

The Power of a Process for Increasing Sales

How to Save Time, Replicate
Your Success and Improve Your Odds
of Closing Every Deal

By Larry Lewis



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What would you think of a surgeon who told you, after he had just performed surgery on you, that he didn't have a process or system for the operation; that he just improvised? How would you feel? Would you be a little nervous? I sure would be. The first thing I would do is check to see if he fixed the right organ, joint or limb. Then I would probably lie awake at night wondering if there were going to be complications. If I ever needed additional surgery, you can be certain that I would find another surgeon.

Wouldn't you feel that way about any professional? After all, accountants have systems for completing tax returns. Lawyers have systems for creating contracts and documenting business deals. Financial planners have systems for developing investment strategies and financial plans. I wouldn't be comfortable using the services of any professional who doesn't use some kind of system in his professional work.

Systems not only save time for the busy professional, they ensure a consistent level of quality for their clients. If respected professionals have a system for what they do, why should it be any different for the professional salesperson or for the business owner who is fulfilling the sales role?

You may not think this is a fair analogy. After all, surgeons are involved in matters of life and death. But is anything more important than sales to the health of a small business? Maybe if we took a

more professional approach to selling, more small businesses would survive.

To be successful at selling you need a system – a process that ensures you do the right things in the right way every time you are in front of a prospect. A selling system is an overall strategy and set of techniques designed to ensure that you handle every buyer-seller interaction in the optimum manner.

In my sales training workshops, I often have the participants complete an exercise that illustrates the benefits of using a system. Each participant is given a piece of paper with the numbers 1 through 100 randomly placed in rows across the page. They are then asked to circle the numbers in sequence starting with the number 1. They are given 30 seconds to find and circle as many numbers as they can. On average, most people find and circle about ten.

They are then told the secret for improving their scores. Each is given a new copy with the same set of numbers and asked to fold it into four quadrants. They are shown how the 1 is in the upper left quadrant, the 2 is in the upper right quadrant, the 3 is in the lower left quadrant, and the 4 is in the lower right quadrant. They go back to the upper left quadrant to find the 5, the upper right quadrant to find the 6 and so on. Once again, they are given 30 seconds to find and circle as many of the numbers in sequence as possible. Using this rudimentary system, the participants

are usually able to double or even triple their original scores.

Although the exercise is simplistic, it does a great job of illustrating the benefits of using a system – benefits that are readily transferable to what takes place on a sales call. Here are the top ten benefits of using a system for selling:

1. It saves time.
2. You make fewer mistakes.
3. You can readily recognize and correct the mistakes you do make.
4. You can learn from your mistakes.
5. You can work at avoiding these mistakes.
6. You can replicate the things you do right.
7. You always know where you stand in the process and have a greater ability to correct course if you get off track.
8. It increases your level of competence and confidence.
9. You increase your ability to stay focused and on track during an appointment.
10. It gives you and your colleagues a unified common language with which to share ideas, analyze past sales calls and strategize upcoming appointments.

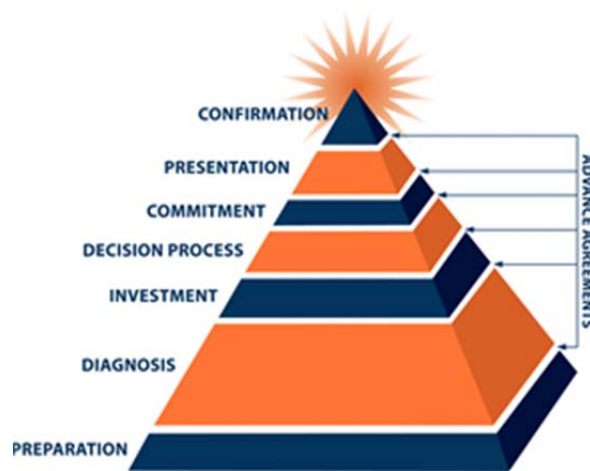
The Client Builder Pyramid

My selling system is comprised of seven steps held together by what I call advance agreements. In building the sales process, I decided to use a pyramid as the model.

Here's why:

1. Pyramids are strong, durable and lasting – just like the client relationships you hope to build.
2. Pyramids are built sequentially, one layer or step at a time – just like my sales process.

3. Each layer of a pyramid is held together by a thin layer of mortar or clay – in selling, the mortar that separates each step in the process and holds a deal together is the advance agreement.



An Overview of the Client Builder Selling Process

Step 1 – Preparation

The preparation step has two levels. At the macro-level the objective of the preparation step is to gather information about your market and the individual prospects within it, so you know who to target and how to engage them in meaningful conversations about problems you can help solve or opportunities you can help capture. Common complaints in the form of third-party stories are what you use to get these conversations started and moving in the right direction. Preparation at the macro-level is something you need to do up front, long before you pick up the phone to begin prospecting.

At the micro-level the preparation step is something you should do before every initial sales call. This is where you learn as much as you can about the person you'll be calling on, their company and the industry they work in. Today, your prospects have neither the time nor the

patience to educate you about these things. With so much information readily available on the Internet, they expect you to come to them fully prepared.

Step 2 – Diagnosis

The objective of the diagnosis step is to determine whether your prospects have “pain” – a compelling, personal reason to change what they have been doing or from whom they have been buying. The diagnosis can take on several different forms depending on what you sell and how aware your prospects are about needing or wanting what you offer. In the diagnosis step you ascertain whether your prospect has a problem you can help solve or an opportunity you can help capture and whether it’s compelling enough for them to take action. As the name of this step implies, like a good doctor, your job is to get at the root of what’s causing your prospects pain so that you can prescribe the right solutions when it’s time to present.

The secret to conducting an effective diagnosis is to listen and ask questions. This requires skill and patience. The right questions cause your prospects to uncover their own pain and move from an intellectual state to an emotional one. For prospects that aren’t even aware they have a problem or an opportunity facing them, the diagnosis step is also the time to teach, not about your products or services, but about what other individuals or companies in their industry are doing to capitalize on new trends and technology. The goal of teaching at this point is to essentially create pain in terms of the widening the gap between where your prospects are today and where they want to be in future.

By the time you reach the end of the diagnosis step you should understand how to turn your prospect’s problems into a plan of action. It is also where your prospects come to believe that you truly understand their goals, aspirations and

challenges. It’s where the lines of communication are established and the relationship is built. It’s also where the sale is typically won or lost.

Step 3 – Investment

The goal of the investment step is to determine whether your prospect is willing and able to invest the resources required to fix the problems or seize the opportunities you uncovered in the diagnosis step. These resources typically involve more than just money. Your prospects may be required to invest time and energy in implementing your solutions or endure the inconvenience of making a change. It may also mean that they’ll have to relinquish the relationships they have with your competition and accept the risk that you might not make their situation any better than it currently is. Before you leave the investment step, you need to be certain that, from your prospect’s point of view, the value they’ll receive is worth the investment they’ll need to make.

Step 4 – Decision Process

Although the questions asked in decision process step are simple, they are often overlooked. Consequently, salespeople frequently find themselves presenting to people who do not have the authority to make a final decision. There are five fundamental questions that need to be answered in this step:

1. **Who** will make the decision?
2. **How** will they go about making the decision?
3. **When** are they planning to make the decision?
4. **Why** is that date important?
5. **What** proof will they need in order to make the decision?

The answers to these questions determine what you will need to do next in the process. If you discover there are multiple decision makers, you need to make arrangements to meet them so that you can diagnose the pain and discuss the required investment from their perspective. If the person you are talking to is the only decision maker, you want to establish the commitment and finalize what they will need to see or hear from you in order to make a final decision.

This step is also the point in the sales process when prospects tell salespeople the second most common lie – “I make the decisions here.” (The most common lie is “Your price is too high!”) Therefore, it is especially important in the decision process step to double-check your prospect’s answers to your questions.

Step 5 – Commitment

Salespeople typically invest lots of time and energy in the preparation of proposals and presentations. After investing all this effort, there is nothing more frustrating than a prospect who cannot or will not make a final decision. Therefore, before you invest the time and effort to develop a proposal or prepare a presentation, you want be certain that your prospect is committed – committed to solving the problems you helped them uncover in the diagnosis step, committed to investing the time, money and effort needed to gain your solution, and committed to making a decision in the manner and timeframe you discussed with them in the decision process step. If they are not committed, you don’t want to spend any more of your time, money or effort pursuing them until they are.

If you present your solutions without this commitment, you are at serious risk of becoming what I call an “unpaid consultant” in which you do a lot of work for nothing. You also run the risk of losing your leverage, which thrusts you into pursuit mode. Before you prepare a proposal, you

want to make sure that every aspect of your prospect’s pain, the required investment, and their decision process has been thoroughly discussed and that both you and your prospect are in agreement about what will happen once you present your proposal.

Another name for this commitment is what I call the “preposal.” In big ticket, long-cycle selling situations where a written proposal is required, the “preposal” should also be in writing. In smaller ticket, shorter-cycle selling situations, the “preposal” can be delivered verbally. Regardless of the form it’s in, the objective of the commitment step is always the same: to co-build a plan to which both parties are comfortable and committed that defines exactly how to bring the sales process to closure in a mutually agreed-upon timeframe.

Closing a sale is not about wrestling your prospect to the mat at the end of a long selling cycle. It’s about developing a strong agreement in advance of the proposal that a decision will be made in accordance with a specific plan. The commitment or “preposal” lays out that plan.

Step 6 – Presentation

Your objective in the presentation step is to bring the deal to outcome. The presentation step is often the shortest step in the entire process. The decision to buy is usually made long before you even get to this step, and sometimes a formal proposal isn’t even necessary.

Your presentation should only include solutions to the pain or opportunity you uncovered in your diagnosis, at a price consistent with what your prospect is willing to invest, and it should only be presented to the people who have the authority to make the final decision. Done properly, the proposal itself should be nothing more than a summary of what you and your prospect agreed to in the commitment step.

Don't rush to get to the presentation step. Spend the bulk of your time qualifying your prospects in the diagnosis, investment and decision process steps. As I've said before, the sale is usually won or lost in the diagnosis, not in the presentation.

Step 7 - Confirmation

There is nothing worse than closing a deal only to have the competition take it back or to have some hidden concern prevent your new customer from taking action. After making a buying decision, everybody experiences buyer's remorse to some degree. This can be exacerbated by your competition, who will do whatever it takes to win back the business, or somebody else in your prospect's organization, who is impacted by the decision to change, prefers the status quo, and consequently attempts to sabotage the organization's decision to buy from you.

The goal of the confirmation step is to strengthen your new agreement and eliminate buyer's remorse by giving your prospect the opportunity to back out while you are still with them. If you are going to lose the sale, the time to discover this is now. Raise an issue that could potentially kill the deal, and rehearse your new customer on how they will handle it when talking to your competition or other naysayers within their organization.

The confirmation step is also the time to set expectations for how you plan to work together. Discuss what could go wrong and how you will handle it if it does. At the very least, establish an agreement in advance as to how often you should meet to discuss the work you are doing or the effectiveness of the products they are buying so that you can ensure that you're meeting your new customer's expectations.

Advance Agreements – The Mortar that Holds the Process Together

An advance agreement is a specific understanding between you and your prospect as to what will take place at each step in the sales process. The purpose of advance agreements is to manage expectations.

When you fail to manage your prospect's expectations, both of you are likely to feel pressure. Pressure is caused by surprise – surprise that comes from your prospect doing something you didn't expect or from you doing something your prospect didn't expect. The way to eliminate surprise is to set clear expectations of what will happen in advance.

It is easier than you think. When you open a sales call, you should begin by establishing an agreement with your prospect as to: (1) the amount of **time** you are planning to spend together; (2) what you hope to accomplish during that time together (in other words, the **agenda**); and (3) the **acceptable outcomes** for that meeting. Similarly, at the end of every sales call, you should proactively set the expectations for your next interaction. Once again, this advance agreement should establish the (1) timeframe, (2) agenda and (3) the acceptable outcomes for your next call.

The advance agreement is the framework that keeps the selling process on track and makes closing easy. If your prospects know in advance that they will be expected to make a "yes" or "no" decision at the conclusion of your final meeting, all you have to do is ask for it. It eliminates the need for any tricky or manipulative closes.

Three Simple Rules for Following a Selling Process

As you dive deeper into the different steps that make up the Client Builder Selling process, you'll probably discover that some of the things you should be doing are things you already do. That's not unusual. However, pay close attention to when you typically do these things. The most important aspect of using my system is the sequence in which you do them. There are three simple rules for following the Client Builder Selling process:

1. Never skip a step to get to any other step.
2. Make sure you and your prospect are in the same step at the same time.
3. Don't leave a step until you are certain you have completed that step.

Selling is the act of qualifying or disqualifying a prospect. If you do it in the wrong sequence you waste a lot of time and put yourself in a disadvantageous position. You cut short the information gathering process that will give you the best chance of making the sale. You risk creating a proposal or making a presentation that misses the mark. You give a prospect the opportunity to shop your proposal with your competitors. You end up in the role of an "unpaid consultant" solving your prospect's problems for free.

The fundamental concept behind the Client Builder Selling process is that you should only present your solutions in the context of how they will solve your prospect's problems or expand their opportunities, within the investment parameters the prospect has shared with you, in the way your prospect has requested them. This should only occur once the prospect has committed to making a final decision within a mutually agreed-upon timeframe. Without a linked sequential process, you simply can't do this.

Should You Stay or Should You Go?

If selling systems had theme songs, mine would be "Should I Stay or Should I Go" from the English punk rock band The Clash. When using the Client Builder Selling process, not only should you be asking questions of your prospects, you should also be asking yourself certain questions. The answers will determine whether you should continue to pursue an opportunity or whether you should close the file and move on to someone else. These are the questions you want to ask yourself at the conclusion of each step.

Preparation: Is this prospect worth approaching? Does it fit my target client profile? Do I know enough about the individual I will be talking with to engage them in a meaningful conversation about the problems I can help solve?

Advance Agreements: Have my prospect and I agreed in advance on what each of us will do and what will happen once we have delivered on our respective promises?

Diagnosis: Are there problems or opportunities that are compelling enough for my prospect to change what they have been doing and possibly buy from me? Do I have a solution for their pain?

Investment: Are the problems or opportunities I've uncovered compelling enough for the prospect to invest the resources required to make the changes I will be suggesting? Does the prospect have these resources?

Decision Process: Do I know what proof the prospect needs from me, and who needs to see this proof, in order to make a final decision? Will I be given access to the person who has the authority to make a final decision? Do I know when they plan to make a final decision and why this timeframe is important?

Commitment: If I deliver the proof my prospect has requested, will they make a final decision on whether to buy what I am suggesting? Do I have the proof the prospect wants to see from me in order to make that decision?

Presentation: At this point in the process, you will be conducting a demonstration, making a presentation or delivering a proposal, with the expectation that your prospect will make a final decision. The only question you should be asking yourself at the end of this step is “Did I get a final decision?”

Confirmation: Is the sale secure? Have I rehearsed my new customer on how to handle questions from superiors or challenges from competitors that might tempt them to cancel our new deal?

If you cannot answer each of these questions in the affirmative, as you and your prospect make your way through the selling process, the prospect is disqualified; at least for the time being. In order to get the sale back on track, go back to the prior step and uncover the information needed to answer these questions. If you can't obtain this information, the sales process is over for now. You are free to allocate your time to someone who is better qualified and more likely to buy.

The Skill of Listening

No overview of a sales process would be complete without at least mentioning questioning skills and the skill of listening. Questions are the building blocks of our sales process.

Salespeople talk far too much. To be truly effective on a sales call, you should speak only 30 percent of the time. This means that the vast majority of your time should be spent listening. If you want to succeed at selling, you must develop your listening skills.

The ability to listen effectively creates an atmosphere where real trust can flourish. Listening enables your prospects to feel safe enough to reveal their problems and the emotional impact of these problems. Consequently, when it's time for you to present your solutions, your prospects are more receptive and better able to develop the conviction necessary to make a final decision. The chapter on “Enhanced Communication” provides a model for how to listen more effectively.

The Power of a Process

Businesses typically have processes for running almost every aspect of their operation. They operate according to processes in order to save time, reduce mistakes and maximize effectiveness. The sales department shouldn't be any different. Without a process, you are at your prospect's mercy, with no clue as to why your prospect will or won't buy what you have to offer. However, there is another reason why implementing a sales process is more important than ever before. Your sales process helps differentiate you from your competition.

Today it is becoming more and more difficult to differentiate yourself solely on the basis of what you sell. All products and services, from the day of their inception, inevitably slide toward a commodity status, from high price/high profit to low price/low profit. Virtually nothing can be done in a supply and demand economy to stop this slide from happening. Unfortunately, with the advent of the Web and the speed of innovation, this slide toward commodity status occurs faster than ever before.

One of the natural consequences of a commodity market is that it places tremendous power in the hands of the buyer. As price becomes the focus of a sales transaction, consumers are positioned to negotiate lower and lower prices by shopping around and pitting one seller against the other. In

this kind of marketplace, a “features and benefits” approach to selling is no longer effective because the features and benefits of competing products and services all sound the same.

Most companies (other than Wal-Mart) cannot survive as the low-cost provider, so they seek to differentiate themselves from their competition through the service they provide to their customers. However, in time, even the service offered by a company becomes subject to the same commoditization process that products do.

Today, it is a company’s business processes that often differentiate it from its competition. In other words, it’s not **what** they do, but **how** they do it that matters most to customers. These business processes can range from the way a company brings a new customer on board to the way it bills its customers. It also includes a company’s sales process.

In 2011, the Corporate Executive Board (“CEB”) announced a startling discovery on what drives customer loyalty. The CEB surveyed more than 5,000 business owners and corporate executives on the issue of why they choose one supplier over another. Surprisingly, 53% of customer loyalty was attributable to the sales experience itself. Only 38 percent of customer loyalty was attributable to a company’s ability to outperform its competition in terms of its products and services or its brand. Pricing was the least important factor at nine percent.

In other words, the CEB determined that, more than half the time, customer loyalty is based not on **what** a company sells, but **how** it sells. The same is true for you. How you sell is more important than what you sell. The Client Builder Selling process will help you differentiate yourself from your competition in a very meaningful way.

About Client Builder Selling

For a more in depth look at the Client Builder Selling process we strongly recommend that you purchase the book titled [Client Builder Selling](#) by Larry Lewis. You can find it on Amazon.com or through our e-store located at: <https://www.createspace.com/3759929>.

About Larry Lewis and Client Builder Sales & Marketing

Larry Lewis is the founder and president of Client Builder Sales & Marketing LLC, a sales development firm that helps companies and professional service firms achieve “EPIC” improvement in sales performance.

Larry’s practical, street-smart approach to prospecting and selling has helped hundreds of sales executives, small business owners, and independent professionals increase their sales and profits with more control, greater confidence and less effort.



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