INTRODUCTION

Why doesn't sales training work?

Why is it that most people who attend sales training courses and seminars show very little sustained improvement? Why doesn't modern sales training consistently produce successful salespeople?

Why is it that most sales training courses and seminars contain large doses of motivational psychology? Why is it that the sales profession is the largest user of motivational training? Is it coincidental that the next largest user is the armed forces? What is it that the armed forces and salespeople have in common that requires them to be the largest users of motivational training? How many carpenters, mechanics, CPA's, claims adjusters or veterinarians need to attend motivational seminars in order to do their jobs?

How many professions come with a built-in fear of rejection and a reluctance to do the job? Why do approximately eighty percent of the people who enter the selling profession leave within the first few years? Why do so many who remain feel trapped or burned out in their jobs?

Why do most people try to avoid salespeople?

Is this all endemic to selling or is there something fundamentally wrong with the way we sell that causes these problems? Could it be that "Selling as the Art of Persuasion" is a concept whose time has come and gone? Could it be that it's no longer profitable to persuade and convince prospects to buy what they don't already want?

We maintain that persuading and convincing is no longer a viable selling strategy. Even worse, the attempt to do so causes too much tension, stress, and frustration. Therefore, we re-invented the selling process.

Everything's changed. All the rules are different. Fear of rejection is no longer an issue. Resistance disappears. Relationships of mutual trust and respect develop naturally.

Self-esteem is a natural result of the process. Salespeople have standards. Who they are as people and who they are when they're selling no longer have to be different.

High Probability Selling trains salespeople how to discover whether there is a mutually acceptable basis for doing business – without using manipulative techniques. High Probability Selling is not an improvement on, or a variation of, any sales technique you know. It's a new paradigm that requires salespeople to sell with integrity in order to achieve outstanding results.

High Probability Selling takes salespeople off their knees and puts them back on their feet, with dignity, where they belong.

CHAPTER ONE
A New Paradigm

On the first day of our High Probability® Selling workshop we ask the participants some questions about selling. After a few minutes of reserved responses people begin to shout out how they really feel. The following is typical of what we hear.
1. **What is selling?**
Initial responses are pretty much textbook:
"The fulfilling of needs, providing a service, pointing out benefits, the art of persuasion."

2. **What is your objective when you sell?**
"Getting the prospect to buy, making money, closing the sale." The consensus objective ends up being getting the prospect to buy.

3. **What do you do to get the prospect to buy?**
This is when things start to get interesting. At first, people say things like: "Educate them, promise them good service, get to know them, point out the benefits of dealing with me or my company." Then it starts to get a little down and dirty: "Convince them, pressure them, put down the competition, act like I'm their friend."

4. **What will you do to get the prospect to buy?**
This is where things really break loose. Someone invariably yells out "anything" or "whatever it takes," and then the dam opens: "Scare them, beg, manipulate, con, stretch the truth (eventually someone says lie), be insincere and unauthentic (pretend you like them, that you're interested in them and compliment them whenever possible), grovel, kiss ass, promise to be available at any time, turn myself inside out, be whatever they want me to be."

5. **How do your prospects feel when they're being sold?**
By this point some basic truths about the selling process are starting to surface: "Resistant, suspicious, resentful, scared, confused, hostile, like their intelligence is being insulted, pressured, like a piece of meat, hunted, vulnerable, abused." Once in a while a participant says their prospects feel good during the selling process. Those participants usually receive questioning looks from the other participants.

6. **How do you feel when you're selling?**
"Scared, vulnerable, like the prospect's in charge, like a supplicant, not good, lacking in self-respect, like I'm struggling, abused, violated, desperate, anxious, angry, pissed off." A minority say they feel good when they're selling, but as the workshop unfolds, most of them retreat from that position.

7. **How do you feel when you don't make the sale?**
"Lousy, hurt, rejected, frustrated, resentful, like a failure, angry."

8. **How do you feel at the end of a selling day in which you've made no sales?**
"Like a failure, there has to a be a better way to make a living, less than..., vulnerable, stressed, beat-up, drained."

9. **In our society is there a sense of trust or distrust of salespeople?**
(This is a "Who is buried in Grant's tomb?" question if there ever was one.) Participants typically smile and reply, "Distrust, of course."

10. **What causes sales resistance?**
Participants usually give a number of causes for sales resistance: "Pressure, past experience, insincerity, begging." Then eventually someone says, "Selling." It's called sales resistance because **SELLING CAUSES RESISTANCE.** And every attempt to mask the selling objective causes more resistance. What becomes crystal clear is that selling is a painful and difficult process for buyers and sellers. So why is it like this? Why is this the way it is?

Because the objective of selling as it's currently defined (the current selling paradigm), is to get the prospect to buy. Selling, by definition, is getting somebody to do something, usually something...
they might not otherwise do. It implies any conduct that can produce a sale, including convincing, persuading or pressuring someone to buy from you. We call this approach the paradigm of Traditional Selling.

When you feel someone is trying to get you to do what they want you to do, the relationship, by definition, becomes adversarial and by reflex you try to protect yourself. That's where resistance, suspicion and hostility come from. Traditional Selling, regardless of how it's cloaked, is hunter versus prey.

Fish exist in a paradigm called water. Fish aren't aware of the water because the water is constant and always there. There's never any "not water." The water, however, shapes their universe; how they move, how they eat, how they breathe and how they act. Traditional Selling is to salespeople what water is to fish.

**WHAT IS A PARADIGM?**
We don't think about paradigms. They're just there. They shape what we think, what we do and even define what's possible. A paradigm is the filter or lens you receive information through, the window you look through, without knowing you're looking through anything. Here are examples of paradigm shifts.

**FLAT WORLD/ROUND WORLD**
At one time people lived in a paradigm called flat world. No one talked about it being flat. It just was flat. And the paradigm, flat world, shaped what people thought and did. That paradigm kept exploration of the world to a minimum. Flat world defined what was possible and how it could be done.

Then, at some point, it was demonstrated that the earth was round. All of a sudden the rules were different. You could sail west and wind up back where you started. Everything changed. Geographical concepts were turned inside out, and new questions arose. For example, if the earth is round, why don't people fall off?

**HUMORS/GERMS**
At one time, state of the art medicine held that disease was caused by evil humors (vapors) in the air. All medical thinking, including diagnosis and treatment, was based on this premise.

When it was later suggested that disease was caused by invisible microbes called germs, the medical establishment was resistant at best, and hostile at worst. When the germ theory of disease was finally proven, all of a sudden all the rules were different. The new paradigm turned every experienced physician into a beginner.

**NEWTONIAN PHYSICS/RELATIVITY THEORY**
For many years Newtonian physics shaped scientific thinking and inquiry. Einstein conceived the theory of relativity and the equation E=MC2 which radically altered fundamental principles of viewing the universe. Time, it turned out, was relative and space curved.
SOME OBSERVATIONS
New paradigms are not logical extensions of existing paradigms. They represent leaps of intuition. Round world doesn't logically follow from flat world. Germs don't follow from humors. The theory of Relativity didn't follow from Newtonian principles.

Until now, the premise (paradigm) that the salesperson's objective is to get the prospect to buy has been largely unexamined. As a matter of fact, paradigms, being generally invisible, rarely get examined. But paradigms shape and limit activity. As a result, efforts to improve sales techniques have consisted of devising new and better ways to get the prospect to buy and overcoming all the objections which arise in an adversarial environment.

High Probability® SELLING
High Probability® Selling is a new paradigm for selling.

In High Probability® Selling the paradigm shifts from getting the prospect to buy to determining whether there is a mutually acceptable basis for doing business.

As described above, when a paradigm shifts, everything shifts along with it. When you replace an existing paradigm with a new one, everything has to be reexamined, from top to bottom. You literally destroy the entire previous basis and all of its ideas and conclusions. That's a very unsettling and disturbing process. People have no place to hold a new paradigm because it doesn't fit inside the old one, and, in many cases, it invalidates it. In the past this kind of problem was solved by burning the proponent of the new paradigm at the stake. Now we just give them a real hard time.

The best way to get value from this book is to put aside every belief you have about selling. Don't filter this information through what you already know (your beliefs). Set those beliefs aside, especially those you are sure of, as you read this book. Remember, what you know about selling may be true in the old selling paradigm, but all the rules are different in the new one.

What follows is a story about an intelligent, hard working, but frustrated salesperson who learns the basics of High Probability® Selling.

Chapter 2 - A New Beginning

Salvatore Esman had been in sales for seven years. Prior to getting into sales, he had worked in the art and then the printing and finishing departments of a medium-sized custom packaging manufacturer. While he was still in production, the company's sales manager recognized Sal's ambition and his gift of gab, and he suggested that Sal try selling. Sal accepted the suggestion because he felt he wanted to make the kind of money sales could offer.

Sal was trained to sell by two hard-hitting, aggressive, old pros. First, they had him attend a two-week training course given by one of the world's largest sales training companies. Then he attended a couple of seminar programs on his own, and read a couple of how-to books on technique and psychology.

Sal felt he would enjoy sales because he was a "people person." Unfortunately, his results did not match his enthusiasm. Of the twelve people in his sales department, Sal's performance was never better than average, and soon he became dissatisfied. In the past, he had excelled at most everything he tried, but after a few years in sales he began to feel "burned out." Sal thought he felt that way because of the intense discomfort he experienced when he had to press prospects to close. The only time he didn't feel "burned out" was during the two or three day period following a motivational seminar. So he bought some
motivational tapes and listened to them in his car. The tapes seemed to get him "up," but soon the novelty wore off and he was back in the same old rut.

Sal was a hard worker who took good care of his customers. The problem was he didn't have enough of them. Calling on new prospects was his toughest challenge, mostly because it wasn't very rewarding. His sales manager often told him that he had to act more enthusiastic with prospects, and that he should learn to be more aggressive. His general manager told him he was not a strong closer and just needed to work harder. The department sent him to another sales training program that was supposed to cure "call reluctance" and the "fear of rejection." But the pattern never seemed to change. For a week or two he felt energized, but after that it was back to square one. What seemed new at first was really just a rehash of the same old stuff.

Sal's sales manager then decided to send him on some sales calls with their top three salespeople. Sal sat quietly and listened closely, but as far as he could tell there was little difference between what they did and what he did. One did a sharp, eye-catching demonstration, using striking and colorful materials. The second had a great sense of humor and a gregarious personal-ity which he used with style. The third was incredibly aggressive.

All three were very convincing when demonstrating the benefits of the company's packaging products and services. They usually managed to deliver their complete presentation with a minimum of interruptions or objections, (something Sal had rarely been able to accomplish). Mainly, they seemed stronger than he could ever be. But even these apparent stars said there were periods when they too found it difficult to remain enthusiastic, energetic and aggressive. They admitted that sometimes prospects got angry during their presentations, and some didn't respond at all.

In so many words each of them said, "Sales is a game of numbers. If you just go out and make enough calls, do it to the best of your ability, day after day, you'll get your share. And, if you work on your style and learn to handle the most common objections, your closing rate will improve. Then if you learn five or six good, strong closing techniques and use them consistently, you'll close even more. Those are the real answers to selling!"

The trouble was, Sal already knew all that. He was beginning to fear that he just didn't have the talent to be top-notch in sales, so he began thinking about getting out of sales and going back into production. The problem was, production jobs didn't pay what he wanted to earn. Eventually Sal found himself talking to an employment counselor who specialized in placements in the packaging industry. She suggested that before he gave up on selling, he should apply for a sales job with one of her clients, Wraparound Packaging Company (WPC). Feeling he had nothing to lose, Sal asked her to set up an interview.

During the preliminary interview with WPC's Assistant Sales Manager, Sal was asked if he was willing to take some written tests to determine his "personality profile," and his aptitude for WPC's approach to sales. He agreed and took the tests that same day. A few days later, WPC's Assistant Sales Manager called him for an interview with the company's sales executives. She told Sal he had scored quite well and they considered him a trainable candidate.

At the preliminary interview the Assistant Sales Manager had stressed that, if hired, Sal would have to learn how to sell "their way." When Sal asked what "their way" was, the Assistant Sales Manager told him a little about what she called High Probability Selling. Overall, he would have to learn how to spend his resources only on customers who needed and wanted what WPC had to sell; that learning High Probability Selling would not be easy, and toughest of all would be giving up most of his old ideas about selling. She said however that the rewards, both financial and emotional, would be well worth his effort. In other words, this was an opportunity to earn good money in a career he would enjoy.

Sal was understandably skeptical about what sounded like pretty extravagant claims. But, even if she were exaggerating, he felt he could only benefit by learning something new about selling. He suspected
from experience that "High Probability Selling" was another sophisticated rehash of traditional sales psychology. But he was intrigued when the Assistant Sales Manager told him that empathy and respect for other people were the most important criteria for learning High Probability Selling, and that he had displayed those traits in his testing. As far as giving up what he already knew about selling... well, so what, a few days ago he was ready to quit altogether.

Sal started at WPC two weeks later. After a two-day orientation, he met the Vice-President of Sales and Marketing, Victor Preston (VP), who was going to do most of his training. Sal was concerned because VP's relaxed style just didn't fit his picture of a top-notch salesman.

At their first meeting, Sal asked Victor to describe High Probability Selling, but Victor said it was too soon for descriptions since people tend to fit new information into preconceived ideas. "With an approach as gentle and different as High Probability Selling," he said, "it's better to see it in action first, and learn the how's and why's later."

A few days later, Sal and VP made their first call together, visiting a multi-billion dollar consumer products manufacturer. VP told Sal that WPC had received their first order from this customer less than a year ago. Since that time they had become WPC's fourth largest customer, even though WPC had only a small portion of their packaging business.

Right before the meeting, VP told Sal to just observe what was going on and say nothing, even if it seemed that VP might be in need of help. When they arrived, they were taken to the buyer's office. After the introductions were completed, here's what happened:

The Buyer, Ann Kaufman, seemed to be annoyed. She opened the conversation by curtly saying that she was very busy and asking why they had come.

VP: You seem upset.
Ann: It has nothing to do with you. I'm in a bind because another vendor's late with a critical delivery.

VP: Perhaps we should come back at another time.
Ann: No, it's all right. There's nothing I can do about it now.

VP: You still seem upset.
Ann: I'm okay. Don't worry, I won't take it out on you.

VP: When we first began to do business with your company, you told me that in order to gain "Favored-Vendor" status, we'd have to deliver top-quality goods and be on time. So I know how important reliability is to you.
Ann: Yes, we've become the most profitable company in our field by reducing costs through minimizing inventories and rejects. To do that we have to rely heavily on our vendors. When a vendor delivers late or ships poor quality goods, we suffer losses that go way beyond the cost of that shipment. And when that happens, I become the focus of a lot of negative attention.

VP: Last week I found out WPC made your Favored Vendors' list. We appreciate the recognition.
Ann: We've been very pleased with your quality and on-time deliveries, so far. But at the moment I don't have any open requirements for the line you've been servicing.

VP: Do you want our packaging for any of your other lines?
Ann: Interesting you should say that. I've been having some problems with the packaging suppliers for two of our other brands.
VP: Which brands?
Ann: Sun and Moon.

VP: What kind of problems?
Ann: Well, the Sun supplier is having quality problems, and the supplier for Moon hasn't been able to handle the volume.

VP: How serious are the problems?
Ann: In Sun's case, the supplier's been told to redo the art work and improve the quality. Unfortunately, I think their quality problems extend into production, too, so I'm really concerned. If we decide to deal with a new vendor, they'd have to come up with new art work of high quality to get that business.

VP: How much time is available to produce the new art work?
Ann: Not much. First, I'd have to have a quote and then have our product manager approve it.

VP: Is that something you want us to do?
Ann: Yes, if you can. The material type and package sizes are about the same as the Star line. Only the print variations are substantially different.

VP: All right. But I'll need to review the art work with your product manager, so that I know exactly what's required for the quote.
Ann: I'd rather not do it that way. I'd like to see your quote before we get the product manager involved.

VP: That's not how I work. I'm not willing to quote it twice. After we get all of the necessary information I'll quote it. That's why we need to talk to the product manager first. Is that okay with you... or not?
Ann: What you're saying makes sense. I'll call him to see if he can join us now.

Five minutes later the product manager for the Sun line arrived carrying samples of the current art work and packaging. After outlining his requirements, the product manager (PM) asked, "How long will it take you to provide new art work for these seventeen packages?"

VP: In order to minimize overtime costs in our art department it would be best to schedule the work as needed. Does that work for you?
PM: Yes, it does.

VP: How many packages do you need right away?
PM: We need four of them delivered within 5 weeks.

VP: If we just work on four, we can have the art work completed in a week. We can deliver the packaging four weeks after you approve the art work. That meets the five week delivery schedule you need. Is that what you want us to do?
PM: We already have the four packages on order with our current vendor, but I wouldn't mind duplicating the order. That way I double my chances of having acceptable packaging on hand by the time production is completed. Of course, that'll reduce my line's profitability for the quarter and have the same effect on my performance bonus. But if you come through, I'll be much better off in the long run.

VP: What would it take for you to be confident that we'll meet your requirements?
PM: If you can send me daily progress reports and copies of the art work in progress, that will help. I can't cancel the order to our current supplier, but, if you keep your end of the bargain, I promise you at least half my packaging requirements, even if the other supplier comes through. They've already messed us up too many times, so I have to have someone else I can depend on.
VP: We'll fax "proofs" to you every morning, since most of the work on the first four packages will be done on overtime. Is that what you want?
PM: Yes. Definitely.

VP: How much time would we have to prepare the remaining thirteen packages?
PM: Between eight weeks and fifteen weeks. I'll get you a copy of the schedule.

VP: We won't have any problem with the eight and fifteen week deliveries. Are you ready to make some commitments?
PM: What do you mean?

VP: I'm ready to make some commitments if you are.
PM: I guess that depends on the price. Ms. Kaufman's department handles that end initially. But the purchase ultimately comes out of my budget, so it'll come back to me for approval.

VP: Ms. Kaufman's already familiar with our pricing. We've done all the art work and packaging for your Star line. With Sun, only the colors and layouts are different. The price will be about the same. Assuming we can get a quote to her tomorrow, and that the price is in line, how soon can you approve the quote so she can release the order?
Ann: Their prices for Star have been in line, maybe a little higher than average.
PM: Price isn't the most important thing. I must have top-quality goods, on-time deliveries, no shortages and no more than two percent overages. If we agree on the price, I'll approve it tomorrow. Just don't miss delivery dates.

VP: Your company gave us "Favored Vendor" status last week. We got that because our quality has been first-rate and our deliveries have consistently been on time.
PM: I'm glad to hear that. But sometimes performance slips when a vendor takes on a bigger load.

VP: Is that something you want to talk about now?
PM: No. Time will tell.

VP: (Reading from notes he took during the meeting) We've covered your requirements for new art work and overall timing. We've agreed on the way we'll handle the delivery schedule for the packaging. We've agreed that I'll have our written quote here tomorrow, and the price will be in line with our pricing on the Star line. Is there anything else we should discuss? Are you satisfied we've covered all of your concerns?
PM: I can't think of anything else.

VP: Are you sure this is what you want to do?
PM: Yes. I'm for turning the business over to you.

VP: (To buyer) Are you willing to release the order to us tomorrow?
Ann: Yes, I have some work to do first. I'll need the Purchasing Manager's signature on the first order because it's so large, and because we're depending on you for a critical delivery schedule.

VP: Will the Purchasing Manager be in tomorrow?
Ann: Good thought. Let me check right now. (The buyer leaves and returns in ten minutes.)
Ann: The Purchasing Manager will be in tomorrow. I've discussed everything with him and he'll be glad to sign off on your order since you're solving a big problem for us.

VP: Is there anything else we should know or discuss today about the packaging for the Sun line?
PM: No, I think that wraps it up. If you have any further questions give me a call. Thanks for your prompt attention.
VP: You're welcome. (PM leaves) (To Ann) Do you want to talk about packaging for your Moon line?
Ann: Not yet. We can discuss the Moon line after you show you can do as good a job with Sun as you have with Star. I don't want to take the chance of overloading you, and I still have a few months to deal with the Moon situation.

VP: Will we have the opportunity to work with you on Moon when the time is right?
Ann: Providing your performance remains good. We always look to our Favored Vendors first.

VP: I'll see you tomorrow with our quote.
Ann: Thanks, it's been a pleasure.

VP: You're welcome.

In the car on the way back to the office, the following conversation took place:

Sal: That deal will probably make them WPC's biggest customer. It sure was lucky you had an appointment with them today.
VP: Lucky?

Sal: Well, if we weren't there when the packaging problems came up, they might've given the business to someone else.
VP: What went on in that meeting wasn't luck. That packaging problem has been going on for some time, as you heard. My approach uncovered it and got it on the table. That's why I didn't want to tell you about High Probability Selling before you saw it for yourself. If you think about the entire sales call, you'll realize that very little of what went on was due to luck. Don't compare what you saw today with any of your old ideas about sales.

Sal: It seems to me that all you did was keep asking closing questions.
VP: That's just what I mean. Maybe that's only what you think you heard.

Sal: Well, because you've dealt with that buyer before, you already knew what was important to her. So you were able to handle her objections before she brought them up.
VP: So you noticed that she didn't raise a single objection. But that didn't happen for the reason you've suggested. She was too busy negotiating a solution to her problems to raise any objections. And consider also that because she wasn't pressured, there wasn't any resistance. What else do you think happened?

Sal: You closed on a minor point, when you asked the two of them about delivery requirements.
VP: Maybe that's what it looked like, but I never asked about delivery dates. The Product Manager brought up delivery. I wasn't trying to close on a minor point.

Sal: Then what were you trying to do?
VP: I was trying to find out what their delivery requirements were.

Sal: Then I'm confused. I thought you were going to show me this great new, high-powered sales technique, and all you did was gather information.
VP: The human mind tends to fit everything into patterns and to group patterns into familiar categories. Most of the time that's helpful because it lets us apply our knowledge and experience to new situations, without thinking and planning about every little thing. But when it comes to learning something really new, like High Probability Selling, that approach is counterproductive. A really new idea doesn't fit into pre-existing patterns. The context is brand new. The fact is you saw a powerful new sales technology this morning, and you didn't recognize it. Wait until tomorrow. When we go back with our quote and get their purchase order, you'll have real evidence of the effectiveness of High Probability Selling.
Sal: I really have no idea what you're talking about. I saw what happened today, and it looked like you handled the situation quite well. Maybe I'm even catching on to the fact that because it looked so easy, more like dumb luck than effective selling, that you did something I don't even understand. But, why did you demonstrate something to me that I couldn't understand?

VP: To open up your thinking. That's difficult for most people to do. Especially in an area you think you already know a lot about.

Sal: So, isn't it about time you explained some of this to me? Or should I watch you again with another customer?

VP: No. It's time to talk. As soon as we get back to the office, I'll go over the fundamentals of High Probability Selling with you.

Chapter 3: High Probability Selling & Traditional Selling A Comparison

VP: To begin with let's discuss two important differences between traditional selling and High Probability Selling.

First, traditional sales training teaches that just about everyone who might need what we sell is a prospect who can and should be sold. High Probability Selling takes a little sharper look at reality. There are clearly many more prospects out there than can ever be given our full sales and marketing message. If you try to sell every prospect, you'll waste time, money and effort. And, even more importantly, you'll waste the "opportunity cost" of not getting to those prospects who are most likely to buy, now.

Second, traditional sales training teaches that selling is the Art of Persuasion - that the way you get a prospect to buy your product or service is to manipulate the prospect through the five classical steps of the buying decision. In contrast, High Probability Selling teaches that selling is the art of Agreement and Commitment. Only High Probability Prospects - those who are willing to commit step-by-step to the buying process - are worth the salesperson's time, energy and resources.

Sal: But how can you tell whether someone is a High Probability Prospect before you've gone through a presentation?

VP: That's what you'll learn in High Probability Selling. The basic idea is to disqualify prospects who don't fit certain criteria, and that can happen at any point in the process.

Sal: If selling isn't persuading people to do what you want them to do, then what is it?

VP: Selling is reaching a series of agreements with those prospects who first acknowledge that they need, want and can afford what we're selling, and commit to buy from us at a specified time if we fulfill their Conditions of Satisfaction.

Sal: I was taught that you start by identifying a need, and then try to persuade the prospect that your product is what they want and that they can afford it. If you get that far, you go into your closing techniques, one by one. I was also taught that if customers say no often enough, they will eventually say yes, and that one yes is worth ten no's. So, until they get tired of saying no, you're supposed to keep on pitching.

VP: What most salespeople don't realize is they're wasting a lot of good selling opportunities by seeing too many of the wrong prospects. That wastes time, talent, energy, emotional strength and company resources.

Sal: Well, how do you know whether you have a good prospect until you try to sell him?
VP: Good question. It raises a lot of complex issues. We'll begin with some key points about prospects that most salespeople know but usually ignore. Here's how we categorize them:

1. Some prospects already need, want, and can afford what we sell. That group is happy to buy from us.
2. Some prospects need and can afford what we sell but do not want it.
3. Some prospects need and want what we sell but can't afford it.
4. Some prospects need, want and can afford what we sell, but won't buy from us. Like prospects who want what we sell, but prefer another brand or source.

Obviously we should be spending most of our time and resources talking to prospects in category one. The problem is those prospects don't wear a big red "one" on their foreheads. So, how do you recognize them?

Sal: You can't. Especially before they know whether they need and want what you're selling. And they can't know that until they hear your presentation. Which is why you try to sell every prospect you meet with.

VP: Not so. Most prospects make up their minds about an offer in the first minute. That's about all the time worth spending when you're prospecting. And what you're describing also requires the salesperson to be "aggressive" and "persistent."

Sal: Are you going to tell me that being aggressive and persistent doesn't work either?

VP: **Aggressive salespeople create defensive prospects. Persistence breeds annoyance.** Those approaches and other things salespeople do to manipulate prospects in order to get an appointment are what cause "sales resistance."

Sal: I don't get it. Are you saying that most of what I've learned over the years about selling doesn't work?

VP: Yes, and the hardest thing for you will be to give up those approaches, especially aggressiveness and persistence.

Sal: That's hard to believe. They're so much a part of selling that a lot of the help wanted ads for salespeople even advertise for those qualities.

VP: I know. But let me give you some background to help you understand.

**The Traditional Sales Culture**

Traditional Attributes of an All Star Salesperson:

A. Ambitious
B. Aggressive
C. Persistent
D. Glib
E. Hard Driving
F. Good Dresser

G. Charismatic

H. Energetic

I. Fast Thinking

Most companies would gladly accept this list, maybe adding a few more points of their own such as: 
tireless, holds his liquor, good golfer, etc. Although the world has changed quite a bit since this list was 
compiled, no one has taken the time to re-examine it.

Traditional sales techniques were developed on a psychological foundation that was largely 
misinterpreted. What they came up with was:

Attention (The Sizzle)

Interest (The Benefits)

Desire (Need and Want)

Conviction (Resolution of Doubt and Objections)

Action (Close)

 Millions of people were taught sales techniques based on this model despite the fact that most 
salespeople found them difficult to learn and uncomfortable to apply. Keep in mind that this technology 
was based on the idea that you could use psychology to make almost anyone buy almost anything.

That approach worked, or it seemed to for a while, because the most aggressive, most glib, and most 
ambitious people learned the system first and best. They were the people who sold a lot of storm 
windows, freezers, aluminum siding, and cars.

But a lot of buyers reacted with heavy-duty sales resistance. The problem was with the notion that people 
could be persuaded to buy a widget even if they didn't want one and that almost anyone could be trained 
to sell widgets. Many salespeople who tried that approach found that the failure and frustration were not 
worth the effort. Don't get me wrong! The basic psychology may be correct but the applications have been 
way off the mark.

Sal: Everybody knows someone who's a sales star. There's usually someone in every organization who's 
successful using traditional selling methods.

VP: Most successful salespeople don't know what it is about their style that works. They know and use 
many different approaches depending on the circumstances. Instinctively they do whatever works to get 
the order. I've questioned a lot of successful salespeople about their work, and watched many of them in 
action. They all seem to have different ideas about what it is they do that works. But what they actually do 
is rarely the same as what they say they do.

Without trying to, most good salespeople ultimately develop very similar approaches. We've identified 
those approaches and examined them. We've discovered that what works is very different from what we 
were taught traditionally. And what we've learned fits into a pattern that is governed by certain basic 
principles, which is why High Probability Selling is called a technology.
Sal: How does High Probability Selling differ from what I've always done?

VP: First of all, traditional sales has a basic rule that "you should always ask for the order." In fact, some systems tell you to keep asking for the order until the prospect throws you out. **We never ask for the order.**

Sal: **That is different.** Everything I've ever been taught or read about selling says you always have to ask for the order. What else is different?

VP: Do you remember when we discussed spending your resources on prospects who need, want, and can afford what we sell? Well, the closer a prospect fits that description, the higher the probability he will buy from us. We don't waste time trying to sell prospects who probably won't buy from us. Why waste the effort? That's a basic shift in philosophy.

Sal: Well, if you're not trying to convince prospects to buy what you're selling, why do you need salespeople at all?

VP: That's a good question. The answer is contained in the question: "What's the role of the salesperson in the nineties?"

Back in the fifties it cost very little to have someone on the streets knocking on doors. Back then salespeople either worked on straight commission or received a small draw against commission. At very little cost companies had salespeople making calls on anyone and everyone. Of course, most salespeople didn't last very long under those conditions.

Television was available but it wasn't very sophisticated, and TV had almost no value as an informational medium. Only a small fraction of the news, trade and business magazines in circulation today existed then. Direct mail wasn't automated. So overall, there was much less advertising and publicity to educate and inform the market.

Salespeople were the "missionaries" who penetrated the market with new products and services. Their job was to convince as many prospects as possible that they needed, wanted and could afford these new widgets the salesperson was selling. But most industries can't afford missionaries any more.

Sal: Well, it's obvious that it's not cost effective to have salespeople do a company's advertising. But why isn't it cost effective to have salespeople out there trying to convince every logical prospect to buy from them?

VP: As a salesman, which would you prefer? Meeting with fifteen prospects, whom you **sold** on the idea of giving you an appointment (who each probably regretted giving you one as soon as they hung up); or seeing five High Probability Prospects, who've already told you that they need, want and can afford what you're selling and will buy from you now, if you can meet certain criteria?

Sal: Some choice. But how do you get appointments like that?

VP: For starters you have to eliminate sales resistance in the prospects you contact.

Sal: I've been taught that sales resistance shows up as "objections," so you have to either answer the objections before they're raised, or handle them as soon as they come up.

VP: We don't **handle** objections. In a High Probability Selling environment, the prospect is involved in the process of reaching agreement with you, not trying to resist being convinced. "Objections" don't surface as
arguments or reasons why the prospect won't buy. They surface as points that have to be addressed, discussed and negotiated.

Sal: I think I'll just have to see that in action to understand it.

VP: I agree! Here's more background. I'll give you a quick review of traditional selling techniques.

FIFTIES SALES TECHNOLOGY

Prospecting: The typical salesperson of the fifties started with a list of prospects that was "the market." Then the salesperson did whatever he had to do to get appointments with as many prospects as possible. He used any kind of scheme, strategy or trick available to get in the door. Once the salesperson came face to face with a prospect, he was told to hit them with everything, the full pitch, the whole "dog and pony show" - complete with "bells and whistles."

A "pitch" was usually a prepared presentation, complete with visual aids. It was usually modeled as a "five-step sales presentation," organized to follow the five psychological states a prospect goes through when buying. I mentioned them before but let's go over them in a little more detail.

1. **Attention**

   Get the prospect's attention. Use showmanship, say something enticing, do whatever's necessary to get him to focus on what you're selling. The more dramatic, the better.

2. **Interest**

   Hook the prospect with a strong emotional appeal connected to your product or service. Show the men the picture of the red convertible with the blonde in the passenger seat (notice that you can see her face, but you can't see the male driver's face - it might even be him). Show the women the picture of a woman in a neat station wagon, with happy children sitting quietly in their seat belts. It's "Show (business) Time." (The example for women would probably be much different today but the idea is the same.)

3. **Desire**

   This is the seduction. Show them all the great features of your product or service and how it can benefit them. Give a great presentation, paint beautiful word-pictures. Get the prospect involved. Let them try it, taste it, or test drive it (if possible).

4. **Conviction**

   Show them statistical proof of your product's superiority. Use endorsements from prominent people who say they're delighted with your product or service. Or show them testimonial letters, certifications from customers, the government, their church, etc. All the while the salesman asks, "Wouldn't you like to?" questions and nods his head.

5. **Action (close)**

   Test their reaction, ask for the order, handle their objections, and hit them with your favorite closing technique. There are hundreds of them. If they say no, find their objection. If it's hidden, dig it out. Handle the objection and close with a different technique. No sale? Do it again, and again, and again, with a little variation each time.
VP: As you can see, the whole approach is very manipulative and adversarial. It also takes a lot of time, a lot of energy and a ton of practice. It's also difficult to do without offending the prospect. And what's most offensive to prospects is that the salesperson does almost all of the talking. IN THIS PLAY THE CUSTOMER'S ONLY ROLE IS ANSWERING YES TO RHETORICAL QUESTIONS.

Sal: What's wrong with the five-step model - Attention, Interest, Desire, Conviction, and Action (Closing)?

VP: It may be accurate as a buying model. But as a selling model, it doesn't work. It's manipulative. When you use it as a selling model, you're trying to control the prospect by leading him through the steps. Being manipulated is insulting and annoying to people and leading a prospect through the five steps also takes a lot of time and effort.

Here are some of the basic problems with using the Five-Step Model when you sell:

**Attention**

If you have to do something unusual to get a prospect's attention, you don't have a very good prospect; certainly not a High Probability Prospect. Disqualifying a prospect like that prevents you from wasting your time. When you're offering people something they want, they naturally pay attention.

**Interest**

A lot of time is wasted trying to get uninterested people interested, and in boring people who are already interested. More importantly, there are a lot of interested people who won't act. The prospect's level of interest is meaningless. What counts is whether your prospect wants what you have to sell.

**Desire**

Rather than creating desire for your product or service by telling prospects about its features and benefits, you should be showing them how your product satisfies the desires they already have. But that should only be done after they've made a conditional commitment to buy.

**Conviction**

By the time you get to this step, you're in the "Can You Top This" mode. While you're showing, telling and proving, the prospect has yet to either set the limits for his satisfaction or make any commitment.

**Action**

If you don't close until the end of your presentation you've put out too much effort for an uncertain result. That invites crushing disappointment. In High Probability Selling the entire process is the close.

Sal: I know about the five-step sales approach, but never thought of it as being really effective. When I first learned it, I used it a lot but it felt awkward. After a while I just concentrated on my closing techniques, and with a lot of practice, I improved my closing rate.

VP: How much?

Sal: Well, I probably improved by 20 or 25 percent over a six month period. But it involved so much practice and concentration that after a while I just couldn't keep it up.
VP: Learning High Probability Selling requires effort as well, and lots of practice. But once you learn it, selling becomes easier and more natural and you'll increase your sales. And it's not a matter of concentration. Once you learn it, you own it. It becomes part of you.

Sal: You still haven't explained why the traditional five-step selling model is inaccurate.

VP: You misunderstood me. I said that it may be accurate as a buying model but not as a selling model. The technology that was developed to manipulate a prospect through the five steps in order to sell him isn't effective. If you want to sell as many prospects as you can within the time you have available, it's much more efficient to start with prospects who already want your product or service. With that in mind, we skip the first four steps and **begin** with the "Action" (close) step. That's where you want a prospect's attention. But, we don't use traditional closing techniques. We have too much respect for people to manipulate them. After you learn more about High Probability Prospecting, you'll see that we're always closing.

Sal: It still sounds like you're trying to get the prospect to do something you want him to do. Isn't that the same objective traditional selling has?

VP: No. High Probability Selling is a totally different approach. Traditional selling does try to get the prospect to do something, whether he wants to or not. Our object is to determine whether you and the prospect have a mutually beneficial basis for doing business, and if not, to go your separate ways. If there isn't mutual agreement and mutual commitment at any point in the discussion, the process stops. We continuously give the prospect every opportunity to disqualify himself, early and often, from beginning to end. As a result, if you and the prospect get through the three phases of the process, there's a very high level of assurance that both of you will get the result that you each want. The three phases of High Probability Selling are:

- **High Probability Prospecting**
- **High Probability Selling**
- **High Probability Closing**

Sal: Sounds easy.

VP: The principles are easy to learn. The hard part is changing your old selling habits, like talking a blue streak trying to persuade people to do what **you** want them to do. Talk to our salespeople. They've all learned High Probability Selling. I think you'll decide that it's worthwhile to give up the struggle and save the effort and frustration.

Sal: It's worth a shot. But I think it's going to be hard to give up what I've worked so hard to learn.

**Chapter 4: High Probability Selling Applied: Some New Concepts**

Over the next several days, as part of his training program, Sal went out on calls with two WPC salespeople, Sue and Larry. They had both worked for WPC before VP was brought in to "revitalize" the sales department. When VP first joined the company they were skeptical of his relaxed style. But after they saw him bring in several large new accounts, they decided to find out how he did it. What they saw was different, but so effective that they both learned High Probability Selling.

When Sal saw Sue and Larry in action he had no idea what was going on. Each had very different styles from the other and from VP. The only thing they all seemed to have in common was that they kept asking
questions. Some of the questions seemed pointless, and others seemed intrusive. In fact, Sal often felt uncomfortable about some of the questions they asked.

On a call with Sue to meet a new prospect, after about ten minutes of questions and answers, Sue was asked for a quote on packaging. She answered saying that since the quote obviously wouldn't result in any business, she wasn't willing to have her sales estimating department prepare it. She courteously planted some seeds for possible future business, but instead of pressing forward, she made a quick exit.

Sal was surprised and after they left he asked Sue about what had gone on. When she told him that it would be more appropriate if VP explained it, he was more surprised. He thought she wouldn't want VP to know what had happened.

Sal dropped the subject and asked Sue whether learning High Probability Selling had made a difference in her career. She told him that her commissions had really taken off. She emphasized she was more relaxed at work and felt better about herself, that she had more dignity and self-esteem, and that she was more in control of the selling process.

When they met again the next day, Sal asked VP about the call Sal had gone on with Sue. VP explained she had done the right thing. She had worked with the prospect only as long as he appeared to be a "HIGH PROBABILITY PROSPECT." As soon as it became apparent that he was unlikely to be a customer then or in the near future, she courteously ended the visit. She was correct in not using the company's resources in a no-win activity. VP maintained that most prospects respect that kind of no-nonsense approach.

Sal said he didn't understand why the prospect didn't qualify as a High Probability Prospect. In fact, he thought it was a positive sign that the prospect had asked for a quote. VP pointed out that was not the case. He said that based on what was said before the prospect requested the quote, Sue was clear either that we weren't getting any business in the near future or that the prospect was unresponsive or non-communicative. Most likely, it was the prospect's unwillingness to have a frank and open discussion that had Sue end the meeting when she did.

Sal: I think she had a lot of nerve asking some of the questions she asked. It's no wonder he didn't answer them.

VP: Soon you'll see the value of those questions, and the value of not going forward when you don't get clear and honest answers to them. This is a good time to tell you about some basic principles of High Probability Selling.

High Probability Selling is really a method of inquiry. The inquiry is designed to arrive at a meeting of the minds and result in mutual commitments between the salesperson and the prospect by determining whether:

A. The prospect needs, wants, and can afford our product;

B. The prospect is willing to define his Conditions of Satisfaction which, if met, will result in the purchase of our product; and,

C. The commitment the prospect makes with regard to his Conditions of Satisfaction is specific as to all the necessary particulars and is absolute and unequivocal.

Sal: A few things make sense already. Sue cut the visit short right after she asked, "On what basis, if any, would you be willing to have us supply some of your packaging materials - as a second source supplier?"
The prospect asked what she meant by that, and she said, "Would the right price, or fast delivery, or guaranteed top quality be a deciding factor?"

He said something like, "Just quote on our requirements and you'll find out whether you quoted right if you receive an order. Our criteria for making those decisions are not your concern." After a few more attempts to get that question answered, she ended the visit and we left.

VP: Sue was following a basic principle of High Probability Selling:

**Don't waste your resources on Low Probability Prospects.**

Sal: But as long as we were already there, she could've stayed and tried to do business with him.

VP: If she did that, she would've had to make a commitment for a quote. Then our estimating department would have to work up the quote, the department head would have to check it, and then we would have to generate a computer printout.

Sue would also have had to review the quote with the estimator, and return to the **Low Probability Prospect** to present the quote and sample materials. She probably would've had to make at least one follow-up call, too. The prospect might even ask her to revise the quote or bring back more samples, which would create another round of work. Even after all of that, the probability of actually getting an order would be low at best.

All that activity costs money. More importantly, it takes us away from the **opportunity** of working with High Probability Prospects. Also keep in mind that the intangible emotional drain on the salesperson of working with a low probability prospect is a hidden, but very considerable, additional cost.

Sal: What about all those questions the salespeople ask? It seems to me a lot of what they ask about is personal information a prospect would rather not discuss.

VP: You're probably right in a traditional sales situation. There the salesperson and the customer are adversaries. It's hard to have a sincere relationship with your enemy. In High Probability Selling the object is to build a relationship based on mutual trust and respect. In order to do that it's necessary to find out who the prospect really is. The **salesperson** gets ripped off with anything less.

Sal: Does that mean if the prospect isn't open and honest with us, we don't deal with him?

VP: Exactly.

Sal: Damn. That goes against all the training I've ever had. I was always taught to keep on talking and stressing benefits as long as a prospect will listen. And when he starts to nod his head or begins to say yes when I ask him positive questions, then it's time to close.

VP: High Probability Selling is very different. First, we clarify what it is the prospect wants, and we both agree on exactly what those wants are. We call those wants the prospect's **Conditions Of Satisfaction**. Second, assuming we can fulfill those Conditions Of Satisfaction profitably, we negotiate mutual commitments. In other words, we get crystal clear on what each of us promises to do. When you're negotiating commitments, you're into what you've always called the "close."

Sal: So, we're almost always asking instead of telling.
VP: Right. You should frame most of what you have to say in the form of a question. The prospect should do most of the talking, primarily answering your questions. The more the prospect talks, the more both of you win.

Sal: But if you don't tell the prospect about the company's capabilities, and why our products and services are better than the competition's, how will he know?

VP: The more you try to convince the prospect that your product is the best, the more resistance you create. Understand this, almost anything you say can be phrased as a question. As long as you're asking questions, the prospect remains involved in the conversation. Let me give you some examples:

You ask: Do you prefer to have your packages shipped open or flat with one push to open?

Prospect: Does WPC ship them flat?

You ask: Yes, is that what you want?

You ask: Are you willing to pay more for top quality and on time deliveries?

Prospect: Yes. We might have to shut down a production line if the quality of the packaging is off. And on time delivery is especially important to us because we've recently gone to just-in-time deliveries and we don't keep back-up supplies of inventory.

You ask: What else do you want?

Whether the customer prefers flat packages or is willing to pay more for top quality and timely deliveries, he's likely to talk about the choices. A prospect may have good reasons for not wanting our products. His product may lend itself better to open packaging. Or low price may be his highest priority. In any case, you save a lot of time by learning those things before you spend time and resources on him. Also, when you're focusing on what the prospect has to say, your ideas on how to serve him are welcomed, especially when those ideas are phrased as questions.

Sal: I still don't understand how and when you close.

VP: That's okay for now. Go over the examples we just discussed. There were probably a number of what you would consider "closing questions."

Sal: Maybe, but gathering information isn't closing.

VP: The entire High Probability Selling process is a closing process. You probably noticed when you went on sales calls last week that when we asked questions and got answers that justified going on, we asked for commitments. We ask questions like: "Is that what you want?" or "Is there anything else we should cover?" or "Are you willing to pay a ten per cent premium for a glossy finish?" or "If we show you we can meet your requirements, what will you do?"

Sal: That doesn't make sense to me. When do you ask for the order?

VP: WE NEVER ASK FOR THE ORDER!

Sal: (Incredulous) Well, do you use closing techniques at all?
VP: As I said before the entire High Probability Selling process is a closing process. We focus on finding out what's necessary to do business, right from the start. We use an orderly process that's thorough and professional. Our approach is designed to have the prospect commit to do business with us if what we have is what he wants.

Sal: Suppose the customer doesn't do that?

VP: In that case we did something wrong. Maybe we didn't disqualify the prospect when we should have. Perhaps we moved to a new phase without a **commitment**. When we reach a point where a prospect won't make commitments, we end the meeting and move on to someone else.

The fault however, if there is one, is ours. We may not have qualified the prospect correctly, or maybe some old fashioned "power selling" snuck through by accident and created resistance. **BUT NEVER ASK FOR THE ORDER!** Just negotiate mutual commitments. In a situation where our company can't fulfill the prospect's Conditions of Satisfaction, acknowledge that promptly and make a swift, courteous exit.

Sal: Do you mean like when he needs a type of material that we don't supply?

VP: That's a good example. Another is when the prospect wants fast deliveries and low price. As you know, we can give him fast deliveries and top quality, but the price has to reflect that.

Sal: How do you convince him that he should want fast deliveries and top quality at a higher price?

VP: You don't ever try to convince a prospect that he needs and wants what you have to sell. If he clearly understands the benefits you're offering, and they're not what he wants, it's time to end that visit. If he really wants what you have, he won't let you go.

Sal: Doesn't that require a strong presentation?

VP: No. But it requires the right questions, such as:

- You said you wanted a fast cycle time, how fast?
- You said you wanted the most insurance you could buy for a $1,500 annual premium. Do you want me to shop the market for you or are you planning to do your own shopping, company evaluation and comparison analysis?
- You said you want the fastest possible delivery. Are you willing to pay a premium for the overtime necessary to fill that requirement?

Sal: Well, that's like asking the kind of "closing questions" they teach in a lot of sales courses.

VP: Not so. Most prospects have heard enough "closing questions" to know exactly what you're doing, and resent it. We're sincere in trying to determine the prospect's Conditions of Satisfaction (and we tell him what we're doing when we're doing it) and he can sense the difference.

Sal: How is what you're asking different than closing on a minor point, such as: "Do you want the blue or the grey?" or "Do you prefer deliveries on Tuesday or Thursday?"

VP: In High Probability Selling we don't ask rhetorical or manipulative questions. We only ask questions we need to know the answers to.
Sal: If you're only asking questions, how do you convince the prospect that he needs and wants your product?

VP: Do you remember the first call you went on with me?

Sal: Yes.

VP: As I recall, you thought it was just "dumb luck" that they gave me their business.

Sal: Now I remember. I was wondering how you could just sit there and ask them what they wanted to do, when all of that business was there for the asking.

VP: Do you also remember how reluctant Ann was to talk to me about any business except for the Star product line which we already handle?

Sal: Yes. But once she started talking about the bind she was in, you could've asked her for the order.

VP: At that point she hadn't made any commitments to change vendors. In fact, the discussion started as a complaint. It was only because I asked questions, gave her choices and asked for commitments, that we received that order. And, as you know, their requirements for the Sun line are about three times greater than for the Star line.

Sal: But why did you wait for them to offer you the business? Why didn't you just ask for an order?

VP: There were several reasons. First, as you now know we never ask for the order. Second, when I asked what they needed and wanted, they defined their Conditions of Satisfaction. If I had asked for a commitment to buy at that point, and been unable to meet their Conditions of Satisfaction, the order would've been jeopardized. If you're not able to satisfy some of their Conditions of Satisfaction, you negotiate those conditions. If you can work them out, then you ask for a commitment. That's what happened when the Product Manager agreed to have us redo the art work just for the first four packages, rather than doing them all at once.

If you create an environment where the prospect is the one doing the talking, he's more likely to open up and tell you exactly what he wants, actually lay out for you all his Conditions of Satisfaction. You don't have to convince anyone of anything, or guess at what they want to hear, or even handle objections.

Sal: Then why did you keep asking everyone whether they were sure that was what they wanted to do? I was sure you would lose the order when you kept doing that.

VP: Prospects usually have what you call "hidden objections" or second thoughts. It's better to get those thoughts out in the open while you're still there rather than have them surface after you leave. Also, by having the prospect assure you he's doing what he wants to do, he takes complete responsibility for giving you his business. Later on, he won't feel like he's been talked into anything, and he hasn't.

Sal: I have to admit I was surprised at how appreciative the customers were. That's not what I'm used to hearing.

VP: I know. That doesn't usually happen when you hammer people for an order, even if you eventually get it.

VP summarized what he called:

THE KEYS TO HIGH PROBABILITY SELLING
**KEY: End The Meeting If You Are Unable To Complete Any Phase Of The Process.**

Rather than trying to transform a Low Probability Prospect into a High Probability Prospect, your time is better spent talking with someone who already is a High Probability Prospect.

**KEY: The Inquiry Method.**

In order to move forward through the High Probability Process, you and your prospect must have a **meeting of the minds**. You already know what you have to offer, but what does the prospect want? The quickest and most effective way to find out is by asking.

**KEY: Being Thorough At The First Meeting.**

Most people will answer almost any question you ask, truthfully and completely, provided you're not being manipulative and they sense that you really want to know the answers. When I say "sense" I mean the intuitive feeling you get about something or someone, a reaction that just comes to you without any thought. If your approach is really an honest one, deep down, the person you're talking with can sense it. So your questions have to be sincere and not threatening in any way. A first meeting only happens one time so it's important to ask everything you need to know, or might need to know in the future.

**KEY: Taking Notes.**

Taking complete notes is very important, because if you forget the prospect's answers, it may be difficult to get that information again. It's also embarrassing to forget what you've already been told and having to ask the same question again. Forgetting can cost you an account.

At every call be sure to have a substantial notebook, writing tablet, or questionnaire with you. Take it out at the beginning of the meeting and start writing. Write down everything of fact or opinion that the prospect says that relates to him or his business, and record it accurately. Three months later you may not be able to fill in the blanks.

Taking notes accomplishes two things. First, it shows the prospect that you really mean business and that you value what he has to say. Second, your notes provide information in its most useful form, the prospect's exact words. Those words will be invaluable when you establish his "Conditions of Satisfaction."

**KEY: Listening.**

When we ask questions, we do so for a reason. The purpose is to **learn something** the prospect knows and we don't. If you ask but don't listen, you defeat the purpose of your question. Listening is not easy, except when you're interested. Then listening is very easy. If you don't completely understand an answer or the prospect doesn't fully answer the question, ask another question to clarify things for you (and sometimes for the prospect). The more thoroughly the prospect answers our questions, the better our chances are of learning exactly what it will take to do business with him. At the same time we begin to get an idea of the probability of satisfying his criteria for buying and the probability of getting his business.

Don't think about your next question when the prospect is talking. Thinking comes after listening. If you don't listen, there will be little to say in response to what he's said. If you're not interested enough to listen attentively to what your prospect is saying, he'll sense that and he'll disqualify you. Focus on your conversation.

**KEY: Not Talking.**
Whenever the salesperson is talking, the prospect has a natural tendency to feel **pressured**. The pressure usually generates questions, statements, and all sorts of objections to what is being said to him. He gets the feeling you think what you have to say is more important than what he has to say. Since he's the prospect, what he has to say is more important than what you have to say. Button your lip.

If the salesperson is doing more than 25 percent of the talking, that's an indication that the meeting is not going well. At that point we ask ourselves why the prospect is non-responsive or why we're talking so much. If we can't rectify the problem, we should end the meeting unless we have a very strong indication that the prospect is just naturally on the quiet side - taciturn. But in most cases, a non-responsive prospect is a Low Probability Prospect.

**KEY: Never Respond To Anger; Defuse It or Leave.**

When faced with a prospect or customer who is angry, sarcastic, depressed, threatening, abusive or negative in any way, deal with that before you proceed with anything. Doing that successfully requires a good deal of self-control and the willingness to sublimate your own emotions.

Your approach to this kind of sensitive situation has to be voiced in a flat, non-emotional tone. You can't be either judgmental or sympathetic. You must be neutral. Use the same tone of voice you would use saying, "It looks like it might rain."

**Step 1:** "You seem upset."

Most often the response will be a heated explanation of why he's upset. Usually that begins with "You're darned right I'm upset." So far nothing has changed and he may be even more upset.

**Step 2:** "You still seem upset."

You must say this in a flat tone of voice with no emphasis on the word "still." He may start to calm down or he may still be upset.

**Step 3:** "Maybe we should discuss this at another time."

At this point the prospect will most often say that he's fine even if he isn't.

**Step 4:** Continue a dialogue as long as he remains calm. If he seems to get upset again, start over at Step 1. Be sure to stay flat and unemotional. If all else fails, go to step 5.

**Step 5:** "I'm not willing to meet with you now. For us to meet now wouldn't serve you or me. Would you like to schedule another appointment, or not?"

**Sal:** Both of the salespeople I went out with last week did those things. I just figured they had a low-keyed style, operating that way; asking questions, taking notes, not saying much and letting the prospect do the talking. In fact, it looked like they weren't very persuasive or dynamic at all. They really seemed too laid back. Now I see that what I thought was "laid back" is really part of High Probability Selling.

**VP:** Good! By the way, how did they do?

**Sal:** They walked away with orders I thought they had no chance to get, even when the customers said they weren't interested. But doesn't talking with customers who aren't interested go against the rule of not wasting time with Low Probability Prospects?
VP: Good question. It shows that you're starting to understand where we're coming from. The answer to your question points out one of the subtle aspects of High Probability Selling.

**KEY: Don't Respond To Non Sequiturs.**

You see, the statement, "I'm not interested" is a non sequitur. A non sequitur is an answer that follows a question but really doesn't answer it. The sequence doesn't make sense. In sales, a prospect often answers with a non sequitur as a defense mechanism.

Sal: Don't I have to say something when the customer says he's not interested?

VP: No. The prospect really hasn't asked you anything or said anything that calls for an answer. It's as if all he did was clear his throat or cough. What he said is just noise.

Sal: But I thought you end the meeting when the prospect gets negative.

VP: Another subtle distinction. Making noises, even if they sound like negative noises, doesn't disqualify a prospect.

Sal: You'll have to explain that.

VP: Well, suppose you ask a prospect whether he's the person responsible for choosing the vendor for their packaging materials, and he says, "I'm not interested in any new vendors." He didn't answer your question.

Sal: Maybe he didn't answer my question, but I sure can't ignore what he said.

VP: Yes, you can; you can treat it like a noise and ask for clarification. You can ask, "Mr. Prospect, does that mean selecting vendors for packaging materials is your responsibility, or does someone else handle that?"

Sal: Suppose he says that he is the one who makes that decision and that he's not interested in a new one.

VP: You go on treating the non sequitur part of what he says as noise. You can say something like, "Mr. Prospect, most of our customers don't use any more than two vendors for each product line. Is that how you operate too?"

Sal: Now I get it. As long as the prospect is answering your questions, you don't have to worry about the other stuff he says.

VP: You're starting to catch on. If he stays in the dialogue and answers your questions, there's a good chance he'll give up his resistance somewhere along the way. If, on the other hand, he makes it clear that he doesn't need or want what you're selling, or that he really can't afford it, don't ignore that. You may have a bona fide Low Probability Prospect on your hands.

Sal: How else do I recognize a Low Probability Prospect?

VP: Enthusiasm. A High Probability Prospect is usually responsive and enthusiastic about what you're offering. A Low Probability Prospect isn't.

Sal: When will I be able to try some of this with some live prospects?
VP: First, you'll need some prospects to call on. So, you'll need some practice in High Probability Prospecting before you get started. We can kill two birds with one stone by having you prospect on the phone for a few days. Tomorrow you can start training with Sue.