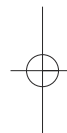




ProActive Selling

**Control the Process—
Win the Sale**

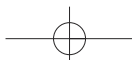
William “Skip” Miller



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Preface

Selling. What a profession. Why do so many people love selling so much, whereas others hate even the *thought* of selling something? What is it about the topic of selling that causes so many mixed emotions? Better yet, why are some people so good at it, and others are always trying to get it right?

They say successful salespeople can sell anything. They are right.

They say successful salespeople are born, not made. They are wrong.

Successful salespeople have five things in common:

1. They think like a customer
2. They are proactive and always think one step ahead, and therefore they pull to control the buy/sell process.
3. They have a natural curiosity. They ask. Great salespeople do not have great answers . . . they have great questions.
4. They qualify from a buyer's perspective early and often. Yes's are great, no's are great . . . maybes will kill you.
5. They use the right tool at the right time at the point of attack: the sales call.

In the years we have been doing sales and sales management training, we have observed over and over again qualities

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in sales professionals and the sales tools they use during a sales call that consistently set them apart from the rest of the pack. *ProActive Selling* clearly identifies the tools that successful salespeople use on a daily basis and provides them for salespeople to use so they can add value in the way they are currently selling. *ProActive Selling* is not another “sales process” book, nor is it about “strategizing a sale.” There are too many books out there that define a “new way of selling” or a “new” sales methodology. A salesperson will likely get better results using his or her current, “ineffective” way than by using these books.

Believe it or not, *there is no one right way to sell*. There are many different approaches you can take to selling, and they are each very successful in their own right.

However, what is needed today is to improve the way we are selling on each and every sales call. Salespeople need to improve their sales skills and increase the number of tools they use. *ProActive Selling* provides more sales tools for the salesperson’s toolbox so that at the point of attack (i.e., the sales call), a salesperson can feel he or she is fully armed, not just carrying a couple of bullets.

ProActive Selling describes what is going on in the buyer’s mind and how salespeople can use this information proactively. It shows salespeople how to use the right tool at the right time so they can sell more effectively in each and every sales call.

How Salespeople Sell the Right and the Wrong Way

There is a motto for ProActive salespeople, and it is: Tactics before strategies within a process. It’s that simple. Successful salespeople sell in a process. Within that process they should use tactics and then combine them with a sales strategy, rather than strategize an account and then implement tactics. It’s important to put the pieces of the process in the right order, tactics before strategies, to be ProActive. Otherwise, the customer controls the sale, and the salesperson is forced into a reactive posture. Putting strategies first makes salespeople reactive. Because their tactics

are poor, they are getting poor information in the development of their strategies. Putting tactics first allows the salesperson to gather quality information during a sales call so the strategy part of the sale has complete and competent information.

The number one reason salespeople lose an account is that they are out of control of the sales process. Period. That's worth saying again. The number one reason a sale is lost is because the salesperson is not in control of the buy/sell process. Salespeople will always claim the reason they won a deal is because they were *so smart*, and that the reason they lost a deal could be one of a host of other reasons, none which are in the salesperson's control, of course.

What these salespeople don't realize is that control of the buy/sell cycle is the number one factor in determining whether a sale will be won or lost, even above best fit of product or solution. In addition, this control is totally the responsibility of the salesperson. Salespeople must learn the tactics of how to control a sales process to increase their chances for success.

In discussions we have had with senior sales management, we found they all want the same things.

1. Shorter sales cycles: Shorten the sales process so more transactions can be made per salesperson.
2. Better forecasts: Better quality and quantity of deals in the pipeline—the ideal is 90 percent-plus accuracy in the 90-day forecast, rather than the 50 to 60 percent accuracy they deal with today.
3. Elimination of “maybe” or bad deals early in the cycle.
4. Control of the sale throughout the sales process, so value can be sold instead of price.
5. Lower cost of sales while increasing the average selling price (ASP) per order.
6. Implement a sales communication process into the sales organization and the rest of the company.
7. Constantly increase the competencies in the sales team to take the A players to A-plus status.

Sales managers wrestle with these strategic issues day in and day out, and must understand how easily they can be dealt

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with if they focus on the right things. Sales managers can have a major impact in all of the above issues if they focus on the tactics of selling and follow the rule of putting tactics before strategies; it's that straightforward. For the most part, salespeople are instructed by their managers to strategize objectively and sell to their accounts, so that the sales manager can obtain his or her own strategic objectives. It is the salesperson's job to develop and set account strategies and to deliver on them so the manager meets his or her overall objectives.

After a while, when sales are not going well, the sales manager panics a little and spends hours with a salesperson behind the scenes dabbling in account strategies that have been developed. He or she will "assist" on issues such as whom to call on, where in the organization the salesperson should call on next, and so on. He or she is "helping" to develop and refine the salesperson's account strategy of all the next strategic moves that are needed to "make the sale."

This is all good, but where are the tactics to go along with it? It's nice to work out the strategy before you get face to face with the customer, but once you are with them, what do you do? What do you say? What do you say first, second, and third? How do you end the call and stay in control? What tools do you use at the point of attack? How do make sure you control the sales call effectively, at each tactical step?

You use tactics before strategies, within a process.

ProActive Selling has 20 tools for the salesperson to use during the sales call and maintain control of the process. These tools are also the tools the sales manager can use to make sure the salesperson is really in control of the sale, at the point of attack, the sales call.

You can combine the tactics and tools of *ProActive Selling* with any of the strategic sales methodologies you like to round out your selling experience. If you have only a strategic piece of the sales puzzle, and then try to figure out the tactics to go along with it, you will falter at the point of attack. If you are armed with tactics and the buy/sell process along with your own sales strategy, you will increase your chance of success, dramatically.

The Two-Dimensional Process of Selling

Most salespeople do not have a sales process. They think they do, but try to have them describe it for you. Most salespeople can't. Without a defined sales process, salespeople can react only passively to customers. Such reactive salespeople base their approach on:

- Customer selling: The customer leads the sales process and the salesperson follows.
- Experience selling: This is the process of hoping that past experience will lead to future success.
- Catch-up selling: The competition directs the sale and then you have to play catch up all the time.
- Bad sales manager selling: The sales manager enforces the "do it like I did" methodology.
- Situational selling: The sales person is "winging it and praying" on every call.

There is a process of selling that is more successful than most so-called selling processes. It is two-dimensional; it not only has the selling process covered, but also addresses the buying process. As you will find out in Chapter 1, there is a process in how people buy. Salespeople are drilled on controlling the sales cycle, but without the added dimension of understanding the buying cycle and matching the salesperson's selling process to the buyer's buying process, they will not be in control of the overall sales process.

Traditional Tactics Are Not Enough

Salespeople are given sales tactics early on in their careers. These tactics may have included open probes/close probes, elevator speeches, and closing techniques. These are all good skills, but they are much too elementary for today's sales environment and are one-dimensional. They cannot be combined and leveraged with other skills throughout the life of a sale. Most, if not

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all, sales efforts today put strategies before tactics. Develop the strategic side of the sale, regardless of what the buyer wants to do, and then push the customer through a one-dimensional sales process. The heck with what the buyer wants to do; push that sales process. This can be a successful approach, but it is very reactionary and is missing the two-dimensional part of selling. It forgets about what the customer wants to do. You can argue that all the homework (strategy) a salesperson does is selling-centric. It focuses on how a salesperson plans for a sales process, regardless of the selling tactics required to accomplish the strategy and align with a buyer/seller sales cycle.

Putting tactics before strategies within a process implies that the salesperson is thinking what is needed for the next step in the *buyer/seller* relationship, and then fitting the tactics into a *buyer's* strategy, which after all is what the buyer is following. What tactics are needed to keep control of the sale and convince the buyer that he or she should follow the salesperson in an atmosphere of mutual discovery, which of course salespeople need to lead? This buying-centric nature of selling, this nonreactionary sales approach, and this buyer-first approach is the core of *ProActive Selling*, since it is all about buy/sell tactics that fit into a process.

Finally, *ProActive Selling* works even better the higher up you go in a buying organization. We all know the “trick” of calling high in a customer’s organization.

Calling high is not the trick. Anyone can do that.

The trick is when you are there, what do you say?

What do you say to have the senior level executive (CEO, CIO, CFO, COO, etc.) treat the salesperson as a value-add asset and to have the executive stay engaged? How can you avoid the C-level executive sending you down into the bowels of the organization from which it is nearly impossible to get back up?

ProActive Selling addresses not only what salespeople have to say at the CXO (Chief X-fill in the blank Officer) level, but gets them comfortable in calling high and staying high, as well as being a value-add to the senior level executive. *ProActive Selling*

is so good at the CXO level that salespeople typically find the senior executives of the account calling them and asking the salesperson what they should do next.

Tactics before strategies in a two-dimensional selling model is what *ProActive Selling* is all about. It is what makes successful salespeople great. It is their attitude of:

- Focusing on how people buy, not how they should sell.
- Focusing on the buy/sell process, not just the sales process.
- Looking at the sale as a series of buyer-related steps
- Qualifying early in the process and then deciding if the salesperson wants to spend time with an account, rather than hoping the buyer wants to spend time with them.
- Taking control and having the buyer follow the salesperson's lead.
- Closing at the beginning of the process, not at the end. There is no such thing as a great closer, or "great closing skills."
- Having the right tools at the right time for the right call.

By successfully reading and implementing the tactics and processes in *ProActive Selling*, salespeople will be able to:

- Accomplish more in less time.
- Be proactive and anticipate the next sales step.
- Motivate themselves to call successfully at all levels in the organization.
- Control the sales process. The salesperson who controls the sales process . . . wins.
- Get rid of maybes in their sales funnel.
- Learn where to hunt and use their time most effectively.
- Plan and utilize homework on the sales call.
- Lower the overall cost of sales.
- Increase the average selling price per order.
- Create a powerful sales introduction on every sales call.
- End every sales call and stay in complete control of the sale.
- Understand the buyer's motivational direction.

- Master the seven qualification questions to call on the right accounts all the time.
- Speak the right language to the right level of buyer.
- Change a maybe to a decision easily and effectively.

On a final note, we use the term *prospect* in this book rather freely. When we say prospect, we mean an individual or a group of individuals who are chartered to make a purchase decision. It could be anyone from an individual buying a new computer to a major corporation working through a committee to make a decision on a new infrastructure automation system. There are many differences at the strategic level between these examples, but the buy process and the tools a salesperson uses during the sales call are easily transferable.

For the most part, selling is selling, so *ProActive Selling* works if you are selling a product, service, or tangible or intangible item. It works when selling over the phone, over the Internet, face to face, or through channels. The examples in the book are simple and easy, but it should not be misconstrued that *ProActive Selling* is effective only for simple sales situations. The *strategies* of a sale can and do change based on what you are selling, usually based on the size of the order and length of the sale cycle. The tactics and process of a sale rarely change, regardless of the sale size or length of a sale, since it all involves sales calls, which is what *ProActive Selling* is here to make you better at. Good luck, and learn how to better your sales skills. . . . ProActively.

Acknowledgments

To the customers of M3 Learning and users of ProActive Selling—thanks for believing and using ProActive Selling. You constantly tell us how well it works.

To my friends and family—thanks for your valued insight and opinions. ProActive Selling would not be around without you.

To my mom and dad—you did it right.