



EBOOK

HOW TO CHANGE THE
BUYER CONVERSATION
WITH INSIGHT

Educate with New Ideas and Perspectives

Our research shows that sellers who win educate buyers with new ideas and perspectives 3X more often than second-place finishers.¹

Many sellers who see this think, “Right. Then I should deliver more presentations to educate my buyers, clients, and customers on what to do and how to do it.”

It’s true that making presentations and telling stories are essential to give buyers a sense of what’s possible. If you can deliver a powerful, persuasive presentation—what we call a Convincing Story—you’ll be well on your way to becoming an insight seller.²

However, driving insight through presentations is only half of the story.

The other half of insight selling is the value you deliver when you create insight *through* your conversations with buyers.

1. Mike Schultz and John Doerr, *What Sales Winners Do Differently*, RAIN Group.

2. Sellers who do insight selling well satisfy the same basic criteria and follow the same story format to bring insight selling alive. The Convincing Story framework is simple and learnable. [Learn more here.](#)



Insight-based selling defined:

Insight selling is the process of creating and winning sales opportunities, and driving change, with ideas that matter. There are two applications of insight selling: interaction insight and opportunity insight.

- **Opportunity insight:** Selling a particular idea or strategy a buyer should pursue but might not know about
- **Interaction insight:** Providing value in the form of creating insights through buyer and seller conversation

Opportunity insight focuses on selling a particular idea that's likely to lead to a sale. It's up to the seller to bring up the idea proactively, introducing strategies, solutions, or concepts the buyer didn't know were possible.

Interaction insight, however, is about collaboration, shaping strategies through back-and-forth conversation with buyers and sellers, and sparking "aha!" moments.

With interaction insight, you change buyer beliefs, their points of view, their agendas for action, and drive much more value than if you took everything—and allowed *them* to take everything—at face value.

With interaction insight, you can literally change the buyer conversation.

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Cognitive Reframing

Insight selling, regardless of how you apply it, hinges on the concept of *cognitive reframing*.

Think about it like this: most accomplished executive coaches, teachers, and strategy consultants, when asked if telling or asking are more powerful to influence people's thinking, will respond "asking." By far.

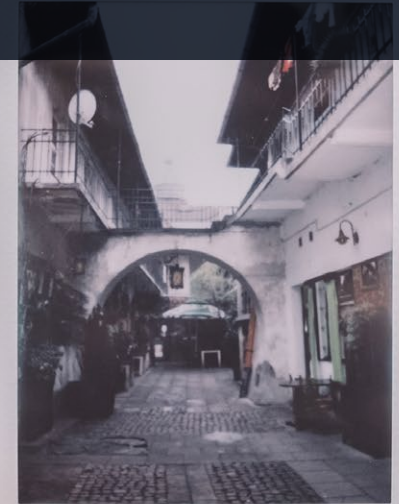
- Question assumptions, strategies, and plans
- Question conventional wisdom and rules of thumb
- Question buyer thinking, what's possible, and how they're approaching their challenges

Do this and you drive thinking and consideration. Indeed, you change the conversation with each question you ask.

When you push buyers out of their comfort zones, they begin to consider that maybe—just maybe!—there's a better way to do something. Or even a better *something to do* than what they're doing.

Cognitive reframing defined:

Changing the way people see things, and creating alternative ways of viewing ideas, events, challenges, and possibilities.



Guide Buyers Out of Their Comfort Zones

When you're working with a buyer who's trying to move an initiative or agenda forward, they're frequently in their comfort zone: either comfortable with what they're trying to accomplish or how they're trying to accomplish it.

But many buyers are headed down paths that won't serve them well. This is because they don't know what you know. And they don't know that something better might be possible.

Your job is to help buyers make the best decisions, which often means making *different* decisions.

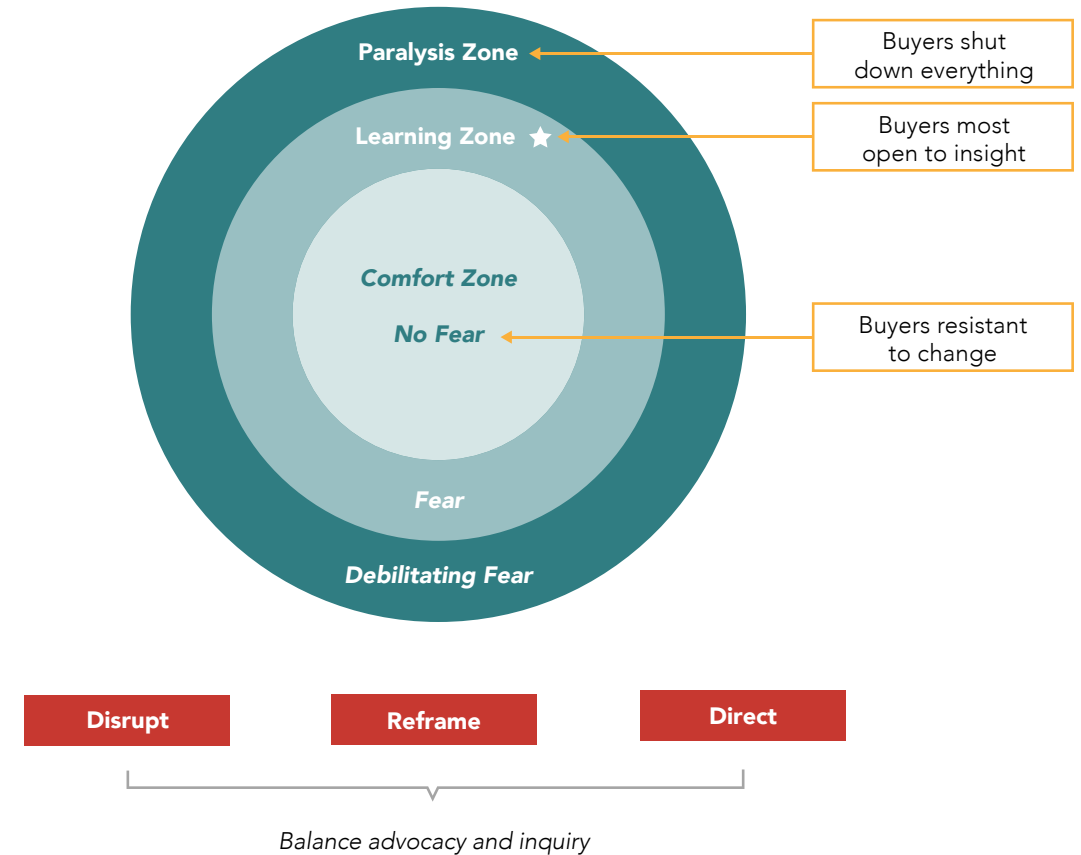
Making different decisions is uncomfortable. Thus, by definition, it doesn't happen in the comfort zone. You need to help buyers move to a place where there's some discomfort. In education theory—and insight selling—we call this **the learning zone**. It's where insight happens.

If the buyer is in their comfort zone, your first step is to guide them out. You must get them to question their beliefs and assumptions to put their mindset in the right mode for learning.

But don't guide them out too forcefully. If they feel you're applying too much pressure, they may shut down completely. When people get overwhelmed, they'll move past the learning zone into **the paralysis zone**.

Your goal is to get buyers to question their agenda for action, or perception of how to approach something, enough to open their minds.

To do this, you need to **disrupt**, **reframe**, and **direct**.



Disrupt, Reframe, and Direct the Discussion

People are guided by their belief systems—what they believe to be true:

- “W doesn’t work.”
- “There are only two ways to approach X.”
- “We can’t solve issue Y. We tried.”
- “We don’t need to do Z.”

Once beliefs are formed and in place, people don’t have to think about them much. There’s no mental processing required. You accept your beliefs and are typically comfortable in your knowledge and belief. But:

- What if *W* does work?
- What if there’s a *third* approach to *X*?
- What if you *can* solve *Y* by trying something different?
- What if you don’t do *Z* and over the next two years your competitors take a big lead on you?



Disrupt

You upset the buyer’s current thinking by questioning it or suggesting other ways to proceed.



Reframe

You encourage the buyer to think differently about something.



Direct

You guide the buyer to better options you know are possible.

What if the buyer is missing something they hadn't thought about?

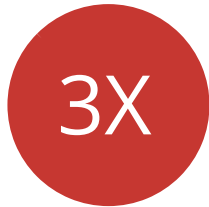
By asking questions, you can disrupt buyers' thinking and what they believe is true. Questions can lead the buyer to open their mind to change and can move them out of their comfort zone and into the learning zone. This is where you reframe and direct.

- "W does work, and here's how."
- "There's a third, and even a new fourth, approach to X, and here's what they are."
- "In my experience, Y's root cause is typically misidentified. One of my clients approached it this other way and saw massive returns."

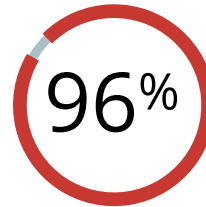
It's questions (**inquiry**) that disrupt thinking in the first place. Once you do that, you can reframe the discussion and direct buyers down a better path (**advocacy**). Inquiry and advocacy are a powerful combination.

Asking questions will help you uncover a buyer's initial perception of need, but it can also uncover hidden needs when you ask "why" and "how" questions.

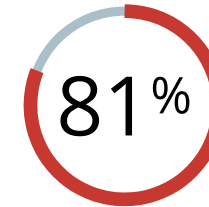
And advocacy will help drive new ideas and new thinking.



Sellers who win educate buyers with new ideas and perspectives **3X** more often than second-place finishers.



96% of buyers say that sellers who focus on the value they can deliver is the #1 influential factor impacting purchase decisions.



81% of Top-Performing Sales Organizations focus on driving maximum value for buyers (compared to 61% of The Rest).

The Powerful Combination of Inquiry and Advocacy

Here's an example of how a seller can move a buyer out of the comfort zone using inquiry (questions) and advocacy (statements and stories).

Seller: "What do you think you need to do to increase sales growth, not just by 3% per year, but by as much as 9%?" [Inquiry]

Buyer: "Well, I'm not sure that's possible."

Seller: "I think it might be. By the time we're done discussing, hopefully it'll become clearer to both of us if it is. [Advocacy – This is where you disrupt.] One of my other customers, Jim Smith over at ACME, was in the same situation. It turned out three strategies he hadn't been considering previously helped drive growth from about 3% to 12%." [Advocacy – Reframe the issue.]

Challenging the buyer is the most direct way to nudge them out of their comfort zone. This is about being assertive, not pushy. It's about opening minds to new thinking, which happens when people question their assumptions.

To do this, you need to:

- Be *willing* to ask questions geared towards driving buyers out of their comfort zone, so you can guide them to achieve the best value and outcome possible.
- Be *prepared* with very good questions, stories, and defensible advice.

If what the buyer is thinking, what they're planning to do, or how they're planning to do it won't get them to their best outcome, your goal is to **disrupt** that thinking, **reframe** the discussion, and **direct** them to something that will.



9 Questions (+1 Bonus) to Disrupt Thinking for Interaction Insight

While there are countless questions you can ask that disrupt thinking and generate insight, we find variations of the following nine questions provide much of the spark.

1. Why?

Why is that your strategy? Why do you say that? Why do you think that? Why do you believe that's the case? Why do A versus B?

By asking why—while keeping the tone collaborative—you're asking buyers to justify something. If they can do so convincingly, great! But often they either can't, or they give reasoning you believe is flawed.

They may come to a new insight themselves as they think and respond. But even if they don't, once you understand their "why," you have the chance to introduce new thinking. You can present possibilities they haven't considered. Or help them think about the situation in a new way.

2. Why haven't you achieved this yet?

This is a "why" question worth looking at on its own.

This question is challenging, but not argumentative. A cheaper, too-basic, ill-conceived, poorly-executed, or even too-complex solution or approach may have failed in the past for the buyer. Their response opens the door for you to help them see why past failures happened and that better solutions are available.

3. How?

How do you see this all panning out? How do you think you need to proceed so this becomes a part of the culture? How might you avoid the common challenges like X, or Y, or Z that often crop up?

"How" questions can highlight potential problems and challenges, and help you see which approach may be good to introduce. Buyers—or you—might come up with a change that alleviates problems and improves the solution.

4. What?

What do you think could be possible? What's your impression of what will work or what won't?

"What" questions help you see the gap between what buyers believe to be true and what's really true or possible, which you, in turn, can then guide the buyer to see.

5. Have you considered...?

Ask this question and you may discover the buyer considered other options but didn't approach them the right way. Or wasn't aware the option existed. In any case, you can shed light.

6. What will the impact be?

Responses to “impact” questions can reveal:

- The buyer sees the impact and why it’s important. This is good.
- The buyer’s perception of the impact has increased by thinking it through with your help. This is great.
- The buyer believes the impact is too small for action. You can show them it’s bigger. Or perhaps they’ll show you why it’s not worth bothering to tackle this area and you can move on to more fruitful topics.
- The buyer doesn’t know the impact, but you know it’s very strong. You can help them realize the potential.

7. What will happen if you don’t act? Or what will happen if it takes too long to solve a problem?

Asking this question gets buyers thinking of the negative consequences of inaction and can greatly increase urgency. For example: their competition will get ahead, they’ll bleed cash, turnover will be unsustainably high, and so on. Or, perhaps they need your guidance to see the negative consequences of inaction or moving too slowly. Either way leads to insight and increases urgency.

8. How do you know that? Or why do you believe that?

Buyers may share “facts” without foundation. Or they may share facts with a foundation that were once true but are no longer so. By asking for the reasoning behind a statement, you can help the buyer question the fundamental basis for their assumptions.

9. What’s missing?

This is the question that often gets a response of, “Good question!” Or prompts people to share what should be but isn’t. They think out loud, which gives them insight and gives you openings to add your own. And, as with the other questions, there can be an element of uncertainty in the response. When there is, this opens the door to learning and insight.

And here’s the bonus: follow-up questions.

Ask a question, and you may get a somewhat solid, somewhat thorough, and somewhat convincing answer. Keep pressing, though, and these answers and arguments can break down. “Somewhat thorough” turns into the tip of the iceberg. “Somewhat convincing” becomes not so convincing at all.

Even simply asking “why” a few more times can open the door to new paths of insight for the buyer.

Use variations of these nine questions to disrupt your buyers’ thinking with insightful inquiry so you can then influence their agenda for action.

Be Prepared for How Buyers React When You Challenge Their Thinking

When you disrupt buyer thinking in your sales conversations, you might assume—if your points are valid—the buyer will say, “Oh, I hadn’t thought of it like that. Good idea. How would it work?”

Yes, some buyers are open to your ideas and might react this way. If so, great! You’ve changed their point of view and you’re adding value.

Unfortunately, this isn’t how most buyers react. This isn’t necessarily bad, though. If you know the common reactions and how to respond, you’ll be able to steer the conversation to a productive place.

You’ll often get some degree of defensiveness from buyers, even if it’s unfounded. After all, they may have spent weeks or months getting to where they are today with their plans and their thinking.



Here are some common buyer reactions and how to respond:

1. The buyer might say, “Yeah, well, I don’t think so.”

This is where you can ask questions to disrupt their thinking, such as:

- “Why is that?”
- “What have you done before?”
- “Why don’t you think it’ll work?”
- “Why would the other way work better in terms of getting you the outcome you want?”

By asking disruption questions, you help buyers question their assumptions. You might not have changed their point of view—yet!—but you opened the door to it, and you’ll begin to demonstrate your value.

2. If the buyer is quite defensive, stonewalling even, they may say, “That’s not what we need.”

You could treat this as defensiveness and ask disruption questions, but be careful. You don’t want the buyer to think you’re being obstinate or not listening. Tune into the nuance of the conversation and try to hear what they’re actually saying.

3. If the buyer says, “We can’t do that,” or, “I don’t think so,” or is otherwise defensive, it could simply be a conditioned response.

Be prepared for buyers to reject new ideas initially. Many people are conditioned to immediately say no when presented with something new.

Or maybe they just don’t want to change because they’re in their comfort zone. Or they may think your idea isn’t plausible or helpful, or they think you aren’t listening. Or they simply don’t want to do more thinking or work.

For example, perhaps the buyer has issued an RFP and they’re committed to the solution identified in it because they’ve already invested a great deal of time and resources to get this far.

This is where your deep knowledge of product and services, company, solutions, client, industry, competition, and so forth come in. Being comfortable and knowledgeable in these areas equips you to apply [insight selling](#). If you know the buyer has overlooked something in an RFP that’ll have a significant impact on their success, you can open the door to insight with the questions you ask.

What Happens When You Ask Insightful Questions?

An interesting thing happens when you ask an insightful question: it triggers the brain to release serotonin, encouraging new neural connections.³ The brain enters problem-solving mode.

It could take hours, days, or maybe longer, but on reflection, the “We can’t do that,” just might become, “But maybe we could do this and this and get even better results!” You’ve reframed their thinking.

When you disrupt buyer thinking, take care to think about the maximum value a buyer can achieve in their situation. Think about getting them the best possible outcome.

Then they may also see that they can, and should, get better results by thinking differently.

Many buyers—and people in general—think too small at first. If you can think big, and get buyers thinking about strong results, they’ll see you as valuable and become emotionally attached to driving the best solution forward.

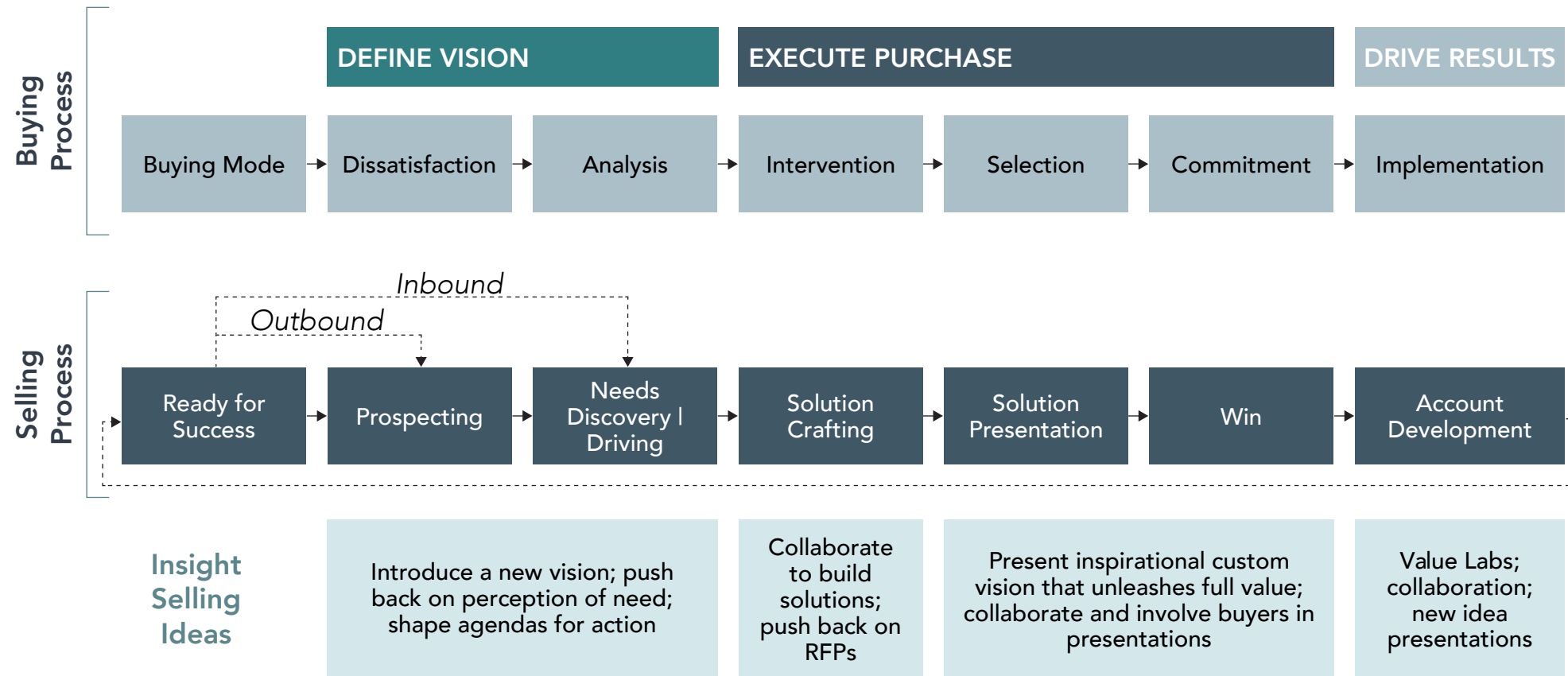
If you start with trying to achieve the best possible outcomes, but it turns out buyers aren’t keen to pursue them, you can always back up and adjust the scope down. However, you’ll never get the best results if you don’t push the limit with insight selling. Yes, there’s risk, but the reward is high for those who value insight.

3. Mary Jo Asmus, "The Neuroscience of Asking Insightful Questions," *Government Executive* (2017): <https://www.govexec.com/management/2017/04/neuroscience-asking-insightful-questions/137274>.



Use Insight Across the Sales Cycle

Insight selling can happen throughout the sales cycle from prospecting and needs discovery to solution crafting, presentation, and account development.



How can I apply insight selling across the sales cycle?

Early on, when you're meeting with a prospect and working to introduce an idea, you might say, "Let me take five minutes to share a short presentation of this idea and the impact it can make. If it resonates with you, we can dig deeper." Then, launch into your Convincing Story ([view the framework](#)).

During **needs discovery**, the buyer may be asking for X when you know what they need is Y. Here you might apply interaction insight by saying, "We're actually thinking Y, not X, would deliver maximum results for you. Here's something to consider..."

Or, "Over the next few years the platform will be evolving in this direction, which will have a major impact on your supply chain. Address this now and you'll be well-positioned to grab market share from your competitors."

They might then say, "How does it work?" If so, and perhaps even if not, begin telling your Convincing Story. Initially, they may not think this will be important to them. They won't see it until you share the vision. Here you're reframing and directing the buyer's thinking.

Likewise with **RFPs**, don't get stuck thinking RFPs are written in stone. You have the ability to push back using insight selling. Even if the buyer says, "no questions please," you can call and ask questions without being disqualified. Perhaps you won't get through, but if you do, you'll be ahead of the game.

Often, the business buyer, and sometimes even purchasing, are open to discussion. They may or may not rewrite their RFP, but may say, "Go ahead. Put those ideas in your response." This could be the key for you to rise above the pack, get invited to a finalist presentation, and win the sale.

When you're **solution crafting**, buyers may say, "We don't need to do X." Or, "We'll address Y next year." You can respond, "I hear what you're saying. Let's walk through what it would look like if you skip X. Here are the pluses and minuses of pushing Y out until next year."

After the discussion, they may respond, "Ah, well, I didn't think we needed it, but now I see that we just might!"

Or, perhaps, as you jointly explore the advantages and disadvantages, you collaborate to arrive at a different—and even better—solution.

Account development is a perfect place to practice insight selling. If you lead [value labs](#)—collaborative, facilitated meetings to uncover ways to maximize value for accounts—you can fill your pipeline by surfacing new ideas that excite and engage the account. Ideas that weren't even on their radar screen until you put them there.

Across the sales cycle, you have the opportunity to get buyers thinking big about achieving the strongest results possible. Your insight selling journey may unfold in stages over a number of interactions. But if you have it mapped out in your head, you'll recognize where it fits in the sales process and be able to apply insight selling when it's needed.

10 Tips to Excel with Interaction Insight

1. Apply interaction insight throughout the sales cycle.

Don't limit yourself. From prospecting and needs discovery to solution crafting, presentation, and account development, you can influence the buyer's point of view in every phase of the sales process.

2. Create a list of buyer points of view that commonly need to change.

That way, you can easily scan the list for points of view applicable to a specific buyer's situation. To uncover these, ask yourself: what should buyers be dissatisfied with? What don't they know about how they should solve their problems? What better future could they have that they don't see now?

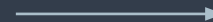
3. Know the points of view you have that buyers should consider.

To uncover these, ask yourself: what new perspectives do I bring to the table around how buyers can solve their afflictions or problems? How can they achieve aspirations they might not see as possible now? What non-intuitive insight can I bring to the table?

4. Know *why* buyers should change their thinking.

To uncover this, ask yourself: what's the cost of failing to shift buyers' points of view? Why is it vital to embrace a new idea or solution now? What's the value of the new point of view?

Common Buyer Thinking that Limits Results	How Buyers Should Think Differently
"I only need the technology. No implementation support needed."	"This is a change management initiative. If we don't get it right, it won't get adopted."
"We should do A, B, and C."	"We should do A and B, but C is a huge effort for little return. We should do F instead."
"This is going to take six months."	"This can take just six weeks if we organize it differently."



Impact
Cost of initiative: \$2 million
Cost of failure: \$20 million in lost revenue over 6 months
6-month risk: \$22 million
Cost of implementation support: \$200k
Success without implementation support: 40%
Success with implementation support: 90%

5. Be prepared to share the justification for why buyers should change their thinking.

When you can share compelling results you've achieved, buyers are more likely to change their point of view.

6. If the buyer is defensive, ask questions to disrupt their thinking.

Why is that? What have you done before? Why don't you think it'll work? This reframes the discussion. You help buyers question their assumptions, which opens the door to changing their point of view.

Also, if they're defensive, know they may need some time to let the ideas percolate. Don't expect insight selling to work the minute you share an idea.

7. When you challenge buyer thinking, start with the best possible outcome.

Many people think too small. Think big and you'll get buyers thinking about strong results. They'll begin to become emotionally attached to driving the best possible solution forward.

8. Don't assume RFPs are written in stone.

RFPs feel formal, but the needs, approach, timeframe, implementation plan, and success metrics may all be open to improvement.

9. Don't push back on the wrong person.

Senior people who make decisions and can change strategies often appreciate new thinking and insights since they're on the hook for the outcomes. Push junior-level buyers too hard or the wrong way and you can scare them off.

10. Don't wear out your welcome.

Push too hard or challenge without emotional intelligence and you can get shut out of future conversations with the buyer.

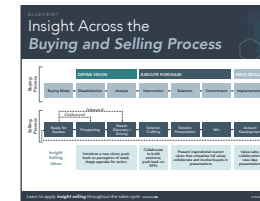
Change Buyer Conversations with Insight

You can change the buyer conversation with interaction insight—the value you deliver when you create insight through your back-and-forth conversations with buyers. To do this well:

- Balance inquiry (asking questions) with advocacy (statements and stories) in your buyer conversations.
- Ask questions that disrupt, reframe, and direct the discussion to guide buyers out of their comfort zones, open their minds to new thinking, and help them make the best decisions.
- Know the common reactions you may receive from buyers when you disrupt their thinking. Be prepared to respond using the guidance we share in this ebook and you'll get positive results regardless of how buyers react initially.
- Recognize where insight selling fits in your sales process and you'll be able to apply it when it's needed.
- Focus on the maximum value the buyer could receive in their specific situation and focus on getting them the best possible outcome.
- Prepare for possible buyer push-back by considering common limiting beliefs and how to respond.



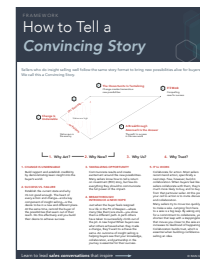
Reference: 9 Questions (+1 Bonus) to Disrupt Thinking for Interaction Insight
Use this reference to spark ideas for questions to ask your buyers.



Blueprint: Insight Across the Buying and Selling Process
Use this model to learn to apply insight through various stages of the sales cycle.



Checklist: 10 Tips to Excel with Interaction Insight
Change your buyer conversations immediately using these tips to reframe and disrupt thinking.



Framework: How to Tell a Convincing Story
Use this model to take buyers through a conversation that excites and inspires.

Turn Your Team into Insight Sellers

Change the Conversation, Drive Demand, and Differentiate through Insight Selling

The landscape of buying and selling has changed more in recent years than it has in preceding decades. Buyers are more sophisticated and have unlimited research and resources at their fingertips. Plus, in the current environment, more buyers are working remotely and facing increased distractions.

RAIN Group's Insight Selling training gives sellers the skills they need to capture attention, strengthen relationships, differentiate from their competition, and win more sales.

It's designed to balance learning and application so your sellers aren't out of the field too long, plus it's contextualized for your business and the sales situations your sellers regularly face so it's immediately applicable on-the-job.

Your team will learn to:

- Inspire buyers with ideas that matter to them
- Use cognitive reframing and disruption questions to open buyers' minds to new ideas
- Tell a Convincing Story that intrigues buyers, shapes their thinking, and drives the buying and selling process forward
- Craft breakthrough solutions that create new possibilities
- Lead executive-level conversations that shape buyers' agendas for action

Click here to request a complimentary consultation [—————>](#)



RAIN Group Delivers World-Class Sales Training

- Modular, multi-modal, and purpose-built for the **modern learner**.
- Unique approach to driving **behavior change** through training that we call Execution Assurance.
- Focused on driving the **business results** important to you.
- A **transformational experience** that ensures the development, adoption, and implementation of new skills.
- Action-oriented **coaching** prepares sellers for real situations and provides direct feedback.

RAIN Group Unleashes Sales Potential

We help organizations:

- Develop and improve sales strategy, process, messaging, and talent
- Enhance sales capability with award-winning sales training
- Design and execute strategic account management initiatives
- Increase effectiveness of sales management and coaching

Best IP: We study buying and selling relentlessly through the RAIN Group Center for Sales Research. Our research and field work allows us to create industry-leading intellectual property to help our clients achieve the greatest success.

Best Education System: We use the best education approaches, methods, and technologies to make training work, stick, and transfer to the job.

Best Results: We make it our mission to drive value and achieve the highest client satisfaction through excellence in quality and producing transformational results for our clients.

