

SANDLER®

ADVISOR

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At Sandler, our VISION is to be the undisputed market leader in driving sales performance through tech-enabled, data-driven sales training. Our MISSION is to drive market-leading growth for the brands we partner with.



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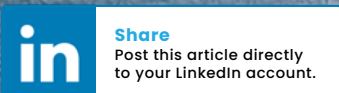
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The Moneyball Moment

Some Thoughts on Sales, Analytics, and Success in a Data-Driven World



David Mattson
Sandler Executive Chairman



The 2011 Brad Pitt movie *Moneyball* is one of those rare baseball films that even people who don't know a thing about the game somehow end up loving. As of this writing, *Moneyball* has a 94% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes – quite high for a sports-themed film. And I've got a theory about why so many people who don't love baseball love this picture.

At the end of the day, *Moneyball* really isn't about baseball. Technically, yes, it's a story that *involves* a baseball team. **But what this movie is truly about is Brad Pitt shaking up the status quo** ... when people really, really don't want to see it get shaken up. And that, I believe, is something that all leaders -- in fact, all of us -- can relate to.

Haven't seen *Moneyball*? No problem. Here's a quick summary that will explain what I mean. (If you've seen the film, feel free to skip the next paragraph.)



Against all odds, having lost his four best players to far wealthier teams, cash-strapped Oakland A's general manager Billy Beane (Brad Pitt) adopts a daring new method for turning around a losing team: analytics. At first, his data-driven approach isn't popular with the scouts, the fans, the radio talk show hosts, or the A's manager Art Howe (Philip Seymour Hoffman). In fact, Howe, along with just about everyone else who reports to Beane, tells him he's crazy. But guess what? The new approach works. Long story short: Beane and his Ivy-League numbers guy successfully chart and track a whole bunch of new metrics; they use those metrics to identify undervalued, overlooked players; and they sign those players for next to nothing, because nobody else in major-league baseball is doing what they're doing. Over the course of a season, the players deliver. Beane leads the A's into the 2002 playoffs, which was supposed to be an impossible outcome. Only it *wasn't* impossible. It was the next phase of big-league baseball's evolution.

Beane's maverick emphasis on analytics has become the way business is now conducted in major-league baseball. In fact, it's become the way business is conducted in *all* big-time sports. The leaders on and off the field have all moved from intuition to data. And leaders in other industries are starting to follow their example.



Move from intuition to data.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE “OLD-SCHOOL GUY”

Back in 2002, what Billy Beane was advocating was flat-out heresy to baseball “purists”—which is another term for people who like the status quo just the way it is, because that’s what they’ve gotten used to.

One of those people was Art Howe, the A’s manager, a classic “old-school guy.” Beane outlined the changes that had to happen. Tactfully and professionally. Multiple times. But nothing changed. In the early phase of the season, Howe simply refused to put the people Beane had signed into the lineup. Howe was stuck in an old-school paradigm. Know anyone like that? (Most sales leaders do.)

I call Billy Beane’s dilemma with his old-school field manager – and our very similar organizational dilemma as sales leaders in the AI era -- the Moneyball Moment.



I call Billy Beane’s dilemma with his old-school field manager – and our very similar organizational dilemma as sales leaders in the AI era -- the Moneyball Moment.

Perhaps you’re wondering *how* Beane eventually persuaded his manager to play (for instance) the new, undervalued first baseman he’d just signed. Answer: Beane *traded away* all the other players who could play first base. Guess who started at first base that night? Right: Beane’s guy.

That’s one creative, highly effective way of addressing a Moneyball Moment.

By the way, the scene where Beane tells his manager about these trades is one of the truly great roleplays on **the art of launching and sustaining a difficult conversation**. This is how sales leaders (and other leaders) inevitably end up resolving a Moneyball Moment: by starting and completing difficult conversations. It’s how leaders survive, and ultimately, it’s how their *teams* survive. After that discussion, Howe had no more comebacks, no more excuses, no more delaying tactics. The game had officially changed. Whether those stuck in the past *wanted* it to change was irrelevant.

SOME THOUGHTS ON SHAKING UP THE ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS QUO

Not all the conversations survivors like Billy Beane face are difficult, though. Very near the end of the film, Beane has a job interview at Fenway Park with John Henry, the owner of the Boston Red Sox.

During that interview, Henry says to Beane:

"For \$41 million, you built a playoff team. You lost Damon, Giambi, Isringhausen, and Pena, and you won more games without them than you did with them.

You won the exact same number of games as the Yankees, but the Yankees paid \$1.4 million per win, and you paid \$260,000.

I know you're taking it in the teeth out there, but the first guy through the wall – he always gets bloody. Always. This is threatening not just a way of doing business, but in their minds, it's threatening the game. Really, what it's threatening is their livelihoods. It's threatening their jobs. It's threatening the way that they do things.

And every time that happens, whether it's a government or a way of doing business or whatever it is, the people who are holding the reins, who have their hands on the switch, they go crazy. I mean, anybody who's not tearing their team down right now and rebuilding it using your model ... they're dinosaurs."

HOW NOT TO BE A DINOSAUR

At this point, I hope you've gathered that this is not in any way, shape, or form an article about baseball. What this is, is an article about **how not to be a dinosaur sales leader enabling a dinosaur sales team**. In the AI era – the era when we all became responsible, whether we liked it or not, for data-driven decisions, meaning decisions based on advanced analytics – we have an ethical obligation to launch difficult conversations with the "old-school guys" (of whatever gender) on our team.



We have an ethical obligation to launch difficult conversations with the "old-school guys" (of whatever gender) on our team.

There are a number of areas where the people who work for us are likely to feel threatened by a new paradigm – and create a Moneyball Moment for us as leaders. Let me be clear: the responsibilities of salespeople and *sales leadership* now need to be looked at in a whole different way – just as Billy Beane and the A's, and eventually all of organized baseball, had to start looking at the job of field manager *and* general manager very differently than they were used to. At the end of the 2002 season, baseball's GMs, managers, and scouts all lived in a new world. The lucky ones realized that. The unlucky ones clung to the status quo.

Today, it's our turn. Just like Billy Beane, we need to be prepared to have some difficult discussions with the people who report to us ... if we expect to survive and thrive in the AI era.

Sales leaders now have a personal and professional responsibility to act more like Billy Beane in 2002 and less like his naysayers. Beane wasn't crazy. He was on the cutting edge. There's a difference. What follows is meant to help you show everyone in the organization exactly where the borderline between crazy and cutting edge really lies.

THREE MONEYBALL MOMENTS

The ever-deepening complexity of the buyer journey means organizational success now requires a whole new breed of salespeople.

That doesn't mean your salespeople are in trouble. It just means that they're going to need to learn to do some things differently. It means some new deliverables are now non-negotiable parts of the job, whether those deliverables are familiar or not. And the sooner those deliverables are established with crystal clarity for salespeople, the better off everyone is going to be.



Salespeople will need to learn to do some things differently.

Very often, when we share with teams what I'm about to share with you, some of the people on the team push back. They talk about what is and isn't in their formal written job description. They resist changes to that formal job description. They talk about autonomy, about doing their job in the way that works best for them, and about how long they've been doing things their way with no problem. So, here's my question for leaders (and everyone else, for that matter): Didn't Art Howe, the old-school manager in *Moneyball*, put forward each of those reasons in defense of *his* status quo?

Howe's job description had changed, regardless of whether he realized it. Cue the difficult conversation.

Defending an outdated status quo may feel easy and safe at first ... but it gets more expensive on both the personal and the organizational level with every passing day. At the beginning of the 2002 baseball season, *zero* major league managers had to look closely at player analytics if they wanted to do their job well and keep that job. Today, *all* of them *must* do that to stay competitive.

What baseball has learned, we need to learn. Getting a better playbook, following it as a team, and executing it in a disciplined way, as a team, are all markers of professionalism in any discipline and any industry. *No* successful team uses the last decade's playbook. *No* good playbook ignores what the competition is likely to be throwing at us right now. And *no* effective leader gathers the team together before the big game and says, "Okay, on the count of three, get out there and do whatever you feel like doing."

Bottom line: Even if people push back at first, we have a professional obligation to update the playbook, and a professional obligation to lead the difficult conversations that ensure that playbook is executed. Each of the following items, then, represents a playbook-related Moneyball Moment for us as leaders to navigate. Each of these three changes will shake up some preconceptions in your organization about what salespeople do for a living. And that's a good thing.

There are three critical areas where cutting-edge sales leaders are going to run into Moneyball Moments: Sales Intelligence, Mapping the Opportunity, and ROI.



Sales Intelligence

Our salespeople will want to be ready to do **more research work up-front about a given contact, a given target company, and/or a given industry** than they did even a year or two ago. Why? Because buyers and influencers have access to more relevant data than ever before, and that access to data has changed the dynamic. As sellers, we need to assume they've done a lot of research on us; if we're going to have a positive impact on them (much less align with where they are in the buyer journey), we have to gather and integrate a lot more data on them than we once did. Fortunately, our people can use tools like ChatGPT to uncover the specific challenges and pain points likely to affect decision makers and influencers we target, and to identify the most important questions and symptoms likely to arise at various touch points. They can use tools like [Humantic AI](#) to personalize their messaging to play to a contact's behavioral style long before they even talk to that contact. In years past, salespeople weren't expected to do any of this. Now they are.



Mapping the Opportunity

Our team members will also want to get better at [understanding the entire cast of characters on the buying side](#), better at clarifying what value looks like to each of those individual players, and better at matching the right internal team member on our side with the right external influencer on the buyer side. In years past, when there were fewer people involved in a purchase decision, this kind of internal collaborative planning was often considered optional. Unless they were dealing with a huge account, salespeople typically looked for ways to steer around team selling. It's now much, much harder to do that and remain competitive. One of my clients told me of a recent close that required no less than thirteen different people to sign the contract. That's the direction we're all headed. The salespeople who succeed will be those who adapt to this new reality.



ROI

Last but certainly not least, our team members will also want to improve their ability to **demonstrate conclusively where we have improved, and can be expected to improve, return on investment**. If salespeople are in any way uncomfortable with this conversation, or if they imagine that charisma and personality are somehow going to serve as a replacement for it, they're no longer going to be competitive in this marketplace. It's that simple. At Sandler, we used to call this skill "dollarization," but in a globally connected arena it probably makes more sense to call it "financial quantification." Whatever we call it, in the AI era, it's not optional. It's table stakes.

These are, as I see it, the three critical areas where cutting-edge sales leaders are going to run into Moneyball Moments with their direct reports. They are well advised to be prepared to initiate, and continue, difficult conversations with front-line sales contributors about these deliverables. Members of our selling team may imagine that last year's rules still apply, and that the deliverables I've mentioned are optional or negotiable. They're not.

The old-school rules don't apply anymore. The game has changed, and whether we wanted it to change is irrelevant. Salespeople who can't get their heads around these three new realities need to be coached until they can ... or, if our analytics tell us that that outcome is unlikely or cost-ineffective, taken out of the lineup (to use a *Moneyball* metaphor).



The game has changed. Whether we wanted it to change is irrelevant.

The potentially *challenging* news for sales leaders is that, like Billy Beane, we may need to have more than one difficult conversation with a contributor we'd really prefer to hold on to. That means we need to be consistent and stay rooted in reality, whether other people accept reality or not. If we don't do that, the market will make the hard choices for us, and we may not like where that leaves our organization. **The changes will happen regardless of how ready we are for them!** Which kind of company would you rather own stock in: one deeply invested in cable broadcasting, or one deeply invested in streaming entertainment? I rest my case.

The *good* news for sales leaders is that, in Billy Beane's world, Art Howe eventually came around. There's no good reason to assume your team won't do the same.

By the way, the AI-driven, analytics-heavy era we're all living in provides plenty of challenges in terms of Moneyball Moments we encounter with peers and superiors. I'll be covering those in a future article, so you may want to watch this space.



Sandler Rule: Be The Least Bad Cake

Some Thoughts On When (and How) to Talk
about Price in a Tough Market



Emily Yepes
Sandler Trainer And Practitioner



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There's a baking show on Netflix my daughter and I really love called *Nailed It!* We've seen every episode at least once. Here's the premise of the show. Three regular people -- not professional bakers, total amateurs -- are given an exact recipe for a high-end, deluxe cake, the kind people would pay hundreds of dollars for. Each player is given all the materials and equipment they need. Each is given a finished, pre-made example of the cake they're supposed to make. Each is given an hour to create it.

Spoiler alert: They never, ever match the original.

To understand what makes this show so special, you need some visual examples of what happens on the show. To the right, you'll see two cakes. The top image gives you a good example of the kind of fancy cake that the amateur baker is supposed to create with just a recipe ... and zero experience. The image on the bottom shows you the kind of cake the amateur actually delivers.

Fantastic, right?

Here's what I love about *Nailed It!* There are so many parallels to sales. Think about it. We're given a sales process. We're given a list that tells us all the great questions to ask, what order to ask them in, and how to handle whatever we hear back. We're given all the stages and the exit criteria for each stage. That sales process is our recipe for closing a sale. But if we imagine that following the recipe to the letter by asking all the questions on the list is consistently going to give us a perfect cake, that's just not reality. And you know what's strange? There's a kind of taboo in some circles about saying that part right out loud. But I think we do need to say it, especially in the 21st century -- which is, let's face it, where we're all operating.

Buying is a complex process these days, one with a lot of stakeholders (some of whom prefer not having to deal with salespeople at all) and a lot of moving parts. We now have more buyers within a B-to-B purchase decision for a single deal than we've ever had before. Recently, a client of mine signed a deal with a major account that required no less than *thirteen* signatures on the final contract!

That's a lot of coalition-building. And the more money is at stake, the more complex the coalition-building gets. It stands to reason, then, that our *selling approach* is going to need a lot of moving parts, too--maybe more than we imagined when we first signed up.

There's another important reason I'm telling you about *Nailed It!* Contestants never have to match the perfect, professional cake exactly. In fact, they don't even have to come close to that standard. To win, all they have to do is make the *least bad cake*.

Now, I've been thinking a lot about this, and what I've realized is that the "least bad cake" standard is just as true for professional salespeople as it is for the amateur bakers on that show.

Let me explain what I mean.



IN SEARCH OF THE LEAST BAD CAKE

In the world of baking, the thing that makes the major difference between the professionally made cakes and the ones that the amateurs come up with is *experience*. The best professional bakers have instincts that have been honed over time, after years of practical application, training, and reinforcement. As a result of all that experience, the pros know how to recognize situations where it makes sense to tweak (or maybe even ignore!) the recipe.



When do you tweak the recipe? When do you ignore the recipe?

A great professional cake baker can look at a bowl full of batter and decide when it makes sense to put the recipe aside. They can say: “Yeah, you know what, the recipe says one cup of liquid. But I can tell, by the way this batter looks, that it needs a spoonful more.” They know how to make the adjustments that keep a “properly” cooked cake from turning into a disaster. If the recipe says the cooking time needs to be 25 minutes, and they look at it while it’s still in the oven and decide that it’s ready to come out a minute or two early – they take the cake out of the oven.

Not only *can* they do all that. They have a professional *responsibility* to know when it’s time to look beyond the recipe. With experience, after all, comes responsibility. And yes, there’s an important parallel here for salespeople.

The recipe is the theory. Theory is important. But it’s not everything we need if we’re going to meet our responsibilities as professionals.

As I’ve already mentioned, for us to win our contest, our “cakes” don’t have to come out at the level of perfection -- although it’s great if they do! But we don’t want to be taken by surprise or left without options when that doesn’t happen.

Remember, we’re playing this game against our competition, not against the best salesperson who ever lived. The least bad cake wins! So the question we always face isn’t how we can be perfect -- which is an unrealistic goal, anyway. It’s: How can we bake a “cake” that’s at least slightly better than our competition’s?

I believe the best answer to that is: ***build better backup plans for when things don’t go the way we expected.***

What matters is whether our backup plans – our strategy for *responding* when things don’t go as planned -- are better than the competition’s. In sales, the difference in winning and losing is often inches. That’s especially true when we’re going up-market, competing against tough players for bigger and bigger deals, and connecting with buyers who love building up walls that are designed to keep salespeople at a distance. Yet – good news – *we don’t need to be perfect*. What we need are sound, practical backup plans, because they’re the single most effective strategy for winning the small advantages we need to be the least bad cake.



The recipe is the theory. Theory is important. But it's not everything we need if we're going to meet our responsibilities as professionals. What matters is what we do when theory conflicts with reality -- whether our backup plans are better than the competition's.

Think of the most successful seller you know personally. I'm willing to bet that that person doesn't just have backup plans -- they have backup plans for their backup plans. If plan A doesn't work, they know exactly what their plan B is, because they've mapped it out and practiced it. And if plan B doesn't work, they know what their plan C is. They've practiced that, too.

That's where we want to be. We want to be *ready* for the situations where theory and reality clash, and not be surprised by those situations. We want to anticipate those situations and respond resourcefully to them, making adjustments that we've already practiced many times. As professional salespeople, we've got a never-ending responsibility to ask ourselves: *How good are our backup plans?* Meaning: How prepared are we to pivot tactically when theory and reality clash?

I believe success in sales is all about making adjustments in real time, for a slight edge here and a slight edge there. Add up enough advantages, and the odds of being the least bad cake improve. That's really our job: adding up advantages by creating and then *executing* effective backup plans for all those times when theory and reality don't match up.

Now, there are literally dozens of scenarios where the quality of our backup plans will be tested. I want to use this article to look at just one of those scenarios, the scenario that salespeople I work with have the most direct, stressful personal experience with: the issue of when and how to talk about pricing.

“LISTEN, I DON’T WANT TO WASTE YOUR TIME”

At some point, we’ve all heard something like this from a buyer:

▶ **Listen, before we get started, let me just be very transparent with you. I don’t want to waste your time or mine. I really do want to learn about what you have to offer -- but I don’t want either of us to be spinning our wheels. So, before we cover anything else, maybe you could just let me know how much your stuff costs?**

Now, if you’re familiar with the Sandler Selling System, and certainly if you’ve been trained in it for any period of time, a question like that is going to set off lots of internal alarm bells. Theory is making you want to say, *No, no, no!*

Why? Because theory says there’s a rule we must follow here: “We don’t share pricing until we’ve been able to have a conversation about Pain – meaning the *problem we can solve that’s having an emotional impact* on this person’s world.”

That’s what theory will tell us. Here’s the “rule” I used to play in my head when I heard this kind of thing from a prospective buyer: *Never give any pricing until I’ve had a thorough discovery conversation.*

But what happens if I follow my little “rule” to the letter every time I get an “I don’t want to waste your time” prospect? Suppose I make a habit of saying ...

▶ **You know what? We actually don’t give out pricing until we’ve gathered a bit more information. Why don’t we talk about your situation first, like I suggested?**

I’ll tell you what happens: the walls that our prospects automatically put up when they see a salesperson approaching get taller and wider.

Here’s the thing. Like any effective system, the Sandler Selling System has beginning practitioners and experienced practitioners. And the more time you spend with the serious, experienced practitioners, the more obvious it becomes that they don’t follow the system’s “rules” as literally and narrowly as the less experienced sellers do. I’ve seen a lot of experts in action, and I’m here to tell you: The people who are the true experts don’t just refuse to share any information in this situation. They execute backup plans they’ve designed specifically for this conversation. They don’t follow “rules” like *Never give any pricing until I’ve had a thorough discovery conversation.*

In fact, I think a more relevant Sandler Rule might sound like this: *Beware of “never” and “always.”*



Beware of “never” and “always.”

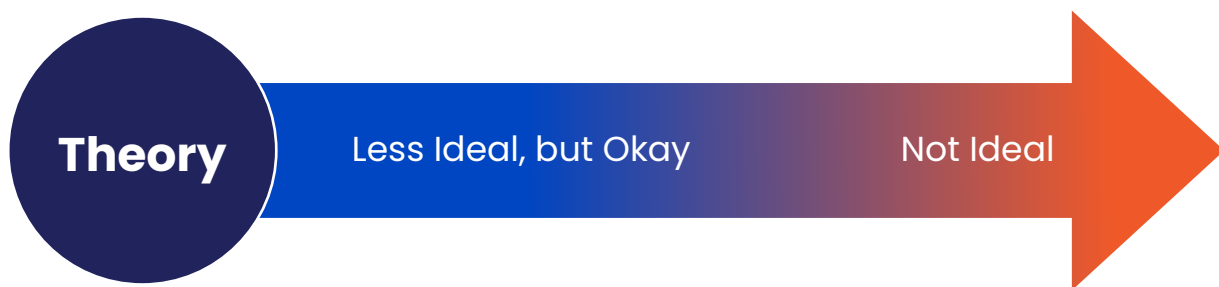
The words *never* and *always* don't match up well with the realities of the world we live in. They can be problematic and limiting. Truly creative people – in business and elsewhere – don't waste much time locking themselves into the world of *never/always*. And great sellers know that the most effective sales conversations have way too many shades of meaning for a *never/always* approach to be helpful.

Most of the time, good conversations with buyers are *not* black-and-white. Most of the time, when we're really having conversations that matter, you and I operate in a world with lots and lots of different shades that we have to make sense of. Most of the time, we are best advised to play the cards we were dealt, not the cards we wish we'd been dealt.

It would be great if we could just play the *never/always* card every time the issue of price comes up and still keep the conversation going. But that's not what happens. Very often, it feels like prospects either are playing with a deck that's stacked against us, or sometimes with an entirely different deck of cards – a deck we don't even recognize. And our job, as I see it, is to have enough cards in our deck to be able to make a sound decision about what the best play is -- especially if the buyer is holding all their cards close to the vest. And let's face it, early on in the relationship, that's usually what buyers are doing!

Yes: We do have to know the theory, because theory is always going to be our starting point. We want to be 100% clear about that: In theory, we would *like* to have a thorough discovery conversation before we discuss pricing. But when that's not possible, we can operate under the principle of "Less ideal, but okay."

In other words, we can choose to take some steps away from theory that are less than ideal, but that still get the job done. Of course, we'll want to *stop* taking steps if we find ourselves approaching something that's definitely *not ideal* and *not okay*. But we don't want to confuse "less-than-ideal" with "not effective," though, because remember: *the least bad cake wins!*



Ideally, we're going to *attempt* to conduct an in-depth discovery conversation about the problem/pain *before* we talk about the available budget for solving that problem and making that pain go away. Ten out of ten times, that's where we're going to start. But these days, we know that we're often going to be operating in the realm of less-than-ideal scenarios that require less-than-ideal-but-okay responses. Bottom line: If we don't have a good Plan B and a good Plan C, we're not doing our job!

“**If we don't have a good Plan B and a good Plan C, we're not doing our job!**”

With that principle in mind, we may want to consider studying, practicing via relentless roleplay, and then, when we find ourselves in a less-than-ideal scenario, *using* these ...

THREE LESS-THAN-IDEAL, BUT OKAY, RESPONSES TO “I DON’T WANT TO WASTE YOUR TIME, JUST TELL ME HOW MUCH IT COSTS”

If we find we can’t do an in-depth discovery session about pain before we talk about money, our next-best option might sound something like this:

- ▶ **You know, I appreciate you wanting to know that -- I would too. The reality is, though, I don’t know enough about your situation to know if we can even help you, or if we could, where we might begin. We sell XX different (products/varieties/models/whatever). If you can tell me just a little bit about what you’ve got going on, I can give you a pretty big ballpark. And then we could go from there, if it makes sense.**

This tactic serves three important purposes. First, it fosters transparency and trust by providing an honest response. Second, it safeguards against providing specific information that’s premature and potentially inaccurate. Last but not least, it keeps the lines of communication open: if the buyer gives us some information, they’ll get a “big ballpark” idea of the costs involved. There’s some back and forth, which of course is what we want. And whatever “big ballpark” pricing emerges, we’re going to want to be sure that number describes a range big enough to keep our estimate from being used to put pressure on another supplier -- and check-quote us out of the deal.

Here’s another option, which is great for situations where your offerings are highly customized, there really *is* no average deal size, and your pricing is all over the place -- but the buyer has never purchased anything like this before. Understandably, these buyers want to know what they’re getting into. That doesn’t mean they’re bad prospects, and it doesn’t mean that they’re unqualified. They’re just trying to get their head around what it is we’re talking about. And that’s okay. So maybe we say something like this:

- ▶ **I appreciate you wanting to get your head around this. I would too. Not knowing anything about your situation, what I can share with you at this point is that out of all the jobs that we’ve done over the last year, our smallest was around \$10,000, and our biggest was around \$300,000. Now, if you’d like to have more of a conversation, I can narrow that range down for you for sure. But at this point, that’s kind of the range of what we’ve worked with over the past year.**

This way, you offer a framework for discussion without committing to a precise figure prematurely. And again, if you pick the right range, there’s no way something like this can be repurposed to lowball an existing supplier.

Our third option is a bit more sophisticated, and it takes some more work up-front on our side, but in a lot of situations where we’re selling more complex offerings with a wide variety of price points, this third option is going to help us keep the dialogue alive. In this situation, we’re going to offer brackets within brackets. Take a look:

- You know, I appreciate your wanting to clarify that. I would want clarity as well if I were in your position. What I can share with you is that when companies start to work with us, a lot of times they've already gotten pretty far along on their own, and all they really need is a few months of our consulting services during the beginning of their implementation to make sure they're on the right track. Those engagements are typically somewhere between \$10,000 and \$30,000. Others we've worked with, though, they're pretty far along, but they do want us to be hand in hand with them for the first six months or a year, maybe a little bit more. Those engagements typically run between \$75,000 and \$150,000. And some companies want to build the project from the ground up with us. They want our expertise from the very beginning, right through development and implementation. Those projects are \$300,000 plus. Based on that, I'm not sure what you had in mind, where you are now, or what you were hoping to hear. So ... where should we start? Are we still on the table? Do we need to continue to talk?

Now, each of the three options I've shared with you is less than ideal – but each can give you a slight edge over a competitor, assuming you deploy it consistently and in the right situations. You can probably complement each option I've given you with a backup plan of your own that's glove-fitting to your industry and your market.

There are many, many more scenarios where consistently following the recipe like an amateur is a major disadvantage ... and creating and executing a sound backup plan like a professional gives us a significant edge. In a world where the least bad cake wins, doesn't it make sense to strategize, practice, and deliver, as many of those [backup plans](#) as we can?



The Leadership Lesson We Found in the Garbage



Michael Norton
Sandler EVP of Enterprise Sales



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Have you ever driven by a landfill, or found yourself driving behind a garbage truck, on a hot, humid day? If so, have you ever found yourself overwhelmed by a stench so rancid you had to roll up all the windows to avoid feeling physically ill?

Believe it or not, this really is something I ask company leaders. The first thing I hear in response is some variation on “Yes, of course.” The second response is a look of predictable confusion and even concern, an expression that translates as: “Why on earth are you asking me *that*? Aren’t we supposed to be talking about leadership?”



We are. Indulge me for a moment, because that stench-while-driving experience is a powerful reminder of a critical, non-negotiable leadership principle: **No garbage is allowed on the premises.** And the fact is, many of us lead teams that are drowning in garbage – garbage that smells (organizationally speaking) just as bad as that garbage truck does. And sometimes -- not always, mind you, but sometimes -- *we ourselves* are the source of the stench.

Whenever we catch a whiff of the kind of garbage I’m talking about, we will of course want to make sure that it’s disposed of immediately and properly ... even if (especially if) we were the ones who dumped it on the team in the first place. Yet that responsibility, I find, is not always something leaders want to hear about or act on.

Think about this for a moment. We wouldn’t haul a rotting plastic sack of *real-life* garbage into a meeting with our team. And if someone else *did* haul that bag in, we’d make sure it got cleaned up, quickly, wouldn’t we? By the same token, we as leaders have a moral and practical obligation to make sure that all the *psychological* garbage that gets dragged in the door gets tossed out in the landfill where it belongs ... and doesn’t end up making our whole workplace stink.

HEAD TRASH IS REAL

Now, you might not be used to thinking of psychological garbage – what David Sandler, the founder of our company, called “head trash” -- as a real thing. But it is real. And to prove that, here’s a hypothetical example of the kind of garbage I’m talking about, and the smelly consequences of ignoring it.

Jim is your lead salesperson. He’s been with you for about three years. He’s good at what he does, which is build business relationships with prospective clients. Like a lot of salespeople, though, Jim can sometimes be overwhelming when it comes to communicating internally about how best to ensure that a commitment he has made to a client gets fulfilled seamlessly. Sometimes the leader of Jim’s team makes excuses for that intimidation by saying that Jim is “intense” or is a “complicated guy.” These are euphemisms. Jim’s got head trash – and it stinks.

Yesterday, Jim closed a deal during a discussion with Anita, the CEO of a HugeCorp, a Fortune 1000 operation. Jim has been working hard to add this account to your company's logo collection for about a year now. Jim's attitude toward Anita during all his calls with her can be described as "sweetness and light." He's not overwhelming when he talks to clients. This morning, though, Jim called up Keiko, a member of your Service Delivery team who came on board sixty days ago. Keiko is responsible for working with Jim to make Anita's company's experience with your firm a positive one. So: Jim dials Keiko's number. Keiko picks up and greets Jim brightly and politely. Jim says:

"Keiko, Jim here, just wanted to put HugeCorp on your radar screen. Maybe you've heard of them: Fortune 1000. Major new client. Anyway. This just closed yesterday -- I'm going to need you to take care of A, and B, and give me an extra-big scoop of C on this rollout. Needless to say, we want to be sure the launch goes absolutely perfectly. Meaning: the opposite of what usually happens, Keiko. Okay? Now, I've scheduled the launch call for next Monday at 1pm, Anita's the CEO, she's going to be there, and I need you to be on the call, too. Thanks, gotta go now, mark it down on your calendar"

Did you smell something just then? Thought so. Me too. Head trash.

THE CRITICAL PARENT HEADSPACE

Side note: Any time we tell someone what to do (example: "mark it down on your calendar") rather than making a quiet, tactful suggestion ... and any time we make a cutting remark with the subtext "I wouldn't have made X mistake" (example: "the opposite of what usually happens") rather than highlighting our own shortcomings ... we're communicating from a headspace that's technically known as Critical Parent. In terms of communication between adults, this headspace makes most exchanges less productive.

There's a lot more I could say about the Critical Parent headspace, but for this article, just think of the most abrasive, annoying, condescending, toxic, control-freak of a teacher you ever had to put up with while you were growing up. Now hear that teacher talking to you, in front of the class, about a mistake you made, making you feel awful in the process. The voice you are hearing is the voice of Critical Parent. People who spend all or most of their time in Critical Parent during an interaction with another person are, in our experience, highly likely to be dragging around bags of unresolved head trash.

Back to that call. Jim is about to hang up when Keiko jumps in, just a split-second before Jim hits "disconnect." Keiko says:



Keiko

"What? Wait – hang on a second, Jim, just need to talk to you about a couple of things, is that okay?"

Jim

"Make it fast." (Another direct order. More Critical Parent.)

Keiko

"Well, I really don't want to cause a problem, Jim, and I definitely will talk to Amy, my supervisor, about this call ... but Mondays at 1pm are already booked solid for everyone here in Service Delivery. That's our big monthly team meeting. Is there any way we could set up another time for this?"

Jim

"Oh, Keiko. Keiko. Please don't tell me you're asking me to go back to the CEO of a Fortune 1000 organization and tell her she has to reschedule a launch meeting -- on my most important deal of the year. That isn't what I just heard you say, is it?"

THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

Man, that garbage truck is grinding out a sickening odor right now, isn't it? Everyone within a hundred yards of it must be holding their nose. This particular evidence of smelly garbage is known as Victim Mindset.

There's a lot more I could say about this headspace, but for this article, just think of a triangle with three points. One of the points is marked Victim. One is marked Rescuer. And one is marked Persecutor. Those three labels mark the borders of a game that never ends, a game that nobody wins ... unless they decide *not to play at all*.

Jim wants to play that game, and he wants to play hard. He's got some time-tested Victim moves in his repertoire, which means he knows exactly how to produce that particular stink in virtually any situation. And as you've probably already guessed, this is another reliable sign that Jim is dragging around a big bag of head trash.

THE COST OF IGNORING GARBAGE

Keiko

"Look, Jim – if it's an important deal, I guess I can talk to Amy about rescheduling our team meeting. I'll let you know what she says. But listen, there's something else important we need to talk about if you've got a moment -- "

Jim

"Make it very, very fast, Keiko – I'm about to jump on a Zoom call." (Direct order. More stinky Critical Parent headspace.)

Keiko

"Well, you said this account's going to need A, B, and C. A and B are no problem – but the rate sheet says we need to charge 10% extra if they want C – did you mention that surcharge to Anita when you talked to her about pricing?"

Jim

"Listen carefully, Keiko. This is a big deal. I can't bother a CEO with something minor like that during a presentation. Do me a favor – just this once, as it's obviously a special situation -- throw in C at no charge." (Direct order. Critical Parent.) "Believe me, the margins are going to make sense on this contract, because, as I say, it's an absolutely huge deal – and anyway, I already promised C to Anita without a surcharge. So, save us both some time here and just do it." (Two direct orders in one sentence. Jim's Critical Parent is really stinking up this conversation.)

Keiko

"I'm sorry, Jim, but Amy's told me that any time we give a client C, we need to be sure to charge 10% extra. I mean, that is what's on the rate sheet, so maybe we should call Amy and ..."

Jim

"Are you serious? Call Amy? I do not believe this. Somehow, we always manage to get this kind of static from Service Delivery. It happens every time we close a major deal. And you know what else? It's always worse with the new hires. Like you. Let me ask you something, Keiko. How long have you been here? That's not a rhetorical question. How long, exactly? Tell me." (Did you notice the masterful blending of both Critical Parent and Victim here from Jim?)

Now, if for some reason you didn't smell that distinctive, overpowering, garbage-truck-on-a-summer-day odor when I mentioned it a couple of paragraphs ago, I'm guessing you can't miss it now. The stench is everywhere. Whether Jim realizes it or not, his garbage truck is stinking up the whole organization.

Because, that morning, Keiko quits. And Amy then calls you. Wondering why.

OF LEADERS, OUTCOMES, AND CULTURE

Here's the point. As leaders, we are responsible, not just for the team's outcomes, but for the team's culture. In fact, our team's culture is what *produces* the outcomes. And for a truly effective leader, culture means living, modeling, and defending the company values – not just when it's convenient to do so, but all the time. That's literally our job. And if the publicly circulated list of our company's values doesn't yet include the value of Respect ... is it possible we should be thinking about how we can *add* Respect to that list? It's a question worth considering closely. Garbage culture typically doesn't produce nice-smelling outcomes.

This whole discussion is part of a big leadership lesson that we help leaders to find for themselves ... typically, in their own garbage. The lesson I'm talking about is rooted in what David Sandler had to say, years ago, about head trash. His insights are just as timely today as they ever were.

The hard truth is, people with head trash don't always notice how bad it smells. Sometimes, people with head trash need a little support and patience and guidance when it comes to assuming personal responsibility for excavating the garbage and carting it off to the nearest landfill. So, guess what? If I'm Jim's manager, I need to find an appropriate one-on-one opportunity to have that difficult private conversation with him. There's some garbage to take out. But here's the thing. Long before I start that one-on-one session with Jim, maybe I *also* need to ask myself: Did I bring this garbage into the building?



Did I bring this garbage into the building?

In other words, is the way I treat Jim, and the example I set for him, having any negative impact *at all* in terms of his communication with members of our organization – or with anyone else *outside* the organization, for that matter? For instance: How often do I communicate with Jim from the headspace known as Critical Parent? How often do I play the Drama Triangle game with him?

I'm not going to sugar-coat it. These are big questions. Sometimes the garbage in question really does originate with the leader's head trash. I've shared just a couple of examples of head trash that may be finding its way into the building through our personal example. There are many more to consider. For instance: We may try to balance the goal of being seen as a strong and effective leader with the goals of being liked by everyone and pleasing everyone. Well, leaders inevitably find themselves having to make the kinds of decisions that will not make everyone happy. Avoiding this kind of decision, or pretending to ourselves or others that we haven't made it, may be another sign of head trash we need to take out.

For help on identifying a member of your team's head trash – or who knows, maybe identifying some of your own – [email us](#). We may just be able to help. And speaking personally, I know I've had a whole lot of experience taking my own bags of garbage out of the building and tossing them into the dumpster ... where they belong.

AI: What I Use That Actually Works



Jordan Ledwein
Trainer, Sandler by i10 Solutions





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Practically every “expert” on social media is telling salespeople they need to get better at using AI. But it seems like no one ever tells us how. I’m hoping that changes with this article. At the end of it, you’ll get something I use that actually works for me.

If you’re like most salespeople I run into, something like 70% of your time is now spent on non-selling activities. AI can help you lower that number.

I decided early on that I didn’t want to be one of those salespeople who try to use AI to replace themselves. I thought that was lazy, which is bad, and ineffective, which is worse. I wanted to use AI to *multiply* myself, so I could spend more time selling and less time doing things that an assistant – preferably one with infinite patience and otherworldly processing and analytical skills -- could do for me. I wanted to figure out how I could spend 50%-60% of my time selling, as opposed to 30%.

I found several tools that helped me to hit that goal. In a moment, I’ll share one of them with you. But first, please look at the four questions I pose to any sales leader who tells me they’re serious about using AI to support their team.



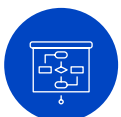
What is your sales process?

Do you have one? If you have nine different reps with nine different sales processes, and you want to implement tools for them, you can’t possibly know which process to implement, or which tools will support it. No, your people don’t all have to be doing the exact same thing. But yes, you probably do want to know which tools are most likely to be effective, generate immediate positive results, and gain wide acceptance. That means you need to know your process.



Can you write the sales process down?

If you don’t know the stages, or what the entry and exit criteria are for each stage, then you don’t know where, how, or even *if* a given tool is going to be adding value to your team, your organization, and its stakeholders.



How manual is that sales process on a scale of one to ten?

One means everyone uses paper and pen; no one ever touches a computer. Ten means your process is fully automated and human salespeople aren’t even part of the sale. (There are companies like that, of course – but they don’t handle transactions where salespeople add value and earn commissions.) So: Where does your organization sit on that scale, as of today?



Where are the bottlenecks?

Successful companies focus on deploying tools that let salespeople spend more time actually moving the sales process forward, and less time on manual tasks. That’s where we tend to find the bottlenecks.

Here's a common bottleneck to consider.

Salespeople are responsible for prospecting. In the historical period in which we all now find ourselves, prospecting exclusively by telephone is roughly as effective as prospecting exclusively by telegraph or smoke signal. That means digital outreach is, inevitably, an important part of the prospecting toolbox for most modern sales processes. Yet ... **digital outreach typically fails spectacularly when it's not personalized**. And most salespeople do not personalize digital outreach messaging well. So there's a lack of meaningful conversations at the front end of the funnel.

Hmm. If only there were a virtual assistant with infinite patience and otherworldly processing and analytical skills that could help salespeople send *their* messaging in ways that made it statistically more likely that that messaging would resonate with a "cold" contact.

Enter [Humantic AI](#) – one of the AI tools I use.

I spend a lot of time on LinkedIn. Maybe you do, too. I like to check out someone's LinkedIn profile before I have a meeting with them. I do that to figure out whether I already know them, whether we know anyone in common, and what I might be talk about with them. So far, so predictable. Most good salespeople do this. But what if we could take this kind of research to the next level?

Humantic AI, a Sandler partner, can use the information on someone's LinkedIn profile and online to analyze and predict the person's DISC style – and give us insights on the best ways to approach that person.

Full disclosure: It's not 100% accurate. It's probably closer to 80% accurate, But you know what? 80% is a heck of a lot better than 0%, which is basically where we were just a couple years ago when it came to brand-new contacts.

So if you happen to be getting ready for a meeting with me, and you and I have never interacted before, Humantic AI is probably going to give you an advantage over someone who isn't using it. It's going to tell you, accurately more often than not, what I'm looking for in a business conversation, what my priorities are likely to be, and even what a good first pass on a text or email to me is going to look like.

I can use Humantic AI as a guide, a pilot to point me in the right direction. I think of it as a virtual assistant who comes up with a reliable "background report" that I can use before going into a meeting with people or reaching out for the first time. And for me, it is an advantage.

For me, this is AI that actually works – meaning, it's AI that gets rid of bottlenecks and lets me spend more time selling. It definitely beats scrolling through LinkedIn for half an hour looking for clues about who I'm about to talk to. It's become an extremely important tool in my toolkit. Why? Because it makes my prospecting and discovery stages more efficient than they were before I started using it.

Who knows? Maybe it will do the same for you and your team.



The Top 33 Sandler Coaching Questions for Salespeople



Bill Bartlett

Former Executive Vice President Franchise Sandler Training

Editor's note: The following list of ten critical coaching areas, with powerful questions for each major coaching topic, is the creation of Bill Bartlett, author of **The Sales Coach's Playbook**. His list is based on more than three decades of personally coaching sales professionals to higher levels of personal and professional achievement. These questions are designed exclusively for use with salespeople who are personally and directly responsible for revenue creation. They are meant to be posed in a private, safe, one-on-one coaching environment. Such an environment can deliver breakthrough results when coaching sessions are focused like the proverbial laser beam on the attainment of personal and business goals that have been identified by, and are personally meaningful to, the salesperson. Early sessions are typically devoted to spotlighting and refining such goals. Note that a quota or sales target is not, on its own, a meaningful personal goal.

Contrary to popular belief, coaching sessions are not training sessions. They're not opportunities for a supervisor to "show them how it's done." They're extended, confidential, open-ended conversations about what's keeping the salesperson from moving forward in their life and in their career. If you are the coach, your role is to ask good questions and support the salesperson's efforts to answer honestly. Nothing more.

It's not realistic to expect to cover all of these questions in a single discussion. A good objective in your pre-coaching prep is to use this list to select questions likely to generate meaningful discussions about one or two of the ten critical coaching areas per coaching session.



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This list assumes a recommended cadence of monthly coaching meetings.



Critical Coaching Area: Goal Setting

- 1 Are you working on three professional and two personal goals each day? What are they? Do you journal your progress? How can I help?
- 2 What progress did you make towards your goals since our last session?
- 3 Have you encountered any setbacks in pursuing your goals, and how did you adapt?
- 4 Do you need to adjust or refine your goals based on new insights or changing circumstances?



Critical Coaching Area: Revenue Growth

- 5 What specific actions have you taken this month to increase your revenue?
- 6 What obstacles did you encounter in pursuing new revenue opportunities, and how did you address them?
- 7 Can you identify any potential untapped opportunities for revenue growth within your territory?



Critical Coaching Area: Problem Solving

- 8 What challenges or obstacles did you face this month?
- 9 How did you approach solving these challenges, and what were the results?
- 10 Is there any recurring issue that needs a deeper analysis or a different approach?



Critical Coaching Area: Managing Internal Thoughts

- 11 Have you encountered any negative head trash or self-doubt this that needs to be eliminated?
- 12 How did you recognize and manage these thoughts to stay focused and motivated?
- 13 Are there any patterns or triggers you've noticed in your negative thought processes?



Critical Coaching Area: Fear Mitigation

- 14 Did you experience any fear or apprehension in your business activity this month?
- 15 How did you mitigate these fears to continue moving forward?
- 16 What strategies have been most effective for you in dealing with fear of failure or inadequacy?



Critical Coaching Area: Sales Methodology

- 17 Which areas of the Sandler Selling System did you find most helpful in your sales interactions this month? Which areas of the Sandler Selling System do you need help mastering?
- 18 Can you share any specific success stories or challenges you encountered in applying the methodology?
- 19 Are there any areas of your sales process where you feel you could benefit from additional training, coaching or support? If so, which ones?



Critical Coaching Area: Strategic Planning

- 20 What strategic initiatives or plans did you implement this month to grow your base of business?
- 21 How aligned were your actions with your long-term strategic objectives?
- 22 Are there any areas of your strategic plan that require reassessment or refinement?



Critical Coaching Area: Personal Development

- 23 What steps have you taken this month to invest in your personal and professional growth? What steps could you take?
- 24 Have you identified any skill gaps or areas for improvement that you would like to address?
- 25 How do you plan to continue developing yourself to enhance your effectiveness as a sales professional?



Critical Coaching Area: Customer Feedback

- 26 What positive or negative feedback have you received from customers or clients this month?
- 27 How do you plan to incorporate this feedback into your business practices or service offerings?
- 28 Are there any trends or patterns in customer feedback that you find particularly noteworthy?



Critical Coaching Area: Reflection and Learning

- 29 Thinking back on what you did this month, what could you have done differently? What could you have done better?
- 30 Thinking back on what you did this month, what worked that you would definitely do more of?
- 31 Looking back on the past month, what are the key lessons or insights you've gained?
- 32 How do you plan to apply these lessons moving forward?
- 33 Is there anything else you'd like to discuss or explore in our coaching sessions?

Bill Bartlett is a sought-after performance consultant and the author of *The Sales Coach's Playbook*. To learn more about becoming a better sales coach, [email us](#).



Getting Your Head Around Sales Technology

Why Senior Leadership is the Key to Revolutionizing Team and Organizational Success



David Mattson
Sandler Executive Chairman



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Maybe you noticed. Over the past year or so, the role of technology in the sales process has evolved not just rapidly, but exponentially. The convergence of technology and sales is reshaping traditional paradigms and opening exciting new avenues for growth.

To take full advantage of these new opportunities, however, company leaders face a new challenge: recognizing and addressing the pivotal role technology plays in driving sales efficiency and enhancing organizational performance. That means keeping up with, and responding effectively to, the extraordinary pace of technological change selling teams now face.

No, nobody can make sense of everything that's happening. Fortunately, though, we don't have to. There are **three clear, strategically vital areas** where the most effective senior leaders are getting their heads around the technology-driven changes their sales teams are navigating. Let's look at each of these in turn.

Getting Your Head around ... **the Complex Buyer Journey**

Gone are the days of linear sales processes. Today, the buyer journey is intricate, fueled by virtual selling and propelled by relentless advancements in technology and digital engagement. The modern buyer committee decision-making process demands a synchronized effort between marketing, technology, and sales to drive success. To compete effectively, successful sales teams embrace digital tools and technologies – and a simple, game-changing concept that makes colleagues who work on other teams allies, instead of rivals: **Buyers buy in packs ... so we sell in packs.**



**Buyers buy in
packs ... so we sell
in packs.**

Today's complex buyer journey means there is no one right way to engage. Cutting-edge sales engagement strategies have evolved to encompass a wide range of tactics, including video presentations, buyer persona analysis, conversational intelligence, and the intelligent leveraging of professional networks like LinkedIn. And yes, these strategies also encompass carefully planned "touches" that leverage internal alliances with teams who don't sell for a living.

Understanding the digital breadcrumbs captured by Marketing on each individual member of a buyer committee is now essential. This new insight allows for personalized engagement – meaning engagement that is tailored to individual preferences and challenges. By the way, that's the opposite of LLM-composed spam messaging ... though resources like ChatGPT do play a critical role in helping us find the likely personal and organizational pain points.

Getting Your Head around ... **a Working Culture that Embraces Sales Technology**

Sometimes, having too many options degrades, operational efficiency. **Creating and sustaining a working culture that embraces sales technology means making good choices about what to use ... and also about what not to use.**

There's no question that the proliferation of sales technology options presents opportunities for sales efficiency and performance enhancement. However, without a well-defined sales tech stack strategy, companies risk poor adoption, wasted expenses, and diminished performance.

How do we curate a cohesive set of technologies that streamline the sales process and minimize friction for sales representatives?

At the core of this tech stack, of course, lies the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, serving as the nucleus of the sales rep's universe. At cutting-edge organizations, supplemental technologies for sales content management, training, prospect/customer engagement, account planning, virtual selling, and pipeline management seamlessly integrate with the CRM to empower sales teams.

Sales enablement organizations play a pivotal role in driving tech adoption by providing ongoing training and showcasing success stories to highlight the tangible benefits of key tools. Yet they can't do it all. Leadership sponsorship and direct personal engagement with the tools is just as essential to foster a culture of technology adoption and ensure utilization across the sales organization.

To paraphrase the film *Field of Dreams*: **If we build it, but don't use it, they won't come.**

Getting Your Head around ... **Empowering Sales Leadership**

In an era of data abundance, the most effective sales leadership is transitioning from mere pipeline management to proactive coaching and leadership.

Prioritizing leadership skill development and advanced sales strategy over simple data collection is a non-negotiable priority for organizations that are serious about driving dramatic increases in revenue performance. This means giving sales leaders the tools and preparation they need to succeed in a complex, difficult role.

Today, more than ever, sales leaders require training. They cannot be assumed to be "natural" team leaders because they performed well as salespeople. Given the support, time, and resources this challenging job demands, they can help their teams do what they were designed to do: produce scalable revenue as the engines of a high-growth organization.

Leading by example, cutting-edge sales leaders can demonstrate personal commitment to technology adoption and use. They can facilitate team and individual proficiency and productivity in real time. Rather than simply gathering information, effective sales leadership can focus on understanding the "why" behind sales outcomes and on devising effective strategies, at both the team and individual level, leveraging successes and rectifying inefficiencies. And they can personally model an effective, tech-enabled selling culture.

Sponsorship from senior leaders is crucial for easing the (now-inevitable) shift from manager to tech-savvy coach within the sales leadership role. That means CEOs and company founders are well advised not just to understand, but to invest time, attention, and financial resources in:

- **cultivation, promotion, and professional development of sales leaders.**
- **codification and reinforcement of a viable sales culture based on the principle of making and keeping clear future commitments.**

Make no mistake. Tech, on its own, can do neither of those things.

Key Takeaways for Leaders



The convergence of technology and sales is reshaping traditional paradigms and opening new avenues for growth.



By using advanced technologies to support the complex buyer journey, embracing digital engagement strategies, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement through proactive coaching, we can execute aggressive growth strategies.



Cutting-edge sales leadership leverages technology to accelerate revenue pipelines and drive sustainable growth in the competitive marketplace.



Leaders who invest time, attention, and financial resources in sales leader development, and in support of a viable, commitment-focused sales culture, will enjoy sustainable competitive advantage.



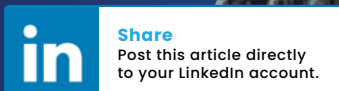
To learn more about becoming a better sales coach, [email us](#).

A Conversation with David Sandler

In which the master personally demonstrates effective selling technique

A first-generation student of the Sandler Selling System details a fateful encounter with David Sandler in the early 1980s in this excerpt from the forthcoming book *Sandler Yesterday and Today*.

Gregory Hobbs
Sandler Alumni



Back in the early 1980s, I started my selling career by working for a company that sold recreational vehicles. From there I moved to a software program for food brokers. Subsequently, a friend I had previously worked with, who had moved on to selling for a company that offered telephone systems to businesses, reached out to me. She asked me to come over and talk to her boss about working there. She said I'd be a perfect fit.

The interview went well, and I began selling telephone systems for this company. Even though it was a good job, it quickly became apparent to me that my level of frustration with the selling process I had been ordered to follow was increasing.

The problem was not what I was selling, but my own dissatisfaction with the profession of selling itself. That level of dissatisfaction began to reach critical mass as I realized that I simply did not enjoy being a salesperson. I did not like prospecting or indeed most other aspects of the selling process. I had a tendency to take the rejection associated with selling personally. It was at this point that I received a fateful brochure in the mail. The brochure was from David Sandler. The brochure promised that I, like others Sandler had trained, could become a "selling genius" -- or at least a lot more effective at selling. All I had to do was order the program. Back then, the Sandler training came in a binder that was sold via a mail-order campaign. As I read through the brochure, my initial reaction was pure disbelief. It said that the selling process could be fun and enjoyable and that all the pain and pressure associated with the selling process could be eliminated. Not some. All. It was hard to believe, but something inside told me not to throw the brochure away.

Initially, I did not do anything with the brochure except carry it around in my briefcase. Every once in a while, I would take it out, read through it, think about it and then put it back in my briefcase. It stayed in my briefcase for four months. The purchase price for the Sandler course was \$125, which seemed pretty steep. I decided to keep selling my way, but I still couldn't bring myself to throw away the brochure.

Selling "my way" became steadily more stressful for me. One day, after an exceptionally frustrating experience, **I decided it was time to call Dave Sandler personally.**

I got his company's telephone number from Directory Assistance and called his offices in Stevenson, Maryland. A young lady answered the phone; I asked if I could speak with Dave Sandler.



She asked me why I wanted to speak with him. I said that I had received his brochure and that I had some serious doubts and concerns about his program. She asked if I would hold the line.

A few minutes later, Dave came on the line, introduced himself, and asked how he could help me.

I told him I had received his brochure and found it difficult to believe that he had the ability to transform the selling process from what I had experienced to what he said it could be: enjoyable.

I told him \$125 was a lot of money.

I told him I didn't think anyone could incorporate all of the selling principles contained in such a training program within just 30 days. (The product had a 30-day money back guarantee.)

Dave asked me, if I had a better guarantee, whether I would purchase the product. I asked Dave what kind of a guarantee he had in mind.

He said, "If I gave you an unconditional lifetime guarantee on the product, would you buy it?"

I said "That depends. Would you put that guarantee in writing?"

He said, "Fair question. Let me ask you this. If I put that guarantee in writing, would you purchase the program?"



The product had a 30-day money back guarantee.

He said, "Fair question. Let me ask you this. If I put that guarantee in writing, would you purchase the program?"

There was a little pause as I considered what I'd just heard – not just as a prospect, but as a salesperson.

I didn't realize it at the time of course, but Dave was executing what I would later come to recognize as the Ultimate Up-Front Contract.

He was also reversing – answering my questions with a question.

Of course, I wasn't familiar with either of those terms back then. All I knew was that my interactions with my prospects didn't sound remotely like what Dave was doing on this call. In that moment, David Sandler became my sales coach – indeed, the very best coach I ever had.

It occurred to me that he had just asked me a direct question and he wasn't doing anything to fill the silence. I figured I should probably answer him.



I told Dave that if he would enclose a letter with my order, signed by him, indicating that I had his personal lifetime guarantee that I could return the product if it didn't work for me as advertised, then I would make the purchase. Dave said he would do that. I wrote out the check and mailed in the coupon from the brochure.

True to his word, Dave enclosed the lifetime-guarantee letter with my order when he sent me my personal copy of the Sandler Selling System® course. It was the best \$125 I ever spent.

There would be more coaching moments from Dave, all by phone, in the days and weeks ahead. And thanks to Sandler, I not only improved my results dramatically ... I actually came to love the profession of selling, something I once wouldn't have believed possible.

Excerpted from *Sandler Yesterday and Today* by Gregory Hobbs.

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