THE SHOE ON THE OTHER FOOT:

Salespeople Must Think Like Buyers

Where a great sales pitch used to work before, today it's a whole different game. A salesperson must learn all about the various actions a buyer takes in making a purchase, and most importantly learn to be rapidly responsive to those actions in ways that are meaningful and motivational.
Tradition

There is a long-term situation in sales of salespeople having a rather one-sided viewpoint: they think only like salespeople. It’s all about the pitch—selling points that they’ve seen work before, and using those to convince that buyer to purchase. To quote the famous play Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller, “The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell.”

Salespeople have been operating this way since the beginning of time. The better salespeople perfected their pitches so they could recite them in their sleep—and sometimes it seemed that they were doing exactly that.

But the salesperson of old, someone like Death of a Salesman’s main character Willy Loman, wouldn’t stand a chance in today’s sales landscape. A further quote from the play: “He’s a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that’s an earthquake. And then you get a couple of spots on your hat, and you’re finished.”

The reason this approach doesn’t work any longer? One vital element in the sales-buyer relationship has radically changed:

The buyer. changed
Informed Buyers

Thanks to the biggest social communication change of the 20th century—that would be the Internet—buyer behavior is quite different than it was 50 years ago.

The reason those pitches from days of old were successful, when they were, was because that salespeople were buyers’ only real source of data about products and services. When a sales rep talked (if they were good) the buyer listened.

The Internet meant a democratization of such information. In addition to being able to research product and service information directly from manufacturers, publishers and providers, there is plenty of third-party data out there, too. There are even web portals dedicated to nothing other than the comparison of products.

Such comparisons are vitally needed today, when offerings per product or service category have increased exponentially over the years. Where before there might have been 5 or so to chose from, today there are 100—and many so similar you can hardly tell the difference.

Today a buyer is learning a considerable amount about a product or service before that first contact with a salesperson.

It’s even been said that the majority of the buying decision is actually made before that first contact. Whether or not that’s true, it is true that a salesperson is confronting a far more educated buyer in that first meeting or phone call than in yesteryear.

That means that a salesperson must have a much better picture of the buyer (referred to in many texts as the “buyer profile”). Buyer patterns have to be researched and known. Issues that a salesperson’s product or service will solve (known commonly as “pain points”) must also be known.
Sales Process

In an effort to bring salespeople up to speed with buyers, most companies have evolved a sales process—that series of steps that take a sale from lead to close. The sales process is a path for the sales rep to follow that hopefully mirrors buyer behavior and makes for a higher closing ratio.

It’s totally true that a sales process is necessary for a sales force to survive in today’s tough, competitive business world.

But a sales process is merely a horizontal series of actions on the part of the salesperson. What is still being missed by many is that the sales process must be equally contingent on buyer actions as well.

Selling Methodologies

There are numerous popular selling methodologies today, such as:

SPIN Selling. SPIN is an acronym for the four types of questions salespeople should ask their clients: Situation, Problem, Implication, and Need-Payoff.
Conception Selling, which is founded on the idea that customers don’t buy a product or a service—they buy their concept of a solution that the offering represents.

SNAP selling, which aims to bring salespeople to the prospect’s level. SNAP is an acronym that encompasses four directives for sellers: keep it Simple, be Invaluable, always Align, and raise Priorities.

Challenger Sale, which asserts that practically every B2B salesperson fits into one of five personas: relationship builders, hard workers, lone wolves, reactive problem solvers, and challengers.

Sandler Sales, which states that both parties—buyer and seller—should be equally invested in the sale.

Solution Selling, which focuses on a customer’s “pain points” and offers solutions, instead of merely selling an existing product.

CustomerCentric Selling, which seeks to transform salespeople from “product pushers” to collaborate consultants.

Consultants are hired to bring in one of these or another such method. Interestingly, each of them seeks to make it possible for a sales rep to monitor, influence and be responsive to buyer actions.

Because it is fully, rapidly and visually customizable, note that Pipeliner CRM will accommodate and empower any of these methods.
Selling System

To emphasize the importance of buyer actions and seller’s activities, we at Pipeliner recently evolved the Pipeliner Selling System. This system, which could be called a common denominator for all successful sales processes, shows that a seller can not simply march through a sales process, but must be acting to cause—and be responsive to—the various buyer actions all down the line.

Pipeliner Selling System

As you can see, when a buyer begins their journey, they are an investigator. They are seeking out possible solutions for an issue or set of issues they are experiencing in their company. The job of a salesperson coming across such a prospect is to focus in on them, and also to focus the buyer’s attention. Hence, as you can also see, the first stage of the Pipeliner Selling System is Focus.
The buyer then follows a natural progression, and each of the Selling System stages directly corresponds:

- Following the investigation stage, the buyer becomes a prospect. At the same time the salesperson enters the next phase of the Selling System, which is Engage.

- When the prospect has successfully been moved through the Engage phase, they become an evaluator. The corresponding phase for the salesperson is Convince. This is where the sale is actually made.

- Following the Convince stage, the buyer then becomes a customer. The salesperson moves into the Close stage of the Selling System, in which a whole new process is applied to the buyer as a customer.

- As the new process is applied to the customer, they are made into an advocate. The phase of the Selling System that applies here is Cooperate, which is exactly what is taking place.

### Truth of a Sale

If you think back to sales you’ve been involved with, you’ll realize that in deals that won, you successfully monitored various buyer actions in coordination with taking actions of your own. In deals which were lost, there had to have been actions you didn’t take, or at the least key indicators you missed.

To the degree that due regard for buyer actions is taken, the sale is succeeding. Unfortunately the reverse is also true.
Think Like a Buyer

For salespeople that have been educated in “the old ways”—and there are plenty still around—it does require a shift of viewpoint. Today the most successful salespeople have learned to “think like a buyer.” In doing so they’re better able know what to expect from the buyer and therefore be prepared for it.

But it’s not just “thinking” in a vacuum that is required. In order to really know how their buyers think and act, they have to get out there and look; talk to some buyers and gain a deep understanding of what they’re generally going through.

This would obviously be different for every industry. A buyer of industrial chemicals is not going to have the same behavior as another getting bids on office furniture for a new building. Hence every company must research this for themselves.
Because of this shift in the sales world, we at Pipeliner have programmed the need for monitoring buyer actions right into our CRM solution. Our “Required Fields” feature means that a company can elect to make certain activities mandatory before an opportunity can be moved to the next stage.

Additionally in Pipeliner, you can connect sales actions with sales activities, so that when an action is taken, it is automatically checked off in the overall activity. In this way actions and activities are always connected and coordinated, and forward progress can be made with the least amount of administration time.

This is a win-win situation: a salesperson always knows what to do, and a sales manager doesn’t have to constantly worry if all the correct actions are being taken with a prospect.

And yes, we practice what we preach. As a practical example of how our “Required Fields” functionality works, here are some of the actions a salesperson must actually take in selling Pipeliner CRM.

Our stage 1 is Engage.

The actions the buyer must take in this stage are:

- Buyer has to provide confirmation about the timeframe
- Buyer has to provide confirmation of their role
- Buyer has to confirm the number of users
- Buyer has to have downloaded and is using the free trial
- Buyer provides positive feedback on the trial
- Confirms requirements and indicates if there is integration needed
- Buyer indicates implementation and training needs
- Buyer indicates whether or not Pipeliner meets their needs, or indicates what we need to do to make that happen
There are actions the seller must take also, in order for that stage to be complete. These are:

- Gather technical information
- Appropriate documents sent after the call
- Set Next Appointment
- Contact and Account details filled out completely

In Pipeliner, these actions are set up so they can be visually tracked, and made almost like a game—a little gold cup appears when the activity is completed.

Only after each one of these activities is completed can the opportunity be moved to the next stage, Convince.

At the Convince stage, the activities which must take place are:

- Prospect outlines their approval process
- Prospect willing to accept offer
- Prospect confirmed budget is available
- Prospect confirms product meets requirements
- Prospect confirms they have sign-off authority or influence

Like the previous stage, these also have a set of seller-specific actions that need to be accomplished in order for the stage to be completed.

We have found that having such actions programmed right into our sales process and as an integral part of CRM makes for the highest percentage of successful closes.
Lessons Learned

To sum up:

1. Salespeople must learn to think like their buyers, and do everything possible to understand their motivations and patterns.

2. Sales organizations must learn to monitor buyer actions, and coordinate their own actions with them so as to move them along through the sales pipeline.

3. Sales organizations should implement Pipeliner CRM so that salespeople are required to complete certain actions before moving a sale to the next stage of the process.

See for yourself.

Download a free trial of Pipeliner CRM.