

# Sales Mindset Drives Sales Results

**Improving sales approaches that are built on the *Traditional Sales Mindset* can yield incremental improvements in sales results; but adopting a sales approach that's built on the *Business Resource Mindset* can yield breakthrough sales results.**

Every salesperson has his or her own thought process about what they're supposed to do in order to be successful. For the most part, this thought process operates at a nearly subconscious level. We call this general way of thinking about selling, **sales mindset**.

Sales mindset can be likened to our sales "microprocessor," "operating system" or "DNA." A practical way to think about our own sales mindset is to consider the many ways we might complete the following sentence: "*In order for me to succeed in sales, I have to...*"

Sales mindset, more than any other factor, determines what salespeople say and do in every customer interaction. Consequently, it is the salesperson's mindset that, ultimately, determines how customers assess that salesperson's value and, in turn, determines results.

No two salespeople think the very same way about every aspect of selling. However, there are several ways of thinking that *are* common among the majority of sales professionals, no matter their experience level or specific selling environment. This commonly accepted thinking about how to succeed in selling is what we mean by the "**Traditional Sales Mindset**." As a result of the natural evolution of the business of selling, most salespeople have "inherited" a Traditional Sales Mindset.

The left-hand column in the table below describes the essence of the Traditional Sales Mindset. It identifies six of the most common ways that salespeople complete the sentence, "*In order for me to succeed in sales I have to...*". In the right-hand column are the corresponding dimensions of what Stapleton calls the "**Business Resource Mindset**."

Perhaps the most important thing to notice about the Traditional Sales Mindset is that it is not fundamentally "broken," wrong or inherently counterproductive. In other words, improving sales approaches that are built on the Traditional Sales Mindset can yield improved sales results, but, we believe, only *incremental* improvements.

However, adopting an approach to selling that's built on The Business Resource Mindset causes salespeople to approach selling differently at a fundamental level and empowers them to truly "go to the next level" of selling excellence and achieve *breakthrough* improvements in sales results.

<p align="center"><b>The <i>Traditional Sales Mindset:</i></b>  <i>“In order for me to succeed in sales, I have to...”</i></p>	<p align="center"><b>The <i>Business Resource Mindset:</i></b>  <i>“In order for me to succeed in sales, I have to...”</i></p>
<p align="center">1. <i>“...master the ability to communicate information.”</i>  (<i>Tell Mode</i>)</p>	<p align="center">1. <i>“...master the ability to understand the customer’s world.”</i>  (<i>Seek Mode</i>)</p>
<p align="center">2. <i>“...build relationships.”</i></p>	<p align="center">2. <i>“...build ‘business peer’ relationships.”</i></p>
<p align="center">3. <i>“...focus on closing the sale.”</i></p>	<p align="center">3. <i>“...focus on advancing the sale!”</i></p>
<p align="center">4. <i>“...understand the customer’s needs.”</i></p>	<p align="center">4. <i>“...understand the customer’s business.”</i></p>
<p align="center">5. <i>“...find the decision-maker.”</i></p>	<p align="center">5. <i>“...be organizationally savvy.”</i></p>
<p align="center">6. <i>“...be responsive.”</i></p>	<p align="center">6. <i>“...respond according to potential return.”</i></p>

**“In order for me to succeed in sales, I have to...”**

1. *“...master the ability to communicate information”*

**Versus**

*“...master the ability to understand the customer’s world.”*

Because sales evolved as a profession of telling, communicating information became the cornerstone of the Traditional Mindset. Salespeople define their purpose: “The better the customer understands my company’s product (or solutions, value, expertise, etc.), the more successful I will be.”

We call this “operating in Tell Mode.” And Tell Mode, more than any of the other five dimensions, is the cornerstone of the Traditional Sales Mindset.

There are degrees of Tell Mode. At the lowest end is the primitive, product-pitching approach to selling (we’re all familiar with that graphic metaphor, “show up and throw up”).

But the more pervasive forms of Tell Mode are the advanced forms: “solution selling,” “consultative selling,” “strategic selling,” etc. These forms of Tell Mode can be summed up as the “uncover-the-need/communicate-our-solution” approaches. As a result, even these more advanced forms of Tell Mode place the salesperson’s ultimate purpose as *communicating information—telling!*

We should add somewhat parenthetically here that over the past decade or so, sales professionals have been exhorted to listen better and ask more questions. Ironically, this advice has often backfired as salespeople “listen the customer to death.” This phenomenon actually bears a closer resemblance to Tell Mode than it does to Seek Mode. We sometimes refer to it as “counterfeit Seek Mode.”

Incidentally, this natural predisposition to Tell Mode explains why Traditionally minded salespeople frequently place great importance on having product superiority and achieving the highest possible level of technical knowledge and product expertise (this is not to say that product superiority, technical expertise and product knowledge are not important, because they are).

By contrast, salespeople who define their professional purpose as “The better I understand the customer’s world, the more successful I will be”—those who “operate in Seek Mode”—are consistently more successful.

It’s critical to understand a key nuance in this Tell Mode/Seek Mode discussion. On the one hand, Seek Mode salespeople rely primarily on their knowledge of the customer’s world to succeed. At the same time, however, they are masters at communicating their own value messages and competitive positioning messages. And, of course, they know *when* to do so. More importantly, because of their deep knowledge of the customer’s world, they have an amazing ability to frame those messages in the context of that same world—which is the ultimate value creator.

## **2. “...build relationships” Versus “...build ‘business peer’ relationships.”**

The idea of building relationships is as old as selling itself. “Relationship selling” has evolved as perhaps *the* most common notion in the world of sales; we hear it every day. But evolution has not been kind to the notion. Too often, “building relationships” has evolved to mean “building rapport,” “creating friendships,” or “being liked.”

But having rapport is not the same as having respect; being a friend is not the same as being a peer; being liked is not the same as being valued.

The unfortunate reality is that, because of the way *customers have historically viewed salespeople*, most customer/seller relationships have evolved, quite unintentionally by salespeople, into various forms of master/servant relationships—friendly or otherwise.

Consider that most seller/customer meetings start or end with some expression of gratitude for the “favor” of meeting with them. Phrases such as “Thanks for your time,” “I know you’re busy,” “I’ll let you get back to work,” are not just social niceties; they’re subconscious indicators of master/servant, not business peer, relationships.

The nature of the customer/seller relationship has profound implications. Salespeople who are viewed as a true business peer by customers garner far more trust and confidence from them, inherently have more “permission” to gain business and political insights from them, and are far more likely to be introduced to colleagues and superiors by them.

### **3. “...*focus on closing the sale.*” Versus “...*focus on the advancing the sale.*”**

We identified above the first two parts of the historical 3-part job description of the salesperson: communicating information and building relationships. The third follows: facilitating transactions. Thus, “closing the sale” was born.

The difference between “closing” and “advancing” the sale seems minor; it’s anything but. For starters, sometimes advancing the sale means walking from the sale. Other times, it might mean “waiting and listening.”

Salespeople with a Traditional Sales Mindset have a “close mentality.” This might seem like a good thing, but it’s not. A close mentality is counterproductive for three reasons:

- It creates an artificial sense of optimism and control over the actual closeability of a sale that may not be closeable at all, at least right now, or that may not even be real in the first place. This results in salespeople chasing bad business.
- It creates “decision-maker myopia,” causing salespeople to attempt to close the sale with contacts who may have no power whatsoever to do so.
- In an insidious way, it creates “sales tension.” Even without using tired old closing techniques, a closing mentality translates into transactional language or into a subconscious—or in some cases very conscious—focus on the “deal.” As a result, Traditional salespeople send a certain, “transactional energy” that customers sense; and it causes them to put their guard up against being sold. This defensiveness reduces information flow from the customer to a trickle. It also quite negatively affects the salesperson’s professionalism and credibility.

Salespeople with a Business Resource Mindset focus on “advancing the sales campaign.” By constantly assessing the *customer urgency, the fit, and the winnability*—i.e. *the reality of the sale*—they end up closing more sales than “closers” do because they minimize tension, understand the true closeability of the sale, and know who closeable contacts are.

Salespeople who operate with a Business Resource Mindset are remarkably clear-eyed about what is and isn’t good business and they act relentlessly on that knowledge. They know when to walk from an “opportunity;” they know when to go into “wait and listen mode;” and they know when—and how—to “go for the close.”

The focus-on-advancing-the-sale mentality demands great skill, discipline, and finesse. It has nothing in common with that passive, and often artificial, “low-pressure sales” approach, which requires no skill at all.

Business Resource salespeople are as passionate and hard-charging as their Traditional (dare we say, “aggressive”) counterparts. It’s just that their passion isn’t directed toward myopically “closing the deal;” it’s directed toward advancing—indeed accelerating—the sales campaign in a realistic way.

#### **4. “...understand the customer’s needs.” Versus “...understand the customer’s business.”**

Obviously, there’s nothing inherently wrong with knowing the customer’s needs. It’s just that customers see far more value in salespeople who want to understand their *business*—and help them improve it—than in those who want to understand their *needs* (and help them solve their problems).

How many times have you had an inferior solution for the customer’s needs and still won the sale? Or, viewed another way, how many times have you had the best solution to the customer’s needs and still lost the sale? Being the best at solving the customer’s problems is rarely enough.

Moreover, customers don’t always know what their needs and problems really are. As a result, they often default to some form of, “our needs are to get the best solution at the lowest price.” Or at best, they define needs quite narrowly.

Lastly, in yet another somewhat ironic twist, there’s a growing impatience on the part of many customers with what appears to be an endless needs analysis process by salespeople and selling organizations.

To become a Business Resource, you must make sure customers see you as the sales professional with a deep desire to understand their business beyond the level of merely understanding the business needs for your solutions. The Business Resource salesperson’s

creed is: “The better I understand the customer’s business, the more value I can bring them.” In fact, the Business Resource has largely extricated the word, “needs” from his or her vocabulary.

## **5. “...find the decision-maker” Versus “...be organizationally savvy.”**

Yet another time-honored notion in selling involves reaching the “decision-maker.”

The very notion of “decision-maker” belies the reality of how things actually get done inside companies. All companies have people with big titles but little power, as well as people with small titles but significant power. And in general, they don’t print this on their business cards! Even understanding the various “buying influences,” made popular by the strategic sales approaches of the past few decades, yields an incomplete view of the customer organization because it identifies only formal and informal buying roles, not political muscle.

Every sales professional has experienced the many decision-maker smokescreens that get thrown up in customer organizations—usually with negative consequences for the seller. That’s why it’s useful to remember one of the main (but unfortunate) truisms in selling: *The contacts with the least power are the easiest ones for salespeople to get to.*

Common questions like, “Who in addition to yourself is involved in the decision?” and “Who else should I be talking to?” are subtle indicators of a lack of organizational savvy.

And speaking of organizational savvy and realities. For decades now, salespeople have been learning all manner of approaches for selling to executives, with limited—and in some cases disastrous—results. Maybe the most overlooked organizational reality is that executives are far more likely to look to internal people for advice and guidance on buying decisions than they are to the salesperson. Because of this reality it’s imperative that salespeople develop the ability to determine *which* people internally executives are most likely to trust...never an easy task.

Bottom line is that salespeople can dramatically improve their results by shedding the Traditional notion of “decision-maker” and reducing their dependence on “buying influences” and attempting to become more organizationally savvy. By putting on their political glasses and learning the telltale signs of truly powerful people they will see their customer organizations in a completely different light.

## 6. “...*be responsive*” Versus “...*respond according to potential return.*”

In the Traditional Sales Mindset the customer is always right. Some salespeople even see themselves as the “customer’s advocate” inside the selling company.

Turns out there’s a vice hidden inside this virtue. Most salespeople would say that they want to commit their time and other resources in a way that reflects the potential payback of the opportunity. In short, they want to protect their company’s resources. That’s the virtue. But because they also want to appear responsive to customers and prospective customers they’re not comfortable *communicating* this desire to those same prospects and customers. That’s the “vice”—and it’s a costly one!

Unfortunately, this responsiveness mentality (and by the way, we’re obviously not talking here about the day-to-day obligations of replying to emails and returning phone calls promptly) results in salespeople unwittingly chasing—and otherwise over-committing resources to—bad opportunities.

The bottom line is that both Traditionally minded salespeople and Business Resource salespeople want to commit resources according to potential return. The big difference—and it is a *big* difference—is Business Resource salespeople are comfortable revealing that commitment to customers (in the right words, of course).

Sales is not service! “The customer is always right” might be a good customer service slogan, but it’s a misplaced notion in sales.

Finally, while the first dimension of the Business Resource Mindset, Seek Mode, may be the most counterintuitive dimension, it’s not the hardest to actually achieve in the trenches. By contrast, this last dimension is *not* counterintuitive, but is usually the hardest to actually execute.