
CHAPTER

1

The Great Sales Disconnect

Suppose that you wrote the following goal on your office whiteboard: “I want to make as much money as possible.” Now suppose your clients saw it. How would they feel? How would you feel knowing that they’d seen it? Would you feel proud or embarrassed?

What if you went over your prospect list, and the only thing written next to each prospect’s name was a dollar figure and a projected close date? Would your prospects be happy if they saw that? Would they want to do business with you?

Probably not; it reduces them to nothing more than a number. Yet, that’s exactly how most organizations talk about their customers on a daily basis.

Think about the typical conversation a sales manager has with his or her sales rep. It usually goes something like this:

“When are you going to close this? How much revenue will it be? Are all the key decision makers involved? Who’s the competition? What do you need to close this deal?”

All of the questions are about *when and how* we’re going to collect revenue from the customer. Very few managers ask about the impact the sale will have on the customer’s business or life.

This is a big problem.

Imagine a salesperson walking into a customer’s office and opening the sales call by plopping a revenue forecast down on the customer’s desk, announcing, “I have you projected for \$50,000 this month. Give me an order now!”

That rep would be thrown out in a second. Yet that’s the kind of language most organizations use when they talk about their customers internally. It’s like two different worlds.

We expect salespeople to focus on customers’ needs and goals when they’re in front of customers, but the majority of our internal conversations are about our own revenue quotas. Although it’s an unintended disconnect, it’s a fatal one.

Most organizations want to have a positive impact on their customers’ lives. It makes good business sense, and it appeals to our more noble instincts. Yet when managers are caught up inside the pressure cooker of daily business, their desire to improve the customer’s life is eclipsed by quotas, quarterly numbers, and daily sales reports.

This results in salespeople who don’t have any sense of a higher purpose, other than “making the numbers.” It sounds good in theory, but customers can tell the difference between the salespeople who care about them and those who care only about their bonuses.

The great disconnect between what we want salespeople to do when they’re in the field (focus on the customer) versus what we emphasize and reinforce internally (our own targets and quotas) results in mediocre sales performance.

What Lack of Purpose Costs a Sales Force

When the customer becomes nothing more than a number to you, you become nothing more than a number to the customer—and your entire organization suffers. When you overemphasize financial goals at the expense of how you make a difference to customers, you make it extremely difficult for your salespeople to differentiate themselves from the competition.

And the problem doesn't stop there. It has a ripple effect on salespeople, who:

- Start thinking only about the short term.
- Fail to understand the customer's environment.
- Cannot connect the dots between your products and customers' goals.
- Cannot gain access to senior levels within the customer.

Then the problem escalates:

- Customers view you as a commodity.
- You have little or no collaboration with them.
- Customers place undue emphasis on minor problems.
- Customer churn increases.
- Contracts are constantly in jeopardy over small dollar amounts.
- Salespeople's default response is to lower the price.
- Sales has a negative perception in the rest of the organization.
- There is little or no product innovation.
- Sales force turnover increases.
- Salespeople try to game the comp plan.
- Top performers become mid-level performers.
- Salespeople view their fellow salespeople as the competition.
- Sales force morale declines.

It's not a pretty picture. When the internal conversation is all about money, the external conversation becomes all about money. And all of a sudden, that's the last thing you're making.

Companies have tried a variety of methods to solve this problem. Organizations spend millions on sales training programs that teach salespeople how to ask better questions and engage the customers. They spend even more millions on customer relationship management (CRM) systems to capture critical customer information. They host off-site retreats to create mission and vision statements. They hire expensive consultants to craft their value story.

But the results are short lived at best. Salespeople abandon the training. No one updates the CRM. The mission and vision are put on a meaningless placard in the lobby. And the value story is reduced to a bunch of ho-hum slides that sound just like everyone else's.

The reason these solutions don't deliver sustained improvement is because they address only the symptoms. They don't tackle the root cause: the lack of purpose.

Peter Drucker, widely considered the most influential management thinker in the second half of the twentieth century, once famously said, "Profit is not the purpose of a business but rather the test of its validity."

I'll take that a step further: *driving revenue is not the purpose of a sales force; it's the test of its effectiveness.*

When targets and quotas become the primary organizing element of your business, the result is mediocrity at best. Although profit is of course critical, it's not the best starting point for driving sales revenue. To do that, you have to start with a Noble Sales Purpose (NSP).

An NSP is a definitive statement about how you make a difference in the lives of your customers. It speaks to why you're in business in the first place. Used correctly, your NSP drives every decision you make and every action you take. It becomes the underpinning for all your sales activities.

One of my clients is a provider of information technology (IT) services for small businesses. Their NSP is simply, "We help small businesses be more successful." It drives everything they do. Every decision, large or small, must pass through that filter, "Will this help us make small businesses more successful?" If the answer is no, they

don't do it. Every new product and service they create—every sales call they're on—is focused on how they can make their customers' businesses more successful.

Since implementing their NSP strategy, their sales are up 35 percent. In a tough economy when customers are cutting back on outside IT services, their business is growing.

An NSP is a new way to think about your business. Doing business from an NSP perspective is counter to the way most corporations, entrepreneurs, and salespeople have been told to think—and that's exactly why it works.

Instead of making profit your sole purpose, you emphasize the impact you have on customers. Profits are the result of your work, not the sole purpose of your efforts. It might sound like heresy, but purpose is the secret to driving *more* revenue.

Ad agency owner Roy Spence, who works with Southwest Airlines and Walmart, says, "Purpose is your reason for being; [it] goes beyond making money and it almost always results in making more money than you ever thought possible."

An NSP drives more revenue than financial goals alone because an NSP taps into a human instinct even more powerful than our desire for money.

Why NSP Makes You Money

In his book *Drive: The Surprising Secret about What Motivates Us*, author Daniel Pink—who has written extensively on the changing world of work—debunks the myth of the carrot and the stick as effective motivators. He writes, "The science shows that the secret to high performance isn't our biological drive or our reward-and-punishment drive, but our third drive—our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to expand and extend our abilities, and to live a life of purpose." Pink goes on to say, "Humans, by their nature, seek purpose—a cause greater and more enduring than themselves."

Pink's research reveals the discord between what social science knows (humans crave purpose) and business does (the carrot and stick). Nowhere is this dissension greater than in sales, where organizations

continue to dangle incentive programs, bonuses, and trips in front of salespeople, hoping that it will motivate them. Yet time and again, the incentive programs produce short-term spikes in performance from a small percentage of people. In most organizations, the top performers remain the same year after year, while the rest of the sales force stays stuck in the mediocre middle.

What's missing is a sense of larger purpose.

When you ask salespeople who are performing at an average level why they go to work, very few will give you an answer that sounds anything remotely like a sense of purpose. They usually just talk about money. But when you ask top-performing salespeople why they go to work, they will almost always talk about having a larger noble purpose.

Here's the disconnect: top performers are driven by purpose, but their company leadership almost never discusses any purpose beyond making money.

The very thing that differentiates top performers—a sense of purpose—is almost never mentioned by company leadership.

What's ironic is that many companies *do* make a difference to their customers and serve a larger purpose. They just don't talk about it with the salespeople.

I once worked with a health care products company that was literally saving people's lives. The senior leaders made a regular practice of describing the meaningful impact their products had on customers to the manufacturing team, the customer service group, and even the accountants. Yet it was like they developed a sudden case of amnesia when they interacted with the sales department. All the discussions in sales meetings and coaching sessions were about quotas and revenue or products' features and rollout plans. They almost never talked about the impact the products had on *actual human beings*.

It was as if they believed that their sales force was some bizarre strange animal, living in a parallel universe where meaning, purpose, and contribution were irrelevant. When it came to sales, it was only about the money.

Of course, this was huge mistake.

The very people who should be on fire for making the difference to the customers—the sales force—almost never heard it mentioned. Talk about a mismatch.

Is it any wonder that their sales force struggled to maintain margins and was often treated like a commodity by their customers? If all you talk about is money and margin when you're inside the organization, it's only natural that's where things go in customer conversations. What else are your salespeople going to discuss?

Is it any surprise they had high turnover in sales and their best people left for a competitor? The salespeople felt very little affiliation for their company, the leadership, or even the products. It was never about anything but numbers, so when another company started offering the reps a better comp plan, they jumped at it.

If your sales force isn't passionate about the impact your company has on customers, they don't have a strong sense of affiliation with your organization. They're not able to differentiate you from your competitors in front of the customers. Their work becomes just a job—one that they'll leave for something better at the drop of a hat.

That's why you need an NSP—it solves the great sales disconnect. It combines making money with making a difference, and it bridges the gap between internal conversation and external conversation.

What's Gained from Approaching Sales with NSP

Your NSP points you in a nobler and, ultimately, more profitable direction. It's the starting point for a series of changes that can dramatically improve your sales force and the bottom line.

An NSP:

- Brings the customer voice to the front and center of the conversation.
- Keeps your sales force focused on quotas *and* customers.
- Provides an organizing framework for planning and decision making.
- Reinforces the right sales behavior.

- Improves the quality of your existing sales training.
- Helps mid-level performers set more challenging goals.
- Helps top performers stay focused.
- Acts as a reset button during times of challenge and change.

This book is written for sales leaders, because you are the ones who set the tone for your organization. Whether you're a vice president of sales, a sales manager, or an aspiring sales leader, you have the power to reframe the way you and your team approach customers.

An NSP is not a tactic. It's a *strategic shift* in the way you approach your business. It's more than a simple sales technique; it's a sales leadership approach that turbocharges all other techniques. It's the missing ingredient a sales force needs to take their performance to the next level.

You gain the following from approaching sales with an NSP mindset:

- You become more resourceful as a salesperson, since you're always looking for ways to help customers' businesses.
- Clients take you to the higher-level people in their organizations, because they see you as a resource and not someone with a sales quota.
- You establish relationships with these higher-level people, because you will have greater impact there.
- You have a shorter sales cycle. You ask more robust and second-tier questions, delving into critical customer business issues, whereas product-focused people ask low-level manipulative and mechanical questions.
- You create proposals and presentations that are more persuasive, because they're organized around the client's goals, not focused on *your* product's or service's features and benefits.
- You increase the probability of success with the current opportunity, as well as future opportunities, because you understand the client's organizational direction.
- You're less likely to be seen as a commodity and have pricing issues, because you can map everything to the client's urgent business goals.

- You love your job, because you have a more noble purpose than just “selling stuff to make money.”
- Your job becomes far more interesting, because every opportunity requires new thinking and solutions and is a chance to make a difference.
- You’re more likely to talk about your job in social situations, and when you do, people are more likely to be interested in hearing about it—since making a difference in people’s lives is exciting.
- You bring the customer’s voice into your organization, which helps you create better products, services, and marketing.
- You get better coaching from your boss, because your conversations are about topics deeper than quotas. You speak in depth about client situations and needs.
- You gain a competitive advantage, because your work becomes a noble calling.
- You don’t have to “act like” you care about your customers, because you really *do* care.
- You’re better able to manage obstacles, because you don’t get defensive and take them personally. You see them for what they are: a simple request for help.
- You know what really matters to customers; you don’t trot out trite or artificial differentiators.
- Your work has a larger purpose. Your NSP becomes your North Star, a way of resetting yourself during tough times.

How to Use This Book

I want to make this extremely clear: This is not a book about marketing. This is a book about **sales**. An NSP is not a tagline. It’s a tool that sales leaders can use at every level of their operation to grow revenue and do work that makes everyone in the organization proud.

The ideas and techniques you’ll learn in this book are drawn from the more than 10,000 hours I and my colleagues have spent studying, coaching, training, observing, and interviewing salespeople

and sales managers. In addition to observing their behavior, I've also conducted in-depth interviews to uncover their mindsets, attitudes, and beliefs.

I've been in this business for more than 25 years and have worked with some of the best sales organizations in the world. I've coached and trained sales leaders from Apple, Google, Kimberly-Clark, Pfizer, Procter & Gamble, and a host of other top companies. Whether you work for a global giant or a small firm that's just getting started, you can apply the ideas in this book to your sales efforts right away.

This book is meant to be practical, not just theory. I want you to be a better sales leader *tomorrow*. As such, at the end of each chapter, I've included a feature I call "Do One Thing"—a single idea that you can implement immediately.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part you'll learn how NSP works and why it makes such a difference in sales performance. I'll explain the three elements of an effective NSP and provide you with examples from my clients and others. You'll see how leaders in a range of careers and industries—banking, construction, health care, IT, manufacturing, and even a California court system—have used this process to jump-start their organizations. We'll look at some surprising information about why overemphasizing profit has an alarming effect on salespeople and customers and how you can reframe the profit question inside your company. You'll learn some of the brain science behind NSP and where it fits within the structure of your larger organization. At the conclusion of this section, we'll walk through a three-part process to help you create your own NSP.

The second part of the book is where the rubber meets the road—because as we all know, ideas don't work unless you put them into practice. This is where you'll learn how to keep your NSP alive in the face of daily challenges. We'll look at the role that fear plays in selling and how it erodes your NSP. You'll learn techniques to keep that from happening to your team. You'll discover some surprising science about the impact that mindset has on salespeople and customers, and you'll learn five NSP mindsets that will make you and your team more powerful. We'll also look at why most of the time and money we spend on sales training is wasted and how you can avoid that costly pitfall in the future.

We'll explore the role of customer information in the sales process. You'll discover why some of the very systems meant to improve

sales performance, such as your CRM, may be undermining sales performance in ways that you don't realize. You'll learn techniques for creating compelling NSP stories and case studies to substantiate your NSP with customers and your team.

You'll learn coaching techniques that will dramatically improve your sales reps' performance on sales calls. We'll look at how you can use your NSP with your marketing team and internally to invigorate projects and alleviate turf wars and silos. You'll also learn how one pivotal behavior can put your entire organization on the path toward an NSP.

The third part of the book is the road warrior's bible: a sales manager's blueprint for creating a sales force of true believers. Each of the short chapters in this section focuses on a single area of sales manager responsibility: sales meetings, incentive programs, interviews, presentations, and precall coaching, among others. You'll learn how to apply specific techniques for using your NSP in each of these areas, how to bring your NSP to life in sales meetings, and how to use it during interviews to quickly identify top performers (and nonperformers). You'll learn how to reinforce your NSP with visual reminders and how to coach salespeople right before they begin an important call.

At the end of this book, I've included a bonus chapter, "How to Use Purpose to Make the Rest of Your Life More Meaningful." I'll also share the personal story about the painful experience that taught me some of these lessons the hard way.

Here's what you can expect from me:

- **I'll give you the best of what I've got.** You hold in your hands the result of 25 years spent studying, coaching, training, and interviewing salespeople, sales managers, and their customers. I've combined my experience with the latest research about human behavior to give you practical tools and techniques that you can use starting tomorrow.
- **I'll provide real-life examples.** It's challenging to go from concept to application, so this book is filled with examples from major corporations such as Procter & Gamble and Southwest Airlines, along with smaller firms such as getAbstract and Graham-White—two sales forces that are now using NSP to become market leaders. You'll see how sales leaders just like you have adopted this process to jump-start their teams.

- **I'll share stories about failure.** Instances where I and others have missed the mark—in some cases, horribly so—will show you what *not* to do. You'll also discover that no matter how bad things seem at the time, it's never too late to reclaim your noble purpose.
- **I'll ask provoking questions.** I want you to think deeply about what your job means to the world. So I'll ask you to consider your work in ways that might be unfamiliar to you. I want you to be great at your job. I also want you to enjoy it.
- **I'll honor your intelligence.** You wouldn't be holding this book if you hadn't already achieved some level of success, since this book wasn't written for the sales novice. It's for people who are serious about sales leadership and who want to take their teams and themselves to the next level.

Reframing the Sales Profession

I have high aspirations for you and for our profession. For me, this is personal. As the famous saying goes, nothing happens until somebody sells something. Salespeople are linchpins; we're the ones who bring in the revenue that keeps everything else running. Personally, I believe that a role in sales is one of the highest callings you can have in an organization.

Unfortunately, our profession doesn't always get the respect it deserves. There are two widespread misperceptions about sales:

1. Sales is sleazy.
2. Sales is easy.

Scott Jensen, a sales coach at Deloitte, tells a story about being a young sales manager with another company. Upon walking into an internal departmental company meeting, he heard one of the other department heads say, "Here comes the commission whore." The rest of the group laughed at the joke.

I am not kidding when I say that this story makes my head spin. I feel tightness in my chest when someone insults a fellow salesperson; my heart starts to beat faster, and I feel an anger akin to what you'd feel if someone offended a member of your family.

I completely understand why salespeople sometimes get a bad rap. The bad ones can be pushy, arrogant, and downright awful. But that doesn't describe the salespeople I know.

The salespeople I know return customer calls at 7 o'clock on Friday night because they care about their clients. They leave before sunrise so that they can be in a customer's office for an early meeting. They stand for hours at trade shows, enthusiastically engaging every person who comes up to the booth. They make sales calls at all hours of the day. They go in at 5 AM to meet the end users. They visit customer sites on the weekend. They work a full day in the field and head home to do their paperwork at night. They work on presentations at 10 PM, after they put their kids to bed.

They put thousands of miles on their boxy four-door cars. They squeeze themselves into the center seat of a packed plane for a 4-hour commute to the next city after a long day in the field. They spend evenings away from their families hunched over computers in lonely hotel rooms. They study sales reports for hours, trying to figure out how they can reach even more customers next year. They do most of their work alone and often have to motivate themselves in the face of rejection. They even smile when customers are rude to them.

And they do all of this to make a living for their families and create success for their organizations. If you're one of those kinds of sales professionals, this book is for you. If you want to build a team of top performers that you can be proud of, people who make a difference to their customers and who drive revenue through the roof, you're in the right place.

If you want to manipulate customers or lead by fear and intimidation—well, then, you're not.

I love salespeople. They're the unsung heroes of business, and I want to restore nobility to the sales profession.

This is a book to help you think and act. Therefore, this is what I ask of you:

- **Give this your best effort.** This approach requires a shift in thinking that may not seem natural at first. But it works. What may seem artificial initially will become second nature with a little practice.
- **Read Part I in order.** After that, you can jump around. The subsequent chapters are written as stand-alone sections, so pick whatever interests you and start there.

- **Write things down.** There are several places where you'll be asked critical questions. We've provided space for your answers. Write them down. (E-book readers can use a scratch pad.) Writing things down will help you remember what you've said and will increase the clarity of your thoughts.
- **Do something.** The book is filled with easy-to-implement action items. Pick the one that seems the easiest for you and do it first. If you experience some success right off the bat, you'll be more likely to stick with it.
- **Don't give up.** As a sales leader, you have the power to change the culture around you. It may sometimes seem as though your customers, team, industry, and perhaps even your boss are working against you. But I promise you this: you will begin to see a shift in the people around if you use these techniques. It almost always happens faster than you expect.

Whether you're leading a large organization or running a small group, this book will help you find your NSP and ignite it with your customers and team. You'll learn how to drive more sales revenue and enjoy your job more while you're doing it.

I'm going to let you in on a secret: your life is about much more than just making money. It's about the impact you have on other people. As a sales leader, you have the opportunity to interact with more people in a month than most people do in a year. Every word you say and every action you take has a ripple effect on the people around you.

Don't ever think for a moment that your job doesn't matter. It *does*.

You already make a difference, and I want to help you make an even bigger difference. When you know that your job matters, you perform at a higher level and enjoy it more. I told you that I wanted to help you like your job, but that's not entirely true. I don't want you to merely *like* your job; I want you to love your job. When you love your job, your whole life lights up—and so does everyone around you.

You deserve that. We all do.

Are you ready to get started?