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Smarter Selling

By Keith Dugdale & David Lambert

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“Success in the consultative sale is all about creating customer value from every meeting, but few salespeople know how to do this. Smarter Selling has many useful and practical ideas to help salespeople.”

Neil Rackham, best-selling author of *SPIN Selling*

“The tools covered in Smarter Selling will help any sales person who is wanting to make the shift from a traditional to a consultative approach and ultimately towards becoming a trusted advisor.”

Charles H. Green, best-selling co-author of *The Trusted Advisor*

“Whatever you sell, this book will help you do it better...” proclaims the jacket of *Smarter Selling*. So, this is a book for all advisors and salespeople from retail to technology, for consultants, lawyers, engineers, bankers, media agencies, accountants, and for internal support functions, such as Finance, HR and Marketing, who need to sell within organisations.

With such a broad target audience it is no surprise that the book’s scope goes far beyond traditional sales approaches. In essence, it looks at how to quickly establish rapport and trust, then develop ongoing business relationships built upon openness, trust, mutual respect and genuine shared interest.

At its core, the book has a very simple message. In our hyper-competitive world, the best way to differentiate your offering is through a focus on the person or people that you’re dealing with, as opposed to the technical merits of your offering. Treat people fairly and they will remember you and want to work with you. This message is supported by numerous stories and examples from the authors’ many years’ experience both working with, and consulting to, many of the world’s leading companies.

A change of mindset

As a book, *Smarter Selling* scores highly because it is a “how to” book, full of easy to apply tools. The authors add a note of caution though, saying that to practise the book’s IoweU™ approach and use the tools, without adopting the required mindset will quickly be exposed as a sham. True IoweU™ practitioners adopt a genuine “helping” mindset (versus a “selling” mindset) that is fundamentally different to the majority of sales approaches.

Start with yourself

Most sales approaches start with the offering and then look at the buyer. Readers of *Smarter Selling* begin with an evaluation of their own behaviours to develop an understanding of how this is likely to impact buyers.

The Octagon™ behavioural profile generated by completing the questionnaire provided with the book provides critical insights in eight key domains relevant to relationship building:

- Leading / Following
- Opportunity / Fear
- Trust / Control
- Your needs / My needs
- Feelings / Facts
- Free flowing / Organised
- My best / Better than you
- Big picture / Detail

Using this framework, the authors show how, armed with an increased awareness, we can flex our own behaviour to match or mismatch with others and so impact their thinking patterns.

A deeper understanding of business relationships and buying behaviours

The book argues that people often misjudge the nature and strength of their business relationships with the common result that opportunities are missed.

They categorise relationships as either social, ad-hoc, technical or partner and provide examples and stories to illustrate each type, together with suggestions for steps to take to move relationships in the desired direction.

There is also an interesting discussion of organisational buying characteristics ranging from price-busters through deal-hunters to value-buyers, and a reminder of the different roles that individual buyers can play in a corporate buying decision.

“So much more than just a sales book. Smarter Selling takes a critical look at business relationships and shows how to improve them.”



Making the right first impression

Moving to skills, the book introduces a new way to frame conversations that quickly engages buyers in a collaborative process and signals very strong customer focus.

The I We YOU framing comprises three elements:

- I** – is all about INTENT or aims, ensuring that the objective of the discussion is clear and agreed.
- WE** – is focused on WE. It's about passing control to the buyer and involving them in agreeing the time and topics – quite different to a more typical agenda-driven discussion.
- YOU** – is a reminder to state at the outset the benefit that YOU (the buyer) will enjoy as a result of the conversation.

The authors claim that framing conversations in this way begins the process of differentiation and leads to much more open (and informative) discussions where the other person wants to be in the conversation.

Helping buyers achieve their goals

All relationship building and sales approaches need a questioning process to build an understanding of how a product or service might be of benefit to the buyer. We've seen them all, from AIDA to SPIN but we like the extra dimension added by *Smarter Selling's* SHAPE process. SHAPE feels more balanced, positive and future-oriented than other approaches that target business pain to generate immediate action (and a sale), but at the potential expense of the longer-term relationship – since pain often breeds resentment.

The "A" for "Adjust" of SHAPE feels different too. The authors contend that too many sales discussions feel to the buyer like an interrogation: a series of questions driving towards the buyers preferred end-point. "Adjust" reminds sellers to pause from time-to-time, summarise the discussion thus far (which demonstrates respect and understanding), then check whether the buyer wants to continue or change the direction of the discussion.

In addition to the SHAPE questioning process, the book also details specific examples of question types: "Focus-5" and the more exotically captioned "Spicy Questions" that can lead the conversation into interesting and different places, further helping the seller to engage the buyer's interest and achieve a sense of differentiation.

It's all about collaboration

By this stage, it is clear that *Smarter Selling* is all about collaboration. It isn't about pushing an offering to a buyer who doesn't need it. It isn't even about your offering. It's all about the buyer. Get the buyer to talk, find out what challenges he/she faces and work with them to help them move forward. Do this and work will flow.

Ideas and tools

From "Value Sheets" to "Levels of Thinking" and "CC Notes", *Smarter Selling* is so full of ideas and practical tools that there isn't sufficient space to cover all of them here. For the advisor or salesperson, the book provides a valuable resource of approaches and tools that can be used to remove blocks in communication and build collaboration.

Where's the selling?

It's striking that in a book that is apparently about selling, the selling doesn't get underway until Chapter 9. And then, it rejects many of the slick jargon-based approaches that buyers tired of long ago, instead advocating a return to simple language and a focus on tangible benefits that buyers identify with.

This is so much more than just a sales book. *Smarter Selling* takes a critical look at business relationships and shows how to improve them.

If any of this piques your interest, you can buy the book at good bookstores, internet booksellers and at www.engage-universe.com.

"If you're looking for an edge and don't want sales models that were created 40, 20 or even 10 years ago, this book is most certainly for you."

Nic Read, author of *Selling to the C-Suite*

Alternatively, if you would like to get more information about the book or the training and coaching programmes that align with the book, you can contact us through email at info@engage-universe.com.

