you to forgive me a moment's bitching if I pick out a particularly unhelpful trend in many of these about-to-become-best-selling business books, especially those in sales, that use what I call the Armageddon selling formula.

The approach goes something like this: "Everything you've ever learned about sales is wrong and, unless you stop doing it instantly, your sales efforts will shortly die in agony. There is, however, one simple cure that I have discovered. It is . . ." and here the author puts in a pitch for the appropriate magic bullet, such as "my prospecting method," "my selection system," "our funnel management process," or "our trademarked social media analytics"—take your pick...

The Armageddon approach to sales doesn't help anyone. When, for example, a serious journal like the *Harvard Business Review* publishes an article titled "The End of Solution Sales," it damages the credibility of all involved. The sales field has been growing up nicely in recent years: It can live without this kind of overstatement. As Schultz and Doerr point out, solution selling (or consultative selling, as I prefer to call it) isn't dead or finished; it just needs to adapt to the new sales world.



ATTRIBUTES OF INSIGHT SELLERS

Insight sellers share new ideas and perspectives and collaborate with buyers to develop the best solutions. They don't just sell the value of their products and services, they are the value.

To succeed as an insight seller, we've identified 12 attributes (Figure 1), which we divide into *tendencies* and *qualities*, that drive their success.

THE 12 ATTRIBUTES OF AN INSIGHT SELLER

Insight sellers share seven tendencies—these are the predispositions that drive how people choose to spend their time:

1. Passion for work and selling: Insight sellers have a desire for success in general and for selling in particular.

Without it—Sellers don't do the work. They may be compliant, but they are not committed to doing what it takes to succeed.

2. Conceptual thinking: Insight sellers conceive innovative ideas and select the right strategies. They see how the parts affect the

whole and tend to have the mental discipline to think structurally and systematically.

Without it—Ideas are poorly positioned. Sellers tend not to create compelling solutions or inspire buyer confidence.

3. Curiosity: Insight sellers are interested in people and situations. They have a thirst for knowledge and strive to become experts.

Without it—Sellers don't seek knowledge. They often don't ask enough questions or listen. Insights they do share often aren't new, interesting, or relevant.

4. Sense of urgency: Insight sellers value speed. They drive sales forward, are impatient with the status quo, and take action.

Without it—Sellers let too much time slip by. They don't focus on actions that drive the best results or push for decisions. They aren't change agents.

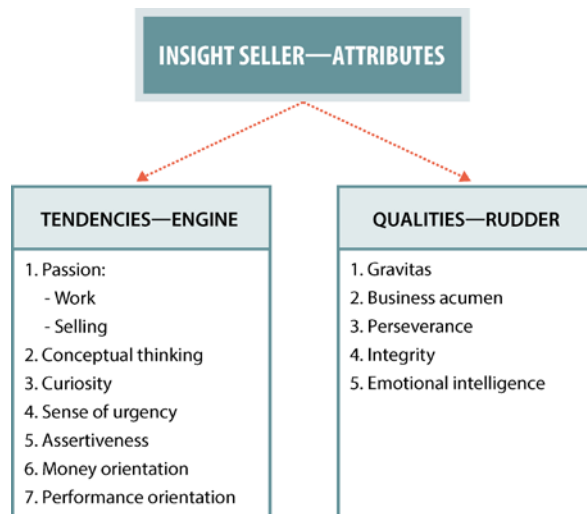
5. Assertiveness: Insight sellers take control and lead discussions. They defend their point of view and insert themselves into important situations. They are not afraid to create disruptions.

Without it—Sellers don't create the tension or disruption required to create change. They don't practice interaction insight and aren't forceful enough to even get on the buyer's radar screen.

6. Money orientation: Insight sellers are comfortable discussing money and understand how businesses make money. They are also motivated to maximize their personal income.

Without it—Sellers tend not to qualify prospects or establish return on investment (ROI) cases necessary for driving new initiatives forward. They don't ask about

Figure 1. Attributes of an Insight Seller





money and waste time chasing leads that don't have a chance of closing.

7. Performance orientation: Insight sellers manage their time ruthlessly and focus on results. They take advantage of opportunities, manage their pipelines tightly, and are driven to win.

Without it—Sellers don't manage their time or activities well. They make excuses and don't make strong ROI cases.

These tendencies are the engines that drive an insight seller's actions. But tendencies are only half of the story when it comes to what it takes to succeed as an insight seller. Insight sellers also share 5 qualities that guide their success.

If tendencies are the engines of behaviors, qualities are the platform and the rudder:

1. Gravitas: Insight sellers are substantive, confident, and credible—they are people to be taken seriously.

Without it—The advice of the seller is not valued or taken. They tend not to succeed with executive buyers and they wilt under pressure, such as in a negotiation.

2. Business acumen: Insight sellers are quick to understand situations. They give advice and make good decisions. They understand organizations, people, change, innovation, finance, and accounting, along with the key drivers of profit and success in business.

Without it—Sellers don't establish credibility or communicate insights and advice leading to good outcomes. They don't drive action and change and don't make strong ROI cases.

3. Perseverance: Insight sellers are willing to do what it takes to succeed. They focus on the task at hand, and stick with it for the long haul.

Without it—Sellers are easily distracted. They don't pursue the knowledge and skills necessary for insight selling success.

4. Integrity: Insight sellers have strong moral values and they consistently meet their commitments.

Without it—Sellers ruin their relationships when they're uncovered for not being virtuous and success doesn't last.

5. Emotional intelligence: Insight sellers understand and manage their own and others' emotions. They can handle difficult personalities and adjust their style based on the buyer. They don't panic, get distracted, or react emotionally.

Without it—Sellers don't create or succeed in situations that require tension. They get flustered and lose focus easily. They also have a difficult time creating and maintaining a peer dynamic.

Anyone can come to a training class and learn a skill, but not everyone will a) become good at what they learn, or b) apply new skills and behaviors when selling. Getting to top performance depends on whether the person is the right fit for the role.

And the right fit, when it comes to becoming an insight seller, is very much determined by these 12 attributes.



Watch the webinar, [The Future of Consultative Selling](#), to learn how buying has changed and what you need to do to win in the new sales environment.



The 3 Cs OF WINNING SALES

You now know what insight selling is and the attributes of the best insight sellers.

In the rest of this guide, we'll outline what you need to do to excel with insight selling.

As we analyzed the research on what sales winners do differently, we discovered that the way winners sell can be characterized by specific behaviors at three different levels:

+ Level 1: Connect

Winners connect in two ways. First, they connect the dots between customer needs and their company's products and services as solutions more effectively than second-place finishers. Second, winners connect with people. Buyers believe that winners both listened to them and connected with them personally more often than the rest.

+ Level 2: Convince

Winners convince buyers that they can achieve maximum return, that the risks are acceptable, and that the seller is the best choice among all options. Many sellers are not good at convincing buyers, and a large portion of sellers aren't even willing to convince. When they can and do, they win more sales.

+ Level 3: Collaborate

Winners are collaborative in how they work and what they do. They are perceived by buyers to be responsive, proactive, and easy to buy from. And buyers believe winners actually collaborate with them during the buying process by working together to achieve mutual goals. Buyers perceive collaborative sellers to be integral to their success.

If you want to apply insight selling, you must excel in these three levels.

INSIGHT SELLERS CONNECT

Insight sellers connect in 2 ways:

1. They connect with buyers
2. They connect the dots between buyer needs and their solutions

CONNECTING WITH BUYERS

There's been a lot of noise the last several years declaring the death of relationship selling. *"The Internet has changed everything."* *"Personal connections don't matter anymore."* *"Selling is not about relationships."* *"Throw out everything you thought you knew about sales, Armageddon is coming!"*

We strongly disagree with the idea that selling is not about relationships. Relationship building is still critical to winning sales. But it has changed.

Our research found that sales winners make strong personal connections at more than double the rate of second-place finishers. Relationship building in sales is far from dead. So what's changed?

HAND SHAKES, LUCKY STRIKES, AND THREE-MARTINI LUNCHES

Let's first take a look back at how sales relationships were forged in the *Mad Men* era.

Classic relationship selling in the 1960s involved a lot of schmoozing. It was, "Let's have lunch. Let's have dinner. Let's go to a show. Let's go to Sardi's. Let's meet the family. Let's do it again." Then, "OK, I like you. Let's do business."

The relationship came first in a world that was very localized, where buyers and sellers could sit down face to face.



So what happened in those three-martini lunches?

When sellers build personal connections with buyers, they lay the foundation for trust and establish their business value. In the *Mad Men* days, personal connection often came first, before the sale occurred. Relationship building in sales occurs, however, in two categories—personal connection (based on common affinity and liking one another) and business value (connection based on strength of business impact).

Now, some so-called sales pundits say, “Don’t bother with that. A personal connection is unimportant. Relationship builders aren’t top performers.” Or they define relationship building in anachronistic terms, such as “being generous with your time” or “making everyone happy and harmonious.” We don’t see relationship building that way. In any case, it’s not dead. Not by a long shot.

HOW SALES RELATIONSHIPS HAVE CHANGED

Relationship building, the personal side, is still critical to earning trust and winning sales. What has changed is the way customers form relationships with sellers. Today’s sellers and buyers often determine business value *first*. They vet each other’s businesses and decide if they want to work together—but they don’t go out for extended cocktail-tipping lunches like in the *Mad Men* days.

Today, the business interaction comes first, with the relationship being the reward customers give sellers who work for it. But that doesn’t

Figure 2. When Business Value Comes First

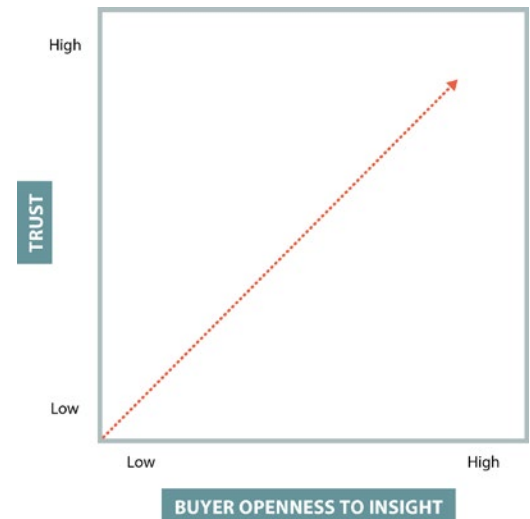


Source: Schultz, Mike, and John E. Doerr. *Insight Selling: Surprising Research on What Sales Winners Do Differently*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

mean the personal connection is any less valuable (Figure 2).

As insight sellers establish themselves as trustworthy sources of value, buyers open up to an exchange of information and ideas. If the buyer likes and trusts you, they’re more apt to take your advice. This increases your business value, along with the frequency and depth of interactions with the buyer. That’s a solid buyer-seller relationship. It just happens in a different order than in the wine-and-dine-the-client-before-they-buy times (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Buyer Openness to Insight Directly Correlates to Trust



Source: Schultz, Mike, and John E. Doerr. *Insight Selling: Surprising Research on What Sales Winners Do Differently*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

Indeed, the world has changed. The rhythm has changed. The order in which we do things has changed. But what hasn’t changed is the need to build strong personal connections with buyers. Dismissing the value of personal connections is ill-advised.

Relationship building in sales is alive and well. We don’t see that changing any time soon.



FROM NEIL RACKHAM'S FOREWORD TO INSIGHT SELLING

The traditional wisdom has long taught that relationship building is the foundation of all business-to-business selling and much of consumer selling, too. However, particularly since the publication of *The Challenger Sale* in 2011, the Armageddon enthusiasts have been widely putting it about that relationships have become unimportant and that relationship selling is in its death throes. Again, nothing could be further from the truth.

What has changed is the way customers form relationships. In the past, the sequence was for salespeople to build the relationship first and then to sell. Today few customers have the time or the inclination to build relationships before the sale. Instead, the relationship is the reward that customers give to salespeople who have created value for them.

So, the sale comes first and the relationship building starts from there.

LOOKING AT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WINNERS AND SECOND-PLACE FINISHERS, "UNDERSTOOD MY NEEDS" WAS THE FIFTH LARGEST GAP. IN FACT, WINNERS DEMONSTRATED THEY UNDERSTOOD BUYERS' NEEDS 2.5X MORE OFTEN THAN SECOND-PLACE FINISHERS.



CONNECTING THE DOTS

Insight sellers don't just connect with people, they connect the dots between buyer needs and seller solutions.

Think of the classic solution sales concept: diagnosing and connecting the "pain" of the buyer with the products, services, and overall capabilities of the seller as "solutions."

In our research, we found that while this concept is still alive and necessary today, it has changed in three very important ways.

1. Understanding vs. diagnosing needs:

In solution sales, there's typically a heavy emphasis on the seller "diagnosing" the needs of the buyer. The need for diagnosis implies that the buyer doesn't have a thorough understanding of why they find themselves in their current, undesirable situation or what to do differently. Through diagnosis, the seller figures this out like a doctor might with a patient who feels unwell, but who doesn't know what they have or what to do to get better.

In our research we looked at what the winners of actual sales opportunities do differently than second-place finishers. Of the 42 factors we studied, "deepened my understanding of my needs" was 40th on the list of what winners do. Winners barely did it compared to the rest of the factors, yet they still won the sale.

Second-place finishers actually focused more on diagnosis than the winners, yet they still lost.

While sellers may not have to diagnose as often or as deeply anymore, they do have to demonstrate understanding of need. This is critical. The terms may seem similar, but throwing the "understanding" baby out with the "diagnosing" bath water is not a good idea.

Looking at the differences between winners and second-place finishers, "understood my needs" was the fifth largest gap. In fact, winners demonstrated they understood buyers' needs 2.5 times more often than second-place finishers. On top of that, of the 42 factors, buyers said "understood my needs" was the fifth most important factor that second-place finishers should change in order to win their business.

Fundamentally, sellers need to shift from diagnosing needs to demonstrating an understanding of needs.



These days, diagnosing needs isn't nearly as important as simply demonstrating understanding of needs.



2. Focusing on pain: Another needed change is a shift away from the prevalent use of the words “problem” and “pain.” These are the two most common terms associated with discovering buyer needs. These words all too often drive sellers to employ find-out-what’s-wrong-and-fix-it thinking.

Let’s say the buyer doesn’t perceive anything—or anything important enough to act on—to be wrong. Soothe-the-pain sellers find themselves at a dead end. No problems to fix. Nothing to sell.

Insight sellers, however, don’t just focus on the negative, they focus on the positive—goals, aspirations, and possibilities achievable by the buyer, even if the buyer doesn’t know it yet. Along with having much richer sales conversations, focusing on the positive opens the door to significant opportunity to increase sales.

Sellers who focus on aspirations as well as afflictions are able to directly influence the buyer’s agenda by inspiring them with possibilities they hadn’t been considering, but should.

3. Necessary, but not sufficient to win the sale: While a solution sales approach used to be enough to win the sale, it’s now only the price of entry (Figure 4).

Imagine for a minute that someone is selling to you and you perceive the seller doesn’t understand your needs and doesn’t craft a compelling solution. Their chances of winning business from you are probably pretty slim.

Now consider that the seller demonstrates a strong understanding of your needs and crafts a compelling solution, but you perceive that they aren’t listening to you and you haven’t made any kind of personal connection with them. As long as any other seller meets the minimum criteria, you’re unlikely to buy from the unlikeable seller who isn’t listening.

The point is: sellers who do a good job, even with these changes to the traditional solution sales approach, haven’t yet won the game, but they’re in it.

Figure 4. Changes to the Basic Premise of Consultative Selling





INSIGHT SELLERS CONVINCING

CONVINCE

con·vince /kən'vins/

1. Cause (someone) to believe firmly in the truth of something.
2. Persuade (someone) to take action.

Building confidence in the validity of an idea.
Inspiring action.

While a few do insight selling naturally, many struggle. Sellers might know with great certainty that when buyers buy they'll be better off as a result, but they just can't get the buyers to believe it too.

What's interesting, though, is that the sellers who are good at selling an idea and those who aren't often both understand the idea and its importance. It's just that some communicate it far better than others.

Those who do insight selling well—whether they know it or not—satisfy the same basic criteria every time, following the same story format. And the great thing is this: the basic structure is simple and learnable. We call this basic structure a Convincing Story (Figure 5).

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?

HOW TO TELL A CONVINCING STORY

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.

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:

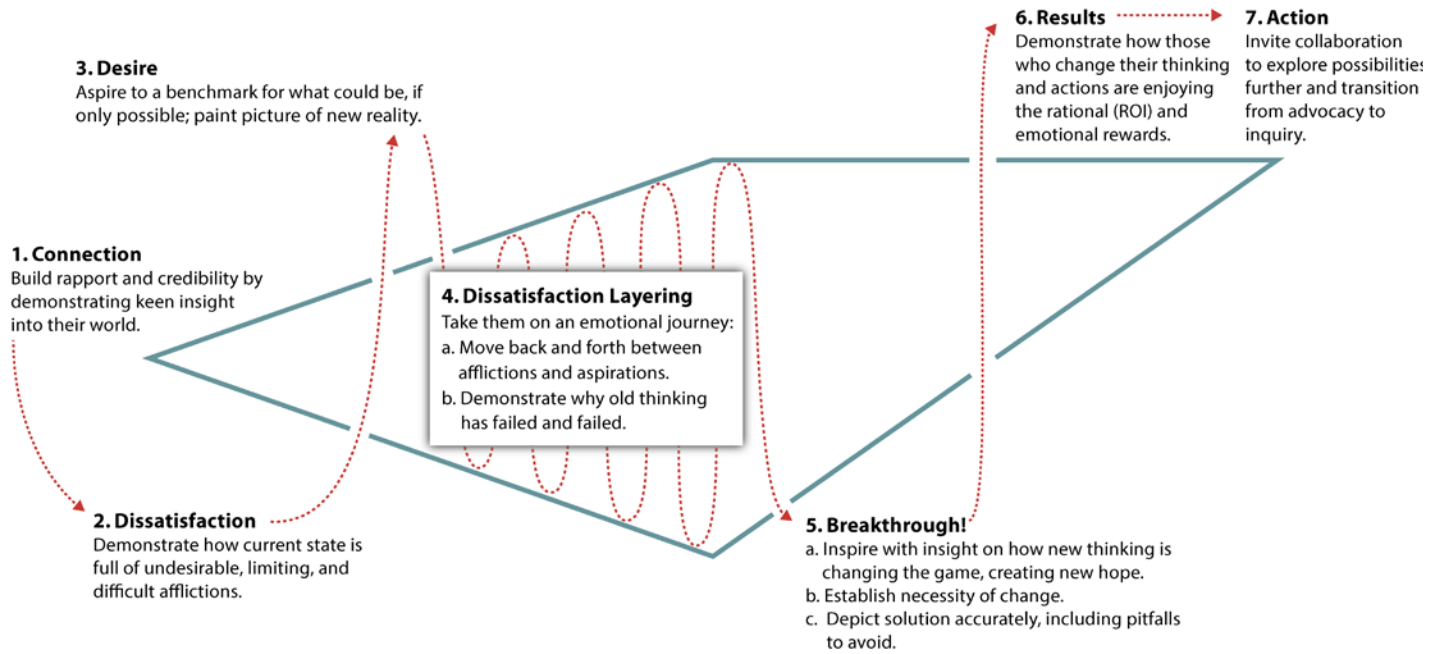
People have a natural tendency to drive forward. But if they don't know where they're headed, as they say, any road will get them there.

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*.

CLICK HERE FOR A PDF OF THE CONVINCING STORY FRAMEWORK.



Figure 5. Convincing Story Framework

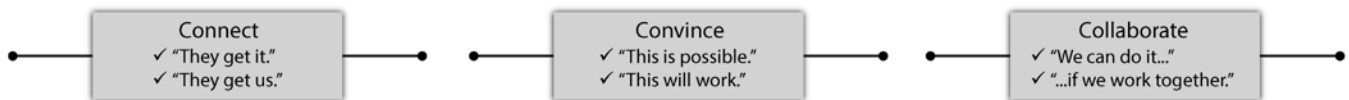


Influence Principles:

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:



Source: Schultz, Mike, and John E. Doerr. *Insight Selling: Surprising Research on What Sales Winners Do Differently*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

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.



Watch the webinar, [Become a Source of Insight for Buyers: How to Sell Ideas and Drive Demand](#), for an example of the Convincing Story framework in action.



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.

LEARN	FEEL	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + 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. 	<p>+ Collaborate with you to bring the New Reality to life.</p> <div style="border: 1px dashed red; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>USE THE CONVINCING STORY STRUCTURE AND YOU’LL ACHIEVE THE THREE OUTCOMES YOU NEED TO SELL AN IDEA: LEARN, FEEL, DO.</p> </div>

INSIGHT SELLERS COLLABORATE

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

1. They are required to buy.
2. They want to buy.

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 keys 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.



Listen to the podcast, [5 Steps for Collaborating with Buyers and Increasing Sales](#), to learn how to work with buyers to create ownership and investment in the buying process.

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.

5 STEPS TO COLLABORATE WITH BUYERS IN THE SALES PROCESS

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 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?

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, 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 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.



Read this article, [Generate More Leads with Existing Accounts through Value and Collaboration](#), for an email example of exactly how to set meetings with current clients that open the door for collaboration.



If the buyer has great answers to your tough questions—answers that make you think, “Okay, you don’t need any help,” then good. 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. (See page 16 for 11 specific insight questions to ask.)

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 overall solution 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 I think 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: 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 throughout the selling process. Not only will you get on their priority lists and shape their agendas for action, the likelihood they’ll take that action with you will skyrocket.



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. Influence buyers' thinking with your insightful inquiry and you can then influence their agenda for action.

This is what insight selling is all about. Here are 11 questions that can help you do just that:

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:

- + They see the impact and why it's important (good!)
- + Their perception of the impact grows as they think it out (great!)
- + They see the impact as too small for action (you can show them it's bigger!)
- + 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.

These types of questions lead buyers to say (or, at least, think) things like, “Well, I wasn’t thinking of it like that.” When they do, you’ve helped them achieve cognitive reframing: influencing the way they think and what they believe.

Influence buyers’ thinking with your thoughtful inquiry and you can then influence their agendas for action. The trend in selling has been to do this only through advocacy. Now you know how to do it with inquiry as well.



19 INSIGHT SELLING MISTAKES TO AVOID

Like anything, insight selling comes with its own potential pitfalls. To help you avoid them, we have outlined the most common insight selling mistakes. Some points are tactical, and others strategic. Each is listed under a general area key to insight selling success.

OVERALL

- + **Treating insight selling as a tactic rather than a pursuit:** Some sellers think that if you share content and antagonize buyers you are employing insight selling. Insight selling is not about doing one thing or another, it is about *you* providing value throughout the entire sales process.
- + **Not embracing the mindset of seller as a change agent:** If sellers are just part of the status quo and are not pushing buyers to step outside of the box, they're probably not selling anywhere near their potential. Insight sellers must embrace their role of change agent and push buyers out of their comfort zone.
- + **Being arrogant or meek:** Many buyers report that sellers are pushing too far, too hard, and too fast. On the other end of the spectrum, a success killer is the quiet seller who isn't willing to challenge the thinking of buyers. You must find the right balance.
- + **Sending information via email and believing that's insight selling:** Buyers see this for what it is—a non-customized strategy that communicates the seller is not making an effort. All messages should be relevant, personalized, and focused on a strategic imperative important to the individual buyer.

CONNECT

- + **Equating insight selling with pitching:** Embracing insight selling does not lead to an altogether rejection of solution selling concepts. When sellers make this assumption, they forgo questioning, listening, and understanding in favor of taking up the mantle of an idea and pitching it forcefully. Solution selling is necessary, it's just no longer sufficient for sales success (see page 8 for more on this).
- + **Lacking customization and customer focus:** With a little effort, sellers can create much deeper engagement with buyers. Take the time to demonstrate understanding and tailor interactions uniquely for them.

CONVINCE

- + **Not convincing at all:** Insight sellers must be able to take a point of view, defend it convincingly, and persuade others to believe.
- + **Conducting ill-timed needs discovery versus presenting:** Know when it is time to share a point of view and when to listen. For example, if the buyer requested and arranged the meeting, let them own the floor first.
- + **Making presentation gaffes:** The list of possible mistakes is long: bad story, bad slides, too many slides, improper humor, etc. Most importantly, design your presentation to be interactive, and master the material.



- + **Dismissing trust:** The buyer's trust in the seller is essential. Without it, the buyer perceives the risk of buying from you as too high.

COLLABORATE

- + **Equating collaboration with consensus:** Collaboration does not mean getting absolutely everyone on the same page, and it does not mean including people who are tangential to the decision-making process. Instead, engage the primary buyers in needs discovery and solution crafting.
- + **Being unwilling to involve the buyer:** Working closely with senior, highly-knowledgeable buyers can be intimidating. Put in the effort and time to increase your expertise and craft a peer dynamic with the most senior decision makers.
- + **Creating psychological ownership, then stealing it away:** Sellers commonly don't allow the buyer to take the credit for ideas and thus don't create ownership. Instead of pointing out that you had the same idea, simply say, "I agree."
- + **Not taking control and guiding the collaboration:** Collaboration does not mean relinquishing control. It is important to have the skill and gravitas to prevent a buyer from strong-arming his or her way out of a collaborative setting.
- + **Not being proactive:** Buyers are disengaged when sellers don't establish themselves as sources of insight in collaboration-driven meetings. Proactively invite collaboration—don't leave it to chance.

CREATING THE INSIGHT ORGANIZATION

- + **Expecting that everyone can be an insight seller and not hiring for insight:** Not everyone is destined to be an insight seller. Assessing and hiring candidates who have the necessary skills and attributes (see page 4 for the 12 attributes of an insight seller) is critical for organizations that want it to become a part of the sales culture.
- + **Lacking the tools and resources to execute insight:** It is not always possible for every seller in a team to generate his or her own ideas to expand buyer thinking and success for the business. Circulate good ideas among the team to ensure that every seller is armed with the best tools.
- + **Not coaching for insight:** Sales coaching too often focuses on the process of a deal. Rarely do coaches give encouragement, offer ideas, and provide resources to make the seller more effective with insight selling.
- + **Providing training that fails:** If insight selling is simply this quarter's training program, don't expect traction. To build effective insight sellers, company leaders should think of training less as an event and more as an ongoing priority and initiative.

Common mistakes and misconceptions hinder the ability of many to master insight selling. To be successful, follow the lead of the winners—connect, convince, and collaborate—and avoid these common pitfalls.



TRANSFORM YOUR SALES TEAM

Sellers who harness the power of ideas don't just sell the value of their offerings, they *become* the value.

Following the tips outlined in this guide is a great start to becoming an insight seller. Implementing insight selling, however, is fraught with challenges. Getting it done right is tricky. But those who do reap the rewards.

Go forth and share your insights with buyers. Connect, convince, and collaborate during the sales process and not only will you find yourself in the winner's circle more often, you will also maximize client loyalty and generate the most referrals.

○ TRANSFORM YOUR SALES TEAM INTO INSIGHT SELLERS

Insight Selling by RAIN Group, a highly customized two-day training program for sellers and sales leaders, will teach your team exactly what they need to do to succeed with an insight-based approach. They'll learn how to create conversations with buyers on the premise of ideas and insights, maximize relationship strength based on value, and more. **See the next page for more information.**

RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

WEBINARS

[What It Takes to Sell with Insight](#)
[Become a Source of Insight for Buyers: How to Sell Ideas and Drive Demand](#)

PODCASTS

[Buyers Want and Need Insight from Sellers](#)
[5 Steps for Collaborating with Buyers and Increasing Sales](#)

ARTICLE

[Generate More Leads with Existing Accounts through Value and Collaboration](#)

TOOL

[Convincing Story Framework](#)

VIDEO

[The Person As Distinct](#)

Insight Selling by RAIN Group

How to Change the Conversation, Drive Demand, and Differentiate through Selling



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The landscape of buying and selling has changed more in recent years than it has in preceding decades. Buyers are more sophisticated and, thanks to the Internet, are awash in information and research. At the same time, executives are searching—often in vain—for new ways to innovate, compete, and improve their success.

When sellers bring valuable insights and ideas to buyers, they strengthen relationships, differentiate from competition, and win more sales.

Insight Selling by RAIN Group teaches sellers how to create conversations based on ideas, inspire with insights, and set themselves and their companies apart from the pack.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In Insight Selling by RAIN Group, participants will learn how to:

- + Create conversations with buyers on the premise of ideas and insights
- + Tell a Convincing Story that intrigues buyers and shapes their thinking
- + Create insights by asking incisive, powerful questions
- + 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
- + Maximize relationship strength based on value

TOP 10 BENEFITS OF INSIGHT SELLING BY RAIN GROUP

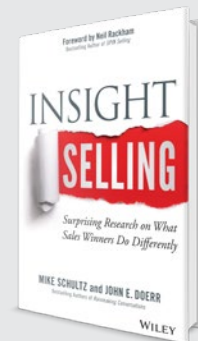
1. Differentiate and set your company apart from the pack
2. Create new business opportunities that fill the pipeline
3. Tell a Convincing Story that intrigues and inspires buyers to act
4. Understand personal strengths and challenges for applying insight selling
5. Get to, and succeed with, senior executives
6. Challenge buyers without being standoffish
7. Bring client-centric selling to a whole new level
8. Become an indispensable source of insight to buyers
9. Sell on value and realize higher margins
10. Win more sales and grow existing accounts

DELIVERY OPTIONS

- + Tailored on-site, instructor-led programs
- + Train-the-Trainer, Licensing
- + Blended learning: Online and on-site, instructor-led curriculum
- + Online learning program

Buyers Want Your Insight

In our groundbreaking book, *Insight Selling: Surprising Research on What Sales Winners Do Differently*, we found that the number one factor separating sellers who win the sale from those who come in second-place is: Seller educated me with new ideas or perspectives. In fact, sales winners educate buyers with new ideas and perspectives 3x more often than second-place finishers.



By RAIN Group Presidents and bestselling authors Mike Schultz & John Doerr

Insight Selling by RAIN Group Online Training Program

Are you an individual looking to become an insight seller or is your team spread across a broad geography? Insight Selling by RAIN Group online training will walk you step-by-step through exactly what you need to do to make the transition to an insight seller and achieve greater sales success. Learn more here.

Contact Us

Phone: 508-405-0438

Website: www.raingroup.com

Email: info@raingroup.com



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 73 countries increase their sales significantly with RAIN Group's consulting and sales methodology.

We can help you:

IMPLEMENT SALES TRAINING THAT DELIVERS REAL RESULTS

RAIN Group's sales training system inspires real change and delivers 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 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 or calling (508) 405-0438.

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