

The background of the entire page is a grayscale photograph of several modern skyscrapers with glass facades, viewed from a low angle looking up. The buildings are slightly out of focus, creating a sense of depth and a professional, corporate atmosphere.

Sales Has Changed

Has Your Sales Management Changed with It?

How modern B2B sales strategy, sales management and the Psychology of Buying need to work together.

Paul McCartney
August 2026

A Note from The Author

Sales leadership can be a lonely job.

When you are responsible for a sales team – or several sales teams – there is always something demanding your attention. Targets need to be hit, forecasts need to be accurate, pipelines need to be healthy, good people need to be retained, and underperformance needs to be addressed. At the same time, you are expected to keep one eye on the future: changing buyer behaviour, new technology, emerging competitors, shifting markets and the constant pressure to deliver more predictable growth.

I understand what that feels like.

One of the positions I held in Commercial Radio, was Group Commercial Director, responsible for managing multiple sales teams across a number of stations operating in competitive local markets. That meant dealing with many of the challenges sales leaders still face today: different personalities, different levels of ability, pressure on revenue, inconsistent pipelines, the need to coach managers and salespeople, and the difficulty of balancing short-term targets with longer-term commercial strategy.

The tools have changed considerably since then.

The fundamentals of leading people, creating focus and helping customers make buying decisions have not.

That is why I have written this White Paper.

My aim is not to tell you that there is one perfect way to manage sales. There isn't. Every organisation is different, every market is different and every sales team has its own strengths, weaknesses and pressures.

Instead, think of this as a guide to help you examine the way your organisation sells and the way you lead the people responsible for selling.

That is what this White Paper is designed to help you do..

Paul McCartney
August 2026

How to Use this Paper

You can read the Paper from beginning to end if you want a broader view of how sales and sales management have evolved over the past decade.

But you don't have to.

You may already know where the problem is.

- Perhaps your pipeline is inconsistent.
- Perhaps forecasts bear little resemblance to what eventually happens.
- Perhaps your salespeople are busy but not producing enough meaningful opportunities.
- Perhaps too many proposals are being sent without enough being won.
- Perhaps you are struggling to generate referrals.
- Perhaps marketing creates activity, but sales cannot convert it.
- Perhaps your CRM contains plenty of data but very little useful management information.

Or perhaps you simply feel that the way your team sells has not kept pace with the way your customers now buy.

If that is the case, use this White Paper as a reference document. Go directly to the section that relates most closely to the issue you are trying to solve, take the ideas that are relevant to your organisation and ask what needs to change.

Throughout the paper, I return to a simple model I call the Psychology of Buying:

Trust and Rapport → Need or Want → Solution and Ask.

Because however sophisticated our technology becomes, people still need to trust you, care sufficiently about the problem or opportunity in front of them, and believe that your solution represents the right way forward.

The challenge for today's sales leader is to build the strategy, systems, management discipline and team capability that makes those conditions more likely to occur.

That is what this White Paper is designed to help you do.

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Introduction

Ten years ago, it was still possible for a reasonably competent salesperson, armed with a database, a telephone, an email account and enough persistence, to create a respectable pipeline of business.

The salesperson generally held more information than the buyer. They could introduce a product or service, explain its benefits, answer objections and guide the prospect through a fairly recognisable sales process. Marketing generated awareness, salespeople sold, and account managers looked after customers afterwards.

There were exceptions, of course, but the boundaries were relatively clear.

Today, those boundaries have almost disappeared.

Buyers can research your company, your competitors, your people, your prices, your reputation and possible solutions to their problem without ever speaking to you. They can ask AI to compare approaches, read reviews, follow experts on LinkedIn, download reports, speak to peers and arrive at a sales meeting with a surprisingly sophisticated understanding of the subject.

They can also disappear.

A prospect can investigate a solution for several weeks without identifying themselves, make contact when they are already well through their decision-making process and then involve several other people who have different concerns, priorities and levels of influence.

Meanwhile, salespeople have access to more technology than at any point in history. CRMs, sales-engagement systems, LinkedIn, intent data, call-recording software and artificial intelligence can help identify prospects, research accounts, draft communications, analyse conversations and forecast revenue.

Sales has therefore become simultaneously easier and harder.

It is easier to find information and communicate with potential customers.

It is harder to earn their attention, build trust and persuade them that speaking to a salesperson will actually add value.



Introduction

That distinction matters enormously for a founder or business owner trying to improve sales performance. Because if the market has changed but your sales strategy and management approach have not, there is a danger that you simply ask your salespeople to do more of something that is becoming progressively less effective.

Activity remains important, but activity without strategy is simply expensive motion.

Modern sales management is therefore no longer primarily about supervising salespeople. It is about designing and managing a system that helps the right prospects make good buying decisions.

That is a very different philosophy.

And it fits closely with what I describe as the Psychology of Buying.

This model is deliberately simple:

- There must be Trust and Rapport.
- There must be a Need or Want.
- You present the Solution and Ask for the Business.

Technology has changed enormously during the past decade.

Human psychology however has changed rather less.

People still buy when they trust the person or organisation they are dealing with, recognise that something matters enough to warrant action, and believe the proposed solution represents an appropriate way forward.

What has changed is how those three conditions are created.

That is where modern sales strategy and sales management begin.

- More calls.
- More emails.
- More LinkedIn messages.
- More meetings.
- More proposals.
- More pressure.



The Psychology of Buying

1. Build Trust & Rapport
2. Establish a Need or Want
3. Propose a Solution
4. Ask for the business



The Balance of Power Has Shifted Towards the Buyer

Perhaps the most important change in B2B selling over the past decade is the shift in control from seller to buyer.

Traditionally, the salesperson was an important source of information. If you wanted to understand a product, service or solution, speaking with a salesperson was often part of the research process.

Today, buyers can conduct substantial research independently.

McKinsey's continuing B2B Pulse research describes omnichannel buying as the established B2B norm, with customers moving between in-person contact, remote interaction and digital self-service rather than following one seller-controlled route. Its research also indicates that buyers have become increasingly comfortable making significant purchases through remote and digital channels.

This means the traditional idea of a linear sales funnel can be misleading.

A buyer may see somebody from your company on LinkedIn, visit your website, forget about you for three months, hear your name from a colleague, read an article you wrote, attend an event where you speak, look at a competitor, return to your website and finally make contact.

By the time your salesperson receives the enquiry, the sales process may have been happening for months. The salesperson simply wasn't present for most of it.

This changes the role of sales.

If your salesperson begins the first conversation by explaining information the buyer has already discovered online, they add very little value.

The modern salesperson needs to help the buyer interpret information rather than merely provide it.

That requires better questioning, commercial understanding and judgement.



The Balance of Power Has Shifted Towards the Buyer

The salesperson increasingly earns their place in the buying process by helping the customer understand the problem more clearly, recognise implications they may have overlooked and determine what matters most when evaluating possible solutions.

In other words, the salesperson increasingly becomes a guide rather than an information provider.

This is where the second stage of the Psychology of Buying – **Need or Want** – becomes particularly powerful. The objective is not simply to establish whether the prospect has a problem.

It is to establish whether the problem matters.

There is an enormous difference.

A business owner might acknowledge that lead generation is inconsistent, margins could be higher, systems need improvement or their company depends too heavily on them.

That doesn't necessarily mean they will buy anything.

The salesperson needs to understand the external problem and the internal consequence.

What is happening?

Why does it matter?

What is it costing?

What happens if nothing changes?

What would better look like?

How important is making that change compared with everything else competing for management attention?

Good selling has always involved these questions. Modern selling makes them even more important because simply explaining features and benefits is increasingly something a website or AI system can do.

Human salespeople create value through diagnosis, judgement, perspective and confidence.



What is happening?

Why does it matter?



What is it costing?

What happens if nothing changes?



What would better look like?

Trust Now Starts Long Before the Sales Meeting

The first element of the Psychology of Buying is Trust and Rapport.

A decade ago, much of that trust was developed directly by the salesperson. Today, prospects frequently begin forming an opinion before a conversation happens.

- They look at your website.
- They look at your LinkedIn profile.
- They look at what you publish.
- They look at your clients.
- They look for reviews.
- They search your name.
- They examine your team.

And increasingly, they can use AI tools to summarise what is available about you and compare your apparent proposition with alternatives.

Your salesperson is therefore rarely starting from zero.

The customer may arrive with positive trust, negative trust or uncertainty already established.

This makes the relationship between sales and marketing fundamentally different.

Marketing cannot simply be responsible for "generating leads" while sales is responsible for "converting them".

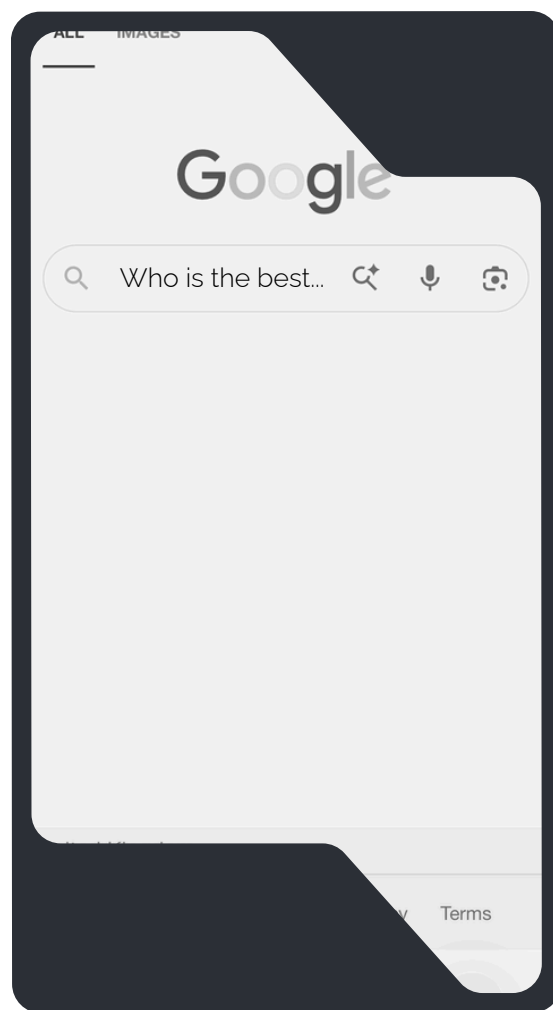
Both functions influence trust.

Thought leadership is a good example.

Research published by LinkedIn and Edelman has continued to examine how useful thought leadership influences not only obvious target buyers, but also less visible people involved in B2B purchasing decisions.

Their work argues that credible expertise can help establish trust and influence before direct seller engagement occurs.

That matters because in many B2B companies, particularly professional services and consultancy businesses, the first sale is not the service.



Trust Now Starts Long Before the Sales Meeting

The first sale is credibility.

The prospect has to believe:

·"You understand businesses like mine."

·"You understand this problem."

·"You are credible enough for me to spend time talking to you."

Only then does the next stage begin.

This changes how a business owner should think about prospecting.

Cold outreach is not necessarily dead. But genuinely cold outreach has become more difficult because buyers are overwhelmed with poorly targeted automated communication.

The answer should not be to automate even more messages. It should be to reduce the temperature of the introduction.

That is not merely a marketing technique - it is the first stage of the sales process.

You are building Trust and Rapport before asking the prospect to invest time.

- *Perhaps the prospect recognises the salesperson from LinkedIn.*
- *Perhaps they have read something the company produced.*
- *Perhaps someone has introduced them.*
- *Perhaps they attended the same industry event.*
- *Perhaps the salesperson references a genuinely relevant commercial issue rather than sending a generic pitch.*

CREDIBILITY



Sales Is Becoming Less About Persuasion and More About Relevance

There was a period when sales training placed enormous emphasis on persuasion techniques.

- Closing.
- Objection-handling.
- Scripts.
- Pressure.
- Creating urgency.

Some of these skills remain useful when applied appropriately. But modern B2B selling increasingly punishes manipulation.

- Buyers can check claims.
- They can compare alternatives.
- They can consult colleagues.
- They can search for reviews.

And if the salesperson exaggerates or pressures them, the buyer has more ways than ever to withdraw from the conversation.

solution



Sales Is Becoming Less About Persuasion and More About Relevance

Modern selling therefore places greater emphasis on relevance.

- Is this the right customer?
- Do we understand their problem?
- Do they genuinely have a reason to act?
- Can our organisation create sufficient value?
- Is this likely to be profitable for both parties?

These questions should be answered before the sales team spends significant time pursuing the opportunity.

That changes strategy.

Instead of asking:

"How can we sell more?"

the founder should first ask:

"Who should we be selling to?"

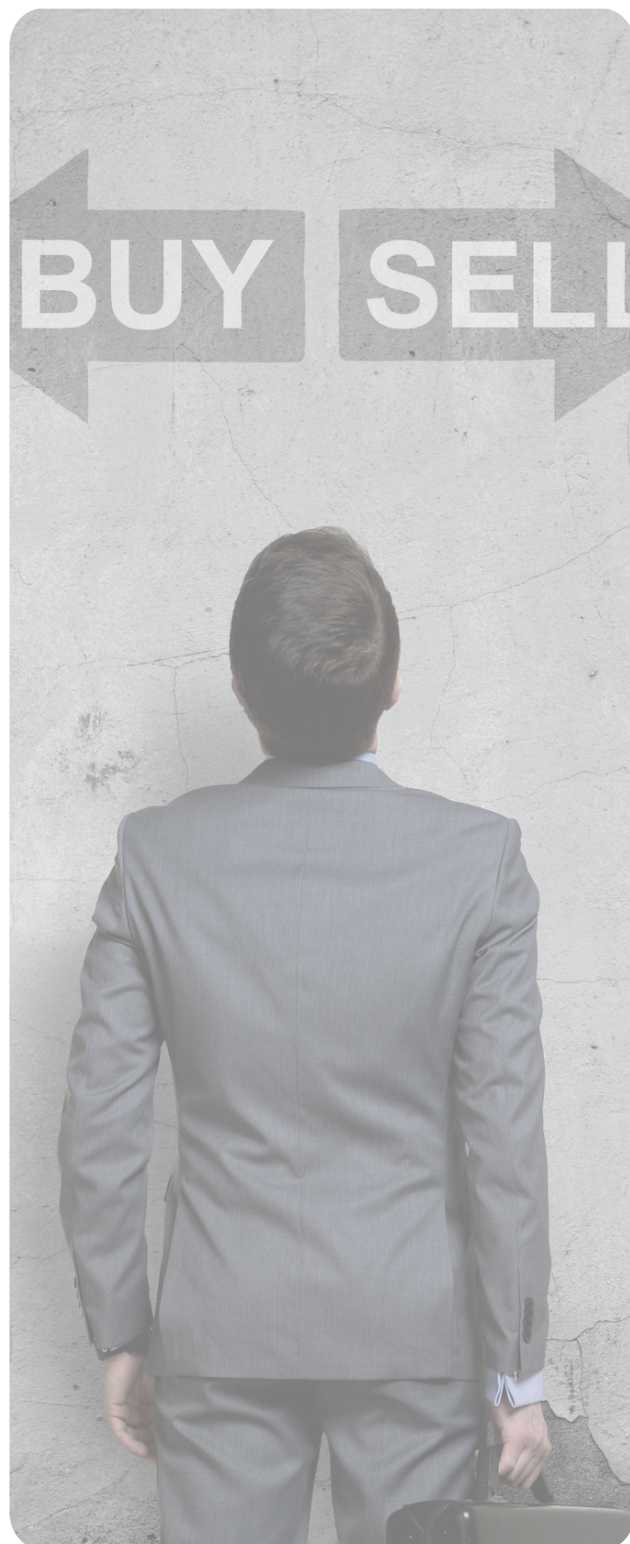
This means defining an Ideal Client Profile far more precisely than age, industry, location and turnover.

A good ICP considers commercial fit.

- Which customers obtain the greatest value from what you provide?
- Which recognise that value?
- Which are willing and able to pay for it?
- Which are profitable to service?
- Which produce further opportunities?
- Which refer you?
- Which create unnecessary operational difficulty?
- Which problems are you particularly good at solving?

Looking at your existing customer base through this lens can transform sales productivity without adding a single salesperson.

Because a sales team pursuing badly selected prospects can appear busy while producing remarkably little profit.



The Sales Strategy Has to Begin Before the Sales Target

This is one of the greatest mistakes I see in sales management.

1. A business determines that it wants, for example, £3 million of revenue next year.
2. The sales director divides that number between the salespeople.
3. Each salesperson gets a target.
4. The target is divided by twelve.
5. And everybody goes to work.

That is not really a sales strategy – it's arithmetic.

Strategy begins by understanding where the revenue should come from and why.

- How much should come from existing customers?
- How much from new customers?
- Which sectors?
- Which services?
- Which geographic areas?
- What is the average deal value?
- What is the expected customer lifetime value?
- Which products produce the strongest margin?
- Which offerings create recurring revenue?
- Which services create follow-on opportunities?
- Where are you unusually competitive?
- Where should you stop spending sales resources?

I would argue against designing territories purely around postcode and instead combine geography with vertical expertise, recognising that different commercial clusters have different needs. I would also suggest specialist roles across prospecting, closing and account growth rather than assuming one generic salesperson should perform every activity equally well.

There is a wider principle behind this.

Sales resources should follow strategic opportunity, not organisational habit.



The Sales Strategy Has to Begin Before the Sales Target

If your salespeople have always divided London into four geographic territories, that does not mean four geographic territories remain the best model.

A salesperson who understands professional services companies in London may be far more effective selling to similar businesses across several areas than selling indiscriminately to every company within one postcode.

Similarly, an account executive who is excellent at navigating complex buying groups may be wasted spending half the week doing early-stage cold prospecting.

Modern sales organisations increasingly recognise different stages of selling as different jobs.

- **Sales Development Representatives** may focus on prospect identification and engagement.
- **Account Executives** may concentrate on diagnosis, opportunity development and closing.
- **Account Managers or Customer Success teams** may concentrate on retention, expansion and advocacy.

Smaller businesses will not always have enough people for completely separate positions, but the functions still exist.

The founder should ask:

- Who is responsible for creating opportunities?
- Who is responsible for developing and closing them?
- Who is responsible for growing customers after the initial sale?

Even when one individual performs all three roles, understanding them separately helps identify where the real constraint lies.



The Pipeline Is No Longer Just a List of Possible Deals

The CRM should be one of the most valuable management assets in the business, and yet too often, it becomes a very expensive address book.

- Salespeople reluctantly enter information because management tells them to.
- Managers inspect the numbers before a meeting.
- Everyone debates whether opportunities are really likely to close.
- Then the forecast is put into a spreadsheet because nobody completely trusts what is in the CRM.

That defeats the purpose.

My view is, that the CRM should be seen as the "single source of truth", covering the customer journey rather than operating simply as a prospect database. I would recommend structured qualification, forecasting and tracking leading indicators alongside closed revenue.

The important shift is from recording sales activity to understanding sales probability.

Suppose you have £1 million in pipeline.

That number tells you remarkably little.

- Are these genuine opportunities?
- Has the need been established?
- Have you identified the decision-maker?
- Is budget available?
- Is there a defined decision process?
- Does the prospect intend to make a decision?
- Who else is involved?
- What are they comparing you with?
- Why would they choose you?
- What could stop the decision?
- What happens next?



The Pipeline Is No Longer Just a List of Possible Deals

A £100,000 opportunity that answers those questions clearly might be considerably more valuable than £500,000 of speculative proposals.

This is why structured qualification approaches such as MEDDIC (Metrics, Economic Buyer, Decision Criteria, Decision Process, Identify Pain) and related methodologies have become increasingly important in complex B2B sales.

The point is not necessarily to adopt one methodology religiously. The point is to create a common definition of a genuine opportunity.

My 'Psychology of Buying' provides an elegant additional management lens.

For every opportunity, a sales manager could ask three questions.

1. **Trust and Rapport:** Do the stakeholders genuinely trust us enough to buy from us?
2. **Need or Want:** Have we established a problem or desired outcome important enough to justify action?
3. **Solution and Ask:** Have we demonstrated how the solution addresses that need and created a clear route towards a decision?

Suddenly, a vague pipeline conversation becomes a coaching conversation.

Instead of:

"Do you think this will close?"

the manager can ask:

"What evidence have we got that the customer wants this badly enough to change?"

That is a much better question.



Sales Forecasting Has Moved from Hope Towards Evidence

Forecasting used to contain a surprising amount of optimism.

The salesperson said an opportunity was likely to close, the manager applied a probability, the spreadsheet multiplied deal value by percentage, everybody hoped the result resembled reality.

Modern sales management should be considerably more disciplined.

Forecast accuracy depends on evidence, and so a manager should distinguish between pipeline stage and probability.

Just because a proposal has been sent does not mean the deal has a 70 per cent chance of closing.

Indeed, sending a proposal too early may be evidence of poor selling rather than progress.

A proposal should normally confirm a buying conversation that has already happened.

The salesperson should understand the problem, desired outcome, stakeholders, decision criteria, commercial parameters and next steps before substantial work goes into producing it.

Otherwise, the proposal becomes a substitute for selling.

This leads to one of the most important modern sales-management principles:

Manage movement, not merely volume.

- How long has an opportunity remained at the same stage?
- What has changed since the previous conversation?
- What specific commitment has the buyer made?
- What happens next?
- Who owns the next action?
- When will it happen?

Deals that never move are not really pipeline.

They are storage.

Sales management should therefore examine pipeline velocity, conversion rates, average sales cycles and stage progression rather than focusing solely on the total monetary value sitting inside the CRM.

The Modern Sales Manager Must Manage Leading Indicators

Revenue is important, however revenue is a lagging indicator.

By the time the monthly sales figure tells you there is a problem, the activity that caused the problem may have happened months earlier.

This is another area where sales management has progressed.

A good sales leader identifies the small number of behaviours that predict future performance.

These will differ according to the business.

They might include new qualified conversations, first meetings, opportunities reaching a defined qualification standard, second meetings involving additional stakeholders, proposals issued after full diagnosis, or expansion conversations within existing accounts.

I believe in tracking meaningful conversations and meetings alongside closed revenue so that management can intervene before poor performance appears in the final number.

The word **meaningful** matters.

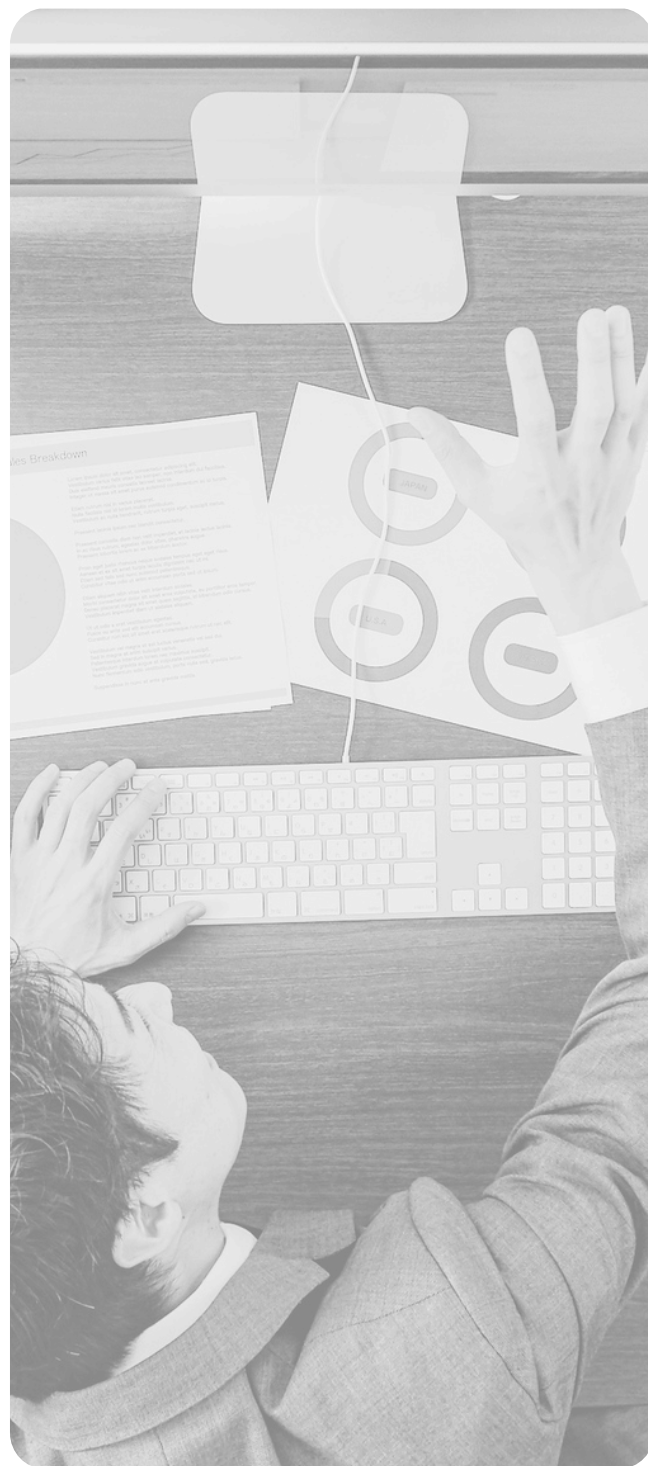
Counting telephone calls merely encourages telephone calls. Counting emails encourages emails. Counting LinkedIn messages encourages LinkedIn messages.

People optimise for whatever you measure.

If the objective is 100 calls a day, eventually you will get 100 calls a day.

That does not mean you will get good conversations.

Sales management therefore needs to distinguish **activity from progress**.



The Modern Sales Manager Must Manage Leading Indicators

A better dashboard might examine the relationship between activity and outcomes.

- How many targeted contacts create a conversation?
- How many conversations become qualified opportunities?
- How many qualified opportunities become proposals?
- How many proposals become customers?
- How long does each transition take?
- Where does each salesperson's performance differ?

This gives the sales manager something genuinely useful to coach.

- One salesperson may struggle to generate conversations.
- Another may generate meetings but fail to uncover sufficient need.
- Another may diagnose well but struggle to ask for the business.
- Another may close well but neglect existing customers.

The monthly revenue figure alone cannot tell you this.



Coaching Has Replaced Command-and-Control Management

Traditional sales management could be highly directive. The manager had often been promoted because they were the best salesperson – they knew how they sold.

Their management approach therefore became:

"Do it the way I did it."

That model has weaknesses.

The best salesperson is not automatically the best manager - and the manager's preferred way of selling may not suit every person, customer or market.

Modern sales management is increasingly coaching led.

That does not mean becoming soft on performance - quite the opposite.

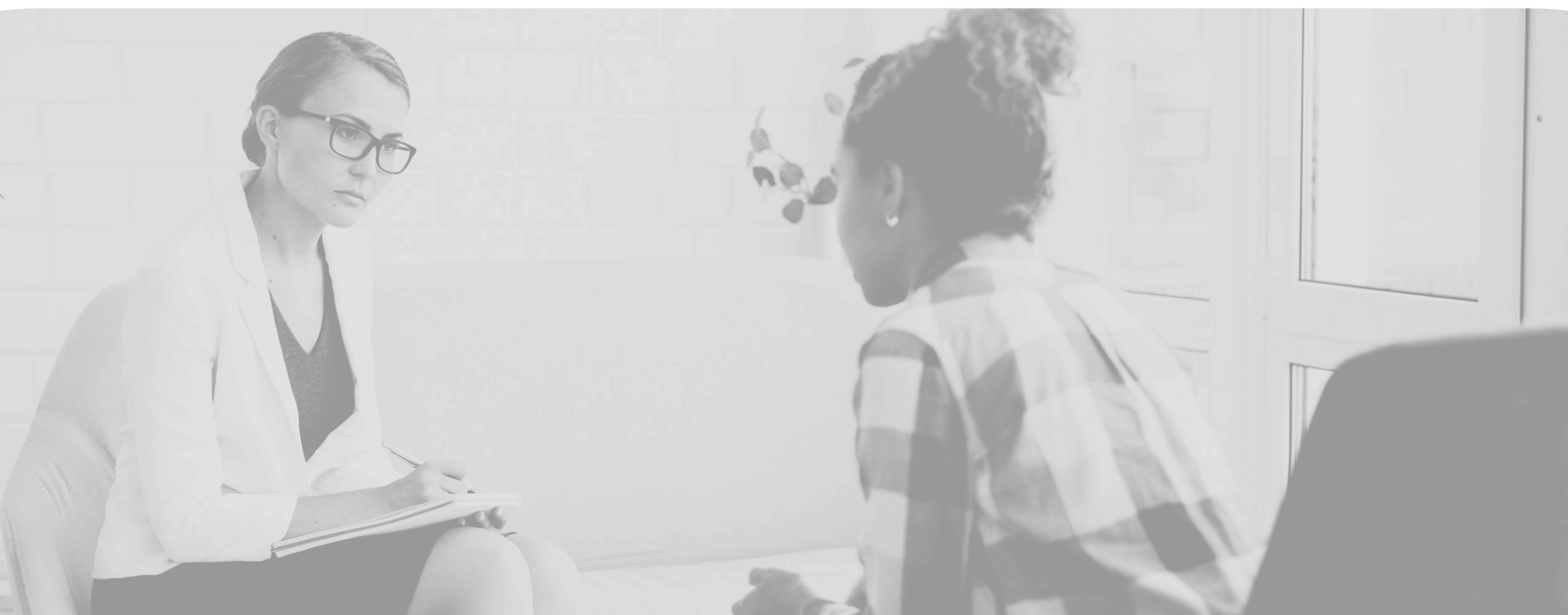
Good coaching creates greater accountability because it exposes the thinking behind the behaviour.

Rather than saying:

"You need to make more calls."

the manager asks:

"Where is the gap between where your pipeline needs to be and where it is now?"



Coaching Has Replaced Command-and-Control Management

Then:

"What is causing that gap?"

- Perhaps the salesperson has insufficient target accounts.
- Perhaps the ICP is poorly defined.
- Perhaps they are contacting the wrong people.
- Perhaps their message is weak.
- Perhaps they lack confidence.
- Perhaps they are doing plenty of outreach but follow-up is poor.
- Perhaps they are spending too much time servicing existing customers.

The intervention depends on the cause.

This is why managers should resist treating every performance problem as a motivation problem.

Sometimes the salesperson does need greater discipline.

But sometimes the system is wrong.

That distinction is essential for founders.

A poor sales process can make good salespeople appear average.

A good sales process can make average salespeople considerably more effective.

The manager's job is therefore partly to develop people and partly to improve the environment in which those people operate.



Multi-Stakeholder Selling Has Become the Norm

B2B purchasing has rarely involved only one person, but the number and visibility of stakeholders has become increasingly important.

- The person who likes your solution may not control the budget.
- The person who controls the budget may not use the solution.
- The user may care about practicality.
- Finance may care about return.
- Procurement may care about terms.
- IT may care about integration.
- Compliance may care about risk.
- The managing director may care about strategic impact.
- And somebody you never meet may have enough influence internally to stop the project.

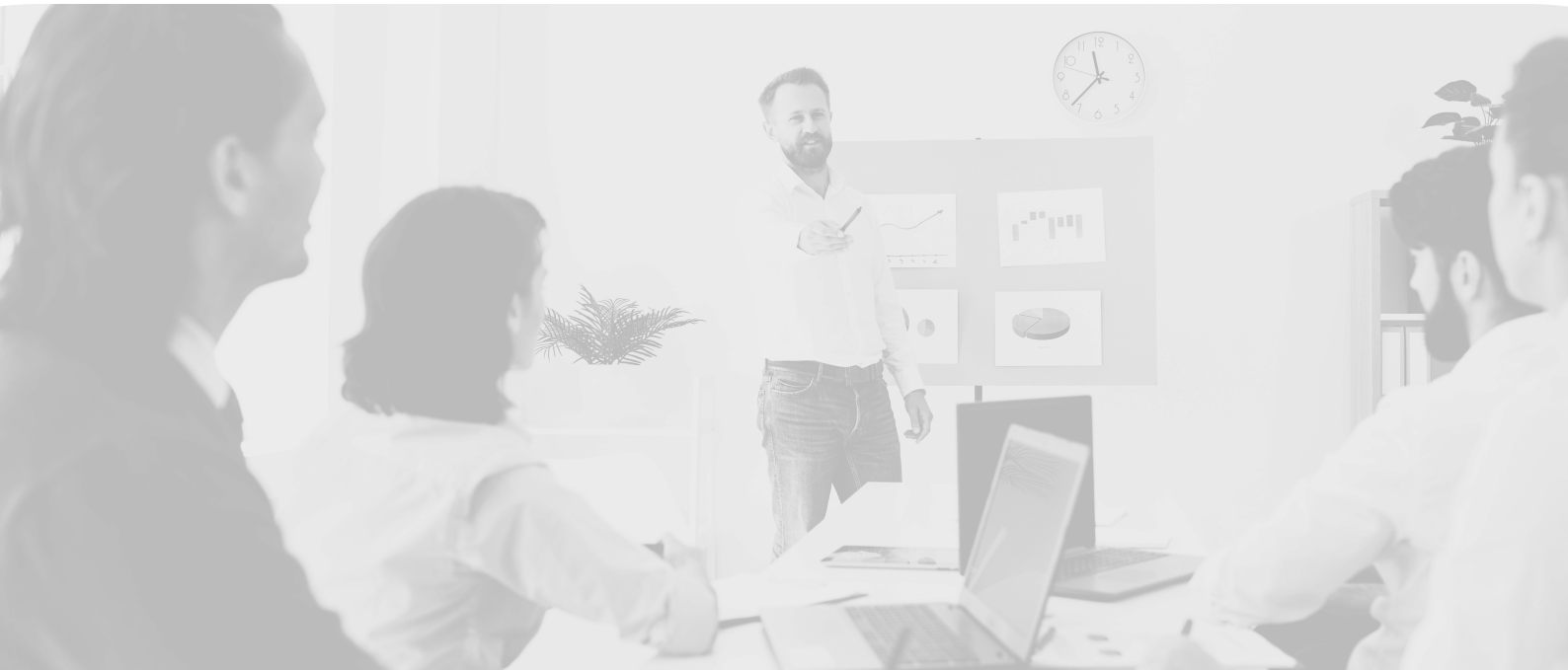
Multi-stakeholder selling means you must navigate the "Yes Chain", engaging finance and compliance stakeholders early rather than discovering them at the end of the sales cycle.

This represents an important evolution in selling.

The salesperson is not simply persuading a buyer.

They are helping a group of people reach sufficient internal agreement to make a decision.

That requires different skills.



Multi-Stakeholder Selling Has Become the Norm

The salesperson needs to understand who has influence, who has authority, who benefits, who carries risk and who could block progress.

They also need to equip their internal champion to sell the idea when the salesperson is not in the room.

This is buyer enablement.

Good sales collateral therefore does more than explain what the supplier does.

The salesperson increasingly succeeds not merely by being persuasive in the meeting but by making it easy for the customer to persuade everybody else afterwards.

- It gives the customer material they can use internally.
- A clear business case.
- An ROI argument.
- Evidence.
- Implementation information.
- Risk reduction.
- Case studies.
- Answers to likely objections.



AI Is Changing Sales Work, but Not the Reason People Buy

Artificial intelligence is perhaps the most visible recent change.

Sales teams are using AI for research, administration, drafting communications, meeting summaries, opportunity analysis and other repetitive tasks. Salesforce's UK and Ireland research in 2024 reported widespread adoption of AI by sales teams, and its more recent sales research continues to position AI investment as a major priority for sales organisations.

This creates enormous opportunities.

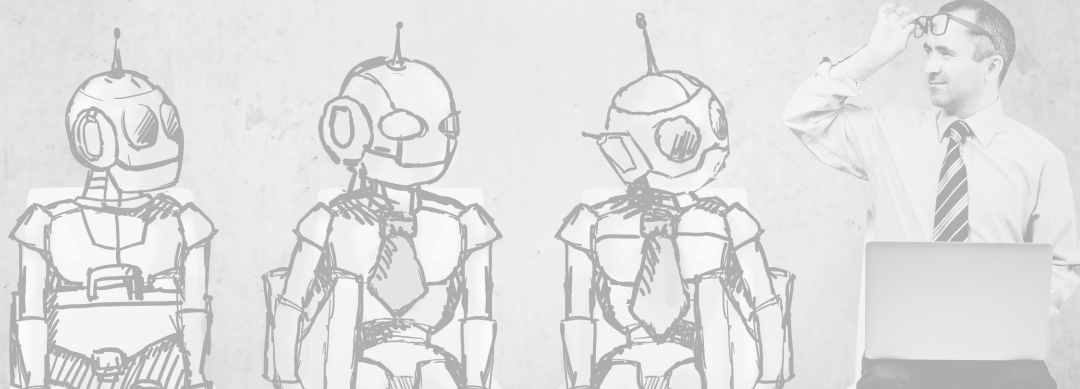
- A salesperson can potentially prepare for a meeting faster.
- Research an account faster.
- Summarise previous communications.
- Identify patterns within a CRM.
- Draft follow-ups.
- Create first versions of proposals.
- Analyse calls.
- Surface stalled opportunities.
- Managers can spend less time compiling data and more time interpreting it.

But there is a danger.

When every salesperson has access to AI, the volume of apparently personalised communication can rise dramatically.

The customer's inbox does not become more valuable because everybody can send more emails... it becomes noisier.

Therefore, the competitive advantage shifts again.



AI Is Changing Sales Work, but Not the Reason People Buy

If technology makes communication cheap, relevance becomes expensive, if AI makes information easy to produce, insight becomes valuable, and if everyone can create polished messaging, trust becomes differentiating.

This returns us to the Psychology of Buying.

- AI can support Trust and Rapport.
 - It cannot automatically create genuine trust.
- AI can help research a Need or Want.
 - It cannot replace a thoughtful conversation about what the issue means to the person sitting opposite you.
- AI can help articulate a Solution.
 - But somebody still needs to make the judgement that this is the right solution and confidently Ask for the Business.

The strongest sales organisations will therefore not ask:

"How can AI replace the salesperson?"

They will ask:

"Which parts of selling should technology do so that our salespeople can spend more time doing the work humans do best?"

That means:

- Listening.
- Questioning.
- Diagnosing.
- Challenging.
- Reassuring.
- Negotiating.
- Building confidence.
- Reading nuance.
- Exercising judgement.
- And developing relationships.



The Separation Between Sales and Marketing No Longer Makes Sense

One of the organisational legacies that needs challenging is the rigid distinction between marketing and sales.

- Marketing creates leads.
- Sales converts them.

That sounds tidy.

The customer does not experience your company that way - they experience one organisation.

They may see a LinkedIn post written by a salesperson, receive an email created by marketing, talk to a business development manager. They may download a report, attend a webinar, speak to an account executive, read a case study, or visit your website.

Every interaction influences the buying decision.

That means sales and marketing need a shared understanding of the Ideal Client Profile, customer problems, positioning, messaging and buying journey..

- Sales hears the language customers use.
- Marketing needs that language.
- Marketing sees patterns across audiences.
- Sales needs that information.



If the two functions work separately, useful intelligence gets lost.

Modern sales strategy therefore involves a feedback loop. Salespeople should regularly report what they are hearing.

- Which objections are increasing?
- Which competitor appears most frequently?
- Why are customers buying?
- Why are others not buying?
- What new problem keeps appearing?
- Which message gets attention?
- Which customers are unexpectedly profitable?

Marketing should turn that intelligence into better communication, which in turn makes sales conversations easier. The strongest organisations create one commercial system rather than two competing departments.

Existing Customers Deserve as Much Strategy as New Customers

Many traditional sales cultures disproportionately reward the acquisition of new customers.

New logos are exciting. They are visible. They feel like growth.

But the economics of existing customers can be much more attractive.

There is, in my view, a deliberate distinction between "hunter" and "farmer" roles which is critical when identifying untapped opportunity inside existing accounts.

This needs to become part of the sales strategy.

- What else could this customer reasonably buy?
- What additional problem could we solve?
- Which department is not using us?
- What will the customer need next?
- When should the account be reviewed?
- Are we delivering enough value to justify a referral?
- Could the client become a case study?
- Could they introduce us to another organisation?



Growth from existing customers should not happen accidentally - it should have ownership.

This is where Customer Success has become an increasingly important commercial discipline.

The sale does not end when the contract is signed, it should be the moment the next sale begins.

If you promise an outcome and fail to deliver it, the relationship contracts. If though, you deliver meaningful value, the relationship expands.

Trust becomes cumulative, and because Trust and Rapport form the first stage of the Psychology of Buying, an existing client with high trust should theoretically require less effort to consider an additional relevant solution.

Not because they should be "sold to" more aggressively, but because the first psychological barrier has already been overcome.

The Best Sales Strategy Is Increasingly a Focus Strategy

The modern salesperson has access to an almost unlimited number of potential contacts.

That can create the illusion of an unlimited market.

In reality, attention and selling time remain limited.

Therefore, focus becomes strategic.

I would recommend named target accounts for outbound sellers and advocate Account-Based Marketing (ABM) for suitable higher-value opportunities.

Whether or not a business formally adopts ABM, the underlying principle is useful.

Choose your prospects intentionally.

A list of 200 companies that strongly resemble your ideal customers may be commercially more valuable than a database containing 20,000 vague contacts.

- Research them.
- Understand them.
- Identify likely stakeholders.
- Follow relevant developments.
- Create useful content.
- Build familiarity.
- Look for introductions.
- Develop hypotheses about possible problems.
- Engage intelligently.

This is slower than pressing "send" on 10,000 automated emails, however it may also be considerably more effective. Especially in markets such as London and the Home Counties, where the density of businesses creates both enormous opportunity and enormous competitive noise.

Official UK business-population data continues to show London as having the highest business density of any UK region, reinforcing the point that the issue is rarely a lack of potential organisations to approach.

The challenge is identifying those worth pursuing.



Signal Selling: Stop Treating Every Prospect as Equally Ready

One of the most useful developments in modern B2B sales is the move towards signal selling.

Traditional prospecting often starts with a list.

The salesperson identifies companies that fit the target market and begins contacting them. That still has value, but it assumes that every suitable prospect is equally likely to buy at any given moment.

They are not.

Signal selling looks for evidence that something has changed which might make a prospect more receptive to a conversation.

That signal could be a new senior appointment, recruitment activity, expansion into a new market, a funding announcement, a change in legislation, a new office, a merger, declining performance or increased activity around a particular issue.

But some of the most valuable signals can come from your own marketing.

Suppose you produce a white paper, guide or PDF containing links to other resources on your website. If a prospect simply downloads the document, that tells you something.

If they subsequently click a link relating to pricing, implementation, a case study, a diagnostic or booking a conversation, that tells you considerably more.



Signal Selling: Stop Treating Every Prospect as Equally Ready

The download demonstrates interest.

The subsequent behaviour may demonstrate intent.

This is why downloadable content should not be thought of simply as a lead-generation device. It can become part of the sales intelligence system.

A founder should ask:

Which actions suggest curiosity?

Which suggest somebody is educating themselves?

And which suggest they may be moving towards a buying decision?

Those signals can then influence the timing and nature of follow-up.

Importantly, signal selling should not become surveillance selling.

The purpose is not to contact somebody and say, "I noticed you clicked page three of our PDF at 10.42 this morning."

It is to help the salesperson prioritise.

A prospect who has downloaded a report, returned to the website, viewed a relevant case study and clicked a link to a service page probably deserves more attention than somebody whose only qualification is appearing on a database.

The principle fits perfectly with the Psychology of Buying.

Signals do not prove that somebody will buy.

But they can indicate that Trust is developing, a Need or Want is becoming more important, or the prospect is beginning to investigate a Solution.

Modern selling therefore becomes less about asking, "Who haven't we contacted yet?"

And more about asking:

"Who is giving us a reason to contact them now?"



Nearbound Selling: Growth Through the Trust That Already Exists

At almost the opposite end of the spectrum from cold prospecting sits Nearbound Selling.

The phrase may be relatively new, but the commercial principle is not.

It means growing through the relationships, partnerships, customers and networks that already surround your business.

In practical terms, it is referral marketing made more deliberate.

Most founders recognise the value of referrals. A prospect introduced by somebody they trust normally enters the conversation differently from a completely cold lead.

Some of the first stage of the Psychology of Buying has already happened.

Trust and Rapport have effectively been borrowed from the person making the introduction.

Yet many businesses still treat referrals as something that happens by chance.

A customer is happy - they happen to meet somebody - your name happens to come up - an introduction happens.

Nearbound selling turns that fortunate accident into a strategy.

The first step is identifying who already has trusted relationships with your Ideal Clients.

Existing customers are obvious.

But the wider ecosystem might include accountants, solicitors, consultants, technology providers, membership organisations, industry specialists, networking contacts or complementary suppliers.



Referral
Marketing

Nearbound Selling: Growth Through the Trust That Already Exists

The question becomes:

"Who already knows the people we want to know?"

The next step is giving them a reason and an easy way to introduce you.

That might mean being very clear about the problem you solve, the type of customer you help and the situations in which somebody should think of you.

This is where vague positioning damages referral performance.

"We help businesses grow" is difficult to refer.

"We help founder-led consultancies with inconsistent lead generation build a predictable sales pipeline" is much easier.

The strongest Nearbound strategy is also reciprocal.

It should not simply be a network of people you expect to send business to you. You should actively look for opportunities to help customers and partners as well.

Over time, this creates a commercial ecosystem based on mutual trust.

For a founder, that has strategic significance.

Cold selling asks you to manufacture trust from nothing.

Nearbound selling starts closer to the point where trust already exists.

That can shorten the sales cycle, improve conversion and often produce better-fit opportunities.

In an increasingly noisy B2B market, one of the smartest sales questions may therefore be:

"Before we approach a stranger, who could introduce us?"



Salespeople Need Commercial Skills, Not Merely Sales Skills

Another significant change involves capability.

The salesperson who succeeds by personality alone is increasingly vulnerable.

Modern B2B buyers expect commercial competence.

Salespeople need to understand enough about the customer's business to ask intelligent questions.

- How does the customer make money?
- What drives margin?
- What creates cost?
- What creates risk?
- What causes capacity problems?
- What influences customer retention?
- What makes implementation difficult?
- What is the financial consequence of leaving the problem unresolved?

This does not mean turning every salesperson into an accountant or strategist - it means giving them sufficient commercial understanding to hold a conversation that matters to senior decision-makers.

This becomes especially important as salespeople move upwards inside an organisation.

- A product user may care about functionality.
- A CEO may care about strategic return.
- A Finance Director may care about cash, margin and risk.

A salesperson needs to communicate value differently to each stakeholder while remaining consistent about the fundamental proposition.

This is why sales training cannot be a one-off event.

Training should include product knowledge, questioning, financial literacy, negotiation, account planning, industry understanding, technology, communication and coaching.

Continuous training of existing salespeople creates adaptability rather than treating sales capability as something established when the person joins.



The Psychology of Buying as a Modern Sales Management Framework

This brings us back to the model, the simplicity of which is its strength.

Modern selling is surrounded by acronyms, technologies, funnels, methodologies and platforms.

They can all be useful.

But underneath them sits a human decision.

Trust and Rapport - do I trust this person and organisation enough to continue?

Trust today is created through far more than personal charm. It comes from positioning, reputation, expertise, social proof, consistency, transparency, relevance and behaviour.

The modern sales manager should therefore measure and coach the activities that create credibility.

- Are salespeople demonstrating understanding before pitching?
- Are they following through on commitments?
- Is our digital presence consistent with what the salesperson says?
- Do case studies reinforce credibility?
- Do customers advocate for us?
- Does our thought leadership demonstrate expertise?
- Does the prospect feel understood?

Need or Want - is there sufficient motivation to change?

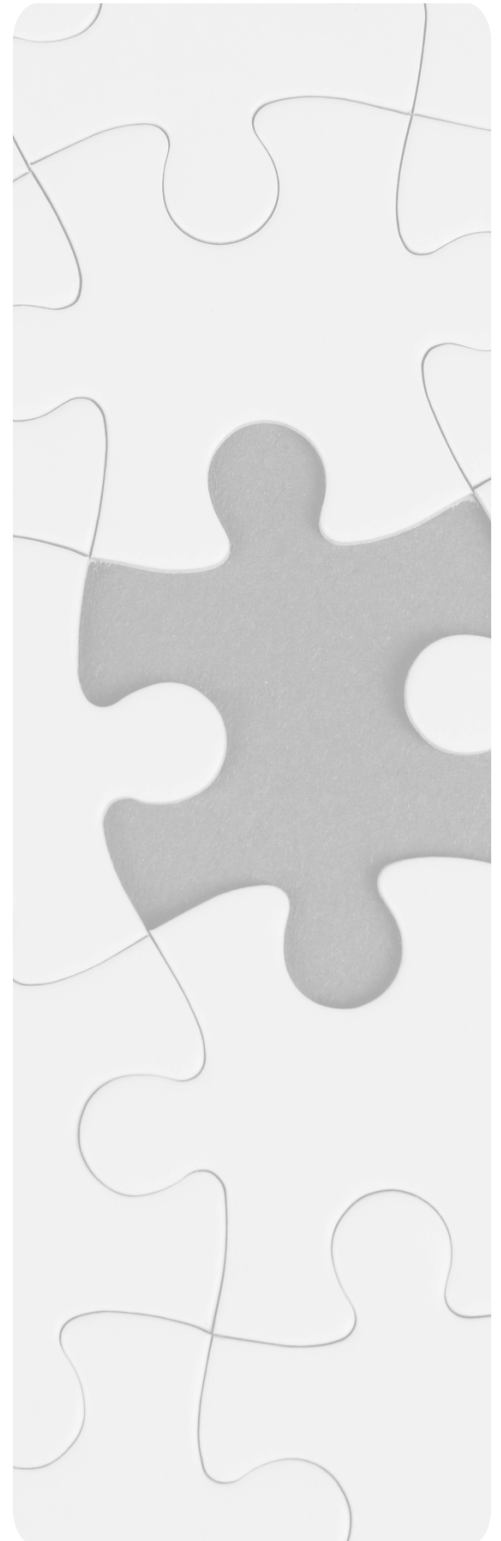
This is where many weak opportunities survive far too long. A problem exists, but not a priority. The salesperson must identify the consequence.

- What is the cost of the current situation?
- What opportunity is being missed?
- What emotion sits underneath the commercial issue?
- What happens if nothing changes?
- Why now?

Good qualification is therefore not interrogation. It is discovery.

Sometimes the best outcome is recognising that there is no sufficiently important need and agreeing not to proceed.

That is not a lost sale, rather it's saved sales capacity.



The Psychology of Buying as a Modern Sales Management Framework

Solution and Ask - only when trust and motivation are established does the solution become central.

This is where many businesses reverse the sequence - they begin by talking about themselves. Their history. Their process. Their product. Their features. Their awards. Their people. Their technology.

But until the buyer sees a need and trusts the organisation, most of that information has very little value.

The solution should connect directly to what has already been discovered.

"You told me X is happening."

"You said that creates Y."

"You want Z instead."

"This is how we would help you move from X to Z."

Then comes something salespeople occasionally avoid.

The Ask.

The customer needs clarity.

- What happens next?
- Are we asking for the order?
- A pilot?
- A second meeting?
- Access to the Finance Director?
- Agreement to the proposal?
- A decision date?

Every worthwhile sales conversation should normally end with an appropriate commitment.

Not pressure. Progress.



What This Means for the Founder

For a business owner, all these developments lead to an important conclusion.

You cannot improve sales performance simply by hiring a salesperson and giving them a target.

You have to build the environment in which selling can succeed and that starts with strategy.

- Define precisely who you want to serve.
- Understand why your best customers buy.
- Be clear about the problems you solve.
- Decide which products and services deserve sales focus.
- Understand where profit comes from, not merely revenue.
- Choose your channels.
- Clarify the roles required.
- Create a repeatable sales process.
- Agree what qualifies as a real opportunity.
- Use the CRM properly.
- Measure leading and lagging indicators.
- Build forecasting discipline.
- Coach the team.
- Align marketing and sales.
- Manage existing customer growth.
- Use technology to remove low-value work.
- And continually improve the system using what you learn from the market.

The founder then has to create a culture where the sales team can tell the truth, something that is more important than it sounds.

If salespeople know they will be punished for removing an unlikely opportunity from the forecast, they leave it there. If they are attacked for admitting that the target may be missed, problems are hidden. If every pipeline meeting is an interrogation, CRM data becomes political.

Predictable sales performance requires psychological safety combined with commercial accountability.

A salesperson should be able to say:

"I don't think this deal will happen and this is why."

The manager's response should be curiosity before criticism.

What happened? - What did we misunderstand? - What can we learn? - What should we do differently next time?

This doesn't mean accepting poor performance - it means understanding performance well enough to improve it.

Honesty Trust Respect

From Sales Management to Revenue Leadership

Perhaps the biggest evolution of all is the role of the person leading sales.

The traditional Sales Director could concentrate primarily on salespeople and revenue. The modern commercial leader on the other hand, operates across a much wider system.

They need to understand marketing, technology, customer success, data, pricing, positioning, revenue operations, customer profitability, AI, people development, forecasting, and strategy.

They need to know when a sales problem is genuinely a sales problem and when it is actually something else.

- Perhaps the proposition is unclear.
- Perhaps pricing is wrong.
- Perhaps the business is targeting customers who cannot afford the service.
- Perhaps marketing creates low-quality enquiries.
- Perhaps delivery failures damage referrals.
- Perhaps salespeople spend too much time on administration.
- Perhaps the compensation system rewards the wrong behaviour.
- Perhaps there is insufficient differentiation.
- Perhaps the company simply hasn't given prospects a compelling reason to change.

The modern sales leader must diagnose the whole commercial system. This is why sales management should have a much stronger strategic voice within the business - after all, sales is where strategy meets the market.

- Customers tell you whether your positioning matters.
- Prospects tell you whether your message resonates.
- Competitors expose weaknesses.
- Lost deals reveal assumptions.
- Objections identify friction.
- Won deals reveal value.

The sales organisation is therefore not merely there to execute strategy.

It should help create it.



Right Thing. Right Time. Right Customer.

Sales has moved on enormously during the past decade.

Technology has accelerated prospecting. Data has improved visibility. CRMs have become more sophisticated. Digital self-service has expanded. AI is automating previously manual work. Hybrid selling has become normal. Buyers conduct more independent research. Buying groups have become more visible and complex. Marketing and sales increasingly overlap. Customer success has become part of revenue strategy. Forecasting can become more evidence based. And sales management has shifted from activity supervision towards coaching, analysis and system design.

But underneath all of those developments, selling remains deeply human.

A business customer still has to decide:

- Do I trust you?
- Do I care enough about this issue to do something?
- Do I believe your solution will help me?
- Am I prepared to act?

That is why the Psychology of Buying remains relevant.

If anything, it is more relevant now than it was a decade ago.

- Technology can create more leads
 - It can't make them care
- AI can draft a proposal
 - It can't manufacture genuine trust
- A CRM can tell you an opportunity has not moved
 - It can't by itself understand the hesitation in a managing director's voice
- Automation can send a follow-up
 - It can't replace judgement about when to challenge, when to reassure and when to walk away



Right Thing. Right Time. Right Customer.

The businesses that improve sales performance over the next decade will therefore not necessarily be those with the most technology or the largest sales teams - they will be those that combine human understanding with commercial discipline.

- They will know exactly who they want to serve.
- They will create trust before demanding attention.
- They will diagnose before proposing.
- They will qualify before forecasting.
- They will measure progress rather than noise.
- They will coach rather than merely supervise.
- They will use technology to strengthen human selling rather than replace it.
- And they will design their sales organisation around the way customers actually buy rather than the way the company would prefer to sell.

For the founder, that may require a change in mindset.

Sales is not something that happens when somebody picks up the telephone.

- It begins with strategy.
- It continues through marketing.
- It becomes personal through sales.
- It is validated through delivery.
- And it grows through the relationship that follows.

When all of those elements work together, the sales team stops behaving like a collection of individuals trying to hit targets.

It becomes a commercial system.

A system capable of creating opportunities, building trust, identifying genuine need, helping customers make decisions and producing increasingly predictable revenue - and that, ultimately, is how sales management has moved on.

The objective is no longer simply to manage people who sell - it is to build and lead an organisation that understands how people buy.



Conclusion

Sales has changed significantly over the past decade, but the fundamentals of why people buy have not changed nearly as much.

Buyers now have more information, more choice and more control over the buying process.

They can research suppliers, compare alternatives, seek recommendations, consume thought leadership and identify possible solutions before ever speaking to a salesperson. At the same time, sales teams have access to better technology, richer data, AI, CRM systems, behavioural signals and more sophisticated ways to identify and prioritise opportunities.

The challenge for founders is bringing those two realities together.

Modern sales performance is not simply about asking people to make more calls, send more emails

or create more proposals. It is about building a sales system around the way customers actually buy.

That means being clear about your Ideal Client, understanding why your best customers choose you, creating Trust and Rapport before trying to sell, uncovering a genuine Need or Want before presenting a Solution, and ensuring your team is confident enough to Ask for the Business.

It also means improving the system around the salesperson: clearer qualification, stronger pipeline management, better use of leading indicators, more accurate forecasting, effective coaching, Signal Selling, referral and Nearbound activity, and technology that helps people spend more time on valuable conversations.

The objective is not to change everything at once.

It is to identify where the biggest constraint currently sits and work on the right thing at the right time.

To help you identify where your biggest opportunity may lie, I have created a short Sales Management Health Check.

Seven questions will help you assess your organisation across three areas:

Sales Strategy — Sales System — Sales Management

It takes around three minutes and will highlight where your current approach appears strongest and, more importantly, where there may be opportunities to improve sales performance and predictability.

Or, if you would prefer to talk through what is happening in your sales organisation, you can book a 60-minute conversation with me and we can explore your current sales strategy together.

Either way, the objective is the same:

To identify the right thing to work on first, rather than trying to change everything at once.



**Take the free
assessment**



**Book a Sales
Strategy Call**

