

Value-focused Selling

A fresh approach that puts your customer's value creation first

By Michael Leimbach, PhD, and David Yesford, Wilson Learning



How do you sell effectively, when so much in our world has changed?

When customers are well-informed and now expect far more than a run-through of features. How do you stand out from the crowd?

Needs-based selling alone no longer cuts it. Demand has shifted. Today's customers want sellers to align with them and actively support 'their' value creation. This requires a shift in focus, a deep and shared understanding of how your customer builds and delivers value to their customers.

At Wilson Learning, we call this approach **Selling to Value**.

Selling to Value moves sellers beyond 'problem' solving to a more impactful level, allowing them to become trusted partners. In this eBook, we reveal the must-have mindset, knowledge and skills that sellers need to effectively Sell to Value – plus the practical steps you can take to do it successfully.

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How a Sale Was Lost

Selling to Value (S2V) =

an approach to selling focused on aligning your offering to the business value it creates for the customer

Ann was not happy as she left the meeting with a long-term customer—now a former customer.

“Ann, we have done business together for a long time,” her customer started, “but we have decided to go in a different direction this time.” Her customer went on to say how ABC Company, one of Ann’s biggest competitors, worked with them to integrate ABC Company’s solution into their own systems, resulting in faster inventory turns with fewer shipping errors. And they were able to demonstrate how this will increase margins and profit for the company.

ABC Company’s salesperson sold value.

The Selling to Value approach requires the salesperson to develop an ever-expanding mindset and skill set—and it requires a commitment to a purpose that goes beyond self-interest to include both the interests of the individual customer and the interests of that customer’s organisation.

Focus on Discovery

Selling to Value (S2V) needs to be considered in all aspects of the sales process: prospecting, qualifying, contacting, discovering, proposing, and closing a sales opportunity. But S2V has the greatest impact on how a salesperson discovers needs. Discovering needs is at the very heart of the Selling to Value relationship. When done correctly, it has a profound effect on customers' understanding of their business and where they can generate growth.



Traditional Discovery

On the surface, there is nothing wrong with traditional needs-based discovery; millions of salespeople use it successfully every day. Unfortunately, since almost every salesperson follows this process, your product gets compared to competitors' products, feature by feature. This makes it extremely difficult for the customer to distinguish amongst competing solutions. While a traditional discovery process is necessary, it is not sufficient.

Traditional needs discovery ignores additional sources of value that can be brought into consideration. At its core, S2V is a thorough consideration of how the customer's organisation creates value for its customers.

Differentiation Through Discovery

Traditional Discovery

- Gather info on needs
- Ask fact questions
- Match product features to needs

Outcome

- Address a need

Selling to Value Discovery

- Gather info on value-creation activities
- Ask fact- and feeling-finding questions
- Match product capabilities to value-creation actions

Outcome

- Create new value
-



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94% of buying executives indicate that they want salespeople to engage them in a business impact discussion—but those same executives indicate that only 25% of salespeople are effective in this regard.”*

* Hinge Research Institute. 2020. *Inside the Buyer's Brain*.
Rochelle, M. 2011. *Essential Selling Competencies: The Buyer's Side Perspective*. Brandon Hall Group.

Discovery for Selling to Value

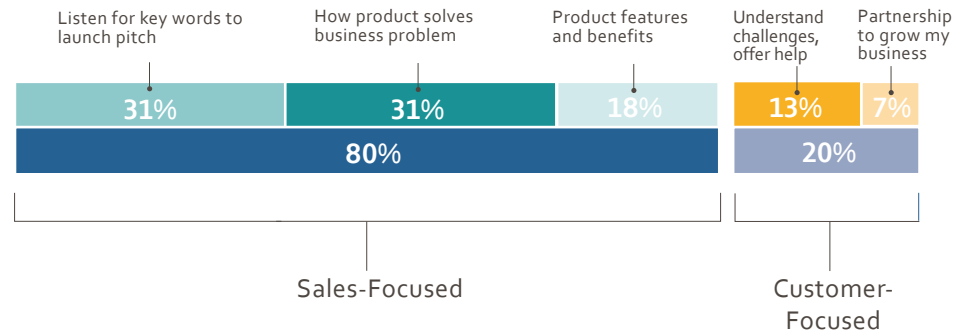
The Problem

In a recent study of buying executives, 94% indicated that they want salespeople to engage them in a business impact discussion—but those same executives indicated that only 25% of salespeople are effective in this regard.*

Competing Value Agendas

The problem is that customers and salespeople often have different agendas for a call. Customers observe that 80% of salespeople focus on value for the seller and only 20% of salespeople focus on value for the customer.

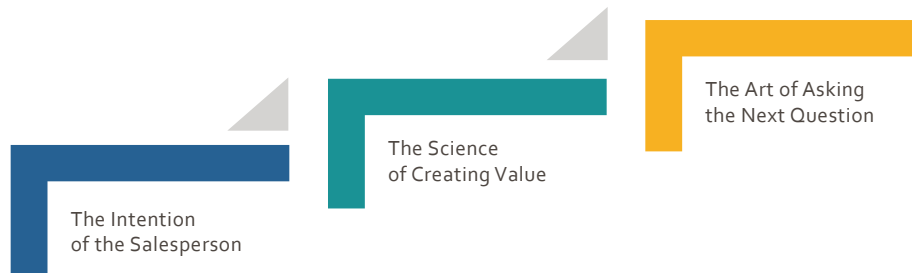
Customer Perception of Salesperson's Agenda



Source: Global Executive Buyer Insight Online Survey

This gap between what buying executives want and what they get is driven by three critical elements: *the intention of the salesperson, the science of creating value, and the art of asking the next question.*

Keys to S2V Discovery

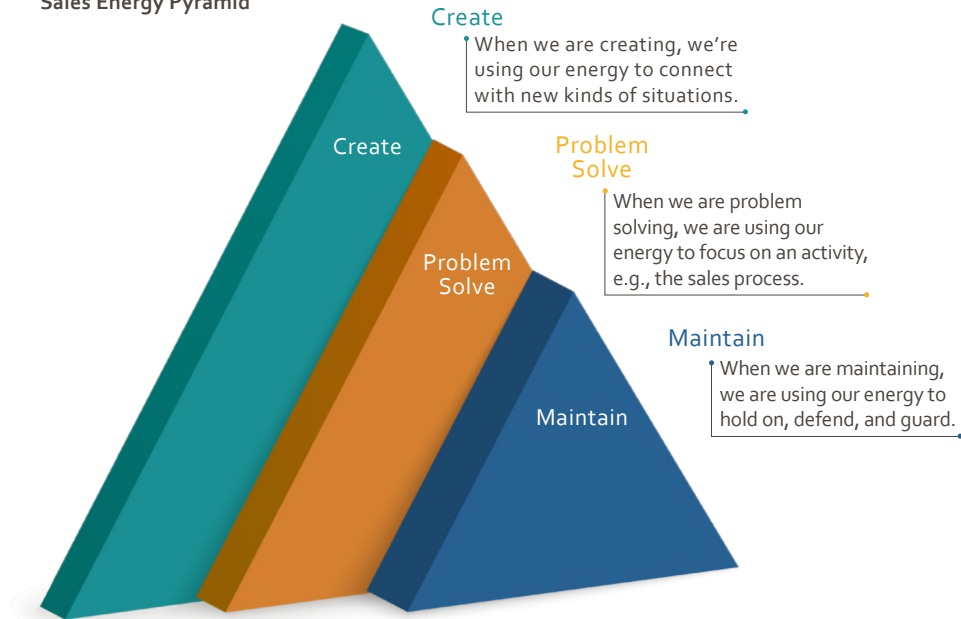


The Intention of the Salesperson

When salespeople first start out, their energy is focused on Maintain—earning a commission, guarding against competitors, and making it to the next quarter. As they mature into traditional selling roles, their focus shifts to Problem Solve—selling to the customer's needs. S2V requires a different intent, the intent to Create—advancing the customer's business and creating value. S2V requires salespeople to expand their role beyond just finding and solving problems to truly wanting to see their customer's business flourish and grow.

Salespeople, by their own report, experience different levels of energy associated with their sales activities.

Sales Energy Pyramid



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When salespeople are focused on making the sale and achieving their quota, or just surviving in a COVID-accelerated world, their energy is internally focused and fixed on self-protection. However, when focused on advancing the customer's business, they report that they feel more focused and fully engaged in the moment. They are free of fear and second-guessing.

Exploring enriching ways to advance the customer's business performance, in partnership with the customer, creates new energy for creativity and innovation.





Are You in the Create Mindset?

- **Relaxed**
Free-flowing energy, not conflicting with anything else
- **Present**
Fully aware of the immediate surroundings and the here-and-now moment
- **Focused**
Engaged, involved, and attentive to detail
- **Secure**
Self-accepting—absence of fear, insecurity, seeing your personal worth as being at stake or on the line, feeling compelled to prove something

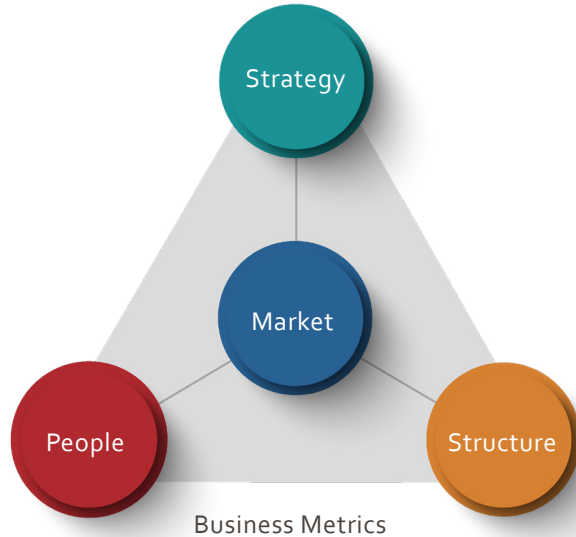
The background is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this background is a network of white circles of various sizes, connected by thin white lines. The circles are distributed across the entire frame, creating a sense of interconnectedness or a molecular structure.

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The value produced by the customer organisation is always best understood from the perspective of the market, its customers, and its competitors.”

The Science of Value Creation

Business Needs Identification



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With this clear “Create” mindset, advancing the customer’s business requires salespeople to:

- Move beyond solving problems toward exploring how to advance the customer’s business
- Expand the conversation to include the value-creation activities of the business

The value-creation activities are defined by what we call the Business Needs Identification approach. This approach provides an organizing structure that guides the exploration of how the customer organization creates value. There are five major elements.

1 | Marketing

Conversations with customers begin by exploring the market in which the customer organization competes. The value produced by the customer organization is always best understood from the perspective of the market, its customers, and its competitors.

S2V involves exploring market trends and helping the customer organization exploit opportunities that arise from a growing market or minimize the effects of a contracting market.

Questions to Ask the Customer

- How do you compete in the market?
- How established is your brand identity?
- What are your goals?

2 | Strategy

The conversation about market forces flows naturally into an exploration of how the customer organization's strategy addresses their market and produces a competitive advantage. Questions about their source of competitive advantage and their Critical Success Factors (CSFs) dominate S2V discussions to determine their long-term goals and resource allocation.

Questions to Ask the Customer

- o What are the major obstacles to achieving your strategy?
- o How well does your initiative align with the company's objectives?
- o What are your CSFs for this initiative?

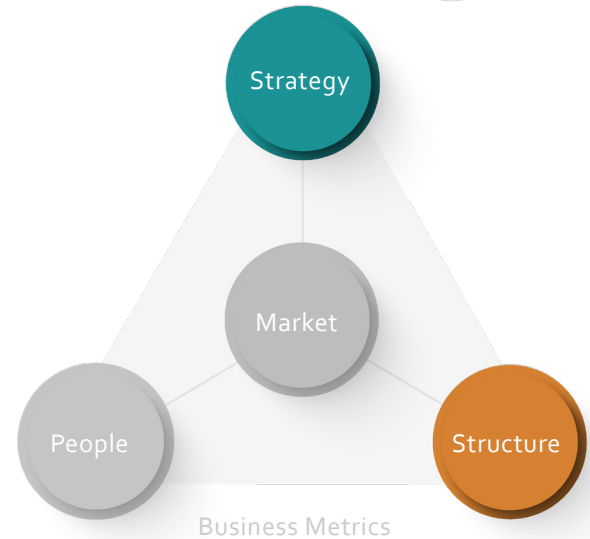
3 | Structure

The customer organization's strategy cannot be implemented unless the organization's structure is aligned to execute that strategy. With a solid picture of market conditions and current strategy in place, the conversation easily flows into a discussion of the customer organization's ability to execute the strategy.

Questions to Ask the Customer

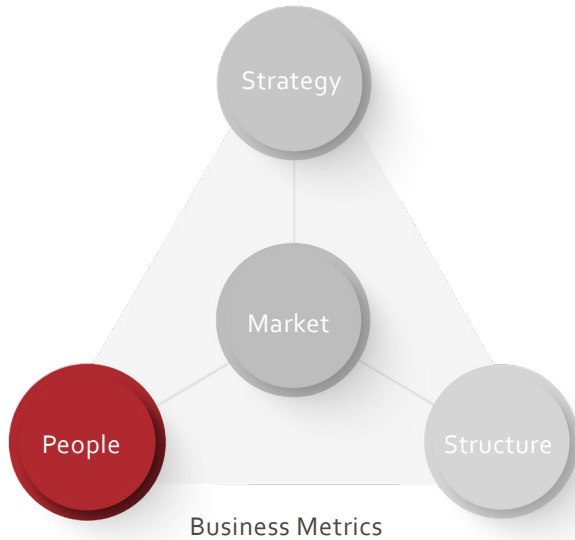
- o What other departments are affected by this initiative?
- o Do you have the necessary resources to carry out your plans?
- o Who else can give you insight?

Business Needs Identification



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Business Needs Identification



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4 | People

There is a reason payroll is the single largest business expense: people drive the business forward. Efforts to implement a new strategy require the engagement, not just cooperation, of the people in the organization.

Questions to Ask the Customer

- Do you have access to the needed skills/talents?
- Are people aligned on the value/importance of the initiative?
- How will this affect engagement?

5 | Business Metrics

Underlying all the other components are the customer's business metrics. Knowing what metrics are most important for the customer organization helps you understand how they measure and track their own value production and how they will track the performance of your solution. S2V requires salespeople to become fluent in the way customers talk about and measure their own success.

Questions to Ask the Customer

- How does the organization measure success of the strategy?
- How will you assess the success of the initiative?



The Art of Asking the Next Question

A new salesperson recently lamented: "I don't know what happened. I went on a joint call with Sam (company's top salesperson) and wrote down every question he asked. But when I tried using them, it didn't work; the client ended the meeting early."

Sam understood the art of the next question; the new salesperson didn't.

The S2V discovery is much more than a list of questions. It is, first of all, a demonstration of the salesperson's intense and compassionate curiosity about the customer and the ability to let *customers* lead the discovery process, not the salesperson.

Business professionals love to talk about their work. They are excited to participate in a conversation about the issues that keep them up at night. They can become deeply engaged when they feel they are learning something new or are exploring new possibilities for producing more value for their customers.

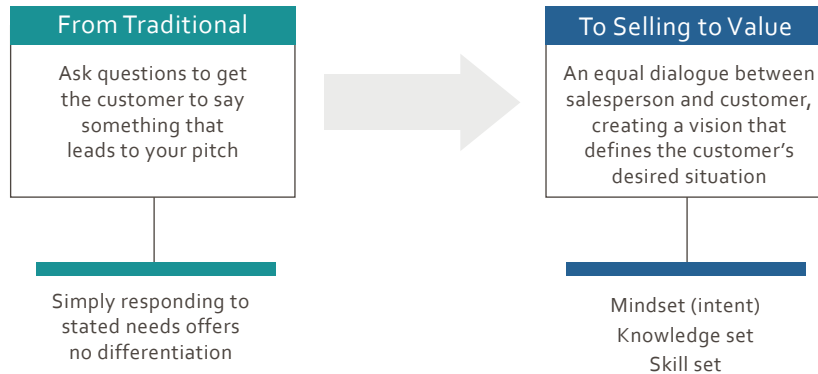
When a salesperson, in conversation with a customer, offers his or her full experience and expertise in service to the customer's organization, and allows the discovery process to dig deeply into the concerns of the customer, something special happens. Important information is shared, cooperation and trust strengthen, and new possibilities are created and explored.



Customers are looking for something more
than an explanation of features; they are
looking for a new perspective on how best
to move their business forward.

Practicing the Art and Science of Discovery

Advancing Value Discovery



In the past, there was a world in which the customer had limited access to product information, and a simple needs-based approach to selling worked fine for both the salesperson and the customer. Today, the customer has already shopped extensively before agreeing to meet with a salesperson. Customers are looking for something more than an explanation of features; they are looking for insight and a new perspective on market trends and competitive positioning to move their business forward.

Sales organizations need to develop an approach to selling that adapts to the way their customers want to make purchasing decisions and, at the same time, delivers value.

Customers increasingly expect selling organizations to use and sell to value.

This move from a problem-centered approach to a business-centered approach may seem easy, but it requires three things:

- A mindset change that places the customer's business ahead of your own
- New knowledge by exploring how the customer's business runs
- New skills to follow the customer's lead to the next question



About Wilson Learning

Our work with thousands of organisations has taught us that every organisation is uniquely shaped by its history, culture, mission, values, lore, leadership, and, ultimately, its people. Every organization has a pulse.

For 55+ years, Wilson Learning has partnered with organizations around the world to consult on, assess, design, develop, deliver, reinforce, and sustain learning solutions, fueled by our passion and vision for "Helping People and Organisations Achieve Performance with Fulfillment."

Our broad-reaching capabilities include:

- Providing learning services that help address human performance needs, including performance consulting, instructional design, customisation, and flexible delivery of learning solutions using every available modality
- Leveraging the wellspring of our Intellectual Property to produce double-digit percentage performance improvement in salesforces, workforces, and leadership ranks
- Employing our global presence to meet your needs for consistent learning solutions around the world, ensuring local and cultural adaptation while working in over 50 countries and 30 languages

For more information, contact us at info@wilsonlearning.co.uk or visit our website at wilsonlearning.com



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