



My Twelve Golden Principles Of Selling

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Introduction

Two years ago, I first posted my **"Twelve Golden Principles of Selling"** and then, last year, I updated the article, which became known as the 2.0 version.

In the light of events this year, I thought it timely to not only update again, but also to expand my thoughts on each principle.

So this in effect is the 3.0 version, including the original introduction. I hope you enjoy it.

"I received a call from an ex-student this week, who is designing an induction program for new recruits about to embark upon a career in sales. He asked that if I had to create the "twelve golden principles of selling," what I would come up with?

Clearly, this is not only a very subjective view, but also I found it terribly difficult to reduce my initial list of the essential rules of selling to just twelve. However, mindful of the fact that this exercise is designed to provide guidance to salespeople just starting on the first rung of the ladder (although I do believe that we should all regularly re-visit our founding principles), here is my take on the "twelve golden principles of selling".





Principle 1: Always Sell to People

This may seem obvious, but it cannot be emphasized enough: You are not selling to an organization or to a conglomerate, but to actual, real people. It is important to remember that all people are different, so you cannot sell the same way to everyone. Second, no two sales are the same, even if they are made to the same company under similar circumstances.

To become a good salesperson, it isn't enough to know how to sell. You must aim to become a people expert. It may sound shocking, but the best professional salespeople actually like people!

How can you ensure that you approach people in the correct way? Here is just one example:

"Knowing About Social Styles", developed by Merrill and Reid, is very useful. In the **Social Styles Model**, there are four basic "styles" or preferred ways of interacting with others.

Merrill and Reid believe that a person's Social Style is a way of coping with others. People become most comfortable with that style, in themselves and others.

Understanding your own style and those of others can help in making meetings more productive. The main objective of Social Styles is to help people develop versatility in dealing with others.

I learned about the "Social Styles Model" many years ago and it has helped me enormously.

Remember, people buy from people — they always will.

- **Recommended reading:**

["How To Relate To And Influence The Four Personality Types"](#)



Principle 2: You Have To Sell Yourself

Just as you are selling to people, you must also remember that you are not only selling and representing a product or service, but you are in effect selling yourself. When beginning a sales relationship, it is important to remember a few key aspects to representing yourself well. First, be interesting. If potential customers are bored by you, they have less of a chance of being enthralled by any product or service you are representing.

Develop intellect. Of course, you are an intelligent person, but can you converse in an intelligent manner? Can you discuss related subjects with thoughtfulness and hold your clients' interest? You are in their territory now, can you speak their language? Never be arrogant — never talk up or down to your potential clients. It's rude and will serve only to alienate them. Respect the buyer, and they will respect you.

Along the same lines, develop your empathy levels. If you can relate to your customers' situations authentically, it helps to build rapport.

Rapport is the most important process in influencing others. It is vital if you want to maintain relationships. Without it, you are unlikely to achieve willing agreement to what you want. People who have excellent rapport with others create harmonious relationships based on trust and understanding of mutual needs.

Finally, do remember that you **cannot** rely on logic.

Emotion drives 84 percent of all buying decisions, not logic. What are the chief buying emotions? They include ego, security, pride of ownership, greed, health, prestige, status, ambition, and fear of loss. Be well aware of these emotions as you approach, engage and deal with your customers.

- **Recommended reading:**
["How To Develop Rapport More Easily"](#)



Principle 3:

You Must Ask Questions and You Must Also Listen To Understand

A good salesperson knows what questions to ask, and when. Develop your questioning techniques, always remembering the traditional rules of questioning: What? Where? When? Which? Why? Who? How?

Continually test your understanding of the situation by asking questions and verifying that everybody's on the right track.

The key to uncovering needs lies in good questioning techniques. Questioning is a skill that requires much practice and concentration, but once mastered serves you well.

Also remember that God has given us two ears and one mouth - we should use them in that order! Successful sales professionals talk for 20 percent of the time and listen for 80 percent of the time. It's crucial for new salespeople to develop their active-listening skills.

Understanding people and human motivation demands alertness to behavior clues. Among the most important clues is the words people use. Human relations is all about helping others like themselves. Sincere listening demonstrates sincere interest.

The best sales approach begins with a question. Listening for the answer is your guidepost to the right road.

- **Recommended reading:**

"How To Become An Active Listener"

"How to Uncover Needs Painlessly Using The Funnel Technique"



Principle 4: Get Connected & Develop Yourself

Sales 2.0 has arrived and, unless you want to be left behind, you must fully embrace all of the opportunities that lay in front of you. Think Social Media – LinkedIn, Jigsaw, Twitter, Plaxo, OneDegreeConnected – sign up and start building your network. Use these facilities to gain an inside edge by learning more about your clients/prospects/suspects.

Become involved with sales communities like Sales HQ, Sales Gravy, Salesopedia, The Customer Collective and Eyes On Sales and engage with like minded, forward thinking professionals.

Invest \$25 for a whole year and join the most innovative, significant and exclusive sales related club on the net – www.topsalesexperts.com – and for less than 7 cents a day gain access, personal advice and coaching from seventy of the world's leading sales gurus.

The benefits of effective networking are many. Some of these are:

- It is the most cost effective marketing tool available
- Networking referrals will typically generate 80% more results than a cold call
- 70 – 80% of all jobs are found through networking
- Every person you meet has 200 – 250 people with whom they connect who can potentially assist you

Anyone that you might want to meet or contact in the world is only five to six contacts away from you.

So, get networking!!

- **Recommended reading:**
["The Nature Of Networking"](#)

["How To Begin The Networking Adventure"](#)



Principle 5: You Must Fully Utilize Sales Process Tools

Failing to focus your activity reduces efficiency and consequently reduces results, because there is not a salesperson alive that believes they have enough time in their working week to complete all the activities they want to achieve! Time is a huge constraint on their activities so that when their manager asks them for more, it is no wonder that they are overwhelmed.

Secondly, but equally important, salespeople often are not clear about how to identify the prospects most likely to have a genuine need for their product or service. Without an objective way to priorities which prospects to contact first and/or an efficient strategy for contacting them, salespeople are doomed to waste a large percentage of their time. Another huge dilemma for many salespeople is how to divide their time between servicing existing clients and generating new business from new prospects.

A common approach among salespeople can be summarized in the saying “*If you throw enough mud against the wall, some of it is bound to stick*”. This approach is exhausting, demoralizing, extremely unproductive and very expensive in the long term.

In his book “*Fundamentals of Selling*”, Charles Futrell identifies careful use of selling time as perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of the successful salesperson - and he is right.

- **Recommended reading:**

“You Cannot Control External Events If You Do Not Have Control Internally”



Principle 6: Features Must Be Linked to Benefits

It's a standard sales component, but the features-and-benefits connection bears repeating and reminding: Features are common, but benefits are personal and specific.

Fundamentally, a benefit is only a benefit once it matches the customer's requirements. Think about it for a moment. Let's suppose you wanted to buy a house and had a good amount of money to spend. Your absolute passion was to live in the countryside with acres of land, so that you could wake up each morning to the birds singing their dawn chorus. You wouldn't be remotely interested in a flash city apartment that was a real bargain, even if this apartment boasted of spectacular views over the city, the latest Hi-tech heating and sound system and 24 hour security. No matter how appealing the Real Estate Agent tried to make this apartment, its benefits would fall on deaf ears because they aren't in alignment with your own specific requirements.

When describing the product or service you are selling, use "link phrases" when outlining the benefits of the features you are showing. Say, "*Such and such is a feature of this service, which means that . . .*" Remember to be specific.

Then, sell the results – paint a picture.

You want the outcome for your prospect to be rosy, but you need to convey that. Discover your prospect's "prime desires" and personalize the benefits to him or her. Describe the end results of the transaction and how it will improve the life of your prospect.

- **Recommended reading:**
"Features & Benefits"



Principle 7: Plan To Be Successful

Success should be something you do not just 'Kinda Sorta' want to achieve, but something you must achieve.

Generally, **top achievers expect to be successful and, consequently, they usually are.** They are driven by a **'have to'** attitude - not a **'want to'** attitude.

If you have no concrete goals and you have been succeeding in spite of yourself, just think how much more success you could enjoy if you set your sights on a definite path and had a specific time-frame in which you expect to reach your destination.

Even though you do not need to set goals in order to reach some level of success, most professionals who fail to set goals reach a plateau and lack either the motivation or the direction to go beyond it. They are unable to move upwards to a higher achievement status.

Setting Goals Keeps You Focussed

What you should know is that goals give you three distinct advantages, which help you succeed:

- Goals keep you on track
- Goals let you know when and what to celebrate
- Goals give you a focused plan to work with

If nothing else, goals let others know what they have to aim for to keep up with your standards!

● **Recommended reading:**

"My New Direction"



Principle 8: Knowledge Is the Key

I work with a very simple formula:

Attitude + Skills + Process + Knowledge = Success

Each is equally important, and it would be unwise to remove any of them from the equation, or to devalue their significance, when compared with the others.

Most people when they think about “Knowledge” immediately think about product knowledge.

This is not surprising because even today, research suggests that 80% of training budgets are still spent on “product familiarization”.

But what about all the other kinds of knowledge?

What about industry knowledge, or more specifically, sector knowledge? What about competitive knowledge or commercial business knowledge? Let's not forget knowledge of our own company/organization.

Finally, there is self-knowledge - that means how well do we know ourselves, our strengths, our limitations, our motivators, etc. The very best sales professionals have an intimate knowledge of themselves, which is why they are able to continually improve.

That is not to suggest that product knowledge is not important - it **is** extremely important. But a good salesperson realizes that buyers buy solutions and results - they do not buy products or services. You must know the specific aspects of your product or service that will create your client's desired result.

● **Recommended reading:**

“The Four Component Parts of Professional Selling - Part Two”



Principle 9: Aim To Be Unique

You want to convey to your customers an attitude of “me first”, rather than “me too”. Every business, every company, every product has something that is unique - and this is what you need to stress. Look outside the square and identify the uniqueness of your product, your service, your company — and yourself. Learn to create real value propositions that pass the “so what” test!

At first you may find it difficult, because I understand that companies can no longer rely on:

- Product Superiority
- Price Performance Measures
- Industry Presence

In fact, one of the very first exercises I work through, with any new client, is to have the sales team try to sell me on the “unique selling points (USP's)” that they believe they have.

Typically, the initial responses include “superior products” or “highly qualified technical support staff” or “our customers like us”. But when I ask them what their competitors would say if I posed the same question to their sales team, after a moment's pause the lights come on and they agree that I would most likely receive exactly the same responses. So...

Question: What is the one asset a company has which is difficult, if not virtually impossible, to imitate?

Answer: Its people. Their superior selling skills, better attitude, greater knowledge and their commitment to the full use of process. If you aim to be unique, you will be.

- **Recommended reading:**

“What Are The Characteristics Of The Very Best Sales Performers?”



Principle 10: Don't Sell on Price

Selling on price is simply a cop out. You must value your expertise, your products and your services, and price accordingly. Remember the definition of negotiation: *"To arrange forms of business by means of discussion, conference or meetings, to transact business, to bargain, to exchange security for cash"*. It doesn't mention giving anything away for less than its real value!

So here are a few quick, but extremely valuable tips:

- **Aim high** - you will achieve more. Salespeople who think big get big results, and never let your prospect lower your sights.
- **Don't give it away** - good negotiators defend their price
- **Never give away concessions** - nothing should be given away free - so trade
- **Always negotiate the variables** - know your variables
- **Constantly erode the value of the prospect's concessions** - reduce the buyer's perception
- **Be a miser** - never say yes too quickly
- **Be alive to the danger of deadlines** - deadlines weaken your position
- **Look at the "Big Picture"** - always keep the whole deal in mind
- **Negotiate through deadlocks** - patience is the key
- **Understand your weaknesses** - negotiator know thyself!

Remember, anyone can give business away. Selling merely on price means we do not need sales people! Just because we might be selling in tough economic times, doesn't mean "dropping your pants" at every request to do so! Let me leave you with a thought: Do you know the total value of the products/services/solutions you have sold this year? Add just one per cent of profit/gross margin to every deal – it's a lot of \$ that you have left on the table, isn't it? Or rather, given away!

- **Recommended reading:**
[A selection of "How to" negotiation articles](#)



Principle 11: Present Your Solutions

When we present our proposals, rather than mailing, faxing or e-mailing, we increase the likelihood of a sale by a factor of 10, if we do so in person. This is your opportunity to impress every member of the DMU (Decision Making Unit) and to do your job, which is to sell you, your solution and your company - so grab it with both hands! Why rely on someone else to do the selling for you, which is what you do when you simply mail your proposal?

When it comes to the enthusiasm that sales professionals have for making a presentation, they broadly fall into four categories:

The Avoider: An Avoider does everything possible to escape from having to stand in front of an audience. In some drastic cases, salespeople may seek positions that do not involve making presentations.

The Register: A Register is also extremely hesitant of speaking in public. However, Registers may not be able to avoid speaking as part of their job, but they never encourage it. When they do speak, they do so very reluctantly.

The Acceptor: The Acceptor will give presentations as part of their job, but does not seek opportunities to do so. Acceptors occasionally give a presentation and feel they did a good job. They even find that, once in a while, they are quite persuasive and enjoy the experience.

The Seeker: A Seeker looks for opportunities to speak. They understand that anxiety can be a stimulant which fuels enthusiasm during a presentation. Seekers work at building their professional communication skills and self-confidence by speaking often.

Becoming a "Seeker" is a pre-requisite for success!

- **Recommended reading:**
["How to Deliver a Professional Presentation"](#)



Principle 12: Take Good Care of Your Attitude

Everyone needs some form of motivation to get them to do anything. This really means “sufficient reason” for doing it. It can take very little to motivate someone to do something pleasurable. It can take quite extreme circumstances to get that same person to do something objectionable.

The key point is that what constitutes sufficient motivation can be judged only by the person being motivated. Circumstances that would motivate one person will leave another unmoved.

Everyone is constantly subjected to a variety of motivating factors. The more basic the factor, the stronger it is in determining the course of action which will be taken. As sales people, if we continually look to find motivation from outside of ourselves, then we are placing ourselves in a risky situation, because it may not always be possible to have a drip-feed of motivation feeding us when we need it most. That’s why, the more we can understand about what motivates us personally, the more it helps us to tap into our internal motivational power.

We are all unique individuals and are motivated by what is important to us personally. The factors that are important to us can be described as our values and are the fuel that drives our behavior. Our values are unique to us and we each have a different set of values based on different aspects of our lives.

Always accept total responsibility for your own motivation levels, and work with the maxim: *“If it’s to be, it’s up to me”*.

“Winners in life constantly think in terms of I can, I will and I am. Losers, on the other hand, concentrate their waking thoughts on what they should have done or what they don’t do” - Dennis Waitley.

- **Recommended reading:**

“Motivation - Moving Beyond the Carrot and Big Stick Theory”



And finally..... Be Professional at All Times

The greatest compliment a customer can pay you is to describe you as “professional”.

Don't worry about being liked — be respected! Customers do not buy from you because they like you, but rather because they are prepared to trust you.

Being professional is not one thing, it is three - It is what you do, what you say and how you present yourself.

I believe that selling is the most wonderfully exhilarating, satisfying and fulfilling career in the world – but only if you are selling successfully.

Someone has to be the best – why not you?

Jonathan Farrington

- **Final recommended reading:**

“Seven Habits of Highly Successful People”



Jonathan Farrington



Jonathan Farrington is a globally recognized business coach, mentor, author and sales strategist, who has guided hundreds of companies and thousands of individuals around the world towards optimum performance levels.

He is Chairman of The Sales Corporation, CEO of Top Sales Associates and Senior Partner at The JF Consultancy based in London and Paris.

Formerly, Jonathan was the Managing Partner of The jfa Group, which he established in 1994.

Early in 2007, Jonathan formed Top Sales Associates (TSA) to promote the very best sales related solutions and products. TSA is now a subsidiary of The Sales Corporation, based in London and Paris.

The [JF Consultancy](#) launched early in 2008 and Jonathan's highly popular daily [blog](#) for dedicated business professionals, which attracts thousands of visitors every day.

Finally, Jonathan is the Chairman of the Executive Board over at [Top Sales Experts](#).