

# TRUST-BASED SELLING

FINDING AND KEEPING CUSTOMERS  
FOR LIFE

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*David A. Monty*

Apress®

## ***Trust-Based Selling: Finding and Keeping Customers for Life***

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*The Apress Business Team*



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# About the Author

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A veteran of the U.S. Navy, **Dave Monty** has sold software and hardware solutions for over 20 years. He has been an account manager, regional manager, or director of sales, for such companies as Cisco, EMC, and Dimension Data. Monty has a passion for training, and for helping individuals and companies reach their full potential in sales. He currently lives in the Research Triangle area in North Carolina.



# Introduction

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Tom is a new salesperson about three months into his job. Tom was promoted from within the company because he was the number one inside salesperson. His job was cold calling to set appointments for the outside sales team. He is diligent, hardworking, and already understands the company and its products.

One day, he is out to lunch with some colleagues, and one of the more senior reps asks, “How are things going, Tom?”

His reply, “Things are great, I have been on many appointments. My boss is happy with the number of customers I have been in front of. My pipeline is very strong. I have not booked my first order yet, but I am excited. My second quarter will be huge!”

“How many customers have you visited?” the senior rep continues.

“Close to 25,” says Tom.

The senior rep is impressed; this is a large number of appointments for his industry, so it’s clear he is working hard.

So far, it sounds like everything is great. High activity, opportunities in his pipeline, a happy manager; the only thing missing is some closed business.

Three months go by, and Tom walks into the senior rep’s office. He asks Tom the same question, “How are you doing?”

“Well, quite a few of my deals *pushed* [moved to the next quarter] or fell through this quarter, but my pipeline is even bigger, and Q3 will be huge.”

“Tom, how does your boss feel?”

He replies, “I can tell he is a bit more concerned with the numbers. He loves my pipeline, but he is pushing me to start closing some of this business.”

“What is his advice?”

“Keep pursuing leads. He says keep my pipeline strong, and deals will come.”

The senior rep asks, “How many customers have you visited?”

“Maybe another 25 this quarter. Marketing is great—they keep the leads coming.”

The senior rep then asks, “What are your top opportunities?”

Tom lists some companies. The senior rep recognizes that from a geography standpoint, he is often driving three hours in one direction, then four hours in another direction. He asks Tom, “Why are you driving all over the place?”

“My boss wants me running down the opportunities on these leads.”

“So you have been in front of 50 different customers? How many different opportunities are you working?” The answer is an impressive 40.

The senior rep is starting to spot a trend. Tom is working on more opportunities than the senior rep himself. And he knows that in this industry, you can make your living with 10 accounts. So, he leads Tom by asking, “Tom, which of the 50 customers have you qualified as your best?”

Tom is confused, “What do you mean?”

“I mean where are you spending your time? Which customers are getting your time?”

“I have been following up leads, and trying close these deals, so pretty much where I have opportunity.”

Instead of pointing out an issue, he gives Tom some direct advice, “Go back through the list of accounts you have visited, and figure out which customers are a fit for our company and for you. Note where they have money, where there is change, where they have aging IT infrastructure, and where you felt you had a good personal fit. You need to start establishing relationships and building trust with these customers.”

Tom nods; the advice seems to make sense. But he’s sure some of the leads he gets each week will take care of the problem.

Another quarter goes by, and he walks into the senior rep’s office one more time. The rep asks, “How are things going?”

“Not so good,” says Tom. “I barely closed anything last quarter. I had three large deals that we thought we had won, but we lost them to price at the last minute. My pipeline has shrunk. We cannot figure out what is going on, so my boss is starting to think I must be lazy, or I am just not a closer.”

“Did you take my advice and identify your ‘go-to’ customers?”

“Well, no. I have been too busy trying to close deals.”

This story does not have a happy ending. Tom was let go a few weeks later. How do you go from a hard-working inside sales rock star to being fired as a salesperson? He worked hard and had a strong pipeline, so why was he not closing business?

## What Happened?

Tom is brand new to outside sales, and he was simply following the advice of his management team. This issue points out a fundamental flaw in sales process—poor sales training and coaching. Most sales training is based on sales skills or process. The problem is that most processes start with an opportunity, but they do not hit the fundamentals of new account penetration. This book is aimed at building a foundation for new sales professionals, and getting the seasoned professional back to basics after they've lost their way. (This is nothing to be ashamed of; it has happened to me and other sales professionals whose techniques, for one reason or another, became ineffective. Read on for the story of how Peyton Manning had to return to the fundamentals.)

The approach that Tom took is how most salespeople approach starting a new sales role. The company trains them on its top-selling products. They are given a list of accounts or a territory, some sales training based on skills or process, a laptop, and a phone.

The advice—from managers, books, seminars, and other sources of sales training—for starting typically goes something like this: “Work hard, get in front of as many customers as possible, work your leads, find opportunities, and close business. Go hunt!” If the salesperson is “lucky,” he is probably given a common strategy. “Your goal is \$5,000,000 in revenue. This equates to \$1,250,000 per quarter. We close 30% of our deals. So you should have \$4,200,000 in potential revenue in your pipeline at any time.” In other words, find as many opportunities as possible; keep your pipeline full.

The sarcasm in that last statement was not meant to insult the many managers who have used that advice. I have used that advice myself in the past. On the surface it seems like perfect common sense. However, as you start to dig into why customers buy, look at the most important asset a new salesperson has (time), and understand why managers push for pipeline much greater than quota, you learn that this logic hurts more than it helps.

As this book will show, the senior rep in the previous story has the right idea about how to succeed: identify the most likely accounts, develop relationships, and build trust. But Tom—and most of the Toms in the sales world—doesn't hear this kind of advice often enough.

## Not Just for Rookies: Fundamentals Matter

Just recently, NFL quarterback Peyton Manning broke the record for the most career touchdowns thrown by a quarterback. Following the game, he did a quick on-field interview. His message struck a chord with me. He was asked why he has been even more successful after being out for a year with a neck

injury. When he started his journey back, he could hardly throw a ball. In NFL years, he is—at 38 (in early 2015)—an old man. And, you know the old saying, “You can’t teach an old dog a new trick.” Personally, I was expecting him to say, that the Denver Broncos, the team he joined after his injury, surrounded him with players that are there to support his type of offense. But his reply, which I am paraphrasing, surprised me: “When I started throwing the ball again, I called my old coach to help me get back to my pre-injury form. We went right back to the fundamentals—arm mechanics, foot work, movement in the pocket, etc. I believe that getting back to the basic fundamentals has helped me become a better quarterback.” And, by all measures Peyton, at the age of 38, came back better than he was pre-injury.

I think any sales professional can learn a lot from Peyton Manning. Over time we all develop bad habits, or start to get lazy with process, or the basics of selling. While this book is about the basics of selling, even the seasoned professional can further their results by refreshing the foundation of their strategies, process, skills and tactics.

## Why I Wrote This Book

I have been a salesperson and sales manager, among other sales-related jobs, my entire career. My experience has been mostly in the IT industry. You will find many real-life examples and stories from multiple industries in this book, but the majority comes from the industry in which I spent my career. As you’ll see, the advice is universal. Many of the examples come from when I was with a VAR, or value-added reseller. If the tactics and strategies work with a VAR, they will work for any B2B sales person. Resellers find it difficult to differentiate themselves from competitors. By definition, they do not have their own products. There are multiple companies in the same territory selling the identical products from the same vendors. This leaves the salesperson as the main differentiator to the customer. Veteran salespeople therefore learn early on that developing good relationships is the key to success. While most salespeople are concentrating on their products, the customer is looking at the salesperson and thinking, “Can I trust this person?” And that is the same in any industry. As you will see, the sales skills and strategies needed to succeed in this industry translate to any B2B sales environment.

When I started this book, I was a regional manager at an information technology (IT) reseller, or VAR. It was this new role as a regional manager that actually prompted me to write this book. I was given a territory that at one point had been one of the most successful regions in our company. Throughout the years, five salespeople were all at, or above, their quotas. However, in the two–three years prior to my taking over the region, we had turned over most of the team more than once. Our partners had lost faith in our company, and our customers were concerned about the health of the

company due to the turnover of the sales force. This territory could support five to six salespeople. I only had three salespeople left and they were a mixed bag of experience, work ethic, and skills. One was experienced and performing, one had very little sales skill and was unwilling to learn, and the third was for the most part not showing up. So, my first job, which is not always easy, was to let the latter two go. My uphill battle continued:

- I had one salesperson, but I carried a quota for five salespeople
- I had to hire four new salespeople, and finding the right people takes time
- We had damaged customer relationships
- In the IT industry, as a VAR, it is not unheard of for a salesperson to take six months to get their first order
- It typically takes up to 12 months, if not longer, for a new salesperson to match pace with their monthly quota

I wanted to make money in my first year. I did not want to take the long ramp period as the definitive truth. I turned to several sales books I had purchased over the years. Our company was a user of SPI's Solution Selling, but their process started with the first sales call, and I knew that there was an uphill battle getting first appointments. I reached out to colleagues whom I trusted in sales management roles, but the advice was pretty much the same: train the best you can, cold call, follow up on leads, and drive the pipeline. The main advice—or the belief—for success was to drive high activity. I always held the belief that high activity was important, but the wrong activity is purely a waste of time. I needed to identify which activities would help my reps start producing in the short term.

Lastly, I turned to personal experience. Before becoming a regional manager, I had worked as an account manager for this company for four years. Before that, I was a territory salesperson for two large, fast-growing manufacturers and a large VAR. I personally have ramped seven sales territories with varying degrees of success. (Of course, like any salesperson, I have had my share of losses, which I will be sharing with you as well.) However, I never stopped to think about why some territories never took off, why some took years to ramp, and why some were successful from the start. What was the common thread? What worked and what didn't? Why did 80% of our salespeople close an average of only five deals their first year?

I quickly learned that it had nothing to do with work ethic, as with Tom. I witnessed some of the hardest-working salespeople fail miserably. And my experience prompted additional questions: Why did only 20% of new hires reach quota? Why, in my most successful territory, did it take me four months to get my first order and why, by the end of the year, was I pulling in more

business per month than most of the other salespeople at the company? Why did some of my own territories fail?

This desire to understand the first year of sales also led me to thoroughly research the science of selling, including buyer psychology, seller psychology, sales process, sales techniques, and behavioral change.

During the process of writing this book, I gained even more confidence as a salesperson and sales manager. In good conscience, and to be able to provide all the advice this book contains, I used the process I developed and outline here. I took a direct sales role with a new company. The new territory was a challenge and the previous two salespeople had failed by any metric you measure. They made very few sales, and secured perhaps two or three new accounts in about two years.

In my first year, my sales engineer and I secured sales with approximately 40 new customers and finished at 230% of our annual quota. While this is a small data set, I proved to myself that I was on to something with the system you are about to learn.

## Traditional Sales Training Does Not Work

Here is the dirty little secret of sales training:

***Sales training and materials are developed to be sold, not developed to work.***

This may sound a bit harsh, but let's analyze the most popular topics of sales training. Sales books and training come in all shapes and sizes, but 80% of it falls into two categories:

- Sales skills
- Sales processes

Here's what I have learned and what the book will show you: Your success does not depend on your ability to manage opportunities, your ability to close, or your ability to "wow" with presentations.

This is a bold statement, but it's true. Salespeople with average skills can be very successful with the proper strategy. Most sales training, in contrast, concentrates on improving a salesperson's selling skills. I believe this is a lazy approach by management. Managers feel they need to do something to improve sales. So, they train the sales team on skills and expect better results.

This simply does not work. Management sees that the training does not work and they turn back to the trainers for help. The recommendation to solve this problem is, if they don't "get it" the first time, use repetition. Role

play. Repeat over and over again. It sounds like common sense. The sales training community pushes the idea because it can sell more training time and materials to their customers.

Sales management buys into this because it is easy to blame the salesperson for not “getting it.” They never stop to ask whether the salespeople are being tasked and managed effectively. You have probably seen this in training classes you have taken. You have a great teacher who motivates you. You are excited about everything you are learning. It all makes perfect sense. You role play over and over again until you have memorized the process. Then what happens when you get back in front of the customer? The ego kicks in. You now have something at stake, and you revert to your core ego-driven personality.

Ask yourself: Has sales training ever improved your skills? If so, you are in the top 5% of self-aware people. Someone needs to be completely self-aware to make significant change in personality.

I am no different. As I have already stated, I have read hundreds of sales books over my career, and I have taken multiple trainings, including some of the most popular training courses in the industry. It took me 10 years to realize I was one of the “talkers” who did not listen to customers enough. It has taken me an additional 10 years to improve on this bad personality trait. While I continue to improve, I am sure a 20-year return on investment is not the result anyone is looking for. You want to see improvement today, not years from now.

The next area that is popular with sales training is the sales process. Again, the end customer is the VP of sales. One of their main responsibilities is to forecast accurately at a company level. Forecast accuracy is vital to the running of any company. Companies need to execute on business planning, and Wall Street is looking for revenue expectations. A good process should

- Help the sales force forecast more accurately.
- Drive proper selling behavior.

Most processes on the market are so cumbersome that management stops using them. However, at the end of the day, most companies hold on to old processes to justify the massive investment in tools. Salespeople are stuck using just the reporting aspects of the process, but selling productivity seldom increases.

This example highlights the issue of training focused in the wrong area.

## The Charles Barkley Effect

A perfect example of the difficulty of overcoming ego is The Haney Project. Hank Haney is considered the one of the best golf instructors in the world. He has a television series on the Golf Channel, and each season, he takes one amateur and works with them to improve their golf game.

The first season is a classic. His amateur is ex-NBA star Charles Barkley. Charles's "natural" swing is horrid. He has glitches, stops in the middle of the down swing, and literally looks like he is going fall over every time he swings a golf club. (If you want see this swing, take, Google "Charles Barkley + golf swing." Hank teaches the skill—how to swing the club—like we try to teach sales skills. They go to the driving range and practice and practice until Charles has a decently smooth swing. This practice is like sales role play. Then they go back on the golf course (the sales call), where the swing needs to produce results, and where there are consequences. What happens? The same horrid swing reemerges, as do your day-to-day sales skills. Why? Because under pressure, the subconscious mind takes over. The same thing happens to selling skills when you get back in front of a customer.

## Skills vs. Strategy

Selling skills are of course important. Improper selling skills will hinder your ability to execute some of the fundamental strategies in this book. But let me be clear: the quickest road to better sales results is by shifting your strategy.

And that's exactly what this book shows you how to do. It has some selling techniques, some skills training, and some process, but majority is based on a strategy *anyone* can implement. Let's go back to the golf example. If you are an amateur golfer, you can spend months on the driving range with a golf pro, and maybe see a one- or two-stroke improvement. Or, you can go buy Jack Nicklaus's book, *Golf My Way*, which teaches nothing but shot preparation and golf course management. You learn how to aim at the right location, how to set up for the golf swing, how to aim away from trouble, which holes to attack, and which holes to play cautiously. He teaches you how to get the most out of your game regardless of your skill level. With these new strategies, you will see a five-six stroke improvement your first time back out on the golf course. And, they do not require you to improve your golf swing at all. This is the difference between strategy and skill.

You can work the strategies in this book in conjunction with the more popular methods like *Solution Selling* or the *Challenger Sale*. As with golf, I want the quick strategies to help my game *today*. But, I also continually work on the skills and methods that will improve my game in the long run. I believe you should do this as well.

## You Picked the Right Book

If you want to sell more, you have picked up the right book. It will not require you to deal with uncomfortable role play. It will not require you to change how you talk to your customers. It will not require you to change how you sell. The strategies it contains do not require you to change your personality. Instead, they help change the focus of your efforts, and they produce results.

Specifically, this book is intended to teach you the correct methods for gaining access and getting the all-important first order with new customers. You learn how to start building trust before you meet with the customer, how to engage new customers, how to message, how to identify real opportunities you can close, win new customers, and how to keep these customers for life.

## Roadmap to the Book

Here is what you will learn from this book:

- The major obstacles that plague most salespeople trying to acquire new accounts
- How customers make purchasing decisions
- A sales process to align with the buyer
- How focusing strictly on opportunity will sabotage your success
- Skills and strategies for qualifying customers and opportunities
- Which prospects are worth your time, and which ones to cut loose
- Which products and services in your portfolio will give the greatest odds of success
- How to identify prospects who are ready to buy today
- How to become the trusted, and therefore the preferred, vendor for potential opportunities
- How to manage and forecast opportunities
- How to keep won customers indefinitely

In short, you will learn how to win and keep new customers through proper strategy.

Let's get started.

**Disclaimer:** This book is an abridgement of my first book, *Sales Hunting*. This is a scaled-down version that concentrates on the basics of sales, not hunting (opening up new territory) specifically. We cut out chapters to make the book more streamlined for today's busy professional. The chapters that remain were taken almost verbatim from *Sales Hunting*. If by chance you have bought both books, please contact me and we'll come up with an accommodation.