

To Sell is Human Summary

By Daniel Pink

You've probably heard the phrase, 'They could sell ice to an Eskimo.' The popular belief is that certain people are natural salespeople, and that you either have the ability, or you don't.

To Sell is Human dives into the history, evolution, and significance of sales in today's work environment. It explores why the sales landscape isn't what it used to be, and why selling is pivotal to almost every job. By drawing on social science, Daniel Pink teaches us how to improve our sales skills.

You might think that sales is its own unique job title or description, but the truth is that most of us are in the business of sales. If you disagree with this, why not check your weekly calendar and ask yourself, how much of your day is spent pitching ideas or negotiating with people? And, how often do you need to persuade a funder, or perhaps just cajole a child into taking a bath or doing homework? Evidence suggests, that regardless of our job-titles, we spend almost half of our day trying to persuade, convince, and move others to take action.

Daniel Pink writes extensively on business, technology, and the ever-changing world of work. He believes that whether we like it or not, we're all in sales. So if you're tired of outdated "18 ways to close a deal" advice, and if you're looking for a fresh, science-based take on the "why" and the "how" of modern sales, then this will be of interest.

We'll briefly look at why, in today's world, everyone needs to learn about

sales. So, forget the misconceptions that you may have about pushy salespeople, and readjust your mindset towards seeing the value in the art of persuasion. Pink shows us that sales skills are highly sought after, and necessary in every single work environment. So whether you're a teacher, a doctor, a tech guru, a gym instructor, or even a stay-at-home parent, sales skills will improve your overall performance. We'll start with a broad overview of why we're all in sales; then we'll dive into the new and updated ABC of sales. And, finally, we'll learn some tools of the trade, i.e., how to pitch, when to improvise, and why selling is about serving others.

Sales isn't a Dirty Word

Every single one of us is involved in sales throughout the day. That's right; we're all in sales. American labor data tells us that one in nine workers make a living by convincing others to conclude a purchase, so these are people like real estate brokers and car dealers. This probably comes as no surprise, but what might be startling is that the remaining eight do what Pink terms, "non-sales selling."

If we look at how white-collar workers spend their time, irrespective of their job roles, a significant proportion is spent convincing, persuading, and moving others to act. For example, teachers convince students of the value of paying attention; entrepreneurs woo founders, screenwriters sweet-talk producers, coaches encourage players, so no matter the profession, we're all essentially doing some form of sales.

What's more, we spend almost half our day in some form of selling. One study, aptly titled: *What do you do at work*, gathered data on 9,057 respondents worldwide. The findings revealed that a person spends 40% of their workday persuading, influencing, and convincing others in ways

that might not involve anyone making a purchase, but is still an act of selling.

Although most of us might not officially be in sales, we do spend an enormous amount of time in non-sales selling. In other words, convincing others to make an exchange that doesn't involve a direct purchase. This exchange isn't denominated in dollars; it's denominated in time, attention, or effort.

Perhaps a better way to look at sales, is to see it as the business of *moving* others. Any sale intends to *move* others to part with resources to get to mutually beneficial outcomes. Whether the resources are tangible, like cash, or intangible, like effort or attention, the aim is still the same. But, how do we move people, and how do we get to these outcomes? The answer is that we need to go back to basics; we need to go back to our ABCs.

Gone are the days of "Always Be Closing"

In the old days of sales manuals, ABC was an acronym for "Always Be Closing." This approach is no longer as helpful as it was in the 80s, because buyers have more options and information than ever before. This emphasis on closing the deal, might have worked in the '80s, but it no longer applies to contemporary sales situations.

If we were to picture your typical car salesperson in the heyday of traditional sales, we'd probably come up with similar ideas. The stereotypical car dealer of this era, was shady at best. For example, to close a deal, they may have misrepresented the vehicle's quality, and perhaps its actual value. They also had a very singular objective to make

a profit, and therefore, honesty and transparency often took the proverbial backseat. This market was termed the "buyer-beware" market. Buyers had to be critical and on-the-ball. With the rise of internet business, nowadays, we can just go online, find information on car values, review dealerships, and potentially expose dishonest dealers. This power to cause irreparable reputational harm to a business, has shifted the market to that of a "seller-beware."

The internet has made integrity the cornerstone of modern and successful salesmanship. Whether we're in sales, or non-sales selling, none of us can function as custodians of information. Instead, we need to learn how to distill and portray information in a more service-oriented way. This process will be further aided by the ability to listen well, to be able to ask questions, to understand the customer's needs, and finally to help them filter through online information.

So, just as the times have changed, so too have the ABCs.

The New ABC

When it comes to contemporary sales, there's a new ABC. The new ABC stands for, Attunement, Buoyancy, and lastly, Clarity.

Attunement helps us connect with others, and see things from their perspective. Buoyancy is the ability to stay afloat, in what can feel like an ocean of rejection. And clarity is the capacity to help others, by analyzing their situation, in fresh and new ways. Whether we're trying to sell a computer system or trying to get a patient to accept treatment, these three qualities are now absolutely essential.

A is for Attunement

The new A in modern sales, gauges our ability to tune in, adopt another's perspective, *and* only then to pitch a sale. This is no easy feat, because it means that we have to listen to the people that we're communicating with, and acknowledge their specific needs.

Attunement is different from empathy. Make no mistake, empathy has its place, because it's important to sense how others are feeling, but when it comes to the art of sales, we need to zero in on how buyers think. This act of thinking like a potential buyer, is known as cognitive perspective-taking. It's the ability to put ourselves in the buyer's shoes, consider their context and needs, and not allow our needs, our desires, and our experiences to cloud our judgment.

Two things that we can practice in order to improve our attunement skills are, mimicry and power-shifting. People feel more at ease with others who share their mannerisms or subtly mirror their ways. So how can you mimic your client's embodied presence? A simple adjustment of posture, or a different tone of voice can build trust. Secondly, attunement is lost when we try to adopt a position of power, and rigidly hold onto our views. Rather than talk verbatim about what you have to offer, first ask the buyer questions about what they're looking for, and how you might be able to help them with this. This gives more power to the buyer, which increases trust and allows them to feel secure.

B is for Buoyancy

B is for buoyancy, which is described as a gritty spirit, with a sunny

outlook. Resilience is a crucial trait for anyone in the business of sales, and we must all work on our own ability to bounce back.

Here are three easy ways to foster resilience, and to stay positive throughout the sales process:

The most challenging part of conducting a sale, is often the beginning. To boost our confidence before a potential sale, we might be tempted to build ourselves up with motivational mantras, or to look in the mirror and assertively claim that, 'I can do this!' However, it's actually better to switch from the self-help pep talk, to self-interrogation talk. This is because when we interrogate ourselves, and are encouraged to ask the difficult questions, this process elicits actionable answers. It helps us set clear intentions and think through how we can achieve our goal, thereby developing success strategies. Questions elicit something much more muscular than affirmations. So try replacing one-liners such as, 'I'm the best,' with thought-provoking questions such as, 'How can I best be of service to this buyer,' or, 'How can I show this buyer that this purchase is worth it?'

Another way to develop resilience, is to create a positive environment *during* a sale. Studies show that a healthy ratio of positive to negative emotions, makes buyers more receptive and open to possibility. This then makes them more likely to take action, and make a purchase. We all know that positivity is infectious, but be careful, because insincerity drives customers away. Studies show that when we experience three positive emotions, to one negative emotion, our well-being improves. However, you can go too far with the positivity and smiley faces. If we look specifically at what science tells us, eleven positive experiences to one negative experience, creates what's known as "positivity overload." So when it comes to setting an optimistic atmosphere, remember a friendly

tone and warm smile can go a long way, but it's vital to maintain your authenticity.

And then finally, like it or not, at some point we will all encounter some polite, or not-so-polite rejections in response to our request. How we explain the nature of such encounters, will inevitably help us to stay buoyant. Successful salespeople have an optimistic explanatory style, which means that they remember that negative experiences are temporary. So it's important to remember that the rejection you may receive isn't personal, and that people behave in ways that are circumstantial.

C is for Clarity

Clarity is something that we all need more of, particularly because we live in a technology-driven world of "information overload."

How many times do you think that you use Google on an average day? It's probably a lot, and all of us are used to having quick answers, right at our fingertips. And we know that it's easy to search for possible solutions, but what if we're solving the wrong problems?

Before we can help a client find a solution, we need to clarify what the "real" problem is. Buyers are more than able to solve problems themselves, if they can quickly identify their issues. However, research shows that customers are a lot more likely to purchase a product or service, when they realize that there's a problem that they were previously unaware of, or need further clarity on.

The contemporary salesperson needs to be a thinking partner and to be

able to view problems in a new light. Five different frames can help to provide clarity. So let's look at two of these frames, the "Less Frame" and the "Experience Frame."

Have you ever walked into an ice cream shop and been completely baffled, or spent hours deciding what to watch on Netflix because there are so many options? The less frame will help you with this, because it involves restricting choices. Choice can be very overwhelming, so the key is to show people what's available, while also limiting feelings of anxiety. So by applying the principles from the less frame, maybe it's better to look at Netflix recommendations, or to choose between five flavors of ice cream?

The experience frame, provides a picture of the experience that we're looking at purchasing. All of us love a good story, and one of the key ways to interact with customers is through weaving a narrative about what the product or service will do for them. We've all seen travel posters, adverts on television, and smiling couples enjoying a shared experience. The point is that often it's best to skip over the attributes of what you're selling, and go straight for what it'll add to the buyer's lifestyle. Once a buyer imagines themselves using, or experiencing the product or service, they'll be able to decide whether or not it's what they actually want.

So when it comes to modern sales, asking the right questions is significantly more important than having the right answers. And, now that we know the ABCs, let's move onto some tactical advice.

The Art of the Pitch

A pitch is a quick and persuasive appeal for an idea or a product, and it's something that every salesperson has to nail down.

Owing to the pressures of the modern-day working environment, it's becoming increasingly essential to hook in your potential buyer as quickly as possible. You're likely to have heard the term "elevator pitch." If you haven't, this comes from the idea that we've got to invite people into a conversation about our product or service in about 30-60 seconds, which is the typical length of an elevator ride. However, this is now outdated, because time and attention are in even shorter supply, and what's more, people in elevators are too busy looking at their phones.

The art of the modern pitch is that it needs to be even shorter and more engaging. The suggestion is to reduce pitches to the length of a tweet, or even the subject line of an email. There are six successors to the elevator pitch, and this book develops all of them, and how best we deploy them. Again, we'll explore two of these fundamental ideas, the "one-word pitch" and the "question pitch."

If you were to pick a word that best describes you, to put on your cv, what would it be? It's an interesting question, and I'm sure you're battling to pick just a single word. If we think back to President Obama's 2012 campaign slogan, their one word was, "Forward." This word was likely picked from a myriad of options until it was decided that it was the best option for what Obama wanted to accomplish. And furthermore, it's memorable.

So how can we bring our pitch down to just one word? Well, it really is about the act of elimination, so to begin with, write a 50-word pitch, and then keep deleting words, until you get down to one.

Have you ever been asked a question that you weren't compelled to answer? The very nature of questions is that we tend to answer them, and they also help to focus our attention. So think of a question that encompasses the key message of what you're selling. For example, Ronald Reagan famously pitched for his U.S. Presidency by asking Americans, 'Are you better off today, than you were four years ago?'

However, as we know things don't always go according to plan. So what do we do when our perfectly attuned, appropriately buoyant, ultra-clear pitches go awry? Well, we improvise. The point is that not everything needs to be carefully planned; in fact, we should cultivate a spirit of openness, flexibility, and a bit of old-fashioned improvisation.

The Art of Improvisation

As with actors, salespeople rely partly on scripts. However, going off script and embracing the art of improvisational theatre, or improv as it's called, cultivates free flow communication. This process fosters chemistry between actors, which results in a better overall performance. These same elements apply to sales, and our awareness and sensitivity to our client's needs are paramount.

The most basic tenant of improvisation is to listen. We falsely assume that the ability to listen is a natural gift, for which no training is required.

Did you know, that research indicates that doctors often interrupt their patients within the first 18 seconds of them speaking, well before they've fully described their symptoms? Not only are we constantly not listening to each other, but most of the time, we converse in a kind of passive transactional way, rather than in a transformational fashion. We're often so focused on what we want to say next, that we only "half-listen" to others. The art of listening requires us to slow down, to be fully present, and to listen in order to listen, rather than to respond.

Another strategy, is to avoid overusing the word "no," or negative language, because this tends to shut the conversation down, and inhibit flow. Instead, opt for a phrase like, "yes, but..." So if a client wants to buy a cellphone, and the buyer wants to know if insurance is part of the deal, instead of saying, 'no, you have to buy it separately.' Rather, say, 'yes, but you have to buy it separately.'

So far we've explored how to throw a pitch, and go unscripted. But what's essential in the business of sales, is the service itself. The final piece of crucial advice that completely goes against traditional sales is to serve first, and sell later.

Upserve Rather than Upsell

Our motive in modern sales should be to improve someone else's life. Two crucial components underlying service-oriented sales are to make a sale personal, *and* purposeful.

To sell is human, because we're ultimately trying to serve another's needs. When we make it personal, both parties benefit. For example, studies show that radiologists who see a photograph of the person's face

when studying their X-rays, do a far better job interpreting the X-rays. Seeing a human face is a reminder of who they're aiming to serve. The point is that we all try to extract a higher purpose in what we do, and helping others is a reminder of this. Another study aimed at improving hand-washing among medical staff in hospitals, found that the response was far more positive when the encouragement centered around protecting patients' health, as opposed to the staff's health.

So, the central idea or theme, is that we all need to shift our approaches towards thinking about how best we can help other people. And, by considering the human aspect of sales, we'll perform a lot better, because, after all, to *serve* is human.

In Conclusion

Based on what we've covered, is your answer to whether or not you're in sales any different?

The key message is that most of us are in sales, because we spend a lot of time trying to *move* others. The author's take on why the art of selling is essential, and at the core of who we are, is fresh and counterintuitive.

By redefining the original ABCs, Pink shows how to adjust what we think we know about sales. For the contemporary salesperson, it's all about Attunement, Buoyancy, and Clarity. And armed with these key attributes, we're also shown what constitutes a successful modern sales pitch, how to understand another person's perspective, and how to make our message clear and persuasive. Whether you're selling a product, trying to negotiate a deal, or even parenting a child, this book illustrates the art of how to move a person to act.

So instead of trying to upsell, how can you upserve?