

10 THINGS I HATE ABOUT YOU, SALES



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INTRODUCTION

It's clear the buying process is broken. Roughly 70% of buyers have done pre-research on your company, product, and industry before they contact sales. Gartner research shows that 75% of buyers prefer a salesperson-less experience.

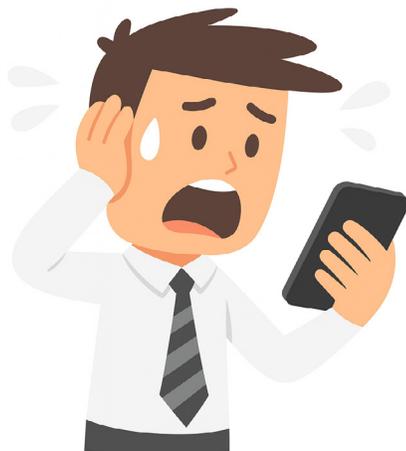
In the face of this trend shift, the process we Sales put those buyers through hasn't adapted well, if at all. The same struggle points, box-checking exercises, and lack of educational value we present to buyers drives them up a wall. We're inflexible but often demanding, rarely easy, fun or even valuable. We're causing dissatisfaction in our target audience.

When dissatisfaction mounts, buyers turn to competitors or stay status quo because we've made it difficult for them to do what we all want - purchase.

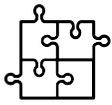
This guide is for Buyers to understand why Sales performs specific acts in the cycle, and for Sales to understand Buyer frustration. It then provides some recommendations for each party to better find common ground and create a more buyer-centric experience.

I'll cover 10 common scenarios in a deal cycle, highlighting key points in each:

- The Buyer's Perspective
- Why Sales Does It
- What Both Can Learn



#1 MULTIPLE CALLS/EMAILS, AKA “HOW'D YOU GET MY NUMBER?”



Example

Sales reaches out to a Buyer 9 times in 14 days, using a combination of email, phone, social network and other messaging. Generally, the messaging is “cold,” i.e. unsolicited, and it causes negative emotions in the buyer resulting in low reply rates.



Buyer's Perspective

They're angry getting dozens of unsolicited messages a day, most often asking for time to set a call to be interrogated about their top business problems. Nevermind low reply rates, the phrase “take me off your list” has become standard practice.



Why Sales Does It

We've been told our entire career this is the correct way to reach new buyers. Data would somewhat support it, showing that it takes an average of 13+ touches to get a reply. How else would we find new buyers?



What Buyers Can Learn

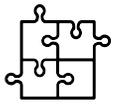
There is genuinely good messaging that can bring you new ideas and solutions if you're willing to have a conversation. And if you're not open to it, a decisive “*Not interested, do not contact me again*” is the best way to ensure the end of these messages. Sales wants “Yes” or “No,” we don't like the unknown so if we get a “no,” most will leave you alone quickly, and we are obligated to remove you from lists when asked.



What Sales Can Learn

Buyers want relevant information, and they don't want to be spammed with low quality messages. Educate buyers, ask for interest rather than their time, and skip the long, cut-copy cadences that drive buyers nuts. And if Buyers say “No,” respect their answer and move on.

#2 OBJECTING TO OBJECTIONS, AKA “NOT INTERESTED”



Example

Sales connects with a Buyer by phone. Sales pitches their product, and the Buyer says “*Not Interested.*” Sales continues to speak about how great their product is despite the Buyer’s statement.



Buyer’s Perspective

A Buyer has said “No” to a likely unsolicited call. Why is that statement being rejected? It pisses them off and seeds distrust of the sales profession.



Why Sales Does It

We live in an industry where “No” is prevalent, but overcoming obstacles is part of the job. “*Not interested*” has become the default response when a Buyer doesn’t want to speak to us, but it doesn’t mean they don’t have a problem we can solve or a product they want. We are trying to get to that stage to see if an opportunity exists.



What Buyers Can Learn

Good Sales strongly believes we solve your problems or give you products of value. If there’s a compelling reason for us to accept your objection, we won’t press further. Understandably, the ask here is for you to provide some context to your answer, though you are not obligated to do so. But if you do, we’ll likely move on.

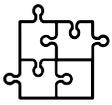


What Sales Can Learn

Buyers have been automatically trained to reply in this way because in that moment, we are the biggest problem in their day. They want to be rid of us because they weren’t expecting our call, and they have more important things to do. To avoid these interactions altogether, lead with a problem-solving or strategic value approach that uses research about the buyer’s company or industry. Rather than blindly pitch, educate and ask a thought-provoking question. The goal here is to start a meaningful conversation contextualized around Buyer interest.



#3 SETTING NEXT STEPS, AKA “WE’LL GET BACK TO YOU”



Example

Sales and Buyer connect on a call. At the end, Sales says “Let’s schedule the next call for DATE/TIME.” Buyer shows reluctance “We’ll get back to you” or “Need to speak with my team.” Sales continues to push for the next meeting on the calendar, and the Buyer is turned off.



Buyer’s Perspective

Buyers don’t want to commit their valuable time to something that isn’t urgent to them. And sometimes, they’re just too nice to tell us.



Why Sales Does It

Schedules get busy. Life throws curveballs. A scheduled, confirmed next step shows commitment from both parties, and our leadership expects us to pursue that. Deal progression dies swiftly without next steps scheduled.



What Buyers Can Learn

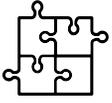
If you’re not interested in scheduling, or it’s not an urgent need to continue conversations, tell Sales. We would rather move on to Buyers who do have urgent needs. We don’t want to be chasing people down who are not ready or not able to move forward.



What Sales Can Learn

Try to pinpoint the Buyer’s urgency and gauge whether a next step is necessary and desired. Lay out what next steps look like, and provide flexible dates and times that align to the Buyer’s schedule. Understand they may be nice and don’t want to tell you they don’t want to move forward (be bold and call it out: “Buyer, sounds like this isn’t top priority, is that fair?”)

#4 INTERROGATIVE DISCOVERY, AKA “TELL US WHAT’S WRONG”



Example

A discovery call is set between Sales and Buyer. Sales shows up and runs a very one-directional call, asking about the biggest problems in the business, what happens if they aren't solved, and pressuring buyers to commit to timelines and requests. The Buyer feels threatened and doesn't have an opportunity to learn anything new.



Buyer's Perspective

The majority of Buyers have done their homework. They want to have a 2-way conversation, be educated and understand Sales can help them. They didn't expect to show up and rattle off answers to help Sales fill out mandatory CRM fields.



Why Sales Does It

It's usually for two reasons. One, we've been told to follow a qualification framework (BANT, MEDDIC, etc) to better understand if we have a real opportunity. Second, we are trying to uncover the problem you are trying to solve, and if it's worth solving soon so we can prioritize resources accordingly.



What Buyers Can Learn

You'll encounter less savvy sellers and more experienced sellers. Less savvy means less training, and they're more likely to dominate a 1-sided interrogation. More experienced sellers will have a 2-way conversation, and come to the table with information on what you're trying to solve. Equally, they are trying to gauge whether it's worth their AND your time to solve the problems you're sharing with them.

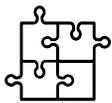


What Sales Can Learn

Come to calls with a Point of View, informed hypothesis, etc. Assume the Buyer knows about your company, but ask and if not, provide a brief explanation and correlate it to everyday experiences the Buyer faces. Qualifying deals for your CRM will come in time. Focus on a Buyer-centric experience that shares stories and examples around their biggest problems.



#5 DEMOING, AKA “SHOW ME THE DEMO”



Example

An inbound demo request comes through the website. Sales has no further information. A call is set, and Sales asks “*What’s the nature of your interest?*” Buyer replies “*Just show me the demo.*” Sales either 1) continues to ask for more information, frustrating the Buyer, or 2) executes a demo with no contextual information, rendering it ineffective.



Buyer’s Perspective

Inbounds are primarily from the Buyers comprising the 70% who have done lots of pre-call research. They have a specific purpose in contacting you, and specific ideas on what they want to see. Delays to their process are not Buyer-friendly.



Why Sales Does It

Demoing without understanding Buyer objectives is a recipe for disaster. We don’t know the exact, contextual problem Buyers want to solve, so we want more info so we don’t waste time with generic examples Buyers could have found on their own.



What Buyers Can Learn

Share information up front on demo requests, such as the specific problem or objective that interests you, and why it’s important. Even 1-2 sentences of context can dramatically help Sales deliver a personalized, Buyer-friendly demo experience.



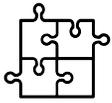
What Sales Can Learn

Contact inbounds ahead of the call asking 2-3 basic questions to help inform your demo context. If you can’t do this before the call, do it at the beginning of the demo and remind Buyers it’s in their best interest to do so for a more personalized experience and not to waste their time. Buyers who struggle to communicate at this step are likely not your target Champions in the business.



#6 HIDING PRICING, AKA “WHAT’S IT COST”

12%
23%
45%
100%



Example

Sales and Buyer wrap up a meaningful call. Buyer asks *“I didn’t see pricing on your site, how much does this cost?”* Sales, hesitant to quote a number without contextual backing, provides an excuse like *“I’ll have to run some numbers and get back to you.”* Buyer leaves frustrated.



Buyer’s Perspective

The Buyer shows up to a call expecting to collect information to ascertain product value, and doesn’t get pricing information on demand (which they are used to as a consumer.) This drives feelings of frustration, deceit, and wasted time.



Why Sales Does It

Pricing is increasingly seen as confidential information and hidden away until an opportunity becomes more qualified, one of the reasons many software orgs don’t publish it on their site. But it’s also become de facto sales process to present customized pricing using contextual ROI & COI evidence to justify the cost. Buyers process pricing emotionally (see more about that in my Value eBook) and Sales throwing out a number without a business case to support the number can scare cost-conscious Buyers.



What Buyers Can Learn

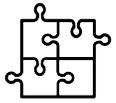
Sales is aware of how you’ll react, so if you can provide some context around your problem and your expectations of what long-term value will look like, they’ll be more likely to share pricing up front. Any qualifying information to customize a quote is helpful, since we usually have to process quotes through automated systems.



What Sales Can Learn

A Buyer is going to be cost-conscious about pricing in any call, whether it be the first or fifth. We are wasting time stringing along an opportunity with someone who will never agree to our pricing. Building trust with Buyers who can buy, detail their problems, and embrace pricing is key and shows 2-way communication, and building that rapport early can help close difficult deals. Hiding pricing only delays the inevitable conversation about value.

#7 MULTI-THREADING, AKA “WHO ELSE CAN WE SPEAK TO?”



Example

Sales and Buyer have agreed the problem and are exploring a solution together. The Buyer hasn't introduced other colleagues yet, and Sales sees an opportunity to message those colleagues on their own to start a conversation - all without notifying or asking the Buyer first.



Buyer's Perspective

Some Buyers are extremely protective of their evaluations and don't want anyone else involved until they see fit. “Going behind the back” can blow up the relationship between Sales and Buyer in an instant. Sales is being seen as pushy, impatient and deceitful.



Why Sales Does It

Most deals die with only one Buyer attached. The bigger the problem, the bigger the opportunity - that means there's more Buyers to speak to, which increases our odds. We can't put all of our eggs in one basket, and if our solo Buyer leave, go silent, or disengages, our momentum is lost.



What Buyers Can Learn

Leadership is constantly pressing us to find new Buyers in the account, and to target larger problems that increase win rates and deal sizes. All Sales has horror stories of engaging with only one Buyer, to see that person leave their role, not respond, or come back and say “We've signed with competitor” or “Budget was stalled.” Communicate with Sales any reservations or intentions to include/exclude colleagues and why. It's a leap of faith, but good Sales will generally try to enable you as best as possible given your particular situation.

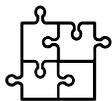


What Sales Can Learn

Part of the reason Buyers want to keep colleagues out early is that they see an opportunity for a Personal Win by engaging Sales solo - these individuals want to “be the hero” in solving a problem for the organization and get justified credit from their leaders when they do. Multi-threading dilutes the credit due, so asking to do so can jeopardize the potential of turning a Buyer into a Champion. It can be helpful to ask “Who else is affected by this problem” to gauge a willingness to introduce other Buyers, or to pre-identify particular names you think should be involved, and mention them as you cover needed next steps to move forward.



#8 EXECUTIVE SPONSORSHIP, AKA “WHO ACTUALLY SIGNS THIS”



Example

Sales and Buyer are discussing a proposal and pricing. Buyer confirms the contract can proceed, but says it has to go through approvals. Sales asks “Which executive signs this and can we meet with them?” The Buyer who has owned the process so far gets cold feet about involving an executive, and the deal stalls or dies since they don’t have signature power themselves.



Buyer’s Perspective

Sales is being seen as pushy and doesn’t trust the Buyer to close the deal, so they’re trying to end to an executive, rather than the Buyer briefing their exec themselves. Potentially, this could exclude Buyer from the deal, they might get slapped down for trying to buy, or worse.



Why Sales Does It

We all have been in a deal cycle where the Buyer says they have authority to buy and sign, but at 11th hour an executive is needed to approve. We’re fatigued from these situations, and we are mitigating risk by asking for executive sponsorship early. And it’s not just for closing - executive sponsorship means we have aligned strategically with our Buyer’s Company goals. Execs can clear red tape, approve business cases, find/create budget, and overcome major hurdles in deal cycles.



What Buyers Can Learn

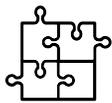
Of all the asks made to Sales, Sales Leadership is constantly probing if we can get in front of Buyer execs. Peer-to-peer conversations, product demos, networking... these relationships drive deals faster and better than most things. It’s not to cut Buyers out, but to ensure we have alignment on the most critical parts of a deal, and there is confidence and documented momentum on both sides towards closing. If you are an interested Buyer, you should want your exec involved too, supporting your efforts.



What Sales Can Learn

There’s an advantage to offering executive value early to Buyers - they can frame it to their leadership for personal kudos, reduce obstacles, and move faster. Research specific execs and give compelling reasons as to why they should be involved, and how it will benefit both Buyer and Company. Be conscious of the fact that Buyers are protective, and may not respond positively. Work to find out what, if anything, can be done to positively introduce execs in the conversation that makes your Buyer look good.

#9 MAP, AKA “WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO CLOSE”



Example

Sales and Buyer have verbally agreed to a contract. Sales presents a Mutual Action Plan (MAP) that details the steps and personnel needed to close the deal by a certain date.



Buyer’s Perspective

The Buyer may see a complicated path to closing a deal that involves things they do not control, and requests for colleagues who are not aware of the deal. They also may see an arbitrary close date (usually populated by when Sales WANTS the deal to close) and feel undue pressure to all tasks by then, not to their benefit.



Why Sales Does It

Leadership has asked us to “Commit” our deals for the quarter so they can be forecasted to the Board against target. To commit deals and close them responsibly, we need to be aware of the steps it takes to get from verbal confirmation to Buyer signature. We know this usually involves departments like Procurement & Infosec. Often these departments are not motivated by the same urgency to solve the business problem Sales and Buyer have agreed, which complicates the process and slows the deal.



What Buyers Can Learn

The MAP (or whatever acronym Sales uses) is mutually beneficial, so long as both parties have input. There’s no shame in not knowing all of the specific steps needed to buy, or in telling Sales changes need to be made - Sales wants an accurate road-map for themselves and you. But if you are aware of specific buying steps at your company, communicate them clearly, with any required asks, so Sales can begin their internal work of providing what you need.

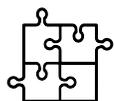


What Sales Can Learn

The urgency behind the MAP is completely dependent on the Buyer. The end date should correspond to whatever Compelling Event in the business is dictating the purchase in the first place. Understanding if one exists, and why, is paramount to establishing a true target close date, at which point you should ask what steps, walking backwards from signature, need to be completed from. If your Buyer isn’t aware, you should make recommendations and try to help them draft someone (Exec Sponsor) who has purchased before. The less times Buyer has purchased, the more complicated this process will be.

#10

NEGOTIATIONS, AKA “WE NEED A DISCOUNT”



Example

Sales and Buyer have verbally agreed pricing, the contract is ready to sign and in Procurement review. The Buyer company comes back and says *“This is too expensive, we need a discount.”* Sales replies *“This is our best price, why do you need a discount,”* and sets off a perhaps lengthy, contentious path to what should otherwise be a good buying experience.



Buyer’s Perspective

Buyers may be pressured by late changes in budgeting. CFOs and Procurement often enter to ensure fiscal responsibility, their personal ambitions, and more. Most Champion Buyers will be frustrated by delays to get a solution in place, but must comply.



Why Sales Does It

We are at the finish line and we feel as if a trap has been sprung on us. Often, we’ve already given a discount, and forecasted the sale to leadership, so negotiating for less right at the end conjures up resentment within the Sales-Buyer relationship, makes us look bad to our leadership, and reduce dollars in our pocket.



What Buyers Can Learn

Sales has forecasted the deal and probably included a discount. We are aware other individuals in the Buyer’s Company may need their own Personal Wins by getting an extra X% off. In that case, Sales wants a list of final asks from the Buyer Executive Sponsor attached to the deal, and confirmation that if we can honor those requests, the deal will close - and that there won’t be another twist in this tale.



What Sales Can Learn

People outside the deal (like Procurement, CFO, other execs, detractors) can come in at any time and delay/kill a sale. Some just need their wins to sign off. Strong Buyer champions are going to help us understand that landscape, and stick to pre-agreed terms negotiated and communicated in advance; weak Buyer champions will bob with the waves their colleagues create. A deal isn’t closed until it’s signed, so we can’t take verbals for granted. Pre-identify any concerns in negotiations early, test your Buyer Champions strength in detailing next steps, and communicate common obstacles and recommended solutions. Negotiate in good faith, build trust, but verify 2-way desire to close.



SUMMARY

The buying process is broken, and modern Sales orgs haven't risen to the challenge of fixing it to meet Buyers where they are.

If you have one major takeaway from these examples, it should be that building trust and educated communication between Sales and Buyer is critically important. That trust can solve a lot of these issues before they arise.

"Be more trustful." That's a hard thing to ask either party to do considering what's led us to this point, but progress has to start somewhere.

Buyers, try to have an open mind, and give good Sales a chance to help you.

Sales, come prepared to educate your prospects and give them your all to turn them into a champion of your product.



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#JoinThePack #HuntTogether

