



Nutshell 

The Sell to Win Playbook

55 Expert Sales Tips to **Drive Your Success**





Selling is a transference of feeling.

– Zig Ziglar

If you're reading this, you're a fantastic salesperson. I'm not just blowing smoke, either. The key difference between great sellers and their average-performing peers is the constant drive to learn and improve—exactly what you're doing right now, in other words.

Read by tens of thousands of sales professionals every month, [Nutshell's Sell to Win blog](#) features original insights and education from some of the world's most highly regarded sales thought-leaders, including Brian Tracy, Mike Weinberg, Lori Richardson, David Hoffeld, and Andy Paul.

Whether you're a sales rep looking for a few new tricks to get more prospects to “yes,” or a manager trying to create a sales environment that inspires your reps to succeed, I'm confident you'll find something useful in this guide, which collects some of the best expert-driven articles we've published.

Thanks so much for reading, and please [reach out any time](#) to let me know what you think!

All best,

Will Gordon

Editor, Sell to Win

www.nutshell.com/blog

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Join Nutshell's Sell to Win Facebook group!

Looking for a place to learn, vent, laugh, and collaborate with other sellers? We're building a community to connect our readers—and it wouldn't be the same without you. Come in and say hi!

[LET ME IN!](#)

11 Things Successful Sales Reps Do Every Week

What separates superstar sales reps from the just-average? We asked 14 sales experts to share their weekly game-plans for success.



Stay organized



“The #1 thing that helps reps the most is staying organized. At the end of every day, make sure your notes are tagged properly and in the right place, your checklists are organized, and your data is up to date.

“The minute you start to let this slip, everything slips. Accounts go untouched. Follow-ups don’t happen. Make organization a priority early on and you’ll have a long and successful career.”

Max Altschuler, CEO, Sales Hacker
Saleshacker.com | [@MaxAlts](https://twitter.com/MaxAlts)

Focus on your buyers



“Focus on who your buyer is and speak about them, not about you or your company. Find out who your customers are and what is important to their company growth.

“Tailor all your messages and interactions for each buyer so that they create interest, show you care, and add value.”

Lori Richardson, Founder and CEO, Score More Sales
Scoremoresales.com | [@scoremoresales](https://twitter.com/scoremoresales)

Always be learning



“We all know the ABC’s of sales, but ABL is just as important! I should know: Ignoring this concept and thinking that I knew better literally cost me hundreds of thousands of dollars in missed sales earlier in my career.

“I challenge every sales rep to make sure that they read a book, attend a seminar, hire a coach or at least watch some YouTube videos every single week to succeed in sales. It’s easier than you think!”

Stephanie Scheller, CEO, Scheller Enterprises, LLC

TheStephanieScheller.com | [@SuccessSteph](https://www.instagram.com/SuccessSteph)

Review and manage your calendar



“Every week, evaluate how much time was spent on prospecting, sales conversations, customer work, follow-up, and administrative tasks. Then use that review to better schedule for the coming week.

“Often, your sales calendar will have more internal meetings and admin time interfering with your ability to prospect regularly, engage in sales conversations to qualify opportunities, and handle appropriate customer work. Learn to say no to things that get in the way of selling.”

Barb Giamanco, CEO, Social Centered Selling

Scs-connect.com | [@barbaragiamanco](https://www.instagram.com/barbaragiamanco)

Constantly practice your pitch and presentation



“If you want to be a successful in sales, then you need to constantly practice your pitch and presentation. Whether you’re making a cold call or giving a sales presentation, it is absolutely critical that you are prepared—even over-prepared. This means having all relevant information at your fingertips, including pricing, testimonials, samples, and a list of questions you need to ask to direct the sales conversation.

“I suggest creating a checklist of all of the information you will need, and reviewing it before your call or presentation. No matter how many times you’ve made a sales call or given the same presentation, always review your material ahead of time. You only have one opportunity to make a great first impression, so don’t waste it.”

Brian Tracy, Chairman and CEO, Brian Tracy International

briantracy.com/blog | [@BrianTracy](https://www.instagram.com/BrianTracy)

Use technology wisely



“It’s tough to keep up on all the deals in your pipeline and the many buyers and influencers. Learn to use the tech you’ve been given to help you better manage your day and keep your deals on track.”

Nancy Nardin, Founder, Smart Selling Tools

Smartsellingtools.com | [@sellingtools](https://www.instagram.com/sellingtools)

Focus your time on where the commission lies



“Top reps attack every day proactively and strategically instead of RE-acting to what’s in front of them (the squeaky wheel). They focus their time on where the most commission lies by blocking time for ‘A’ accounts, ‘B’ accounts and ‘C’ accounts, working deals, returning messages, dedicated email time, crossing off the to-do list—and they end their day with planning for tomorrow.”

Lauren Bailey, President, Factor8

Factor8.com | [@Factor8Sales](https://twitter.com/Factor8Sales)

Record your sales calls



“Go back and review your ‘game tape.’ Break it down for what works and how you can improve. You’ll get better.”

Steve Richard, Founder and CRO, ExecVision

ExecVision.io | [@srichardv](https://twitter.com/srichardv)

FYI: Nutshell offers unlimited Click-to-Call so you can record and review your sales calls.

TRY IT FREE FOR 14 DAYS!

Look for ways you can be useful to potential customers



“Successful sales reps look for ways they can be useful to potential customers. By using empathy as their intuition and reaching out—via phone, email, and social media—in a meaningful way, they build trust. They know this truth: The best selling approach feels like helping (because it is).”

Brian Carroll, Founder and CEO, B2B Lead Blog

B2bleadblog.com | [@brianjcarroll](https://twitter.com/brianjcarroll)

Visibility creates opportunity



“I have one mantra that has proven to drive success year after year: ‘Visibility creates opportunity.’ Every week, sales people need to increase their visibility by sharing and engaging with buyers on social networks.”

Koka Sexton, Founder, Social Selling Labs

socialsellinglabs.com | [@kokasexton](https://twitter.com/kokasexton)

And finally...



“Pick up the phone.”

Jeb Blount, CEO, Sales Gravy

Salesgravy.com | [@SalesGravy](https://twitter.com/SalesGravy)

Four Phone Script Lessons That Will Double Your Win Rate

The use of phone scripts has been debated among salespeople for years. Do they actually increase your odds of hooking a prospect, or do you they make you sound too robotic and impersonal?



MIKE BROOKS



Mike Brooks, aka [“Mr. Inside Sales”](#) and author of the book [Power Phone Scripts](#), believes that effective phone scripts are the difference between success and failure in sales.

“I used to be a terrible salesperson because I just didn’t believe in scripting,” Mike told Nutshell. “I thought I could ad-lib my way out of a paper bag and I wasn’t willing to work hard. I failed miserably and was ready to quit the entire profession until I finally said, ‘I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired. I’m going to do what needs to be done.’”

“Once I did that, I went from one of the bottom reps out of 25 to the number one closer, in just

90 days. **Nine months later I was the number one rep out of five branch offices.”**

We recently had the pleasure of speaking with Mike about his phone scripting and closing philosophies, and the specific phrases he uses to advance and close the deal.

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“I thought I could ad-lib my way out of a paper bag and I wasn’t willing to work hard.”  
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Lesson #1: The first call is about qualifying, not selling

As Mike sees it, many sales challenges can be traced back to one inconvenient truth: **You can't close an unqualified lead.**

“Most salespeople are so driven to make numbers, generate leads, and put prospects in their pipelines that anybody who says, ‘Send me some information,’ becomes a lead for them. They’ll put them in their pipeline, chase them down, and try to close them—oftentimes not succeeding.”

“When I say ‘lead,’ I mean a **prospect who has been spoken to, supposedly qualified, and then put into a follow-up situation, with a scheduled call back, presentation, or demo.** Most salespeople are closing two leads out of the ten they put in their pipeline. So, what does that tell us about the state of qualifying? It tells us that sales reps don’t do a very good job of actually qualifying their leads.”

“So what happens is a salesperson gets back on the phone with a prospect and attempts a demo or does a presentation, and eight out of ten of those leads are not closing. No wonder salespeople hate calling prospects back—they know they’re going to lose most of the time.”

According to Mike, closing starts on the qualifying call.

“Qualifiers are budget, timeline, competition, decision makers, decision process, buying motive, and possible objections,” Mike explains. “The easy way to qualify for timeline, after engaging the prospect in conversation, is to say, **‘I look forward to our presentation next week. And let me ask you this, if you like what you see, what would be the next steps on your end?’**” That would be a soft way of doing it.

“A slightly more aggressive way would be, ‘Hey, I’d be happy to take you through this. If you see that this can actually give you the results we’re talking about here, **could you see anything that would prevent you from moving ahead with this in the next two weeks?**’

“Then my favorite is, ‘I’m going to send this out to you. I’ll go through it and cover everything with you. And, let me ask you this, if you’re convinced it’s going to give you what you’re looking for, **is this something you would be prepared to move forward with at the end of the call?**’”

Of course, there’s a right way and a wrong way to ask qualifying questions. “When you qualify them for decision making you don’t say, ‘Are

“No wonder salespeople hate calling prospects back—they know they’re going to lose most of the time.”

Need a little help getting your leads from qualification to close? With Nutshell’s sales automation tools, your reps will know exactly what to do at every step to keep their deals moving forward.

[LEARN MORE](#)

you the decision maker?’ Oh, that’s terrible, don’t say that! We all know that people make decisions with other people, so how about a softer way: ‘Joe, besides yourself, **who else would be weighing in on making a decision on something like this?’**”

Lesson #2: Don’t spray and pray—engage

According to Mike, “Once you qualify a prospect, now you’re ready to actually close, because you’re putting qualified leads in the pipeline. And, by the way, this means you’re going to start adding less leads to your pipeline. **At first, your manager will go into a panic mode.** The director of sales will think you’re loafing. This happened for me: Rather than send out ten and close two, I would send out eight (leads into my pipeline) and close five. It would take me longer to get those, but my closing rate went through the roof.”

“So, I wasn’t wasting the company’s resources. I wasn’t wasting my time practicing bad selling techniques. I was more confident, much more empowered, and I made a ton more money. And, here’s another benefit: I had more time to prospect because I wasn’t spinning my wheels hoping and praying that those unqualified leads would close!”

“Funny story: I had a client send me recordings of their people trying to close. And what they did was basically pitch, pitch, pitch, and then they squeaked out an offer to buy. And I told the client, **‘We’ve got a big problem here. You guys are pitching, pitching, pitching, pitching and barely asking for the deal.’** And he said, “Mike, we call that a **‘spray and pray’** approach”

Once you have a qualified lead, Mike says the first thing you have to do is engage them. “What I like to do in the beginning of my close is have the prospect direct me in terms of what they’re interested in hearing about. So I don’t like to open up my pitch and say, ‘All right, let me show you this first slide...’

“Instead, I like to engage the prospect by saying, “It’s so great to spend some time with you today. I appreciate you taking your time. There’s a lot of information that I can give you, but I’m sure you’ve probably got some questions that you’d like to know about. **So I’d like to turn the reins over to you. What’s most important for you in terms of XYZ? What are you looking for?’**”

“I do that so that I can identify buying motives and I can **speak to their listening.** Everybody is listening for something. If I don’t know what you’re listening for, I won’t know how to pitch to your listening, so I can get through to you

and score points. This is the very opposite of the ‘spray and pray’ approach.”

“Everybody is listening for something.”

“After I give a benefit statement, or after I finish a slide, I have to get their feedback,” Mike says. I don’t use an old, used, tie-down question like, ‘What do you think?’ No, I use a real, engaging check-in statement. So for example, if I were to give you a benefit like, “Here’s how I can increase your closing percentage by as much as 50%,” then I’m going to say to you, **“And let me ask you this John, how would that affect your bottom line?”**

“This is especially important in inside sales where I can’t see you and I don’t know how you’re reacting. I’m going to ask a direct question after I’ve given a feature or a benefit to engage you. Now, **if you aren’t willing to engage, that gives me valuable information.** Either you’re closed down, you don’t believe it, or you’re not interested.”

Lesson #3: Introduce the trial close

“Mid-way through the presentation, I like to start my trial closes,” Mike says. “You have to get buy-in throughout your presentation to develop a ‘yes’ momentum, so asking for the order is not this, ‘Oh, by golly, let’s cross our fingers and hope he’s going to buy’ situation. I better have some good feedback, an idea where you’re leaning.”

As an example, Mike suggests, **“So, Joe, is this sounding like it’s going to work for you?”** That’s a soft trial close. And you can go further as you get close to the end, by asking, **‘If you had to make a decision on this, Joe, right now, where are you leaning?’**”

“You have to get buy-in throughout your presentation to develop a ‘yes’ momentum.”

“Most salespeople are scared to death to ask that because they A) are not pitching qualified leads, and B) they’re not involving or engaging people throughout the presentation so they’re afraid if they use even one trial close, the prospect is going to say, ‘This doesn’t really

look like it’s for me and I’ve got to go.’ And then they’ll have no idea what to do.”

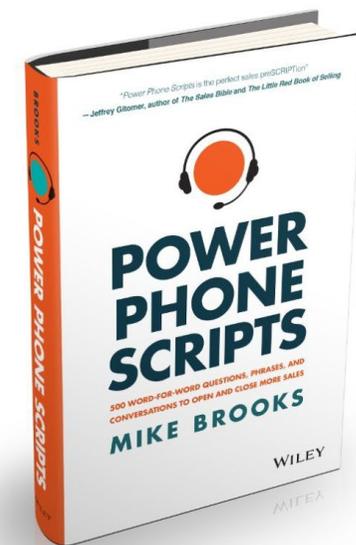
Lesson #4: Be ready for the objections.

“Here’s the last part about closing: **You need to be prepared for the objections, or stalls, that you’re going to get.** If they say, ‘Well, I need to think about it,’ you’d better be prepared with three or four good scripts that you’ve adapted to your style and your product or service to get your prospect to open up. The sale doesn’t start until the third, fourth, or fifth ‘no.’”

According to Mike, “That doesn’t mean you’re an obnoxious telemarketer, but you can’t just roll over and play dead if somebody says to you, ‘I’m going to need to talk to the boss about this,’ or ‘Can I talk to my manager?’ The answer isn’t, **‘Well, when should I call you back?’** That’s what a lot of people are doing. They’re just creating stalls right and left. You’d better have some answers in your back pocket.”

Mike says, “If they blindside you with those sorts of questions, guess what? You’re pitching an unqualified lead. So, you should say, ‘Terrific, I think you definitely should do that. Let me ask you this, I’ve given you a lot of information your manager doesn’t have. **If your manager says, ‘Joe, do whatever you think is best,’ based**

“The sale doesn’t start until the third, fourth, or fifth ‘no.’”



on everything we've gone over and how you understand it right now, what would you tend to do?'

"That's isolating the objection. That's what closing is about. You have to pitch a qualified lead, get an idea what they want to hear in the beginning, use trial closes throughout to build a 'yes' momentum, and then be prepared to actually handle stalls and objections with scripts that work."

Life lesson: Prepare to win

"I was taught that **if you're willing to do the things that most sales reps are not willing to do, then soon you'll be able to enjoy the things that most sales reps will never be able to have.** What that means is, actually [buying a book on closing](#) or listen to CDs. Learn and invest in your career by recording yourself, critiquing yourself, writing phone scripts and making them your own, and actually learning the skills of sales. Sales is a set of repeatable selling situations. If you learn the skills to deal with them, you'll do really well."

"If there's a top producer in your company or industry, there's no reason you can't be one. It's just a matter of being willing to make a commitment—that's the number one characteristic of top sales producers. I'll leave

you with this quote from Bear Bryant: **'It's not the will to win, but the will to prepare to win that makes the difference.'** When I heard that quote, I thought, wow, that's what I've been saying this whole time!" 🍌

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"Sales is a set of repeatable selling situations. If you learn the skills to deal with them, you'll do really well."  
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15 Ways to Nail Your Next Sales Presentation

Are your sales presentations falling flat?

We asked some of our favorite sales experts to give us their best advice for making tired presentations more engaging, relevant, and effective.



Timing is everything / Make it a dialogue



“Stop presenting so soon. **Just because a prospect wants a demo or presentation doesn’t make it the right time to do it.** If you haven’t done good discovery work to uncover their issues—desired outcomes, frustrations, specific challenges, initiatives, etc.—then you have no right to be doing a presentation.

“My second tip is a bit contrarian. Nowhere is it written that a presentation must be a monologue. Put up a slide titled ‘Our

Understanding of Your Situation’ listing several of the prospect’s key issues and turn the ‘presentation’ into a dialogue. You’ll be amazed how much the prospect will appreciate you making the meeting about them and not your offerings.”

Mike Weinberg, Sales consultant, coach, and speaker; author of [Sales Management Simplified.](#)

newsalescoach.com | [@mike_weinberg](https://twitter.com/mike_weinberg)

Use your prospect's language



“Every industry has its own specific language, terminology, or jargon. Your industry does too. Too bad your prospects don't generally use or understand that language.

“**Improve your sales presentations by speaking about the #1 challenge your prospects face, using the language they use to describe that challenge.** When you do this, your prospects will ‘get it.’ More importantly, they will think that you ‘get it’ as well.”

Wendy Weiss, President of ColdCallingResults.com

[Cold Call Survival Guide \(free download\)](#) | [@wendyweiss](#)

Create a mental model



“Invest 60 seconds creating a Mental Model of how your sales presentation will go. **Create a picture in your mind of what you are going to say, the questions you will ask, the responses the prospect will have, and the questions you need to answer.** Do this simple routine and your clarity and confidence will help you meet the prospect's needs and win the business.”

Tom Ziglar, President, [Ziglar Inc.](https://ZiglarInc.com)

ZiglarShow.com | [@TomZiglar](#)

Meet before the meeting / Stop talking and listen



“Prospective clients care most about their particular situation. Research the company and industry first and then **hold an initial meeting to verify facts so that you may accurately tailor the presentation to their needs and interests.** One size never fits all.

“Most sales reps kill the sale due to providing the same presentation to everyone without prior knowledge of needs and interests, and they incessantly talk without listening to input provided from those in the room.”

Elinor Stutz, CEO of SmoothSale™, author of [Nice Girls DO Get the Sale](#)

www.smoothsale.net | [@smoothsale](#)

Develop an internal knowledge base



“Know your audience and the answers to any possible questions or objections they can pose. Your team should share the questions previously asked and have an internal knowledge base for the answers that you can study.

“If you're presenting to an organization that's not that evolved yet, **practice it on 10 different allies in the space and record their questions.**”

Max Altschuler, CEO of Sales Hacker and Revenue Summit, author of [Hacking Sales](#)

SalesHacker.com | [@MaxAlts](#)

Start drawing your solution, and let the buyer finish it



“As many of the other contributors have discussed, the ideal presentation should be a dialogue, not a monologue. You want to engage the buyer’s energy and attention. They don’t have it all figured out yet. **The point of the presentation is not just to confirm what they need to buy. A presentation should also continue the discovery process.**”

“To make that happen, ditch your slide deck. Trust me, no one wants to see it. Or hear you present it.

“Instead, **use a whiteboard for your presentation.** Start drawing out a flowchart or system diagram for your proposed solution. But don’t draw out the entire diagram. Map out maybe 10% of it. Then, to paraphrase Dan Roam’s recommendation in his great book Draw to Win, invite the buyer up to the board to take over from you and draw out the rest of the solution as they see it. The level of engagement with your ‘presentation’ will go through the roof.

“**The net result will be a jointly created solution in which the buyer has a feeling of ownership.** Through this collaboration you’ll have delivered value to the buyer in terms of helping them clarify their needs and objectives and how you will help the buyer satisfy them.”

Andy Paul, Sales acceleration coach,
host of the [Accelerate! sales podcast](#)
[andypaul.com](#) | [@realandypaul](#)

Preparation makes you relevant



“Sales reps need to focus more on being relevant than consultative. The consultative sale means you spend more time asking questions which most often you can find the answers to online or if you study their competition.

“You need to show up with case studies, ideas, and research. **Your clients do not have time for needs assessments and hundreds of questions.** Use the tools at your fingertips and come to your next presentation ready to prove that you are an expert in your field and you are prepared for the meeting.”

Ryan Dohrn, Sales coach and keynote speaker; publisher of
[SalesTrainingWorld.com](#) | [@RyanDohrn](#)

Sell them what they want



“Stop thinking about it like it’s a presentation—that encourages salespeople to think it’s all about them when, in reality, it’s all about your prospect! Ask questions and get your prospect to talk to you first.

“After you finish listening to them, make sure you tailor your presentation to focus on what they tell you they want to hear about. **Stop selling your personal favorite benefits and sell them theirs.**”

Stephanie Scheller, CEO, Scheller Enterprises, LLC
[TheStephanieScheller.com](#) | [@SuccessSteph](#)

Invest in your training / Don't read off the PowerPoint / Keep it open-ended



“1) Take an online course on presenting PowerPoints. **If you aren't going to invest in yourself to get better, why should anyone else?** It's OK to ask your company to pay for it, but if they won't, you still want the skills, right?

“2) **Stop reading the PowerPoint—people can read.** What you say should not be on the PowerPoint.

“3) Stop asking ‘Does that make sense?’ **It's the dumbest question ever to ask during your presentation.** Instead, engage your prospects with open-ended invitations like:

- ‘Hey, I have been talking for a while. I'd like to shut up and hear what you are thinking.’
- ‘I'd like to stop here and see what use-cases you may be envisioning as you think about all of this.’”

Richard Harris, Founder of The Harris Consulting Group; Director of Sales Consulting and Training for [SalesHacker](#)

Theharrisconsultinggroup.com | [@rharris415](https://twitter.com/rharris415)

Use a shared agenda / Focus on the slides that matter



“The #1 thing in the world that everyone loves talking about is themselves, which is also the #1 problem in sales—**we all love talking about ourselves and clients don't care.** This is why I recommend using a shared agenda to guide your presentations or demos, starting with a quick intro from everyone that includes what their priorities are and what they want to get out of the presentation.

“Then, don't dive immediately into your background, history, client list, and awards. Instead, focus on what you know about them and try to get clarity on their priorities. After that, **take the 20+ slides you have in your demo or presentation and focus on the 5–10 that are most relevant to them** based on what they told you their priorities were.”

John Barrows, Owner, [JBarrows Sales Training](#)
learn.jbarrows.com/library | [@JohnMBarrows](https://twitter.com/JohnMBarrows)

Collaborative teams close more deals. Nutshell's @-mentioning and customer timelines help sales reps share the knowledge that moves deals forward.

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Six Closing Lessons From a Traveling Salesman



Few people have what it takes to succeed as a traveling salesman.

Stu Larkin is one of them.

As a [traveling bronzed baby shoe salesman](#), Stu has been criss-crossing the country for over 30 years, and claims to close nine out of 10 sales when meeting with prospects.

With so many salespeople tied to their desks these days, what can we learn from a guy who's still out there carrying a bag? We recently got a chance to speak with Stu, and learn some of his secrets to closing so many sales.

1. Be confident

“First and foremost, be confident in yourself,” Stu says. “Even if you didn’t close that sale,

or you didn’t write that order, you must immediately **analyze what you did wrong and what you could have done differently**. Then you must institute the change.”

2. Learn the craft

As Stu puts it, “Selling is a profession. You don’t just declare that you’re going to now be a salesman. The way to become a professional is to **constantly read books about prospecting, about your client, about closing the sale, about personality, about how you treat people**. That’s what you need to do if you want to become a true professional salesman.”

3. Pre-qualify before scheduling

“You can’t close a prospect who isn’t pre-qualified,” Stu says. He’s seen many salespeople who just want to get the appointment. Since he doesn’t want to waste his time or theirs, he makes sure to qualify potential customers before he’ll meet with them.

Stu starts by asking, “**Is this something that you really want?**” If they say anything besides a resounding “Yes,” he disqualifies them. He doesn’t want to meet with someone who isn’t sure they want what he has to offer.

Next, he confirms that they want to proceed now. He doesn’t meet with anyone who is simply collecting information for the future. As Stu puts it, “**I’m not gonna allow you to be a tire-kicker on my watch.**”

After that, Stu will say, “Let me ask you this, and please don’t misunderstand me: **Are you the person that could make the decision on this day?**” If it turns out more than one person is involved, he won’t meet with one without the other, so he can be able to close the deal in one appointment.

To confirm that his prospect will be able to pay, he asks what method they plan to use

by saying, “**And, by the way, how would you take care of that? Do you use Visa? Do you use MasterCard? Would you use a check?**” If they say “Oh, no, I pay cash.” Stu responds, “Oh, really? You know you’re gonna need about \$100 tomorrow. Is that okay?” If they respond positively, great.

“Why would I go to this person who says, ‘I don’t have any checkbook. I don’t have a credit card. And I don’t have any cash.’ What am I doing there? I didn’t qualify them.” They must be able to pay him, to qualify for an appointment.

When they qualify in all four ways, he schedules an appointment.

4. Listen to your prospect

Whenever you ask your prospect a question, it’s important to be quiet and wait for the answer. Don’t answer your own questions. You have to wait for the answer. According to Stu, “**You have to learn how to shut your mouth, and listen to your customer.** Listen to the needs that they have and then fulfill those needs.”

“There is no sale when you’re not asking the right questions,” Stu says. He advises that you should ask, “What can I do with my product, my features, my benefits, and how they relate to



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- Whether or not your business is ready for CRM
- What you need to know before choosing a CRM platform

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you. If you fill those needs, the order becomes your order when you listen and solve the problem.”

5. Ask for the order...and ask again

According to Stu, “anyone can make a presentation and talk about a product.” All too often he said he’s “seen people who had tremendous product knowledge, but kept talking themselves out of the sale.” It’s important to talk about the features and benefits of the product, but **you must remember to ask for the order.**

As Stu says, “You have to ask a question, and once you ask that question, your key is to shut your mouth and wait for the answer. This is paramount, especially when it comes to closing. **The first person that talks, loses.”**

That answer is going to tell you how to proceed from there. If you get the answer you want, proceed with the order. If not, you’ll have to deal with the objection head-on. “As a good salesman, you must take that objection and fly with it and turn it into the order,” Stu says. **“Take that objection, handle the objection, and then it’s back to closing the sale again.”**

6. Get to a win-win

Once you get to the final objection, most prospects are willing to tell you what needs to happen for them to buy. **In Stu’s experience, the final objection, “always comes down to price.”** He finds out what would need to change to make the sale, then offers them other options to get to a win-win and close the sale.

The goal is to get the sale that day by negotiating, not by dropping the price. Stu says, **“a lot of salesmen think that the only way to get the order is by always lowering the price. But what they really need to do is explain the value.** That’s why I [close] nine out of 10. I show value.” 🍷

How to Set Quotas That Don't Sink Your Sales Team



In the wrong hands, a sales quota can be a dangerous weapon.

Although sales quotas are necessary to establish expectations and track performance, trouble tends to follow when those quotas [detach from reality](#).

So, what does a healthy sales quota look like? **Nutshell asked a few sales experts for their advice** on how companies can set sales goals that keep their reps motivated, productive, and sane.

How to create a reality-based sales quota

No sales manager has ever said, “I want our revenue to go down this quarter.” The quest for growth is universal in sales—but those growth targets can’t be pulled out of thin air.

“It’s very hard to make intelligent decisions about what quotas should be if you don’t

understand the territory for each individual sales rep or sales team,” says Bob Apollo, founder of the B2B sales advisory firm [Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners](#). “What is your historical revenue from existing customers in that territory? How many customers who match your ideal customer profile are present in that territory? Without a clear idea of those parameters, you won’t be able to set quotas in an informed way.”

“One thing that never works is when quotas are exclusively set from the top down, or aren’t aligned with the sales organization’s expectations,” adds Tibor Shanto, Chief Sales Officer of Renbor Sales Solutions and author

of Shift!: Harness The Trigger Events That Turn Prospects Into Customers. “For example, the board of a company will say they’re looking for X amount of growth, the leadership will do a top-down forecast or go through an exercise to get a bottom-up forecast, and if there’s a gap, they’ll arbitrarily assign it to a sales team. Clearly, that team’s quota is unrealistic from the start, and the salespeople are probably going to be demotivated.”

According to legendary performance coach Brian Tracy, sales quotas should reflect as much hard data as possible on a company’s sales history. “Take into account seasonality, new product launches, past performance of the sales department and individual employees, and every other factor that may come up before determining exact numbers,” Tracy advises. “By doing this, you’ll have a better idea of what you can actually expect and your projections will be more accurate.

“And remember, these numbers are what you strive for, but you should be fluid in your approach on them,” Tracy says. “Motivate your team to reach them, but don’t make it the only way you reward them or acknowledge their performance and hard work. **Employees sell better when they’re not under large amounts of stress.**”

Why money and stress are quota-killers

There are two common methods sales managers use to motivate sales reps to hit their quotas: Rewarding exceptional performance with money or non-financial incentives (“the carrot”) and pressuring salespeople to work harder through threats and humiliation (“the stick”).

An overwhelming amount of scientific research has concluded that both of these methods do more harm than good. In his must-read white paper [“The Science of Motivating Sales People: The Carrot & the Stick Must Go,”](#) Hoffeld Group CEO and Chief Sales Trainer [David Hoffeld](#) writes, “The foundational precept of the carrot and the stick is that salespeople must be bribed or beaten into obedience.”

Hoffeld found that these extrinsic motivations—sources of motivation that come from outside of an individual—can undermine a person’s internal desire to accomplish a goal, inhibit the ability to creatively adapt when executing a task, and foster a culture of greed or desperation that can cause salespeople to behave unethically in order to make their numbers.

As Hoffeld told Nutshell, sales managers have

to rethink the concept of sales quotas in order to keep their teams on the right track. **“To me, quota is the minimum standard that I’ll accept as a manager,”** Hoffeld says. “It’s not what I want you to hit, it’s the base standard for a sales position. The goal is always to perform beyond quota, and if you’re not hitting it, there’s something we have to fix, or else this isn’t working out.”

Setting quotas far above reasonable expectations of performance is a proven recipe for failure, and it’s one of the primary reasons why [45.4% of salespeople miss their quotas, according to CSO Insights](#). “I don’t like when quotas are outrageous sales goals that make salespeople go, ‘How in the world am I gonna hit this?’,” Hoffeld explains. “I worked with one company that would raise quotas as soon as you hit your best month ever—that was your new quota. And if you didn’t hit it, you didn’t get paid. It’s like, ‘Well, every time I do well, I get slapped for it, so I’m not going to do that anymore, because it doesn’t make any sense.’”

Though Hoffeld has found success using “overachievement commissions” to reward top-producing salespeople, he urges sales leaders to always view money as a secondary motivator. “I’m very much in favor of commissions,” Hoffeld says. “Good salespeople are competitive—that’s their primary

motivation—and commissions are a way for them to keep score. What I'm not in favor of is when managers try to motivate with income, because that's when the crazy starts."

For more of David Hoffeld's insights, read [The Science of Selling: Proven Strategies to Make Your Pitch, Influence Decisions, and Close the Deal](#)

Do we really need sales quotas?

Even if the misuse of quotas can be devastating to performance and morale, every sales expert we spoke to argued for the necessity of quotas in general.

When asked whether he thought sales quotas were inherently demotivating, [Sales Management. Simplified.](#) author and sales coach [Mike Weinberg](#) didn't mince words: "You cannot have a healthy sales culture without goals and a laser-focus on results vs. goal," Weinberg told Nutshell. **"Honestly, the premise of this question is ridiculous to sales managers and executives who live in the real world—you know, the world where companies have owners with bank covenants and business plans, the world where the primary job of sales is to grow the top-line, not to babysit a territory or over-serve existing customers. In that world, nothing works without goals."**

"I'm a firm believer in setting goals in every area of your life—including in sales," added Brian Tracy. "Without having a goal, your sales team will falter and not have a clear direction or purpose. **The key is to set tangible sales goals that are reasonable but also inspire your team to strive for more.**"

One way sales managers can do that is to set quotas just past those data-backed expectations. "I think if you can narrow in on a good quota based on potential growth, the length of the sales cycle, the length of the buying cycle and other things, there are some positive elements to stretching," Tibor Shanto says.

"For example, if you felt that a territory could present 10% growth from a data perspective, raising the sales target to 11% might inspire the sales person to try a little harder or more creatively," Shanto explains. **"It's perfectly fine to expect your thoroughbreds to run a little better,** and to continuously re-invent elements of their game and the things that made them successful to begin with."

Just remember: Some pushback is inevitable. **"It's pretty rare to find a sales rep, frankly, who's delighted with their quota,"** Bob Apollo says. "They'll all attempt to argue it down, they'll probably low-ball the sales manager



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when trying to set appropriate targets—a certain level of dissatisfaction is just to be expected. But I think you can get to a fair quota by applying a few straightforward principles. You might not have the salespeople turning cartwheels about it, but at least they'll believe that they have a chance of achieving it."

What can sales managers do to save their reps' sanity?

The [2016 Wells Fargo scandal](#) is an extreme (but not unique) example of what can happen when sales goals are established with insufficient regard for the consequences. To avoid a similar fate, sales managers must take steps to ensure that the culture they create doesn't wind up damaging their company's reputation or their employees' well-being.

"If you expect your salespeople to behave ethically, then as a manager you've got to behave ethically yourself," Apollo says. "I think unethical salespeople are sometimes the result of unethical signals sent by leadership, or managers who choose to turn a blind eye to bad practices. My belief is that sooner or later, that sort of thing catches up with you."

David Hoffeld agrees that salespeople mimic their managers—for better or worse—and

sees it as an opportunity for managers to set a positive tone. "I think sales managers should foster a culture of continuous learning," Hoffeld says. "They should empower their people, not micro-manage them. Coaching is something that all effective sales managers do: **'How do I help people get to that next level that they want to get to, but they don't have the knowledge or skills to get there?'** How can I remove the internal obstacles that are limiting the amount of time they can spend selling?" I see sales management more as a service role. You're trying to serve the people that report to you, and guide them to where they want to be."

Direct coaching from sales managers might actually be the most decisive factor in whether or not a sales team's meets its quotas. "It's disappointing when I ask sales managers if they have coaching plans for their individual reps and they don't," Tibor Shanto says. "Then how are you helping your reps achieve quota? That's where I think some of these disconnects happen, more than some number being off. **I can give you a really tough number to reach for, but if I do everything I can to help you, then I'm doing my job as a manager.'**"

In other words, providing your sales reps with the right coaching and support drives revenue far more effectively than big commissions or

insane sales targets can—and it ensures that your salespeople won't be tempted to sacrifice their ethics to close a deal.

"The most important thing is how your customers are treated," Shanto says, "because ultimately, that's where the money comes from." 🍷

Eight Ways to Retain Your Top Sales Reps (After They've Gotten Their Bonuses)

For sales organizations, high sales rep turnover isn't just disruptive—it can be financially devastating.



According to a [DePaul University study](#), the average turnover cost per sales rep is \$97,690 when you add up recruiting costs, training costs, and lost sales. In other words, if you have a large sales team that churns through five sales reps in a year, congrats, you've just poured nearly half a million dollars down the drain.

Scary fact: The average time to replace a sales hire ranges between 3.69 months (for inside sales reps) and 5.42 months (for field sales).

This is especially alarming when you consider

that most sales reps—no matter how happy or successful they are—typically have one foot out the door at all times. A Glassdoor survey found that only 19% of sales reps have no immediate plans to leave their companies. Meanwhile, 68% plan to look for a new job within the next year, and 45% of sales reps plan to look for a new job within the next three months. Outside of goat-herding, there are few professions more transient than sales.

So why do salespeople change jobs so often? And what can your sales organization do to stop your top sellers from leaving as soon as their bonus check clears?

PART 1: **Why Good Sales Reps Leave**

With tremendous pressure on sales reps to perform, high expectations on new talent, and the constant lure of a better situation down the road, there are plenty of reasons why salespeople find it hard to stay in one place—but those reasons may not be the biggest factors driving sales rep turnover, particularly for high performers. **Limited career growth opportunities and job boredom are the leading causes of employee turnover for top performers** across a range of industries, and these factors are even more pronounced in the world of sales.

Scary fact: 70% of sales reps who left their organizations due to lack of promotion opportunities were top performers.

“The extreme focus on performance and production leaves no time for development of next-level skills or leadership abilities,” [People First Productivity Solutions](#) President Deb Calvert told Nutshell. “We see an epidemic of incoming sales managers who are unprepared for the role because, as sellers, they were singularly dedicated to making the numbers.”

The problem isn't merely that sellers leave

their companies,” Calvert continued. “Many talented people also leave the sales profession because they see no opportunity for growth and become bored in a sales role that offers no new challenges.

According to Ken Thoreson, President of [Acumen Management Group, Ltd.](#), poor sales culture drives top talent away more than anything else. “High performers tend to leave companies because they lose ‘belief’ in the company’s ability to deliver positive results to their clients or execute effectively,” Thoreson told Nutshell. “It’s management’s failure to focus on the emotional connection with the individual, or their failure to focus on improving sales culture.”

Scary fact: For SaaS companies and other recurring revenue businesses, it takes an average of 11 months to break even on a new sales hire.

As any sales veteran could tell you, a rotten sales culture can take many forms. In her [Training](#) magazine article “[Hunting the Hunters.](#)” Kristin Thomas argues that the more distractions sales reps are forced to endure, the harder it becomes to keep them.

“Few things turn a salesperson off more than bureaucracy,” Thomas writes. “**They detest**

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“We see an epidemic of incoming sales managers who are unprepared for the role because, as sellers, they were singularly dedicated to making the numbers.”  
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internal meetings and [administrative tasks that take time away from selling](#). Want to see steam come out of a salesperson's ears? Have them spend an hour submitting an expense report (then take two months to reimburse them)."

Finally, sales managers too often make the mistake of over-relying on compensation as a means to keep their best sellers on board.

"Money is a poor substitute for leadership, development, engagement, and inspiration," Deb Calvert told Nutshell. "Sales managers may temporarily appease top performers by finding ways to boost their pay, but that doesn't address their deeper-level needs. I find it ironic that this is what we teach first and foremost in selling—it's about the value, not the price! The same is true in hiring and retaining talent."

PART 2: Eight Sales Rep Retention Strategies That Work

Now that we know what drives sales reps away, what should sales organizations be doing instead to stop the bleeding? Here are eight tactics that will dramatically reduce your churn rate.

1. Provide new challenges and opportunities

To prevent top talent from getting antsy, sales organizations should provide challenges beyond simply assigning them increasingly larger sales territories. "High-performing salespeople need fresh challenges," Ken Thoreson told Nutshell. "Give them an opportunity to launch new product and service offerings, allow them to lead training sessions, or ask them to provide advisory roles on sales strategy."

2. Increase employee engagement

According to a [Corporate Executive Board](#) study, employees with lower engagement are **four times more likely to leave their jobs** than those who are highly engaged.

"Understanding employee engagement and the domino effect that comes from it is critically important," says Deb Calvert. "Employee engagement means **'a heightened emotional connection that the employee feels for his/her organization**, that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work.'

“The first part—a heightened emotional connection—is what leads to improved retention rates. The second part of that definition—additional discretionary effort—yields higher rates of productivity, improved customer satisfaction, and increases in both top-line revenue and profitability.

“So, for sales managers, it’s more than just ‘engagement and retention are important,’” Calvert explains. “It’s that those two things lead to goal attainment. There is a direct cause-and-effect, backed by reams of research.”

To learn how to boost engagement within your own sales team, download [People First Productivity Solutions’ Employee Engagement & Productivity Checklist for Sales Managers](#).

3. Be smarter about bonuses

If your sales team’s compensation is largely tied to quarterly or annual bonuses, don’t be surprised if your reps stay with you just long enough to collect them. According to Richard Harris, Founder of [The Harris Consulting Group](#), “the goal is to keep the carrot within reach” at all times, through a more frequent mix of monetary and non-monetary incentives. Harris suggests offering the following to retain high-performing reps:

- Larger retention bonuses that pay out at one, two, four, and five years
- Shares in the company that can be vested within 6–12 months
- Extra vacation time at two- and four-year cliffs (“At two years, all sales reps should get two consecutive weeks of vacation to come back fully charged,” Harris told Nutshell.)
- Offering to pay off the sales rep’s student loans at certain intervals
- Continued sales training and professional development training on a yearly basis (“The organization should invest in management training for each team member as much as they do for any other kind of training,” Harris says.)

4. Stop making 1:1 meetings only about pipeline

You can’t expect sales reps to develop team loyalty and personal engagement when their managers only care about their numbers. Harris insists that managers and reps hold one-on-one meetings that are completely separate from pipeline review. “A pipeline meeting is just that—a meeting to discuss

your deals,” Harris says. “A 1:1 meeting should be about career development. The best managers know how to invest in their people by understanding them beyond the pipeline. Taking time to work with people to get better at their craft will make it harder for reps to leave.”

5. Get serious about your onboarding process

So far, we’ve focused on top performers who leave their companies voluntarily, but the financial impact of having to fire underperforming hires shouldn’t be ignored. According to the aforementioned DePaul University study, [involuntary dismissals make up 33% of sales rep turnover](#). When sales managers simply write off those reps as “bad hires”—then continue to hire and train talent the same way—they’re doomed to repeat their mistakes over and over again.

Many salespeople leave companies because they fail,” Ken Thoreson told Nutshell. “Either they were mis-hired, or they experienced what many new salespeople experience—limited or no formal onboarding process.

A sales team’s onboarding process should consist of a lot more than running through a phone script and showing new hires where

the bathrooms are. “There needs to be a specific process to ensure new salespeople understand the job and the product/services they will represent, and that they can ‘sell’ the company before they enter the territory,” Thoreson says.

6. Build camaraderie among your reps

Encouraging friendships among team members can be a very effective strategy for reducing churn. [According to OfficeVibe](#), 70% of employees say that having friends at work is the most crucial element to a happy working life, and most workers (58% of men and 74% of women) would refuse a higher-paying job if it meant not getting along with their co-workers.

“Sales can be a solitary job much of the time, but most salespeople enjoy getting together to cut loose and share war stories,” Kristin Thomas explains. “To attract and retain good candidates, you need to offer an equivalent environment that has a strong sense of community among the sales team.

“If your team is dispersed, find ways for them to get together on a regular basis. It helps them learn from one another—which has a value for them and your organization—and it helps build

Many salespeople leave companies because they fail,” Ken Thoreson told Nutshell. “Either they were mis-hired, or they experienced what many new salespeople experience—limited or no formal onboarding process.

a closer affinity to your company's brand, which easily can fade if people don't feel connected."

7. Celebrate the small victories

As [Zig Ziglar](#) famously put it: **"People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing—that's why we recommend it daily."**

If sales managers are only giving their reps recognition and encouragement when they close big sales, those reps can lose motivation and jump ship for a more supportive environment.

"Sales reps get a big rush when they see the fruits of their labor pay off," says Shawn Karol Sandy, Founder & Chief Revenue Officer of The Selling Agency and host of The SellOut Show. "However, what I've found is that keeping reps has less to do with big bonus checks than it does with everyday victories."

"Keeping reps engaged with success every day means they're not just banking on a 'Hail Mary' or 'Big Elephant' deal to give them that high," Sandy told Nutshell. "High performers need systems, coaching, tools, and support to sustain their performance. Double down your efforts on the forward progress of accounts and nurturing business to produce fewer peaks

and valleys for your salespeople and more consistent progress."

8. Develop from the inside instead of hiring from the outside

Though all of the above strategies will help you reduce sales rep turnover, you'll never be able to eliminate it completely. It's a fact of life that some of your top performers will leave your company due to personal or professional reasons. The question is, what are you going to do about it? **Do you have a backup plan for replacing valuable sellers who churn out?**

"Far too often sales leaders respond to the loss of top sales reps by recruiting new top performers from the outside instead of developing the capabilities of the people already on their team," says Andy Paul, sales strategy coach and host of the [Accelerate! podcast](#).

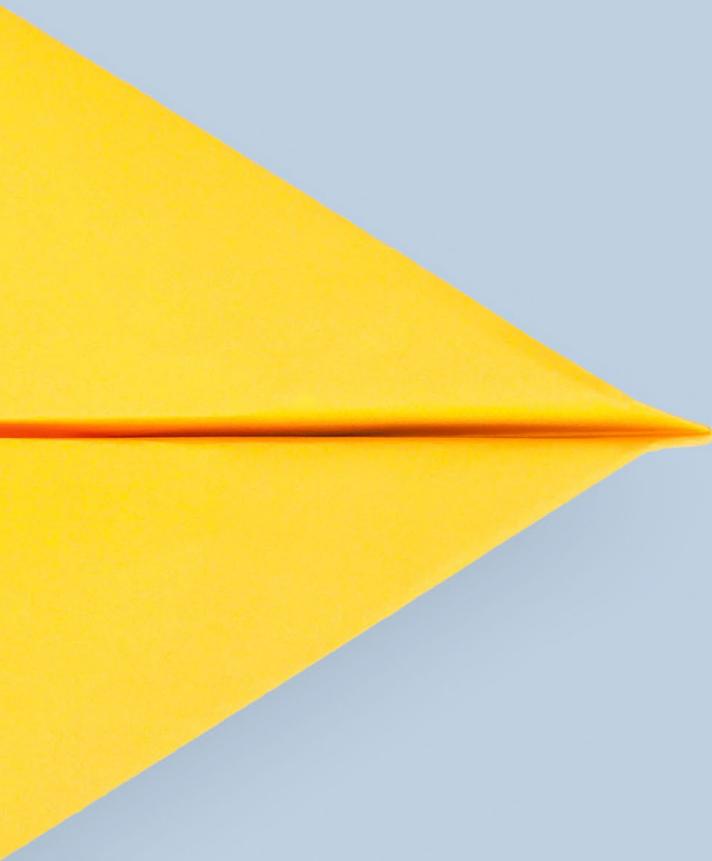
Invariably these hired guns have a lengthy resume full of short stays at numerous companies," Paul told Nutshell. "Some might even be good at what they do. But they won't stick around for long. And they'll contribute to the constant turnover in sales that will inevitably take its toll on your customers and impede the future growth of your organization.

So while you're making improvements to your sales culture, bonus structure, and onboarding system to reduce harmful turnover, ask yourself: How deep is your bench of sales talent? And what formal programs do you have in place to develop and groom your newer hires?

"Start today to make sure that you are always prepared for the loss of some heavy hitters," Paul advises. "Activate your next generation of top performers with increasing amounts of coaching, training, and account responsibility to prepare them to quickly fill the void created by the inevitable departure of some of your top sellers." 🍷

Was this Playbook helpful to you? Take our five-minute survey to suggest topics and sales experts that we should feature in the next installment.

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