

UnSelling™  
sell less ...  
to win more

22 Strategies  
to Win  
Without Selling

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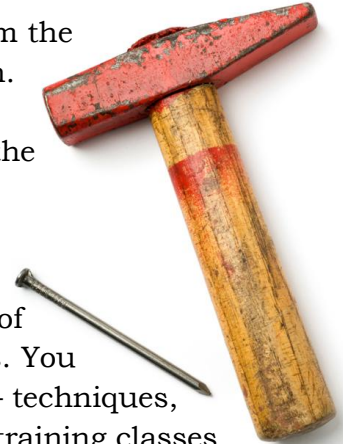
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**Introduction: *UnSelling ... To Win More Business* .....**

The more you sell, the less the client trusts you to tell them the truth. The more you sell, the less inclined the client is to listen. The more you sell, the more you tend to look (and act) like a hammer looking for a nail – where any nail will do. In reality, the more you sell, the less you win.



This position is entirely counter-intuitive to the average sales person, mostly because we are taught from the first day of sales training that the key to success is great sales techniques. You can find thousands of books on the art and science of selling – techniques, tricks, even scripts to “sell” the prospect. Our corporate sales training classes always insist that sales is about understanding the prospect’s needs and then articulating your solution so that the prospect is compelled to choose your obviously-superior solution – right? Not so fast!

**The Background on *UnSelling***

I was trained, starting in 1980, by one of the premier sales organizations in the world – the IBM Corporation. I went on to work at some great and highly successful corporations/organizations including Nynex (now Verizon) and Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) where I headed up worldwide business development for this market-leading consulting organization for much of the last half of the 90’s. Interestingly, even these well-respected organizations instinctively tend to default to a “selling” model – focused on compelling the client to choose our product, solution, or approach because it is superior.

Then in 1997 while at Accenture I conducted a market-wide evaluation of potential sales methodology companies and evaluated an array of sales methodology firms you’ve heard of (and likely been trained by) – including Miller Heiman, Target Account Selling, and Solution Selling, among others. I ended up hiring a sales methodology and training organization I had never heard of – The Complex Sale (TCS). TCS was founded by Rick Page (author of the best-selling book, *Hope is Not a Strategy*) and I chose Rick’s firm because he understood what few people I had previously met really understood – that sales success, particularly when selling consulting and professional services offerings, has little to do with having the best features and functions of your solution. In fact, the best solution loses more than half the time in competitive deals – over half!

Based on our success at Accenture and my personal alignment with Rick's fundamental methodology and thought process, I decided to leave Accenture in 1998 to share both Rick's methodology and my philosophy about *UnSelling* to many new and different clients in services-based businesses. I have managed and coached thousands of sales people and led countless large pursuits. And while this little-understood concept of *UnSelling* has proven successful in many different organizations with whom I've worked, I'd be remiss in not acknowledging the insight and knowledge that Rick and his team of Principals have helped me understand and embrace and have been instrumental in the market-tested development of these concepts which have been integrated in this book. I can confidently say that TCS has developed the most effective sales methods and tools to help sales people and teams to win deals they can't afford to lose.

Before we cover the *UnSelling* philosophy and approach in-depth, I should provide one additional dimension central to developing this concept. Since the mid-90's, while at Accenture, we made a decision to institutionalize the process of conducting win-loss reviews when we had either won or lost a large, strategic opportunity. And in nearly every organization I have worked with since that time I have either instituted (using third party client research firms) or personally conducted face-to-face executive interviews with client executives who were deeply involved in the decision process to find out the whole truth, and nothing but the truth related to their decision.

The reason a third party review is so powerful is that, in most cases, the client won't tell the sales team the truth. When asked, "Why did we lose?" you can likely guess the most common client answer, "It was really a price decision." Why is it that the client usually says "price" when asked by the direct sales team? Because it's the easiest answer to give and usually is difficult for the sales person/team to refute. In fact, it's really pretty easy for the salesperson to then go back to management and explain that it wasn't their fault – because it really came down to price. My experience in these post-mortem reviews is that the client's rationale is rarely based primarily on price. In most cases the losing team was outsold and the client doesn't want to have the confrontation to say otherwise.

All of these experiences – in coaching large opportunities, in conducting these win-loss reviews, and in teaching sales strategy to thousands of sales people with TCS - have been combined to develop this *UnSelling* philosophy. This may be the single, most powerful set of strategies to "sell" more effectively for the average sales person or team.

You'll notice I commonly (and interchangeably) use the terms "client" and "prospect" throughout this book. Perhaps it's my consulting upbringing but I have always felt that in order to embrace the appropriate relationship between buyer and seller, it's not only acceptable but even advisable to refer to the prospect as a client. I recognize that they may have never bought anything from us to this point but when you adopt the *UnSelling* approach, the premise is that we can and should add value from the first meeting with the prospect and they can accurately be considered a client.

Finally, any sales person (or organization) that embraces *UnSelling* will want to ensure that all sales-related resources are aligned in dealing with your clients. If one person is very consultative and collaborative and the sales engineer or sales support resource (or God forbid, the sales manager) is in full-throttle-selling mode, the client's perception will be reduced to the least common denominator – which is that we are a classic "selling/telling" organization and should be treated as such. Don't be victimized - get all of your selling-related resources on the same page with this philosophy!

Let's dive in and perhaps the best place to start is exploring why "selling" doesn't work ...

## Chapter 1: “Selling” Doesn’t Work .....

To grasp the power of *UnSelling* (and the weakness of traditional selling) we need to understand the psychology of the buying and selling process and the motivations of both buyer and seller. Let’s explore some tangible examples:

- When a sales person “sells,” the prospective buyer has an immediate negative reaction. For example: you walk into a clothing store and a sales associate walks (er, runs!) over to you and asks, “May I help you?” What’s your answer nearly every time? “No thanks, just looking.” Think about what just happened. Even if you actually do need help your first reaction is “no” because you don’t want to be sold. The crazy thing is that 30 seconds later (when you’re convinced the salesman has retreated) you’ll look around the store to actually get the help of one of these sales clerks. What’s that all about? When we’re being “sold” we are less likely to want to buy. The same is true on a new car lot when you are ambushed by the car salesman or just about any other environment where it’s obvious that you are about to be sold...to death in some cases! In fact, a friend of mine recently went to a major appliance retailer and was literally stalked by a commission-based sales associate as he was evaluating his options. His comment to me, “I’ll never step foot in that store again!”
- You and your sales team have just entered the client’s conference room where your request for a one-hour meeting with the key, executive decision maker has been granted. You proudly give the executive a copy of the half-inch thick (35 page!) presentation that you diligently prepared for a time such as this. Think carefully about the client executive’s perspective at this point – he or she looks at the sheer size of the presentation materials they see in front of them and they will conclude one or more of the following:

“We’ll never get through all of these slides in the hour I have allocated – I am going to suffer a “death by PowerPoint!””

“I certainly don’t have time to ask any questions so I’ll just nod agreeably and hope they finish on time.”

“Better yet, I think I’ll text message my assistant, Mary, and ask her to come into the meeting room in 15 minutes to announce that I have been asked to attend an unplanned executive meeting!”



You get the picture? Executives look at the sheer volume of information that we, as sales people tend to throw at them and get overwhelmed at the sight. I can promise you that they don't say to themselves: "I can't wait to see the next slide!"

- Or, as so often happens, we as sales people tend to "dash to the demo" early in the buying and selling process because we're convinced, "Once this prospect sees what our product can really do, they will be compelled to buy from us!"

In reality, the prospects in these and many other "selling" scenarios are neither convinced, nor are they compelled to buy from us when we use these types of approaches. Why, then, are so many sales people inclined to default to traditional selling? There are a few logical reasons:

- We tend to know a lot about our products and love to share our knowledge (and passion) for what we do.
- We tend to believe that anything we can do to accelerate the decision/close is better for us – which leads to skipping necessary steps in the process and defaulting to "teller" mode.
- And, we are often afraid to ask questions that may be perceived by the client as being overly-invasive or that they might be uncomfortable answering.

In order to understand these and many other real-life situations where classic selling can be so counterproductive, let me provide two distinct perspectives that will give you some additional context that became the inspiration for *UnSelling*. First, we'll review the key findings from win-loss reviews with clients. Then, we'll explore the dynamics of the buying and selling process and the critical need to change the typical "subservient" buyer-seller relationship to a collaborative relationship.



### **Win-Loss Reviews: The Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth ...**

Having conducted, sponsored, and/or reviewed more face-to-face win-loss reviews with customers than anyone I know, it's amazing how instructive the findings are when it comes to understanding what works (and doesn't) in the selling process. Here are a few common themes that emerge that are surprisingly consistent:

- Your sales team and every other team you are competing with tend to say the same things (granted, in different ways) to the prospect and the average prospect is unable to differentiate one solution from another. They hear our words, they see our conviction, and they see our solution details but the ugly reality is that they can't really distinguish amongst options and often conclude:

“The solutions I am evaluating are relatively alike and I can't really distinguish one from another.”

“I have more than one reasonable option – which really means I'm not “stuck” with one choice.”

And because of this, the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th best competitors in a sales pursuit are actually motivated to make their solutions sound just-like the favored solution – often because they have a cost/price advantage. If they can make all the solutions sound alike they're able to leverage their price advantage.

- The “best” solution loses most of the time! I know you're first reaction: “That can't be! The client always chooses the best solution in their own mind!” Think about it this way – if a Martian came down to earth and objectively determined what percent of the time the customer actually chooses the very best solution, what would you guess they'd find? I have asked this question of my workshop participants for many years and most often I hear answers between 20-50%. In reality, you can't rely on the best solution to win because it's usually not good enough to win by itself.
- RFP's (Request for Proposals – a formal, documented statement of customer requirements) are not designed to choose the best solution. Huh? That doesn't make any sense you say? Stay with me on this! Most often, RFP's are designed to prove that whoever the buyer intended to choose in a competitive evaluation is actually chosen. That's a sobering thought – and has significant implications for how we can best work with these prospects.
- The dreaded “do nothing” decision is often the biggest competitor your sales teams face. Experience shows that your prospect is most inclined to stay with what they have today, often because the pain of change is greater than the pain they experience today with their current solution provider.
- Clients are motivated to mislead the sales person/team – and it's not because they are evil people. Most often, they tend to tell us less-than-the-

whole-truth so that they can maintain control in the buyer-seller relationship. They convince themselves that if we and other vendors knew the truth (that we don't have a prayer of winning their business, as an example), we wouldn't accommodate their needs and spend the time they need us to spend to help them not choose us (sound pretty crazy, doesn't it?)

- The real reason clients don't choose us is almost never really related to price. Yes, the client will often say it was a simple matter of price when asked but that is mostly because it is the easiest answer to give and it's the hardest argument for the defeated salesperson to overcome. Interestingly, when a third party executive like me asks the client the real reasons they chose whoever they chose, they sing a very different tune and will mention the real, non-price-related issues where the losing team has been outsold by the competition!
- Far too often, we also find that a core reason for a loss is that it wasn't the right client and/or the right opportunity for the sales team to pursue. In other words, had the account and opportunity been properly qualified early in the process, they wouldn't have pursued the opportunity and spent the last 6-9 months chasing a deal they didn't have a reasonable chance to win in the first place.
- The sales team **complied** with the client's buying process instead of adding value and influencing the process. Successful sales teams walk into a relationship with a prospect with a pre-disposition that the first priority is to bring our expertise and knowledge in helping clients make informed, well-thought-out decisions so that they can choose the very best solution. Alternatively, less-experienced sales teams are so "delighted to be invited" that their inclination is to comply with whatever buying process the customer has devised, regardless of how flawed or incomplete it may be. We do ourselves, and more importantly, we do the client a disservice when we do so.
- And finally, we often find that the competitors who lose don't have a strategy. In fact when you ask them, "What was your strategy?" You get these inquisitive stares and they're really saying, "Peter, what do you mean by "strategy"? Do you mean, 'Are we preparing a proposal?'" The emphatic answer I always give is, "No!" We'll talk more about the importance of strategy in the next chapter!

## **Customers Want To Control the Buying and Selling Process**

In your opinion, who is more qualified and experienced to define a set of steps and criteria to thoroughly evaluate the reasonable alternatives to determine the very best solution for the client's needs – us or the client? If you hesitated with the answer, allow me to explain why the answer is an obvious one: we are!

Great sales and business development people are clearly the most qualified! Why? Because we do this for a living. We see clients do it well. We see them do it poorly. We've seen the good, the bad, and in more cases than we care to admit, we've seen ugly client evaluation and decision processes that end up with them choosing something less than the ideal answer. It begs the question – when's the worst time for the prospect to figure out that they had a faulty process that selected the wrong solution? After they've signed a contract with the fourth best solution! Shame on us if we let them make that mistake!

So here's the paradox – the prospect has every intention of managing and controlling the buying and selling process because they want to be in control. They want to control the flow of information and they want you to hear only what they want you to hear. Specifically, that you are a reasonable option for them (which may or may not be true).

In fact, what they really want us to believe is that we are a viable solution alternative and that we have a realistic opportunity to win their business. Once again, they don't do this because they're mean-spirited or evil-natured! They treat us this way because they need us to be engaged in their process. Please don't confuse “needing” us to be involved with “wanting” us to be selected. They need us to provide them information, to show them our product demonstration, to deliver a competitive proposal/price (so that they can negotiate effectively with their “chosen” vendor), and perhaps even to share some insights as to what other companies have done well. It makes perfect sense – except that this represents a sub-optimal relationship between buyer and seller.

What the buyer often wants, in order to achieve the above objectives, is a buyer-seller relationship that is best described as “subservient.” One way to describe this relationship: the prospect says, “Jump” and the seller says, “How high?” In essence, they tell us what to do and when to do it, and we then do it without asking questions. When they want a demo, we ask delightedly, “When can we schedule it?” A subservient sales person doesn't ask challenging questions of the prospect; they don't challenge

their assumptions; and they really don't add much value to the client's evaluation and decision process – and therein lies the problem with the subservient sales model.

If you're used to working with clients and prospects that treat the relationship in this way, we're doing them a disservice for a few key reasons:

- They don't get the best of our experience and insights. The experienced sales person/team has worked with many organizations and seen clients and prospects manage the buying process well (and poorly). This prospect doesn't get the benefit of that experience. We have insights about the steps they should be taking, the people they should be involving, the criteria they should be using, and the pitfalls they should be aware of – for their benefit (not yours)!
- When the prospect thinks of us predominantly as a “vendor,” their natural tendency is to have their personal and professional defenses up in their interaction with us. Remember the example I shared previously about any of us shopping at a clothing store? The parallel: you keep asking: “May I help you?” and they keep responding, “No thanks, just looking.” For as long as you act like a hammer looking for a nail – they're going to hesitate to deal with you openly because they're not convinced they're really a nail.
- And finally, if they do have a pre-disposition for one of your competitors, they will remain focused in their desire to mislead you about their intent and their preference – and will do all possible to convince you that you have a reasonable chance of winning their business and their confidence.

I know these facts can be somewhat demoralizing for the average sales person. It's the precise reason I want to arm you with a different approach to selling that allows you to proactively change the nature of the relationship between buyer and seller – and seek to learn the truth and gain the client's confidence and preference in the process.

Let's get to the details of the *UnSelling* approach in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2: The Alternative: *UnSelling* (Think 7up<sup>®</sup> - The Uncola) .....

7UP was launched as a lemon-lime soft drink in the 1920's by Howdy Corporation as a hangover cure (I'm not making this up) and they developed an ad campaign in the 60's that called 7UP the "Uncola" because it's not really a cola drink but it's a refreshing drink nonetheless. They had tag lines like, "put some UN in your life" and "Are you an Un?" It was a very effective marketing strategy that led customers to embrace 7UP as the alternative to traditional cola soft drinks.



In the same way, *UnSelling* is a new and very different way to "sell." The essence of this approach to working with prospects and clients is ensuring the prospect is convinced that we aren't a hammer looking for a nail. Said another way: *UnSelling* ensures that we can lower the buyer's natural defenses about someone trying to "sell" them so that we can have a far more productive relationship with the buyer that is built on trust and collaboration. A relationship where we can provide honest, useful advice and gain credibility (and preference) in the mind of the buyer. And by doing so, encourage them to share more information about their needs, their priorities related to this initiative, and their personal agendas – all of which improves our ability to serve them effectively.

What we'll explore in this book are the attitudes, tactics, and strategies that aren't traditional selling approaches. In fact, from the client's perspective, it doesn't even feel like they're being sold. Let's look at the contrast between the two sales approaches:

<b>Subservient “Selling” Approach</b>	<b>Collaborative, UnSelling™ Approach</b>
Client says, “Jump”; We say “How high?”	Client says, “Jump”; We say, “Sure, but why?”
Client is always right and knows best	We are the subject matter expert and the client may not always be right (or be most knowledgeable)
Client is in control of the buying and selling process	We provide advice and counsel to guide the client in how to most effectively evaluate alternatives
Client tells the seller what they think they should know	Client tells the seller the whole truth ... and nothing but the truth
Client is on the defensive when it comes to the selling vendor	Client is open and collaborative and impressed by the degree to which the seller wants the client to make an informed decision
The client will be helped when we’re chosen as the solution	We’re going to start helping and adding value from the first meeting with the client in the process









Let's take this one step further – when the client “needs” us (even though they may not really “want” us to win), we have a unique opportunity to gain control in the buying-selling process because we have leverage in early stages of the process (because they “need” us – see graph above) – making sense yet?

This is why so many of the concepts and strategies that I outline in the next chapter about how to *UnSell* effectively have an important timing dimension. Specifically, they tend to be most effective early in the buying process when the client needs you and when you, therefore, have leverage in the relationship. Think about it this way: as you get to the later stages of the buying process (after the client has gathered all of the information they feel they need to make an informed decision), the buyer doesn't feel they “need” you anymore. They've gathered information, they've seen demonstrations, and they have your proposal and pricing. They accomplished their goal and can now decide. Or perhaps better said, they can now confirm that whomever they intended to choose in the first place is indeed chosen (and in many cases we have helped them confirm that decision).

What do we mean by having “leverage” in this buyer-seller relationship and how do we use it to *UnSell* effectively? Here are three specific, priority examples:

- **Gathering information** (many organizations call this phase of the sales cycle, “Discovery”). It is perfectly reasonable for a sales team to request, gather, and then review information provided by the client about the nature of the problem they're trying to solve, the severity (via quantification) of the problem, and what they're doing today (or have done previously) to solve the problem.
- **Gaining access to key executives**: let's be careful to point out that this doesn't mean we “ask” for access to executive decision makers. When you “ask” you are inviting an easy “no” response from the prospect. In reality, if the buyer wants us to provide a well-thought-out solution recommendation, it is imperative that we meet and collaborate with the key stakeholders and decision makers. We'll cover the techniques for gaining this access in more detail in the next chapter.
- **Influencing the buyer's evaluation and decision process** is a third example of how to use our leverage in the early part of the buying-selling process. Most commonly, great sales people (and teams) are more knowledgeable about how to define, organize, and execute an effective evaluation and decision process than the client. And if done well, it can be one of the most effective ways to build our credibility (by adding value), to

highlight our solution's strengths, and to expose the competitors weaknesses – the trifecta!

Let's summarize our intent in all of this before we get into some details on how to *UnSell* effectively in the next chapter. Our goals are as follows:

- **To use the buying-selling process as an opportunity to establish our credibility and expertise** – which is almost never established by providing product demos and 2-inch-thick proposals.
- **To attempt to understand the whole truth and nothing but the truth in the discovery process with the client** – because without the truth we are ill-equipped to provide an optimum solution (and we waste a lot of our time and the client's time).
- **To add value in the buying-selling process** – including the evaluation and decision process the client is intent on conducting - regardless of whether they buy from us or not.
- **And ultimately, to gain the trust, confidence, and votes of the key decision makers!**

In reality, “selling”, in the traditional sense, actually precludes your ability to do these things well. The less we sell, the more likely we are to win the prospect's business. If that sounds completely counter-intuitive – let's shift gears and talk about the tools and techniques (and the logic) to do this well.

### Chapter 3: *UnSelling* Practical Examples and Applications .....

The *UnSelling* concept is most powerful when you consider real-life, actual examples - where it works, how it works, and why it works. And that's what this chapter is dedicated to providing. I'll share examples from my business; some from the companies I have worked for and/or consulted with; and we'll continue to build a war chest of great examples from those of you who read about this concept and would be willing to [share your strategies and successes](#) so that we can continue to proliferate the art and science of *UnSelling*. Consider yourself part of a new "community of practice" whose goal is to better serve clients and achieve more business success in the process.

Before we dive into these examples, let's summarize a few "guiding principles" related to the *UnSelling* approach:

- The intent of this process, above all else, is to create an open, honest, and collaborative dialogue with the prospect who is normally predisposed to be careful about what they share and often not open to the solution provider's input and suggestions. We start with the premise that we, as experienced professionals, have a lot of knowledge about how to evaluate options to help our clients effectively make an informed choice.
- We have to be genuine in our dealings with the prospect. When you make a "whiplash" statement or question to a client (i.e. "One logical option you should consider is not changing from your current provider...") you have to mean what you say and say what you mean. If you aren't genuine, clients and prospects can sense this from a mile away – much like a dog can smell our fear as they approach us.
- We have to operate under the premise that bad news early is good news – always! You can't avoid bad news or you'll risk spending too much time on the wrong opportunities. The corollary: bad news late is almost always bad news! *UnSelling* is designed to minimize the likelihood that you'll hear bad news late in the buying-selling process.
- Foremost in our minds: this is all about what's good for the prospect. When we keep this orientation (vs. what's good for our firm) the client benefits, we benefit secondarily (which I'll explain in the coming pages), and, believe it or not, we can actually disadvantage the competition without disparaging them (which is an art and a science).



- Patrick Lencione recently published a book called *Getting Naked* and he introduces a concept that aligns very well with the *UnSelling* approach. He calls it, “just start helping.” The point is that many sales teams lick their chops and get excited about really adding value “once we win this deal.” *UnSelling* embraces the philosophy that the help and value we can provide starts from the initial prospect meeting – advice, counsel, clarifying questions, etc. – all of which is helping the client to better understand and accomplish their goals.

Be careful not to lose sight of these guiding principles. Without them, *UnSelling* is no more effective than good ole’, hammer-looking-for-a-nail selling. Let’s cover the 22 key strategies and tactics associated with *UnSelling* in the balance of this chapter.

## 1. *UnSelling*: It’s All In the Words You Use!

If you embrace the notion of *UnSelling* it means you have to adopt a new way to communicate with your clients and prospects. A selling-oriented sales person tends to use phrases like:

- “You really need this product”
- “You’ll like the way my solution does...”
- “Is there anything else you need to see before you buy?”



The challenge with the “selling” approach is that the more we sell, the less we collaborate with the client (and the less they share). And the less we collaborate, the less we really understand the problem the prospect is trying to solve. If our goal is to create an open, collaborative relationship between buyer and seller, the following types of phrases/questions are far more likely to create the relationship that allows us to understand the client’s pain and better differentiate our solution:

- **“Regardless of whom you evaluate and ultimately choose, you may want to consider the following criteria in your evaluation of all of your options...”** (Which tells the prospect we are aware and comfortable with them looking at alternatives and also demonstrates your subject matter expertise in these types of evaluations.)
- **“We may or may not be the optimum solution for your needs but the better I understand the business problem you’re intent on solving, the better I can help you assess whether we have a good fit.”** (Which makes

it obvious to the prospect that we are not trying to be a hammer looking for a nail.)

- **“If I were in your position, before looking seriously at buying this new application for your business, I’d first determine if it makes sense to change from what you’re using today.”** (Which clearly demonstrates that you are ready and willing to talk with the client about the option of “doing nothing” as it is often the biggest competitor we face in these more complex selling environments. By doing so, we’re also far better equipped to qualify this opportunity before we spend extraordinary time and effort on the new pursuit.)

Or an alternative to this last example may be, **“One of the reasonable alternatives you should consider is the option of staying with the process/vendor you currently use – why would you consider changing from what you do today?”** (Which allows you to not only test how serious this prospect is about looking at a new solution but also tends to give you clarity on how serious the incumbent vendor’s challenges are for the client)

- **“Why did you decide to call our firm?”** (Which most sales people are afraid to ask, mostly because they are afraid of the honest answer. This question can be very informative about how they found you and perhaps how serious they are about your solution as an alternative.)
- **“There are a number of reasonable alternative solutions for you to consider...”** (Which sets the expectation with the prospect that you are perfectly comfortable talking about – and inviting him/her to talk about – their competitive options.)
- **“When I was in your position...”** (Which gives the client a sense that you’ve “been there, done that” and can build your credibility in their eyes.)
- **“Our primary concern shouldn’t be on whether or not you choose my solution. Rather, we both ought to be primarily concerned with you achieving the business objective you’ve set out to achieve. Can we start by helping me get clarity on those goals/objectives?”** (Which reinforces the concept that *UnSelling* is all about the client – not us!)

I think you get the picture. And these are only a few examples but they highlight the vast difference in styles – from “selling” to *UnSelling*. The latter approach is far more likely to create the optimum relationship between you and the buyer – for the benefit of both!

## 2. Using Provocative Point-Of-View (PPOV) Statements

Another way to contrast traditional selling (or “telling”) from *UnSelling* is to consider how we create demand in the first place. A selling-oriented person often leads with the product/solution and hopes to capture the prospective buyer with the extraordinary features and functions of their solution. They make the assumption that the prospect is more than likely to appreciate how valuable this solution must be. Or, perhaps they’ve read a book or two on consultative selling and they’ve learned the art of effective questioning in the early part of the buyer-seller exchange. Of course, the challenge with this approach is the patience the client may or may not have for what often feels like an interrogation session followed by the “light bulb” moment when the seller declares, “Well, based on your answers, have I got a solution for you!”



The *UnSelling* alternative takes a very different approach. Instead of desperately trying to find a pain that I can quickly solve, it attempts to engage in a dialogue. A dialogue that’s relevant to the client’s world. A dialogue that demonstrates that we understand their business and/or industry. A dialogue that engages the client in a conversation that also allows us to have further discussion.

One effective approach to doing so is to use provocative point-of-view statements. Let me share an example in my world of helping clients to transform the way their organization sells. When I meet a VP of Sales, I want to engage them in conversation and the last thing I want to do is jump to being a solution peddler. One way to avoid this is with a provocative question or statement: “Of all of the VP of Sales I’ve met over the years, almost none have had clarity on the biggest competitor they face in their specific market.” Now consider if you and I were having a discussion and I made this provocative statement. What would you be thinking? Perhaps you’d say, “Really? Why don’t they know?” Or you might say, “We know who our biggest competitor is – hands down!” Or you may react entirely differently – which is just fine for the *UnSelling* professional because we have accomplished the objective: creating a significant dialogue between two credible professionals (vs. a subservient buyer-seller relationship) on a topic that is relevant and useful. My ultimate goal is to have the opportunity to have more dialogue (perhaps a more in-depth meeting) about what’s happening in their business or industry – what’s working, what’s not working, or anything that allows us to build a peer-like relationship.

I should explain the “angle” associated with my question above. In most organizations I have worked with or consulted with over the last 30+ years, the biggest

competitor is often the dreaded, “do nothing” where the client puts us through our paces for anywhere from 3 to 9 months of the buying process only to announce at the end of the evaluation that they’ve decided to stay with what they have today (whether they intend to stay with the incumbent or do it themselves matters little – we’ve still lost to “do nothing”).

In essence, our goal in *UnSelling* is to engage the client in a discussion that builds our credibility and relationship with the potential buyer and does so without overtly selling. You have one great opportunity in the early dialogue with a client to establish your credibility and your subject-matter-expertise and these ppov’s enable you to have a business discussion with an executive instead of a game of cat and mouse that so often characterizes buyer-seller exchanges. Can you think of 4-5 point-of-view statements that would be effective with your prospects?

### 3. Qualify Early (And Often) With Small, Polite Confrontations

There are a lot of reasons why sales teams don’t qualify effectively. In some cases we’re simply “delighted to be invited” and don’t want to run the risk of upsetting the proverbial apple cart with questions that may annoy the prospect. In too many cases the sales team may get a false sense of comfort that the prospect is genuinely serious about our chances of winning on a given deal and therefore falls into the trap of skipping the qualification step entirely.

Great *UnSelling* people don’t ever skip the qualification step. The obvious reason is that we can’t afford to spend our time on the wrong opportunities because every minute spent on the wrong deal is a minute away from the right deal and will reduce our chance of winning those ‘right’ deals. What’s the key to qualifying effectively? The answer is simple: asking the hard (or “whiplash”) questions of the prospect. We can do so with a series of what Rick Page calls, “small, polite confrontations.” The easiest way to understand this philosophy is to contrast the selling approach to qualifying with the alternative I am proposing. Here’s some standard qualifying questions that the average “selling” person tends to use:



- **Do you have a budget?**
- **What problem(s) are you trying to solve?**
- **What’s your timeframe for a decision?**
- **Who/what are you using today?**



At first blush, although not entirely complete, this looks like a pretty good list of qualifying questions – right? Not so fast. The problem with these is that the client will most often answer these questions in a way that will lead the average sales person to conclude that this is an opportunity worth pursuing. Our clients have been to “buying school” and they know what the right answers are. Do these answers sound familiar:

- **Do you have a budget?** Client answer: “Yes”
- **What problem are you trying to solve?** Client answer: “We really believe that there are some great alternatives to what we are doing today and that’s why we were intent on asking your firm to give us a proposal” (Note: there is no “problem” statement here – just a statement that would lead us to believe that they want us involved)
- **What’s your timeframe for a decision?** Client answer: “Within 45 days”
- **Who/what are you using today?** Client answer: “We have been using Paradigm Services for the past 4 years which is why we think it’s important to look for alternatives.”

Do you see the challenge? You’ve asked reasonable qualifying questions and the client has provided reasonable (although not overly helpful or detailed) answers and the average sales person is likely to pursue this opportunity having satisfied themselves and sales management that they have qualified the deal.

Let’s now look at the same questions with an *UnSelling* attitude where we are willing to have a series of small, polite confrontations that are designed to get to the truth – for the benefit of both the client and our firm because we aren’t afraid to ask the hard questions or talk about topics that are uncomfortable for many “selling” people:

- **“Tell me a bit about how you derived the budget for this initiative and whose budget will be spent?”** Note: This question forces a more in-depth dialogue about how the budget was derived and who, specifically, will fund this initiative. Incidentally, if the client’s budget is out of alignment with what we, as highly-experienced professionals, have found to be sufficient, you then have the opportunity to share what our experience has shown. Remember, if there’s a disconnect between their budget and what is required to solve this problem effectively, we’d rather have this polite confrontation early in the process – not 6 months later!



- **“What problem(s) are you trying to solve and have you quantified the problem with a business case or value proposition?”** Note: We should help the client understand that our experience has shown that the problems that get solved in most organizations are the ones that have a compelling, quantified value proposition. I even like to role-play the CFO of their organization by saying, “If I were the CFO and you brought me this requisition for \$300,000, the first question I’d ask is, ‘What’s the value of us doing this or changing vendors?’ What will you say when that happens?” In many cases you’ll find the client won’t have a well-defined business case which then allows us to add our value: “Would it be helpful if I worked with you to help define a business case so that you know if it’s even worth considering this investment?”
- **“What’s your timeframe for this decision?”** And when the client says, “45 days.” Your next question becomes the most important small, polite confrontation, “Thanks. I’m curious – what bad things happen 46 days from now if the decision hasn’t been made by then?” Note: See the difference? Instead of celebrating when the client tells us a timeframe that is far-too-often unrealistic, we’re now getting to the truth about the client’s timeframe and their source of urgency (or lack thereof). You’ll find the answer to this last question is often, “Nothing, really” which is evidence that there may not be much validity to the 45 day target timeframe.
- **“With your current approach (and vendor) to this business problem – how are you doing today and why would you even consider changing?”** Note: With this question you are saying to the prospect that without a compelling reason to switch they are entirely likely (and you may even suggest that they would be reasonable) to continue using the current vendor. The statistics are overwhelming – clients have a high propensity to stay with what they know today because it’s too hard to change!

See the difference? *UnSelling* offers an approach to qualifying that is far more likely to get the truth and build trust between you and the potential client. Qualifying always involves the core questions: the business problem and value proposition associated with solving it; the executive sponsorship; the competitive landscape; the source of urgency; and yes, the budget among others. The difference in the *UnSelling* approach to qualification is all in the way we approach the dialogue on these critical topics. Let’s consider a couple of additional examples:

- **“How did you determine to invite the vendors you have invited and more specifically, how did you decide to invite us?”** Note: The average

sales person never broaches this topic, mostly because they are afraid of alienating the prospect by asking about the competition (and they're often afraid of the real answer to the question about why they invited us). And yet, the answer to this question is important for several reasons. It helps us understand the sophistication of the client (based on how they created their invite list); it helps us to know the strength of the competitive landscape so that we can assess our ability to defeat these competitors; and it also gives us a clear indication as to how open they are to discuss these topics – which is often a good indication of how serious they are about our candidacy in the opportunity.

- **“I’ve found that projects of this nature are rarely successful without clear and compelling executive sponsorship. Who is the executive sponsor and what is their primary objective with this initiative?”**

Note: This seems like an innocent enough question on the surface but it can reveal several critical items. It helps us determine if our key contact sees themselves as the key driver of this decision (which they often say but is almost never the case); gives you clarity on who is driving this decision at the “power” level of the organization; and also subtly gives the prospect an indication that we have “been there, done that” in similar situations and, in our experience, executive sponsorship is a critical success factor.

There are many other examples you can develop – specific to what you have found are the core qualification questions in your business. For each question, you should convert what is normally a ‘soft’ question that is easy for the prospect to answer without divulging the truth (i.e., “*When will the decision be made?*”) into a hard or “whiplash” question that is far more likely to be useful in the qualifying process (i.e., “*What bad thing will happen 46 days from now if you haven’t made a decision?*”)

The bottom line – qualifying effectively has everything to do with determining if you have a reasonable chance to win. If you don’t, stay out of the race. If you can see a path to win this opportunity, determine whose vote you need to win and how you can best win those votes. Without doing so, you’ll end up wasting your time and most importantly, diluting your ability to win the deals that really matter (and that are winnable).

#### 4. “Whiplash” Questions

We’ve referred to “whiplash” questions and you must wonder what is meant by the term. This is a technique to identify or validate potential client issues and/or

objections that the prospect is usually not inclined to talk about. Not only does the client hesitate to talk about these issues (for fear that they will scare the sales person/team away) but too often the sales team is afraid to bring them up as well (for fear that it will spoil an otherwise good, forecasted opportunity). Our goal in *UnSelling* is to minimize (perhaps even eliminate) all surprises. Instead of hoping that bad news won't come up, we proactively ensure that it does. Let's consider an example.

I've spent many years in sales within technology and business process outsourcing. One of the common challenges within outsourcing is the frequency that prospects either use the evaluation process to get smart on what's broken within their function being evaluated (call centers as an example) so that they can either fix it themselves (what I call the dreaded, "Do Nothing") or, equally dangerous, they go to their existing vendor and use the knowledge gained in the evaluation process to squeeze them on performance standards and price but with every intention of staying with this vendor. Given how frequently this occurs, I like to pose the whiplash statement: "Mr. "C" level executive, one of the options I would suggest you consider initially is to first determine if it makes sense to outsource this function at all."

Think about that for a moment – you mean we're actually encouraging the potential client to consider not outsourcing? That's selling suicide, isn't it?! That's why I call it a whiplash statement – it is intended to be provocative. So much so that if you were with another sales team member when you made this statement their head would snap your way (hence the reason we call it a "whiplash" question) with a look that says, "What in the world are you saying that for?" Not only is it a relatively provocative statement, it's also entirely advocating the client's best interests - while attempting to learn the truth about their intent.

And yet, it's the most advantageous approach for us as well. If any organization were to really look at whether it makes sense to outsource a part of their business processes, the first thing they'd do is conduct an assessment of how efficient (or broken) their processes are today – which is exactly where we want to start the discovery process anyway (more on this in the next strategy)! Perhaps most importantly, I get credit from the C-level executive that I am not a hammer looking for a nail and perfectly willing to talk about client options that aren't in my best interest (the possibility that they may not outsource at all). The response I often hear from executives when you make statements like the one above is, "Yes, that is one of the options we have considered. We just didn't think you'd be willing to talk about that since you sell outsourcing for a living. Can you help us assess this as part of the process?"

Do you see the power of the approach? If they are likely not to outsource the function, when would you want to know? As early as possible! Asked well, whiplash questions will change the way you interact with potential clients and will foster open, honest, and useful conversations between buyer and seller.

## 5. More on “Let’s Decide If It Makes Sense to Do This At All”

I’ve outlined previously the danger of the selling or “telling” approach that so many sales people employ. Let’s look at a diametrically opposed approach: offering to help the client determine if investing in a new solution makes sense in the first place. I always recommend this approach in opportunity management workshops where we develop strategies to improve the odds of winning current, in-flight deals. Once when I made this recommendation, “Mike,” the VP of Sales, raised his hand and asked that we take a break, mostly because he wanted to talk to me off-line to see if I had gone off the deep end. Mike was afraid that we may plant the seed of an idea (to not go forward with the project) in the client’s mind. Of course, the likelihood that any executive worth their pay has not thought of the “do nothing” alternative is low but they usually won’t confess that they are considering this option. And this is exactly why we have to bring the issue up and do it in such a way that makes it clear to the client that we’re willing to talk about these issues – even ones that are disadvantageous to us getting the sale.

Think about it this way – if you can get a prospect to briefly take a step backwards in their process to first consider if it even makes sense to do this project/initiative, what’s the first thing any reasonable person would do to find the answer? You’d take the time to determine what’s broken today and how badly it’s broken. How long has it been a problem? Is it getting better or worse? What are the other implications of the pain/problem? You’d also determine which key executives are most impacted by the problem(s), which allows you to have clarity on which key stakeholders we need to meet with as part of the discovery process.



Here’s the powerful part of this approach – when done well, where the client realizes you are genuinely interested in helping them determine if it’s worth fixing the problem at all, you end up getting the same information you would aspire to gather in a classic “discovery” process that any sales methodology would prescribe. If the problems are significant, they are likely to do something. If the problems aren’t significant, you’ve at least uncovered the risk of “doing nothing” early in the process before you’ve spent months of your time on the pursuit. You’ve also gathered this

knowledge in a non-threatening and partnering way that is dominantly focused on what's best for the client – not based on how I can win this deal.

One last point on this approach: if you can get the client to buy into this notion of determining if it's worth solving the business problem at all, the *UnSelling* professional will also be adamant about the importance of building a strong and well-quantified value proposition or business case. In fact, you'll actually help them create the case. It should be the foundation for the client to justify the project and will help you get the buy-in of key executives in the later stages of the buying/selling process. Without the business case, your risk of losing to “no decision” is too high for my comfort. More on this in Strategy #7!

## 6. Don't Conform; Consult With the Client about Their Evaluation Process

The subservient sales person usually asks the question, “How will the decision be made?” It's a reasonable question that usually begets the feeble answer from the key contact at the prospect, “Oh, I have good news – I'm the decision maker!” To which the “delighted-to-be-invited” sales person says, “Alleluia – I found the decision maker!” (Tongue firmly planted in my cheek as I type this of course)

On the other hand, the *UnSelling* professional handles the question differently and for a very different purpose. What we really want to understand is both the evaluation process (the steps they will take to gather information including an RFI (Request for Information) to 10 vendors, a formal invitation to 4 vendors to propose, a series of reference calls and client site visits, etc.) and the decision process (which are the specifics about who will be involved and what roles they will play in the actual decision - influencer, approver, technical evaluator, decision maker, etc.)

But here's the catch: instead of asking these questions so that we can conform to the client's chosen process (which are almost never well-defined or thorough), our goal is to actually add value in the buying process by consulting with the client on the steps and evaluation criteria they should include in order to make the best, most-informed decision. Remember, this is all about the client's success – not ours! It just so happens that if we help them define the ideal steps and criteria it will not only advantage them by leveraging our experience with other clients but will also help them know what steps and criteria to use that



will highlight our solution's strength and expose our competitors' weaknesses (if done well).

Consider this question: when's the worst time for the client to determine they didn't ask all the right questions of all of the vendors they have evaluated? You're right if you answered, "After they have chosen the wrong one and signed a long-term contract with that vendor!"

Here's the key: great *UnSelling* professionals have made their living working with prospects and clients who have been both successful and unsuccessful in evaluating and implementing solutions in their industry. We've seen the good, the bad, and the ugly with a myriad of clients and when it comes to knowing what to do and how to best conduct an effective evaluation, we are the experts, hands down! If you buy into this notion, instead of starting out selling, why don't we start by asking the prospect how he/she intends to conduct the evaluation? And, assuming they have an incomplete process (or no process at all), offer to help them define a set of steps and a set of criteria that will be most helpful to them – to both determine if they should do anything at all and if they do, how to effectively choose the best solution? If you take this "high road" in the buyer-seller relationship you will gain more credibility, establish strong relationships, and have a significant competitive advantage throughout the buying-selling process.

I should challenge every reader on one more point: shame on us if a prospect comes to us and asks – "Can you help me define the best evaluation and decision process for this initiative?" and you look at them like they have three heads! To do this well, and proactively, you'd be well-advised to define and document your collective experience with numerous clients to develop a personal (or better yet, corporate) perspective on what the right steps are for your prospects. Done well, you'll have a process that is most advantageous to the client but also highlights your solution's strengths (and exposes the competitor's weaknesses) because the client is asking all the right questions.

## **7. The *UnSelling* Approach to the Discovery Process**

Most sales people, even those inclined to be sellers (or "tellers" for the extreme cases) do some degree of discovery with the prospect – gathering data, talking to one or two key stakeholders, understanding the problem the prospect is intent on solving, etc. The difference in the *UnSelling* approach is more than nuance. If we're really going to be collaborative and consultative (not subservient) we'll embrace the role of being an

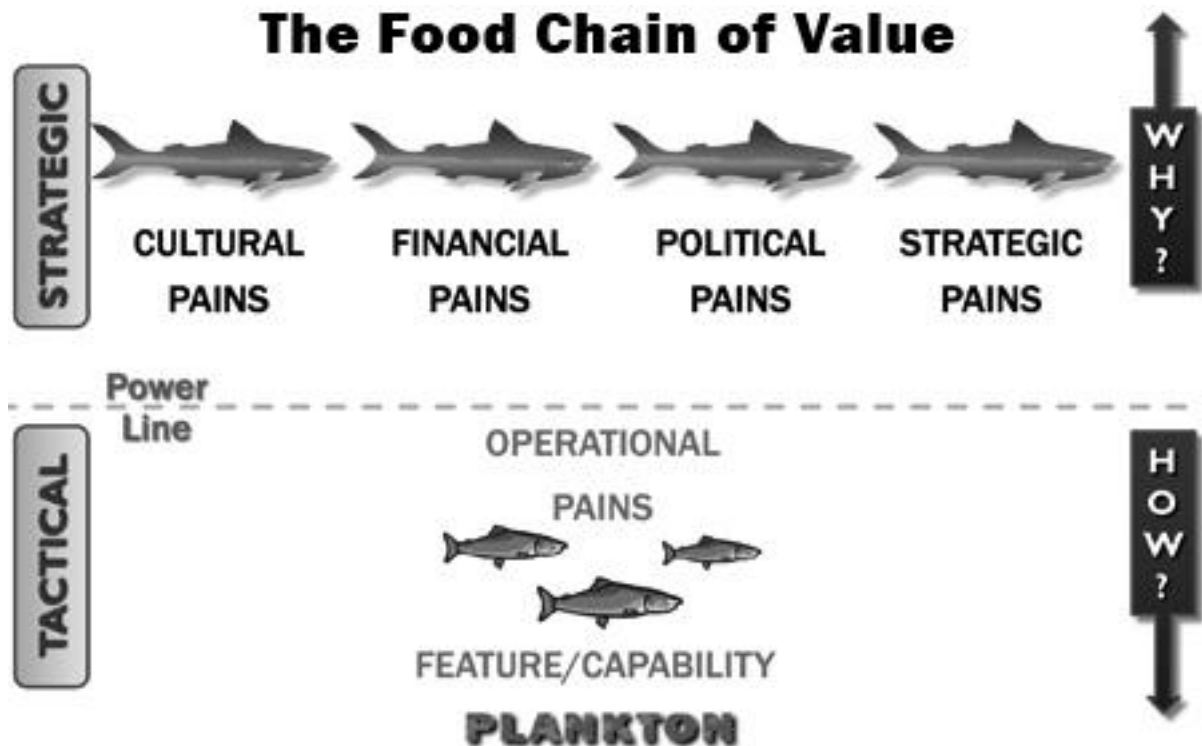


advocate of the client. When we gather information about a confessed issue or challenge, we don't celebrate that we found a problem. We dig deeper to understand the severity of the problem. As Rick Page is famous for saying – we find out the “So what?” and the “Who cares?” about the problem. Far too often, the client is perfectly willing to share the operational (low-level) nature of the problem they want to solve and the *UnSelling* approach resists all temptations to jump to the premature prescription (our solution of course) once we've found these operational challenges.

As an example, when a prospect says they're having a challenge with customer satisfaction, the “seller” says, “I've got just the answer!” The *UnSeller*, on the other hand, asks another set of relevant questions. “How do you measure customer satisfaction and how bad is it? What was it a year ago and what's your goal? Have you quantified the value (benefit) associated with reaching your goal? Who in your organization is most impacted by this measure and your ability to improve?”

The clear difference in these approaches is that the *UnSeller* better understands the challenge, the severity of the challenge (beyond operational details), and perhaps most importantly identifies the key stakeholders who care and the likelihood they will spend money to solve the problem based on the value proposition and ROI. Discovery, done well, is not prone to declaring ‘victory’ too early in the selling process when you've uncovered only the relatively low-level pains of the prospect.

The Complex Sale has developed a framework for this imperative called the The Food Chain of Value/Pain (aka “The Shark Chart). The essence of the Shark Chart is that pains (and client value) can be represented as a food chain where all pains are not created equally. Operational pains are the focus of low level stakeholders and Strategic pains (among others) are the focus of high level stakeholders.



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All pains are important (i.e. a food chain dies without plankton) but the pains of the high level stakeholders tend to trump lower level pains because these high level stakeholders tend to have the budget, power, and the authority to make things happen. The more you know about the pains at all levels, the better your ability to collaborate with the client to solve them and to involve more stakeholders in the process.

One final point – when you're in the discovery process, ensure you **quantify** the pain because it will help you and the client to justify the expenditure. Far too many sales people celebrate when they hear a pain at any level and then aren't diligent about helping the client quantify the pain and the goals and measures of success that help the initiative to get funded. If there's not a compelling value proposition, you're then equipped to have a small, polite confrontation with the client to help them seriously consider the prudence of this investment so that they don't waste their time (or yours).



## 8. Really Understand Your Client's Business and Challenges

Based on the previous discussion on provocative point-of-view-statements, you likely have a sense that a key dimension of *UnSelling* is the need to truly understand your prospective client's business. This includes their key performance indicators (the measures they use to track their own performance), their challenges, their strategic imperatives, their competitors, and even their risks. The most successful *UnSelling* professionals have become students of their client's business and their industry.

The reason this knowledge is important is that we can't aspire to create the peer-level, collaborative relationship with a client unless we have enough knowledge to have a reasonable executive conversation. The more you know, the less likely you are to lean on the "selling" crutch of your solution's features and functions (a brochure as an example) to have a dialogue and the more likely you are to have a business discussion.

In today's Internet world, the information is readily available to allow us to do research on our client's business, products, competitors, etc. The combination of their company website and primary research facilities provided by Yahoo Finance and institutional investor analyst reports that are easily available for publicly traded companies, make knowledge of our client an achievable goal.

I recently read that if you read 3 books on any given topic you would be more knowledgeable than 95% of the U.S. population on that topic. In essence, you'd be a subject matter expert after reading a mere 3 books! The point: become a "student" and subject matter expert on your client's business and you'll be a far more effective *UnSelling* professional.

## 9. Executive Access Is Not Optional

Every sales person knows that to win large, complex, and highly competitive opportunities you have to be able to gain access to key executives whose budget is being spent and who normally play a significant role in the final decision-making process. Your ability to gain this access is often the challenge.

The subservient sales person knows that executive access is a critical success factor but because they tend to be deferential to the client they'll often ask permission to access these key stakeholders. And when you ask permission you are inviting the answer that clients learn when they attend "buying" school and that is,



“NO!” Now what? Once your key contact says “no” and follows that short answer with an explanation about the role they are playing to be the “primary” vendor interface (read between the lines: ONLY interface), you’ve lost out on this critical success factor. That’s the danger of the subservient approach to selling.

Let’s consider the alternative: instead of asking permission, we embrace the consultant and subject matter expert role that we deserve and we make executive access an assumptive part of the buying/selling process. It goes something like this, “In order to ensure that we fully understand the business problem you’re intent to solve, it will be imperative that we talk with the following three, key executives (being specific of course with the names) who will be most impacted by this solution and who will be key to your ultimate success in this initiative.”

I know what you’re saying to yourself right now: “They’re still going to say, ‘No – I can tell you everything you need to know!’” And you may be right – which says you need to be prepared with the *UnSelling* response to this objection.

Whenever I get push-back on the assumptive approach to executive access, I use the “collaborative” answer – and it’s not optional. “Having done this for many years and having worked with dozens of clients on projects of this nature, we’ve found that a key success factor for your ultimate success is dependent on having a first-hand perspective from these key executives. Based on these meetings we will configure the approach, the timing, and even the pricing of our solution to ensure we are addressing the executive’s perspectives. Without it, we are not in a good position to give you the best possible answer, or even determine if we have a solution that fits your need .”

Is the difference in these approaches obvious enough? Remember, to do this well you can’t be kidding. In other words, if your key contact says you can’t talk to anyone other than them, you can’t back peddle and say, “I was just kidding, when’s the proposal due?” If you do – you’ve epitomized the subservient sales person. Try this analogy with the client: if you were sick and went to the doctor and said, “Doc, I’m really sick and I need some medicine.” And the reasonable doctor says, “Happy to help, what’s wrong?” And you quickly reply, “I can’t tell you that Doc, I just want some medicine!” What is the doctor likely to do? He’ll wish you well and send you on your way, without medicine of course. Similarly, why would we agree to provide a proposal, unencumbered with the facts, to a prospect without knowing first-hand what the executives are intent on accomplishing? Great sales people make executive access an important, non-negotiable part of the buying/selling process – it’s not optional! And here’s my bet: if a prospect won’t allow us executive access (and we haven’t been

involved in helping them define their initial requirements) you're likely not a serious consideration for their business anyway.

## 10. Executives, Especially, Don't Want to Be Sold

Sales people can also fall into a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to key buyers. We assume that all buyers are equally important and that all the same tactics and messages will appeal to all stakeholders. Here's what students of The Complex Sale methodologies and *UnSelling* professionals have learned:

- **All stakeholders are NOT created equally.** What matters most is to understand how and who will make the decision and how we can best gain the votes of the key decision makers. Show me a sales team that either gets "stuck" to one key contact or spreads their time evenly between a myriad of buyers (often at low levels) and I'll show you a team that loses more than they should.
- **All buyers are different and have different pains, priorities, and personalities.** Winning the vote of any given stakeholder is not about giving the best demo and the most compelling presentation. Rather, these stakeholders tend to form a preference based on finding the person or sales team that they believe best understands the problem and/or personal agenda they are intent on solving. (Note: DiSC® profile assessments can be very helpful to accurately assess the personality of your buyers in order to adapt to what's most effective for each).
- **And finally, key executives tend to resist the typical "sales" approach more than anyone.** They have little patience for pitches or long demonstrations and almost no interest in a "death-by-PowerPoint" slide presentation that provides all of your solution's feeds, speeds, bits, and bytes. They are perfectly willing to have a business discussion on topics that are relevant to their priorities and challenges and often would prefer to have a ferocious debate among credible people than to be sold. If you act like an executive and become an expert on their business you'll have a far better opportunity to gain their confidence... and their vote!

## 11. Above All Else, the Client Deserves the Truth

Are you sensing an underlying theme in many of these *UnSelling* strategies? I hope the theme that's obvious is that our clients deserve the truth. Even if it's hard for us to

admit the truth. Even if it's not what they want to hear. Even if the truth is likely to hurt our chances to "win." Sounds heretical, doesn't it? But when we focus on best serving our clients and providing the information they most need, you will develop a level of trust and credibility that will pay long-term dividends.

*UnSelling* relies on a fundamental principle that you are the subject matter experts in whatever solution you provide and that you, therefore, know what works and what doesn't based on what other clients have done previously. A collaborative relationship between buyer and seller is not unlike a collaborative marriage – they both require two parties to share ideas, explore risks, develop plans to be successful, and to ultimately make good, informed decisions. At the risk of being trite: even though the truth sometimes hurts, honesty is clearly the best policy in *UnSelling* to win more business!

## 12. Provide the Client Alternatives to Build Trust

One of my TCS partners, Joe Southworth, and I were talking recently about real-life examples of using *UnSelling* tactics and he made a great observation. His contention was that 'trust' is our ultimate goal in relating to our clients and one way to develop trust is to provide the client with multiple alternatives. He offered a simple example using a doctor/patient relationship.

Let's say a patient walks into the orthopedist's office and declares, "My knee is killing me after I hurt it playing tennis yesterday!" The doctor could easily take an X-Ray or MRI and say, "You need surgery on that knee." Even if the diagnosis is absolutely correct, the ailing patient is likely to be skeptical. He may wonder, "How does he know that already?" "What are my other treatment options?" "Maybe I should get a second opinion." Regardless, the patient is hesitant at best and more likely skeptical – in large part because the Doctor has provided exactly one option – surgery!

On the other hand, a Doctor (or salesperson for that matter) that offers multiple alternatives to the patient by saying, "You actually have a few alternative approaches and let me share with you the risk and benefits of each." He then goes on to offer options including:

- Physical therapy without surgery
- A cast to immobilize the knee for a short period to see if it will heal by itself
- And the third option of arthroscopic ligament surgery

In this case the patient feels better educated, is provided reasonable alternatives, and now feels as though they have a choice in the matter. They are still likely to choose the surgery option (which is the Doctor's best recommendation) but the big difference is that there tends to be far more trust between buyer (patient) and seller (Doctor) when the client is provided choices.

Try it yourself – instead of telling the prospect that you have the right solution, help them understand the reasonable options they should consider. You'll be pleasantly surprised to see that they often reply, "That's helpful - what do you think I should choose amongst these alternatives?" You've just changed the nature of the relationship to one of trust and collaboration!

### **13. Don't Be a Jack of All Trades and a Master of None**

One red flag that potential buyers tend to watch for in evaluating vendors is when a vendor contends that they have a "breadth of capabilities" it is often perceived by the prospect as sounding like your firm is a "jack of all trades." Even if your solution has a comprehensive capability, consider an alternative way of positioning yourself as a specialist vs. a generalist. When someone asks me what kind of sales training our firm provides, I often respond with an answer like, "We are called most often when an organization has very large, strategic, and highly competitive opportunities that they can't afford to lose." That doesn't mean we don't do many other things (negotiating skills, sales process design, account management, etc.) but it tends to communicate to the client that we are specialists (and this happens to be where we have the best reputation and the most client demand).

Another way to accomplish the same clarity in the client's mind is to proactively refer business they may ask you to provide to other, non-competitive firms. For example, if a prospect of mine is interested in conducting a high volume of telephone-based win/loss reviews, I will explain that this is not our focus as a firm because there are great organizations that do this exclusively and I will connect them with one or two firms that specialize in this area.



In essence – focus on your sweet spot and be an expert in that!

## 14. Resist “Death by Powerpoint” at All Costs

Have you ever attended a sales presentation when it felt like the person selling the product had a mentality of “stop me when you see something you like” or worse yet, flops a 30 page presentation in front of you and says, “Let’s get started!” If you’re like the average buyer, we tend to get restless (at least) and desperate (at worst), already anticipating how long this is going to take and expecting that if we don’t do something creative we’re destined to be late for our next meeting (or dinner that night). Often, the creative executive approach to this scenario is either to be perfectly quiet to ensure discussion and dialogue doesn’t exacerbate the problem, or they may text message their executive assistant to come into the meeting in 20 minutes to tell them that they’ve been called away unexpectedly with no plan to reschedule our visit. If you think this doesn’t happen, you’re wrong.

Here’s the point – “telling” and “selling” should be avoided at all costs for someone who embraces the *UnSelling* approach. In fact, even “demos” in many environments are dangerous for the average buyer-seller relationship. The reason is when the client sees a demonstration of your solution, they often feel they now have everything they need to know in order to make a decision about your solution and they no longer “need” you (even though they often never really “wanted” you). Here’s an example: one of my clients for many years is one of the largest healthcare companies in the world and I work with a division that sells a leading-edge technology into hospitals. A few years ago I facilitated a meeting of some of their top sales people with the intent of defining the “best practice” sales cycle steps that these sales people were using to manage the buying and selling process so that we could document these practices and share them with the balance of the sales people in this division.

I was fascinated to find that on this topic of demonstrations, the high performance sales people in the room that day had learned that in the 7 step sales process they were following, they would politely defer doing a product demo for the client until at least stage 5. In fact, when we published the best practice “roadmap” for this organization, we had a coaching section at the bottom of the first 4 stages of the sales process (Qualification, discovery, strategy development, etc.) that said in bold letters, “NO PRODUCT DEMONSTRATIONS ALLOWED!” These experienced reps had learned that when you provide a demo, you actually lose your leverage with the client. And if we’re intent on having open, collaborative dialogue to really understand the problem(s) the prospect is intent on solving, you can’t jump to the answer with demos, collateral brochures, or worse yet - premature proposals and/or PowerPoint slides.

And when the prospect says – “I’d like to start our evaluation by seeing a demo of your solution” you have to be prepared with an effective answer. I’m in favor of an approach such as, “I want to first ensure we actually have a solution that fits your needs and if we do determine our solution is a reasonable option then I’d like to make sure I share it in a way that is most relevant to your needs.” In essence I’m saying I don’t even know if I have a solution for your needs and until I do, it would not be a good use of the client’s time to schedule a demonstration. Instead, we need the client’s help to better understand their challenges and goals.

Remember what we said about a key lesson learned from win/loss reviews – differentiation has less to do with your solution’s features and functions and far more to do with your ability to “link” your solution to the pains the key stakeholders are intent on solving. You can actually have the third or fourth best solution in a competitive pursuit and win the client’s business because you’ve done a better job of connecting your solution to their challenges and goals. Trying to “wow” the client with great PowerPoint slides and demonstrations is no surrogate to accomplish this goal of differentiation!

## **15. Accelerating Discussions that Are Perfectly Illogical (To “Selling” People at Least)**

When is the best time to engage the prospect in a discussion about the keys to successful implementation of the solutions they are considering? “Selling” oriented people typically will do everything possible to defer this discussion because it distracts them from what they most like to do – sell! And besides, these sales reps often feel that the easier we make the entire delivery and implementation process sound, the more likely the client is to say, “yes” to our proposed solution. I couldn’t agree less!

The *UnSelling* approach takes the exact opposite approach. The premise is that you (and the client, first and foremost) actually benefit far more from having an early discussion about all of the things we have to get right in the implementation process. There are several reasons this is beneficial:

- You identify additional stakeholders that are more apt to engage in the process if they know the downstream impacts and key factors for success on a given project.
- Doing so provides evidence that the client has the intestinal fortitude to do what it takes to be successful in this endeavor –by including these additional key stakeholders early in the process.



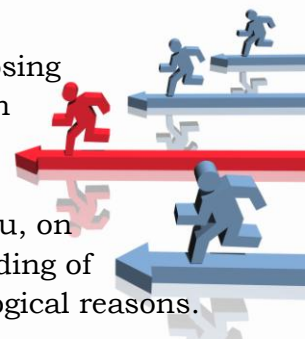
- And, it's actually a great way to differentiate your solution and approach from other vendors who make every project sound unrealistically simple.

On this last point related to differentiation, this works particularly well when the sales team is honest with the client about why the project they are planning to take on is difficult, not easy (see Strategy # 17 for more on this topic). Think about it, if all of the vendors on a given pursuit make the whole process sound easy to design, build, and implement the proposed solution, it not only disadvantages the prospect (because it's usually not true) but it also disadvantages all but the low cost vendor who gains an advantage when the prospect can't differentiate amongst alternatives and therefore concludes that low cost ought to be the basis of the decision.

## 16. Give Your Competitors Some Credit (Sort Of)

In any complex selling environment, it's important to fully understand the competitive landscape. The challenge is that the prospect is often unwilling to share what competitive options they are considering. This leaves you with at least two options. First, you can ignore the competition and assume that you can compel the client to choose your solution without worrying about who or what else they are considering. The second, which is the *UnSelling* approach that I'd recommend, is that you proactively bring up the competition and encourage the client to feel comfortable with this non-threatening discussion.

This is a classic case of two parties (buyer and seller) with opposing objectives/perspectives. The prospect isn't interested in talking with you about the other solutions under consideration for a number of reasons, perhaps the most prominent being their concern that you are going to use negative selling by disparaging the competitors. You, on the other hand, are highly motivated to have a complete understanding of the competitive landscape you're facing for a number of good and logical reasons. Understanding the competitors enables you to:



- **Effectively qualify the opportunity** – are they serious about your solution as an option?
- **Better differentiate your solution vs. the other options** – for the benefit of the client of course
- **And ultimately allows you to influence the decision and evaluation process** to expose the competitors weaknesses without disparaging them



*UnSelling* professionals genuinely believe there are often one or more reasonable alternatives to your solution and that one of our responsibilities is to help the prospect to better understand the differences between these options. If you adopt this philosophy you will be comfortable saying something like, “You are likely aware that there are some good, reputable alternatives to our solution. Who else have you decided to evaluate?” The question itself is an invitation to an open and honest response. They may still resist telling you or perhaps they respond with a question, “Why do you need to know?”

Whenever I hear this question I tend to tell a real-life story about a competitive situation where our firm was invited to compete and the other two competitors the client chose to invite were names I hadn’t heard previously and obviously I had never competed against (which is unusual in our business). In this case I said to the prospect, “The reason that information is helpful is that when you are considering two competitors that I have never heard of or competed against, there’s a reasonable chance that one of us is at the wrong dance – and it may be me!” It turned out to be a very effective approach because it allowed me the opportunity to better educate the prospect on the typical stratification of sales methodology/training firms and where we are positioned relative to others. It’s likely that the other firms were good, credible companies who may simply specialize in other areas (see an example below on how we differentiate The Complex Sale as a “Selling 401” firm).

By engaging in this discussion it’s not only helpful to the client in distinguishing between competitors, it’s also helpful to us because we have an opportunity to gain credibility and differentiate our solution in the process.

So, what’s the approach we can use to learn what we need to learn but still minimize the logical concerns the prospect has about sharing this information? First, you have to commit to the client that you are firmly committed to not disparage competitors because no one benefits when it happens.

Second, and arguably most importantly, you have to be willing to have an open dialogue with the prospect about both the strengths **and** weaknesses about your solution in order to create a “safe” environment where the client feels comfortable being open and honest about the competitive landscape. When done effectively, the client actually begins to open up about the positives and negatives associated with the competitive options they are considering. Let me offer a couple of simple examples:

One *UnSelling* statement I often make to new prospects: “We are not the ideal fit for every prospective customer’s needs. There are some great competitors out there

that are uniquely equipped to provide what I call “face-to-face” selling skills to sales organizations – think of it as being expert in selling ‘101’ skills (to use a college parallel). On the other hand we (The Complex Sale in this example) are far better known for sales strategy – selling ‘401’.”

Consider what we’ve just done – we’ve admitted we’re not the answer to every problem; we’ve effectively positioned ourselves exactly where we want the client to position us in their minds; and, in a back-handed sort of way, we’ve actually put some doubt in the client’s mind about being careful that they are conscious of hiring a sales methodology company that may not be as adept at providing opportunity strategy for their sales people. Selling ‘101’ is great for helping inexperienced sales people to make a better sales call while selling ‘401’ is focused on ensuring you win the deals you can’t afford to lose. I haven’t disparaged the competitor but have begun to get the client to think about what they are really trying to accomplish – basic selling skills for their sales team or sales strategy that can drive new business success.

Here’s another example of how to proactively overcome what might be considered a weakness in your company or solution from the prospect’s perspective. What if you asked a prospect a leading question about their perception of your solution’s weaknesses (that they likely know about but often don’t confess they’ve heard)? You might ask, “As you consider your options, I would guess that there are a few things you’re concerned about with our solution – am I right?”

When you ask this question it’s critical that you watch the body language because you’re really inviting the client to be brutally honest with you and you have to be entirely non-defensive, regardless of the answer. If they pause and stammer and ultimately say, “Well, nothing, really” – the healthy skeptic in me believes they are likely being evasive because they’re still concerned that you’re going to be defensive if they answer honestly. So the *UnSelling* specialist primes the pump by saying, “What I hear pretty often from others is that we have a reputation for being hard to do business with. Is it safe to say you’ve heard, or perhaps even experienced this first-hand?” When you use this (or similar approach) the client is far more likely to confess their concerns including two or three other concerns they may have that they were previously hesitant to share because you’ve now demonstrated that it’s safe to be open and honest on these issues. It’s what *UnSelling* is all about.

This philosophy is equally applicable to common objections clients tend to have about our solution. If the client is likely to have a concern about your capability (even if they haven’t raised the issue yet) you’re better off bringing up the issue yourself – and proactively positioning it in a way that you would prefer (i.e. saying it your way)

instead of hoping it doesn't come up and then being surprised when it does (and looking defensive).

In essence, *UnSelling's* aim is to genuinely convince the client that we're fully prepared (or better yet – welcoming) to have them tell us what they really think and may be concerned about. When you do so in a non-defensive way, the buyer-seller relationship becomes far more open, collaborative, and useful for both.

## **17. If The Prospect is Doing Something Difficult, They Deserve to Know**

In a previous section we outlined the value of accelerating the implementation challenges and imperatives to an earlier stage of the buying-selling process. Let's now look at implementation from another perspective. So often, in the training and deal coaching that I've conducted, the sales team is inclined to make the prospect believe that the implementation and change management they are about to embark on will be simple and achievable. We insist that we've done this countless times and have all the tools and experiences to make this successful. While this may seem perfectly logical and rational, it may be among the biggest mistakes a sales person or team can make.

The reason? More often than not, the projects our clients pursue are not very easy. When I initially meet with a sales team that I'm coaching, I'll often ask the question, "On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very difficult), how difficult will it be for the client to implement this solution and achieve the intended benefits, both on-time and on-budget?" The typical answer I hear is 9, 10, or 11. Not surprisingly, the nature of most of the projects we all do for our clients are not easy! It takes time, thoughtful planning, the right resources, leadership commitment, not to mention training, communications, and countless other key success factors that make these projects work (or not).

Why then, does the average "selling" team have this enormous tendency to make the client believe these initiatives are a piece of cake? Maybe we think that gives the prospect confidence that we've done this many times? Maybe we're afraid of telling them the truth for fear they won't undertake the effort if they know it is this difficult? Or, perhaps the sales team believes this gives us a competitive advantage?

Regardless of your logic, it usually doesn't work. In fact, when we make the client believe that the project implementation will be straightforward and easily achievable, we actually accomplish the opposite unintended consequence: the prospect buys into the notion that anyone can do it well which serves to advantage our often-lower-price

competitor. It also sets an expectation with the prospect about the implementation process that is unreasonable and when anything subsequently goes wrong in the project they feel as though we have misled them or that we've over-sold and under-delivered.

Alternatively, a great *UnSelling* professional will approach this differently:

- **They'll focus time and energy with the prospect to ensure they have established the measures of success for the project.** By doing so, we can collaborate with the prospect to initially ensure this project is worth undertaking at all and also help sustain momentum when things get difficult (because the benefits justify the effort). "Selling" people don't worry about this step for fear that the client won't know what they want to achieve, or worse yet, that the client's ultimate goals won't sufficiently justify the cost of the initiative.
- **They'll be very specific about the key success factors (the positive approach) or perhaps even more effectively, the common points of failure that we've seen in projects of this nature.** By doing so, we actually gain credibility in the eyes of the client because they get evidence that we've actually done this and that we've seen what it takes to deal with these risks in order to make these projects successful. And, when your competitors make everything sound easy, the prospect usually doesn't believe it (because you've explained the challenges) and this can truly become one of the most powerful points of differentiation for those who employ this strategy.
- **This approach also helps us execute the previous strategy of accelerating the implementation planning discussion to the earliest parts of the buying/selling process** so that we can gain credibility and determine (early on) whether the prospect is serious about making this project successful by involving the right people and committing the right resources.

When I was at IBM we always loved the old adage that, "no CIO has ever been fired for hiring IBM" because when the client knew the project was going to be challenging, they were ever-more inclined to hire the company or team that had the most experience and that really understood what it took to make projects of this nature successful. If we make it sound easy, we've lost one of our biggest advantages!

## 18. Using the “Walk Away” Strategy... to Win?

Most sales people think of the walk away strategy as a strategy of last resort. In essence, they use it as a strategy to finally walk away when it's obvious that they don't have a prayer of winning.

The *UnSelling* professional looks at this strategy very differently. We adopt the philosophy that effective selling is entirely about the client's success, regardless of whether we are the chosen solution provider. And to really know how to help the client succeed we must have enough information about the client's issues, challenges, and goals to be able to provide a thorough, well-thought-out recommendation and solution. Without this information we're likely to be guilty of the selling equivalent of medical malpractice (if you think back to my analogy of the doctor who is asked to prescribe medicine to the patient who is unwilling to confess their pain).

Here's an example of what we call the “Walk Away” strategy: A prospect calls you and asks you to provide them a proposal as they consider replacing their existing system that they have used for the past 5 years. They contend that they want to keep this a level playing field between competitors and for that reason they will only allow 7 days for your proposal to be submitted and they won't allow you to talk to any key stakeholders or allow you to gather any information over and above the 15 page RFP requirements document. Sound familiar? I'd venture a guess that every experienced sales person has faced this scenario often.

The next time this occurs, here's my advice: have another small, polite confrontation and use the walk away strategy to do so. To do this well, you'll want to first define what the prospect will have to allow you to do in order for you to provide them the value they deserve (i.e., access 3-4 key stakeholders, access key information about the current system/challenges, and likely more than 7 days to assess their situation to develop a credible recommendation for the solution). When you do so, and explain why these steps are for their benefit (vs. yours), you've now shifted the decision as to whether you stay in the competition or walk away to the prospect. If they say, “sounds reasonable” you now have both the time and information you require and a reasonable chance to differentiate your solution in this competitive situation. On the other hand, if they choose not to honor your reasonable request for time, access, and information, you are safe in concluding that they weren't really looking for your best answer, just a proposal and price quotation that helps them justify their intent to choose someone other than you.

To be effective in this approach, you have to make it clear that you would love to help this client, regardless of who they decide to choose but you're only able to provide that help if the client truly wants your firm's best thinking on the technology/approach to help them solve their problem. And you have to be seriously committed to this attitude. In other words, when the client says "no" to your reasonable request, the surest way to a subservient buyer-seller relationship is for you to then backpedal by saying, "I understand, tell me again when the proposal is due?" You have to have the intestinal fortitude to stand behind your convictions. Without this type of information, you aren't able to add enough value for the client and you'll struggle to differentiate your solution.

One final application of this concept – the walk away strategy can also be used when the client is heading down the wrong road and is likely to be unsuccessful in their endeavor – which also means you're likely to be unsuccessful if you are the vendor of choice. So often, optimistic sales people will defer the confrontation and "hope" it will all turn out right, and of course it rarely does. If the client is about to drive the train off the tracks, tell them the truth and show them how to get it back on track. After the discomfort of the initial confrontation, you and the buyer will be well-served and your credibility will be that much better in the eyes of the client.

## **19. While You *UnSell*, Let Your Client References "Sell" to Their Heart's Content**

When I was with IBM one of the best "sales" resources available to me were my Systems Engineers. The key reason was that they were never perceived by the client as a selling resource. They were technically knowledgeable, were responsible for making things work, and were viewed by the client as being focused on their success, not in selling the next system.

In the same way, when you have a satisfied customer who has been through the buying and selling process and has previously evaluated reasonable alternatives (and ultimately has chosen your solution) you can connect that customer with your prospect and you don't have to do any selling because these satisfied clients will do enough selling for both of you. The prospect isn't nearly as concerned about whether they are getting "sold" because the source of the information doesn't have a selfish interest in whether the deal is closed. The reference and the prospect can compare notes on their common challenges; they can collaborate on approaches to solve the problems; and in many cases, they end up forging a relationship that outlasts this

single evaluation. Use these valuable resources to your best advantage and let them do the selling so you don't have to!

## 20. *UnSelling* Doesn't Stop at Contract Signing

There's a tendency, at the conclusion of the buying/selling process (at or after contract signing), to dismiss all selling-related concepts because now we're in project implementation/delivery and we no longer need these strategies. On the contrary, these skills and this philosophy become even more important as you transition to the delivery phase for the client. Here are a few examples of what I mean:

- **Whether you've won or lost a pursuit, you and your sales team need to know why the client chose the solution provider they did.** Those who win almost never take the time to understand what made the difference and it may be the most useful information you could gather, given all of the time and energy you spent in the pursuit. If you lost, it's important to know why! How did they decide? What really made the difference? What feedback can the client provide that would allow us to better serve them in the future?

If it's a very large opportunity, I always recommend that you engage a third party to conduct the personal interview of the key client stakeholders (I have done many of these face-to-face interviews for the largest of my clients' wins and losses). If it's not large, these can often be conducted by a sales manager or other manager in your business who is far more likely to solicit the truth than the sales team is able to do (clients will always tell the sales team it was "mostly a price decision"). Regardless of a win or a loss, when you do get feedback from the client, the interviewer's role is to ask good questions and listen. We can't afford to get defensive or try to explain to the client why they missed the boat on this decision. These reviews can be enormously informative and useful if you conduct them properly and then apply what you learn to future pursuits.



- **When you transition to implementation/delivery, the client still needs to hear the whole truth and nothing but the truth – even if it hurts or risks that the project timing will be compromised.** Better to do things right than fast and ineffectively.



- **And if things aren't being done properly, we must have the courage to stop the implementation long enough to make adjustments** in order to help the client get back on a course for success.

## 21. *UnSelling* Begins With Account Management

There's a tendency to think that selling starts when a new opportunity presents itself. To the contrary, most effective selling starts with how well you manage your existing large, strategic accounts. One notable example relates to our ability to engage key executive stakeholders in a new opportunity. I often ask groups I speak to, "When's the best time to get to key executives?" The most common answer I hear, "Early in the buying-selling process!" In reality, if we're managing our accounts effectively, the best time to get to executives is before an opportunity breaks out – because the executives are less suspicious of our motivations to spend time with them when there's not an opportunity in sight. If you want to build trust and credibility – get to them before you actually need them and before they'd be suspicious of being 'sold.'

The *UnSelling* approach also aligns with the notion that all accounts are not created equally. If you are prone to try to equally serve many different accounts in your territory/portfolio, you're doing yourself and your best clients a disservice with this approach. Great account managers proactively decide which accounts deserve extraordinary attention (and time) and they serve these clients accordingly. It means some of your clients won't get much of your time. And when they object to this, it's a great opportunity to have an honest discussion with them about your desire to spend more time with them – as long as you can rationally allocate your time in accordance with the value of the joint relationship. Your clients will recognize that you need to be a good steward of the finite time and resources you have available.

I previously implored all great *UnSelling* professionals to invest their time and attention in thoroughly understanding their client's business, their challenges, their competition, and even their industry. When it comes to effective account management, this knowledge becomes even more critical. You should strive to become a student of your client's business to have the credibility to use *UnSelling* to your best advantage.

And finally, the best indicator of whether we are managing our large, strategic accounts effectively is the degree to which we **create** demand in our clients versus **reacting** to the client's demand. How often are we bringing ideas to our clients that are valuable for them to solve? Or, are we most often waiting for them to invite us to

compete on an opportunity? My experience has shown that 90%+ of new opportunities for the clients and companies I have worked with are demand reaction – which basically means the sales team is behind from the start of the pursuit! The epitome of *UnSelling* is bringing a great idea to a client that they haven't even thought about solving. When you do this, you'll find that you may not have to sell at all. You simply need to help them figure out how to solve the problem and in doing so, you'll end up winning far more than your fair share of new opportunities!

## **22. Without a Roadmap, Any Old Selling Road Will Get You Nowhere**

I continue to be amazed at how sales people in most organizations seem to have to blaze their own trail to success. When they ask their sales manager what steps they should take and how to best manage the sales process they most often point to the six or seven stages of the pipeline “funnel” and assume that is sufficient for the average new sales person. It's not!

I've worked with a number of very successful organizations that have allowed us (TCS) to facilitate a workshop that involves their most successful sales people (usually 6-10) in order to define and document the steps they take and the activities within each major step that they consistently execute. These steps and activities tend to “explain” their successful track records. You'd be amazed at how consistent and common some of the key strategies and activities these successful sales reps implement.

Here's the big idea: if you (and your entire sales team) would take the time to really dissect what these successful sales people do well and how they effectively qualify, conduct discovery, develop solution strategies, etc. so that you ultimately define your organization's Best Practice Sales Cycle (BPSC) – all of your sales people and each of your sales pursuits are far more likely to execute and leverage these best practices. The result? You'll win far more than your fair share of new business!



## Chapter 4: You Know You Have It Right When ... ..

We've covered many different scenarios and approaches to help you understand what's really meant by *UnSelling*. I'll predict that when you begin to employ these strategies you will have trepidation because it's contrary to every selling bone in your body and what you've been taught since you were trained in sales school '101'. Any of these sound familiar?

- **Emphasize features, functions, and benefits** (telling!)
- **Show them your great product** (dash to the demo!)
- **Always trial close** (i.e. "Is there anything else I need to address before you buy today?" Note: which has always made me want to run the other direction when a sales person says this to me)
- **Qualify early** (with a list of interrogation questions that makes the buyer entirely defensive – if not impatient or angry)
- **And you can likely add 10 more** you've been taught in traditional sales training

To help you persevere in this approach, there are some behaviors on both your part and the client's part that will become obvious (and ultimately normal) that will give you confidence that you're on the right track. Here are a few:

- The prospect is inviting your input about the steps they are taking in their evaluation or the criteria they are using in order to get your advice and counsel
- The prospect is far less guarded in their communications and seems to be sharing information that they haven't shared previously – because they're no longer entirely concerned about keeping absolute control in the process
- You'll begin to feel more at ease telling the client the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And interestingly enough – that will invite and encourage the prospect to do the same!
- You will find your client relationships begin to take on a new form. No longer purely a buyer-seller relationship but one based on trust (both personally and professionally), truth, collaboration, and the ability to admit our mistakes.

- Your focus will shift from, “How can I win this deal?” to “How can I help this client achieve their goals?” And when this shift occurs, you’ll stop selling and just start helping – right from the start of the interaction with the client.
- And, you’ll consistently exceed the client’s expectations. Which also means that you’ll be able to “sell” less often going forward because the client is no longer concerned about whether they have the best solution. They’ll have confidence that you will do what’s right for them, regardless of whether it is optimum for you or your firm.

I was asked recently what skills are required to be effective in *UnSelling*. As I contemplated the answer and began to capture the key attributes, I was struck by two things: 1) how different these skills are compared to sales people who operate in traditional selling environments; and 2) How consistent most of these are with fundamental biblical principles. Here’s a short list in my book:

- **Honesty** – mostly because this approach requires that the *UnSelling* professional be willing to tell the client the whole truth and nothing but the truth and be prepared to talk about the client’s alternatives openly and defenselessly.
- **Empathy** – to borrow a phrase from Stephen Covey: to “seek first to understand” the client’s perspective and resist the temptation to prematurely prescribe a solution.
- **Servant-leadership style** – because the notion of ‘just start helping’ requires us to help the client from the start of the first meeting – regardless of whether we have a contract or commitment from the client to do business with us and even if you decide not to pursue the opportunity.
- **Humility** – willing to admit that we don’t have all of the answers but we do have the skills and the commitment to help.
- **Effective listener** – we were given 2 ears and 1 mouth for a reason – to use them proportionately. Asking good questions and then truly listening for the answers are required skills for *UnSelling* effectively.
- **Calm and patience** – the more desperate we are to sell the client a solution the less attractive our solution is to the client.
- **Courage** – to be willing to have small, polite confrontations with the client that add value and benefit the client.

- **Discernment and Knowledge** – the client is far more concerned with their business than they are about your business. We should be a student of our client's challenges, goals and imperatives so that we can help them achieve success.

Try this *UnSelling* approach and embrace its premise: clients don't want to be sold, they want help. When you do, I'd like to hear about your successes so that we can share them amongst the other sales professionals who do this well. You can share your stories via [this link](#) and the stories will be viewed online at: <http://www.betterwaystrategies.com>.

Good luck and good *UnSelling*!

**About The Author** .....

Peter Bourke is the Founder and Principal of Better Way Sales Strategies and a Principal at The Complex Sale ([www.complexsale.com](http://www.complexsale.com)), a market-leading sales methodology and training firm. He has more than thirty years of experience in sales leadership in the professional services, high tech, and outsourcing industries. Prior to joining The Complex Sale in 2003 he served as president of the outsourcing division of Spherion Corporation.

Peter's background in sales leadership, marketing and operational management includes key roles with Andersen Consulting (now Accenture), IBM, NYNEX, and First Financial Management. At Andersen Consulting he was Global Director of Business Development. In this role, Peter led the development of the business development framework that was implemented throughout the firm for outsourcing and consulting services.

Peter received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, as well as an MBA from Pepperdine University.

Through Better Way Sales Strategies ([www.betterwaystrategies.com](http://www.betterwaystrategies.com)), Peter provides keynote speech programs, win/loss reviews, and large, strategic opportunity coaching to his clients.

