The top 10 myths in sales
What every sales leader needs to know
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A good salesperson can sell anything.

First impressions count.

Never attack the competition.

Objections are a sign of customer interest.

Salespeople are born, not made.

Open questions are more powerful than closed questions.

More calls equal more orders.

Start at the top.

Always be closing.

First impressions count.

Focus on the big customer.

Never attack the competition.

Discover the truth about the top 10 myths in sales.
A good salesperson can sell anything

Fact or fiction? Research indicates this is not strictly true. A seller involved in smaller sales might well move from selling stationery to selling household goods, proving very successful at both as each sale can typically involve a single call to close the business. What would happen though, if the stationery seller moved into selling large, complex cloud technology?

Yes, the seller would require a new set of knowledge, but the skills required to operate in this long cycle, multidimensional sale are also very different.

Research shows that in small sales the seller is product focussed and uses much of the airtime. The seller tends to push his product at the customer.

In successful large sales, much of the focus is on truly understanding the customer and their needs. It's often the customer who uses the airtime, responding to many and varied questions from the seller. The seller is seen to encourage the customer towards a successful outcome.

For an organisation selling large sophisticated solutions who wants to introduce a new low priced range of products, it may not be the smartest move to expect their current sellers to sell the new range – the skill-set required may well be very different to those they currently use.

More calls equal more orders

Fact or fiction? There's a link to Myth 01 here. In low value sales where the seller is acting the role of a talking brochure, then one could extrapolate more orders from more calls. Double-glazing selling is one such example.

However, Huthwaite’s research shows that in large value sales where the salesperson takes time to understand customer needs and leads the customer through a diagnostic and solution focussed process, Myth 02 falls down. This type of call requires planning and preparation, a skilled interaction and time for reflection afterwards.

Small sales are all about efficiency whilst larger, more complex sales are focussed upon effectiveness. It's a numbers game versus an application of skills.
Open questions are more powerful than closed questions

Fact or fiction? This one has been around for a long time. Huthwaite research finds no correlation between open questions and success. The calls we’ve observed have a mix of both open and closed questions and differing balances between them.

Furthermore, the responses to open questions aren’t always a flow of information. In fact, 10% of open questions receive a simple closed answer. What’s more, 60% of closed questions receive a lengthy answer.

Whilst open and closed questions can assist the process of the interaction, the real effectiveness behind sales questions lies in their content.

Fact or fiction? Why waste time when you can deal with the decision-makers?

One thing that Huthwaite noticed when observing highly effective sellers - they do not rush to the top. Instead, they spend time in the middle of the organisation with the problem owners to fully understand the issues before approaching more senior colleagues.

Senior people are hard pressed for time. When a seller talks to the C-suite, it’s crucial for them to engage the executives by:

a) showing full understanding of their issues

b) showing how their solution meets their company’s needs and demonstrates the benefits it can bring

c) talking their language.
**Always be closing!**

Fact or fiction? They’ve been telling us for years, “Always Be Closing” but, it’s not what we see effective sellers do. In fact, in high value sales premature attempts to close can actually lose business.

Skilled sellers explore the customer needs in depth, demonstrate their capability to meet those needs and show a clear business case for their solution before they start to close.

Effective closing follows a simple three-stage process.

1. Check no issues (opportunities) are missed
2. Remind the customer of the key benefits of the solution
3. Ask for an appropriate commitment from the customer.

Progress in large, complex sales will be staged. Initially it may take the form of commitment from the customer to take action in advance of making the decision. No movement by the customer equals no progress in the sale.

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**First impressions count**

Fact or fiction? “Most people know if they are going to do business with you in the first 60 seconds.”

Linking back to Myths 01 and 02, it depends on the nature of the sale. In some small sales, yes this can be true. In larger, complex sales we find no correlation between call openings and successful outcomes. Indeed, even a frosty reception can warm when a customer sees the business benefits the seller can provide.

This is not to say that sellers can open carelessly. It’s important to establish the reason for the discussion, expectations from the meeting, timings and to position the questioning process. This may be a new and improved experience for some customers.
Salespeople are born, not made

**Fact or fiction?** What a myth! Some early sales studies in the 1940s and 50s indicated a high level of extroverts amongst sellers. However, much of the selling was for low value products which needed an efficient and repeatable process. Now, most of that happens via the web.

Customers demand empathy, trust and integrity. The sophisticated seller nurtures relationships with decision making teams over long sales cycles for high value solutions.

Observation reveals that many successful salespeople do not fit into the extrovert mould, they are often quiet, considered, skilled professionals that care about their customers.

Objections are a sign of customer interest

**Fact or fiction?** Let's rationalise our poor performance shall we? We do a mediocre persuasion job, the customer objects so we tell ourselves they wouldn't bother to object if they weren't interested. Where on earth has this myth come from? If customers object it is because they have been offered a part or whole solution they do not value.

We have failed in our job as sellers to establish that value. The objection stems from the seller not fully understanding customer needs and offering something unsuitable. Our research shows that many objections are a response to salespeople offering solutions where the customer has not expressed a clear need. The research also correlated the use of questions against objections received - the more questions, the fewer objections. The questions were generally those that helped seller to understand and develop needs.
**Never attack the competition**

*Fact or fiction?* In the literal sense, this is pretty sound; don’t attack the competition directly. However, our research shows that effective sellers do address the weaknesses of the competition in a more subtle way. Compare the following:

a) “Widget are a small company and their service coverage is very thin at the best of times.”

b) “Small companies quite often have difficulty matching the service levels of larger organisations – and you are looking for a three-hour response are you not?”

The message in statement b) is clear, but is not aimed directly at Widget.

For sellers to remain professional, it is crucial to avoid direct attack on the competition. Effective sellers remind the customer where they are strong and where the competition is weak by using business scenarios.

**Focus on the big customer**

*Fact or fiction?* Fact or fiction? Although true once upon a time, the sophisticated buyer of large organisations today paints a very different picture. Procurement aims to create the greatest efficiencies possible resulting in greater demands on the seller as both a resource and a cost centre.

Effective sellers are beginning to realise that middle-sized customers, especially those in growth markets, can present a better proposition. Competition may not be so fierce, which can result in more profitable business. Decision-makers are more accessible and decisions made more quickly, which means a shorter sales cycle for the seller.

So where should sellers focus their time and effort?

‘The biggest accounts’ may not be the answer any longer. We know that 80% of profit typically comes from 20% of accounts, but sellers beware – don’t confuse large with profitable and be sure you fully understand your customer’s needs.
What next?

Further reading

**Developing Sales Effectiveness**

Do you aspire to take your sales approach to a world class standard? This report summarises the skills and tactics used by successful sellers compared to those who are average performers. Compare yourself and identify your own areas for improvement.

**Download**
https://huthwaiteinternational.com/developing-sales-opportunities

**Creating and Capturing Value**

A global study of the value-creating behaviours needed for better business Value is one of the biggest contributors to business success. This global research report, in association with the ISM, focuses on how organisations can create it for themselves and their customers for more profitable business.

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About Huthwaite International

Huthwaite International is a training provider specialising in sales, negotiation and communication. Our methodologies are unique. Proven through observational research and unique verbal behaviour analysis we help individuals to understand and command their verbal communication to maximise their impact in critical business interactions.

Organisations around the world, from small businesses to many of the Fortune 100 depend on our methodologies for their commercial success.

Contact us

To find out how we might help your business contact us for an informal discussion.

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