

# Build Trust Into Your Selling

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How do you go about improving sales in your firm? If you look to the sales books, you find many approaches. There are the 5 Key Elements of Selling, the 10 Laws of Sales, the 6 Keys to Winning, the 4 Levels of Sales, the 6 Sales Framework Elements, the 5-Step Sales Meeting Process, the 6-Step Sales Management Process, the 7 Generations of Relationships, the 4-step Account Strategy, and the Circle of Leverage. All have at least some merit. Nearly all, of course, come with acronyms at no extra cost.

Besides the plethora of entry points, what's noteworthy is that they are (necessarily) written from the seller's perspective. It is very hard to maintain a buyer's perspective when your aim is to produce results for the seller. Yet the critical fact is—buyers' actual behavior is enormously influenced by the relationship the buyer feels with the seller—in particular, by trust. And steps and processes aren't inherently trustworthy.

Trustworthiness comes from a mix of credibility, reliability, intimacy and other-orientation. Selling firms can increase buyers' experience of trustworthiness if they consistently hew to three values—long-term orientation, buyer-focus, and a habit of collaboration.

*Sellers can increase trustworthiness by consistently hewing to three values—long term orientation, buyer-focus, and a habit of collaboration.*

Where do you apply these three values to build trust into selling? To people's skills? Their attitudes? The model of the sales call? The account management process? Account strategies? Planning processes? This paper suggests two specific ways to build in trust. One focuses on design of the steps in the sales process; the second, on sales conversations that occur in all steps, but mainly in formal face-to-face meetings.

## Building Trust into the Sales Process

You build trust into the sales process by rigorously and systematically asking, at each stage in the process, whether you are living according to the three trust-creating values—long-term perspective, buyer-focus, a habit of collaboration.

Most sales designs boil down to a few commonsensical steps, such as shown below:



What does it look like to reflect the values—long-term orientation, buyer-focus, and collaboration—at each step? No article can substitute for the relentless and systematic thinking on behalf of your own process. However, Table 1 offers some common examples of how the values are—or are not—typically fulfilled at each process step.

**Table 1. Applying Values to the Sales Process: Examples**

Step	Not Living the Values	Living the Values
<b>Target</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screen by fit with seller's offering</li> <li>• Quantitative criteria</li> <li>• Analyze data to define issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screen by buyer's level of pain</li> <li>• Relationship criteria</li> <li>• Pick issues by reading/asking buyers</li> </ul>
<b>Contact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading with seller offer</li> <li>• Time spent rehearsing pitch</li> <li>• Time spent writing, scripting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead with buyer need</li> <li>• Time spent rehearsing listening</li> <li>• Time spent role-playing</li> </ul>
<b>Meet</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present an agenda</li> <li>• Show how much you know</li> <li>• Show answers, early</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present an agenda for discussion</li> <li>• Be candid about what you don't know</li> <li>• Focus on problem definition</li> </ul>
<b>Propose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write proposal back at the office</li> <li>• Focus--qualifications, approach</li> <li>• Meet to present proposal</li> <li>• Write a winning proposal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write proposal at client site—<u>with client</u></li> <li>• Focus—hypotheses, benefits, outcomes</li> <li>• Meet to review pre-discussed document</li> <li>• Build a winning relationship</li> </ul>
<b>Close</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek a specific outcome</li> <li>• Answer objections</li> <li>• Build up to, make case for price</li> <li>• Make the best case for seller</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek a buyer-preferred outcome</li> <li>• Understand objections</li> <li>• Raise price issues earlier in process</li> <li>• Make the best case for the buyer</li> </ul>
<b>Maintain</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest follow-on solutions</li> <li>• Pass leads to internal SMEs</li> <li>• Stay in your competence zone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask about issues</li> <li>• Explore related issues yourself</li> <li>• Acknowledge your limits, then explore</li> </ul>

If these are hard concepts to pin down, try these approaches. Look to the language you use to document the processes. Ask someone from outside the selling function to look it over. Ask a buyer. Ask someone from another firm. Values may seem squishy—but they show up in language and behavior.

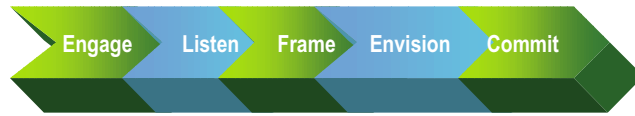
## Building Trust into the Sales Conversation

The sales conversation itself is sometimes treated by sales writers and by managers as “101” material. Many senior managers believe that “you don’t get to this level without knowing how to do basic personal selling.” To be blunt-- that is simply not true. The majority of sellers—particularly in high-content businesses like complex, intangible services—are in fact not adept at personal selling at all. And the biggest mistake they make is an over-reliance on technical expertise; they behave as if the critical task is to convey content mastery. The truth is,



again--buyers' actual behavior is enormously influenced by the relationship the buyer feels with the seller—in particular, by trust. And trust grows in conversations.

The process by which trust grows in conversations is documented elsewhere. It consists of a five-stage process—Engage, Listen, Frame, Envision, Commit. It applies to any conversational interaction between seller and buyer. Table 2 below shows how some trust process elements apply at three selected stages in the sales process.



**Table 2. Applying Trust to Sales Conversations**

Trust Stage	Contact: Step 2	Meet: Step 3	Propose: Step 5
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We've noticed that [POV] seems to be the case for your firm; might we talk about that?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reiterate earlier call</li> <li>• Share agenda</li> <li>• Is what we talked about still of interest?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Here's an issue</li> <li>• Here's a perspective</li> <li>• Is this worth discussing?</li> </ul>
Listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is that a big issue?</li> <li>• If not, what is?</li> <li>• Paraphrase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In our experience with others...where are you?</li> <li>• Open-ended; personal</li> <li>• Paraphrase, empathy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restate findings</li> <li>• Ask for concerns, incorporate</li> <li>• Identify individuals' stakes</li> </ul>
Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sounds like it might be useful for us to discuss:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-our idea?</li> <li>-your idea?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are key issues you see arising here?</li> <li>• I think what I see is...</li> <li>• Sounds to me like...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Propose problem statement</li> <li>• Check for buy-in</li> <li>• Check for concerns</li> <li>• Restate problem statement</li> </ul>
Envision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check agenda</li> <li>• Would you prefer just me at meeting? Purpose?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would imagine that...</li> <li>• What's at stake here?</li> <li>• Does that mean if...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restate benefits</li> <li>• Restate changes implied</li> <li>• Measures of success?</li> </ul>
Commit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'll bring X content</li> <li>• Agree time contract</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this powerful enough to move on?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• POV on staying coordinated</li> <li>• Roles, responsibilities, CSFs</li> </ul>

So, how do you go about improving sales in your firm? There are many approaches to choose from. Trust can be integrated into nearly all of them. The risk is believing that processes, designs, strategies and key lists can accomplish the job alone. You need to inject trust into them to make them compelling to buyers.



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