



WHY SALES FAIL *by SHARON DREW MORGEN*

Are your sales cycles longer than necessary?
Are you losing business to the competition when you shouldn't be?
Are you having trouble differentiating yourself?
Are you getting price objections when your product is clearly superior?

If you face any of the above, it's because you are using sales methods.

Do I have your attention? Good, because sales operates on a set of myths that perpetuate failure.

I am going to debunk these myths that have defined the entire industry for decades, if not centuries. Myths that have cost companies, sales people, and clients unfathomable money, time and success. Myths that not only advocate misguided sales methods, but design unproductive marketing and advertising campaigns, and keep management from being able to forecast revenue. And myths that have kept sales people from closing all the sales they should be closing.

THE BUYER IS STUPID

Let me begin with a story. My book [Selling with Integrity](#) was originally titled: "I'd Close More Sales if it Weren't for the Buyer." I mentioned this at the start of a sales training with a noted hardware provider. Everyone cheered and gave me a standing ovation. I was surprised: for me the title was so silly that I expected laughter. For me the title was equivalent to: I would have had an easier birth if it weren't for my mother.

These successful professionals were doing the stuff that sellers are expected to do: gathering data, understanding a 'buyer's Pain', learning enough about a buyer's needs so they could present a relevant solution, developing relationships, offering strategic ways to solve persistent problems, providing good service, following up, having a trustworthy product, being a great Trusted Advisor.

Yet they were not getting the results they deserved, feeling frustrated that given how well they understood buyer's needs and provided creative solutions (Truly they did!), gave such great service (They care! They care!), had such a good product (The best!), and assiduously followed up (After waiting just the right number of days!), they closed only a small percentage of their prospects.

Indeed, they were perplexed at the prolonged time it took to close, and watched in dismay and annoyance as a prospect often chose the wrong solution or - even more confounding - chose no solution at all.

So much wasted time. And the loss of so many prospects who would have closed if they knew how.

There could be only one conclusion: the buyer was stupid.

Maybe, I suggested, there is something you are missing. They couldn't think what it could be: they were smart, rigorous, and professional. They assumed the disappointing results were 'givens': that buyers made stupid decisions, didn't really know what they needed, didn't appreciate quality, had no loyalty, weren't smart enough to understand a new product.

WHAT IF THE BUYER WEREN'T STUPID?

And, so, the problem with sales. Given the best sales skills in the world, given care and responsibility, a great product and branding, and talking to the 'right' decision makers, you close only a fraction of your prospects. Telemarketing and scripted calls close ½-1%. Small business bankers close approximately 2% even after a year of face-visits. Software sales close approximately 5-7%. But it's safe to say that there is a more-or-less 90% failure rate, from time of prospecting, using available selling skills.

Yet you have continued to seek perfection over the years. You focused on Customer Care, then Relationship Management, then Trusted Advisor. You've discovered buyer Pain, marketed with Neuromarketing and targeted the Old Brain. You've done Solution Selling and SPIN, gotten to VITO, and looked for the High Probability.

You keep learning how to better yourselves with updated forms of pitching, presenting, prospecting, closing, educating, and handling objections. You learn to put your needs second, and profess to *really* care that customers get what they need, *even if* it's not your product. You hire seasoned professionals, assuming they'll be more successful – and then play musical chairs as you fire them for deficient numbers and hire someone similar in hopes of greater success. You assume that if you provide the right information, in the right way, at the right time, and brand yourselves fashionably, the buyer will understand why they need to buy. From you.

Sales, advertising, marketing all are based on product placement and perceived-problem resolution – a Problem Management Model if you will. The industry spends trillions on demographic studies, neuroscience studies of learning how the buyer's brain works, focus groups, market tests. But all that achieves is higher probabilities for specific markets - not a way to manage or influence an individual prospect's decision-making capacity.

But you still fail to close all of the sales you deserve to close.

Regardless of sales vehicle or skill, the industry or the price tag, the same basic set of beliefs about the 'job' of sales persists, building in reduced possibilities (a 400 %+ increase over your standard expectations could be the norm), 100 hours a month wasted using your bodies as prospecting tools, and months or years of positioning, strategizing, and waiting. Adding insult to injury, you hire 4X more sellers than necessary because close rates are so abysmal that you have to hire more people to make up the numbers.

And what about the buyer? What if the buyer is getting less than what they need, paying more for it, and not getting their resolution in a timely way because they are just responding to the sales model? What if the buyer has the best will in the world – truly wants the best vendor or solution or time frame - and still ends up with an inferior solution? Where do they go wrong? And why don't the very skills of 'sales' help them get it right?

As yet, few have questioned the model itself. You've just built in failure as being an expectation of the field, and continuing the frustration of finding new ways to do the same thing differently, with the same results - better and better skills at doing the same wrong things better and better.

What is going on here?

WHERE SALES FAILS

I'm here to tell you that you are wonderful, your product is great, and your buyers are smart. It's the model itself that is broken.

Let me begin by naming a few overarching myths that sales perpetuates:

1. buyers buy because they are in Pain;
2. buyers recognize a need when they notice a problem;
3. buyers buy on price;
4. buyers buy on emotion;
5. buyers need to have a 'face' visit with a seller to develop a relationship;
6. buyers buy from a seller they like *because* they like and trust them;
7. good branding and great products will drive sales;
8. being professional, doing great information-gathering, being a great Trusted Advisor, will teach a buyer how to trust and choose a vendor;
9. sellers need to understand a buyer's problem/'pain';
10. providing and gathering the right information will enable buyers to make sense of their need.

If the above were true, buyers would have solved their problem yesterday, or make quicker decisions, or choose the very cheapest solution every time. But they don't.

As a result of operating out of the wrong beliefs, sellers:

- have sales cycles up to 5 times longer than necessary;
- get unnecessary money objections;
- assume that a 90%+ failure rate is the norm (and build these inadequate projections into their budgets);
- chase prospects for months or years and then possibly lose the sale;
- assume the *Pain + good solution + good service + good price + need = purchase*;
- don't know when they have lost the sale until it is too late to recover;
- work arduously on attempting to know all of the answers to ensure they sound professional, represent their company well, and attempt to be seen as true professionals;
- spend zillions of dollars figuring out how to present and pitch information that buyers may not need in order to buy;
- don't recognize that a buyer will never buy until they have spent too much time on them.

Sales has failed because it assumes that you can sell product by fully understanding the Identified Problem and positioning and pricing and presenting your solution appropriately, using the most appropriate medium, in front of the 'right' people.

When I ask sellers why they lost a deal, they ultimately say – after first complaining about what a jerk the buyer is - that if they had done their job 'better' the buyer would have bought. So... it's the *seller* who is stupid?

IT'S ALWAYS A SYSTEMS PROBLEM

Given your skill set, you do a wonderful job. Truly. I've met very, very few of you whom I would call unprofessional. Across industries and market segments, from telemarketers to senior Partners, I find that you truly care about your clients, and really want to do a good job. You somehow weather the daily rejection (also built into the profession) and keep on keepin'on. Each day you fight the good fight. You read more books on your profession than professionals in any other industry – working ever harder at getting that 'edge' that will help you close the deal. One half a billion dollars a year are spent on sales training world wide. It's a very very professional group with ethics, standards, and commitment.

Yet, through no fault of your own, you haven't been taught the secret: that a buyer's Identified Problem – that problem or 'pain' that you work so assiduously to understand and resolve – can't be fixed the way you've been taught to help fix it. You haven't been taught that sales should be a systems competency, that a buyer's Identified Problem is only a small piece of a much larger issue they are facing, unwittingly held in place daily by the company or team, history and rules, politics and relationships.

Indeed, the buyer's Identified Problem is only the tip of the iceberg – the visible part of some much larger, unresolved, set of issues. And having a product that will 'fix' the perceived problem is like putting a band aid on a broken leg: it treats the Identified Problem as if it were a relatively isolated event.

Systems thinking believes that nothing stands alone, that everything is somehow related, that nothing exists in a vacuum, that there are '...key interrelationships that influence behavior over time. These are not interrelationships between people, but among key variables...' (pg 44, The Fifth Discipline, Peter Senge).

The Neuroscience of Human Relationships by Louis Cozolino says, "Our experience of the world is constructed around the notion of the isolated self.... Yet... all of our biologies are interwoven" (pg 3). Nothing stands alone. Nothing is isolated from the system that creates, surrounds, perpetuates, and constrains it. In other words, to change, the very elements within the system that created and maintains the problem must seek, and then embrace, the change.

NOT AN ISOLATED EVENT

Here's a simplistic analogy: Imagine driving down a street and seeing a "For Sale" sign on the house of your dreams - and going directly in and buying it. Unthinkable! Your spouse will most probably object; your budget and funding would have to be considered; your time frame would need to be organized; you'd somehow have to manage an array of interrelationships (schools, playgroups, soccer practice, moving schedules, weather) that are unique to you and your living situation.

Great house, great price, great location, you have the money, you need to move anyway.... And your spouse might want to change jobs and need to relocate. Or you are waiting for interest rates to drop. Or you need to have knee surgery next month. Or or or....

When you consider offering a solution to a prospect, it's important to remember that all of the stakeholders *and* ideas *and* unspoken biases *and* hidden, historic events *and* policies *and* rules that reside within the prospect's company, team, or family have conspired to create, maintain, and perpetuate the Identified Problem.

So what is perceived as the prospect's Identified Problem is merely a highly visible segment of a much larger problem within the buyer's culture – like having historic money issues that would preclude you from easily getting a loan on that perfect new house. Add this to the challenge that the problem has become part of the fabric of the system and will continue to maintain itself daily (and will resist change) until something else replaces it that the entire system buys-in to.

This tangle of interdependent components (sometimes invisible even to the prospect) creates an Identified Problem that needs so much more than just recognizing, understanding or resolving. And, because your product probably does resolve the visible part of the Identified Problem, you dangerously assume that your product could be the prospect's solution, leading you to continue the 'push' strategies invoked by sales.

But by then you're not only facing unnecessarily long sales cycles, you're also facing a resistance problem. That's why you end up getting objections, excuses, confusions, time delays, contact problems, and decision issues, and closing such a small percent of your prospects.

SALES CAN'T DISCERN SYSTEMS

As you can see, it's quite simplistic to think that your care and professionalism, product, or any external solution coming in at the wrong time – even when the Identified Problem seems to seek a resolution - cannot resolve this. Of course, some prospects show up and buy. I call this the Lucky Stripe - that magical place where everything shows up just right and you close a sale quickly. This happens because the prospect has already managed their systems decisions.

Make no mistake: this resolution of systems components needs to happen anyway - with you or without you – and the time it takes buyers to accomplish this is the length of the sales cycle.

The entire model of selling is based on the wrong assumptions. Buyers buy not when they discover a need, or have pain; they've been living with that for a period of time. They buy only when they have defined their own internal questions, resolved and discovered their own unique path through their systems issues, and figured out how to bring in change without disruption. Once this occurs, they will know exactly how to buy you and they will actually need your sales skills and product knowledge. But until then, the sales model potentially slows down any comprehensive resolution.

Sales fails because you are pushing, pulling, influencing the area surrounding the Identified Problem, handling just the tip of the iceberg. Sales fails because it assumes that great products and well-positioned data will teach a buyer to buy. And sales ultimately fails because the system will fight change until all internal systems elements are managed. Sales must become a Systems Resolution Event – not a Problem Management Model.

SUCCESS IS POSSIBLE

It is indeed possible to help buyers manage their buying decisions. To do this you will have to learn an additional set of skills: new ways to listen and new things to listen for, new types of questions to ask, new curiosity, new focus and a new way to enter the seller-buyer interaction.

Your results will be profound. You will:

- have much, much shorter sales cycles as buyers will be able to make all necessary decisions much more quickly;
- have a much broader range of prospects, including folks who hadn't been seeking a solution but indeed need your product;
- be able to discern the difference between a real prospect and someone needs to be dropped (even on the first call);
- quickly become part of the buyer's decision team and lead them efficiently through critical systems decisions;
- differentiate yourself from the competition because you are facilitating the real issues – helping resolve the Core Problem vs. the Identified Problem;
- and hear no objections as there won't be anything to object to.

Adding this front end to your current sales approach will give you a shorter sales cycle overall. Remember: the buyer has to do all this anyway; s/he might as well do it with you. Doing it *with* you will save time, differentiate you, and create a lasting bond. And your buyers will have found their own answers, melding your solution into the solution they design.

Change the game. Selling and buying are two different activities and handle the two distinct phases necessary for a buying decision – the buyer-led systems management phase, and the seller-driven product placement phase. Do you want to sell? Or have someone buy?

(Exzerpt aus Morgens' neuestem Buch „Why Sales Fail, or, I'd close more sales if it weren't for the buyer)

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Montag, 24. September 2007: Sharon Drew Morgen (USA)

BUYING FACILITATION: DO YOU WANT TO SELL OR SOMEONE BUY?



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Die Autorin der New Yorker Times Bestseller Selling with Integrity, Sales on the Line und Buying Facilitation: the new way to sell, sowie von über 600 publizierten Artikeln, macht in Wien mit ihrem teils provokativen immer jedoch gewinnorientierten Konzept BUYING FACILITATION den Auftakt zu der Event Serie LEADING WOMEN BUSINESS THINKERS, und unterstreicht damit das Motto der Veranstaltung gründlich: neues Gedankengut für eine moderne, globalisierte und nachhaltig erfolgreiche Wirtschaft in kurzen, intensiven Vorträgen anwendbar zu machen.