
F O R E W O R D

What makes selling value so difficult today? Salespeople—even those who are trained to ask the right questions, probe for critical needs, and apply solutions to customers’ long-term business challenges—frequently find themselves confronted with buyers who only want to talk about price. Salespeople are told to sell to true decision makers, but are never given the tools to reach the corner offices where these key executives are located. They’re told to become sales consultants, only to find that prospects aren’t particularly interested in being consulted with.

As publisher of the nation’s top sales magazine, I hear a familiar refrain over and over again from salespeople in nearly every field, as well as sales managers, VPs of sales, and even CEOs. They tell me that so many buyers are focused on this one issue—price—that salespeople are forced to choose between two unappealing options: lose the deal or abandon selling value. Selling in this environment means that even when you win, you lose.

As Shonka and Kosch point out, however, there is another path. Confronted with this lose-lose scenario, the sales professional’s role itself is responding by dividing into two separate tiers. Slowly becoming obsolete are those at the bottom who persist in trying to compete with little more than price, features, and a winning personality to recommend them. At the top are the salespeople willing to fight the tide and break out of the “Vendor Trap” by refusing to sell to buyers who only care about price, by elevating their selling efforts, and by moving beyond traditional notions of what it means to sell value. This path, they argue persuasively, is the future of selling.

Admittedly some top sales performers have the innate instincts, ability, and eloquence to rise above the pack and get in front of prospects who are empowered to buy value and close on mutually beneficial business relationships. In this book, the authors clearly demonstrate that what these top performers do by instinct can be systematized into a reproducible process that

nearly anyone can follow. I was intrigued to read as the authors provided a master-blueprint to help salespeople:

- Conduct penetrating information-gathering research meetings with key players.
- Cultivate a strong network of coaches who want you to win.
- Go over, around, or through the gatekeepers and “ankle-biters,” such as product evaluators and purchasing managers who don’t understand the value you offer.
- Gain regular access to the decision makers who are not only able to but also eager to buy into truly value-based solutions.
- Deliver blow-’em-away business presentations to executives you once might have been intimidated even to meet.

And unlike so many sales guides I’ve read, this is not some academic textbook you can only get through with the help of multiple cups of coffee. The authors are not professors—they’re as hands-on as they come. Not only are they operating within breathing distance of top sales professionals, consulting in today’s selling trenches with some of the most admired sales organizations in the world, they’re also out there on the front lines themselves, successfully selling in the same price-obsessed marketplace the rest of us face.

I was also impressed by the authors’ unique approach to the professional selling challenge. Every year I’m confronted with thousands of ideas to help sales professionals improve, yet so much of what passes for new sales ideas are merely the same old tools repackaged. But here you’ll find something genuinely different—a perspective and process that take selling value to a new level. This is the level where price objections, controlling gatekeepers, restrictive RFPs, and all the other exasperations of the Vendor Trap fall away until you’re allowed to deliver the kind of value solutions that make being a sales professional so rewarding.

In addition to showing you how to raise the level of your game, the authors also provide a series of real-life case studies that drive home the critical lessons in an unforgettable way. This book is an enjoyable and fast read. With each page of the manuscript, I became more determined that my own sales team never be caught in the Vendor Trap.

Ultimately, 21st-century sales professionals will have to decide whether to be leaders or followers in selling’s next generation. Both for individual sales professionals eager to strike out with a fresh plan for attacking the new challenges they face and for managers with sales teams to reinvigorate and redirect, this book offers a detailed, street-smart roadmap to help you leverage your strengths, elevate your selling game, and achieve long-term sales success.

—Gerhard Gschwandtner, Founder and Publisher, *Selling Power* magazine