a Beermat publication

Sales on a Beermat

Self-Study Training Workbook

by **Mike Southon and Chris West**

Mike Southon is the UK's foremost speaker, author and mentor on entrepreneurship and - his greatest passion - sales.

Mike is a highly experienced and successful sales cornerstone. In the '80s, he co-founded The Instruction Set and helped make it Europe's leading open systems consultancy and training business, before selling the company in 1989. In the '90s, he worked with 17 start-ups, two of which, RiverSoft and Micromuse, went public.

In 2002 he co-authored with writer Chris West the UK's best-selling book on entrepreneurship, *The Beermat Entrepreneur*

In August 2005, Mike and Chris released *Sales on a Beermat.* The book is a sales handbook for everyone in the start-up or ambitious SME. It dispels the myths of selling - that it involves deception, that it is a kind of bolt-on to the business - and offers a philosophy and method of selling that is ethical, effective and involves everyone in the business, from the CEO to the postboy.

Mike has given his *Sales on a Beermat* workshop, on which the book was based, to many businesses of all sizes from start-ups to FTSE 100 Companies.

Chris is a successful writer with a marketing background. His travel and fiction works have been published in Britain, the USA, Europe and Japan, but he is best known in the business world as the author of the Beermat books.

He says: "My job is to gather the material, sort out what is useful and what isn't, then present it in a way that is clear, logical, and hopefully fun to read as well. We never just regurgitate other people's stuff - everything 'Beermat'has either been worked out by us from our experience (our preferred route), or if it is based on existing material, tried, tested and usually modified to suit our audience."

He also gives talks and workshops based on the Beermat material.

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Welcome to our

Self-Study Workbook

Like our *Sales on a Beermat* book and talk, this is designed for everyone interested in acquiring and developing sales skills.

We will walk you through the main elements of sales and provide exercises to cement the learning from each section. We promise they won't be dull; we promise they will be useful.

We recommend you also read our book, *Sales on a Beermat.* Read other sales books, too - just as good musicians still keep studying and Tiger Woods still has a golf coach, good sales people never stop learning.

This workbook is for self-study, and you will acquire a great deal of sales knowledge by using it on your own. Even better, however is to work through it with a friend who is also interested in understanding sales and acquiring sales skills. It always helps to discuss points raised in the book, and several of the exercises we recommend work best when acted out as 'role play'.

Good luck, and enjoy learning with us.

Mike Southon, Chris West

Units

Introduction

The Beermat model

If you are new to the world of 'Beermat' - what's it all about?

The story began in a pub, where Mike and two friends formed their first company. They didn't have any paper to hand, so wrote down the basic business plan on beermats.

This implies two things:

- Keeping things simple. You can't get 200 pages of management bull on a beermat! We promise this book will use plain, clear English, not gobbledegook.
- Keeping things fun. Pubs are places where people congregate for enjoyment, and we believe that successful business should be the same. It's a group activity; it's about the pleasure of 'doing interesting stuff with nice people'. This is particularly true in sales: the motto of Beermat sales is 'people buy from people'.

Beermat is also about having a focus on action rather than analysis - analysis is, of course, important, but not as important as action - and about acting ethically.

In our book *The Beermat Entrepreneur*, we developed our thoughts into a series of tools and concepts for building businesses. One of the key ones was the concept of the cornerstone. Entrepreneurs don't build businesses on their own - they need a team around them. This team needs to be balanced, and consist of experts in delivery, sales and finance. These experts are the cornerstones of the business.

The sales cornerstone is at the heart of every successful Beermat business.

A Beermat business grows by engaging the energies and commitment of its people. Part of this commitment involves selling: everyone in a Beermat business sells. This does not mean everyone is a front-line salesperson, but that everyone has a role in the sales process. Everyone should understand the principles of sales, what the sales department is doing and how they do it, and their own role in the company's sales drive.

Unit One

How to double sales immediately!

Sales Beermat 1

How to double sales immediately!

* Write case studies – story format: beginning, middle and end
* Turn your favourite customers into Customer Mentors
* A Simple Question
* The Value of Referrals

Get off to a flying start!

Without investing money into extra marketing, how can you double your sales immediately?

Write up your case studies. A case study is a simple retelling of the story of how you helped a customer. Tell it in the style of a story, with a beginning, middle and end…

"Once upon a time, Customer A was sad: they had a problem. We came along and solved it. And we all lived happily ever after."

Remember that the middle of a story often features *complications.* What particular difficulties did you overcome in solving the problem? In the end, what had changed and how?

Next, think of your favourite customers - not necessarily your biggest, but the ones you like the most, the ones you'd enjoy having a coffee or a beer with, *regardless of any potential business.* Call them now, and say you fancy dropping in tomorrow. Before you see them, do two things. Write up a case study of the most useful piece of work you have done for them, and check how much they spent with you last year.

When you see them:

- Run your case study past them, and ask them to add other details - their side of the story.

- Ask a simple question: "You spent £x with us last year. What would you spend £2x on?" They are unlikely to write you out a cheque on the spot, but it often throws up new needs and opportunities.

- Then ask them for six *referrals* - people in their situation who they know would benefit from your goods / services. Most people enjoy giving referrals; you just need to be bold enough to ask!

You are turning your favourite customers into *Customer Mentors.* Because you like each other, they will almost undoubtedly be happy to accept this role.

Customer mentors will do all the above,

and also…

- Provide market information about competition and planned expenditure by their own and other companies.

- (Very important) Tell you informally if there are problems with your product/service. This gives you time to fix things before the formal complaints start coming in - by which time your reputation will already be damaged.

Exercises

Exercise 1.1: Your Favourite Customer

Write down

- **What it is you do**

  e.g. "We provide e-commerce consultancy" - keep it simple!

- **Your three favourite customers, and what they do**

  e.g. "John Smith from Megacorp, a widget manufacturer." Note - these are the customers with whom you get on best, not necessarily your largest.

1

2

3

- **Roughly how much they spent with you last year**

  £100? £1,000? £10,000?

1

2

3

Exercise 1.2: Your Case Studies

Write four one-page case studies.

- A study on a piece of work you have done with your favourite customer
- The piece of work you did where the customer was most delighted
- The piece of work that you consider the most typical of what you do
- The most interesting / unusual piece of work you have done

Write them out on the following pages.

If they overlap - for example if your work with your favourite customer was also the one where the customer was most delighted - then write extra studies that come to mind.

If you have not carried out four pieces of business yet, then write up as many as you can.

If you have done no business yet, do the same for past pieces of work you have done - except that make the third one ('most typical') an imagined scenario of your new product or service in action.

This exercise is most suited to 'business to business' work. But even if you plan to sell direct to consumers, and even if the items are small, do the exercise anyway, as it encourages the right, customer-facing mindset.

Remember

- Beginning - customer pain
- Middle - how you solved it
- End - happy customer What did they value most about what you did?

- **Some work I have done with my favourite customer**

- **The piece of work I have done where my customer was most delighted**

- **The piece of work that I consider the most typical of what I do**

- **The most interesting / unusual piece of work I have done**

Unit Two

Salesperson characteristics

Sales Beermat 2

Successful salespeople....

* ...Ask simple questions
  - Uncover needs
  - Work out if they are liked (the empathy ladder)
* Listen
* Move on if there's no rapport
* Offer to help if there is rapport

Many people think that successful salespeople have a number of stereotypical, negative attributes - the gift of the gab or 'economy with the truth'. The reality is completely different. Most selling, and all the selling we are talking about in this workbook, is 'relationship' selling, based on repeat business. To acquire this, you need to be liked and trusted.

First, let's consider the actual, positive characteristics needed to be successful at sales. Typical ones include:

- **Confident**
- **Outgoing**
- **Good listener**
- **Product knowledge**
- **Market knowledge**
- **Ethical**
- **Empathetic**
- **Thick-skinned**

These are all good, so work on them - but by far the most important attribute is simply to *be liked.*

If they like you they'll see you; if they like you they'll talk to you; if they like you they'll want to work with you. Remember any long-term sale is about your becoming a stakeholder in the customer's business, as an important supplier.

Early on in the sales process, you need to establish if the individual to whom you are selling likes you. Don't be squeamish about this - remember:

- not everyone likes everyone
- if someone doesn't particularly like you, it does not mean they actively dislike you. Indifference is the most common alternative to liking.

To find out if someone likes you, ask questions in a specific order, and see if they open up. This technique, which we call the *empathy ladder*, is also useful socially (it's recommended for speed-dating!).

Start with questions that require simple, factual answers: where and what questions

Question 1: ***Where* are you from?**

Question 2: ***What* do you do?**

Then move on to questions that require some kind of narrative answer - how questions

Question 3: **What does your work involve? (= *How* do you do that?)**

At this point, consider how things are going. Are you enjoying talking to this person? Is there a pleasant, natural flow to things? Or is it all, for reasons you may not be able to pin down, feeling rather hard work? If the latter is true, it is probably time to disengage. If things are going well, move on to questions that involve emotion - how do you feel about x?

Question 4: **What made you go into that line of work? Do you still enjoy it? What do you like best / least about it? What are you biggest rewards and biggest headaches? These are essentially why questions, about motivation.**

Some people clam up at this stage and won't provide detail. Fine. They didn't like you enough to share their feelings.

If they do open up, show some empathy with them - *match* their openness with a similar, small piece of self-revelation. Note: don't overdo this, and turn the conversation into a competition!

Offer 1. The next stage is to offer to provide a small piece of information, such as a web address or a book title or an article which might interest them. Again, don't force this on them: if you are too pushy, you might be perceived as 'rescuing' them from their situation.

If your offer is accepted, remember to follow it up and do whatever you said you would do. If they decline, go back to the previous stage, and try and find more common ground.

Question 5: **Find out how they feel about other things.
You are in essence asking '*Who* are you?'**

Don't forget to match their openness. What do you feel about these topics?

Offer 2. Offer to meet them again and introduce them to someone who might help or interest them:

> "Why don't I arrange lunch with my friend Fred from Megacorp - you'd enjoy meeting them, and they had your issues, which we solved for them."

If you get to this stage, you have a strong rapport and they are excellent customer and (more exciting) customer mentor potential.

Exercises

Exercise 2.1: Salesperson Characteristics

Assess yourself against the following list of salesperson traits. Give yourself marks out of 10. Be honest!

- **Confident**
- **Outgoing**
- **Good listener**
- **Product knowledge**
- **Market knowledge**
- **Ethical**
- **Empathetic**
- **Thick-skinned**

Then get a friend to check your self-marking!

The point of this is *not* to perfect each one of these, but to spot any obvious gaps. If you rank average or above in all of them, that's good enough (we'd like to see 9 or 10 in ethics…) Rather than provide general solutions for any gaps, we advise reflection and choosing your own specific methods of self-improvement.

Exercise 2.2: *Does this person like me?*

Practice using the empathy ladder with ten new people you meet. Do not take the results personally. Treat this like a scientific experiment: out of ten people that I talked to, how far down the ladder did I get with each of them?

The point of this is to practice the ladder, to make its use natural and unforced, so it becomes instinctive.

Fill in the table below - how far did you get with each of the ten people?

With...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Got to...										
Q1										
Q2										
Q3										
Q4										
Offer 1										
Q5										
Offer 2										

Remember there are no wrong answers. It's very unlikely you will get to Offer 2 with all of them. Even if you don't get to Offer 2 with any of them, it doesn't matter. Just understand the process.

If you don't get far, work on your use of the empathy ladder, and try again in a month's time.

You might want to repeat the experiment every month anyway. Copy this page.

Month.

With...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Got to...										
Q1										
Q2										
Q3										
Q4										
Offer 1										
Q5										
Offer 2										

Month.

With...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Got to...										
Q1										
Q2										
Q3										
Q4										
Offer 1										
Q5										
Offer 2										

Further reading

Please add to this section yourself from books, websites, webpages or articles that you have read and found useful.

Copy and insert them after this page. The law allows you to do this for 'private study and use'. Libraries may require you to fill in a copyright form - you won't be charged. Material on the web is 'subject to the website owner's copyright', not, as some people believe, automatically in the 'public domain': check the legal stuff on the particular site for permission to copy. The deal will most likely be the same as that for printed work, that you are allowed to copy for private study, but not to resell. (Note - these legal points apply to all the 'Further Reading' sections in this workbook!)

From *'Sales on a Beermat'*,

read pages: 11-18.

Unit Three

The key sales roles

Sales Beermat 3

The key sales roles

* Hunters
* Farmers
* Managers
* Ambassadors

Hunters open up new accounts. Outgoing people (e.g. perennial networkers) are ideal for this role.

Farmers go into existing accounts and manage them. They typically generate 10 times more revenue them a hunter! ‘Delivery’ people (e.g. lawyers, software engineers) usually enjoy being farmers. The only thing they might be embarrassed to do is talk money. If so, don’t force them; get a hunter to do it.

Sales Managers oversee the entire process. An eye for pattern and detail is essential here, plus an understanding of the strategy and constraints of the business as a whole. Accountants can often do this job well.

The above roles are specific sales roles. But everyone in the business can and should be an *ambassador* for the business. This involves two things:

- talking about it in a positive light (where appropriate)
- keeping an ear open for information
  - about competitors and, above all, about potential customers.

If an ambassador (i.e. a non-sales person who had studied this workbook) finds out that a customer has pain in areas that their company can solve, they must get the contact details of the relevant person in the customer organization, then pass those details on to the sales cornerstone (or sales manager in a large organization).

This table is adapted from *Sales on a Beermat*

Hunter	Farmer	Manager
Must be liked	Must be liked	Not seen outside company. Must be respected inside it
Enjoys risk	Risk-averse	Risk-averse
Spontaneous	A planner	A planner
Impatient	Meticulous	Meticulous
Bored by company politics	Intrigued by company politics	Won't take 'company politics' as an excuse from salesperson
Inspirational	Gets job done	Gets job done, but should be able to inspire subordinates, too
Emotional	Logical	Logical
'Works' a room at a big gathering	Delightful guest at dinner party	Who cares? As long as the sales keep coming...
Rock star	Record producer	Tour manager
Ideal material for sales cornerstone in start-up	Taken on once big accounts have been initiated by hunter	Runs entire sales effort once company is big enough
Dependent on quality of qualification	Dislikes closing	Will direct team to qualify or close depending on Sales Pipeline (see later)
A born salesperson	Job can be done well by technical ('delivery') person	Job can be done by finance person

Hunters tend to think ‘big picture’ while farmers are more interested in detail. In a large, complex sale, this can lead to problems. The hunters open the door and do the initial discussions - ‘We could save you £100,000!’ When discussion gets round to exactly how the £100,000 gets saved, the hunter begins to lose interest, which is often interpreted by the customer as a sign that he or she has been lying (or, at best, exaggerating). Get a farmer to work on the detailed stuff. A good farmer should be able to negotiate and close the deal - if the farmer is new, or dislikes closing, (or is not a sales person at all but a technical person sent in purely to discuss detail), then the hunter must keep control of the negotiations and do the closing.

Exercises

Exercise 3.1: Hunter, farmer, manager or Ambassador

- **Which one are you?**

- **What sales role are you currently playing within your organization?**

- **If this is not the same answer as the one you gave to the first question, what steps are you going to take to change this?**

1

2

3

Note, if you are a sole trader - you have to do all four roles!

Further Reading

Please add to this section yourself from books, websites, webpages or articles that you have read and found useful.

From *'Sales on a Beermat'*,

read pages: 23-38, 131-134.

Unit Four. Qualifying 1

Target markets and securing initial meetings

You must set out by choosing a *target marke*t. Defining markets is not as easy as it looks. So keep it simple. The main criteria are industry sector, size of customer and geography. For example…

- Local authorities in England and Wales
- Vetinary surgeons within 50 miles of Derby
- FTSE 100 Companies (i.e. companies above a certain size in the UK)
- Computer service businesses in Sussex with less than 25 people.
- The world's major pharmaceutical companies.

Etc. etc.

You may have defined your target market already. If so, well done! Treat the next paragraph as an experiment.

If you have not defined your target market, or are interested in redefining it, then think back to your three favourite customers. Are they in the same market? Perfect! Are two in the same market? Make that your target market. If they are all in different markets - what do their businesses have in common? They must have something… Or simply choose - which of the three possible markets do you want to be in?

Next, get a list of other firms in your chosen target market. Potential sources of information include:

- **The internet**
- **Your local Chamber of Commerce**
- **Directories**
- **Yellow Pages**

Create a list of 200 prospects. Phone round to check their contact details are correct. Who should you be speaking to there? What is their email address?

Refine the list further by discussing it with your customer mentor(s). You may end up with a 'good list', a shortlist of 100 prospects, with all contact details correct.

Now take a break. Revisit your elevator pitch. Remember the entrepreneur's magic question: 'Where's the pain?' Think…

- **What pain do you solve?**
- **For whom (your target market)?**
- **Why should these people buy from you rather than someone else?**

Then send Mike's Magic Email…

This is an extract from Sales on a Beermat

Emails are not intrusive, as the phone is, and have a good chance of getting read, unless they are spam or personal but verbose. Spam, of course, is now illegal, but even before the legislation it was no way for a serious business to announce itself to the world. You will write a 'Beermat' introductory email: compelling, brief and personal. Every email will be slightly different, written individually and sent to a specific person.

There are five key aspects to this email, which translate into four brief paragraphs plus the all-important subject heading.

1 ***"I notice…"*** Use your information here. 'I notice that you have recently overtaken MidiCorp as the largest suppliers of grommets in the UK…' Or, if it's personal information. 'Congratulations on your appointment as COO of MicroCorp…'

Note that if someone has 'just been appointed' they may well be interested in replacing incumbent suppliers. Whenever, in your regular trawl of the web/specialist press, you find a new appointment with purchasing responsibility, drop them a Beermat intro email, just to let them know who you are and how good you are.

2 ***Your elevator pitch.*** The basic benefit you deliver. Remember the entrepreneur's Magic Question: 'Where's the pain?' Why does this company need your product/service now? "We believe we can cut your costs by 25 per cent."

3 . By far the best proof is a personal endorsement by somebody highly respected in the industry. Such people exist in every industry - if you're already in it, you'll know who they are; if you're trying to break in, look at the trade press, and talk to your mentor. If you are new-ish to the industry but have a few customers, one of them will tell you who to contact. Or, better still, they will make the endorsement themselves. If they will do this themselves, they are on the way to becoming a customer mentor.

4 Finally, of course, you ask for a *meeting*. Always offer to visit the customer - it takes less of their time, but also gives you an invaluable chance to take a peek at their organization. Is it buzzing or half-asleep?

5 ***The subject heading***. A well-written email will get you a long way, but it is no use if nobody opens it. For all I know the one I received yesterday from fneij590djr09ejf9 offering me cheap Viagra may have been a masterpiece of sales copywriting. But I didn't open it. Your email must have an arresting subject heading. If you have a personal endorsement from a respected industry player, that's the ideal one. You head the mail: 'Recommendation from Joanna Smith'.

The recipient will spot the name and open the mail. (Of course, you must check with your endorser that they are happy to be used in this way. It is a step beyond a simple endorsement, and they may not agree.)

A model Magic Email.

Subject: Referral from Joanna Smith

CC: Joanna Smith

Dear Mr Jones,

I notice from your website that HyperCorp just won the Ministry of Ag and Fish national widget contract. Congratulations!

Joanna suggested I get in touch, as we do all the widget design for MegaCorp.

Joanna would be pleased to provide a reference: joanna.smith@megacorp.com

I'd like to arrange a short meeting. I will be in Neasden on Tuesday 14th in the morning. Can you spare me 15 minutes?

Regards,

Mike Southon,

Acme Widget Design

Exercises

Exercise 4.1: *Your elevator pitch*

You should have this worked out, and known off pat! But many businesses don't. If you are in this latter category, here's a chance to get it right.

- **What pain do we solve?**

- **Who for? (the target market)**

- **How do we solve it?**

- **Why should people buy from you rather than the competition?**

Take time over this - it's worth it.

Note - if you are in several markets, you may need different elevator pitches for the different parts of your business. For the purposes of this exercise, concentrate on one sector.

Exercises

Exercise 4.2: *Your magic email*

You've seen Mike's Magic email - now for yours! Write ten magic emails to ten customers in your target market

Remember:

- **Get your customer mentor's permission to use their name in this context!**
- **Part 1, "I notice…", must be different for each magic email.**
- **You have to do your research. The rest of the email can be standard.**

Subject:

CC:

Dear

I notice

Your elevator pitch

Your proof

Suggest a meeting…

Yours (or however you like to sign off)

Well done. Now, nine more ‘I notice’ paragraphs for nine more potential customers…

2

For…

I notice

3

For…

I notice

4

For…

I notice

5

For…

I notice

6

For…

I notice

7

For…

I notice

8

For…

I notice

9

For…

I notice

10

For…

I notice

Further Reading

Please add to this section yourself from books, websites, webpages or articles that you have read and found useful.

From *'Sales on a Beermat'*,

read pages: 39-42, 84-98.

For materials on the Target Market, read our ebook, *Marketing on a Beermat.*
http://www.beermat.biz/catalogue.php?id=2

Positioning, by Al Reis and Jack Trout, also has a powerful message on this subject.

Unit Five. Qualifying 2

Have they got Needs and Money Today?

Sales Beermat 5

Needs and Money today?

*Understand their needs
- Where's the pain?
- Reinforce the need
- Provide proof
- The Salesperson's Magic Question: 'How can we help?'

* Have they got the money?
- How does the company buy?
- Are you talking to the right person?

* Have they got the money today?

Your magic emails should earn you a decent number of exploratory meetings. These should not last more than 15 minutes. Now is the time to find out if they have that magic trio: *needs* and *money today.*

Needs.

Remember the Entrepreneur's Magic Question: "Where's the pain?"

Start the conversation with a simple, open question, such as "How are things here at Amalgamated Widgets?" If you get a blank response: "Fine, thanks, no problems at all", you're probably wondering why they asked to see you in the first place. But it can happen. Spend the next 14 1/2 minutes asking more and more specific questions, to try and find out what problems they have and how you might help them. If you get nothing at all back, leave gracefully, and chalk it up to experience. Don't worry - the next sales visit will be more fruitful!

But this is relatively rare - if they've bothered to take 15 minutes out of their busy schedule to see you, it's because they have some interest in what you do. You'll most likely hear something like: "I was interested to learn you have a new technique to smooth widgets and have done it successfully for Acme Engineering. We've a bit of an issue here with rough widgets, so I'd like to hear more."

Well done! They've expressed a need, and trust you enough to want to find out more about your potential solution to their need. As soon as you uncover a need, then *reinforce* it. "Oh yes, we find there's a big problem generally with rough widgets…"

Then add proof. "I've got a case study here which talks about that, which you might want to look at."

It almost goes without saying that the opposite to reinforcing the need is counter-productive: 'Oh dear, not another idiot who can't work out how to smooth their widgets…' (We say 'almost', because we've all been on the receiving end of this kind of rudeness.)

Ask them how they think you should help them - the Salesperson's Magic Question: *"How Can We Help?"*

See which of your many benefits (and even larger number of features) are the key ones for *them* - regardless of what you might think! These are what we call *Golden Nuggets.* For each customer you should have one, perhaps two, but no more than three. Any more than three, and your customer will become confused or forgetful.

Money

Even if all the above goes swimmingly, you may not be talking to the person who can actually write (or authorize) the cheque. Yes, in a perfect world, only people with *power to order* ('PTO') would talk to you - but in reality…

There's no magic formula for ensuring that the person you are sitting opposite has PTO. The key is to assume they have, unless they tell you otherwise, but at the same time keep an eye open for clues that they do not. Like buying signals, the clues are always there if you watch sharply enough.

As with all interactions, we recommend starting off assuming that the person opposite you is playing fair and straight. So be as open as is tactful. Ask:

- **"What sort of budget do you have for this?"**
  Expect a ball-park estimate. If it's low, then the person can probably sign it off themselves. Try and find out: ask, subtly

- **“And you can sign that off, can you?”**
  This question is a bit cheeky - but a simple, clear ‘Oh, yes’ in response is of such huge value that it is worth asking. So don’t ask that question aggressively. Don’t press them if they are evasive - they may just feel they’re being pushed too hard. But note the evasiveness: it is a possible first clue that they lack PTO.

With a larger budget, you will have to become an expert on their buying process. So start finding out, via simple questions like:

- **“What are your purchasing procedures?”**

- **“Who else do I need to talk to?”**

At this first meeting that you must be pushing for further commitment from the prospect. Another meeting with them is not enough; they must commit enough to get you face-to-face with other people in their organization, preferably other people more senior to them, and who have emerged in your discussions above as key decision-makers. Reluctance to introduce you to anyone else is the best *early signal* that the person is a time-waster, with no PTO.

- **Ask to meet their boss, or the head of the relevant department**

Once discussions have advanced a bit further, you can:

- **Suggest your FD contacts their FD to discuss financial aspects of the deal**

- **Suggest your technical people meet their technical people to discuss technical aspects**

Selling a ‘Tiny Thing’

Finally, the test for PTO with is a mini-sale. This also tests other things, too - are the company as a whole really interested in buying? Try and sell them something small - a day’s consultancy, a single item or a small batch of products. If they won’t buy these, you are very likely to be wasting your time.

We talk more about this in Unit Nine, on Sales and Account Management. This *‘Tiny Thing’* sale is a sanity check, an essential part of the sales process.

Today

Clearly the budget needs to be available now, or in the very near future. If the person says a budget will be available in six months, start building a relationship with them - ideally by some small sales ('Tiny things'). If this is not possible, agree on a time when it would be sensible to meet again.

Salespeople are naturally optimistic, so may well assume the deal is theirs - and start asking other people in the business to do advance work for it. The rest of the team should avoid this, as resources can be wasted that way.

On the other hand, don't go the other way and ignore customers who have needs, money and whom you like, but can't pay straight away. Keep in regular touch, so that when the money becomes available, you know about it.

Follow-up

After the meeting, e-mail the prospect - that evening - with a list of their challenges ("Our Understanding of Your Needs"). This roots out misunderstandings early and reinforces the positive points of your discussion. They may well have things to add: often they've thought of a few more things after you've left.

This should be standard practice after all meetings, not just an initial one.

Here is a useful set of things to establish at a first meeting. These come from the NLP model.

1. *What does the client want?* The Salesperson's Magic Question: "How can we help?"

2. *What would our helping do for them?* Establishing what the real, underlying benefit to the customer is. In business-to-business negotiating look for something simple like extra revenue, lower cost or happier customers.

3. *Why is that important to them?* Reinforces the previous question - if you've established a real benefit, then the answer to this question should be obvious from 2 above.

4. *How will they know when they've got it?* The benefits must be measurable. What are their targets?

5. *What could go wrong?* This sounds negative, but actually moves the process forwards. The customer has now mentally bought your good or service, and is now working through the practicalities of using it. Stay with this, and work through any potential hazards.

6. *Knowing all of the above, what do you want?* Back to the Magic Question, but now with a much clearer picture of what the customer needs, expects to gain, and how the process will work.

Exercises

Exercise 5.1: List Five 'Tiny Things' your company could deliver

These should either be could deliver to delight the customer and prove that your products or services are excellent. Note: you should always charge for these. You can offer a discount, but it's important that your benefits are both measurable financially, and valued by the customer.

1

2

3

4

5

Exercises

Exercise 5.2: The best way to get better at what is taught in this section is to get out there and talk to prospects!

You will find yourself developing your own ways of finding out if the prospects have needs and money today - questions you feel comfortable asking, which yield results and which keep the relationship with the prospect good.

Note them down below - your magic questions.

To establish needs

To establish power to order

To establish that the budget is available now

Further Reading

Please add to this section yourself from books, websites, webpages or articles that you have read and found useful.

From '*Sales on a Beermat*',

read pages: 99-108.

Unit Six

Negotiating

Sales Beermat 6

Negotiating

* Create a win-win
– Negotiating is not haggling

* Don't get personal

* Be ethical
– And expect ethical treatment from the other side

* Remember the 'Golden Nuggets'

If the client wants to place an order with you, there will no doubt be some negotiating involved. Remember that what you are working towards is a situation of mutual benefit: a *'win:win'.* You take their pain away; they give you money - that's the deal! Negotiating is about clearing a path to this outcome. It is not a 'zero-sum game', where any participants'gain is always another's equivalent loss - that's *haggling:* negotiations can descend to that once people start asking for discounts!

Good negotiation is *objective.* Don't let your emotions get in the way. Don't make the negotiation a clash of egos - that way you'll soon be haggling. 'Separate the people from the problem', to quote the classic text on negotiation, 'Getting to Yes'.

Good negotiation is also *ethical.* Act ethically yourself. If you feel you are being treated unethically, express that concern to the other party. If they do not take that concern seriously, it's time to walk away. Remember the Beermat adage: 'only sell to people you like'.

There are many aspects to a deal. If the customer insists on terms that are difficult for you in some areas, make sure they give something back in others, such as…

- **Payment terms**
- **Size of order**
- **Level of service expected (don't negotiate this away - keep it high and use it to justify other terms favourable to you)**
- **Delivery schedule**
- **Providing referrals (actually doing so, not just a vague promise to do so!)**

At the heart of the deal, however, are those Golden Nuggets we mentioned in the previous Unit - those benefits that you (and, ideally, only you) bring to the customer, to help them with their pain. Keep reminding yourself, and the customer, of these. They lie at the heart of the successful negotiation and the successful delivery of the product and / or service.

Exercises

Exercise 6.1: Looking for win-win

Examine some conflicts, and think how the participants could move towards a win-win outcome.

- **What personal issues might they have to put to one side?**
- **Where is the conflict irreconcilable (a 'zero-sum game'), and where does one party's benefit not detract from the other's (or where does a major gain for one party mean a trivial loss for the other)?**

Examine this in:

- **A public, political situation**
- **A business situation you find yourself in**
- **A personal situation you find yourself in**

Exercises

Exercise 6.2: Your negotiation diary

As with establishing 'needs and money today', you can't really practice negotiating on your own. Get out there, get in front of prospects, and negotiate! And learn from the experience. The best way to do this is to keep a descriptive diary of your meetings.

- **Assess on a scale of 1 (aargh!) to 10 (fantastic!) how the meeting went.**

- **Why do you say this?**

- **What was the best thing about it?**

- **What was the worst thing about it?**

Exercises

- **Were there any moments when the mood suddenly got worse? If so, was it something you said or did (and won't do again)?**

- **Were there any moments when the mood suddenly got better, and you felt 'now, we're getting places!' If so, was it something you said or did (and will do again)?**

- **What were the concrete outcomes of the meeting? Smiles and handshakes all round are not enough: who agreed to do what, when?**

Photocopy this and the previous page and use it as many times as possible.

Further Reading

Please add to this section yourself from books, websites, webpages or articles that you have read and found useful.

From *'Sales on a Beermat'*,

read pages: 58-70.

We also recommend the book *Getting to Yes* by Fisher, Ury and Patton (published by Random House Business Books).

Your notes on **'Getting to Yes'**

Unit Seven

Closing

In essence, sales is about two things - qualifying, which we have already discussed, and closing. Closing is asking for orders, getting across that gap between customer interest and an actual deal. It can be tough, but unless it is done, the very survival of your company is at stake, regardless of the merits of your products or services.

Closing is the part of sales which is always regarded as the biggest challenge, but the process is actually quite simple, and can be done by everyone (not just salespeople) with a little coaching and the right mindset.

First, you need to do your homework.

- Have you listened to your client's problems and *fully understood their needs*?
- Have you provided no more than three *Golden Nuggets*?
- Have you provided a *Customer Mentor reference* as definitive proof?
- Do you have in your mind a *fair price*, one that makes sense in the light of what you know about the customer's needs, your ability to meet them, and the general market price for what you provide?

PRICE - Some Golden Rules

You should never do anything for free, even a trial, as the customer will not perceive any value.

You should never be the cheapest alternative, especially if you're a service. Cheap service always equals poor value in the eyes of a customer.

You should never discount without getting something back. The moment you simply give away a discount, you have stopped negotiating and started bartering. Keep negotiating. All the formal studies show that salespeople who are given flexibility in discounting always give that away in the first 10 minutes then end up selling less as well!

If your customer offers something worthwhile in return for a discount - in other words, they are negotiating - then say you'll discuss with your MD or finance cornerstone and come back to them.

Now it's time to ask for the money. This is difficult. *Everybody* finds it difficult, even experienced salespeople.

So practice beforehand. Write a script, then rehearse it in front of a mirror until it comes out clearly and confidently and feels totally natural - 'second nature'. It's like learning lines in a play or song lyrics.

When you use the script in the actual sales situation, say the words, then *nothing more!* This is very important. Most of us dislike silence, and the temptation to follow up the clear, forceful script with something gentler - 'of course, you don't have to decide now' (or whatever) - is massive. Resist it at all costs.

In fact, closing takes place from early on in the sales process. When you ask for, and get, a 15-minute meeting with a prospect, you have in fact done a small close, making them make a commitment to you. This is the meaning of that oft-quoted acronym, ABC. Always be closing.

In practice you will not be closing 'all the time' - as we've said, a lot of sales is about listening and developing an understanding of the client's needs and how you can meet them. But every sales interaction should involve some closing, from the small one of securing a meeting to the big close of asking for, and getting, the money.

Exercises

Exercise 7.1: *Your Script*

Write appropriate scripts for your key products. Keep them very, very simple.

"It's £1,000 plus VAT."

"So, you want ten days at £1,000 each - that will be £10,000 plus VAT."

Practice them

- **To yourself**
- **In the mirror**
- **With a friend - ask them to role play being the customer.**

If you practice them and get them perfect, then go into a sales situation and make a mess of things - relax. Most successful sales people have done that! Go back, and rehearse again.

Exercises

Exercise 7.2: The Power of Silence

This has to be done with a friend.

Simply sit with them in a normally convivial situation and don't say anything. Notice how the desire to speak wells up inside you - and practice denying it.

Don't deliberately concentrate on something else, unless that's the only way you can stop yourself from speaking.

Don't ruin your relationship over this! Even a minute of silence will teach you a lot. You probably won't even need to explain why you were quiet so suddenly (even if asked, "sorry, I was miles away" is normally enough.)

Write down what it felt like to want to say something, and to fight back that desire.

Further Reading

Please add to this section yourself from books, websites, webpages or articles that you have read and found useful.

From *'Sales on a Beermat'*,

read pages: 39-45; 107-108.

Unit Eight

Customer responses

Sales Beermat 8

Dealing with customer responses

* "Yes"
– Take the order

* "No"
– Clear up any misunderstandings

* "Maybe"
– Walk away if necessary

When you've asked for the order, there are only three things a customer can say: 'Yes, 'No' or Maybe'. Each response requires different responses.

"Yes"

Nobody should have problems with 'Yes' - but some people create problems by talking themselves out of orders. They do this by thinking they are on a roll and trying to sell extra stuff on the back of the newly-successful sale. Behind this usually lurks insecurity.

Instead, be pleased that you have achieved the outcome you intended. Thank the person for the business, tell them what the next step will be - 'Our delivery cornerstone will be in contact'; 'The x's will arrive on Thursday'(or whatever) - then leave with a smile and a handshake. And, if necessary, a signed contract.

If you try and cap the sale you wanted with something more, it can lead to the customer saying "How interesting - send me a proposal for the whole lot" - at which point you've 'un-closed' the sale and are back selling again. If you have more stuff to sell, wait for the right opportunity - later.

"No"

There are only two possibilities:

- False. The no is based on a misunderstanding. You haven't completed the negotiating stage properly, and the customer still doesn't understand the benefits you deliver. Reinforce the need ("So if I did have a green pen, you'd be able to place the order?"), then clear up the misunderstanding ("Look - here's our fantastic green pen!"), and we're back to Yes!

- True. The customer has a genuine and insurmountable issue with your product or service. If you were in their position, you'd say the same thing. If this is definitely true, and you can't find a sensible way around the problem, then walk away. As a favour, you might (informally) direct them towards someone who might be able to help them. Remember to make it clear that you're disappointed to lose the business! Next time you call, you'll be remembered as the ethical salesperson who told the truth.

The problem, though, is not people who say 'yes' or 'no'. The real problem is....

"Maybe"

"I'll get back to you..."
"I'll have to speak to my MD…" (Later) "Er, he hasn't made his mind up yet…"
"Leave me a brochure..."

And other horrors - we've all been there!

There are various reasons for people saying 'Maybe':

- The lead wasn't qualified properly in the first place. They don't have needs and money today after all, or the person you're with isn't the right person to be talking to.

- They want to say no, but think they are being nice.

- The salesperson is too pushy, and refuses to take a simple no.
- They're playing mind-games, due to their own inadequacies
- They're doing this deliberately, as part of a tactic to mess you about - purchasing directors are trained to do this!

Usually, you have to walk away from the maybes. Many sales people waste valuable time on people who, for some reason, string them along, who never had any intention of buying. Do not do this. Your time, energy and motivation are better spent elsewhere.

Establish some clear, timed action points for the future - "When will you know by?" If they won't provide these, that's a clear sign of time-wasting.

Gentle email reminders from time to time are easy to send - though if they haven't responded to the last three you sent, take them off your prospect list.

One of the main reasons why we recommend selling to people you like wherever possible is that such people will give you a straight answer, yes or no.

Exercises

It's hard to practice these responses - except in an actual sales situation.

The 'Yes-but' game can be played with a friend as a reminder not to pursue maybes. Imagine a situation where one party is suggesting a course of action, and the other one appears to agree but actually comes up with ever more absurd reasons for not taking action.

A classic example is the children's song 'There's a Hole in my Bucket' - a story of a pain which well meaning, practical Liza tries to solve but is rebuffed by Henry playing mind-games (or maybe Henry is a purchasing director…)

It begins…

There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza

There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, a hole

Then mend it, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry

Then mend it, dear Henry, dear Henry, then mend it

Then poor Liza is dragged through…

With what shall I mend it? (she suggests 'With some straw…')

But the straw is too long… (she suggests 'Then cut it')

With what shall I cut it? (she suggests 'With a knife')

But the knife is too dull… ('Then sharpen it…')

With what shall I sharpen it? ('With a stone…')

But the stone is too dry… ('Then wet it…')

With what shall I wet it? ('Try water…')

In what shall I fetch it? ('In a bucket…')

And Liza's left looking useless as Henry goes back to his original complaint

But there's a hole in my bucket…

Further Reading

Please add to this section yourself from books, websites, webpages or articles that you have read and found useful.

From *'Sales on a Beermat'*,

read pages: 56-70.

Unit Nine

Account management

Sales Beermat 9

The Sales Pipeline

* Every item has a simple next step
  - When will it be done?
* Change is monitored on a weekly basis
* Forecasting
* A general sales activity plan
  - Below target: more qualifying
  - Above target: more closing

Individual sales skills are great, but of limited use if they are not used in a clear and systematic way. This is particularly true for one-person businesses, start-ups and other small enterprises. (It's important for businesses of all sizes, of course, and is often surprisingly badly done in businesses that are big enough to know better!)

The Beermat Sales Pipeline is a simple but very powerful tool for ensuring that the time, effort and morale of sales people - that's you, if you're your own boss - are used to maximum effect.

We hope that by now you'll have understood that a sale is a process, not a one-off event. The pipeline is simply a way of keeping tabs on the process, of breaking it down into observable, manageable steps.

Looking back at the Unit on qualifying, we have four early steps:

Stage One	**You have a list.**
Stage Two	**You have a properly qualified list.**
Stage Three	**A 15-minute meeting has been arranged.**
Stage Four	**The client appears to have needs and money today.**

Next should come…

Stage Five	**A 'sanity check'. The client really does have needs and money today, and you are speaking with someone with power to order.**

For a small, simple sale, one could go on…

Stage Six	**Negotiation takes place. The client's needs match your offer precisely**
Stage Seven	**The deal is closed verbally**
Stage Eight	**A formal contract is signed**
Stage Nine	**The work is done / product delivered**
Stage Ten	**The money's in the bank!**

Other businesses will have different processes, especially in stages 6 to 9. For example there may be no contract, instead, a deposit is accepted. In other cases there may be a shortlist, or some kind of 'mini-sale' like a cheap pilot or some kind of 'test drive'. For some businesses, the process may be simpler, with only one or two steps between 5 and 9. Fine - leave gaps.

Each sale should be monitored as to which stage in the process it has reached, and thus what actions are needed to move it further towards Stage Ten. If a sale has got stuck at a particular stage for a while - why? Good sales managers will take a sale off the list if it gets stuck at any stage for too long.

The model can also be used for forecasting. Turn the stages into decimals, making stage one '0.1', stage two '0.2' etc. Then multiply the expected value of the sale by this decimal to give it a 'Beermat' value - a useful figure for *forecasting and activity planning.*

Below is a section adapted from *Sales on a Beermat…*

You have four sales on the go. One is contract for £15,000, at level 0.4. Another is a smaller contract for £9,000, which you have been told is yours but no paperwork is done. You have just finished negotiations on a contract worth £20,000. And your ‘hunter’ has set up a 15-minute meeting for a contract that could bring in £100,000.

You can create a revenue prediction sheet that will look like this…

Customer	Level of Sale on pipeline	Expected value of sale	Current ‘Beermat’ value
United Grommets	0.4	£15,000	£6,000
Borough of Neasden	0.7	£9,000	£6,300
Spencer Fittings	0.6	£20,000	£12,000
‘Beermat’ expected revenue			£24,300

Note that the nice juicy £100,000 contract isn’t there. You can’t put it on the forecast until you get to 0.4, till they are a ‘serious prospect’, with needs and money right now.

Cautious sales managers will then divide the Beermat expected revenue by 2, because it’s a hard world and salespeople have been known to be overoptimistic about the chances of their success. This produces a conservative Beermat Revenue Forecast of £12,150.

Is this an accurate forecast? No, but I don’t know any forecasting method that is. It is, however, consistent, so any change in the forecast is a real sign of something happening. If it starts to fall, you are heading for problems and must act.

You can also derive an activity plan from spotting changes in the shape of the pipeline. The general shape is a funnel, with lots of prospects in the top and few deals at the end... Is the pipeline suddenly getting fatter in the middle? Time to work on closing some deals. Thinner at the top? More qualifying needed, more research, more prospects 'loaded into the hopper'.

And, actually, I don't see any harm in using the Beermat Revenue Forecast as an estimate of future income. It's as reliable as anything else. What revenue targets has the CEO set, and does the forecast match them? If not, even if the pipeline looks the right 'shape', get selling! And if you look to be getting more revenue in than expected, the delivery cornerstone should be checking that you really can support these sales.

Note that when you start using the Beermat Sales Pipeline, you get a strange dip in the sales forecast in the first few iterations. This is because sales people were optimistic when the table was first drawn up. In the few months after that, the unlikely sales drop off the list. After that, however, things pick up, as the new discipline gets the sales force moving sales through the system quicker.

For many businesses, the sales process is more complex than the simple one outlined above. There are pitches, 'beauty parades', more pitches under the guise of a 'shortlist', requests for free pilots etc. etc. - all of these with negotiation rumbling on in the background.

To go into this is beyond the scope of this workbook - it's a topic deserving a book, DVD, workbook (etc.) all of its own. However we'd like to offer a little advice on this topic. Bidding for big contracts is hellishly difficult and expensive for small businesses, sometimes cripplingly so. So don't do it.

If you must sell to big organizations, *build a relationship with them slowly*. If you've uncovered needs, persuaded the customer of your benefits and have a good Customer Mentor reference, then go the opposite way to the 'big contract' route - try and find a 'Tiny Thing'you can do for them, as the first proof you're as good as you say you are. Why not do a day's consultancy and write a short report?

This is especially good for companies who sell products. What pain does your product take away? Are there services you could provide today before they buy your product? If they won't pay for a day's work from you, it raises the alarm - will they ever pay for anything bigger?

Once this initial work has been done, and you have a foot in the door, start farming the account. Can you deliver this 'Tiny Thing' to other parts of the business? Can you expand the offer of the 'Tiny Thing'to a 'rather larger thing'? Grow the link and the dependence between your small company and their large company slowly but surely (and stealthily). Remember that farmers are much better at managing this process than impatient hunters.

Exercises

Exercise 9.1: Your Sales Pipeline

No two sales processes are exactly the same. The one we showed in this section is a generic one. Is there any way you can refine it, to fit the precise way you sell to your major customers? What are the key steps in the sales that you make? List them here… (Note: If you are happy with our generic model, then write it down again here. This is now your sales process.)

1

2

3

4

5

6

Exercises

7

8

9

10

And then…?

Use this tool! Visit it every week, and:

- check on the progress of every sale on it
- look at its shape, and see if there is bulging at certain points (get closing!) or if it's getting thin at the top (more qualifying!)
- work out a Beermat revenue forecast

Overleaf is a model grid for keeping pipeline records. Note that 0.1 has been left off - no need to put these on.

Photocopy it and use it!

Beermat Sales Pipeline.

Week ending / / Sheet Number

Customer						
Salesperson Responsible						
Stage						
0.2						
0.3						
0.4						
0.5						
0.6						
0.7						
0.8						
0.9						
1.0						

Further Reading

Please add to this section yourself from books, websites, webpages or articles that you have read and found useful.

From *'Sales on a Beermat'*,

read pages: 99-124.

Unit Ten

Account management

Sales Beermat 10

Customer service

* Happy customers
– Make them customer mentors

* Indifferent customers
– Can slip away

* Unhappy customers
– Apologise
– Take personal responsibility
– Ask them what they think
is a fair solution
– Can become best customers!

Too many companies think the sales process ends once the money is in the bank. You should have a rigorous process for checking customers' satisfaction levels, from the moment the salesperson agrees the order, to the moment the entire solution is delivered. And then you ask again, three months after that.

Think carefully who should play what role in this process and when they should do it.

- **Everyone, in their role as ambassadors, should be listening out for comments about quality of customer service - yours and your competition's**

- **Delivery people should routinely be asking the question: "are you happy with the quality of our solution?"**

- **Salespeople should ask this too, not just when they're looking for a repeat business.**

- **Your MD/CEO should once a quarter make a point of calling their MD/CEO to check everything is fine.**

Responses are dealt with in simple ways:

Happy customers

- **"Great! Anything else we can do for you?"**
- **Do you like them and do they like you?**
  If so, they are good material to become fully-fledged customer mentors.

Indifferent customers

- **Most likely to switch vendors!**
- **Farmer should find out why**
- **A decision may have to be made: it might take considerable time, money and effort to change them to happy customers. Is this cost-effective? Such a decision can only be made on a customer-by-customer basis.**

Unhappy customers

- **"I'm sorry to hear that."**
- **"Thank you for bringingthis to my attention."**
- **You, personally, take responsibility for doing something about it…**
- **…And follow through!**
- **Ask the customer what they feel would be a fair solution. If it's simple and cheap, agree and carry it out.**
- **Remember, unhappy customers are often potentially excellent customers. If they had a genuine grievance, which you solved and turned into a genuine win-win, then they'll trust you.**
- **Some may have excessive expectations or just be unreasonable, for example blaming you for their problems. Find a way of quietly letting them go - you'll be much happier!**

Exercises

Exercise 10.1: Custmer Services

Think of the last three times someone complained about your business.

- **How did you feel?**
- **What did you do?**
- **What was the immediate result?**
- **How is your relationship with that customer now?**
- **Would you act differently now? If so, in what way?**

Remember the three keys to dealing with dissatisfied customers

- **"I'm sorry to hear that"**
- **Take personal responsibility**
- **Ask them what they think is a fair solution**

Write these three case studies down on the next three pages.

Exercises

Customer service: Example one

How did you feel?

What did you do?

What was the immediate result?

How is your relationship with that customer now?

Would you act differently now? If so, in what way?

Customer service: Example two

How did you feel?

What did you do?

What was the immediate result?

How is your relationship with that customer now?

Would you act differently now? If so, in what way?

Customer service: *Example three*

How did you feel?

What did you do?

What was the immediate result?

How is your relationship with that customer now?

Would you act differently now? If so, in what way?

Further Reading

Please add to this section yourself from books, websites, webpages or articles that you have read and found useful.

From *'Sales on a Beermat'*,

read pages: 113-115.

Unit Eleven

Difficult commercial situations

You name it, Mike has experienced it! Here are some classic negative responses from clients, and some suggestions on how to deal with them.

"I've been with another supplier ten years; why should I switch?"

Are they happy with the other supplier?

If not, don't waste effort on knocking what the rivals do, even if your prospect seems to be angling for a derogatory comment. (It sets a negative tone and can get you involved in all sorts of politics in the customer organization.) Instead, make clear the ways in which your product or service solves pain in the way that your rival's does not. Stick to the facts!

If they are happy with their supplier, then you can't expect them to switch. What you should work for is a foot in the door. Volunteer to be a 'stalking horse'. "Sometimes when a company has a long-term relationship with a supplier, things get stale. Why not give us a chance? We'd love to see if we can match or even beat their service. And I'm sure if they see that we're working with you, your incumbent supplier will start being more attentive."

If the customer likes you (a very important part of the Beermat sales process, remember), they may well give you a chance and try you out. If this happens, deliver superbly, and deploy your 'farmers' to start making new friends in the customer.

This approach can bring tactical benefits, too. It challenges your competitors on their home turf: they may panic, spend a disproportionate amount of time hanging on to their existing customers, and slacken their search for new business - so you neatly outflank them.

“I don’t like salespeople”

This person may have had bad experiences with dishonest salespeople in the past. Still, they have agreed to see you, so must have an interest in what you have to offer. Remember that this is likely to occur at an early meeting, where you are largely still qualifying: get them talking about their issues as soon as possible and don’t do any ‘selling’.

Beermat salespeople are likeable, so as you talk, you may overcome the client’s initial dislike. Remember that Beermat salespeople such as you are not the kind of salespeople who have upset this person in the past - the used-car, ‘tell any lie to keep them on the forecourt’ stereotype. You never cheat the customer; you understand that success relies on repeat business.

Build a relationship with this person, so they don’t see you as a ‘salesperson’ but as someone who helps them solve problems.

Closing may be difficult with them, as however pally you have become they may suddenly flip back into ‘I hate salespeople’ mode. Set the close up extra well, going over all the benefits and details and making doubly sure the person sees it as a win for him or herself as well as for you. Then close as usual.

Alternatively, this response is just someone playing games - unscrupulous purchasing directors do this very well! They kick off the meetings with veiled or actual insults as a power-play. As with all mind-games, don’t react: step back. Play along a tiny bit if you have to, but only on the surface - don’t get involved emotionally at all; remember this is just a pointless, empty ritual. Wait till they’ve got the bull out of their system, then start a proper adult discussion about first, their problems and, second, what your offer can do to solve them.

If they really won’t engage in sensible discussion, then it’s time to leave: they are wasting your time. Do so politely, even if you feel like giving them a taste of their own medicine!

"Just give me a price" (i.e. client won't negotiate, only barter)

It's very important to remember that it's never just about price. (The only exception to this is when there has been a misunderstanding, and the customer is in the completely wrong ball-park, wanting a Trabant when you sell Rolls-Royces.) If your customer is refusing to discuss the benefits of your products and services and is just going on about price, then something is amiss.

Often it's a purchasing director playing games, trying to elicit a discount. Don't play the game with them. You have a great product or service and a sensible price, which you can defend. Remember that Beermat salespeople only agree a discount if there is a similar gesture from the other side, such as a larger than expected order or payment up front.

Another possibility is that you've done an inappropriate 'feature sell'. Rather than trying to understand the customer pain, you've reeled off a list of features, which may or may not be relevant; the customer is becoming frustrated and/or running out of time and is simply trying to close the conversation. If this happens, quote a price, with an appropriate caveat, such as, "This price depends on a few factors, which we can discuss in more detail at the next meeting," and try again next time. And next time, listen harder!

“We used you before, and you were unsatisfactory”

This can often happen to a fast-growing company, who skimped on customer service at the outset (often through ignorance rather than deliberate policy) and is now haunted by the ghost of their former, less structured self.

First, just apologise. It probably wasn’t you who messed up, but say sorry anyway. Then find out what went wrong. If appropriate, explain how the company has changed since then. (Note, don’t just say ‘we’ve changed’, but be specific: ‘We now do x, y and z…’) Ask them what they think is a fair solution, and take personal responsibility for making sure that happens (assuming that what they request is reasonable.)

A business faced with lots of disgruntled ex-customers should think through and use a specific ‘welcome back’ package. Don’t build one before talking to a number of ex-customers and finding out what they really want and what really makes them feel ‘OK, these people have sorted their act out, and I’m staying with them now.’ And be prepared to be a little flexible with it, too.

With high-tech products (or even not-very-high-tech products for customers who aren’t very technologically savvy), there may need to be some training element in the package - was the real reason why they didn’t get any value out of their product first time round because did they didn’t know how to use it? They are unlikely to admit the fact, and you cannot go down the line of getting them to admit the fact. Just offer some training as standard.

Another part of the package should be a personal visit. You are very unlikely to win customers back with letters, emails or phone calls.

Especially in narrow, well-defined markets (which are nice places to be), word travels fast. Sadly, word about poor service spreads faster than word about good service. So time spent converting disappointed ex-customers to happy current customers is time very well spent.

Exercises

Exercise 11.1: *Your Success Stories*

If you have done any selling, what where the trickiest situations you got out of, ending with the prospect changing their tune radically and becoming a customer?

If you have not experienced these yet - leave these pages blank, and fill them in when you do start selling, encounter difficulty and overcome it.

Keep referring back to these pages, especially when you have a run of bad luck (as we all do). You've triumphed over adversity before; you will do it again!

Try and keep to the story format.

- **Setting the scene - who was the client; why did the sale matter? To make the story vivid, recall some details about the day - what you wore; if it was a visit, what their premises looked like (or whatever else brings the story back to life for you)**
- **Your initial conversation**
- **What went wrong**
- **Complications - attempts to right the wrong that didn't work.**
- **Success - how you finally cracked solved the problem**
- **How it ended up**

- **Success Story One**

- **Success Story Two**

- **Success Story Three**

And finally...

Sales Beermat 11

The basics

* Be liked

* Find the sales role that suits you
- Hunter
- Farmer
- Manager
- Ambassador

* Only sell to people you like
- If they don't like you, they won't buy
- Find someone in your organization who does like them to sell to them
- Create and Value Customer Mentors

* Qualify and close correctly
- Mike's Magic Email
- Needs and money today?
- The Beermat Sales Pipeline
- Closing = "script + silence"

* Negotiate, don't haggle
- The end must be a win for both sides...
- ...As you are after repeat business

* Keep customer service a priority after the sale

Appendix 1

Articles from 'Director' Magazine

1. Adding Service

'We don't just make widgets, we provide total widget solutions.' How often have we heard that formula trotted out in the last few years? The answer, oddly enough, is not as often as we would have liked. Yes, it has become a cliché, but many people we talk to still haven't really got its message.

Clichés are unattractive because they are obviously right (and thus uninteresting), not absurdly wrong (and thus ludicrous). Why is the obvious rightness of this one still being ignored?

The 'technology trap' is one possible culprit: the team is so interested in what they are developing that it loses interest once the widgets leave the science park. Another reason is that, as with most sage-sounding aphorisms, the difficult bit is putting it into practice. What the hell is a "total widget solution" and how on earth do you deliver it?

A third possible explanation for why it is being ignored is that the phrase has become such a cliché that anyone uttering it invites ridicule - being accused of seeking a total thirst solution when you next reach for a glass of water or a total waste solution when you pop out to the loo. Okay, the idea was taken too far after Theodore Levitt's famous "marketing myopia" piece set everyone and their dog asking: "What business are we really in?" But that does not mean there is no value in it.

If your product does not solve real customer pain (or does not provide customers with unexpected delight), then you are doing something wrong. If it does solve pain, you are doing something right - but you can bet the pain is not solved simply by the widgets arriving at the customer's premises.

They will need to be installed, tailored to specific conditions and mastered by the people who are actually going to operate them. The best person to take the customer through these processes is you, the world expert on the product. So do it. Add consultancy.

Of course, you should charge for this. A really radical option is to provide the widgets for cost, or even nothing, and charge only or largely for the consultancy. Why not? This can create more revenue; it leads to the customer getting what they need. It can also teach you a lot about their business, including a whole raft of other needs they failed to mention at the sales meeting (but for which, amazingly, you have exactly the solution. “In fact, while our people are here, why don’t they do a temporary fix and we’ll get the grommets over this afternoon?”)

All of this may sound obvious, but many businesses are still failing to do it. Apparently a huge amount of software is bought, installed, found to be too difficult to operate and ditched. The companies that flogged this software deserve the misery that will undoubtedly come their way, once they find themselves getting no repeat business and their once-unique software becomes a cheap commodity. Had they added consultancy to their sell, they would have made more money and would have had friends for life. Start-ups can benefit hugely from thinking service from day one. Outside dotcom dreamland, cash is a major issue for start-ups. If your product or service addresses a real pain, customers will pay for advice and hand-holding, even before the widgets arrive.

If they still have a few teething problems when the products do arrive, you’re already there to work with the customer. You may even get paid while you’re doing this. And once they’re up and running, keep your customers abreast of the latest developments in the area.

Run regular refresher courses for their people. Invite them to seminars. Remember, you are Mr or Ms Widget. Your customers want you to be the experts. Getting this right begins with that magic question: Where’s the pain? If you are addressing a deeply felt need, you will have no problem adding consultancy to your product.

Mike Southon and Chris West, Director Magazine April 2003

2. Sales: a Job for Professionals same as adding service

No revenue = no business. Obvious. But we've met so many people who haven't taken this "obvious" truth on board. They may have done so intellectually, but not in the actual way they are running their businesses. So many start-ups have an entrepreneur plus a couple of techies, plus maybe someone who's worked in marketing. Everybody "does a bit of selling", just as everybody will clean the loo if necessary (start-ups are like that, everybody has to muck in). The trouble is, selling isn't like that. It's a specialist, professional job.

Recently, we were talking at a major business school and we asked how many had done sales training, expecting most to say "of course". Not a single hand went up. Selling clearly has an image problem, caused by pushy "forecourt" salesmen or those people who phone you up in the middle of your favourite TV programme to talk about kitchens. Beermat selling is nothing like that. It's about listening to customers, finding out their needs and how to meet them, closing a deal and following up the deal to ensure customer satisfaction (and to make further sales). It is disciplined, long-term and co-operative.

Of course, everyone thinks they can sell - entrepreneurs, who have a natural tendency to think they can do everything, are particularly guilty of this. But while entrepreneurs may be able to dazzle the customer with their enthusiasm, they usually fail at two crucial sales tasks: qualifying customers (selling to those with real needs and real money, not just anyone within earshot) and closing (asking for payment, something most non-sales people find difficult).

Start-ups need customers quickly, and these are best found by sales people. Everyone thinks they can sing My Way, and yes, most people can get the words out roughly in time with the karaoke machine. Most people can enthuse about a product and get someone else's head nodding too. But a professional sales person does so much more than that. Get a proper sales cornerstone in your team.

Where do you find people to be your cornerstone? You could visit our website, where several such individuals have left their details. But you should be networking as much as possible - it's amazing how soon someone will probably come up with an answer. Or you could try creating your own sales cornerstone. Look around your friends and acquaintances for someone who is particularly popular - the kind of person who always has a group of people around them at parties. Check your intuition, that you do really trust and like this person. Then suggest the idea to them. If they're up for it, send them on a standard sales course.

The old adage “people buy from people” should be engraved above the doorway of every start-up. Critics of this adage say that it is fine for business-to-business (B2B) operations, but what if you want to sell to consumers directly? One person won’t be enough - we’re back to marketing and sales teams.

First, many of the entrepreneurs we meet are trying B2B, and still haven’t got sales cornerstones. But even if you are planning to sell to the consumer, must you do so directly? Instead, you could do a deal with a big intermediary - a good sales cornerstone will make this deal a “win-win”, not the one-sided deal some big company purchasing departments impose on start-ups.

So whatever your business, get a proper sales cornerstone in your team and you’re half-way towards “funding from revenue”.

Mike Southon and Chris West, Director Magazine October 2002

3. Retailing the Beermat Way

Some people have questioned whether the basic principles of Beermat selling apply in the retail environment. We say, emphatically, ‘yes’, if the business is dealing in quality products.

As in any business, you need to move sales down the pipeline as fast as possible, which for retailers means getting qualified people into your shops and then closing deals. Note the ‘as quickly as possible’: if your sales process is a naturally slow one, then you must let it proceed at that speed. But no slower.

You begin, as does a classic ‘b2b’ business, with a list of prospects, which you then refine to a good list: one from which all irrelevant data have been removed and all inaccuracies ironed out. The b2b business now seeks a meeting: for a retailer, you want to get people onto your premises. This is best done in groups - organize special events that will attract their interest. The key to these is not to sell at them, and to make sure the customer know they won’t be sold to at them. Oh, and make them interesting - to the customers, not to you. As with all such events, the less you say the better. Get outside experts in.

Naturally, you do a lot of listening at these events, as alert for buying signals as a salesperson would be in a meeting. Contact interested people afterwards. What is the next stage in your sales process? A test drive? A DVD about your tailor-made holidays? Make sure there is such a process, that moves you and the customer ever closer together in small but clear steps, and that each prospect is mapped onto it via a proper sales pipeline.

In addition to this, of course, you will have customers walking in off the street. Selling to such people is an art, for which we have great respect. Good staff soon learn to spot the difference between ‘tyre-kickers’ and people with serious interest - a lot of it’s in the body language (and the subject of another piece!) Once your people have decided the customer has potential, then it’s time to engage with them. Remember that at the start of this process, you are still qualifying: have they got needs and money today? Talk to them: establish their level of knowledge. Often people are unsure of what they want - or rather what they get for what money - so help them by establishing price ranges. Getting them to decide what they want and what it will cost them is a real, clear step to a sale.

Each time you move a customer up another step, you are making a small close. Then, of course, the time will come for the final close. The principles and practice of closing are the same in every business: script and silence. Retailers often use the ‘assumptive’close - ‘so you either want one of these or one of these…’ This works well if done subtly, and very badly if mishandled! Be careful with it.

Don’t forget to follow up your customers. Can you make them customer mentors? Keep inviting them to events.

There are many aspects of retail that are special, and about which we would not presume to lecture. But the quality retailer is, in our view, as much a classic Beermat enterprise as a business services provider, and needs to follow the above principles.

Appendix 2

Articles on Sales

1. Let's Double Sales!

Managing Directors always look at us salespeople with a mixture of anticipation and suspicion. Anticipation, because they'd really like to increase sales, that's why they hired us in the first place. Suspicion, because they have no precise idea what we're up to out there in customer-land, with our Ford Mondeos and expense accounts.

One of my most popular presentations is called "Let's Double Sales Immediately", a snappy title which always packs them in. But as I kick off, I look down on a sea of rather cynical faces, and I realise I've got to come up with something quick or the bread rolls will start flying.

So how would I double your sales immediately if I joined your company? Right now, not in six months time, when you've spent lots of money on marketing. You want instant results, of course!

What I would do on my first day would be to start working on your case studies. Who your favourite customers, not necessarily your biggest, but the ones you really liked? You wouldn't mind having a coffee or beer with them, even if there was no business to talk about.

You should tell me the story of the sale, a narrative that explains what you did, from first contact through to successful delivery and payment.

I learnt this technique from my co-author Chris West, the one in our team who actually writes the books. He's a novelist, and writes in that style: a narrative, a flow. He tells stories. Your case studies should do the same:

"Once upon a time, we found a customer who had a problem, challenge or opportunity. We provided out products or services, with excellent results. The customer was delighted and gave us lots of money. We all lived happily ever after. The End"

Helping write these case studies would be a good activity for my first day with your company. I'd be finding out exactly what you do, and in the process meeting many of your delivery people, the stars of the stories. I would soon have a good insight into your favourite customers, and what you did for them.

It's then time for the first test: "These happy customers - can you call them right now and make an early appointment? I'd like to meet them."

This is not usually a problem. Sometimes, the client suggests we pop in next Friday afternoon, and grab a bite afterwards. That's a very good sign. They like you too!

I'd come along with my freshly minted case study and ask them: "is this what actually happened?", and is there something else the customer would like to add?

Customers will always mention things that you took for granted. Of course you delivered on time. Of course your widgets were 99.9% reliable. You're a professional company, it's what you do. But do put it in the case study. The customer felt it was important - that's all that matters.

And then the second test. I'd say: "I see you spent £10,000 last year with us. What would you spend £20,000 on next year?" and wait to see what they said.

They might say "Twice as many widgets of course!" and I'll have doubled your sales in an instant. Result!

More likely they'll say: "we've got enough widgets for now, but we'll need some more in about six months". (Make mental note to call in 4 months....). "Though, I'll tell you what our biggest problem is, Mike........"

Here's an important buying signal. It may be in an area that's connected to what you do, some gold-plated business development input. If it's totally unrelated, then you can offer to ask around for them thus earning a 'brownie point'.

And before I left, I'd ask for referrals. "Know anyone else looking for some top-quality widgets?" Don't be shy in asking for referrals. People enjoy doing it for people they like. It's human nature.

So that's how you double sales immediately. Ask your favourite customers for double the business, and for some referrals. Easy!

And in case you're wondering exactly what it is us top salespeople do out there in customer-land in our Ford Mondeos, it's just that. Can you pay my expenses now?

2. How to Network - Who Likes You?

I had a bulging postbag after the last column about doubling sales. “It’s all very well for you, Mike, just breezing in, bold as brass, asking for double revenue and for some referrals. You clearly have no shame and the skin of a rhinoceros. I couldn’t do that. I have feelings.....”

This is a very valid point. Us ‘Hunters’ do have a thick skin; its part of our DNA. Regular people are more worried about rejection, or coming across as sleazy or dishonest.

But everyone should be an evangelist for their company, to be able to describe what they do in a social situation, to be enthusiastic, and to pick up any buying signals.

So what are the personal characteristics of the successful salesperson? Some are obvious: optimism, determination, thick skin, good listening skills, product knowledge, credibility, honesty and so on.

Of course a good salesperson has to have an engaging personality and the ability to create empathy. We take that even further, and say the number one attribute of a successful salesperson is to be liked.

The skill of the successful salesperson is to be able to work out quickly who ‘gets you’. It’s rare to be utterly disliked immediately. What’s more common is people don’t ‘get you’, and in a sales situation you hear: “sounds very interesting. Leave a brochure, and I’ll get back to you if I’m interested.”

This is ‘indifference’, the curse of the sales process. You don’t really know if they are prospects or not. Should you spend more time chasing them up?

It’s not difficult to spot if someone likes you if you know how to look for the signals. Imaging a networking event, where you steel yourself to chat to 30 people, each for a few minutes. Which ones are worth following up afterwards?

The key is to ask questions in a specific order. Good questions to start off with are, simple and factual: ‘Where’, ‘What’ and ‘How’: “Where are you from?” “What do you do?” “How do you do it?”

The last question should elicit a story of a typical event in the life of their business, the things they do, the customers they help. But watch out for signs of indifference.

If it's hard work talking to them even at this early stage, then you should find a polite way of disengaging. Don't worry - there are twenty nine other people to speak to.

If you're enjoying the chat, and both seem to be getting along, you ask them a more probing 'Why?' question. "Why are you here? Is there anything you need help with, hence your trip to this networking event?"

If they don't like the 'cut of your jib', then the shutters will come down. "Everything's fine, thanks." Don't take it personally, move on. 28 to go!

But if they like you, they'll tell you what's on their mind: "Our biggest problem right now is......"

Always agree with them, it's called 'reinforcing the need': "yes, that's a very typical problem, isn't it?" You're beginning to create some empathy.

The opposite, "you must be very stupid to be worried about that" is not good form. Top tip: never insult a potential customer.....

But things are going well. They have problem and you're sympathetic. You then offer a fact, something that might help them: a web site, an article, a book, anything. See if they accept it. If they do, then you can go for the final question, which is "Who?"

Who would they like to meet, to help solve their problem? Maybe it's one of your network contacts. Maybe it's one of your technical staff. Offer a follow-up meeting, and see what happens.

You'll leave your networking meeting with 30 cards. Most were quite interesting, and probably worth a gentle nudge at some later stage. But you found five people you really liked who liked you, so let's e-mail them tomorrow and set up that meeting.

And that's the basis of networking - chat to a bunch of people, ask "where?", "what?", "how?", "why?" and "who" and see which ones you liked.

So what do you think? Was this a useful article? Fancy a bite of lunch sometime?

3. Cold Calling

Hands up who likes cold calling!

I ask this at conferences and one or two slightly shifty people put their hands up. The rest of the audience looks at them with a mixture of pity and contempt. Pity, as they suspect they're the sort of people who trawl the internet for 'discipline services' (people like Supernanny, but more exotic 'naughty steps'). Contempt, because these are the idiots who call us at home at dinnertime with the astonishing news that there's a double glazing representative in our area...

Everyone hates cold calling, particularly the recipients. But the Sales Director says we need more business, so let's get out the Yellow Pages and hit the phones. Or worse, let's send the most junior members of staff on a cold-calling course, delivered by a sleazy guy with bling for teeth and a Teflon toupee.

I think cold-calling is dying. Nobody sits by the phone waiting for a call from a stranger. That's why God gave us voice-mail. And the delete button.

So what's the alternative? We think the answer is e-mail. No, not SPAM, unless you are indeed selling replica watches or 'stiffening solutions'. You need to have a more structured approach.

First, decide who is your favourite customer, your 'Customer Mentor'. Someone you like. Someone you'd go and have a coffee with even when there's no business to talk about. You genuinely enjoy their company.

What industry are they in, and what's their job title? Let's say, they happen to be Bob, a Managing Director of a building company.

Next you get a list of 200 similarly sized building companies, ordered in geographical proximity to your own office.

Show this list to your Customer Mentor, and ask them to delete the deceased, the difficult, the nearly destitute or the just plain deranged. Your list could now be down to 100.

You then need their e-mail addresses. This should be provided by your Marketing Department, or outsourced to a Market Research company.

You’re now going to write 100 individually tailored e-mails, each no more than four lines long. Why so short? Well, each extra line increases the chance of instant deletion by approximately 50%.

The first line is something about their company, along the lines of “I noticed that....” Ideally, it’s a specific gem that you’ve gleaned from your customer Mentor that leads nicely into your product or service. In the worst case, it’s something you’ve spotted on their web site, perhaps in their Press Release section.

These tend to be less than earth-shattering bits of information, such as they’ve opened up a new office or have a new USB port. This is never going to make the front page of The FT, but to you, utterly fascinating.

Lines two and three are your Elevator Pitch, what you would say to a prospect in an elevator, a maximum of two sentences. First, your Premise, a fancy way of saying what you do. And of course ‘big yourself up’ a bit: “We make excellent widgets”.

This is a bold claim and you’re clearly selling, so before the prospect has time to run away, you need a compelling second sentence. This should be Proof. How can you support that audacious assertion about your widgets?

Your Proof is the name of your Customer Mentor. “Bob at The Building Company loves us and our widgets. Why not ask him?”

If the prospect has heard of Bob or his company, then you’ve won another 15 minutes. This is a realistic objective of a good Elevator Pitch - you’re never going to close a serious sale in a lift with two sentences.

And the objective of the e-mail? To get an appointment of course, so the fourth and final line of this e-mail says “I’m going to be near your office on Tuesday at 10am - would that we a good time to drop in?”

Why not try this instead of putting yourself through the misery of cold-calling? It’s cheap and it works. I can provide references. Honestly!

And if you offer ‘Discipline Services for Naughty Schoolboys’, forget the expensive medieval torture equipment, just get a business directory and tell them to start ‘cold calling’. They’ll soon be begging for mercy...

4. Negotiation

People often ask me: “Mike, please tell us everything you know about negotiation”.

“Easy!” I say. I get out my trusty Beermat and write down the following:

1. **Take the client down the pub**
2. **Say to them: “Please give me the contents of your wallet!”**
3. **Run away as fast as possible**

All right, I confess. I’m totally useless at negotiation. Purveyors of sexy gadgets rub their hands with glee when they see me coming. I’ll buy anything. And the more the salesperson talks at me, the more likely I am to sign on the dotted line, without ever reading the small print.

So why am I so useless at negotiation? It’s simple. It’s because I’m your stereotypical new business salesperson, or to use the correct technical term, a ‘Hunter’.

All companies need a few people like me; out there in my Ford Sierra, knocking on doors and telling people how wonderful their life will be as soon as they decide to buy our company’s products and services.

This approach works very well…for a while. Very soon the euphoria evaporates, and sensible people, often with glasses and stern expressions, start asking me hard questions. Like “exactly what does your product do?”, “what’s our discount?” and “when do you ever shut up?”

I then look anxiously at their business card, and see the dreaded words “Purchasing Director”. My heart sinks. Not only is this person a skilled negotiator, they have also been specifically trained to resist all my clever sales tricks, like pretending to agree with everything they say. I make my excuses and call for back-up.

This is actually the correct approach. The Purchasing Director now wants to speak to someone about the detail, which is not the strong point of us Hunters. They need to discuss the technical merits of the solution, and use the language of the spreadsheet: price, profit, margins and other complicated stuff which makes Hunters’ eyes glaze over. They need to speak to your ‘Farmers’.

These are your delivery and finance people, who are actually going to do the real negotiation, as the devil is always in the detail.

Negotiation is not rocket science. The basics are very simple. It's all about achieving the obvious and highly desirable win: win scenario.

The Hunter has already done their job. They've found a customer with a genuine need for your products or services, and, more importantly, with money in the bank. Customer references have been provided and checked.

Negotiation is primarily about getting everyone 'on the same side of the table', working towards a common goal. It's much easier to do this, of course, if both parties like each other.

Your company's 'Farmers' will be judged by the customer on their technical ability and the quality of the detail being discussed. If they are open, honest, and factually precise they will make the right impression.

The Hunter should now shut up and listen. My shins bear the mark of many a work colleague having applied a swift kick when I try and intervene randomly with irrelevant comments. I should be looking for the danger signs; perhaps the customer is trying to be "clever" in a negative or manipulative way, or avoiding giving straight answers. This should set the alarm bells ringing.

You strengthen your negotiating position considerably by having the nerve to walk away if the numbers don't stack up, or if a key member of your team has a very bad feeling about the deal. This can be tough when your revenue projections don't look good, but if you have any niggling doubts at this stage, you'll have major problems later, in my experience.

The ideal negotiation doesn't seem like a negotiation at all. Your technical people and their technical people have a nice chat and agree to be chums forever. Their Purchasing Director has wrangled spreadsheets with your Finance Director and the numbers represent profitable business for both parties.

Of course, life is never quite as easy as that, so I'll look into common disasters and their remedies in a future column.

But for now, it's all about Peace, Love and Understanding. And if you're looking for a long-term relationship with a customer, that's non-negotiable!

5. Farming Today

It's often said that "it's like a 'zoo' out there" I prefer the analogy of a 'Farm', organic of course, with a bunch of happy animals, presided over by a benevolent gentleman in a tweed jacket and green wellies, like the non-threatening farmer character in 'Babe'.

All the hard work is actually done by the animals - they wake up, eat grass, produce wool and baa a lot - it must be a happy life being an organic sheep (unless your name is 'Lamb Chop')

Perhaps your delivery people (from my background, software developers) are treated like well-loved sheep, kept from danger, and mostly happy, so long as they have a nice pasture to work in, and the latest workstation.

There is, of course, a dog running about and barking at them, but that's the equivalent of their project manager, making sure the sheep do the correct things, to specified deadlines and within budget. Generally, all is well in the world, but the challenge in a growing business is to how get your delivery people involved in the sales process, or in this case, getting your sheep to find people interested in jumpers.

Of course 'sales' is a distasteful business, done by lowlifes like me. We're called 'Hunters' and our job is to find new customers and to open doors. This is fine, but where's the business card of that bloke our technical staff met at the conference, the one with all the difficult and expensive-sounding problems?

This is the real part of selling, often called 'Farming' (you see, you knew this piece would make sense eventually!). 'Farming' is done by non-salespeople: reliable, normal folk, who are trusted by the people they're speaking to. After a few beers, the prospect has explained in lurid detail the serious problems their company is having, and wonders if you can help.

Delivery people hear these 'buying signals' all the time. All you have to do is teach them to listen and to pass back the information. However, the two things they must never discuss, under any circumstances, are 'timescales' and 'money'.

Discussing potential project timescales without being in possession of all the facts is very dangerous. Customers with big problems want them fixed today, and helpful people naturally want to take the pain away immediately. A golden rule is always deferring the answer to "when can you start?" You always need to check with your office, not just about a possible start date, but if, after reflection, your company wants to do the work at all.

Even more problematic is Talking about money, which represents the main stumbling block for getting non-salespeople involved in the sales process. It's embarrassing talking about money, especially if it's for yourself. That's why great performers have agents and successful agents have big houses. If you tell your delivery people they are expressly forbidden to talk about money, they'll give a sigh of relief and thank you forever.

All you need to be a successful Farmer is to be a good listener (get them to talk) and pass everything back for later follow-up, especially scheduling and pricing. But be aware that even in large companies around 20% of revenue comes from Hunting, and 80% of revenue comes from 'Farming'.

It's very important to get this process embedded in the DNA of your company. Make sure you have good 'Farming' procedures in place and that 'Farmers' are rewarded, always with recognition, and with real cash, if appropriate.

Good Farmers don't have to feel sleazy or uncomfortable. All they are doing is listening to people they like and seeing if they can help. Sometimes they're actually finding out how much the customer wants to spend and passing that back as well. If this happens, always remember to look slightly surprised when you learn the customer has agreed the price.

And if you do have a full-time salesperson, the analogy from the 'Babe' still holds. Your salesperson is the popular, eager, helpful piglet that thinks they're a sheep. The other sheep don't mind them at all; they're good to have around the place, as you can laugh at their cute little foibles. And if your salespeople miss their targets consistently, they're still useful. They're delicious, with apple sauce.

6. Don't 'Go Large'

It's always a happy scene in the office: the careworn Managing Director looks up from their depressing spreadsheet full of declining sales and increasing costs to see the happy puppy of a salesman hopping up and down excitedly outside their office.

Like small pets, many salespeople are not actually house-trained, so it's wise to open the door to the garden. But hopefully their bubbling exterior means a big new sale....?

Well not exactly. It seems a sales visit went very well. The customer had a whole bunch of problems, and said they would like you to fix them. Indeed, the meeting took a couple of hours, and then continued into lunch, then the rest of the afternoon was spent talking to their technical people, then they all went to the pub. No wonder the salesperson needs to go to the toilet.

This is of course good news, but a little premature. Clearly the customer liked the salesperson, otherwise they wouldn't have spent so long talking to them, and definitely wouldn't have told them all the problems they have in such lurid and comprehensive detail. These are clearly 'buying signals'.

Before the meeting, the marketing director reckoned the customer represented an opportunity of around £5,000. "Company that size, that sort of turnover.... £6,000 maximum."

"No way!" replies The Sales Puppy of Happiness. "With all their problems, sorry, development opportunities, we're looking at £100K, possibly more!" You can tell their other brain-cell is already on EBay, putting in an offer for something pointless and expensive. You can almost hear their credit card whimpering.

It's sad to pour cold water on everyone's enthusiasm, but bitter experience has shown me the larger the potential order (and the more optimistic the salesperson), the more likely it is to just wither away over time, like vampires at dawn.

Six months down the line, whatever happened to that £100K plus deal? "I don't know", howls The Mangy Hound of Misery. "They haven't returned my calls for six weeks". Thank heavens their bid for Angelina Jolie's brassiere was unsuccessful....

So what happened, and what can we do about it? The answer to the first may be complex; maybe the customer's priorities changed. Maybe another supplier turned up with an even nicer salesperson. Maybe their Purchasing Director got involved.

This last point makes sense, and is easily avoidable. The bigger the potential order is, the more likely (and sensible it is) that Purchasing get involved. Look at it from the customer's perspective - would you hand out a £100K order after everyone had been to the pub?

Here's the solution: of course it's great to have a highly optimistic meeting where the customer comes up with more and more potential 'stuff' for you to do. Acknowledge everything and reinforce their needs. Then go the other way. Ask them what is the 'Smallest Thing' you can do for them - perhaps a days' consultancy?

Or, if you know them well, you might be cheeky and ask: "How much can can sign off, personally, without going to Purchasing?" If they say £5,000, offer some services, perhaps training, for £4,950.

What you're essentially doing is auditioning each other. If they say "Oh dear, £4,950 is a lot of money to spend on this", then (respectfully) I don't think they'll be spending £100K soon, or ever. They've failed their 'big customer' audition.

And they'll think they're auditioning you: "yes, let's try this supplier out on a small order". Maybe they'll even do a 'Tiny Thing' with a couple of suppliers and compare and contrast. That's annoying from your perspective, but all the more sweet if you trounce your competitor!

If they agree to a 'Tiny Thing' you can see what they're like to deal with. If they're a complete pain in the rear over £4,950, then the £100K deal will be even more deeply unpleasant. Perhaps you shouldn't bid for that large job after all...

So train your salespeople not to get excited about big prospects, but to be ecstatic about wining 'Tiny Things' to get your foot in the door. "Good dog! What's that in your mouth - a new small order? Well done - here's a bone for you. Please get off my leg...."

7. Sleazy Does It

Some of the happiest companies I meet seem to have no salespeople at all. They're successful, of course; some are even growing like Topsy. However, they have nobody with 'sales' or even 'business development' in their job title.

How have they done this? Well, they have good revenues of course but this seems to have taken minimal sales effort on their part. They tell me nice things like "we can't keep up with all the enquiries we get" and "we spend nothing on marketing".

Lurking at the back of their mind is that this has all been a fluke, or perhaps they're looking to grow rapidly and think it's about time they hired a 'proper' salesperson. I always try and talk them out of it. Certainly they shouldn't hire someone with a track record in sales who happens to be personally obnoxious - this will be culturally disastrous.

I nearly made this mistake once. The company I co-founded, The Instruction Set, had grown to 20 people and had a turnover of over £1M in Open Systems training workshops. Although I was called the 'Sales and Marketing Director' success was definitely due my being at the right place at the right time, rather than about my selling skills. My previous job had been selling scaffolding, badly.

I thought I'd better hire an experienced, grown-up salesperson, so put the word out to the recruitment agencies. A dazzling array of people turned up, all with excellent track records in sales, most with scary-looking moustaches (even the ladies, which was nice).

The most brutal candidate had a simple sales message. "I'll double your sales, Mike, just give me the bullets and I'll fire them." He then did the little mime with the thumb and first finger. Bang!

His CV was impressive. Sales had been doubled wherever he went. He had references. He looked perfect. All I had to do was to show him around the office and introduce him to whoever happened to be in that day.

Good salespeople have the skill to alter their body language and behaviour to create instant empathy with who ever they meet. This character was different. He did indeed alter his behaviour in interesting ways, but the response from our staff was always instant hostility.

He gabbled irrelevant sales gobbledygook to our CEO. He insulted our technical staff, implying they were lazy and he'd keep them over-worked. And then he met our

Office Manager, who actually ran everything in our company, but (surprisingly to him) happened to be a woman. He made a flirty but inappropriate comment and asked her to make him a cup of tea.

Lunch was worse. The waitress was late with the soup, (thus preventing him firing his bullets) so he tore a strip off her. I returned to my office, depressed. I didn't like him, but I supposed you had to hire that sort of person to get on in business. Then I remembered it was my company (well, 20% of it anyway) and I wasn't going to hire a total 'banker' (to use the popular rhyming slang).

All the people in our company he'd met suddenly appeared at the door. I had to give them the bad news - undoubtedly this was a successful salesperson, but I'd decided not to hire him as I hadn't liked them. There was a big cheer - they'd hated him too.

I turned him down, politely, in an e-mail. He responded with abuse for a week. Then I looked closely at his references. They all said he was effective. None said they "liked" him.

So that's the moral of the story - only hire people you like, especially if they're in sales. If you can, promote from within, someone inexperienced in sales, but who understands your customers and your culture. If they're also liked by your customers, then the rest is detail and largely coaching - the nuts and bolts of 'how to sell' can be taught in a day.

So if you have a successful 'boutique' business (say up to 25 people), and you're getting all the business you need via word of mouth, that's perfect. You don't need a sleazebag salesperson. If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

8. Out of Commission

Never ask a candidate for your sales team how they should be rewarded. Here's what you'll get: "a highly competitive salary" (read, £200K per year) "a fast company car" (so they can get to that important meeting on time), "a realistic expense account" (where "realistic" is a euphemism for "unlimited") and "very long holidays" (they work really hard and need their recovery time).

This little excursion into Cloud-Cuckoo Land is finally garnished with: "an uncapped commission scheme". They argue that results should bring proper rewards - so what if it bankrupts the company at the same time?

This is, of course, meaningless drivel, guaranteed to give the Finance Director an ulcer and a hernia simultaneously. Anyone who sits in front of you and seriously suggests you should pay them £200K per year plus fringe benefits needs their head examined (possibly by your steel-tipped boot). You're an SME, you can't afford ludicrous packages. Plus you don't need to pay them commission.

I can hear the red felt-tips of hate being unleashed as I write this. Surely salespeople need to earn a proper living? Surely the sales force needs to be motivated?

Of course they do, but in Maslow's famous "Hierarchy of Needs", money is way down the list. In a small company, with its tribal atmosphere, anyone who tells you they're only working for the money needs advice on moving to somewhere more boring and stable, like a building society. Working in an SME provides benefits much higher on Maslow's list: peer respect and making a difference.

What salespeople really want (but usually won't tell you) is "an easy life". The perfect company has a nice bunch of people who are a joy to work with, not too much hassle (like checking up exactly where they are every 10 minutes), and a product or service that's easy to sell to nice people, who enjoy a decent lunch now and then.

I remember seeing Sir John Harvey Jones chatting to the sales director of Morgan in an early series of the BBC's Troubleshooter. There was a two-year waiting list for the car, so the guy wasn't "selling" cars, he was "rationing" them, possibly the easiest sales job in the world. You can't promise that the job will be quite that simple, of course. But great products are easy to sell because people need them. If you can say "we have the No 1 product in the field, and can prove it with our customer referrals", applicants should flock to your door.

Salespeople should be rewarded for success, but not some ludicrous commission scheme that means they get three times as much as the delivery people who actually do the hard work. Our model is to put everyone on the same scheme. First, pay a slightly above market rate salary, so you can attract the best people. Then, give out bonuses based on two factors: how the company's performed, and how the individual has performed.

The first is the most important - if times are hard, it's belt-tightening all round, even if you're working 14-hour days. Company performance should be presented openly at the monthly company meeting, so this element should not be a surprise at bonus time.

Personal performance can be hard to measure for administrators and delivery people, but not for salespeople. Discuss and agree sales targets at the beginning of the process, and measure the salesperson's performance on a weekly basis.

It's important to explain that if a salesperson beats their sales target, this is usually increased for the next quarter; it's the way of things. Also, if you don't hit your sales target you get formally warned, and then fired, sometimes over the course of only a couple of quarters. That might seem a little unfair, since it's a lot more difficult to get fired from delivery or admin or finance. But that's just the way sales is.

So only hire salespeople who enjoy selling, who like your customers and aren't too greedy. High-commission salespeople get desperate and will tell any damn lie or stick a knife into their workmates' back if they think it might help them hit target.

And that's why you're reading this column in our Sales on a Beermat Manual, not Estate Agent Weekly.

Appendix 3

The Power of NLP

Sales people are not professional psychologists or life coaches, but understanding what makes people 'tick' - both customers and yourself - is always important. Successful salespeople strike up a quick empathy with potential customers and are able to modify their behaviour to suit the situation without seeming false or becoming embarrassed. They are always watching and listening, picking up all the conscious and unconscious signals and responding appropriately.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a huge and fascinating approach to psychology. It has many aspects: in this piece I will stick to the three that I have found most useful in sales.

As with all toolsets, these techniques should not be used slavishly as part of a dogmatic approach.

1. Meta Programs

Most psychological models produce 'polarities', ways of perceiving or interacting with the world that differ from individual to individual, and which make us all different. The popular Myers-Briggs indicator is a classic example, dividing people into extraverts vs. introverts, people who judge by emotion vs. people who judge by reason (etc.)

NLP 'Meta programs' are similar polarities. There are a number of them: here are six that I have found most useful in sales situations. As with all the best NLP material, they are easy to understand, and, even more important, easy to use: you can pick up the clues quickly, and use the simple techniques to turn what you notice into genuine rapport with the client.

Note that customers may not 'run' all the programs below. But the chances are that they will be strongly influenced by one or two of them. Remember you're not here to do a complete psychological profile, just to find sufficient common ground to lead to the next 'Tiny Close'.

Meta Program one: Big Picture / Tiny Detail

Is the customer looking for a ‘Big Picture’ (“I want a company that can do all our widget smoothing”) or ‘Tiny Detail’ (“I’m fascinated how you get your widgets so smooth - exactly how do you do this”)?

Once you have established if he or she falls into one of these categories (remember, not everybody runs every meta program), treat them accordingly. Detail will annoy Big Picture people: to the lover of Tiny Detail, the colourful imagery of the big picture will seem shallow and false.

Note that these two common attitudes map closely onto the ‘Hunter’/ ‘Farmer’ model. Hunters are usually good at giving the Big Picture - imagine lots of arm-waving and lively imagery - “one day there will be no rough widgets in your organisation, and everyone will live happily ever after!”

Farmers are usually good at going into detail - imagine a long technical discourse on precisely how the technique was invented, the pitfalls along the way, and some interesting research avenues on how the technique might be improved in the future.

Meta program two: Moving Towards / Moving Away From

‘Moving Towards’ people like to head for a goal. ‘Moving Away From’ people need to escape places of difficulty.

Ask the customer what they need. They can respond in either positive or negative mode:

Positive: If they say “I want to......” - this shows a ‘Towards’ meta program.

Negative: If they say “I don’t want, or I want to avoid....” - this shows ‘Away From’.

It’s very important to spot this quickly and mirror their attitude in your language. Concentrate on goals with ‘Moving Towards’ people, and on problems (and their eventual solution) with ‘Moving Away Froms’.

Note that among your sales people, hunters will prefer ‘Towards’ behaviour, uncovering needs, explaining benefits and leading the customer towards the sale. Farmers are often more comfortable showing ‘Away From’ behaviour, bringing a customer back from the place where they were experiencing difficulties.

Meta Program three: Helps Me / Helps Them

In selling, it is always worth asking who would be the immediate and direct beneficiaries of your product or service. But actually, what matters most is how the person in front of you sees this outcome. 'Helps me' people will be interested in what they will personally get from any transaction. 'Helps them' people are more altruistic: 'will my team and co-workers benefit?'

If you ask the simple question "What will this do for you?", the 'helps me' person will engage and give a full answer. The 'helps them' person may well show initial confusion, and their answer will be less cogent. This may be mistaken for reticence or stupidity, but actually they are just not used to 'sorting by self' (to use the NLP terminology).

On our side of the table, the hunter is often 'Helps Me' , and the farmer 'Helps Them'. So each will form a natural rapport with people of similar type. Ego-boosting sales patter from a helps-me hunter will alienate a 'helps-them' prospect. 'Helps them' farmers may well come to dislike 'selfish' people in the client organization. Watch out if the budget holders are 'helps me' types!

Meta program four: Must Have / Might Have

This is more about the customer's perception of the situation, which will be a mixture of the reality of the situation and the way they prefer to look at things. A situation may be urgent, but a naturally tentative person will still resist this. Other people love urgency, and try and impose this on actually rather unimportant situations.

Signs that the customer feels this is a 'Must Have' situation are their use of words like 'must', 'immediate', 'important', 'essential', 'vital' and 'definitely'. These are buying signals. Don't be embarrassed - offer to solve the problem; if they're sceptical, show some proof (such as the Beermat Case Study); close the sale!

More often, sales are perceived by the customer as 'Might Haves'. This is evidenced by their using language like "we need to look into....." and "various factors will affect our decision......" In this case, you need to provide more detail. A farmer will be better at doing this than a hunter.

As well as looking at the language of the customer, try and gauge the level of pain suffered by the customer, by trying to sell a short consultancy project to look into the various options. You can justify this because you have established yourself as a company who a) understands the customer's problems and b) has helped others, as shown in your case studies.

You're offering to use this expertise to generate a study, which will not only fully define the problem (there may be extra issues which the customer might not appreciate) but also offer a tailored solution.

This study, especially part one, will be a stand-alone document which will be useful to the customer, even if they decide not to proceed to the second step. It has a value and you should charge for it - not what they might expect from a consultancy like McKinsey, but something which reflects the work you put in. This is a nice outcome: they are effectively paying for you to sell to them!

Meta program five: Similar / Different

A simple game will illustrate this meta program in action. Take two similar (but not exactly the same) images or pictures and ask people to discuss them. Some will focus on similarities. Others will point out the differences.

It's common in the sales process to concentrate on the positives and compare like with like. Case studies do this implicitly - if the customer buys from us, they'll be as happy and as the customer in the example.

Sometimes, however, the customer response is to focus on differences: "In our company we do things differently" or "You're probably not aware of our specific problems..."

Always reinforce rather than denigrate and differences this customer may perceive, otherwise you run the risk of them thinking you're ignorant or stupid. Find a way that your product / service solves their particular pain.

Hunters (and I speak from personal experience here) are very bad at dealing with this. In our world, everybody has similar problems, and we're sure we have the right solutions. Anyone who disagrees with us is either ignorant or stupid! This is, of course, both dangerous and wrong.

Farmers are much better at dealing with differences. They will agree and say "Yes and....." pointing out how the difference is a virtue and how they would tackle it.

If you think the customer is playing games, disagreeing with you to try and wind you up or elicit a discount, withdraw gracefully and concentrate your efforts on people who don't play games.

Graceful withdrawal can work as 'reverse psychology'. You say "yes, I see your point - we're probably not right for you..." and withdraw very slowly, giving them the chance to call you back and generously overlook the (now) minor obstacles.

Meta program six: External / Internal

A good final question to ask the customer is: "If we do provide our product and service, and it performs well, how will you measure success?"

Of course you're looking for direct and measurable customer benefits, such as increased revenue and/or reduced costs. But try and find out what will be the benefit to the customer personally.

Are they most interested in external benefits, such as a promotion, salary increase or pat on the back from their boss? Or do they have an internal focus? They know when they've done a good job, and don't need to be told so by anybody else.

Try and paint the appropriate picture of success for the customer.

This meta program also useful in motivating your own sales people.

Imagine if the project went so well there was an awards ceremony to celebrate the success. For the External person, it's their lifelong dream - the problem is getting them off the stage. For the Internal people, this is their worst nightmare: they shuffle on, look deeply embarrassed, don't say a word and run off.

In the sales process for External people, always mention the possibility that if it all goes really well, you might want to have of a company event with an awards ceremony. This could be anything from a morale-boosting pub night to a huge event with Stephen Fry handing out the gongs.

For internal people always remind them that they know when they've done a good job, even if it's only the two of you that realise it. And make sure the entrepreneur drops them a private note of 'Well done!'

Generally, hunter and farmer salespeople fit the following table.

Hunter	Farmer
Big Picture	**Tiny Detail**
Towards	**Away From**
Helps Me	**Helps Them**
Must Have	**Might Have**
Similar	**Different**
External	**Internal**

What kind of person is your customer? What kind are you? Are you the right person to be selling to them?

Good selling isn't about faking yourself. It's often said that salespeople are good actors. I disagree, unless we're talking about actors who only play themselves in different situations -Sid James, Terry-Thomas or perhaps even Hugh Grant (sorry Hugh, if you're reading this!). Formidable actors who change chameleon-like into a vast range of characters (think Laurence Oliver, Meryl Streep, Kevin Spacey) would undoubtedly be successful at the first sale, but not so good on repeat business. The customer might have felt 'sold-to' at the first meeting and would probably be worried about which character was turning up for the next one.

Try and adapt to the customer as far as possible, but if your meta programs are radically different, find someone in the organization who suits them, and get them on the case.

2. Personal Drivers

The meeting has gone well, and perhaps the customer is even saying, "What's the next step?" You need to get commitment from them. Three things that can happen next, in increasing order of desirability:

1. **They can agree to look at some more information**

2. **They can agree to a further presentation**

3. **They can agree to a trial or initial consultancy project**

The course of action they choose depends, of course, on where they are in the decision process, but can also be affected greatly by their own 'Personal Drivers'. These are even deeper than meta programs, being the most basic ways in which people both take in and process information.

Individuals have three main drivers - sight, sound and touch (kinaesthesia).

Sight people are interested in reports and pictures. They say things like:
"I'd like to see my people doing this"
"This is the big picture"
"I'd like an overview of what you're proposing"
Offer them more written information

Sound people want to hear about the solution. They say things like:
"I head about you from someone"
"I have a few questions to ask about your solution"
Offer them a presentation

Touch people want to give the solution a try. They say things like:
"We need to try this out"
"I'm keen to move on this"
"That feels right"
Offer them a consultancy project

If we spot these preferences in customers, we can alter our language and behaviour to make them feel more comfortable and to make their buying decisions easier.

Spot the drivers by looking at the way they speak. Here is a summary of typical 'predicates' (NLP terminology for the words used by people with each of the three Personal Drivers):

Sight Predicates	Sound Predicates	Touch Predicates
Clear	Call	Balance
Focus	Dialogue	Drive
Illustrate	Hear	Feel
Insight	Listen	Grasp
Look	Pitch	Move
Overview	Question	Run
Picture	Say	Stretch
See	Speak	Support
Show	Sound	Touch
View	Tell	Try
Offer Report	Offer Presentation	Offer Consultancy

3. Altering States

NLP makes the perhaps obvious point that we spend our lives moving in and out of various moods, states of mind etc. (It calls all such things 'states'.) However, it goes on to outline techniques whereby you can move yourself, and other people, from one state to another.

As with all such techniques, there is always a danger of abuse. Remember that Beermat selling is about creating long-term relationships with people, so manipulating them into a state when they buy from you once, but then resent it, is not on the cards here.

You are allowed to help - and should be helping - the customer move from a state of pain to a state where they actively solve that pain, involving, of course, your product or service! This is creating a win/win situation, not a rip-off.

Such a path often follows this route:

Pain -> Curiosity -> Frustration -> Desire -> Trust -> Action

The customer starts off with a Pain. You have already moved them to Curiosity by getting them to see you.

The reason for including 'Frustration' in the chain is that the client is likely to be in this state, frustrated with the existing situation or the alternatives to your solution. It will emerge in the sales meeting, and needs to be harnessed. Especially if the client is an 'Advance' person, as many people in business are.

So deal with this early. Identify the client's frustrations. Reinforce them if appropriate ("That must be infuriating…")

To prevent the process returning to this point later, keep an eye open for potential future frustrations. What might go wrong along the way? What internal barriers are there to prevent the project going ahead? Who needs to be included in the sales process?

Moving people along the chain can often be done by telling stories, of how someone moved from one state to another. If you have identified the current state of the customer, find a story that moves them along to the next point. They will identify with this - and actually, if you tell it well, so will you. The more sincere and personal the story, the better - the dimension of trust is essential.

You only have to look at a successful speaker or comedian to see how this is done. They move the audience to different state using stories, made real with sights, sounds, actions and even audience participation.

NLP calls any stimulus that changes our psychological state an Anchor. There are many ways of using these, both on oneself and - ethically - on customers.

If you've ever noticed that when you do something you consistently have a particular response, you've noticed an Anchor. Think about the famous experiment where Pavlov would get dogs to salivate when they heard a bell, even if there was no food around - that was an Anchor.

In our daily life we have many Anchors. Typical ones are feeling good when you first hear someone's voice on the phone. Perhaps a particular song or smell takes you back to a specific memory. Places, people, clothes, sounds, smells, touches, words, tones of voice can all act as Anchors.

It's possible for anyone to deliberately create Anchors for positive states, and defuse Anchors for negative states. This is a key technique when you receive personal coaching, especially from an NLP practitioner.

So the best advice we can give is to identify Anchors as often as possible:

For Yourself
This is to get yourself into a positive frame of mind before a sales visit, especially if you're nervous. Think of times when a sale went well - what did you do? What music did you play in the car? Did you put on a particular after-shave or perfume? Did you read a particular article? Do the same again!

For The Client
As them to remember a time when a project went very well, or they felt good personally. What audible, olfactory or visual factors were involved?

Here's a (literally) cheesy example of something that I have used in some sales situations: "Hello everybody! I was passing a pizza shop, and brought one in for everybody - doesn't it smell and look great?"

As I've said, there is much more to NLP than these three topics. Feel free to investigate further: a good introductory book is

Principles of NLP by Joseph O'Connor and Ian McDermott

Or take it further still… My discovery of NLP has been helped greatly by Robbie Steinhouse, an NLP practitioner, trainer and coach. You can find more details on Robbie and his NLP School Europe here: *www.nlpschool.com*

Contact us

If you have enjoyed this workbook and found it useful, do contact us. We answer all emails ourselves!

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Please also visit our website on

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where there are more materials on selling (and all other aspects of business).