
Chapter 4

The Technology Salesperson's Toolkit

No one has to tell you how even a phrase or question at the right moment can change everything. You already know many approaches and techniques; this section will add even more to your toolkit.

These are all tested and proven – they come from my work with thousands of technology sales professionals. You will learn ways to stay important, how to make references pay off, specifics for selling emerging technologies and how to reach even ‘unreachable’ executives.

Throughout, you will find Words That Work that you can adapt in your sales situations.

Knowing more techniques means having more options in challenging sales situations. I’m sure you will use these time and again – but the beauty of knowing more is that the first time one delivers a single incremental sale, you already have a great ROI.

Serving Up Services

Customers see services differently than they view hardware or software. While all three come under the same 'technology umbrella', you need to focus on different things when selling services.

Why is this? From the customer's point of view:

Services are *Really Intangible*: More so than software or hardware. The customer can't hold services, can't peek under the hood, can't easily compare them with other models.

Services are Far Less Predictable: Unlike hardware or software, services don't come off an assembly line. There are no manuals to read, no objective reviews to bring confidence.

Quality Assurance is Impossible: While manufactured products go through extensive quality assurance, there's no such equivalent with services.

Services are Inconsistent: Every piece of hardware or software that comes off the production line is identical. But services depend on which individual is working on your project today and tomorrow.

Services are all about people. When a customer is buying services, they're really buying your company.

That means the quality of services hinges on what individuals know and can do, and how effectively and quickly they can do it.

This, in turn, means your services sale hinges on how well you convey and differentiate that knowledge and competence.

It also explains why customers remain cautious even despite the often-heard claim, *“What makes us unique? Oh, we’ve got the best people!”**

When I work with sales teams, here are some of the things we cover and practice:

Sell Your People

And don't be shy about it. Don't just say that you've got highly trained people. Such empty claims can be made by your competitors.

Instead, make your technical experts real – have the customer feel like he or she already knows them. Tell a brief story about how one of them made an impact at a customer. Name names, and convey pride in how their training and experience made a hero at that account.

Detail Where Their Expertise Comes From

Talk about where they've been and what they've seen. Talk up the complex projects they've handled masterfully. If yours is a smaller company, and some of your people worked previously at well known large system integrators, you might want to mention it. Talk about the ongoing training they get and any conferences they attend.

Have a Kicker

Don't just say they did a good job at an account – point out something they noticed and improved that went beyond the call of duty.

Here an example of how **Flexible Business Systems** does that when selling to small businesses. The salesperson might explain the case

* Customers rightfully ask themselves: If every services company claims they have “the best people”, then where do all the mediocre ones work?

where their technical people solved an intermittent router problem that had previously been 'unsolvable' by other companies.

Then they add this kicker: While on the project, their folks went beyond the call of duty and checked the data plan that customer had with the phone company. They determined it was far more than that company needed. Because of this, that customer changed their plan with the phone company and immediately began saving \$600 every month – over \$7,000 every year..

If you were a small business owner, isn't that the kind of care and expert initiative you'd want?

Use the Halo Effect

It can be valuable to briefly mention some very complex projects your people have done at big companies, even to customers whose needs are far more humble. It brings great confidence to know such mastery will be brought to work on their projects.

Make your services personal – highlight the individuals, make the customer feel for their accomplishments and professionalism. This is what the customer needs to differentiate your company and move ahead with confidence.

References, Premature

"Well can you give me a few references I can talk to?"

It's such an easy question to ask – even on a first meeting, even if they're not really serious. Who knows, they may even think it's the polite or expected thing to do.

Careful here. At this early point, how relevant are the comments of a total stranger? Not very. Besides, this prospect isn't far enough along in the process to even know what to ask that reference.

References at the wrong time, even great ones, can actually slow down a sale. Don't allow them to come into play too early. Even when the time is right, you shouldn't just hand over their contact information; doing so creates three problems:

1. Tired References

References are a limited resource. Even if I am your biggest fan, at a certain point I've had enough of talking to strangers for you. If I feel I'm wasting my time doing this, I cease being that reference for you.

2. Lost Opportunities

Will they actually connect up and talk? Often, they won't. Your prospect calls me and leaves a message. I call back and leave another message. Or I forget. Either way your sale is not moving ahead.

3. Not Impressed

Customers rarely like to talk about their past inefficiencies, or may be using your technology to gain a competitive advantage. As such, comments may be vague. Your prospect is unimpressed. You don't know what happened; all you know is that the prospect is not returning your calls.

Toughest Questions, Never Fearing

If you sell technology, you're going to get surprised. It's not a matter of if; it's just a question of when.

No matter how well trained or brilliant you may be, there will be times when you hear a question that has you fumbling. So don't beat yourself up too much when it happens.

But, as the saying goes, you don't learn much the *second* time you get kicked by a mule.

When a question surprises you, decide at that very moment that this will be the last time that particular question will ever be a problem for you.

After that interaction, ask whomever in your company might know the best answer. Don't be shy about it; I would ask other salespeople or my boss, *"I was caught off guard when a prospect asked ... I want to be masterful next time anyone poses that. What do you think is the best way to handle that?"*

Learn everything you can, craft a terrific approach to take the next time that question comes up. Practice and master your answer.

Then the next time that question comes up, you're set. The hardest thing you'll have to do is stifle a knowing smile because you're so ready to knock this out of the ballpark.

Selling When Attacked

There will be times when you find yourself in a meeting where someone is trying their hardest to undermine you and your solution.

Maybe they're biased towards another vendor or are showing off for someone else in the meeting. It could be a game to them or a negotiating ploy.

Whatever the reason – and you will probably never know – you are in an awkward spot. If you directly rebut them, they may see it as a personal attack. Proving them wrong may win the moment but lose the sale.

You're stuck. If you don't try something new right now, this will be your last meeting with them. Here's a tack to take:

Words That Work:

"I'm hearing a lot of concerns. On one hand, that's good; it means you're looking for the right solution for your company. On the other, I'm not sure it's good for any relationship we might have for us to be having such a challenging discussion."

Pause for a second, to collect your thoughts.

"If it's okay with you, I'd like to briefly raise a point, then ask you all a question."

Pause again; you're awaiting permission. That's important. It's their conversation too, and you're asking if it's okay to come at it in a different way. You will quickly get a nod or comment that it's okay; I've never been in a situation where it wasn't allowed.

Words That Work:

"The point is this. While I'm not saying it automatically means we're right for you, as you probably know we have been chosen by companies like ..., ... and"

Quickly rattle off three companies they will recognize. It might be companies the same size, in the same industry, or in their area.

Then:

"Now most people would agree these aren't all foolish companies. They've got sharp people who looked long and hard and then decided to do business with us. It's been a good experience; I can connect you up with the key people over there if you'd like."

"In the time we have left in this meeting, is there any way we can focus on the good things our solution is doing for them and other companies, and would be able to do for you?"

Once you pose that, there's only a limited number of outcomes.

1. They will remain contentious.

This is hard to do, since you've offered an olive branch to defuse the acrimony. You've also pointed out how other companies somehow didn't see all these shortcomings. If they stay in fighting mode, it's likely there's a hidden agenda here; you never really had a chance.

2. Someone in the meeting will agree to change the tone.

Usually it's the highest ranking person in the meeting. You've made it easy for the meeting to return to civility and move ahead.

You'll hear a comment along the lines of, *"Well, we will need to explore those areas at some point, but for now, why not tell us more about what you're doing for (one of the companies you'd mentioned)."*

It's a great feeling. You've just saved the meeting, and maybe the sale.

Competing Against “Free!”

Competing against a cheaper competitor is easy – but what about one that's free?

That was the problem that **ATG** faced when technology giant SAP began offering a competing portal product at no cost.

I had worked with ATG before, teaching their sales teams in the North America, Europe and Asia.* This portal product was a strategic one for them. It was priced attractively; no serious prospect would balk at the cost. But when a huge company like SAP dangles one for free, that changes everything.

The real problem here for the customer isn't about the money – it's about *explaining*. What do you say if a senior manager asks why you want to spend money on something that appears similar to one that an industry giant will provide at no charge?

If you can't confidently answer that question, you are going to choose the free one.

It's tempting for the salesperson to dive in listing reasons why that free one isn't as good. That may be the case, but it doesn't address the problem their prospect is facing. If he or she is challenged internally, listing technical details will likely bring, “*Are you saying SAP's won't do most of the things we need?*” Not a good spot to be in.

* See ‘Follow the Money’, Chapter 2

What's the Real Cost of Free?

Let's role play. I'm the salesperson, and you've just told me,
"I do like your portal technology, but SAP will give us theirs for free."

You see me pause to take that in; it's clear that I'm thinking about it. Then I look across the table and earnestly ask you:

Words That Work:

"Hmm. Why do you think they're doing that? I mean, why would a company like them choose to value their portal that way?"

Then I don't say another word. What is going through your head?

As the customer, you can't help thinking – and in this case, saying aloud – reasons like:

- *"It could be because their portal has flaws and that no one was willing to pay for it."*
- *"Either that or they're going to make the money up, and more, with services."*
- *"Or choosing it might somehow lock us into buying additional things from them."*
- *"Or..."*

The key here is that these are the customer's insights – not arguments given by a salesperson. That's important; it brings great confidence. Should anyone inside their organization ask, *"Why not get the free one?"*, all they have to do is think out loud again.

This thinking on the part of your contact changes everything. Now, anyone who suggests choosing the freebie is taking a personal risk – it's up to them to make a very compelling case for accepting a free product and whatever strings may later be found to be attached to it.

“We Need You to Lower Your Price”

“We like you, but I have to tell you. We have another resource whose price is lower. You’re not the cheapest, and price is important to us.”

It’s awkward whenever a prospect you’ve been working with tries to get you to lower your price.* If this squeeze comes from a manager in a meeting where you are outnumbered, it is even more problematic.

What do you do?

If you simply refuse to drop your price, that manager now looks weak. They could say okay, but more likely they will tell you the whole purchase is now in jeopardy. Now you’re stuck.

Inexperienced salespeople may try explaining that they don’t have the power to change pricing. The hope is that will end the discussion and result in the sale. More likely, they’ll say to get your boss involved – and the sale is on hold until you do.

Let’s keep matters in perspective. There must be a reason why you’ve reached this advanced point: They truly want what you’re selling. That’s why they’ve invested time and energy. If they were so enamored with a lower-priced competitor, they would have already bought from them and this meeting wouldn’t be taking place.

With that in mind, here’s an approach you may find very useful. I know for a fact it has saved millions of dollars over the years I have been teaching it.

* See ‘Your Price is Too High’ for five tactics.

Chapter 5

Mastering the Meeting

In sports, it's all about what happens on game day. You can practice all week, you can have the best plays. What really matters, though, is how you perform at the actual game.

In sales, it's all about your meetings. That's where sales are won. Those interactions decide if the purchase becomes a priority.

In this section, I'll share lessons about mastering the different kinds of meetings you will attend. I'll also include best practices for handling interrupters and late arrivers, leveraging mixed meetings where participants have conflicting interests, and what to do if they get that bored look in their eyes.

In a perfect world every meeting of yours would go as planned. Of course, they rarely do. But now you will have more ways to keep the challenges that pop up from derailing your sale.

Joint Sales Calls

When you are selling a complex solution, you often bring specialists along with you. These technical folks may be brilliant, but selling is not their area of expertise.

Regardless, they may have enormous influence and credibility with your customer. What they say or don't say can make or break a sale.

That's why it is essential for you to gently educate them so they can best help that customer and your sale. Here's an approach that will avoid many problems.

Before the sales call, over a cup of coffee, say this to your technical partner:

Words That Work:

"I don't know nearly as much as you about technical things, but I do know about customers. So here are some ground rules I go by; let me know if you disagree with any of them.

- *"You are incredibly influential. Don't be surprised if they take every comment you make as gospel.*
- *"Because of this, avoid making flippant remarks about anything – they may misinterpret it. if in doubt, don't say it.*
- *"Don't insult our competitors, except in a respectful way. Start any criticism with, 'From what I've heard...'*
- *"Please, please, don't inundate businesspeople with details. They want confidence, not an education.*
- *"Steer any lengthy technical issues to the end of the meeting. Then follow my lead; I may want to turn it into a separate meeting.*

- *“Never, even in jest, say anything disparaging about our company, our products, our past products, or salespeople.*
- *“Don’t talk in elevators or cafeterias. You never know who is listening.”*

After the sales call, it’s time for a review. Tread gently when critiquing. People can be unexpectedly sensitive about such things, especially if they wanted to impress you.

If there are any rough spots to discuss, say three nice things, then point out any areas where their comments weren’t ideal. Then ask if there were things you could have done better from their point of view.

Give Them a Magic Wand

We've all been there – at meetings where things start to take a bad turn.

It might be because the prospect is getting overwhelmed with information, or distracted, or any other reason. You can sense the sale is growing more and more distant.

Before they've completely talked themselves out of everything, here's an approach that can work wonders for changing the mood:

Words That Work:

“Lee, let me ask you a question. If you had a magic wand, what would you like to see happen?”

It's a thought provoking question, designed to lift them out of their reality and visit a wonderful place in their imagination where they can make things happen. Don't be surprised if the mood immediately changes.

Lee is likely to answer, *“A magic wand? Okay, here's what I would love – if...”* Let him go on.

You just may find that your sale is back on track. I've seen it happen many times, and in addition you now have important information on what they really want from you and your solution.

Technical Interrupters

“Well before you go into that, can I ask how this will work if we’re streaming via the Hubble telescope on a Tuesday during a solar eclipse?”

You’re selling in a mixed meeting – and suddenly one of the technical people is interrupting your flow with a complicated question that is not at all critical to the discussion. Whether it’s because they’re being impulsive or are trying to show off, this presents a problem for you.

You know the answer, but it’s not a short one. If you delve in now it will surely bore the others. It will also reward the interrupter and probably encourage him to interrupt again. What do you do?

Words That Work:

“Phil, the short answer is, yes, we definitely can do that. In fact, right this minute, at accounts like ..., ..., and ... they are using our solution to do precisely that.

“But can I ask that we delve into this either after this meeting or at a separate one? That way we can cover our agenda without going over. Is that okay?”

Important: Before you say another word, wait for Phil to nod or say, “Yes.” If you don’t, he may feel he’s being bullied or trivialized in front of others. By a salesperson, no less. By asking so respectfully, after your very logical reason, you defuse this potential problem.

Your brief comment, by the way, didn’t only avoid having the group endure a detailed answer. It also quickly answered that, yes, you certainly can do that. You even named companies who are doing it

right now, subtly reminding everyone that you have happy customers all over.

To Prevent Technical Interruptions:

That was how to handle Phil *in the middle of a meeting*. The best approach is to prevent this from happening in the first place. To do that, take 20 seconds to start your meeting with:

Words That Work:

“As I’m sure you know, we could talk for hours on this. But our time is limited today, and to make this as valuable as possible to all of you, can I suggest we save in-depth technical questions for after the meeting, or for their own meeting? That way we can cover our agenda and give those questions the time they deserve. Is that okay?”*

Pause for a beat, and then move on. If anyone balks, don’t fight. With a smile, simply say you just want to make sure the meeting doesn’t run late, but you will be happy to answer any questions. Despite their posturing, that person will nevertheless think twice before forcing all on a techie detour. Mission accomplished.

After the meeting, if you feel Phil is a sensitive type, privately mention to him that you hope you didn’t seem out of place and your only intent was to make sure others didn’t complain later if you had not had time to cover everything. He will probably appreciate this extra attention.

* If you haven’t already confirmed, this would be a good time to make sure just how much time you have. “Am I correct that we have an hour?” The key player may answer, “Well, that was the plan, but I have to leave in about 25 minutes.” Now you know, and can adjust your flow accordingly.

Chapter 6

It's All in the Presentation

You've worked long and hard to arrange this presentation. Stakes are high; the people you're meeting with will either advance your sale or block it. That's why presenting is such a critical selling skill.

That's true in any business, but the challenge is greater when selling technology solutions. Things can get complex and confusing – and we all know that bored people rarely become customers.

With that in mind, I created my Winning Presentations seminar and workshops. It was specifically designed for technology salespeople, and I have taught it at companies ranging from startups to IBM and Accenture.

This section brings techniques you can use every time you present, and even includes specific advice for presenting to large groups or in international settings.

It has some surprising insights – such as why you should *never* ask for questions at the very end. Get ready to have a newfound advantage the next time the spotlight is on you.

Opening Strong

Your First Slide Speaks Volumes

You've sat through plenty of presentations; you know that people make sweeping judgments early on – starting with the title slide.

Think about the presentation you usually give. At the first moment, when absolutely everyone is paying attention, what does your title slide say?

Is it about you – dominated by your company's logo with a title that merely names what you will be talking about? Opportunity lost.

Far better to intrigue with that first slide. Tell them this will be about them and their world. Refer to how others are benefitting because of that product or service. By using a title and subtitle, you can accomplish a lot in very few words – together they can set the tone and draw everyone in. Your first slide is an opportunity not to be ignored.

What's the Best Way to Open?

With a question. Questions are remarkably powerful – they get people thinking, they can open minds. Because they engage the viewer's mind, it is impossible for a good question to be boring.

The best ones speak to that customer's world and goals. Here's a quick example:

<p>Ken Wax & Associates</p> <p>Our Capabilities and Advantages</p>	or	<p>How Can Any Technology Salesperson Sell More – Starting Next Week?</p> <p>Ken Wax & Associates</p>
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Which of these slides is more likely to pull you in to the presentation?

If you are in charge of your company's sales team – or even if you personally just want to earn more money – that slide on the right is far more compelling. That's why the right question is irresistible – it pulls people in because they want it answered.

Next, Quickly Tell Me Where We're Headed

Your first slide's job was to engage and intrigue. Now it's time to tell everyone what to expect. Have some form of agenda slide so you can quickly give an idea of what you will and won't cover, how long it will take, and your goals for this meeting.

Keep it short, and hopefully intriguing. As you quickly mention the sections areas you will cover, create desire and anticipation, as in:

Words That Work:

"And we'll look at some interesting parts of this area, including what one company found that surprised them."

Don't Overlook Telling Me Why It's Important

Either before or immediately after that agenda slide, have a slide that lets you speak to why this entire topic and presentation is so relevant and useful to this company's work. Don't expect them to intuitively know this; the people you're meeting with have a lot of other things on their minds.

Words That Work:

Don't get fancy here – it is very effective to simply have a blank slide with text in the middle that says, *"Why Is This So Important?"*

Then, with all eyes on you, briefly you tell them why and then flow into the rest of your slides.

The “Who Cares?” Test

Here's the test to use whenever you are reviewing a new presentation.

It may seem harsh to the well-intentioned folks who tried to fit in so much, but it poses the question every prospect will ask.

For every item on every slide, ask: *“Who will care about this?”*

If the answer is, *“Well, this is important for them to know.”* it's time to stop and examine that slide. Says who? Will that busy, distracted prospect see any reason to pay attention to this? What's in it for *them*?

If the prospect doesn't care, they will tune out. So would you. Either delete that slide or rewrite it so it connects with that prospect's world.

Chapter 7

Advancing to a Higher Version Number

Remember you, five years ago? Ten years ago?

Since then you have certainly advanced – you know more, you understand more. You've become more valuable to customers and to your company.

That's what personal advancement is all about. It determines how high a person will soar – and when.

I've long felt it shouldn't be left to chance. In this section, you will find ideas and insights about reaching further, faster. At the very end I've reprinted two of my often-requested magazine articles about success and selling.

It's our final section, and I can't think of a more important topic than you and your future success.

How Much Should a Sales Rep Know?

After speaking at a big channel event, a regional manager from Oracle asked me that question. The correct answer is: 'More'.

- *More* than your counterpart at your competitor knows.
- *More* than your customer really expects a salesperson to know.
- *More* than you knew last week, even if just by a little.

The last one is the most important. When I work with sales teams, it is quickly clear who the best salespeople are. They know more than the rest, because they never stop learning.

If you want to make more money and reach greater heights, here's the recipe: Find the time, put in the effort and learn more. Invest in yourself.

It really is that simple. Anyone can do it; no one needs to assign the task. That's how stars shine at startups, it's how top achievers outsell the rest at established companies.

All it takes is a decision, and investing 20 minutes or so a day to do it.*

* What can be gained in 20 minutes? It adds up. Investing 20 minutes a day equals over an hour and a half a week. That's over 75 hours a year – the equivalent of about two full workweeks. Anyone who does that is definitely going to outperform the 'too-busy' masses who don't invest in themselves.

Your Credibility Counts

Pardon me for asking, but *who the heck are you?*

I really want to know – and so do your customers. But not to be polite; they want to know about you for purely selfish reasons.

Here's why: Imagine you're at a dinner party. The host announces his cousin Dan will be showing some card tricks in the den. You like magic but have little desire for some clumsy amateur magic show, so your plan is pass on it and stay where you are.

But what if instead your host had mentioned that Dan, though an amateur, is a sleight of hand expert who has studied with some of the world's greatest magicians?

Those extra few seconds of explanation change things significantly. Dan now has new credibility – and you are far more likely to get a good seat and pay close attention.

You're also more likely to be impressed with the experience. Credibility is like that. It steers our perceptions.

In selling technology, credibility is king. If I know you are an experienced expert, I'm far more likely to want to meet with you. I'm also more likely to pay attention, believe what you say and then repeat it to others. And chances improve that I'll want to have you meet others here at my company.

It's easy to overlook all this, because, well, you already know all about you. You know your experience, your training, your successes, your integrity, your follow-through, your everything.

What one has to keep in mind is that I, as a prospect, know none of that.

That's why it's useful for me to get an answer to the question: Who are *you*? Until I know more, I don't know how to value you.

Each time you meet a new prospect, there's only one thing they really know for sure: that you're here to hopefully sell them something. Since they've met plenty of mediocre salespeople in their life, their natural assumption will be that yet another one is here. It may not be fair, but it is a reasonable starting point. You would feel the same if you were in their seat.

In my workshops, I have taught thousands of salespeople how to create and deliver their own short 'credibility speech'. It's less than 30 seconds in length, but it changes everything.*

You need credibility. Actually, you already have it. It's just that strangers have no way of knowing. You just have to tell them. As you will see on the next page, that's what your 30-Second Credibility Speech is all about.

* I've lost count of how many times I've received emails along the lines of, "Ken, I still use the Credibility Speech I created in your workshop every day."

The 5 Levels of Selling

When I met my first human brochure, I didn't know what to make of him.

It was early in my career before entering the technology business, back when I was a buyer for Macy's. Because my job was to buy millions of dollars of consumer electronics, all sorts of salespeople wanted to meet with me. They ranged from local reps to National Sales Managers for leading manufacturers. It was quite an education.

I can still remember being amazed that someone would fly across the country for a meeting, only to turn pages and bring no additional value whatsoever. So many obviously knew nothing about the pressures and needs of a buyer, or how buying decisions were made.

My experiences on the 'other side of the desk' taught me much about the variances among salespeople. Meet enough salespeople and you appreciate that there are definite levels of understanding and abilities.

When I joined the tech field, it was in distribution, as a merchandise manager for Ingram-Micro. Again, I was meeting with many salespeople and their managers – and again I found those distinct levels of selling.

Each level corresponds to the value a salesperson brings to his or her customer. As I discovered when I rose to sales management positions, each also has direct correlation to how effective they are at bringing in new business and protecting existing accounts.

Level # 1: Human Brochures

This person knows various things about their company's products, services and their company's story. Just ask; they're happy to relay speeds, feeds, and details. But first, they'd like to show you the company's overview slideshow and read every bullet point. Or just talk for a very long time.

To them, selling is telling. They have a lot to say about their company's offerings; isn't that the purpose of a sales call?

Most human brochures are blissfully unaware of their limitations. Whenever a sale is lost, they know why. It was a fickle executive, incompetent contact, lying competitor, or our stupid pricing. Of one thing they are certain: It wasn't their fault.

Level #2: We're Good, They're Not

Next are those with Level #1 knowledge plus an understanding of the competition's pitch.

This is the stereotypical professional salesperson.* Proud of his or her company and able to point out all sorts of (alleged) competitor weakness that their company has taught them. This can be useful to the customer, who now knows what areas to probe with those other guys to get a lower price.

The biggest problem with the Level #2 salesperson is that they cost as much to hire, train and field as a higher level salesperson. Finding them leads costs just as much, and high-potential opportunities are placed in their hands. If you're going to go to all that trouble and expense, why settle for their limited impact?

* When technical people become salespeople, their understanding of selling is often Level #2. It's comfy; many never leave.

Level #3: A Bigger Picture

At this level, the salesperson has crossed over to be able to bring value. He or she has some level of historical understanding of their field and of customers. They can convey stories of how other companies have benefited, though these are limited to their first-hand knowledge of their own accounts.

The Level #3 professional knows how we all got to where we are. He or she can speak about the advances over the years, changes in standards, and all that. They can relay the experiences of others who've bought, which is instrumental if one wants to get someone excited and able to talk up a purchase inside their company.

It's easy to see how a Level #3 salesperson is more likely to influence a prospect, especially when their competitors are merely Level #1 or #2.

Level #4: Broader Knowledge & Insights

Big jump to get here. At Level #4, you have perspective – you can see the purchase from the customer's point of view* and you are focused on creating *desire*.

We're now entering the area where a salesperson is bringing a customer knowledge they couldn't easily get with a few clicks at your website. Their stories have insights. They can help a prospect look smart and make a confident choice. This comes from having additional dimensions of knowledge:

- *Beyond Their Own Experience*: The salesperson at this level has taken the time to learn the stories of experiences at customers with similar challenges, even if they are in other industries.

* Yep, you're absolutely right – 'Customer Vision'

- *Industry Knowledge* – they're on top of trends and changes in that prospect's field, and what the business will look like in 12 or 18 months.
- *Buying Knowledge* – they've developed an understanding of the dynamics and behind-the-scene decisions taking place for this sale to happen.

This all combines to deliver a personal value to their contact. The Level #4 salesperson knows what questions are going to come up and what the contact needs to know to look smart. They know how to arm that contact with examples and analogies that will inspire their manager and other business executives.

Level #5: Valued Consultant

Our highest level is reserved for those who know so much they could conceivably charge for their insights. They've put in the time and effort to develop knowledge, perspective and vision that is befitting a successful consultant in the prospect's field.

At Level #5, he or she has moved beyond seeing their job as expertly pitching smart solutions. Instead, the goal is have that contact succeed and become a hero in their organization.

No one is born at Level #5. One needs to aim for it and put in work to get there. But the pay sure is better.

At every company I've worked with, the top money makers are at the higher levels. Shifting oneself up even a single level delivers a striking revenue impact.

Where Does Success Come From?

I wrote this for a tech-industry magazine in the U.S.; it was very popular and later reprinted on four continents. My hope is that it has the same impact on you that it has had on others.

Everyone would love to be wealthy. No, we won't give up our beliefs or joys for it, but each of us would like to be in a position of success where we don't need to worry about money.

Yet few people get to taste wealth. Why? And what can we learn from those who somehow achieve great things?

We can't learn much from those whose wealth come from inheritance or owning a piece of real estate that skyrocketed. Let's not condemn them, of course, but there's little we can do about choosing our parents or accumulating wealth through sheer luck. Instead, I care about those people who had to earn success by themselves.

And I'm not the only one to care about them. During the past century, much research has been done about remarkably successful people. But it's not common knowledge. You can spend 18 years or more in school and not receive a single hour-long lesson about success. It's one of those fields you have to actively seek out.

In my work, I am fortunate to meet many successful people. Some have started companies; others have helped their companies reach new heights. Over the years, my company has interviewed thousands of executives and sales professionals at various stages of their careers.

Few fit the image we read in the self-serving autobiographies. You know the type, in which the ghost writer tells how the "author" knew he or she was destined for greatness while still in diapers.

Letter to a Young Salesperson

This article seems to touch people. I've received the most requests for reprints of it. Even the most experienced salespeople seem to enjoy it; I think you will, too.

Dear Colleague,

So you're new to selling. Welcome to a good place; one that is unique in the world of business. But it is also uniquely strange.

Many years ago, I sat where you sit now. I've learned a bit since then; these days companies even seek my counsel in this area. So I thought I'd write and offer a few thoughts.

First and foremost, our kind makes it all happen. People who sell are the engines that drive the business world. If anyone doubts this, ask them to consider a company with fine products, great warehouse staff, and brilliant executives. With enough sales, they thrive and grow. But with too few, it all withers and is soon gone.

Selling is a complex art – and it is an art. Be wary of any simplistic slogans or big-promise recipes. If selling was nothing more than a formula, it would be easy. Every company would follow the recipe and become incredibly successful.

Those who don't sell have difficulty understanding it. You'll sometimes hear bright people, who may be insightful in other areas, trivialize it as being little more than talking with enthusiasm, then taking orders.

But selling is far more. To be a success, you will have to be a combination of psychologist, technical expert, historian, coach, creative thinker, project manager, and motivational speaker. Wait, it

gets tougher. You'll also have to know when to choose which hat to wear, and how to gracefully switch among them.

It's demanding work. Constant rejection is part of the job. Don't let this drain your energy or enthusiasm; it's nothing personal. Those people don't even know you. Try to see those "no"s as necessary, if undesired, steps along the path to your next sale.

Selling is probably the only career where you can write your own paycheck. Plenty of people, starting with less than you, have become wealthy beyond their wildest dreams through selling.

But it won't be easy. *Selling is probably the world's best-paying hard work. But it's not a very good easy job.* Accomplished salespeople can amass a fortune. But, for those whose goal in life is to cruise, it's a lot of pressure and hassles just to earn a paycheck.

Set your sites high. Work as if you were working for yourself, because you are. Figure out ways to accomplish more. Then reap the rewards of your hard work.

What does it take to be remarkably successful in selling? The first requirement is to make a decision. Decide you will be a top performer, and that you will acquire advanced skills in order to achieve this.

Always be learning. Ask questions, study those who are already achievers. Learn about your industry, its history, trends, and what people are saying about its future. Then learn as much as you can about your customer's business, not just the parts that involve your wares.

Read business books, not just the magazines that arrive for free. Read widely. A proven idea in one field is often refreshingly new and potent in another.

Two arts, those of presenting and persuading, will greatly influence your success. Master them, and you become more valuable to customers, to your company, and to yourself.

Doing all this will demand time, and that means sacrifice. Success comes to those who honestly answer this question: *What do I want, and what am I willing to sacrifice right now to get it?*

Selling means working with people, and we humans, well, can be erratic, difficult, and downright crazy at times. Be tolerant – getting upset won't change this. But your sense of humor might.

Keep it all in perspective. Never do anything that is unethical, or even on the edge. There's no need to. And life is just too short to live it that way.

Since the dawn of civilization, every great accomplishment has required selling. Without talented salespeople, no businesses have thrived, no research has earned funding, no charity has been able to help others. Nothing takes flight without those who can inform, inspire – and deliver results. Salespeople.

You are entering a noble, important career. One where the sky is the limit, and you hold the keys to your success. Allow me, on behalf of all those who have come before you, to shake your hand and say, "Welcome".

Enjoy the ride!

Ken