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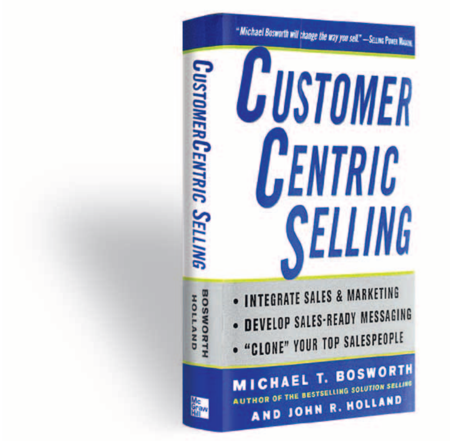

By Michael T. Bosworth and John R. Holland

Integrate Sales and Marketing, Develop Sales-Ready Messaging, and 'Clone' Your Top Salespeople

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC SELLING

CONTENTS

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Even if you are the best salesperson in your company, you could be even better. Forget everything you think you know about selling products to buyers — the rules are changing, and it's about time.

In CustomerCentric Selling, *sales experts Michael T. Bosworth and John R. Holland lay out a new approach to sales, one in which salespeople stop forcing products on buyers and start listening to their goals, problems and needs. Stop giving your "expert" opinion on why a buyer should snap up your products, and start engaging decision makers in business conversations that yield results.* CustomerCentric Selling *will help you stop working inefficiently, and start moving toward better, longer, more mutually beneficial relationships with your customers.*

What You'll Learn In This Summary

✓ **Sales are conversations.** Selling at its best consists of a series of conversations with buyers, during which the seller uncovers and understands the buyer's needs, problems, desires and goals.

✓ **Selling is most effective when the seller uses consistent messages.** The most successful customer-centric organizations use Sales-Ready Messaging — a way of approaching a sales conversation that greatly increases the chances of success.

✓ **Pipelines need to be flushed now and then.** Organizations must qualify buyers, disqualify others, and develop a smoother, more efficient pipeline.

✓ **You should negotiate from a position of strength.** Negotiation is the logical conclusion to a well-planned, well-executed sales cycle, one for which salespeople and their managers must prepare well.

✓ **Forecasting should be a science.** Sales managers must remove subjectivity from forecasting to more accurately reflect business opportunities.

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CUSTOMERCENTRIC SELLING

by Michael T. Bosworth and John R. Holland

— THE *COMPLETE* SUMMARY

What Is Customer-Centric Selling?

Customer-centric behavior has the following seven basic tenets that set it apart from more traditional selling behavior:

1. Having situational conversations versus making presentations. Traditional salespeople rely on making presentations because they believe this approach gives them the opportunity to add excitement to an offering with snazzy visuals and the supposed innovative use of such presentation tools as PowerPoint. Such dramatics, however, are unnecessary. In order to be effective, a salesperson must be able to relate his or her offering to the buyer in a way that will enable the buyer to visualize using the offering to satisfy his or her needs. The most effective way to determine those needs is through honest conversations with the buyer.

2. Asking relevant questions versus offering opinions. People love to buy, but hate feeling sold to. Most salespeople come to a vision of the buyer's problem before the buyer does, usually to the buyer's chagrin. Customer-centric salespeople use their expertise to frame interesting and helpful questions, rather than to deliver opinions, drawing out of the buyer a realization of his or her needs, and building toward a more useful solution.

Earn the Buyer's Respect

3. Solution-focused versus relationship-focused. Salespeople who are not trained to converse with decision makers about product usage gravitate toward focusing on their relationship with their buyers, which can be fleeting, depending on the product and market. In situations where the buyer is attempting to satisfy a need, the successful seller must first earn the buyer's respect by knowing how his or her wares can provide a solution to that need.

4. Targeting businesspeople versus gravitating toward users. Traditional salespeople gravitate toward the users of their products, while customer-centric salespeople target business decision makers. Most traditional salespeople can talk a great deal about a product's features, but very little about how it is used in day-to-day applications. Customer-centric sellers, conversely, focus on how to use a product and what results can be expected, and how much it costs versus the benefits it presents.

5. Relating product usage versus relying on product. Traditional salespeople educate buyers about a product, and assume buyers will know how to apply the product's features to meet their needs. Customer-centric sellers are able to relate conversationally with buyers about product usage.

Monitor Progress When Necessary

6. Managing their managers versus needing to be managed. Traditional sales managers monitor activity, rather than progress; they are promoted to management positions, in part, because they were good salespeople — management skills are rarely used as criteria for promotion. Managers of customer-centric salespeople, on the other hand, must only monitor their charges' progress and, when necessary, provide company resources to help them make a sale.

7. Empowering buyers versus attempting to sell them. Selling is not about persuasion, pressure or coercion; it is about empowerment. A seller's objective, going into a new customer relationship, should be to help the buyer solve a problem, satisfy a need, or achieve a goal. The difference between the two sales approaches is fundamental. ■

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Opinions — The Fuel That Drives Corporations

Opinions play an important role in our personal and professional lives. When organizations need to make important decisions, most hire experts who become familiar with their situation and make suggestions on how to remedy their problems. Not everyone's opinion is of equal value; as you look further down the corporate food chain or line of command, the power of individual opinions to shape policy drops off sharply.

The exception to this rule is often the sales function. Without necessarily understanding that they're doing so, companies tend to rely on the opinions of traditional salespeople to build pipelines, create forecasts, and deliver revenue. This can spell disaster for firms whose sales departments cannot deliver according to plan.

Sales Versus 'Tactical Marketing'

In many cases, the job of positioning offerings is, by default, the job of the individual salesperson, a situation that often results in inconsistency of message from one salesperson to another, regardless of how much a company has invested in "tactical marketing" (literature, brochures, advertising, Web sites, and so forth). Indeed, companies that cannot bridge the gap between tactical marketing and sales are often at the mercy of the opinions of their salespeople. Very few of these salespeople are capable of overcoming the lack of marketing support and taking a genuinely customer-centric approach to each sale — positioning offerings according to buyers' needs.

Consider, then, how much the opinions of underprepared, underwhelming salespeople are responsible for how businesses predict their future incomes. After a brief, often misdirected training effort, new salespeople are asked to immediately begin volunteering opinions. They must first condense their understanding of the company's offerings into a coherent message for buyers. They must provide their opinions of what accounts and titles to call once in a given territory; which accounts should be in their pipelines; what accounts will close, when and why; what prospects will be lost and why; and what enhancements to offerings are needed to improve win rates.

That's a lot to require of anyone's opinions, particularly those of traditional salespeople. Reports are only as good as the quality of the input that goes into them. When the sales process is flawed, sales forecasting is virtually meaningless. Allowing salespeople to forecast sales abdicates control to people whose mission is to justify their jobs, not to predict which opportunities will actually close. Without a good process, opinions rule.

Some companies succeed anyway, without a workable structure, but often not for long. Traditional salespeople tend to "wing it" in one-to-one meetings with prospective customers, launching into a "here's what you need" product pitch, regardless of what the prospect tells them. This creates problems on several levels:

- Most people do not like to be told what to do or think.
- When assaulted by a so-called "spray and pray" sales pitch, buyers will realize there are features of the product they do not need.
- The salesperson in question displays a lack of understanding of the buyer's current environment and future needs.

'Winging It' in Management

As if this were not bad enough, those who manage sales forces are often ill-suited for the job. Companies tend to promote their top-performing sellers into these positions, regardless of whether these people possess the appropriate skills required to teach customer centricity to others. These managers have often "winged it" much of their careers and don't know what has made them successful: It was intuitive. They've never broken down their success into teachable components. ■

Sales-Ready Messaging

Selling at its best and most customer-centric consists of a series of conversations with buyers, during which the seller uncovers and understands the buyer's needs, problems, desires and goals. As the salesperson learns about the buyer's circumstances, he or she also begins to position the company's offerings.

Selling organizations want to influence and steer these conversations. To converse effectively with a buyer, these three conditions must be known by the seller:

- Knowledge of the buyer's title and vertical industry.
- The willingness of a buyer to articulate a business goal or admit a problem that can be addressed.
- The capability of the seller's offerings to help the targeted buyer achieve a goal, solve a problem, or satisfy a need.

Given these three conditions, organizations can create Sales-Ready Messaging — a way of approaching a sales conversation that greatly increases the chances of success. The most effective way of creating Sales-Ready Messaging can be broken down into four major steps:

1. Document titles and goals. Make a list of your vertical industries, and for each industry, jot down the titles or functions a salesperson is likely to call on to get your offering sold, funded and implemented. For each

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Sales-Ready Messaging

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of the job titles listed, write down what goals or business objectives those in that function should have, and note which goals are addressable through the use of your product or service. Each goal listed should be a business variable that your company's offering can help a particular title achieve. Creating this list sets the stage for Targeted Conversations the seller will have with potential buyers as the relationship moves forward.

2. Create Solution Development Prompters. The next step is to develop questioning templates, called Solution Development Prompters (SDPs). These templates are the core content of a company's Sales-Ready Messaging, constituting a kind of road map for a salesperson — a tool he or she can use to lead a specific job title to a specific vision of using the company's offering to achieve a specific goal. If, in a Targeted Conversation, a seller can approach a call with a clear idea of who he or she is talking to, and where he or she hopes the conversation will wind up, the chances of success increase considerably.

The role of the salesperson is to become a buying facilitator by leading the buyer with questions that are biased toward a particular offering. SDPs help develop "buyer visions" that are biased in favor of your offering.

3. Create your Sales-Ready Messaging. Once you create your Targeted Conversations list for a given offering, you are ready to create Sales-Ready Messaging in the form of SDPs, by assembling four components:

- **Offering.** A specific product or service.
- **Industry.** The industry category (for example, Fortune 500 company) to which the buyer belongs.
- **Title.** The title of the contact with whom you will engage in a Targeted Conversation.
- **Goal.** The overall outcome you want to communicate to the buyer.

4. Position your offerings. With the goal you have identified in mind, you can present all the features of your product or service that can be used to achieve this goal. As you do, keep in mind the perspective of the contact — a CEO, for example, will have different interests than a lower-level executive. The detail with which you discuss specific features of your offering must be adjusted according to audience. You can use SDPs to create "real world" examples that illustrate how your offering will help the buyer achieve a goal.

If properly prepared, SDPs provide a more consistent positioning of offerings by all salespeople, and should help your sales effort overall. ■

For Additional Information on Solution Development Prompters, go to: http://my.summary.com

Additional Considerations For SDPs

There are a few additional things to consider when creating Solution Development Prompters (SDPs):

✓ They get easier to prepare after you have created your first few, because some usage scenarios can be recycled for multiple Targeted Conversations.

✓ The true test of an SDP is whether it can be used in making a call. If it can't, it must be modified.

✓ At executive levels, anticipate that a salesperson has 15 to 20 minutes, or less, to have a discussion, which limits the number of usage scenarios one can use in the conversation.

✓ SDPs are dynamic, not static, and must be updated over time. Sales-Ready Messaging is a journey, not a destination.

Core Concepts of CustomerCentric Selling

CustomerCentric Selling reframes the concept of selling, empowering sellers to execute Sales-Ready Messaging to help buyers visualize using their offerings to achieve a goal, solve a problem, or satisfy a need. This reframing is accomplished via a set of core concepts of the CustomerCentric Selling approach.

The first concept is that *you get delegated to the people you sound like.* If a traditional salesperson proves capable enough to get an audience with a decision maker, and he or she merely presents product features and functions to someone with no interest in those things, the salesperson will get delegated to someone else in the company who has a similar interest in features and functions, but who has no authority to make a purchase.

Diagnose Before You Prescribe

Take the time to diagnose before offering a prescription. Physicians will ask patients a series of questions and put them through a diagnostic process before offering medication. Why should selling be any different? The ability to ask intelligent diagnostic questions of a buyer is a key differentiator between great salespeople and traditional ones.

In today's competitive environment, a salesperson must be sincere and competent just to get the opportunity to compete. Customer-centric salespeople ensure buyers retain ownership of their goals, problems and needs — this helps the seller maintain credibility that would be lost if he or she were to give a "here's what you need" speech without asking the buyer any questions.

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Core Concepts of CustomerCentric Selling

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Don't give without getting. Negotiation is not an event — it's a process, and nearly every sale involves some sort of negotiation. Each side should take a "quid pro quo" approach — getting something in return for giving something. When this is established early in the selling relationship, sellers can become more effective negotiators and deliver more profitable business.

Bad News Can Be Good News

You can't sell to someone who can't buy. Sellers must get to the person who can spend budgeted funds. Ideally, your prospect is both a user of your product and the head of a department that has money budgeted to make a purchase.

Bad news early is good news. Some salespeople engage in extraordinarily long sales cycles, in part because the buyer is merely going through the motions, practicing due diligence on multiple vendors even though he or she already has a vendor in mind. If you are not the predetermined vendor, however, bad news early is good news — finding out quickly that you have no real shot at the business gives you the chance to pull up stakes and pursue other winnable opportunities.

No goal means no prospect. When first meeting a buyer, the salesperson's focus should be to build rapport and trust — without these things, a buyer is less likely to share goals or admit problems. A sales cycle cannot begin until the buyer shares a goal with the seller, at which time the seller can ask questions and empower the buyer with scenarios to understand what can be achieved with the product. Without a goal, there can be no solution development, and, therefore, no prospect.

People are best convinced by reasons they discover themselves. When the selling process is strong, sellers can let buyers reach their own conclusions. In the process of answering the seller's questions, buyers are able to discover their own reasons that prevent them from achieving a specific business result.

When selling, your expertise can become your enemy. Once you know something, it is difficult to have patience with or empathy for people who don't know what you know. If a salesperson is tempted to use his or her expertise without consulting the buyer about his or her goals or problems, the seller would be better suited not having that expertise. Without it, he or she would ask more questions, and spend less time pontificating or trying to convince the buyer to make a purchase.

It's Not a Solution Until the Buyer Says It Is

The only person who can call it a solution is the buyer. The seller cannot and should not define a solution — that is up to the buyer only. The seller can help the buyer get there, but he or she can't get there first.

Make yourself equal, then make yourself different — or you'll just be different. When asked to differentiate a product from a competitor's offering, sellers need to respond with the question, "What do you hope to accomplish?" If the buyer responds with a goal, the sale can proceed from there. Before differentiating an offering, sellers must get on equal footing with a prospect from a personal, competence and capability standpoint.

Emotional decisions are justified by value and logic. Buying is an emotional act, but one that must be entered into with logic and thought. Salespeople need to be prepared to deal with both logic and emotion. A buyer might make an emotional decision to purchase a product, but should be armed with the logical reasons behind that purchase so he or she can defend it to a superior.

Don't close before the buyer is ready. Once a seller closes a deal with a buyer, their relationship will never be the same. Sellers should make sure they understand the buyer's goals, and how they can be achieved through the use of the product. The seller must understand the buyer's current situation, and how he or she can help the buyer justify the cost of the purchasing decision. ■

Justifying Emotional Decisions

A man bought a very expensive, beautiful, fun-to-drive German car. When asked why he purchased it, he used several different points as his rationale: It will be a classic, it will go up in value, and it has an aluminum body that will never rust. These were all logical reasons, but the truth is, he bought the car because he loved it at first sight, wanted to drive it, and felt he looked more handsome driving it. If a close friend asked him why he bought the car, the emotional reason would flow along with the question, "Don't I look good in it?" If a stranger asked, most likely the logical reasons would be offered.

If a buyer answers to no one and doesn't care what others think, he or she can buy strictly on emotion. Most people, however, need some kind of logic to explain to peers, superiors, subordinates and friends why they made a given purchase. Salespeople need to be ready to sell to both logic and emotion.

Qualifying Buyers

Many organizations are slowed down or otherwise hampered by inefficiencies in their sales pipelines. Basically, they have no standard way of accurately assessing which prospects are likely to buy. Sales managers need to work with their salespeople to qualify

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Qualifying Buyers

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buyers, disqualify others, and develop a smoother, more efficient pipeline. Sellers need to identify and qualify the Key Players whom a seller must access in order to sell, fund and implement a product or service offering.

Foremost among Key Players are Champions who provide access to other Key Players, as requested by the salesperson, and who can be found at any level within the prospect organization. Ideally, the Champion is also a decision maker who is willing to provide access to those below him or her in the organizational hierarchy. Such top-down access is always preferred.

Qualifying a Champion

One key element of CustomerCentric Selling is the identification and qualification of a Champion, often by a letter, fax or e-mail, composed by both the salesperson and his or her manager. This Champion letter should:

- Provide a sanity check for salespeople to verify they understand the buyer's goals, situation and vision.
- Serve as a reminder to the buyer of a previous conversation with the salesperson.
- Facilitate internal selling by providing the Champion with prospect-ready messaging.

Following Up

Once a Champion letter has been sent, the salesperson must follow up on that communication in order to get the buyer's agreement to the following points:

- The letter accurately summarizes their conversation(s).
- The buyer is willing and able to provide access to the appropriate Key Players.
- After interviewing all Key Players, there will be a chance to gain consensus that further evaluation is warranted.

Phone conversations or face-to-face sales calls can commence once the Champion has agreed to provide access to Key Players. When meeting with Key Players, the salesperson should make sure everyone understands the potential benefits to the organization, should they agree to buy. Spreading the word to several Key Players provides the seller with multiple points of contact in the organization, which can be helpful if one of those players leaves the prospective company. If there is a strong Adversary, he or she will be identified early enough for the seller to determine how to best circumnavigate him or her. If the Adversary is strong enough to withstand these efforts, the seller may make the decision to withdraw from the sale, rather than go the distance and lose.

Defining the Key Players

Aside from Champions, salespeople and their managers must also be aware of these other Key Players with important roles in a client relationship:

✓ **Coaches** want the seller to win the business, and are willing to assist with information and inside selling, but they have limited authority within the organization.

✓ **Decision makers** can make the vendor selection and free up unbudgeted funds. They can commit internal resources to evaluate a seller's offerings.

✓ **Financial approvers** are those who must sign off on expenditures — either by rubber-stamping a purchase or by being actively involved in the purchasing process.

✓ **Users and managers of users** can provide a groundswell of support with the rank-and-file members of a given organization.

✓ **Implementers** are responsible for migrating from the current method or environment to the new offering. They often prefer to work with vendors who offer professional services and ongoing support.

✓ **Adversaries** are individuals who either do not want to change, want to control change internally, or want to do business with a competitor.

Walking Away

Sellers must always be willing to walk away from a sales opportunity if it becomes clear that that opportunity is not winnable. This fact is anathema to most traditional salespeople, whose focus is to keep a full pipeline. If that pipeline is clogged with business that will never reach fruition, however, it is of little use to an efficient sales organization.

Some salespeople are afraid to withdraw a proposal and walk away from an opportunity. However, the two most likely results are:

1. The buyer does not call back. Ultimately, it is better to get rid of blockages in your pipeline, have a realistic view of what winnable opportunities exist, and arrive at the appropriate business plan to develop those winnable opportunities.

2. The buyer calls back and asks why the proposal has been withdrawn. This is an opportunity to determine whether the buyer wants to buy, or would be interested in making changes to the proposal and trying to see if a favorable decision can be reached. If given a second chance, the seller can now focus on helping the buyer understand how to use the offering to achieve goals or solve problems. ■

Negotiation: The Final Hurdle

Most sellers will tell you they are outstanding negotiators — even if their approach to "negotiating" is to keep discounting until the buyer says, "Yes." If a sales cycle has been executed properly, though, the close should be a logical conclusion, rather than an arm-wrestling contest or a fire sale. When it comes to negotiating, there are no magic bullets; salespeople must be prepared and must stick to their game plans. That preparation includes these key components:

● **You must verify that you are the vendor of choice, and that price is the only obstacle to doing business.** Sellers, on their own, often have trouble verifying they are the top choice. This is just how the buyer wants it — to put the seller in a perceived competition with other sellers.

● **You must make certain you are negotiating with a decision maker.** If you are not, you can consider any concessions you make to be mere starting points for when the real decision maker comes into the picture.

Getting to 'Yes' Through 'No'

● **You must posture by using polite "no" questions to respond to requests for better pricing.** Some examples of these questions might be, "Is there anything you would like to take out of the agreement?" or, perhaps, "We've spent a lot of time discussing how to [remedy a problem or help achieve a goal]. Has anything changed?" Some buyers will agree to go forward after one, two or three of these polite "no" questions. This posturing provides artificial patience during a stressful point, maximizing the possibility of a profitable transaction.

Giving and Getting

● **You should ask the buyer whether the "get" you want is possible.** Establish an atmosphere of quid pro quo. Prior to giving, the seller should first ask for something from the buyer. If the seller offers a concession, the buyer will take it and still want a lower price. Also, the psychology is to convince the buyer that he or she is getting the best possible deal. If the buyer makes the first concession, the seller's concessions appear even more valuable.

● **You should offer your conditional "give" and be prepared to walk if the offer does not close at that point.** You should, of course, also leave the door open for further rounds, but only after taking your concession off the table. There are many things a seller can ask for — money up front, a larger transaction or a longer commitment, and even an introduction to another department, enabling the seller to pursue more business. ■

Referrals — Qualification Via Customers

Satisfied customers represent an enormous untapped asset for customer-centric sales organizations. People who have made a buying decision have the tendency to conclude they've made a wise choice and are willing to tell others about it — thus providing sellers with a potential source of new prospective buyers. Why do vendors not take advantage of customer referrals often enough?

✓ They neglect to ask for referrals.

✓ They fail to ask for a "warm" referral — one in which the customer acts as a conduit between the seller and a new prospect.

✓ They make no attempt to find out from customers what specific business goals or problems the prospect might be facing.

✓ They fail to share with the prospect the success story involving their customer — the one that helped bring them together in the first place.

Getting Forecasting Right

Salespeople tend to dislike forecasting, because, in most cases, they are being asked to lie in writing. They know all too well that their forecasts will bear little or no resemblance to the numbers they really generate. In fact, the major value of forecasting is that it gives under-performing salespeople a wake-up call every month that there are inadequate opportunities in their pipelines, encouraging them to increase their business-development activities.

Where sales managers often err is by not removing salespeople from the forecasting process — it simply must be done. To make forecasting more accurately reflective of business opportunities, a number of complementary components are necessary:

1. Sales-Ready Messaging, designed to position offerings specific to title, vertical industry, and goal, which provides less subjective input into the pipeline.

2. Auditable correspondence between seller and buyer.

3. Sequences of events containing estimated close dates, as negotiated with the buyer.

4. Company-wide milestones, with defined ways to achieve and document them.

5. Sales managers who are willing and able to audit milestones, grade pipelines, disqualify low-probability opportunities, and predict what will close.

6. Senior executive commitment to ride through potential "push back" from salespeople and sales managers who prefer less visibility and accountability.

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Getting Forecasting Right

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Grading Opportunities

To provide the kind of analyses required to maintain healthy pipelines, sales managers must have a system in place to grade opportunities. Consider these categories:

- **Inactive.** The account fits a target market and is assigned to a salesperson, but there's no current activity.
- **Active.** Contact has been made and some interest from the customer or prospect has been expressed.
- **Goal Shared.** This is the initiation of the sales cycle when a targeted Key Player has shared a desire to achieve at least one goal that the seller can help address.
- **Champion.** This status can be granted only by the sales manager, and only after the prospect has been thoroughly qualified.
- **Evaluating.** This status is determined by the sales manager, but only after the salesperson has gained consensus from Key Players that further investigation of the salesperson's offering is called for. Opportunities remain in this status until the buyer withdraws, the seller withdraws, or the seller asks for the business after all events in the sales sequence have been completed.

Wins, Losses, Verbals and Proposals

Once the seller has asked for the business, the opportunity registers one of four grades:

- **Win.** An order with all necessary documents signed.
- **Loss.** The buyer informs you that he or she will not be moving forward with you.
- **Verbal.** The buyer has given you a verbal commitment to go forward.
- **Proposal.** A proposal is provided to the prospect with a decision due.

By implementing this system, managers can detect early-warning signs that a given opportunity is stalled or in trouble. They can forecast by reading each salesperson's report on the sequence of events for each opportunity. With this system in place, forecasting becomes a monthly review of the pipeline, with sales managers selecting opportunities that are likely to close, and affording themselves the opportunity to be proactive with procrastinating sales reps. ■

Why Do Salespeople Fail to Close?

So many salespeople view the sales cycle as a mystery, just as they view selling opportunities as mysteries when they don't lead to a closed sale. There are any number of reasons individual sellers have trouble closing. Among them are the following:

✓ Most closing is driven by the agenda of the sales organization, with little or no regard for the buyer. Under pressure to meet targets, many organizations resort to business "blitzes" to close sales, based on those internal pressures.

✓ The vast majority of closing occurs before the salesperson has earned the right to ask for the buyer's business. When sellers make this error, they run the risk of being perceived as a pushy traditional salesperson or scaring the buyer off entirely.

✓ If a salesperson closes before a buyer is ready, he or she has likely discounted the products in an effort to earn an early signing. In some instances, the discount offered to non-decision makers becomes the starting point for the real negotiations.

Upgrading Sales Activity

As sales managers are increasingly proactive in analyzing pipelines, they can also influence and upgrade the quality of activity. To do so, they must break down selling into seven essential skills: (1) new business development, (2) solution development, (3) opportunity qualification and control, (4) proof management, (5) access to Key Players, (6) negotiation and closing, and (7) monitoring success metrics. These are skills that come into play at different times in the buying cycle.

For example, if a salesperson has an insufficient number of new business opportunities flowing into his or her pipeline, his or her manager will recognize the problem as one of business development. In response, a proactive customer-centric manager could do the following:

- Ask to see letters, faxes and e-mails that the salesperson uses to generate interest. The manager can help design more effective documents and/or strategy.
- Ask the seller to spend some time with a more successful peer. It may be appropriate for the struggling rep to listen to successful phone calls, witness successful lead development practices, and see successful approaches to the sales cycle.
- Role-play being a buyer taking a prospective call from the sales rep.

Blockages in getting prospects from Active status to Champion status might point to a lack of skill in getting buyers to share goals. The manager, subsequently, can spend time reviewing the following things:

- The goals for each Key Player the seller is using.
- The success stories used to take a buyer from latent need to sharing a goal.
- The approaches used to get the buyer to share goals or admit problems.

By using such techniques, sales managers can contribute to the improvement of their sales staff, all the while keeping their pipelines visible and predictable. ■