Advance Praise for
Exceptional Selling

“I am a Jeff Thull fan. In Exceptional Selling he zeros in on the key ingredient of sales of any sort: intimate mental and emotional connection with the customer—which leads to deep understanding, a successful sale and its successful implementation. I call this 'connection bit' the ‘missing 98 percent’ of the selling process, overlooked by most sales trainers and salespersons alike. Jeff’s book has something profound to teach each of us, regardless of profession, from the pizza parlor to the pulpit, starting with me!”

—Tom Peters, Author of Re-imagine! Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age

“As a CEO, I highly recommend this book as a guide on executive and financial level conversations. Jeff shows you how to gain access and establish relevancy and credibility with people that hold the power and make the decisions. It's without a doubt the best way to step out of the crowd and connect with executives.”

—Chris Capdevilla, CEO, LogicalApps

“If you want to be an exceptional communicator, you must read Jeff Thull’s books. Exceptional Selling is a complete no nonsense approach to sales—how to get in, how to connect and how to win! It conveys a vital message: Open, honest, and straight-forward communication is the shortest path to long-term success.”

—Frank Toffoloni, U.S. Director of Sales, Diagnostica Stago Inc.

“Jeff has been sharpening the skills of my sales organizations over the past 20 years. His latest book, Exceptional Selling keeps him out front with sensible techniques that work. Top sales producers will quickly recognize how to improve their results; rookies will find the finest road map to success in the selling profession.”

—Peter Muldowney, Chairman, Specialty Materials Division, Morgan Crucible Co. PLC—Retired

“Exceptional Selling is a comprehensive and powerful framework for building strong relationships based on integrity and trust. Just as he has done for our financial advisors, Jeff Thull shows you how to communicate with confidence and create exceptional value for both you and your customers.”

—Richard G. Averitt III, Chairman and CEO, Raymond James Financial Services
“Get your Post-its® ready! From the very first chapter, I found myself tagging pages so I could present and put into practice the dozens of actionable takeaways. I highly recommend this book for any consultative sales team looking to make their product stand apart from the competition.”

—Gary Robbins, Partner/Vice President, Frost & Sullivan

“Exceptional Selling is the masterful continuation of Mastering the Complex Sale and The Prime Solution. At a time when we’re all searching for new ways to leverage our strengths, Jeff’s ‘taking it to the street’ wisdom redefines communication strategies and sets a new benchmark for competitive differentiation. This book will dramatically shift your thinking and show you precisely how to achieve lucrative sales results.”

—Nat Geissel, President, DMS Health Technologies

“Jeff Thull has assembled a real street level guide that uncovers how true value is recognized, assembled, and realized. If you are a sales manager and your team is not having the kind of conversations outlined in this book, your sales opportunities will most likely be lost to someone who is.”

—Brooks Hoff, Western Regional Sales Manager, Fluke Corporation

“Jeff brings clarity to the sales process through his discovery and diagnostic methods that promise higher closing rates and help you convey, in cooperation with your clients, relevance and credibility to solving their problems. We're all looking for that differentiation factor and Jeff shows you the way to gain new levels of respect and credibility from your clients that you may not have experienced in the past.”

—Guy R. Manuel, President, Transcontinental Printing, Marketing Products & Services

“Jeff Thull has done it again with Exceptional Selling—he truly provides a fresh and innovative perspective to the art of sales. By using logical and practical conversation examples throughout the book, Thull identifies and conquers common sales traps and defines successful keys to breaking down communication barriers. Geared toward the individual sales professional, Exceptional Selling is a powerful, applicable tool in the complex world of sales, and is a must-have in the library of any sales executive.”

—Kerry Gilger, President and CEO, FYI Corporation

“Exceptional Selling is a tremendous learning tool for sales professionals. Jeff’s done a great job of expanding on the diagnostic selling concepts from his previous books by emphasizing the amplified role required of a salesperson to quarterback a complex sale—both externally and internally.”

—Chris Ostrander, General Manager, Eaton Corporation
“It’s finally here—a word-for-word, step-by-step guide from Jeff Thull for those of us in the sales trenches each and every day. I have worked with Jeff and Prime Resource Group for over 10 years and have literally begged Jeff to put all of his best strategies in a single resource. Exceptional Selling is that resource. Jeff’s past two books were wonderful, especially from a macro senior-management perspective, but this book contains the keys to the kingdom that the ‘prime resource’ in any sales profession is looking for. I look forward to using this as a tool to help our team take results to a new level.”

—David B. Patchen, Regional Vice President, Raymond James Financial Services, Inc.

“Exceptional Selling clearly articulates the skills and habits that hold back many sales professionals from maximizing their potential impact. Jeff provides tangible and specific techniques that you can start to implement immediately that will truly differentiate yourself in the eyes of your customer. Additionally, the Exceptional Selling message translates well into the sphere of marketing communications and provides a significant counter tactic to the intense ‘commoditization’ being experienced in our crowded market space.”

—Bruce S. Moloznik, Vice President of Global Marketing, Cookson Electronics Assembly Materials

“The Diagnostic Selling methods in Exceptional Selling represent a step change from consultative sales in working collaboratively with clients to jointly understanding and addressing the needs for complex business performance solutions. They give commercial staff the skills, discipline, and confidence to effectively engage at senior executive levels in client organizations to create and capture increased business value.”

—Ian Galliard, Global Manager, Sales Development, Shell Global Solutions International BV.

“While reading Jeff Thull’s Exceptional Selling, I was struck with the thought that this book not only teaches an exceptional sales process but shows how a healthy mind-set provides the foundation for effective communication for solving any complex problem. If you have watched helplessly as disapproving purchasing agents, onerous requests for proposals, and uncommunicative customers continually commoditize your business, Jeff’s exceptional book will give you a solid path to building a healthy mind-set for effective communication and a powerful ‘non-sales’ sales process for creating true value, both for you and your customers.”

—John Hines, PhD, Business Manager, Georgia-Pacific Resins, Inc.

“To serve the global financial community with enterprise software solutions requires exceptional credibility and precise communication skills. Exceptional Selling is a great guide on how to do exactly that. Read it, follow it and enjoy your success!”

—Pierre Gatignol, President and CEO, GL Trade
To Pat Thull,
my lifelong spouse and business partner,
for her guidance in building this company,
her tireless and selfless efforts to assure our
customers receive the highest quality programs and
professional services, for making Prime Resource Group
an exceptional place to work, and for her insights and
experience that have greatly enhanced the content of
Exceptional Selling.
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When I’m not looking after the Corporate Education Program at Duke University, I teach courses on social and organizational psychology in Duke’s Department of Psychology. Both aspects of my professional life have taught me that having a good conversation—in business or anywhere else for that matter—is not as simple as it might appear. In fact, it’s a major challenge, especially in the world of complex sales and multicultural business relationships in which Jeff Thull works.

As Jeff was leading a seminar with our managing directors, it struck me that business today in general, and sales and business development professionals specifically, are not design or solution constrained; in fact, we are far more “diagnose” constrained. There is a great tendency to leap before we listen. I made that observation to our group and Jeff was so moved by its brevity and its accuracy that he suggested it would be the perfect insight for the Foreword to his new book. Thus, I find myself introducing you to a book that is a great read.

Authentic and compelling customer conversations are the key to what Jeff refers to as “privileged access” and “privileged insight.” Privileged access is what we need to tap into the best sources of information within our customer’s organizations. To gain the richest insights, we often need to
hold conversations at senior levels and it seems like everyone is trying to gain access there. The crass commercial reason is that the revenues are bigger up there. But more important is the fact that senior managers are the ones who best understand the critical issues in their businesses. Privileged insight is what we need to clearly understand our customers, their responsibilities, and their metrics. It is the only way we can create compelling offers and it is the reason customers will understand and embrace those offers. To create exceptional sales, we need to earn access and develop insight.

One of the insights that I drew from Jeff’s first book is that the best salespeople are integrators—they orchestrate all the pieces needed to solve customers’ problems in novel and intriguing ways. To be the integrator, you have to understand your customers and their issues and bring them to a deeper understanding of their situation. You also have to understand the solution capabilities your company offers and bring your customers to a deeper understanding of how those capabilities apply to their businesses. Somehow, you have to integrate all of that information in a collaborative effort with your customer to ensure that it yields a coherent and compelling exchange of value.

How do you accomplish this? It is usually achieved through a structured series of conversations in which you listen to and talk with your customers at a higher level of understanding on both sides. Jeff’s book is about how to conduct exceptional conversations. Instead of treating conversations as something we do all the time, frequently with no preparation before, no special consciousness during, and no particular analysis afterward, Jeff proposes that we become expert conversationalists and raise the bar of professional excellence. We should become so good, in fact, that the style and substance of our conversations create all of the credibility and relevance we need to win our customers’ confidence and their business.
The strategies and techniques that Jeff describes in this book can help you improve your ability to communicate with customers in ways that will far exceed your expectations and theirs. You will be able to *really* hear what customers are telling you and add value to what you are hearing. I think of it as having “diagnostic ears.” Customers will actually want to tell you more, give you access, and invite you deeper inside their world. Finally, you will be able to convert what you are hearing into compelling solutions. Customers will clearly understand their situation and see how the value of your solution applies to the challenges in their business.

Jeff’s work can help you raise the tenor of your conversations on a number of levels.

**Understanding Your Customer’s World**

How do we understand their world? Most sales books tell us to become better listeners. They’re right, of course, but the idea of being a good listener seriously oversimplifies what we need to be doing in successful business conversations. We need to listen beyond our customer’s words and look beyond nuances of body language. We need to understand the client’s *meaning* system—the whole set of assumptions, experiences, values, and beliefs that create the context for their perceptions, judgments, and decisions.

Before we can listen at this level, our customers have to be willing to talk to us as equals. We need to establish peer-to-peer relationships with them. How can this be done when everyone is competing for their attention?

It’s not an easy task. As CEO of Duke Corporate Education, if I’m talking to you about the corporate educational curriculum we can provide to your business, I need to acknowledge that you know your business better than I
do. At the same time, I need to have a point of view and be able to make some preliminary assumptions about your business or I don’t belong in the room with you. Since I live in the world of professional development and education, it is likely that I know education better than you do. At the same time, I better recognize and respect what you know about education or you are not going to engage and pay attention to any advice I’m going to give you.

Establishing a mind-set of mutual respect is the secret to walking this fine line. We have to assume that our customers are experts in their businesses and, furthermore, that they know their own organizations far better than any outsider ever will. And then, from that context of respect, we need to establish parity by demonstrating our own expertise in the customer’s business. We also have to assume that our customers are knowledgeable about our solutions and capabilities, and again, from that context of respect, demonstrate our own expertise in those solutions.

This is the most constructive and respectful way to approach a sales conversation. We don’t have to insult customers by telling them everything we think they don’t know, nor do we have to defer to them if they choose to treat us as inferiors. It’s a great way to set the stage for a clearer and more useful understanding of the customer’s world.

Getting to the Customer’s Real Problem Together

I frequently see salespeople jump to the solution. In the rush to sell something, as soon as the customer mentions a
problem, the salespeople start talking about how to solve it with their solution. They make premature judgments, and in doing so, they shut down or change the direction of their conversations and miss the richness of insight, perspective, and depth of knowledge that the customer could provide. The usual outcome is a dissatisfied customer—dissatisfied because he knows that the salesperson has stopped listening and won’t know enough about his situation to propose the best solution.

The ideal sales conversation starts with actually hearing customers in their own terms and with their own meanings. As a conversation progresses, you migrate to a more structured discourse in which you are trying to make sense of what customers are telling you in light of the frameworks in which you are expert. You’re situating your expertise inside the customer’s world. This is what leads customers to begin to experience “ah-ha” moments and start to see their world in a new light. They begin to connect the conversation to their reality rather than some nebulous general perspective and give the access required to further explore the possibilities of a solution.

Jeff shows you how the diagnostic conversation is the mechanism that will allow you to place your expertise in the customer’s context. This is not a shallow interview that presumes the first hint of a problem justifies the solution, but one that gets deep into symptoms, causes, and consequences. It has to be a true partnership, founded on a mutually agreed upon premise that guides an inquiry and journey that is shared and jointly conducted. Otherwise, you are simply selling. This is how customers and sales professionals avoid bias and predetermined outcomes. They construct meaning together and develop a broader perspective on and deeper understanding of the customer’s situation.
Designing Solutions That Sell Themselves

Solution design doesn’t really exist in many sales processes. Salespeople don’t design solutions; they most often present prepackaged and off-the-shelf solutions. Even when design has a place in the sales process, solutions tend to be created in a vacuum by the seller with the customer having little or no participation. And we wonder why customers are skeptical about the efficacy of our offerings and don’t leap to take advantage of them.

This is a problem that we face in the business of education. Universities are based on specific disciplinary expertise. Students pass through the various disciplines and integrate them in their own minds. That’s the way the whole system is designed, and if you look at most executive education programs, they are also designed supplier-out, as opposed to client-in. That’s why education is not considered a strategic tool today—it’s expert centered rather than client centered. I believe the fact that we are aware of it and struggle to avoid it, that we are working at understanding and solving clients’ problems rather than declaring our expertise, has helped earn Duke’s Corporate Education Program its number-one ranking.

Jeff’s work is well aligned to a client-in perspective. He has virtually eliminated the unhealthy dependence on presentations that causes so much suffering among salespeople and their customers. Jeff’s emphasis on establishing design parameters that are based on customer criteria and independent of solutions is also an important factor in designing solutions that don’t need to be sold. If you help the customer create the criteria that she needs to make a quality decision and then offer her a solution that meets those criteria, there is no “close” required. What usually happens
is that your customer looks at you and says, “When can we get started?” That’s a great thing to hear a customer say.

Sales professionals who are exceptional conversationalists as well as exceptional diagnosticians are like chess masters. They know the pattern of the board, the strategies of the game, and they know where they are, where they’re going, and their options at every instant. This not only takes innate talent, it also takes systems, skills, and discipline and, of course, a serious amount of practice. In this book, Jeff identifies the conversations that need to happen in a successful business relationship (the openings, the interactions of the middle game, and the end game, an outcome of mutual benefit), and describes the detailed dynamics of each of those conversations in a way that you can apply to your own customer conversations. He will help you raise the bar of excellence and achieve great results.

BLAIR SHEPPARD, CEO
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As a boy, I was privileged to watch my dad sell. In the summer during school break, he would take me along on a few of his business trips. He sold granite that was used in the construction of multimillion-dollar commercial buildings. I accompanied him on trips to visit the architects who could specify his company’s granite for the buildings they designed.

I remember being impressed with the conversations my father had with his customers. I didn’t recognize it at the time, but he wasn’t acting like the stereotypical salesperson, talking up the quality of his product, or with order pad in hand, pushing people to buy. Instead, he seemed to work with the architects as an equal, poring over blueprints and renderings. He talked with them about the aesthetics of their designs, what their firms were trying to accomplish with their projects, and the requirements and vision of the buildings’ owners. Together they would examine samples my father brought and discuss the color of the stone, size of the panels, and the finish. In retrospect, my dad created a very strong image in my mind of how professional salespeople sound and act, and how customers respond to them.

In today’s world, I continually seek out and study high-performing salespeople, the best of the best. They
think differently, behave differently, and produce exceptional results. I have been defining the skills of high-performing sales professionals, providing research, and most importantly, establishing systems, skills, and disciplines into a methodology that can be replicated to produce very profitable results.

Considering the thousands of people whom our practice has worked with over the years, I have also encountered a lot of struggling salespeople. Over and over again, I’ve watched them engage in conversations with their customers in which they unknowingly shoot themselves in the foot and undermine their own best efforts. They’re so ingrained in their traditional and standardized approach that they have difficulty stopping to think about what they’re doing to themselves.

Even today, with so much experience around us, the marketplace is cluttered with seminars, consultants, trainers, and books espousing antiquated approaches to selling. Many salespeople, unknowingly caught up in the conventional sales approach, continue their self-sabotage and end up alienating and shutting down customers. But by replicating the top-performing professionals you read about in this book, there are new, exceptional ways to sell that can set you apart and pull you ahead of the pack. And those of you who have been very successful and are looking to notch up your skills to continually compete effectively in an ever-evolving market will see that fine-tuning some areas of your approach can make a major impact on your results.

In this book, you will also be warned about the pitfalls that can get us into trouble. Have you ever heard yourself say to a customer, “You’ve probably never thought of this, but . . .” or “We save companies like yours millions of dollars in wasted . . .” Both of these statements could very well be true, but they create what I refer to as “dangling insults.”
They imply that the customer doesn’t think and wastes millions of dollars. While you believe you are enlightening your customers, they may be hearing a criticism. You can tell when customers and best-qualified prospects hear these dangling insults: They lean back, cross their arms, and shut down. The salesperson can keep talking, but the conversation is over.

Sales conversations are rife with traps like these. This book exposes those traps and offers logical and proven alternatives that enhance the clarity, relevancy, credibility, and trust we are trying to create in our conversations with customers.

In the chapters that follow, we drill down into the core of exceptional selling practices and expose three root causes of failure that can prevent us from succeeding: confrontation, comprehension, and compliance.

You will see how ingrained reactions and traditional selling strategies and techniques combine to create an atmosphere of confrontation between salespeople and their customers.

You will find it incredible how preprogrammed behaviors and reactions often get us into trouble. As an example, as salespeople, we’ve been indoctrinated to believe that if we can secure an appointment with the right people and put forth our best presentation, we can turn most opportunities into sales, that objections are meant to be overcome, and that with the proper grit and persistence, we should be able to close any account. However, the more we wrestle with indecisive customers, aggressive competitors, drawn-out sales cycles, and unpredictable outcomes, the more dependent we become on these unquestioned behaviors. The reality that we are ignoring, however, is that our conditioning, along with traditional selling lore, promotes an adversarial style of communication that only exacerbates our
problems and causes us to work harder and with less successful outcomes.

In this book, we will look at specific examples of how salespeople consistently overestimate the customer’s comprehension of the problem to be solved, the solutions we propose, and above all, the customer’s readiness to make decisions. Think about how the complexity of our products and services has escalated, how the customer’s workload has increased, how their staff and technical evaluation resources have decreased, and how the pressure to perform has increased. This harsh reality becomes even more problematic. As complexity increases, customers require more outside expertise to make high-quality decisions, but for the most part, our customers understand less and less of what we tell them. And what are we doing in response? We are trained and encouraged to present relentlessly, to work hard to convince, to persuade, and above all, to be persistent. We lecture our customers about solutions that they don’t comprehend, can’t differentiate, and really aren’t sure they need. Then, we wonder why they buy a suboptimal solution or, as happens too often, don’t buy any solution at all, not from you or your competitor.

Finally, in this book you will see how communication can fail when customers place pressure on salespeople with their buying processes in an attempt to control the sales process themselves. If our customers don’t have a complete comprehension of their problems and our solutions, compliance with their process has a high probability of suboptimal results. Yet, when prospects send us requests for proposals (RFPs), invitation to tender bids (ITBs), or requests for information (RFIs), and invite us to reply, there is this irresistible tendency to jump. Granted, the customer may have made considerable efforts in preparing the request, yet we have no idea whether this is a viable opportunity for the
customer or our company, yet we willingly contribute limited time and resources.

The goal is exceptional selling systems, skills, and disciplines to manage exceptional conversations for exceptional results for both you and your customers. You may have the world’s greatest solution, but if you can’t communicate with relevancy, build credibility and respect, and build clarity for your customers, your potential will be severely constrained.

I’ve devoted my career to studying sales strategy and the behaviors that drive exceptional conversations and have consulted with individuals and executive teams involved in high-stakes sales environments. This book is loaded with conversation examples built around business-to-business sales scenarios. Don’t feel constrained by that focus. High-stakes or complex sales include any sale in which the customer requires personal assistance or guidance to make a high-quality decision. Fundamentally, the conversation is between two people and therefore these conversational strategies and techniques will work in business-to-business as well as business-to-consumer sales. As the scale of the decision increases, the number of conversations will increase, yet at the heart of any relationship is the one-to-one communications that we will focus on. The decisions may range in complexity from quick turnover transactions, to the most complex multimillion-dollar multi-organizational “value exchanges.” As you’ll see, it is a matter of scale and you can easily adjust that to match your situation.

Further, this book can also help you become more effective within your own company. One of the commonly overlooked elements in a career in business-to-business sales is the fact that sales professionals often have to sell the same deals within their own companies that they sell to their customers. More often than not, the internal sale is
even more difficult than the external sale. When sales professionals don’t approach their internal customers with the same processes and discipline, their deals and credibility often fall apart because they did not equip their colleagues and superiors with what is needed to make high-quality business decisions. You can use the lessons in this book to ensure that doesn’t happen to you. The bottom line is: This book is about creating conversations that achieve relevancy, credibility, and respect between individuals, no matter what the context.

An overview of the book’s chapters is important so you will have a sense of its contents and how it is organized, especially for future reference. However, I don’t recommend using this as a guide to cherry-picking the text. The style and substance of exceptional sales conversations are based on the critical components of clarity, relevancy, credibility, and respect that you build throughout the sales process. You are given a guided path. Each step in the process supports and facilitates the next step. This book shows you how to be more efficient and more effective, but there aren’t any shortcuts to exceptional sales results.

In Part I, we will explore the communication barriers that stand between salespeople and their customers. The fact is that most salespeople are working harder for diminishing returns because of fundamental and widespread miscommunication with customers. This miscommunication has two facets: errors in style, or how salespeople talk with customers, and errors in substance, what they choose to talk to customers about.

In Chapter 1, “The More You Sweat, the Less You Sell,” we will examine the style facet. You will begin to understand why salespeople often have two strikes against them every time they engage a customer: they are relying on unconscious patterns that were already set in stone by the
time they entered kindergarten; and they are working with a sales process that encourages an atmosphere of confrontation. You will see how these combine the pressure and stress of sales to sabotage our relationships with customers.

In Chapter 2, “Nobody Buys a Value Proposition,” we will explore the substance facet of customer conversations. All sales, at their essence, are value transactions, but too often salespeople misunderstand the realities of value. They communicate in the simplistic, generic terms of value propositions, that is, in hypothetical terms that do not have the power to compel customers to connect and therefore act. Customers find these propositions indistinguishable from one another and often, undistinguished to boot. This is why customers act as if all salespeople sound alike and the only relevant differentiating factor between their offerings is price.

In Chapter 3, “You’ve Got to Get Your Mind Right,” we get to the good news. You can make the greatest leaps in sales performance and raise your results from average to good or good to great by simply changing your mind. How we think precedes how we behave and our mind-set is without a doubt the critical foundation for success. We will analyze the five fundamental elements of the mind-set that opens the way to value achievement, as well as creating, expanding, and protecting customer relationships.

In Part II of “Exceptional Selling,” we will travel through four series of conversations that result in exceptional sales. These conversations enable sales professionals to guide customers through the value life cycle as it applies to the customer’s unique situation and how the sales professional can create a robust dialogue that yields privileged insight into the customer’s world.

In Chapter 4, “Earning the Keys to the Elevator,” we will detail the conversations a salesperson must undertake
to identify and initiate optimal opportunities. You will learn how to conduct initial engagements that quickly and effectively gain executive sponsorship and privileged access to the customer organization.

In Chapter 5, “Diagnosis Trumps Presentation Every Time,” you will see why sales presentations stunt customer relationships and sales results, and learn how to conduct diagnostic conversations that help customers fully comprehend the inefficiencies and performance gaps that are constraining their business results. In doing so, you provide the customer with the incentive to change.

In Chapter 6, “Cutting Through the Smoke and Mirrors,” we will explore the problems inherent in designing solutions in a vacuum. You will learn how to work with customers to define solutions, and in doing so, capture an unparalleled opportunity to set yourself apart from your competitors, anchor the customer in your solution, and gain an inside track to winning the sale. This is where you see how to give your customer the confidence to invest.

In Chapter 7, “It Doesn’t Pay to Surprise a Corporation,” you will see how salespeople sabotage themselves when they avoid discussing the challenges and risks associated with their offerings, and as a result, set the stage for mistrust and destructive surprises. In essence, they end up losing customers because they are afraid to lose customers. You learn how to conduct constructive conversations about negative issues and how to further enhance your customer relationships.

In Part III, we will explore how to establish exceptional credibility and cement it with the ability to overcome two of the most difficult conversational challenges in today’s complex sales environment: the urgent need to quantify value and the demand that salespeople engage with customers at the highest levels of their organizations.
Preface

In Chapter 8, “Show Me the Money,” you will see why customers do not respond to standard return on investment presentations and salespeople are intimidated by financial conversations. You will learn how to harness the most effective sales accelerant. You will also learn how to guide customers through conversations that enable them to quantify the cost of their problems, as well as to establish the expected return on solution and the appropriate investment to earn that return.

Finally, in Chapter 9, “Connecting at the Level of Power and Decision,” you will see why salespeople lose their confidence and ruin their chances when they reach the C-level in their customers’ organizations. You learn the five rules of senior executive conversations and discover how to gain credibility with, sponsorship of, and guidance by the top leaders.

That’s the big picture and enough said. Let’s get started learning the conversational mind-set, strategies, and skills that power exceptional selling.
The More You Sweat, the Less You Sell

The most common forms of sales sabotage are stylistic. How we talk with customers can easily undermine our ability to position ourselves to succeed and win business. No one does this intentionally, but the fact remains, if you don’t know how to effectively structure and conduct customer conversations, what you talk about doesn’t make much difference. Customers aren’t going to hear you. They won’t care what you have to say. They may even work actively against you.

Many sales professionals hear the word style in the context of communication and think of personality style or style in the sense of something cosmetic or trendy. Style in the sense I’m using it here is an expression of our mind-set, our
stance, and our approach to our relationships with customers. It has a lot to do with the answer to the question, “How do you see your role as a sales professional?”

Our conversational style has a huge impact on building credibility and trust. For years, I’ve cited a study that revealed that the number-one reason that patients change doctors was not based upon the doctor’s competence, but on the doctor’s bedside manner, that is, how well the doctor appeared to understand and respond to the patient. This is further reinforced by recent studies of malpractice lawsuits described in Malcolm Gladwell’s book, *Blink* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 2005). Again, these studies found that the competence, or incompetence, of doctors had little to do with who got sued and who didn’t. What do you think was the most significant difference between doctors who were sued at least twice for malpractice and those who were never sued? “Interestingly,” writes Gladwell, “there was no difference in the amount or quality of information they gave their patients; they didn’t provide more details about medication or the patient’s condition. The difference was entirely in how they talked to their patients” (p. 42).

*How* you speak with your customers has an equally powerful impact on your career. Your ability to constructively attract and engage a customer in a relevant dialogue requires a conversation style as well as substantive content. Style is a critical key in the creation of engaging and compelling business relationships. When customers are engaged, they learn. When what they learn is compelling enough to make them want to change, to take action, they will buy.

I’m assuming that you are not all that surprised when I say your style of conversation has a tremendous impact on your performance and establishing credibility with prospects and customers. You know that. What you may not realize, however, is that the style you are using right
now may very well be setting you up for failure in your critical conversations. It might be difficult to accept that you may be sabotaging your own career, but here are three reasons that could be true:

1. Contrary to the popular image of salespeople as “born communicators,” most people, and that includes sales, service, and support professionals, are not naturally effective communicators. Further, they tend not to know that about themselves. For instance, I see well-meaning professionals get emotionally involved in their conversations with customers all the time. When they do, they unconsciously link the success or failure of those conversations to their self-image and emotional well-being. This raises their personal stake in conversations and they start feeling self-imposed pressure. As their stress levels shoot up, they fall back into old habits and thoughtless reactions that are not pretty and that they often come to regret. From the customer’s perspective, that’s strike one against a credible conversation.

2. The techniques promoted in the majority of sales training programs exaggerate our innate communication shortcomings. Salespeople have devoted countless hours to perfecting their presentation techniques and to understanding how to overcome objections and close sales. The problem is that much of this sales dogma was not designed for the collaborative effort required in sales today (Era 3 in Figure 1.1) and further alienates customers. That’s strike two against a credible conversation.

3. When salespeople get emotionally involved in the outcome of a customer engagement and start to try to drag the customer into compliance using outdated
techniques, what they are really doing is confirming the customer’s negative assumptions and stereotypes about the sales profession. That’s when customers start to identify us with everything bad that a salesperson has ever done to them or that they have heard was done to others, and that can be strike three in an attempt at a credible conversation.

Salespeople frequently have no idea why they struck out. One moment they’re passionately pursuing the sale, using all of the techniques they have been taught, and the next moment the customer is treating them like annoying insects. A fundamental communication disconnect has occurred. When customers believe salespeople have lost their credibility, they begin taking action to distance themselves and quickly shut down. Usually, salespeople are baffled by the customer’s unexpected response. They begin to see their customers as irrational, unreasonable, and sometimes, rude. They think the customer just doesn’t get it! They don’t understand what really happened.

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<tr>
<th>Era 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
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The More You Sweat, the Less You Sell

The last thing we want to be saying about our customers is, “I just don’t understand why they did that.”

One of our goals here is to help you understand the behaviors and words that drive customers to cut off communication and what we can do to prevent that behavior. We also need to look at what customers do and say that can trigger counterproductive behaviors in us and what are the most productive ways we can respond and maintain our credibility.

The Emotional Mind-Set—The Root of Miscommunication

Your emotional mind-set can either provide the foundation on which all successful communications are built, or it can be the primary instrument sabotaging your credibility. You embark on customer conversations with a pre-established view of the world or mind-set. Your mind-set derives from your personality and experiences and it manifests itself in the way you respond to others. It is also formed by the expectations and assumptions you have about the individual you are speaking with, the conversational flow, and the outcomes you hope to achieve. To be an exceptional salesperson, there is nothing more important, nor harder to master, than to get this mind-set right.

Your awareness of the emotional mind-set with which you are entering a customer engagement is going to vary widely. You will be very aware of some of its elements and others will be hidden deep in your mind, just waiting to leap out at the most inopportune time. It’s the elements that you aren’t aware of that can become emotional blocks to open and honest communication with your customers and really hinder your successful outcomes.
“WHAT WE GOT HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE”

**Who's Talking Now?**

One effective way to recognize the sources and effects of mind-set in conversation and relationships is by looking at patterns of adopted beliefs and observed behaviors, like that parent and child in all of us. The parent is composed of borrowed attitudes, opinions, and prejudices—all those things we accepted and stored away without question in the first five or so years of our lives. Sometimes the parent is a critical parent, that part of us that tends to tell, preach, and enforce—and sometimes the parent is nurturing, that part of us that is very supportive and empathetic. The adult is our objective, reality-based self. The child is our subjective, emotional self.

The adult is the ideal state for credible conversations, but the parent and the child pop up all the time and drive many suboptimal interactions. For instance, as you’ll see in the dialogue that follows, salespeople often respond as the child to their customer-parents:

**Prospect:** Our company is planning to purchase an integrated CRM software package for our marketing, sales, and service staff. We understand you have one of the more flexible solutions, and we would like you to demonstrate your solution to our management team by the end of the month.

**Salesperson:** We’d be glad to demonstrate our solution, but first I need to get a better understanding of your company’s needs and budget. I’d like to schedule some time to meet with several of the executives at your company.

**Prospect:** We’d rather not take the time for that. We’d like to start with an overview first and if things look good, we can progress from there.
SALESPERSON: It’s very difficult to present such a complex solution without understanding more about your situation, your requirements, and your budget constraints.

PROSPECT: We have a reasonable budget in place, and we don’t have time to waste on meetings. Do you want to work with us or not?

SALESPERSON: Certainly, when would be the most convenient time for the demo?

What happened here was driven by emotion. The customer calls in and says he wants a product demonstration, a normal and often costly part of the complex sales process. The salesperson responds as an adult and seeks to ensure that a demonstration of his product can be tailored and is appropriate for both the customer and his own company. The customer responds like a parent; it’s going to be his way or the highway. The salesperson, overly anxious to please and scared to lose the sale, responds like a child by complying and, in doing so, commits to an expensive course of action that may very well have no chance of yielding a sale. If you read this and think that the salesperson had no alternative but to agree to the customer’s demands, you may be responding from your child, too. As we’ll see in later chapters, there are viable and effective alternatives that are less likely to trigger these parent-type reactions by customers and that will be more effective than compliance to customers who take the parent role.

The request for proposal (RFP), by the way, is an institutionalized version of a parent-child or superior-subordinate transaction. The customer sends out a parental command to bid a project, the “to-do” list, and many sellers automatically obey, often investing huge amounts of time, money, and other resources in the
proposal process without question and without any real sense of their odds, all in hopes of winning the sale. Again, the idea that you have no alternative but compliance is seriously flawed.

Another very common scenario occurs when salespeople unwittingly play the parent with customers and alienate them at the very beginning of the sale. I’ve often seen salespeople walk into a customer’s office very early in the meeting and in the guise of an “initial benefit statement” say something like, “You probably don’t realize how much defects in the silicon wafer fabrication process cost companies in your industry each year.” This is how salespeople have been taught to start their call in order to gain the customer’s attention. But what do customers hear? Many of them hear a parent or superior insinuating that they don’t know their own business. If you lead a sales conversation with a similar statement and your customer sits back in his chair and disengages, you can guess what just happened.

Once the parent and the child manifest themselves in a business conversation, old patterns of reacting often kick in. These preprogrammed reactions can play out automatically and unconsciously, and what’s left of your connection and credibility with the customer quickly deteriorates.

The Amazing Old Brain

Another hidden element of an emotional mind-set that negatively impacts salespeople resides in what scientists define as the Old Brain. The Old Brain consists of two parts: the brain stem (or reptilian brain) and the limbic system. The reptilian brain is the most primitive part of the brain and controls our involuntary actions, such as breathing,
sleeping, and our reflexes, such as the jerk that results when a doctor taps your knee with that little rubber hammer. The limbic system generates basic emotions, such as fear and aggression. Both parts of the brain operate automatically and unconsciously.

The Old Brain is not big on interpretation and analysis. Scientists say that it reacts to situations and other people in just six ways: attack, submit, flee, reproduce, nurture, or be nurtured. It also decides how to react with lightning speed, faster than the more evolved cerebral cortex—the part of the brain that “thinks” in the more rational sense. So, while the cerebral cortex is thinking a situation through, the Old Brain is ready to act.

Recently, scientists have begun to believe that more and more of our behavior is created unconsciously. Timothy Wilson, University of Virginia psychology professor and author of *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Reed Business Information, 2002), finds that we are always switching between the conscious and unconscious brain. He says our “adaptive unconscious” develops early in life, learns patterns that become fixed and inviolable, and plays a much larger role in our day-to-day behavior than previously believed.

So how does this affect your conversations? Think about how quickly a customer’s gesture or tone of voice can trigger a negative perception, or worse, a negative reaction in you; how quickly a sale can get hung up on a trivial point in a contract; how quickly a customer can get upset and argumentative when you counter an objection by saying, “I’m sorry, but I think you misunderstood.” There is a good chance you are seeing the Old Brain and the adaptive unconscious at work in these situations. When people react negatively and things start heading downhill, conversations can quickly get out of control and they become ever harder to turn around.
In this case, the Old Brain is in the self-protection mode. Note that the words “I think you misunderstood” places the blame on the customer. The implication is “What I said was clear, you just didn’t get it.” A more thoughtful response that nurtures the customer could be, “I can see the language I used may not be clear enough [our fault]; what part of the wording do you think should be revised?”

Remember that the Old Brain and adaptive unconscious exist in all of us. They are emotion laden, they operate automatically, and many times we are not aware of the negative impact they can have on customer relationships and sales results.

**Stress Kills Credibility**

One more thing: Stress is produced when the emotional mind-set problems described previously manifest themselves. Stress is emotional reactions running rampant and it can easily power a self-reinforcing, downward cycle that destroys credibility and trust in conversations. When you react without thought to stress, it drives you back into a reactive mode and dangerous old beliefs. Stress can drop you back into quickly reacting versus thoughtful patterns of response.

Stress can also close salespeople down. They start thinking about the consequences of not closing this sale, worrying about how they are going to salvage it, and what they are going to say next. They are so involved in their own problems that they aren’t paying attention to the customer and they stop listening. When the customer says something relevant, the salesperson either misses it or reacts seemingly out of the blue with disconnected thoughts. The conversation becomes even clumsier and new communication problems are created.
Finally, higher stress levels cause salespeople to figuratively and perhaps even literally start sweating. The rule of thumb about sweating in sales is simple: The more you sweat, the less you sell. If you are feeling pressure, it probably means that you are working harder and, as we will see, when you’re under pressure, it often does more harm than good.

**Key Thought**

*When you’re feeling pressure, you’re doing something wrong.*

**Presentation and Persuasion—Commoditize and Alienate**

When salespeople work under pressure, what do they unwittingly do? They reach back into their subconscious and more aggressively apply the tools and techniques that they assume or have been told will help them win sales. Unfortunately, instead of solving their problems and salvaging the sale, these tools and techniques are, at best, ineffective and, at worst, can irreparably damage their credibility and trust with a prospect or customer. This is because of a flawed emphasis on two elements of conventional sales training: presentation and persuasion.

Presentation and persuasion are not inherently flawed sales tools. When their aim is to convey information that the customer needs to reach a high-quality decision, they can be effective. To be effective, however, their timing, content, and intended audience must be perfectly aligned.
“WHAT WE GOT HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE”

Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. A presentation is an answer to a question; the worst presentations are answers to questions that haven’t been asked. This type of presentation confuses the customer.

Key Thought

*Do not answer an unasked question.*

Take a look at your typical presentation. What questions are you answering? How sure are you that those questions are in your customer’s minds? In other words, how ready are your customers for your answers? Can your customers connect that answer to something relevant to their success?

Presentations Commoditize Solutions

How knowledgeable are your customers when you initiate your sales process? Roughly three-quarters of the sales professionals we have polled place their customers at 60 percent or less in terms of problem and solution knowledge. Only 3 percent of sales professionals think that their customers score at 80 percent or above on the knowledge scale.

This suggests that your prospects will almost always have a less-than-comprehensive grasp of their situation or the problem they should be solving. Ask yourself these questions: Do your customers know the true cost of the absence of the solutions you sell? Do they even know if they are experiencing the problems that your solutions are designed to resolve or the risks they are exposed to if they don’t buy that solution? If you are selling commercial insur-
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ance, for example, can your customers quantify the risks in their current coverage? Do they recognize the gaps in the coverage? Can they recognize excess coverage? Do they understand what they should self-insure? The answer to all of these questions is “probably not.”

The solutions we sell are often more confusing to customers than the problems we solve. Ask yourself these questions: How often, if ever, have your customers purchased such a product or service? Can customers connect the value inherent in your solution to their situation? If you are selling software, for example, have customers established the right decision criteria necessary to make a sound decision? Do they understand the difficulties of implementation? Again, the more complex the sale, the more likely the answer to all of these questions is “probably not.”

How do most salespeople address these issues? They standardize their approach and depend on presentations to educate their customers. But as we’ve begun to see, presentations have some major disadvantages in and of themselves.

First, they transform salespeople into professors giving lectures, one of the least effective ways to transfer knowledge. Learning experts tell us that people retain only about 30 percent of what they hear. Even using the best adult learning techniques, including a well-developed multimedia approach, the experts still say that an audience only retains half of what they see and hear. Our experience suggests that these figures are conservative. When a presentation answers questions that have not been asked, relevance suffers and comprehension drops dramatically. There is no incentive to retain information that appears irrelevant.

Second, consider the content of a typical sales presentation. Based on our research, all too many are devoted almost
entirely (80 percent or better) to describing the salesperson’s exceptional company, the robust solution, and the positive future customers will enjoy once their companies buy it. Most often, presentations are loosely connected to the customer’s current reality and the only quantification metrics they contain are the price and the standard, highly suspect, ROI figures.

Step back into the customer’s shoes for a moment. You’ve heard a number of these presentations. You’ve only understood or cared about a fragment of what you heard in each one. (Between the customer’s lack of experience and knowledge and the inefficiencies of the presentation format, that’s all they will absorb.) The presentations all looked and sounded alike. They aren’t specifically tied to your business; there is no reason to consider them credible. You’re frustrated and likely confused. What do you do? The same thing you do when someone tries to sell you a generic value proposition that makes everything look and sound the same . . . you commoditize. You cut through the haze and compare the bottom lines. If the prices all seem too high, or you never felt any urgency in the first place, you won’t buy. If you’re convinced you must act, you send everyone home to sharpen their pencils, and then you buy based on what you do understand—which more often than not ends up being the price.

I constantly hear salespeople complain about “no-decision” customers and relentless price pressure. If they entered their customer’s world for just a minute, they might see how valid those complaints really are.

It is hard to communicate how painful presentations can be to customers. A vice president of sales recently told me that he sat through a presentation from a vendor who hoped to sell a networking solution to his company. For 50 minutes of the 90-minute presentation, the sales team
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went nonstop. The only reason they stopped there was that the vice president finally interrupted with a question.

**Persuasion Alienates Customers**

The second flaw in conventional sales training is the concept of the salesperson as persuader. Ideas such as “Every prospect is a customer; they just don’t know it yet” and “Anybody can be sold” are classic articulations of the persuasion school. Words like *overcome, persuade, persist,* and *convince* are indicators of that school of selling.

The problem is that we rarely stop to think about how customers perceive the tactics of persuasion that salespeople are taught and encouraged to use. They are going to see you as the “lecturing professor.” You are acting as if they are ignorant, only you have the power to set them straight, and they must listen and learn.

Let’s step back into the customer’s world again. If someone is trying to push you into taking a certain course of action, even when you have misgivings about it, or if he is implying that he knows better than you, that he is smart and you are not, or that you just don’t get it, how would you react?

When someone pressures you to take a certain course, it’s only natural to question his motives. Why is he pushing me so hard? Whose interests is he actually looking out for? Justified or not, the answers to these questions seem obvious to customers and that is why this type of behavior doesn’t build credibility or engender trust. In fact, I’ve had customers tell me that they have been so irritated and insulted by overly persuasive salespeople that even though they decided to buy, they purposely went out of their way to buy a similar solution from another source.
“WHAT WE GOT HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE”

Overzealous persuaders regularly trigger reactions like these that close down communications. They alienate customers. Here’s a common example:

A customer makes a simple statement, “Your price is too high.”

The salesperson thinks, “Objection! Must overcome!” So, he quickly reacts: “Not really, when you consider the exceptional durability of the components and our excellent support. This equipment will outlast anything on the market. We’re so convinced of this that we’ll give you a 10-year, full service warranty—the best in the industry.”

Now, the customer feels challenged. All he hears through his filter is, “You’re wrong. The price is right. You just don’t get it.” His self-esteem has been attacked and his response is quick: “The length of the warranty is not that important. The price is still too high.”

The salesperson bears, “Your stuff isn’t worth it and you have some nerve asking for that much money.” Now, he’s wounded, his stress increases, his Old Brain kicks in, and out comes the critical parent, and possibly the lecturing professor, “The value we provide more than justifies our price. What you need to understand . . .”

Suddenly, the meeting has turned into a debate or worse, an outright argument. The interesting thing about this is how the unconscious mind and our past sales training baggage start reinforcing each other in a negative downward spiral. They are conspiring to hijack the conversation and most of the time we have no idea what’s happening.

Customer Expectations—Snake Oil and the Hard Sell

Just as it takes two to tango, salespeople and customers enter conversations with preconceptions and expecta-
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tions, that is, their own mind-set. Unfortunately, the customer’s preexisting mind-set about buying, and especially about buying with a salesperson involved, is generally not optimistic.

Customers tend to paint all salespeople with the same brush. To them, salespeople, no matter whether they sell advanced avionics or used cars, all come out of the same mold. There’s both good news and bad news in this.

Key Thought

Salespeople are guilty until proven innocent.

First, the bad news: In 2004, when Gallup surveyed the U.S. public on the subject of trust in professionals, it found that the “least trusted” of all professions are automobile salespeople. The sales profession in general doesn’t rank much higher in people’s minds. In 2000, when Jobtrack.com surveyed students and recent graduates, it found that the second “least respected career” was sales. (Politicians were the least respected.)

The portrait of salespeople that has emerged in the arts and media reinforces this poor image. Classics such as Sinclair Lewis’s Babbitt (1922), Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman (1949), and David Mamet’s Glengarry Glen Ross (1983) are typical representations. How often have you seen a salesperson cast as the respected hero in a movie, television program, or book?

It would be convenient to be able to blame others for the poor reputation of sales, but the hard fact is these unfavorable portraits didn’t appear out the blue. Manipulative, dishonest people exist and often are allowed, and even subtly encouraged, to do whatever it takes, as long as they win business. Further, the sales function itself is often
treated like the Wild West of the business world. Until recent years, sales hasn’t received much respect as a profession with a body of knowledge and a code of conduct. (That is starting to change. For instance, in 2004 I was invited to speak at an academic conference attended by professors from some 60 colleges and universities that had all established, or were in the process of establishing, curriculums and degree tracks for professional selling.)

Finally, our customers’ negative perception of salespeople is based on direct experience. How often have you been pressured to buy a product that wasn’t right for your needs, been sold a product or service that didn’t live up to the hype, fallen prey to the bait-and-switch ploy, had to be rude to end a sales call, taken a survey that is just a come-on for a sales pitch? We’ve all had these experiences and over time, we’ve all built up defense systems designed to protect us from snake oil and the hard sell.

Understanding the preexisting mind-set of the customer as you begin your communications will help maintain your emotional control. Your behavior will either confirm the customer’s mind-set or contradict the stereotype and set you apart. But the fact remains that your interaction with a customer is going to be affected by all the salespeople who came before you. If the customer hears you use the same line that the telemarketer or retail salesperson used on him last night or that the “persuader” used who called him the day before, he is going to associate you with them.

If your main competitor came in yesterday and unwittingly angered the customer by refusing to talk about the price before a lengthy presentation and you walk in today and do the same thing, you are in for twice the anger and are highly unlikely to succeed. You could be operating with
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all good intentions; it doesn’t matter. Salespeople are guilty until proven innocent.

Parents, Professors, Policemen

Salespeople confirm customers’ negative sales stereotypes when they tell them what to do, when they lecture at them, and when they imply customers are wrong... in other words, when they act like critical parents, lecturing professors, or accusatory policemen. Remember, I am talking about negative stereotypes here. There are nurturing parents, inspiring professors, and heroic police officers, but adopting the negative behaviors of these roles in a selling environment is common and can have serious consequences.

Even the positive aspects of these role models can create tension and conflict. Think about it. Who do parents, professors, and policemen deal with? Children, students, and criminals. Is that how you see your customers? Probably not. But, that may well be exactly how you are unintentionally treating them.

How do customers react to these roles? It depends on how sensitive they are and what kinds of messages are running in their adaptive unconscious minds. Often, it’s a sequential reaction. When first confronted by a salesperson who is acting like a critical parent, a lecturing professor, or an accusing policeman, the customer may go into a compliant, subservient mode. But they won’t open up, won’t contribute to the conversation, and are a long way from trusting you. On the surface, they will seem to be listening. In fact, they may listen and nod along, accept your brochure, politely thank you, and promise to be in touch. As you have perhaps noticed, the odds are they won’t.

Of course, it may not end that civilly. Things can easily get worse if you continue to be perceived as one of the
negative versions of the parent, professor, or policeman, and the customer takes offense. An offended customer will often decide enough is enough and push back and now you’ve got an openly adversarial relationship. At that point, unless you know how to recover, you might as well show yourself to the door before the customer does it for you.

Solving the Style Challenge

All right, you’ve heard all the reasons why the traditional conversational style in sales is miscommunication and hopefully, you’ve got a new perspective on why customers often act and react in seemingly irrational and counterproductive ways (Figure 1.2). It sounds depressingly bad, but I promised good news, too.

The good news is that with that strong, negative image, it is very easy to differentiate ourselves by acting against type, by not exhibiting the behaviors that customers expect, or literally by doing the opposite of those expected behaviors.

After all, when customers begin a conversation with negative expectations and then realize that those thoughts were not justified in your case, it accelerates the credibility-building process and engenders trust.

Key Thought

*When in doubt, do the opposite of what a salesperson would do!*
To break these patterns and establish credibility and trust with customers:

- We need to be professionally involved and emotionally detached in our conversations with customers. Sometimes salespeople and their managers push back when I tell them this. They believe they need to be enthusiastic and passionate about their solutions to win sales. That is simply not true. Look passionate up in your dictionary. Passionate means being dominated by and displaying strong emotion. More often than not, strong

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**FIGURE 1.2 Conventional Thinking versus Diagnostic Thinking**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Conventional Thinking</th>
<th>Diagnostic Thinking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All prospects will buy.</td>
<td>Only certain customers will and should buy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never take “no” for an answer.</td>
<td>Always be leaving. Give the customer room to breathe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence pays.</td>
<td>Persistence in pursuing bad business wastes valuable resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good salesperson can sell anything to anybody.</td>
<td>A good salesperson weeds out poor prospects and focuses on high-gain opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers know what they need; it’s my job to deliver it.</td>
<td>Customers can be unclear and even wrong about their needs; my job is to do a good diagnosis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never walk away when money is on the table.</td>
<td>Always walk away unless you know you can improve your customer’s business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If at first you don’t succeed, try again and again.</td>
<td>If you don’t succeed in finding pain you can address, try again—with a different customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The customer is always right.</td>
<td>The customer requires professional guidance to complete a quality decision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
emotions interfere with honest, respectful, and professional communication. When you get too passionate, it is easy to cross the line and become emotionally involved. Think confident instead of passionate; think of the doctor role model. Doctors who are confident about their diagnoses, confident about their recommendations, and confident about their ability to treat you are professionally involved. You wouldn’t want a doctor getting excited about your affliction—that would be scary.

- To be effective communicators, it is critical that we retrain ourselves and learn new conversational processes and skills. We have to stop presenting and start connecting. We need to change the content of our presentations, make them inclusive and interactive, and put them in their proper place in the sales process. We need to banish the alienating tactics of persuasion. We have to stop persuading and start collaborating in a process of mutual diagnosis and confirmation.

- We have to confront our conditioning and break the stereotypes, distance ourselves from stereotypical sales images, and establish ourselves as valued business advisors. When in doubt, we want to do the opposite of what the stereotypical salesperson would do, and I will show you how.

Before we start exploring the qualities that will enable us to structure and engage in credible conversations that can consistently meet the above goals, we also need to consider the substance of our conversations. Substance and style go hand in hand.
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Strategy
The Prime Solution

Process
Mastering the Complex Sale

Execution
Exceptional Selling

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Jeff Thull is a leading-edge strategist and valued advisor for executive teams of major companies worldwide. As President and CEO of Prime Resource Group, he has designed and implemented business transformation and professional development programs for companies like Shell Global Solutions, 3M, Microsoft, Intel, Citicorp, IBM, and Georgia-Pacific, as well as many fast-track, start-up companies. He has gained the reputation for being a thought-leader in the arena of sales and marketing strategies for companies involved in complex sales.

Jeff is a compelling, entertaining and thought-provoking keynote speaker with a track record of over 2,500 speeches and seminars delivered to corporations and professional associations. Jeff Thull’s work is published in hundreds of business and trade publications. To download Chapter One of The Prime Solution or Mastering the Complex Sale, visit www.primeresource.com