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How salespeople can stimulate the global economy

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2017/01/25/how-salespeople-can-stimulate-the-global-economy/

January 25, 2017



Currently valued at US\$20.4 trillion, 'no decision' opportunities are languishing in pipelines all over the world; a global 'gold reserve' of seismic proportion waiting to be unlocked by sales people. This is one conclusion from our latest research *The Sales Persons Secret Code*, which suggests more than 27 per cent of opportunities forecast and pursued by salespeople result in no one winning business and much-needed buying decisions not made.

According to the [World Bank](#), the 2013 nominal gross world product (the combined gross national product of every country in the world) was approximately US\$75.5 trillion. A 27 per cent increase creates a US\$20.4 trillion opportunity, enough to halt any global recession. Economists will be interested to learn that this global gold mine is growing. In fact, only five years ago 'no decisions' equated to 14 per cent of opportunities forecast and pursued by salespeople.

Why is this the case? Only after interviewing 1000 of the world's most iconic salespeople from organizations including Adidas, Apple, Cisco, Deloitte, GSK, JP Morgan, Microsoft, Oracle, Steinway & Co. and Vodafone did we start to understand why.

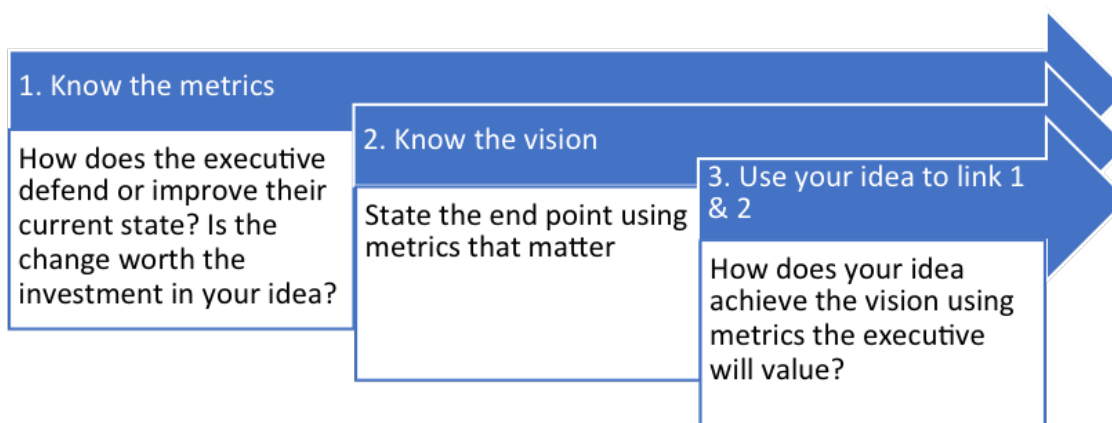
It is clear that 'no decisions' are becoming the significant threat to salespeople. 85 per cent of B2B customers now commence their buying purchasing process via referral, with peer recommendations influencing more than 92 per cent of buying decisions. This represents a great disintermediation of salespeople from buyers.

Analysts at [Forrester](#) believe the disconnect is a backlash against too many sellers having disappointed buyers by being more focused on their own sales agenda and commission cheque than on defining and solving customer problems. This view is consistent with our

own research, which suggests that by 2020, one million B2B salespeople may lose their jobs to self-service eCommerce, if they rise no higher than the 'talking brochure' syndrome described by *SPIN-Selling* author Neil Rackham.

The purpose of a dialogue between a sales person and a corporate executive is to promote change, create new patterns of thinking and to offer challenging insights. When executives refrain from making a decision and continue in their current state, they are either unconvinced to enter a different end state, or have not been equipped by the salesperson to make the case for change within their organisation. The 'no decision' demonstrates the 'least worst option', but this simply kicks the can down the road.

According to Lee Wood, the former head of Global Sales Operations, Planning & Strategy at Thomson Reuters, executives want ideas from salespeople, not solutions. Lee is responsible for improving sales productivity and effectiveness within the IP and Science business unit. He has 30 years of experience and has observed thousands of sales won and lost. He concludes that salespeople need to understand how executives view the world if they wish to unlock 'no decision' opportunities and suggests the following three steps:



Clearly, this approach takes preparation. Our research suggests it requires a level of mastery in three areas.

Pathos is Greek for 'feeling'. It enhances **confidence** in both seller and executive and is used to evoke a stirring emotional connection with what you're discussing. Great speeches and sales pitches build pathos by using light and shade — fast and loud words to convey the excitement of moving forward to achieve one's hopes and dreams (light), and slow whispers or dramatic pauses to drive home why maintaining the status quo is unattractive (shade).

The purpose of pathos is to cause the buyer to relate to the beliefs, ideals or product you're offering. Cynics might cry, "Acting!" Our research demonstrated that top-performing salespeople believe that the entire purpose of communication is to create connection through the dialogue and not to simply transmit a message. In summary, no sales conversation is complete without capturing the buyer's heart through *pathos*. Without it, why should they care?

Logos is Greek for 'reason'. It enhances your **competence** and is used to persuade people

with logical thought and facts. This is where you pitch a proposal using data, charts, percentages, case studies and expert testimony, so the audience is persuaded that your reasoning is irrefutable. Logos causes the buyer to feel a logical conviction about what you're selling...and another expression for 'logical conviction' is 'belief'. No sales conversation is complete without capturing the buyer's mind through *logos*. Without it, why should they believe?

Ethos is Greek for 'character'. It enhances your **communication** and is used to convince an audience about your credibility and authority and, therefore, the veracity of your proposition. Ethos allows you to build a compelling argument that reassures an executive that your idea will deliver against their vision state. But there is more. In a sales context, you generate ethos when you choose language appropriate for the audience, use correct grammar, and cite your background and credentials in ways that add value and are not self-serving. All the while you communicate your knowledge in a likeable manner. This builds trust — your ethos creates an ethical appeal. The purpose of ethos is to build an impression of your authority, competence, credibility and trustworthiness. The acid test in any executive's mind after the salesperson leaves the room will be, "Can I trust them to deliver?" No sales conversation is complete without establishing your ethos. Without it why should they listen, or trust you to deliver idea(s) that result a different end state?

High-performers have continuous, meaningful and adaptive dialogue with their customers because building credentials, even when there's no immediate gain in sight, is the surest way to be in the right place at the right time to spot future sales opportunities emerging. Our research suggests that salespeople who do this find themselves in a position to influence the criteria all other suppliers will later be assessed against and, thereby, they gain incremental advantages.

They keep their personal and company brands in front of customers and prospects on a regular basis, knowing that repeat exposure and repetition (via email, print, phone calls, texts, meetings and social media posts) is like the pealing sound of thunder in a mountain pass — it reverberates back and forth, up and down, long after the initial conversation. As one top-performer from Amex explained, "My job description is for the customer to regard me as someone they should have in their inner circle when they choose to **explore ideas** my company provides solutions for. For that to happen, they need to know me, trust me, and see my contributions to them aren't only made when they put money on the table."

Ideas, not solutions, will prevent the next global recession. For our sake, let's hope salespeople are able to unlock the 'no decision' gold reserve, for we will all prosper as a result.



Notes:

- *This blog post includes insights from the authors' book [The Sales Persons Secret Code](#) (LID, 2017)*
- *The post gives the views of its authors, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*
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