Seth Godin: Leadership Through Chaos

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SOLUTIONS FOR SALES MANAGEMENT
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AMERICA'S 500 LARGEST SALES FORCES 2025

PLUS
10 Recognition Tips • Acquire & Retain Customers
Close Every Sale • C-Suite Strategy
Protect Your Best Assets

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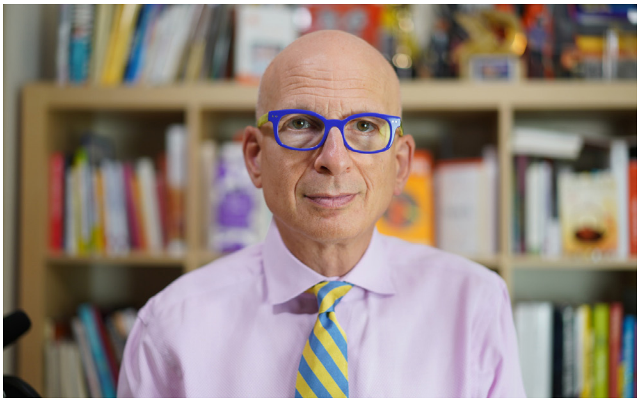
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025



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SELLING TIP

The Eyes Have It

Nonverbal signals affect the way others interpret our words – and eye contact, for one, can strengthen or weaken the message you want to send.

To get past a gatekeeper or close a sale, for example, remember that maintaining eye contact invites a verbal response from the person you're speaking with, but breaking it encourages that person to take action. For example, if you say, "You can make your check payable to XYZ Company while I complete your receipt" – but you then keep looking at the customer – you'll appear to be asking for permission to move forward with the sale. If you immediately look down and start writing, however, you encourage buyers to act in accordance with your statement.

You might get a signed contract by not using eye contact!

– RANDY KARSCHNER

VIDEO: MODERN SALES TRAINING THAT ACTUALLY WORKS

> "If education would cease for a century, civilization would disappear.
>
> WILL DURANT

SELLING TIP

Spring into Action

The way you carry yourself physically often affects how you feel emotionally. Before a big call, fake it 'til you make it.

To offset my shyness and give me some momentum before a big call, I intentionally walk more quickly as I approach the front door of a prospect's building or office. As I reach out and grab the door handle, I find that the extra spring in my step helps give me the confidence I need to do my best.

– JIM PARR

SELLING TIP

Five Quick Steps to Sales Success

Professional salespeople are more than product peddlers; they are the customer's consultant. Sales professionals are educated and skilled, and they have a competent manner that builds confidence in their prospects. The following five easy steps outline the path to sales professionalism.

1. Learn as much as you can about your business, its products, your prospect's company, and its competition. Constantly sharpen your sales skills. Believe in your knowledge and skills and only question them when you are trying to improve them.

2. Maintain a unique relationship with your customers. They soon come to rely on you for valuable decision-making information. Commit yourself to delivering value to your customers. Establish trust and respect through dependable and cheerful service, loyalty, sincerity, and professional competence.

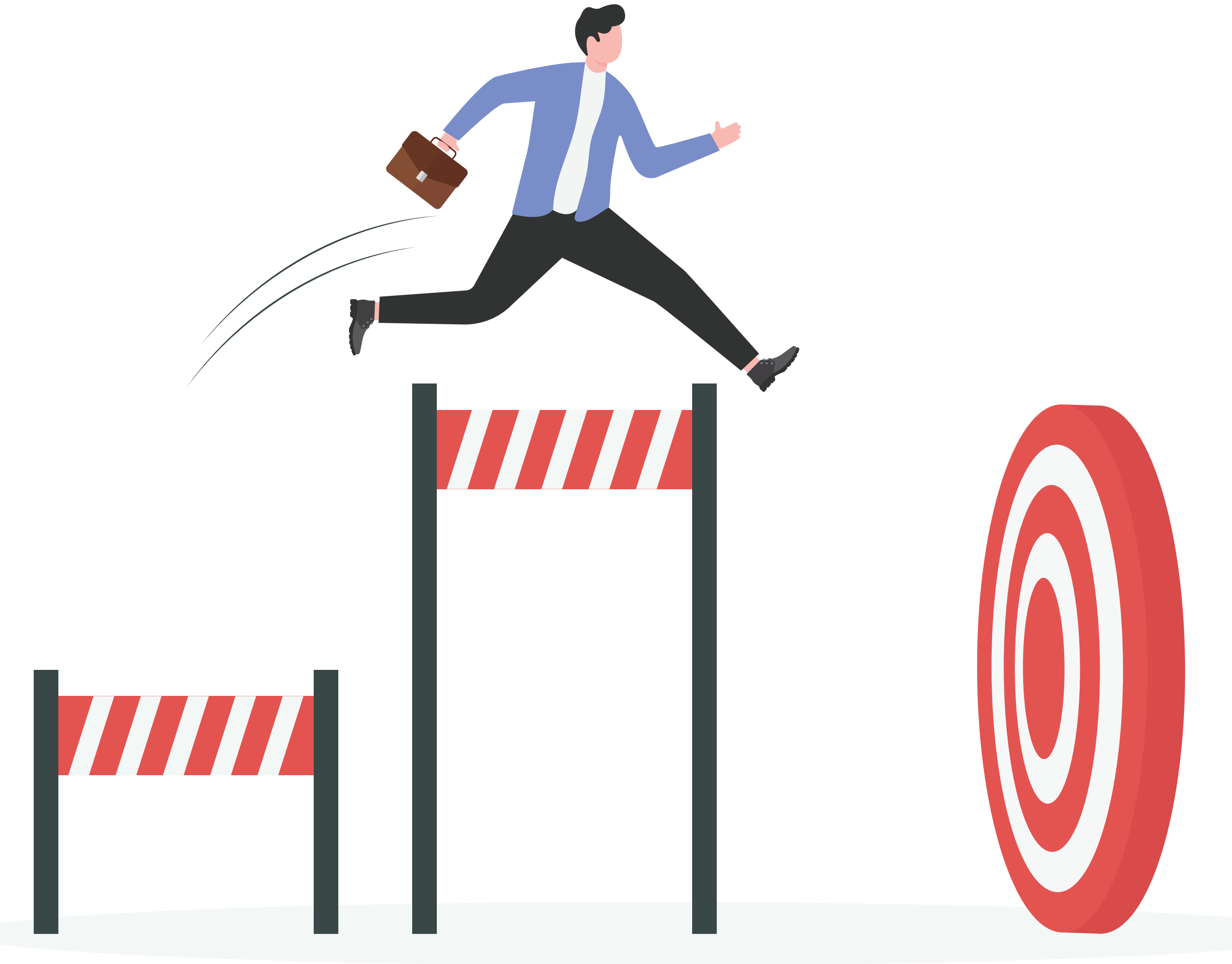
3. Render a valuable service – a service that customers are willing to pay for. Selling is such a crucial function to any business that most companies are glad to pay high commissions, salaries, or bonuses to get the job done right. And most customers recognize that a part of their purchase price goes to pay salespeople.

4. Be accountable to your company and to the customer, but also be self-managed. Don't make false claims or promises to customers just to get them to buy. Work hard, show initiative, and be persistent. Operate with integrity and ethics.

5. Maintain a professional attitude. Take pride in your profession. Keep a positive and confident self-image. Be resourceful in finding prospects and in solving problems. Have a sense of responsibility to your company and its customers. And reach out to tackle new challenges.

These five steps are easy to understand in print but often difficult to apply in real life. Apply that extra effort on a daily basis and you can become a sales professional – not just a peddler.

– NIDO R. QUBEIN



VECTOR MALL / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

See Every Sale Through to the Close

RONALD KARR

When your product solves your buyers' problems, you owe it to them and to yourself to sell until you seal the deal. To renew your determination when you need it most, prepare yourself to meet potentially discouraging challenges. With these techniques for sweeping competitors and other sales barriers out of your way, you can enjoy success that doesn't quit.

CHALLENGE 1: DEALING WITH REJECTION

Even sales masters are no strangers to rejection. If you count on having your share as well, you probably won't be as disappointed when it happens.

Just remember that you can have a realistic attitude toward rejection without setting yourself up for it. Face your prospects well prepared and optimistic, and, if you don't close, remember that "no" is a no-risk response. Prospects may turn down your offer simply because they fear risk. Respond by asking where your proposed solution falls short, to uncover more specific reasons for the buyer's hesitation. Then provide testimonials, facts, and figures or other information to reassure the prospect that, for your customers, the risk of buying paid off handsomely. You may still leave without the order, but don't take it personally. Change your mindset so that, to you, "no" takes you a step closer to your next "yes."

Consider that batters who hit .300 are seen as superstars – they can fail to get a hit seven out of every 10 times they step up to the plate and still be phenomenal successes. Learn your "batting average" – the number of prospects you typically present to before one buys. If you average one sale for every 20 prospects, for instance, every time you hear a no you can tell yourself, "Just 19 more noes until I get a sale."

CHALLENGE 2: UNSEATING THE COMPETITION

If you can sell change, you can more easily persuade buyers to switch from their current vendor to you. To convince them to give you a try, position yourself as a valuable resource. Find out what they would like to change about their supplier, and promise to do what that supplier did not. Ask them what challenges they face; the more you know about their desires, needs, and fears, the better you can position your product and yourself as critical to their success.

Emphasize that you want to do more than deliver a product – that you are more interested in helping them improve their performance. To boost your credibility, be as specific as possible about how (and how much) you can help. Sell buyers on change by reminding them that, even though change can be unsettling, it's vital to growth. If you can, offer a guarantee to minimize their risk.

CHALLENGE 3: OVERCOMING PRICE OBJECTION

No doubt you've heard it before; no doubt you'll hear it again. You can overcome the "Your price is too high" objection, but you have to respond to it instead of reacting to it. To respond effectively, shift the focus back to the prospect after the objection, with one of these three tactics:

1. Uncover the real objection. Many buyers know they have nothing to lose by asking for a lower price, so they do. Maintain that your price is very reasonable, and question buyers as to why they disagree. You may uncover a hidden objection you can address, and, if not, you can stand your ground and may still get the sale.

2. Empower the prospect. When buyers don't want to pay what you ask, give them the option of lowering the price by asking, "Mr. Prospect, I hear your concern. If your budget does not allow for this investment, tell me which part of the offer you're willing to do without." Your buyer may pay what you ask rather than give up anything, but, if not, you can still make a somewhat smaller (but still valuable) sale.

3. Focus on cost, not price. When buyers find your price hard to swallow, highlight the cost of owning your product over its lifetime. Remind them that poor quality costs less up front but is far more expensive in the long run. Point out specific ways in which your product will actually end up saving your buyer money.

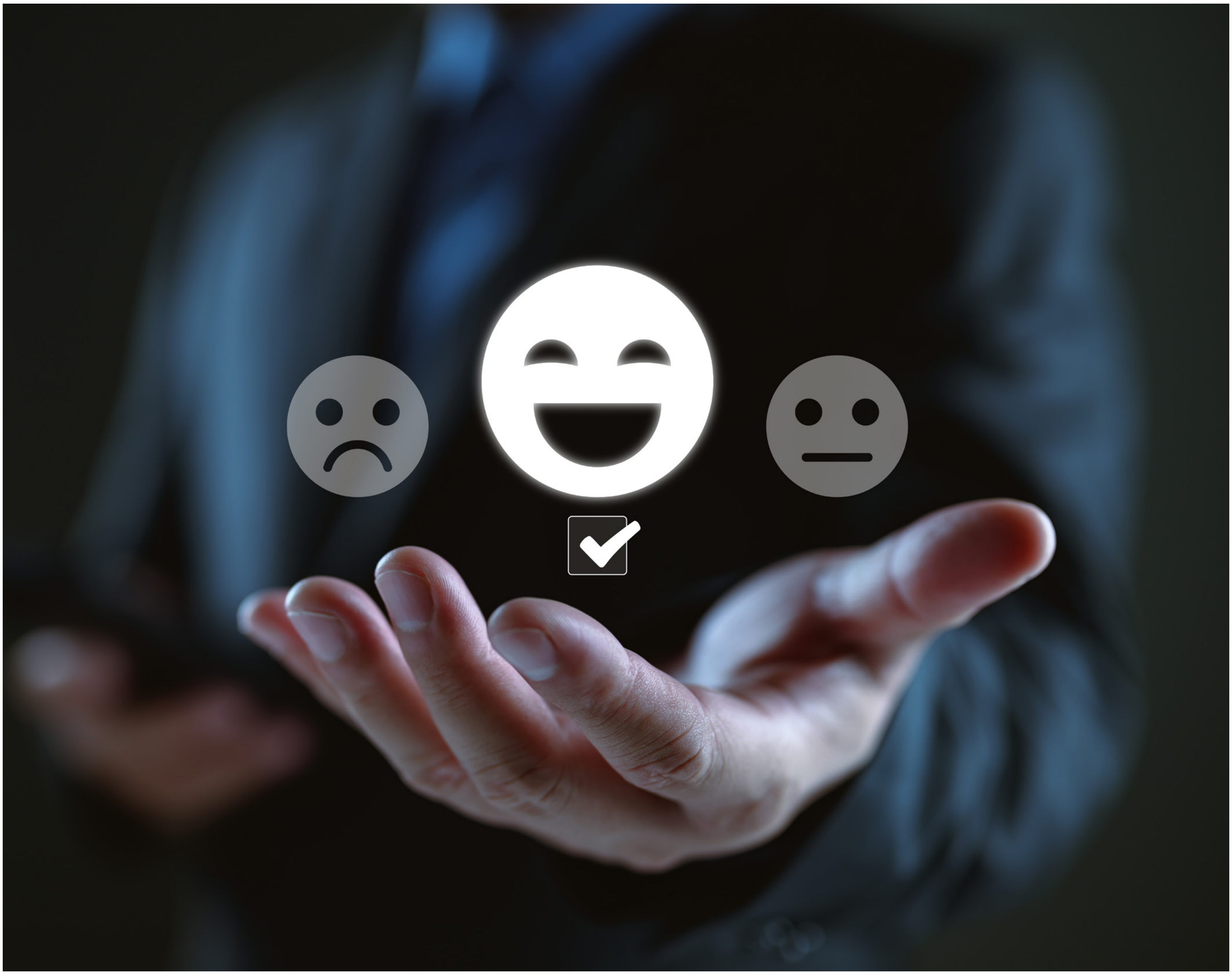
CHALLENGE 4: PROSPECTING MORE EFFECTIVELY

Your work style may give you some insight into your productivity. Strong prospectors are purpose oriented instead of task oriented. Rather than worrying only about the quantity of their calls, they also focus on quality. They understand that they must qualify prospects before they can help them.

Make sure your qualifying criteria are thorough enough and that they truly help you identify prospects with the right needs and budget. Understand that productive selling requires a balance between working hard and working smart, and maintain a balance between the quantity and quality of your actions. Know what selling actions most impact your sales figures, and spend the bulk of your time on those tasks. Remember to use your head when you work instead of just making calls or presentations on autopilot.

Good prospects are too valuable to give up on because of one "no" or because a competitor reached them before you. Persistence wins many sales, and, if you have enough of it, you can improve your performance by leaps and bounds. Learn not to take no for an answer and, chances are, you'll hear yes a lot more often. ■

VIDEO: AI 4 SALES CEO INTERVIEW: MAGICBLOCKS



LOOKERSTUDIO / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

A Friendly Four-Step Strategy to Handle Objections

BILL CATES

The last thing you want to do after a solid presentation is start a conflict with your prospect. But that's just what many objection-handling strategies do. Instead of countering or overcoming your prospect's objections, explore them. This friendly, four-step strategy helps keep prospects receptive to what you have to say so they'll say yes to you.

STEP 1

Many prospects will resist your efforts to change their opinions, so agree with them and validate the objection. Even if your prospect says, "Your price is too high," and your product is one of the best values on the market, remember: The way your prospect sees your product counts most.

Keep prospects from getting defensive and show them you respect what they have to say by validating their feelings with a supporting statement. To give your statement maximum impact, avoid ending it with "but," which sets up the conflict you're trying to avoid. Try to remove "but" from your selling vocabulary and replace it with "and," which lets you add to what you've said without contradicting your prospect.

STEP 2

Ask permission to explore. If you start drilling your prospects with questions – "Why do you feel that way?" or "What do you need to think about?" – right after they voice an objection, don't be surprised when they get defensive.

Before you ask prospects to explain their feelings, ask them for their permission to do so. When your prospect says, "I'd like to look around more before I make a decision," you can respond with, "I understand. I certainly don't blame you for wanting to make sure you're getting the best value for your money. Do you mind if we explore that idea a little bit?" Asking permission helps keep prospects from feeling threatened, reassures them that there's no need to put up their defenses, and encourages them to open up to you.

STEP 3

Reframe the objection. If your prospect seems willing to consider a different viewpoint after step 2, it's time for you to carefully help him do that.

You may need to provide more detail on the problems your product can solve or share testimonials with your prospect. When your prospect starts to come around to your point of view, move on to step 4. If you face deep-seated resistance after step 2, the best way to salvage your sale and your relationship with the buyer may be to back off and try again later. If you leave without irritating your prospect, you might have an easier time getting a second-chance appointment later on. Also, you'll be better prepared with the knowledge you gained on the first call. Use it to carefully plan how you'll approach your prospect the second time around.

STEP 4

Gain agreement and move on. Ask your prospects if they understand and agree with the perspective you've shown them. Be careful, though, not to sound as though you're trying to determine who won a contest. After you've reframed your prospect's objection, you can ask for agreement simply by saying, "Does that sound reasonable?" If they respond with a yes, move toward the close. For each new objection you hear, repeat the four-step process.

When your attempts to answer an objection become a battle of wills, nobody wins. Even if you get the sale, an irritated prospect may make a mental note never to buy from you again. Your best defense against any objection is never to get defensive. Learn to view and respond to your prospects' objections positively, and you'll have a much better chance of improving their perception of your product and persuading them to buy it. ■

> "There are four causes of ignorance: faith in authority, the power of custom, illusions of sense, and the proud delusion of an imagined wisdom.
>
> ROGER BACON

VIDEO: KERRY KALENDRA: A BEACON OF HOPE FOR BURNED-OUT SALESPEOPLE

VIDEO: AI PARTNERSHIP: HOW SALES EXECUTIVES CAN BOOST PRODUCTIVITY & CLOSE MORE DEALS

ANDREY_POPOV / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

How to Combine Customer Retention and Customer Acquisition

LAINE CHROUST EHMANN

During a tumultuous restructuring, a $3 billion company's strategy of customer-centric sales and service proved to be as successful growing its business as it was keeping customers on board. In fact, the company acquired several hundred new customers in the first quarter of its first year using the strategy outlined below, and customer satisfaction scores shot up across the board.

The sales organization took several key steps that allowed the company to keep its loyal customers while reaching out to new prospects.

1. Set expectations. The year started with a scaled-down sales meeting. While the lavish parties and luxury hotels of the past were noticeably missing, enthusiasm still ran high. It was clear the sales organization's focus was moving to include new business, and reps were told, "Don't ever forget that the existing customer base kept this company alive."

2. Provide the right incentives. While sales reps were encouraged to expand their business, they were also rewarded for keeping their base intact. They were clearly given incentives to protect the base.

3. Look for new business among the old. Management stressed that you don't always have to look outside your current customer base to bring in more business. Enterprise clients, once they begin to buy, continue to buy.

Leveraging existing customers to demonstrate the company's strengths had the effect of retaining its customer base despite its reorganization. Existing customers served as one of the sales force's best resources. A strong list of customer referrals also made it easy for the company to share its success with new prospects. ■

How a Ferrari, a *Matrix* Scene, and a Chinese Proverb Are Rewiring the Sales Conversation

BY GERHARD GSCHWANDTNER

There's something unforgettable about watching a seasoned mechanic fumble with a Ferrari. Especially when that mechanic is Ed Soo Hoo – the worldwide CTO at Lenovo – and the Ferrari is his own 360 Modena, 250,000 miles and counting.

Soo Hoo tells the story with the swagger of a storyteller and the soul of a philosopher. He recalls the moment he misdiagnosed a misfire in cylinder five – until his longtime mechanic, Mario, said five words that changed everything: "Pull the plug on five." What had looked like a perfect machine was crippled by one small flaw: a spark plug with zero gap.

"Small things matter," Soo Hoo said. "This was a tale of two plugs. A $200,000 machine underperforming because of a 1/32-inch oversight."

That moment became metaphor. Gerhard Gschwandtner, host of the Sales 3.0 Masterclass, seized on it. "Most companies have sales enablement. Some have customer success. But where's the department that watches for the gap? The space between what is and what could be?"

And just like that, the conversation turned electric.

Soo Hoo, Gschwandtner, and Matt Slotnick, CEO of Poggio, weren't just prepping for a masterclass; they were shaping a worldview – a new mental model for how companies sell, scale, and succeed.

THE GAP AND THE MAP

Soo Hoo, ever the systems thinker, transformed the UK's subway warning – "Mind the Gap" – into a sales framework: Governance, Architecture, and Process. And to cross that gap, he offered another acronym: MAP – Manageable, Actionable, Predictable.

This wasn't slideware. It was soulware.

"If you can't map the interconnections in your business like Charing Cross to Wembley," he said, "you can't scale alignment. And if you can't scale alignment, your customer conversations are chaos."

Slotnick chimed in. "That's the problem Poggio solves. Most sellers don't lack passion; they lack precision. They walk into meetings without a point of view, without intelligence, without orchestration. Poggio makes sure they never have a bad conversation again." AI isn't replacing your sales team. It's preparing them to ask sharper questions, provoke deeper insights, and elevate the entire customer conversation.

FROM ORCHESTRATOR TO ALCHEMIST

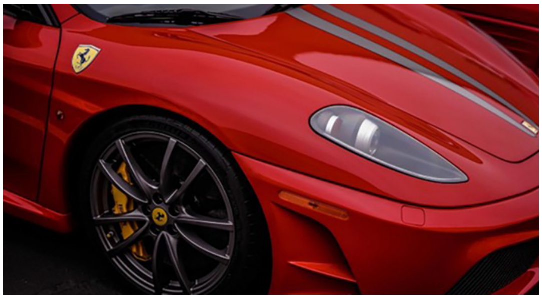
Sales, Soo Hoo reminded us, is not a transaction. It's a composition. "Every seller is a conductor," he said. "You have to know when to bring in the horns, when to soften the strings. Poggio gives you the sheet music for every account."

The metaphor lands because it's real. In one powerful anecdote, Soo Hoo compared Poggio to the scene in *The Matrix* where Trinity downloads the ability to fly a helicopter. "That's what sales needs," he said. "Download the knowledge, flicker your eyes, and say: Let's go." In Poggio speak, "Andiamo!"

Slotnick extended the metaphor: "And if you don't give your sellers that download? Then you're giving them a Ferrari with no spark plug gap. All engine, no ignition."

FIND YOURSELF. DEFINE YOURSELF. REFINE YOURSELF.

The conversation drifted into deeper waters. How do we become the sell-



ers our customers actually want? "It starts with knowing yourself," Soo Hoo said. "Sales is personal. And to truly listen, you have to show up without armor."

In a moment that felt more like a TED Talk than a prep call, Soo Hoo quoted Confucius, General Patton, and a banned casino card mechanic – all to make one point: Selling is a form of co-creation. "You don't push a product; you provoke insight. You become part of the buyer's dream."

THE RED PILL, THE BLUE PILL, AND THE TRUTH IN BETWEEN

Poggio, Soo Hoo said, is the red pill. It breaks the trance of the status quo. "It doesn't just reveal what is. It shows what could be. It calls out the elephant in the room – and then gives you the language to talk about it."

Slotnick added the clincher: "It's not about scaling data. It's about scaling empathy. Scaling preparation. Scaling insight. You can't fake that."

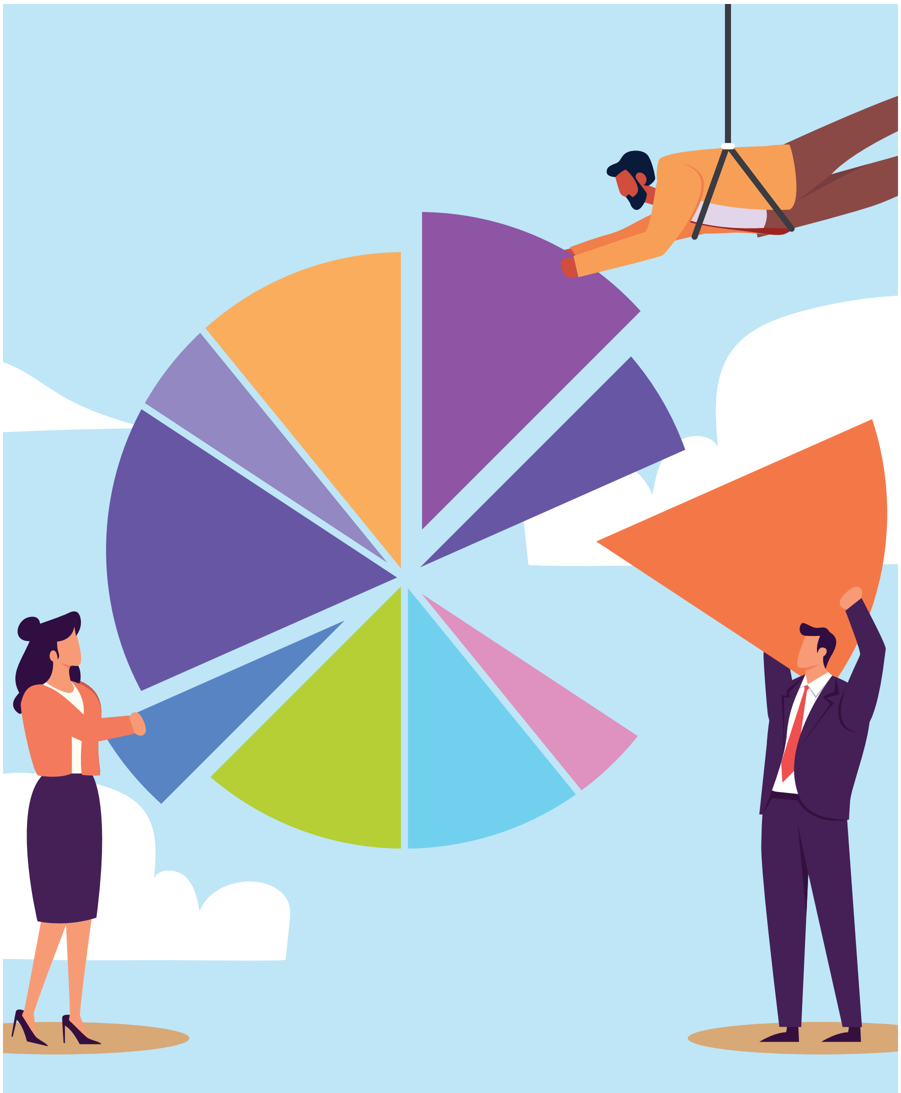
THE MASTERCLASS AHEAD

When these three take the stage, the audience won't get a panel. They'll get a performance – part jazz improvisation, part Socratic dialogue, part Ferrari tune-up.

And the first question they'll pose to the room is deceptively simple:

Where's your gap? ■

Gerhard Gschwandtner is the founder and CEO of Selling Power.



DREAM LOGO CREATION / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Protect Your Assets

HENRY CANADAY

Many sales departments are unprepared to sustain sales goals under diverse market conditions. One survey identified several key weaknesses in sales that can be especially damaging to the sales effort.

IDENTIFY WEAK SPOTS

First, only about half of all salespeople have a solid understanding of their company's strategy. "We asked both managers and customers about their salespeople, and we concluded that fewer than half of reps had a clear understanding of how to translate their company's strategy into their day-to-day work," explained the survey company's spokesperson. For example, firms often spend millions in advertising to go after a particular market segment with a specific value proposition. "If the salesperson does not understand how to follow through on that," the spokesperson continued, "it is a huge waste of money."

The survey found this weakness in strategic thinking across many industries and companies. Moreover, the weakness is just as likely to be found among sales veterans as new hires. "New hires have just been through company indoctrination," the spokesperson said. "The ones who have been out in the field a while, the company thinks they know what they're doing."

Strategic misalignment is especially damaging in times of uncertainty, when drastic changes must be made and executed effectively. Managers must focus on clear goals and objectives for their reps, explain how they connect to sales strategy, and clarify how reps are to spend their time and energy. "The trouble is ambiguity from critical execs, leaders, and front-line managers," the spokesperson shared. "It is communication and coaching."

For example, rather than just send memos on market segments, managers should sit down with reps and challenge them on prospects in the pipeline. "Ask, 'Is this one on strategy? Why go after this account?'" the spokesperson advised. "Coaching is the key to keeping alignment."

Unfortunately, the second major weakness the survey company identified is that sales managers too often lack necessary leadership skills. Overall, managers were rated 6 on a 10-point leadership scale by their supervisors and subordinates. The spokesperson noted, "That is 60%, academically equivalent to a D." The company found that the major leadership deficiencies lie in coaching, motivating, strategic thinking, and creating a good climate for sales.

"Managers must see the big picture, not get bogged down in minutiae," the spokesperson suggested. "They must be thinking partners to help reps deploy solutions and penetrate accounts."

Line sales managers must also, like successful sports coaches, create a climate in which people enjoy reaching for excellence. Too often, that does not happen. "One sales manager put a damper on a whole room when he came in and started talking about numbers," the spokesperson said.

START SOMEWHERE

Where to begin? "Climate starts with the manager and ripples out," the spokesperson said. The aim is a climate that is upbeat, optimistic, opportunistic, and exploratory. Moreover, changing climate should not be as difficult as changing the company culture of values and beliefs. Koprowski compares company culture to a glacier: difficult to alter.

And effective coaching is not about simply teaching salespeople how to talk better to prospects, but about dealing with specific sales situations. "Salespeople want new ideas on overcoming pricing barriers, calling on higher-level execs, and getting past gatekeepers on stalled sales," the spokesperson said. "Practical ideas make a huge difference." Top performing salespeople need reinforcement, recognition, and new responsibilities, such as mentoring new salespeople.

Training can help managers be better leaders, but real improvement usually requires systemic changes in an entire company. "From district managers all the way up to the VP of sales, they have to be supportive. Like reps," insisted the spokesperson, "managers need support."

The third weakness is that salespeople often lack critical skills, especially those needed to find and win new customers. Of 19 sales skills that the survey company tested, finding prospects and winning their business were most highly related to revenue success. "This sounds obvious since all sales is about finding, winning, and keeping customers," the spokesperson acknowledged. "But 10 years ago the difference between high and low performers was in retaining customers." Now even poor sales departments can keep current customers because they understand that this is less expensive.

So the new differentiators between the best and the rest are the skills necessary for finding new buying centers, locating ancillary industries, conducting strategic prospecting, and using referral networks. Which industries should a salesperson tap when typical customers have been hit hard? This could be a new geographical market or a new vertical. Top management may be responsible for finding these new markets in large companies. In smaller companies, the individual salesperson must do it.

The fourth common problem the survey uncovered: Salespeople lack the flexibility to respond to buyers' differing needs. This challenge is largely about company processes, for example in pricing. Some sales departments have a broad range of pricing authority, while others must go through higher management to clear prices.

"It is also a problem in logistics and delivery schedules," the spokesperson said. "Some salespeople can make commitments and have the authority to deal with delivery teams, while others have to get higher approvals. Some reps say their biggest challenge is selling within the company."

Often, critical sales-support systems are at odds with sales strategy. These systems can include customer relationship management, sales force automation, reward systems, performance management systems, invoicing, pricing systems, and information technology in general. For example, a firm has a pipeline and forecasting system that requires entry of an opportunity's projected revenue value and expected close date. Yet the firm's strategy requires understanding customers thoroughly before proposing products or services. So sales reps do not know how much they can sell when they first enter an opportunity into the forecasting system. They have to either enter fictitious information or just ignore the system.

Or consider a firm whose call-center employees are assessed according to the number of calls handled per shift. We can assume that the company's strategy is not just to pitch products but to understand customer needs and provide solutions matching these needs. This strategy requires longer and deeper conversations with customers, not simply a large volume of calls.

> “One thing at a time well done is worth one thousand things started, but unfinished.
>
> RAY CHARLE KASPER

High-performance sales organizations remove or resolve these contradictions between strategy, systems, and processes. They tend to have pipeline management systems that are well run, realistically linked to strategy, and helpful in driving opportunities for reps. "These management systems help both reps and managers monitor volume, quality, and speed through pipeline," the spokesperson explained. "They track the distribution of opportunities through the pipeline in a clear and straightforward way." Weak systems, in contrast, are just a management tool that reps must feed without getting much back. "These do not give salespeople reports, reminders, and follow-ups."

Top-flight managers insist on discipline in pipeline processes: making sure the data is accurate and that it is used and has demonstrable value. "These systems must be constantly monitored, measured, and used to add value for the rep. Otherwise, they are just busywork, and you only have so many days to sell," asserted the spokesperson. ■

AMERICA'S 500 LARGEST SALES FORCES 2025

For the past 27 years, *Selling Power* magazine's research team has ranked companies according to the estimated number of salespeople they employ. The 500 companies in America on Selling Power's 2025 list employ the world's largest sales forces and depend on millions of salespeople to achieve their revenue goals. This year, the number of salespeople in these companies totals more than 21 million.

This year's data was collected at the dawn of massive on-again-off-again tariffs, exacerbating the already uncertain economic climate. The only certainty was that AI was the name of the game across all industries, and all eyes turned toward Big Tech to help power-lift the economy.

While overall revenues ticked up in all sectors, employment remained flat. In fact, according to recent Wall Street Journal reporting, CEOs are now boasting about job cuts from AI automation, forming the new mantra – automation at all costs.

THIS YEAR'S OVERVIEW

The 2025 Selling Power 500 Largest Sales Forces in America list includes the top 200 companies in the manufacturing industry, the top 200 companies in the service industry, the top 50 insurance companies, the 30 largest direct-selling companies, and the top 20 automotive-dealer organizations (megadealers). Every year, new companies make the list while others drop off.

The total number of salespeople reported by all 500 companies on this year's list is 21,401,826, which represents a disappointing second consecutive annual decline of more than 8%, due largely to a continued shift in the direct selling industry. This is unsurprising given the nation's inflationary belt-tightening, which contributed to a decreased viability in making a living wage in direct selling. The manufacturing, service, and insurance industries all experienced stagnation or a decline as industries navigated into the murky waters of AI.

The aforementioned direct selling category, which had shown a brief surge immediately following the end of the pandemic in terms of sales force growth, reported yet another large overall decrease in the number of salespeople from 2024 to 2025.

In other categories:

- The number of salespeople in the manufacturing industry remained unchanged overall, marking the end of a four-year slide.
- The number of salespeople in the service industry rebounded slightly from last year's 7% decline – experiencing a 2% increase.
- The insurance industry remined steady, posting an increase of less than 1% – stopping the industry's three-year slide.
- In the automotive industry, the reported number of salespeople increased by more than 11%.

Overall, without the direct-selling numbers, the number of salespeople increased by less than 19,000. One could question whether the proliferation of generative AI is beginning to negatively impact sales organization staffing, or whether the impact is instead from tariffs, continued inflationary pressures, or more likely a combination of all three.

The states with the most Selling Power 500 companies are California (54), New York (50), and Texas (40). The states in which the Selling Power 500 companies employ the largest number of salespeople are New York (6,196,041), California (4,545,375), and Florida (3,240,293). These states account for about 29% of the total companies and a whopping 65% of the total salespeople. It is interesting to note that California continues to lose ground – and Texas and Florida continue to gain ground – in both the number of major companies and of total salespeople.

For the third year, we are also tracking the gender gap in the leadership of these major companies. It is highly disappointing that, in 2025, a paltry 11% of the Selling Power 500 companies are led by women – and worse, there were no gains for the second consecutive year. In the companies we are reporting on that lead the tech sector, all are helmed by men, with the notable exception of Oracle's CEO Safra A. Catz.

PRODUCTIVITY RIDES HIGHER ON ACCELERATING AI ADOPTION

Continuing a trend in the numbers of the previous four years, our research team found that salespeople employed by manufacturing industry firms contributed a higher amount of sales revenue than those in any other industry. The top 200 manufacturing firms employ 439,130 salespeople and produce almost $6.4 trillion in sales. That's an average of $14.5 million in sales per salesperson. This represents a smaller (3.7%) increase in productivity compared to the previous year and continues in tandem with a declining overall manufacturing sales force. Both the number of manufacturing salespeople and the total number of manufacturing employees dropped by less than 1% from last year.

The top 200 companies in the service sector reported a small increase of over 12,000 salespeople, bringing the total to 569,425 salespeople. Even with the small increase in salespeople, the total revenue for the sector topped $7.5 trillion – an increase of 6% since last year. This represents more than $13.2 million in sales per salesperson and a sizable 4% increase in productivity – now showing 11 straight years of productivity gains. The number of service-sector employees remained flat, posting a decrease of 0.18% this year, marking the first time in six years without reported employee growth.

The top 20 automotive megadealers reported positive results this year – with the unusual exception of productivity. The top 20 firms own 2,443 dealerships, employ an estimated 36,645 salespeople, and produce over $213 billion in sales (up by almost 10%). This brings the average annual sales per salesperson to just over $5.8 million (down by 1.06%).

The top 50 insurance companies employ sales forces totaling 560,396 across the industry, with an average sales volume per salesperson of $3,452,227. This represents a 10.07% increase in productivity. The number of salespeople remained relatively unchanged from last year (a 0.56% increase), which factored into the productivity numbers. The number of employees increased by less than 1.16% over last year, a significant drop in the rate of employee growth.

The top 30 direct-selling companies reported a sizable decrease in total salespeople, coming in at just under 20 million for 2025.

Here are some of the key takeaways for this year:

- The total number of salespeople across the major industries remained stagnant or declined for a third straight year, despite increasing revenues. This is indicative of the continuing economic uncertainty, mixed with the technological gains from the implementation of AI within sales organizations.
- Many of the major tech companies continue to shed employees, continuing an AI automation trend.
- Overall, revenue increases began to slow, indicating an easing of inflationary pressures and rising prices.
- Women-led Selling Power 500 companies account for only 11% of the total companies on this year's listing – a percentage that is relatively unchanged from last year.
- The number of companies based in California reported on in the Selling Power 500 declined in 2025, while states like Texas continued to gain companies.
- Undoubtedly, beyond what the Fed decides on interest rates, or what President Trump decides each day on tariffs, the largest unknown for sales forces of the Selling Power 500 companies heading into 2026 will be the impacts of AI implementation.

SELLING POWER 500 SALESPEOPLE DRIVE THE ECONOMY

Each salesperson in the service or manufacturing industry supports, on average, 24.3 other jobs within their respective companies. That figure marks the first recorded decrease since the inception of the Selling Power 500. Even still, the number indicates the importance of the

Insurance

RANK	COMPANY	SALESPEOPLE
1	Hartford Financial Services Group, The	95,000
2	AFLAC	71,000
3	Lincoln National	57,000
4	OneAmerica Financial Partners	40,921
5	Progressive	35,000
6	Kemper	30,000
7	American International Group	24,800
8	State Farm Insurance	19,000
9	Globe Life	16,400
10	Allstate	15,000

Technology, AI & Internet

RANK	COMPANY	SALESPEOPLE
1	Microsoft	30,000
2	Amazon	15,174
3	Cisco Systems	14,200
4	Salesforce.com	13,816
5	International Business Machines	11,535
6	Oracle	9,896
7	Apple	7,623
8	Google-Alphabet	7,568
9	Dell	6,500
10	ServiceNow	4,171

Communications & Media

RANK	COMPANY	SALESPEOPLE
1	AT&T	29,128
2	Verizon Communications	23,129
3	T-Mobile	19,500
4	Comcast	8,489
5	Charter Communications	3,500
6	iHeartMedia	2,873
7	Lumen	2,458
8	Walt Disney	2,093
9	eBay	2,058
10	United States Cellular	2,015

Food, Beverages & Consumables

RANK	COMPANY	SALESPEOPLE
1	PepsiCo	14,140
2	Starbucks	9,500
3	Sysco	7,281
4	U.S. Foods	6,523
5	Coca-Cola	3,285
6	Performance Food Group	3,000
7	General Mills	2,760
8	Keurig Dr Pepper	2,320
9	Mars	1,710
10	Tyson Foods	1,469

Financial

RANK	COMPANY	SALESPEOPLE
1	Edward Jones	20,125
2	Citigroup	14,497
3	Bank of America	12,152
4	JPMorgan Chase	9,226
5	Raymond James Financial	8,787
6	U.S. Bancorp	6,053
7	RBC Wealth Management	5,820
8	Fidelity Investments	5,756
9	PNC Financial Servcies Group	4,274
10	Capital One Financial	3,510

Healthcare & Medical Products

RANK	COMPANY	SALESPEOPLE
1	Ecolab	25,000
2	Pfizer	7,398
3	GSK	7,000
4	Stryker	6,500
5	Teva Pharmaceuticals	6,150
6	Novartis	5,291
7	Abbott Laboratories	4,843
8	AstraZeneca-US	4,451
9	Eli Lilly	3,395
10	Merck	3,264

sales force in terms of the health of an organization. These companies employ a total sales force of more than one million, who produce almost $14 trillion in sales and ensure the employment of over 25.5 million people.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE SELLING POWER 500

Top executives – Use the Selling Power 500 to benchmark your company's productivity per salesperson. Find out how you measure up to your competition and the average in your industry. Check which companies have decreased their sales forces and which are gearing up for expansion.

Salespeople – Use the Selling Power 500 as your best-prospect list. There is no other source that gives you access to those companies that purchase products for a large number of salespeople. This is your ideal list if you sell sales training, sales-incentive services, customer relationship management solutions, automotive fleets, sales meetings, or trade show services. Begin your account planning by researching company Websites.

Job seekers – Use the Selling Power 500 to plan your sales career. These 500 companies employ the largest sales forces in America. Large companies invest heavily in recruiting, training, and rewarding sales staff. To find job openings, log on to the companies' Websites.

Educators – Use the Selling Power 500 as a tool to build next year's curriculum. Every year, Selling Power 500 companies seek to recruit more than 500,000 college graduates. There are more than a dozen colleges that offer sales curricula, and all of their graduates can look forward to solid careers in sales. Prepare your future students for a lucrative career in sales. (Note: Media research shows that the average *Selling Power* magazine reader has a college degree, works in sales management, and has a household income of over $174,000 per year.)

Special thanks go to our corporate research team for collecting the data. To have your company listed in the Selling Power 500 next year, please email us at **research@sellingpower.com**. ■

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Service

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
1	AT&T	T	29,128	140,990	22	$122,336	14
2	SAP America	SAP	25,834	109,973	25	$37,730	42
3	Verizon Communications	VZ	23,129	99,600	32	$134,788	12
4	Edward Jones	N/A	20,125	55,000	54	$16,257	75
5	T-Mobile	TMUS	19,500	70,000	47	$81,400	23
6	Amazon	AMZN	15,174	1,556,000	2	$637,959	2
7	Citigroup	C	14,497	229,000	15	$81,139	24
8	Salesforce.com	CRM	13,816	76,453	39	$37,895	40
9	Bank of America	BAC	12,152	213,000	17	$101,887	16
10	Automatic Data Processing	ADP	11,083	64,000	48	$19,203	66
11	Starbucks	SBUX	9,500	361,000	11	$36,176	43
12	JPMorgan Chase	JPM	9,226	317,233	12	$177,556	8
13	Raymond James Financial	RJF	8,787	19,000	110	$12,821	87
14	Comcast	CMCSA	8,489	182,000	20	$123,731	13
15	UnitedHealth Group	UNH	7,570	400,000	9	$400,278	3
16	Google-Alphabet	GOOG	7,568	183,323	19	$350,018	6
17	Sysco	SYY	7,281	76,000	40	$78,591	26
18	Southwest Airlines	LUV	7,265	72,500	44	$27,453	51
19	U.S. Foods	USFD	6,523	30,000	78	$37,877	41
20	United Parcel Service	UPS	6,500	490,000	5	$91,070	20
21	U.S. Bancorp	USB	6,053	70,253	46	$27,456	50
22	Berkshire Hathaway	BRK A	6,000	392,400	10	$371,433	4
23	Total Quality Logistics	N/A	5,850	9,000	149	$6,700	119
24	RBC Wealth Management	N/A	5,820	94,838	34	$98,400	18
25	Fidelity Investments	N/A	5,756	77,000	38	$32,700	45
26	FedEx	FDX	5,506	430,000	7	$87,693	22
27	Office Depot	ODP	5,500	19,000	109	$6,990	118
28	Advance Auto Parts	AAP	4,877	62,800	50	$9,094	105
29	Fastenal	FAST	4,458	23,702	92	$7,547	116
30	PNC Financial Services Group	PNC	4,274	55,184	53	$21,555	61
31	ServiceNow	NOW	4,171	26,293	86	$10,984	98
32	Marriott International	MAR	4,098	418,000	8	$25,100	53
33	Cintas	CTAS	3,974	46,500	59	$9,597	102
34	Delta Air Lines	DAL	3,788	100,000	31	$61,643	29
35	Staples	N/A	3,750	12,000	133	$8,000	115
36	Capital One Financial	COF	3,510	52,600	55	$39,112	39
37	Charter Communications	CHTR	3,500	94,500	35	$55,085	32
38	Paychex	PAYX	3,500	19,500	107	$5,400	129
39	W.W. Grainger	GWW	3,342	26,000	87	$17,168	73
40	American Airlines	AAL	3,316	133,300	23	$54,211	33

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Service

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
41	Hilton Worldwide	HLT	3,150	181,000	21	$11,174	96
42	McKesson	MCK	3,106	45,000	62	$359,051	5
43	ARAMARK	ARMK	3,096	266,680	13	$17,401	71
44	Performance Food Group	PFGC	3,000	37,000	69	$58,281	30
45	WM	WM	3,000	61,700	51	$22,063	60
46	Ricoh Americas	N/A	2,914	79,544	37	$16,400	74
47	iHeartMedia	iHRT	2,873	10,100	142	$3,865	146
48	Barclays Capital	BCS	2,867	97,689	33	$26,788	52
49	Wells Fargo	WFC	2,841	217,000	16	$90,777	21
50	Broadcom	AVGO	2,665	37,000	68	$51,574	35
51	C.H. Robinson Worldwide	CHRW	2,578	13,781	125	$17,725	70
52	Gartner	IT	2,500	21,044	99	$6,267	121
53	Lumen	LUMN	2,458	25,000	89	$13,108	86
54	Insight Enterprises	NSIT	2,405	14,324	123	$8,702	106
55	American Express	AXP	2,331	75,100	41	$65,949	27
56	Henry Schein	HSIC	2,320	25,000	88	$12,673	88
57	Morgan Stanley	MS	2,297	80,000	36	$61,761	28
58	MSC Industrial Direct	MSM	2,290	7,423	155	$3,821	147
59	Goldman Sachs Group	GS	2,276	46,500	60	$53,512	34
60	Walmart	WMT	2,200	2,100,000	1	$674,538	1
61	UBS Financial Services	UBS	2,185	108,648	26	$48,611	36
62	Fifth Third Bancorp	FITB	2,160	18,616	111	$10,426	99
63	Meta	META	2,125	74,067	43	$162,355	11
64	Reliance Steel & Aluminum	RS	2,100	16,200	116	$13,835	83
65	Adecco	N/A	2,097	40,000	65	$25,000	56
66	Walt Disney	DIS	2,093	233,000	14	$91,361	19
67	Discover Financial	DFS	2,085	21,000	100	$20,020	64
68	Arrow Electronics	ARW	2,083	21,520	98	$27,923	49
69	eBay	EBAY	2,058	11,500	135	$10,283	100
70	JetBlue Airways	JBLU	2,050	23,000	96	$9,279	104
71	Fidelity National Financial	FNF	2,019	23,533	93	$13,681	85
72	United States Cellular	USM	2,015	4,100	172	$3,770	149
73	DHL	N/A	2,013	601,723	4	$99,324	17
74	Truist	TFC	2,000	38,335	66	$24,253	58
75	Fiserv	FI	1,982	38,000	67	$20,456	63
76	Republic Services	RSG	1,964	42,000	64	$16,032	77
77	United Airlines	UAL	1,961	107,300	27	$57,063	31
78	Foundever	N/A	1,941	9,800	145	$100	200
79	Alaska Air Group	ALK	1,913	33,941	74	$11,735	93
80	M&T Bank	MTB	1,894	22,354	97	$8,479	107

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Service

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
81	PTC	PTC	1,866	7,501	154	$2,134	171
82	Rollins	ROL	1,852	20,265	102	$3,389	155
83	IAC/InterActiveCorp	IAC	1,825	8,300	150	$3,807	148
84	Alorica	N/A	1,818	100,000	29	$2,400	167
85	VISA	V	1,811	31,600	77	$35,926	44
86	Graybar Electric	N/A	1,807	7,799	152	$11,042	97
87	Ryder System	R	1,802	50,700	57	$12,636	89
88	R.R. Donnelley	N/A	1,800	37,000	70	$4,600	137
89	Regions Financial	RF	1,786	19,644	105	$9,373	103
90	Windstream	N/A	1,744	10,974	137	$4,000	145
91	United Rentals	URI	1,700	27,900	82	$15,345	80
92	Centene	CNC	1,612	60,500	52	$163,071	10
93	ZoomInfo	ZI	1,527	3,508	177	$1,214	183
94	Echo Global Logistics	N/A	1,506	2,939	180	$3,450	153
95	Kimball Midwest	N/A	1,505	2,431	184	$240	197
96	CDW	CDW	1,500	15,000	119	$20,999	62
97	Stewart Information Services	STC	1,466	7,000	158	$2,422	166
98	MGM Resorts International	MGM	1,465	63,000	49	$17,241	72
99	Huntington Bankshares	HBAN	1,437	19,932	103	$7,438	117
100	Cencora	COR	1,414	46,000	61	$293,959	7
101	Applied Industrial Technologies	AIT	1,353	6,500	160	$4,479	140
102	First American	FAF	1,350	19,038	108	$6,128	123
103	Data Axle	N/A	1,331	1,500	196	$750	190
104	Ally Financial	ALLY	1,315	10,700	138	$8,181	113
105	Principal Financial Group	PFG	1,307	19,700	104	$16,128	76
106	Dun & Bradstreet	DNB	1,305	6,247	162	$2,382	168
107	Caesars Entertainment	CZR	1,299	50,000	58	$11,245	95
108	Liberty Media	LLYVA	1,275	2,000	190	$3,653	150
109	Gannett	GCI	1,263	11,700	134	$2,509	164
110	Avnet	AVT	1,262	15,462	118	$23,757	59
111	ArcBest	ARCB	1,251	14,000	124	$4,179	144
112	Syneos Health	N/A	1,225	29,000	80	$5,393	130
113	TriNet	TNET	1,196	3,600	176	$5,053	132
114	ManpowerGroup	MAN	1,164	26,700	85	$17,854	69
115	Cloud Software Group	N/A	1,156	10,000	143	$4,300	141
116	Patterson Dental	N/A	1,144	7,600	153	$6,568	120
117	Ingram Micro	N/A	1,143	23,500	94	$47,984	37
118	Workday	WDAY	1,126	20,400	101	$8,446	109
119	Carnival	CCL	1,112	100,000	30	$25,021	55
120	Piper Sandler	PIPR	1,108	1,805	192	$1,526	179

SERVICE

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Service

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
121	Barnes Group	N/A	1,100	5,600	166	$1,600	177
122	Wyndham Hotels & Resorts	WH	1,100	2,200	186	$1,404	182
123	H&R Block Financial	HRB	1,087	70,900	45	$3,610	151
124	Expedia Group	EXPE	1,037	16,500	115	$13,691	84
125	Connection	CNXN	1,035	2,580	183	$2,802	161
126	Paypal	PYPL	1,032	24,400	91	$31,797	46
127	Vestis	VSTS	1,030	19,600	106	$2,806	160
128	Echostar	SATS	1,000	13,700	126	$15,826	78
129	PayCom	PAYC	1,000	7,306	157	$1,883	175
130	UniFirst	UNF	1,000	16,000	117	$2,427	165
131	United States Postal Service	N/A	983	639,000	3	$79,537	25
132	Synovus Financial	SNV	980	4,775	169	$1,989	173
133	Nexstar Media Group	NXST	977	13,065	128	$5,407	128
134	Lamar Advertising	LAMR	975	3,500	178	$2,207	170
135	Progress Software	PRGS	975	2,815	181	$753	189
136	Thryv	THRY	974	29,500	79	$824	187
137	Fox	FOXA	970	10,200	140	$13,980	82
138	Warner Bros. Discovery	WBD	962	35,000	73	$39,321	38
139	Robert Half International	RHI	955	14,700	121	$5,796	126
140	GoDaddy	GDDY	953	5,518	167	$4,573	139
141	BMC Software	N/A	940	6,000	163	$2,000	172
142	Juniper Networks	JNPR	931	11,271	136	$5,074	131
143	Oppenheimer	OPY	931	3,018	179	$1,432	180
144	Equifax	EFX	930	14,700	120	$5,681	127
145	Elevance Health	ELV	919	104,200	28	$177,011	9
146	HIBU US	N/A	900	1,593	195	$500	192
147	Lawson Products	LAWS	900	1,740	193	$469	194
148	Northern Trust	NTRS	881	23,300	95	$8,290	112
149	Omnicom Group	OMC	864	74,900	42	$15,689	79
150	Zillow	Z	862	6,856	159	$2,236	169
151	SS&C Technology	SSNC	852	26,800	84	$5,882	125
152	Target	TGT	840	440,000	6	$106,566	15
153	First Citizens BancShares	FCNCA	838	17,475	113	$12,353	91
154	Union Pacific	UNP	835	32,439	75	$24,260	57
155	Landstar System	LSTR	832	10,284	139	$4,819	134
156	Loews	L	830	13,000	130	$14,270	81
157	Iron Mountain	IRM	822	28,850	81	$6,150	122
158	Baird	N/A	797	5,300	168	$3,500	152
159	ADI Global Distribution	N/A	787	2,716	182	$4,600	136
160	Dayforce	DAY	787	9,600	147	$1,760	176

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Service

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
161	Skywest	SKYW	778	14,610	122	$2,905	158
162	Charles Schwab	SCHW	777	32,100	76	$19,606	65
163	Equitable	EQH	775	8,000	151	$12,437	90
164	Western Union	WU	761	9,100	148	$4,210	142
165	Cincinnati Financial	CINF	760	5,624	165	$11,337	94
166	Paramount	PARAA	753	18,600	112	$29,213	47
167	KeyCorp	KEY	750	17,406	114	$8,427	110
168	First Horizon National	FHN	746	7,352	156	$3,190	156
169	Franklin Covey	FC	736	1,084	199	$287	196
170	Mastercard	MA	728	35,300	72	$28,167	48
171	Virtu Financial	VIRT	722	1,000	200	$2,877	159
172	Service Corporation International	SCI	709	24,953	90	$4,186	143
173	Ryerson	RYI	705	4,200	171	$4,599	138
174	New York Times	NYT	701	5,900	164	$2,586	163
175	ABM Industries	ABM	700	117,000	24	$8,369	111
176	Frontier Communications	FYBR	690	13,000	129	$5,937	124
177	Power Home Remodeling Group	N/A	689	3,683	174	$815	188
178	Groupon	GRPN	676	2,079	188	$493	193
179	Ameriprise Financial	AMP	663	13,600	127	$17,926	68
180	Franklin Templeton	BEN	653	10,200	141	$8,478	108
181	IDT	IDT	650	1,833	191	$900	185
182	Kforce	KFRC	643	9,700	146	$1,405	181
183	Cadence Design Systems	CDNS	632	12,700	132	$4,641	135
184	Choice Hotels International	CHH	625	1,700	194	$1,585	178
185	ADT	ADT	600	12,800	131	$4,898	133
186	CareerBuilder	N/A	589	2,080	187	$375	195
187	Harte Hanks	HHS	583	2,000	189	$185	198
188	X	N/A	583	2,300	185	$3,400	154
189	Bank of New York Mellon	BK	580	51,800	56	$18,619	67
190	Voya	VOYA	573	10,000	144	$8,050	114
191	NTT Data	N/A	568	190,000	18	$3,000	157
192	MSI	N/A	565	3,730	173	$2,800	162
193	Global Payments	GPN	564	27,000	83	$10,106	101
194	Liveramp	RAMP	554	1,300	198	$746	191
195	Paylocity	PCTY	550	6,400	161	$853	186
196	Air Transport Services Group	ATSG	545	4,745	170	$1,962	174
197	Foresters Financial	N/A	544	1,500	197	$910	184
198	Hilltop Holdings	HTH	539	3,646	175	$123	199
199	Booz Allen Hamilton	BAH	532	35,800	71	$11,980	92
200	Randstad	N/A	508	43,340	63	$25,064	54
TOTALS:			569,425	15,298,975		$7,544,093	

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Manufacturing

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
1	Microsoft	MSFT	30,000	228,000	4	$245,122	2
2	Ecolab	ECL	25,000	48,000	71	$15,741	99
3	Cisco Systems	CSCO	14,200	90,400	40	$53,803	32
4	PepsiCo	PEP	14,140	319,000	2	$91,854	13
5	Ford Motor	F	13,284	171,000	9	$184,992	7
6	International Business Machines	IBM	11,535	270,300	3	$62,753	25
7	Oracle	ORCL	9,896	162,000	12	$57,399	29
8	Apple	AAPL	7,623	164,000	10	$391,035	1
9	Pfizer	PFE	7,398	81,000	42	$63,627	24
10	Nike	NKE	7,044	79,400	43	$51,362	37
11	GSK	GSK	7,000	68,629	52	$40,090	51
12	Adobe Systems	ADBE	6,977	30,709	99	$21,505	79
13	Dell Technologies	DELL	6,500	108,000	27	$95,567	12
14	Stryker	SYK	6,500	53,000	66	$22,959	76
15	Teva Pharmaceuticals	TEVA	6,150	36,830	86	$16,544	93
16	Novartis	NVS	5,291	75,883	44	$51,722	35
17	Abbott Laboratories	ABT	4,843	114,000	24	$41,950	49
18	Johnson Controls	JCI	4,630	94,000	38	$22,952	77
19	AstraZeneca-US	AZN	4,451	92,900	39	$54,100	31
20	Northrop Grumman	NOC	3,897	101,000	33	$41,033	50
21	3M	MMM	3,871	61,500	58	$24,575	70
22	Air Liquide	N/A	3,724	66,657	54	$29,300	63
23	Wesco	WCC	3,716	20,000	126	$21,819	78
24	General Motors	GM	3,656	162,000	11	$187,442	6
25	Sherwin-Williams	SHW	3,500	63,890	55	$23,099	75
26	Thermo Fisher Scientific	TMO	3,496	125,000	21	$42,879	47
27	Eli Lilly	LLY	3,395	47,000	73	$45,043	44
28	Xerox	XRX	3,375	16,800	138	$5,935	152
29	Coca-Cola	KO	3,285	69,700	50	$47,061	43
30	Merck	MRK	3,264	75,000	46	$64,168	23
31	Bayer	N/A	3,141	99,538	35	$50,400	38
32	Honeywell International	HON	3,135	102,000	32	$38,498	54
33	Mercedes-Benz Group	MBG	2,984	175,264	6	$157,500	9
34	Medline Industries	N/A	2,897	38,000	84	$25,500	68
35	Bristol-Myers Squibb	BMY	2,874	34,100	91	$48,300	42
36	Sanofi	SNY	2,797	82,878	41	$44,450	45
37	D.R. Horton	DHI	2,779	14,766	145	$36,801	55
38	General Mills	GIS	2,760	34,000	93	$19,857	84
39	Cardinal Health	CAH	2,515	48,900	69	$226,827	3
40	Procter & Gamble	PG	2,514	108,000	28	$84,039	16

MANUFACTURING

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Manufacturing

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
41	General Electric	GE	2,513	53,000	65	$38,702	53
42	Boston Scientific	BSX	2,500	53,000	64	$16,747	90
43	Smurfit WestRock	SW	2,497	100,000	34	$21,109	80
44	Acuity Brands	AYI	2,473	13,200	154	$3,841	168
45	Takeda Pharmaceuticals	TAK	2,458	47,455	72	$30,230	61
46	Amgen	AMGN	2,453	28,000	103	$33,424	59
47	Koch Industries	N/A	2,440	120,000	23	$125,000	10
48	HP	HPQ	2,430	58,000	61	$53,559	33
49	Coherent	COHR	2,378	26,157	108	$4,708	158
50	PPG Industries	PPG	2,371	46,000	74	$15,845	98
51	Eaton	ETN	2,360	94,000	37	$24,878	69
52	Keurig Dr Pepper	KDP	2,320	29,400	101	$15,351	102
53	AbbVie	ABBV	2,299	55,000	63	$56,334	30
54	Becton Dickinson	BDX	2,231	74,000	48	$20,178	81
55	Tesla	TSLA	2,152	125,665	20	$97,690	11
56	Carter's	CRI	2,126	15,350	143	$2,844	177
57	Johnson & Johnson	JNJ	2,100	138,100	17	$88,821	14
58	Mettler-Toledo International	MTD	2,000	17,300	135	$3,872	167
59	Siemens	N/A	1,975	327,000	1	$83,530	17
60	Baxter International	BAX	1,911	38,000	82	$10,636	123
61	Cummins	CMI	1,882	69,600	51	$34,102	57
62	BASF	N/A	1,814	15,969	140	$70,600	20
63	Goodyear Tire & Rubber	GT	1,793	68,000	53	$18,878	86
64	AGCO	AGCO	1,777	24,000	110	$11,662	118
65	Lockheed Martin	LMT	1,733	121,000	22	$71,403	19
66	Intel	INTC	1,721	108,900	26	$48,949	41
67	Mars	N/A	1,710	150,000	14	$50,000	39
68	Microchip Technology	MCHP	1,700	19,400	127	$4,402	161
69	Hilti	N/A	1,671	3,625	194	$6,400	150
70	Snap-on	SNA	1,662	13,000	155	$4,707	159
71	Deere	DE	1,647	75,000	45	$51,720	36
72	Emerson Electric	EMR	1,610	73,000	49	$13,804	107
73	International Paper	IP	1,585	37,000	85	$18,619	87
74	Novo Nordisk	NVO	1,569	75,000	47	$42,120	48
75	Cargill	N/A	1,549	160,000	13	$160,000	8
76	Stanley Black & Decker	SWK	1,548	48,500	70	$15,366	101
77	Builders First Source	BLDR	1,500	29,000	102	$16,401	94
78	A.O. Smith	AOS	1,481	12,700	156	$3,818	169
79	Altria Group	MO	1,480	6,200	184	$24,018	71
80	RTX	RTX	1,478	186,000	5	$80,738	18

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Manufacturing

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
81	Tyson Foods	TSN	1,469	138,000	19	$53,309	34
82	PulteGroup	PHM	1,453	6,793	181	$17,319	88
83	Hershey Company	HSY	1,439	20,030	123	$11,202	120
84	Pitney Bowes	PBI	1,422	7,200	179	$2,027	186
85	QUALCOMM	QCOM	1,422	49,000	68	$38,962	52
86	Anheuser-Busch InBev	ABI	1,418	143,885	15	$59,768	27
87	Genuine Parts	GPC	1,418	63,000	57	$23,487	73
88	Interface	TILE	1,371	3,636	193	$1,316	192
89	Traton	N/A	1,371	105,541	30	$49,371	40
90	Air Products and Chemicals	APD	1,340	23,000	114	$12,100	113
91	Chevron	CVX	1,327	45,298	75	$193,414	5
92	Watsco	WSO	1,323	7,295	178	$7,618	137
93	Masco	MAS	1,313	18,000	130	$7,828	135
94	Albany International	AIN	1,286	5,400	187	$1,231	194
95	SPX Flow	N/A	1,225	3,900	192	$1,980	189
96	Taylor	N/A	1,222	12,000	157	$2,400	181
97	Whirlpool	WHR	1,168	44,000	79	$16,607	92
98	Intuit	INTU	1,122	18,800	128	$16,285	96
99	TD Synnex	SNX	1,118	23,000	116	$58,452	28
100	DuPont	DD	1,064	24,000	111	$12,386	112
101	Lennar	LEN	1,050	13,265	153	$35,441	56
102	DENTSPLY Sirona	XRAY	1,047	14,000	150	$3,793	170
103	Caterpillar	CAT	1,024	112,500	25	$64,809	22
104	Opentext	OTEX	1,012	22,900	117	$5,770	153
105	Campbell Soup	CPB	1,011	14,400	147	$9,636	128
106	Molson Coors	TAP	1,009	16,800	137	$11,627	119
107	Crown Holdings	CCK	1,000	23,000	115	$11,801	116
108	Tennant	TNC	1,000	4,632	189	$1,287	193
109	Vishay Intertechnology	VSH	1,000	22,700	118	$2,938	176
110	Monster Beverage	MNST	998	6,558	182	$7,493	139
111	HNI	HNI	995	7,700	173	$2,526	180
112	Lennox	LII	989	14,200	148	$5,341	157
113	STERIS	STE	989	18,000	132	$5,460	154
114	Texas Instruments	TXN	982	34,000	94	$15,641	100
115	Owens Corning	OC	973	25,000	109	$10,975	121
116	Lear	LEA	953	173,700	7	$23,306	74
117	Rockwell Automation	ROK	947	27,000	105	$8,264	133
118	Nucor	NUE	945	32,700	96	$30,734	60
119	NVR	NVR	926	7,000	180	$10,292	124
120	NetApp	NTAP	916	11,700	158	$6,572	147

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Manufacturing

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
121	Boeing Company	BA	908	172,000	8	$66,517	21
122	Shaw Industries	N/A	887	18,000	131	$4,000	166
123	Reynolds & Reynolds	N/A	883	4,300	190	$2,200	182
124	Ingersoll-Rand	IR	881	21,000	120	$7,235	141
125	SteelCase	SCS	876	11,300	161	$3,166	173
126	Agilent Technologies	A	870	17,900	133	$6,510	149
127	Parker Hannifin	PH	869	61,120	59	$199,330	4
128	Newell Brands	NWL	855	23,700	113	$7,582	138
129	Unisys	UIS	847	15,900	141	$1,702	190
130	Archer-Daniels-Midland	ADM	841	44,000	77	$85,530	15
131	Onsemi	ON	834	26,490	107	$7,082	144
132	Packaging Corporation of America	PKG	834	15,400	142	$8,383	132
133	Clorox Company	CLX	824	8,000	170	$7,093	143
134	Avery Dennison	AVY	823	35,000	90	$8,756	130
135	Gilead Sciences	GILD	818	17,600	134	$28,754	65
136	Kraft Heinz	KHC	811	36,000	88	$25,846	67
137	Roche	N/A	802	103,249	31	$60,495	26
138	Medtronic	MDT	800	95,000	36	$33,537	58
139	Constellation Brands	STZ	796	10,600	163	$10,957	122
140	NCH	N/A	783	8,500	167	$1,005	198
141	McCormick	MKC	772	14,100	149	$6,724	146
142	Colgate-Palmolive	CL	762	34,000	92	$20,101	82
143	J.M. Smucker	SJM	760	8,000	171	$8,726	131
144	Corteva Agriscience	CTVA	758	22,000	119	$16,908	89
145	Valvoline	VVV	754	11,500	159	$1,619	191
146	Jabil	JBL	738	138,000	18	$28,883	64
147	Deluxe	DLX	733	4,981	188	$2,122	183
148	Extreme Networks	EXTR	724	2,656	196	$1,117	196
149	Illinois Tool Works	ITW	717	44,000	78	$15,898	97
150	Bausch Health	BHC	713	20,700	121	$9,625	129
151	Seagate Technology	STX	711	30,000	100	$6,551	148
152	Waters	WAT	711	7,600	175	$2,958	175
153	Zimmer Biomet	ZBH	700	17,000	136	$7,679	136
154	Hormel Foods	HRL	695	20,000	124	$11,921	114
155	ATI	ATI	685	7,700	172	$4,362	163
156	Boise Cascade	BCC	683	7,560	176	$6,724	145
157	KLA	KLAC	670	15,000	144	$9,812	126
158	Dana	DAN	667	39,600	80	$10,284	125
159	Toro	TTC	662	11,461	160	$4,584	160
160	Aptiv	APTV	658	141,000	16	$19,713	85

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Manufacturing

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
161	Weyerhaeuser	WY	648	9,440	165	$7,124	142
162	NCR Voyix	VYX	642	14,000	151	$2,826	178
163	Eisai	N/A	637	10,917	162	$5,356	156
164	Electronic Arts	EA	632	14,500	146	$7,463	140
165	Tenneco	N/A	630	59,380	60	$16,677	91
166	Applied Materials	AMAT	629	35,700	89	$27,176	66
167	Western Digital	WDC	621	51,000	67	$13,003	110
168	Textron	TXT	620	34,000	95	$13,702	108
169	Checkpoint Software	CHKP	615	6,271	183	$2,565	179
170	Avient	AVNT	614	9,200	166	$3,240	171
171	Perrigo	PRGO	609	8,379	169	$4,373	162
172	CSL Behring	N/A	600	32,000	97	$14,800	103
173	Kimberly-Clark	KMB	600	38,000	83	$20,058	83
174	Biogen	BIIB	588	7,605	174	$9,675	127
175	Alcoa	AA	584	13,900	152	$11,895	115
176	Ashland	ASH	575	3,200	195	$2,113	184
177	Charles River Laboratories Intl	CRL	573	20,100	122	$4,050	165
178	Brown-Forman	BFA	570	5,700	185	$4,228	164
179	Hillenbrand	HI	570	10,450	164	$3,183	172
180	MicroStrategy	MSTR	570	1,534	199	$463	199
181	Dow	DOW	569	36,000	87	$42,964	46
182	PVH	PVH	568	28,000	104	$8,203	134
183	Corning	GLW	567	56,300	62	$13,118	109
184	Sealed Air	SEE	566	16,400	139	$5,393	155
185	Kennametal	KMT	565	8,447	168	$2,047	185
186	Synopsys	SNPS	564	20,000	125	$6,127	151
187	Revlon	N/A	561	5,600	186	$1,980	188
188	Canon USA	N/A	560	107,340	29	$30,000	62
189	Smithfield Foods	SFD	559	44,500	76	$14,142	105
190	Viatris	VTRS	552	32,000	98	$14,693	104
191	ConAgra Brands	CAG	543	18,500	129	$11,700	117
192	Boston Beer Company	SAM	541	2,537	197	$2,013	187
193	Danaher	DHR	539	63,000	56	$23,875	72
194	Kellanova	K	539	24,000	112	$12,749	111
195	Trinity Industries	TRN	529	7,380	177	$3,079	174
196	National Beverage	FIZZ	525	1,681	198	$1,201	195
197	Eastman Kodak	KODK	520	3,900	191	$1,043	197
198	Fluor	FLR	519	26,866	106	$16,315	95
199	Avid Technology	AVID	509	1,402	200	$417	200
200	BorgWarner	BWA	502	38,300	81	$14,086	106
TOTALS:			439,130	10,220,444		$6,376,483	

MANUFACTURING

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Insurance

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
1	Hartford Financial Services Group, The	HIG	95,000	19,100	17	$26,535	19
2	AFLAC	AFL	71,000	12,694	21	$18,927	21
3	Lincoln National	LNC	57,000	9,783	25	$18,442	22
4	OneAmerica Financial Partners	N/A	40,921	1,900	49	$3,800	45
5	Progressive	PGR	35,000	66,300	4	$75,372	5
6	Kemper	KMPR	30,000	7,400	30	$4,639	43
7	American International Group	AIG	24,800	22,200	16	$27,251	18
8	State Farm Insurance	N/A	19,000	67,381	3	$122,951	3
9	Globe Life	GL	16,400	3,732	43	$5,778	39
10	Allstate	ALL	15,000	55,000	8	$64,106	9
11	Travelers	TRV	13,500	34,000	14	$46,423	15
12	Erie Indemnity	ERIE	13,000	6,715	31	$3,795	46
13	New York Life Insurance	N/A	12,228	15,131	19	$62,639	10
14	AON	AON	8,000	60,000	6	$15,698	24
15	Chubb	CB	7,000	43,000	10	$55,753	11
16	CNA Financial	CNA	7,000	6,500	34	$14,351	27
17	MassMutual Financial Group	N/A	7,000	11,000	24	$41,000	16
18	Northwestern Mutual	N/A	6,400	8,200	28	$38,000	17
19	Mercury General	MCY	6,340	4,200	40	$5,233	40
20	CNO Financial Group	CNO	6,200	3,500	44	$4,450	44
21	MetLife	MET	6,175	45,000	9	$70,986	6
22	American National Insurance	ANGpB	5,000	4,640	38	$9,503	33
23	Securian Financial Group	N/A	5,000	5,500	36	$8,200	34
24	American Family Mutual Insurance	N/A	4,500	11,073	22	$20,000	20
25	FBL Financial Group	N/A	4,000	1,900	48	$2,329	47
26	Gallagher Insurance	AJG	4,000	56,000	7	$9,934	32
27	Humana	HUM	3,800	65,680	5	$117,761	4
28	Liberty Mutual Insurance	N/A	3,600	40,000	11	$50,218	12
29	CVS Health	CVS	3,500	300,000	1	$372,809	1
30	Nationwide	N/A	3,368	22,453	15	$68,500	8
31	Thrivent	N/A	3,300	3,983	41	$11,123	31
32	Prudential Financial	PRU	2,579	38,196	12	$70,405	7
33	USAA	N/A	2,500	38,018	13	$48,560	13
34	American Financial Group	AFG	1,900	8,700	26	$2,149	48
35	Mutual of Omaha	N/A	1,826	6,532	33	$14,622	25
36	AmTrust Financial	N/A	1,500	6,532	32	$6,200	37
37	CIGNA	CI	1,500	73,500	2	$247,121	2
38	Guardian Life Insurance	N/A	1,500	7,472	29	$14,503	26
39	Hanover Group	THG	1,500	4,900	37	$6,084	38
40	Assurant	AIZ	1,000	14,200	20	$11,876	30
41	Pacific Life	N/A	986	4,300	39	$15,827	23
42	Unum Group	UNM	891	11,063	23	$12,887	29
43	Selective Insurance Group	SIGI	887	2,000	47	$4,862	41
44	Genworth Financial	GNW	780	2,960	45	$7,295	36
45	Tiaa	N/A	741	15,623	18	$46,946	14
46	Horace Mann	HMN	735	1,750	50	$1,595	49
47	Protective Life	N/A	699	3,800	42	$7,756	35
48	W.R. Berkley	WRB	686	8,606	27	$13,639	28
49	WoodmenLife	N/A	646	2,703	46	$1,100	50
50	Sentry Insurance Group	N/A	508	6,000	35	$4,681	42
	TOTALS:		560,396	1,270,820		$1,934,614	

Estimated number of salespeople includes independent agents. Erie Insurance employs independent agents exclusively.

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Direct Sales

RANK	COMPANY	TICKER SYMBOL	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF U.S. SALESPEOPLE	PRODUCTS
1	Avon Products	AVP	6,000,000	Cosmetics, decorative accessories, jewelry
2	TupperwareBrands	TUP	3,200,000	House and kitchenware
3	Mary Kay	N/A	2,400,000	Cosmetics, skincare
4	Herbalife International	HLF	2,000,000	Weight management, nutritional, and personal care products
5	Amway	N/A	1,000,000	Homecare, nutritional, and personal care products
6	Noevir USA	N/A	1,000,000	Skincare, cosmetics, nutritional products
7	Nu Skin Enterprises	NUS	1,000,000	Haircare, nutritional products, skincare
8	Jafra Cosmetics	N/A	500,000	Cosmetics, skincare, fragrances
9	Nature's Sunshine Products	NATR	500,000	Herbal and nutritional products, skincare
10	USANA Health Sciences	USNA	454,000	Nutritional products, skincare
11	Rodan and Fields	N/A	300,000	Skincare products
12	Arbonne International	N/A	242,000	Skincare, cosmetics, nutritional products
13	Scentsy	N/A	232,750	Candles, candle accessories
14	NeoLife	N/A	200,000	Nutrition/homecare/skincare prdts, weight mgt., water trmt systems
15	Market America	N/A	160,000	Nutritional products, weight management, personal care
16	AIM International	N/A	100,000	Nutritional products
17	Immunotec	N/A	100,000	Health products
18	Youngevity International	YGYI	70,000	Health and nutritional products
19	LifeVantage	LFVN	52,000	Health and wellness
20	Pampered Chef	N/A	50,000	Kitchenware, cookware
21	Stampin' Up!	N/A	40,000	Rubber stamps, scrapbooking supplies
22	PartyLite	BTH	35,000	Candles, candle accessories
23	Princess House	N/A	30,000	Crystal, decorative accessories, tableware, cookware, bakeware
24	Discovery Toys	N/A	26,000	Books, educ. materials, toys, games, videos, computer software
25	Tastefully Simple	N/A	23,680	Food and gourmet products
26	Reliv' International	N/A	23,000	Nutritional products, personal care products
27	Conklin	N/A	20,000	Personal care products, homecare products
28	Creative Memories	N/A	20,000	Photo albums, photo album supplies
29	AMC Culinary Cookware	N/A	12,000	Cookware, multi-cooking systems
30	Kirby Company	N/A	5,800	Vacuum cleaners
	TOTAL		19,796,230	

AUTOMOTIVE

500 Largest Sales Forces in America: Automotive (Dealers)

RANK	COMPANY	NUMBER OF CAR DEALERSHIPS	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF SALESPEOPLE	RANK	ANNUAL SALES ($ MILLIONS)	RANK
1	Lithia Motors	459	6,885	1	$36,189	1
2	Penske Automotive Group	346	5,190	2	$30,455	2
3	AutoNation	267	4,005	3	$26,765	3
4	Group 1 Automotive	259	3,885	4	$19,934	4
5	Asbury Automotive Group	154	2,310	5	$17,189	5
6	Sonic Automotive	126	1,890	6	$14,224	6
7	Hendrick Automotive Group	94	1,410	7	$13,964	7
8	Morgan Auto Group	73	1,095	8	$9,443	8
9	Garber Management Group	70	1,050	9	$2,122	20
10	Ken Garff Automotive Group	69	1,035	10	$6,712	9
11	Serra Automotive	67	1,005	11	$4,031	12
12	Holman	60	900	12	$5,109	11
13	Napleton Automotive Group	53	795	13	$3,968	13
14	Victory Automotive Group	53	795	14	$3,136	15
15	Hudson Automotive Group	51	765	15	$5,141	10
16	Ed Morse Automotive Group	50	750	16	$2,336	19
17	Ken Ganley Automotive Group	50	750	17	$3,047	16
18	Servco Pacific	48	720	18	$2,840	18
19	DARCARS Automotive Group	47	705	19	$3,046	17
20	Ourisman Automotive Group	47	705	20	$3,840	14
	TOTALS:	2,443	36,645		$213,491	

Automotive (Makers)

RANK	AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURERS COMPANY/SUBSIDIARY	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF DEALERSHIPS	FRANCHISES
1	General Motors	3,996	
	Chevrolet		2,886
	GMC		1,659
	Buick		927
	Cadillac		567
2	Ford Motor Company	2,959	
	Ford		2,839
	Lincoln		477
3	Stellantis	2,447	
	Chrysler		2,398
	Dodge/RAM		2,388
	Jeep		2,387
4	Toyota	1,088	
	Toyota		1,237
	Lexus		244

RANK	AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURERS COMPANY/SUBSIDIARY	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF DEALERSHIPS	FRANCHISES
5	Honda	1,010	
	Honda		1,070
	Acura		274
6	Nissan	943	
	Nissan		1,069
	Infiniti		197
7	Kia	671	
8	Hyundai	612	
9	Subaru	533	
10	Volkswagen	463	

The total number of dealerships is lower than the sum of the individual franchises of all divisions because many auto dealers carry multiple lines. The automotive industry employs approximately 200,000 salespeople in the United States.

LIGHTSPRING / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

10 Recognition Tips for Every Sales VP or CEO

MALCOLM FLESCHNER

Here's a quick refresher course in some of the key stumbling blocks executives need to watch out for while developing, implementing, and promoting their organizations' recognition programs.

1. DON'T BE A COVERT RECOGNITION AGENT.

There's no reason to hide your recognition strategy from your employees like some closely guarded corporate secret. Through town hall meetings, email blasts, and the company intranet, publicize your recognition philosophy, purpose, and plans.

2. DON'T LEAVE THEM GUESSING.

Your managers shouldn't be left guessing about how to recognize employees. If you don't have any already, create clear recognition policies and review and reinforce them regularly in management meetings.

3. DON'T LET THEM WANDER OFF.

Employee recognition practices should be based on clear, measurable objectives that are aligned with the organizational culture and that help achieve organizational goals. If you're rewarding behaviors that lead employees elsewhere, you need to re-evaluate.

4. DON'T PUT ALL YOUR RECOGNITION EGGS IN ONE PERSON'S BASKET.

No one individual or department should be responsible for all the recognition doled out to team members. Encourage everyone at all levels to get involved in expressing appreciation and recognizing when others are getting the job done.

5. DON'T GET COMPLACENT ABOUT BUDGETING.

This tip may be less necessary in today's fiscal environment, but it's still worth noting – your recognition practices and outputs should be evaluated regularly so that employee engagement remains constant and ongoing.

6. DON'T GO SOLO WITH YOUR REWARD PROGRAM PLANNING.

Instead of generating incentives all on your own, put together a team of internal experts and stakeholders who can work together to come up with bold, creative initiatives that also build on the recognition programs you've run in the past.

7. DON'T SHUT OUT OTHER EXECUTIVES.

Senior leadership should be active participants in doling out recognition to your top performers, high achievers, and new idea generators. By participating in rewards ceremonies, top-level executives demonstrate that they're willing to "walk the walk" of employee recognition.

8. DON'T LEAVE ANY ROOM AT THE TOP.

While any recognition team needs representatives from the ranks of management and front-line employees, there should always be a single executive sponsor to lead the team.

9. DON'T LIMIT YOUR RECOGNITION OPTIONS.

Be aware that employees may have unique, individual recognition preferences. Out-of-the-ordinary recognition approaches include providing knowledge, encouraging steps toward career development, and helping to find avenues for employees to explore their passions outside the workplace.

10. DON'T NEGLECT TO GROW YOUR OWN.

It's always appealing to cast your glance elsewhere to see what other companies may be doing in the recognition department, but don't do so to the exclusion of encouraging and nurturing homegrown recognition practices and programs. ■

The Stra

BRIAN BLOOM

ategic Revolution:

Seth Godin's Blueprint for Leadership in an Age of Chaos

How the marketing maverick's latest insights on strategy are reshaping how leaders think about the future

GERHARD GSCHWANDTNER

In my four decades of interviewing business leaders, from General Colin Powell to comedian Jay Leno, I've learned that the most profound insights often come disguised as simple truths. Few people understand this better than Seth Godin, the bald-headed marketing philosopher whose latest work on strategy promises to revolutionize how leaders navigate our increasingly chaotic world.

"The secret is super simple," Godin tells me with characteristic directness during our recent conversation. "You just have to be bald." His humor masks a deeper truth about authenticity and standing out in a crowded marketplace – themes that have defined his career since he invented email marketing with his groundbreaking book *Permission Marketing*.

BEYOND TACTICS: THE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

As we settle into what promises to be an enlightening discussion, Godin immediately cuts to the heart of what separates successful leaders from the rest. "Most people who are tuning in are tactics driven," he explains. "Tactics are, 'Tell me the steps.' Tactics are, 'If I do this, I'll get that.' But strategy is the hard work we do before we figure out the tactics."

This distinction isn't merely academic – it's the foundation of sustainable success. Marc Benioff, Salesforce's co-founder and CEO, once told me that Godin's thinking helped shape his approach to cloud computing. "Seth taught us that you have to see the system before you can change it," Benioff reflected. "That's exactly what we did with CRM."

Godin's strategic philosophy challenges conventional wisdom about business planning. "Strategy is our philosophy of becoming," he continues. "When we are in a tactics mindset, it's super easy to say yes to any tactic. But that denies the fact that you can't do two things at the same time. So every time you say yes to something, you were saying no to something you didn't even realize you were saying no to."

This insight resonates particularly strongly in today's environment, where leaders feel overwhelmed by endless opportunities and threats. After writing *Permission Marketing*, Godin faced exactly this dilemma. "There were all these people in book publishing who wanted me to write three more sequels to a book they knew would sell. And there were all these people in the software world who wanted me to start a company like MailChimp. Either one of those things would have been fine, but they wouldn't have reinforced my strategy."

THE BUS TO TUCSON: BUILDING STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

One of Godin's most powerful metaphors involves choosing your destination and sticking to it. "We've got to decide where you're going, because if you don't know where you're going, any route will get you there," he explains. "One of the things we're looking for is to be on the bus with the right people. So if you're driving your bus from

New York to Tucson, and there's somebody on the bus who's constantly complaining because you're not heading fast enough towards Seattle, they're on the wrong bus."

This concept of enrollment – getting people to genuinely commit to your vision – separates true leaders from mere managers. "What we're looking for is enrollment – people who announce, 'I'm going to Tucson. And if you're not going to Tucson, don't complain. It's not going to help, because we're going to Tucson.'"

The metaphor extends beyond team building to fundamental questions about organizational purpose. "This is more than goal setting," Godin emphasizes. "This is having a vision for the change you seek to make in the world. Doing the kind of work today that the you of the future will thank you for. That is grown-up work. That's strategic work."

RACING TO THE TOP: THE SPEED VS. DIRECTION PARADOX

In our fast-paced business environment, many leaders confuse activity with progress. Godin challenges this assumption head-on. "I'm in favor of moving fast. The question is, ahead toward what? If they're racing ahead in a race to the bottom – if they're racing ahead to dehumanize their organization to charge less, do less, exert less – let them. Because they're going to crash and burn."

His alternative – racing to the top – requires what he calls "grown-up work." This involves understanding that "there's always pressure to do something other than what you're doing. And your job is to figure out where to go. Because it doesn't matter how fast you're going if you're going in the wrong direction."

This philosophy echoes what General Colin Powell once told me about military strategy: "You can't just react to the enemy's moves. You have to anticipate where the battlefield will be tomorrow." Godin applies this same forward-thinking approach to business strategy.

SEEING SYSTEMS: THE INVISIBLE FORCES THAT SHAPE SUCCESS

Perhaps Godin's most profound insight involves recognizing the systems that govern our industries and markets. "There are systems all around us," he explains. "And the easy way to know that you're looking at a system is to look for gravity. Gravity is an invisible force that gets everything working in a given direction."

He illustrates this with a compelling example from education: "The college industrial complex makes us as parents care what our seven-year-old gets on their report card. Why should we care? Well, because deep down we know that, in 15 years, they might not get into a famous college, and then we will be seen as bad parents. And so it infiltrates every part of our lives."

The strategic opportunity lies in building different systems rather than merely competing within existing ones.

Godin cites Federal Express as a masterclass in systemic thinking: "55 years ago, when Federal Express came up with the overnight package for $20, no one could compete with them, no matter how hard they tried. Because what Fred built was a system where every package went to Memphis, then went back out somewhere else. You couldn't catch up with them if you did only a third of what they had done."

THE AI REVOLUTION: NEW SYSTEMS, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

As we discuss the current technological landscape, Godin's eyes light up with the possibilities he sees in artificial intelligence. "People are looking at AI right now and saying, 'Oh yeah, let me replace some customer service agents.' No. AI changes everything. It changes it more than electricity did 100 years ago, because new systems are being built really fast that are fundamentally different than the systems we rely on now."

His analysis of AI's impact on health care exemplifies his systemic thinking: "Around the world, if you get sick, you got to talk to either a doctor or a nurse practitioner. The wait for that is an hour or a month, somewhere in between. With AI, you can talk to a nurse practitioner all day, every day, and it can remember everything you've ever told it."

The implications are staggering: "The medical system as we know it is going to have a totally different scarcity than it used to. And if you don't think that is going to lead to a spectacular shift in a trillion-dollar industry, I don't know how to help you."

THE SMALLEST VIABLE AUDIENCE: THINKING BIG BY STARTING SMALL

Godin's strategic philosophy extends to market development, where he advocates for what he calls the "smallest viable audience." Using Salesforce as an example, he notes: "During Salesforce's growth sprint, they thought very small: a very specific kind of person needing to move their sales operations to the cloud – The end. You could write their entire business plan on one sheet of paper."

This approach contradicts the conventional wisdom of trying to appeal to everyone. "The fact that there were a lot of people who would need that is great, but they had to make it work for a hundred people first. If it doesn't work for a hundred people, stop trying to make it work for a thousand; go back to the hundred."

STRATEGY AS PHILOSOPHY: THE MERCEDES AND RITZ-CARLTON EXAMPLES

The power of clear strategy becomes evident when Godin discusses how it should cascade through an organization. "Microsoft's strategy is, 'No one ever got fired for buying software from Microsoft.' Starbucks' strategy is 'Every morning, a billion upper-income people wake up with a caffeine problem and a status problem. We're going to solve both at the same time.'"

These simple strategic frameworks enable tactical innovation throughout the organization. "You don't need to be the CEO of Mercedes to green-light an advanced computer-controlled safety system. There are mid-level executives, who understand the strategy, that can approve a tactic that most of their competitors couldn't afford to build or put in every car. That builds on Mercedes' strategy, even though it's a tactic."

Similarly, at the Ritz-Carlton, "if you are the person who makes up the rooms on the third floor of their branch in Fort Lauderdale, you have in your pocket a $1,000 or $2,000 budget to spend any time you find a guest who's unhappy. You figure out the tactic. You can spend it on the spot."

FALSE PROXIES: THE DANGER OF EASY METRICS

One of Godin's most practical insights involves the seductive nature of easily measured metrics. "Easy metrics can mislead us. I call these 'false proxies.' Just because it's easy to measure doesn't mean it's important."

He applies this to hiring practices: "In our culture, there are all these false proxies about hiring. Does the person look like you? Did they go to a school like you? Are they tall like you? Are they the same color as you? Are they the same gender as you? Do they interview well? None of these things are related to whether they're going to do a good job. None of them."

The solution, he suggests, comes from Moneyball thinking: "The entire secret of Billy Beane is he measures something that was hard to see – something that no one else was measuring. Because the scouts at every other team were saying, 'This guy looks like a baseball player,' or, 'This guy's got an ugly girlfriend,' as opposed to sticking with a simple but harder-to-find metric: 'What's their on-base percentage?'"

EMBRACING CHAOS: STRATEGY FOR AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

As our conversation draws to a close, Godin shares perhaps his most important insight for modern leaders: "The world is crazy. It's upside-down. It's nuts. And this is as normal as the world is ever going to be again. And if you are betting on the world staying the way it is, you're going to be in for a lot of trouble."

His prescription is counterintuitive but powerful: "The most resilient strategies are ones that bet on turmoil and chaos and uncertainty. So if it's important to you to make an impact, begin with that."

This philosophy extends to personal career development. "Think about four years from now and you're looking for a job. What do you want people to say about you before you show up for the interview? Do you want them to say, 'This person does what they're asked and they work pretty hard?' Because if that's your strategy, please understand it's going to be very, very crowded."

Instead, Godin advocates for building a reputation as someone who "launched projects that the world has never seen before, is resilient in the face of failure, and understands technologies A, B, and C better than anyone I've ever met. You can make that true, but you have to start today."

THE TEACHER'S STRATEGY: A PERSONAL MISSION

Throughout our conversation, I'm struck by Godin's genuine passion for teaching and development. When I ask about his personal strategy, he becomes notably more animated: "My strategy is to be trusted by enough people to do this work that lights me up. Since I was 17, I've been a teacher. And the pedagogy of figuring out how to turn on lights for people who are going to do good work with it is thrilling."

This personal mission informs everything he does: "I feel like that's a contribution. I could work in a soup kitchen. But I would like to believe that, if I can create the conditions for people to teach other people how to make the world a bit better, that's probably a good use of my time."

CONCLUSION: THE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

As I reflect on our conversation, I'm reminded of something Jay Leno once told me about the difference between comedians and entertainers: "Comedians have a point of view. Entertainers just want to please." Seth Godin clearly has a point of view, and it's one that challenges leaders to think more deeply about their fundamental purpose and direction.

In an era where tactical solutions proliferate and quick fixes dominate headlines, Godin's emphasis on strategic thinking offers a refreshing alternative. His framework for understanding systems, building enrollment, and maintaining focus on long-term vision provides leaders with the tools they need to navigate our increasingly complex world.

The question isn't whether change will continue to accelerate – it's whether leaders will develop the strategic thinking necessary to thrive in the chaos. As Godin puts it: "Is the weirdness going to help you? Or is it going to hurt you? And if you're rooting for weird, I think you'll be okay."

For leaders willing to do the hard work of strategic thinking, Seth Godin's insights offer a roadmap not just for survival, but for significance. In a world obsessed with tactics, strategy remains the ultimate competitive advantage. ■

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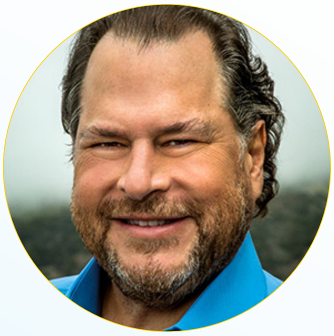

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Sales Operations' Secret Weapon:

How Outsourcing Fuels Scalable, Predictable Growth

LAUREN KINDZIERSKI

Sales operations has become the command center of modern revenue teams – tasked with aligning people, process, and technology to drive revenue performance. But even the best-run sales operations teams eventually face a tipping point: too many demands, too few resources, and not enough time to do it all. Enter sales outsourcing – not as a threat, but as a strategic extension of the operations function.

For forward-thinking sales operations leaders, outsourcing has become a secret weapon for unlocking scalable, predictable growth.

THE MODERN SALES OPS DILEMMA

Sales operations sits at the intersection of strategy and execution. You're expected to forecast with precision, reduce customer acquisition costs, improve seller productivity, launch new segments, optimize tech stacks, and enable reps – all while dealing with constant change.

But what happens when marketing generates more leads than your team can follow up on? Or when headcount is frozen but revenue targets are rising? Or when your data tells you something *should* work but you don't have the bandwidth to test it?

These aren't theoretical problems. They're operational bottlenecks that stall growth.

WHY OUTSOURCING IS NO LONGER JUST ABOUT COST, BUT ABOUT REVENUE

Traditional views of outsourcing focused on labor arbitrage – getting more done for less. But for sales operations leaders today, outsourcing is about driving higher revenue faster and at a lower cost per acquisition.

A modern sales outsourcing partner can help with:

- Seasonality spikes in demand: Scale without the friction of internal hiring cycles.
- Focus on account penetration: Use cross-sell and up-sell campaigns.
- Predict and prevent customer attrition: Be proactive with customer retention strategies and campaigns.
- Support new customer onboarding: Ensure early engagement with welcome calls, product education, and usage check-ins to increase activation and reduce early churn.
- Accelerate lead qualification: Outsource BDR/SDR functions to quickly sift through inbound/demo requests and MQLs so your closers spend more time selling and less time screening.
- Expand into untapped segments: Test new verticals or customer profiles using a dedicated outbound team without disrupting your core motion.

It's no longer about losing control. In fact, it's the opposite: Outsourcing allows sales ops leaders to stay focused on strategic initiatives while trusting trained, managed reps to handle execution with accountability and transparency.

THE METRICS THAT MATTER – IMPROVED

When done right, outsourced sales teams don't just perform – they enhance your data environment. The right partner will deliver AI technology for sales coaching, detailed dashboards, call recordings, and pipeline analytics. You gain cleaner conversion data, better attribution visibility, and a live testing ground for operational assumptions.

Many sales operations leaders who embrace outsourcing report:

- Higher lead-to-opportunity conversion rates
- Reduced ramp time for new reps
- Increased forecast accuracy due to stable pipeline production
- Lower cost per acquisition
- Better alignment between marketing, sales, and CX

HOW TO KNOW IT'S TIME TO OUTSOURCE

Sales operations leaders often ask, "How do I know if outsourcing is right for us?"

Here are a few signs:

- Your sales reps are spending more time qualifying leads than closing them.
- You're sitting on untapped pipeline (aging leads, inactive accounts, missed follow-ups).
- You need to stand up a new program but don't have the internal resources.
- Your ops team is buried in requests to "do more with less."

If any of these sound familiar, it might be time to consider outsourcing – not as a stopgap, but as a strategic lever.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN OUTSOURCING PARTNER

Not all sales outsourcing is created equal. Sales ops leaders should vet partners like they'd vet a new team leader. Look for:

- Deep expertise in your industry or sales motion (B2B vs. DTC, inside vs. field)
- Results – ask for case studies and success stories from a similar client
- Strong enablement and QA processes
- Full transparency in reporting
- The ability to collaborate on workflows, not just deliver call volume

A great partner will treat your brand, data, and customers like their own – and they'll plug directly into your operational model, not force you into theirs.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Sales operations is no longer behind the scenes – it's at the forefront of revenue strategy. And just like your tech stack or analytics, outsourcing can be a powerful tool to help you do more, grow faster, and stay focused on what matters most.

The future of sales isn't about choosing between in-house or outsourced. It's about building the right blended model, backed by data, process, and partnership.

Smart ops leaders know: Outsourcing isn't a shortcut – it's a growth strategy. ■

Lauren Kindzierski is head of sales and innovation at **VXI**.

VIDEO: THE FIVE IMMUTABLE PRINCIPLES OF HIGH PERFORMANCE - PART 1

THOUGHTS TO SELL BY

EDITED BY LAWRENCE J. TUTTLE • PHOTO BY GERHARD GSCHWANDTNER

COLLABORATION

The fun for me in collaboration is, one, working with other people just makes you smarter; that's proven.
LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA

What's interesting about collaborations is the possibility for one plus one to equal three.
REI KAWAKUBO

Collaboration is being open to each other's ideas and benefiting from each other's perspectives in an open way.
ALAN MENKEN

A good collaboration pushes the boundaries of both partners.
NEIL BLUMENTHAL

PROMISE

Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.
MARTIN LUTHER

Part of the middle class promise is that, after a lifetime of hard work, you'll be able to retire and enjoy the fruits of that labor. Medicare was established to secure that promise.
AL FRANKEN

Beauty is the promise of happiness.
EDMUND BURKE

What the people want is very simple: They want an America as good as its promise.
BARBARA JORDAN

SAFETY

They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

It's a very sobering feeling to be up in space and realize that one's safety factor was determined by the lowest bidder on a government contract.
ALAN SHEPARD

Education is our only political safety. Outside of this ark all is deluge.
HORACE MANN

In skating over thin ice, our safety is in our speed.
RALPH WALDO EMERSON