



WHITE PAPER

The Future of Consultative Selling

Making the Leap to Insight Selling

by Mike Schultz, Robert Croston, and Jason Murray

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“Winners sell radically differently than second-place finishers. What sales winners do differently is both surprising and fascinating.”

Executive Summary

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Making the Leap to Insight Selling

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How buyers buy is evolving at an unprecedented pace due to massive changes in the technology that facilitates buying and the vast information available on the Internet. For the past 50 years, sellers have largely adopted a “consultative selling” approach, characterized by understanding need and positioning offerings as solutions to problems. This approach will no longer be enough by itself for sellers to compete and win consistently in the coming years.

Key Takeaways:

1. Forrester Research predicts 1 million of the 4.5 million B2B sales jobs in the U.S. will be lost by 2020. However, one type of seller they label “consultants” is poised for job growth. We learned in RAIN Group’s *What Sales Winners Do Differently* research that consultative sellers who succeed today and will succeed in the coming years will do more for buyers than what they have traditionally done.
2. Sales winners sell radically differently than those who come in second place. What they do includes core consultative selling concepts, and adds concepts such as inspiring buyers with new ideas, pushing back on the status quo, driving change, and influencing buyer decision making. These sellers redefine buyer thinking and paradigms. In essence, they redefine reality for buyers.
3. We call sellers who adopt and apply these advanced consultative selling concepts Insight Sellers. Less than 50% of the Top Performers studied for RAIN Group’s *Top-Performing Sales Organization* research have these skills. This represents an opportunity to gain competitive advantage for those organizations and sellers that do.
4. Inspiring buyers with ideas and insights is critical early in the sales cycle when buyers are defining their visions for action, but it’s not limited to this phase. By applying specific strategies, insight sellers can create buyer epiphanies across the sales cycle.
5. Sellers who use the power of specific types of stories, and apply concepts such as cognitive reframing, change buyer thinking and perception of reality. When they do, they can increase the impact they can have on buyer success, and differentiate from the competition categorically. This kind of “Blue Ocean Selling” increases sales wins while decreasing price pressure.

Selling is also changing in five other major ways: how sellers prospect, research buyers, manage pipelines, work with procurement, and work with buying committees.

The following are also major changes from how consultative selling was, and still often is, to what it will become:

	Traditional Consultative Selling	The Future of Consultative Selling
Definition	Focused on understanding need and positioning offerings as solutions	Includes needs and solutions focus, and adds redefining reality by redefining need and possibilities, inspiring buyers, and driving change
Knowledge	Functional experts	Deep generalists
Needs	Defined by buyer	Redefined with seller
Impact	Vision constrained	Unexpectedly unleashed
Differentiation	Capabilities battle	Categorically distinctive
Value	In the product or service	In the seller
Collaboration	Analog	Analog and Digital

Introduction

Since Mack Hanan coined the term in 1970, consultative selling has been the most widely accepted—and most pursued—sales approach. For the ensuing forty years, advice for how to sell had mostly been a variation on the consultative selling theme.

In the past handful of years, however, selling has changed more than it had in the previous forty. It's changed so much that variations on the consultative selling theme have been replaced by numerous calls to blow it all up and do something completely different. Selling method pioneer Neil Rackham had this to say about the explosion of turn-selling-on-its-head approaches in the foreword to our book, *Insight Selling*:¹

I ask you to forgive me a moment's bitching if I pick out a particularly unhelpful trend in many of these about-to-become-best-selling business books, especially those in sales, that use what I call the *Armageddon selling* formula. The approach goes something like this: "Everything you've ever learned about sales is wrong and, unless you stop doing it instantly, your sales efforts will shortly die in agony. There is, however, one simple cure that I have discovered. It is..." and here the author puts in a pitch for the appropriate magic bullet...

He goes on to say:

The Armageddon approach to sales doesn't help anyone. When, for example, a serious journal like the *Harvard Business Review* publishes an article titled "The End of Solution Sales," it damages the credibility of all involved. The sales field has been growing up nicely in recent years: It can live without this kind of overstatement.

Who's right? Should we blow up consultative selling and replace it with something completely different? Or, is it still relevant today and just needs to change?

We know buying has changed and will continue to do so. Selling must change with it. The question is: How? In this report, we take a close look at the future of consultative selling and what sellers need to do to win in the new sales environment.

¹ Mike Schultz and John Doerr, *Insight Selling: Surprising Research on What Sales Winners Do Differently* (Wiley, 2014).

What is Consultative Selling?

There are many definitions of consultative selling. This one from Study.com is representative of the most common themes across definitions:

Consultative [selling] is a selling method in which the salesperson spends time with the customer to understand the problem the customer is trying to solve and then recommends a solution that will specifically address that problem. It's different from a traditional sale in that it involves suggesting a solution to a problem, rather than a focus on selling a specific product.²

As recently as March 2016, we found 26 experts who weighed in on how to develop a consultative sales approach. Most focused on ways to make the definition above come true.³ Even today, in the midst of the hyperbolic and melodramatic Armageddon pitchmen, what you predominantly find is advice to master the art of selling...as it worked best in 1987.

Based on our research and field work with clients around the globe, we believe both approaches miss the mark. It's true, selling like it's 1987 (or even 2007) doesn't work like it used to. If traditional consultative selling isn't as effective anymore, then working on ways to implement it is akin, as they say, to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

So throw it out and start over, right? The sky is falling. Frogs. Armageddon!

Well, not so fast. We researched it, and that's not what we found.

But doing the same thing as before won't work either. Consultative selling itself must evolve.

Evolve or Perish

Evolving buying trends and rapidly changing technologies are threatening many sales jobs.

Andy Hoar from Forrester Research predicts the 4.5 million business-to-business sales jobs in the U.S. will be reduced by a million in just 5 years.⁴ That's a 22% reduction.

However, he believes only certain kinds of sellers are destined for pink slips.

Sellers he labels Order Takers, Explainers, and Navigators are all job-loss candidates. To different degrees, they are all losing out to 1) technology that facilitates purchasing, and 2) massive amounts of information available broadly on the Internet (see figure 1 on next page).

The Consultants, however, he says, "explain abstract concepts, solution sell, and build relationships." He describes them as "true consultants," and expects job growth in the category. As we discuss throughout this report, we know the consultants must take it further than this, but conceptually he's on the right track.

It is not necessary to change.

Survival is not mandatory.

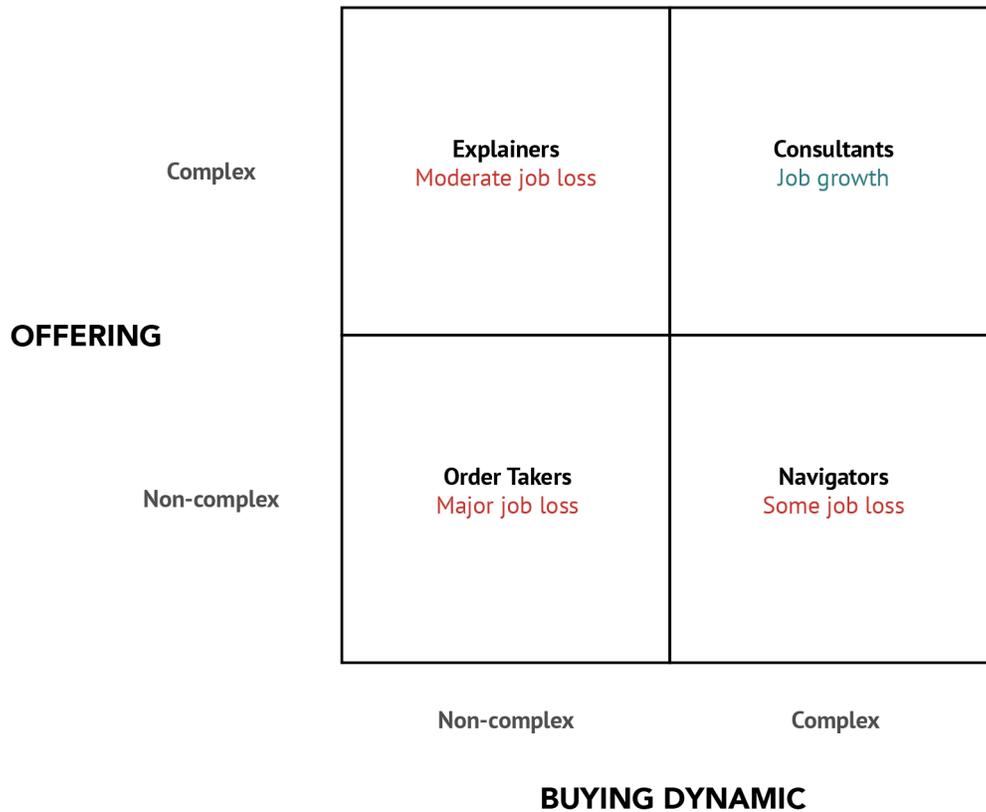
- W. Edwards Deming

² Carol Woods, "Consultative Sales: Definition, Process & Techniques," *Study.com*, <http://study.com/academy/lesson/consultative-sales-definition-process-techniques.html>.

³ Cobhan Phillipson, "How to Develop a Consultative Sales Approach: 26 Business Sales Experts Share Their Expert Tips," *Docurated*, <http://www.docurated.com/all-things-productivity/develop-consultative-sales-approach-26-business-sales-experts-share-expert-tips>.

⁴ Andy Hoar, *Death of a (B2B) Salesman* (Forrester Research, 2015).

Figure 1. Death of a (B2B) Salesman



We agree that consultants (or consultative sellers as we redefine the role in the coming pages) will see significant job growth because of the value they add for the buyer. And the more they add value, the more they will win sales. What, then, do these sellers do to add said value?

What Sales Winners Do Differently

While many sellers are running their old playbooks and losing sales they used to win, others are winning and winning consistently. We wanted to know why, so we posed the question: What are the winners of actual sales opportunities doing differently than the sellers who come in second place?

To find the answer, the RAIN Group Center for Sales Research analyzed more than 700 business-to-business purchases made by a broad sample of buyers responsible for \$3.1 billion in annual purchasing power.

Here are some key findings, summarized from *Insight Selling*:

1. Winners sell radically differently than second-place finishers. In many ways, what sales winners do differently is both surprising and fascinating.
2. There's a specific combination of behaviors that sales winners do and outcomes they achieve that second-place finishers don't.
3. Several key factors that set winners apart are rarely discussed in the world of selling. They now demand attention.
4. Consultative (or solution) selling is definitely not dead, but fundamental consultative sales concepts need reimagining and relabeling. And while traditional or core consultative selling concepts are necessary, they're no longer sufficient to win sales.

What does this all mean? A new future for consultative selling.

Three Levels of RAIN SellingSM

In our *What Sales Winners Do Differently* research, we found three levels of selling behaviors and outcomes that set sales winners apart from second-place finishers.

Level 1 is Connect. Winners connect the dots between customer needs and their company's products and services as solutions more often than second-place finishers. Winners also connect with people. They're perceived to listen and connect personally with buyers more often.

Connecting with people and connecting the dots—sounds a lot like consultative selling to us. This core consultative selling approach used to be the crux of winning sales. Now it's the price of entry. Sellers who stop at Level 1 don't find themselves in the winner's circle nearly as often as those who move on to levels 2 and 3.

Level 2 is Convince. Winners convince buyers that they can achieve maximum return, that the risks are minimal, and that the seller is the best choice among all options. In other words, they are masters at making the value proposition case as compelling as possible, and communicate it effectively.

Level 3 is Collaborate. Winners collaborate through behavior—they are perceived to be responsive, proactive, and easy to buy from (collaborative in how they work). At the same time, it's not just how the seller interacts; it's what they do. Buyers believe that winners actually collaborate with them during their buying process (collaboration in the sense of working with the buyer to achieve a mutual goal), and that they educate buyers with new ideas and perspectives. Indeed, buyers perceived these sellers to be integral to their success.

We call the sellers who get to level 3 **Insight Sellers**. They don't just sell the value of their products and services, they become the value, working with buyers and bringing new ideas and perspectives to the table. In the pages that follow, we share our insights on how they do it.

Putting the Consulting in Consultative Selling

Think for a minute about the consulting industry. Strategy firms like Bain, McKinsey, Roland Berger, Boston Consulting Group, and Booz Allen help their clients make the best decisions to drive their success.

In fact, these strategy consulting firms redefine reality for their clients using two common strategies. They:

1. **Give advice.** Sometimes they do it evangelically, such as sharing with clients the direction an industry is going or how a new technology is emerging, and then providing ideas for how to take advantage. Sometimes they do it after collaborative analysis: they study and interact with clients to dig deep into their situations and needs, and then provide guidance for what to do. In any case, they give advice that inspires their clients and drives them to new heights.
2. **Question the status quo.** Strategy consultants push back. They don't accept current thinking and paradigms. Always leery of the dangers in the comfort zone, these consultants challenge everything about the status quo. The end result is rigorous analysis and critical thinking leading to "aha" moments that shape decision making.

Both traits of strategy consultants lead to the same outcome for their clients: they redefine reality.

Peter Block, author of *Flawless Consulting*, would call these consultants "collaborators." Collaborators, he says, don't just create and implement solutions, they give clients fresh perspectives, clients benefit from their diversity of experience, and clients work with them to define the problem before solving anything.

Another type of consultant is one Block would call a "pair of hands." Their job is to understand the need as presented by the client, position their offerings to solve the need, and execute.

"Pair of hands" consultants do not redefine reality. They may execute effectively (no small feat), and perhaps have their own novel ways of doing so, but the client's reality stays the same.

Exploring the dynamics of consulting itself is instructive because it's an almost exact parallel to what's happening with consultative selling.

- Consultative selling *has* been defined for half a century like "pair of hands" consulting: understand need as defined by the buyer, present offerings as solutions, solve problem.
- Consultative selling *will* be defined to include strategy consulting: anticipate need, anticipate eventualities, provide and inspire new ideas, challenge the status quo, drive change, drive decision making, redefine reality.

Insight Sellers do not accept their buyers' perception of reality. They redefine it.

After almost 50 years of consultative selling focusing on implementation of the buyer's vision, the concept breaks new ground to include strategy consulting where the seller takes an active role in setting—or later altering and improving—the agenda itself. Consultative sellers would do well to think about themselves less as consultative sellers and more like actual strategy consultants. In doing so, it will be easier to shed old thinking about what a consultative seller "is" and "should do," and embrace a new self-image that includes strategy-defining, as well as understanding and executing.

This is more of an evolution than a revolution, but it will require a new approach and advanced skill set that many sellers don't have. We call this type of advanced consultative selling **Insight Selling**.

Consultative Selling—A New Definition

We propose the following new definition for consultative selling:

Consultative selling is an approach to sales whereby sellers redefine reality and maximize buyer value through:

1. A mix of understanding, shaping, and redefining need, crafting compelling solutions to address the need, and communicating maximum impact for the buyer (core consultative selling)
2. Inspiring buyers and driving change with ideas that matter (advanced consultative / Insight Selling)

As a result of these actions, consultative sellers build relationships, build trust with buyers, and maximize sales wins.

Some of the first part of this definition is similar to the traditional definition for consultative selling shared earlier. Sellers are still required to understand need and craft compelling solutions. But as we found in our *What Sales Winners Do Differently* research, this is now often just the price of entry.⁵

The sellers who win today, and will win tomorrow, take it a step further. When analyzing what most separated sales winners from second-place finishers, we considered 42 factors.

The top three factors that most separated winners from second-place finishers were:

1. Educated me with new ideas and perspectives
2. Collaborated with me
3. Persuaded me we would achieve results

This research data underscores the evolution sellers must make. They have to educate (inspire buyers, ideas that matter), they have to collaborate (redefine need, redefine reality, drive change), and persuade buyers they will achieve results (compelling solutions, communicate impact, ideas that matter, build trust).

From Functional Expert to Deep Generalist

In the past, consultative sellers could be functional experts. If a buyer had a need, the seller could explore it fully and then position their offering as a solution to those needs.

Along with needing new sales skills, sellers need different knowledge and attributes in order to pull off advanced consultative selling.

Without broader business knowledge, they won't be able to question the status quo or inspire buyers with new ideas.

⁵ Mike Schultz and John Doerr, *What Sales Winners Do Differently* (RAIN Group, 2013).

Specifically, sellers need deeper understanding of buyers' businesses and industries, buyers' needs both now and where they are likely to be in the future, their own company's capabilities across the board, how to apply their capabilities in not just thoughtful, but innovative ways, how to help buyers capture opportunity created by new trends in the market, and where their competition is lagging.

From an attributes perspective, sellers need to be assertive or they'll never question the status quo and be willing to drive change by advocating strongly for a new direction. They need business savvy and gravitas or they'll never be taken seriously in the executive suite. And they need to be at least somewhat curious and theoretical or they'll never care about ideas, which makes it difficult to inspire buyers with them.

The new consultative seller needs to be a deep generalist.

Redefining Reality Throughout the Buyer Journey

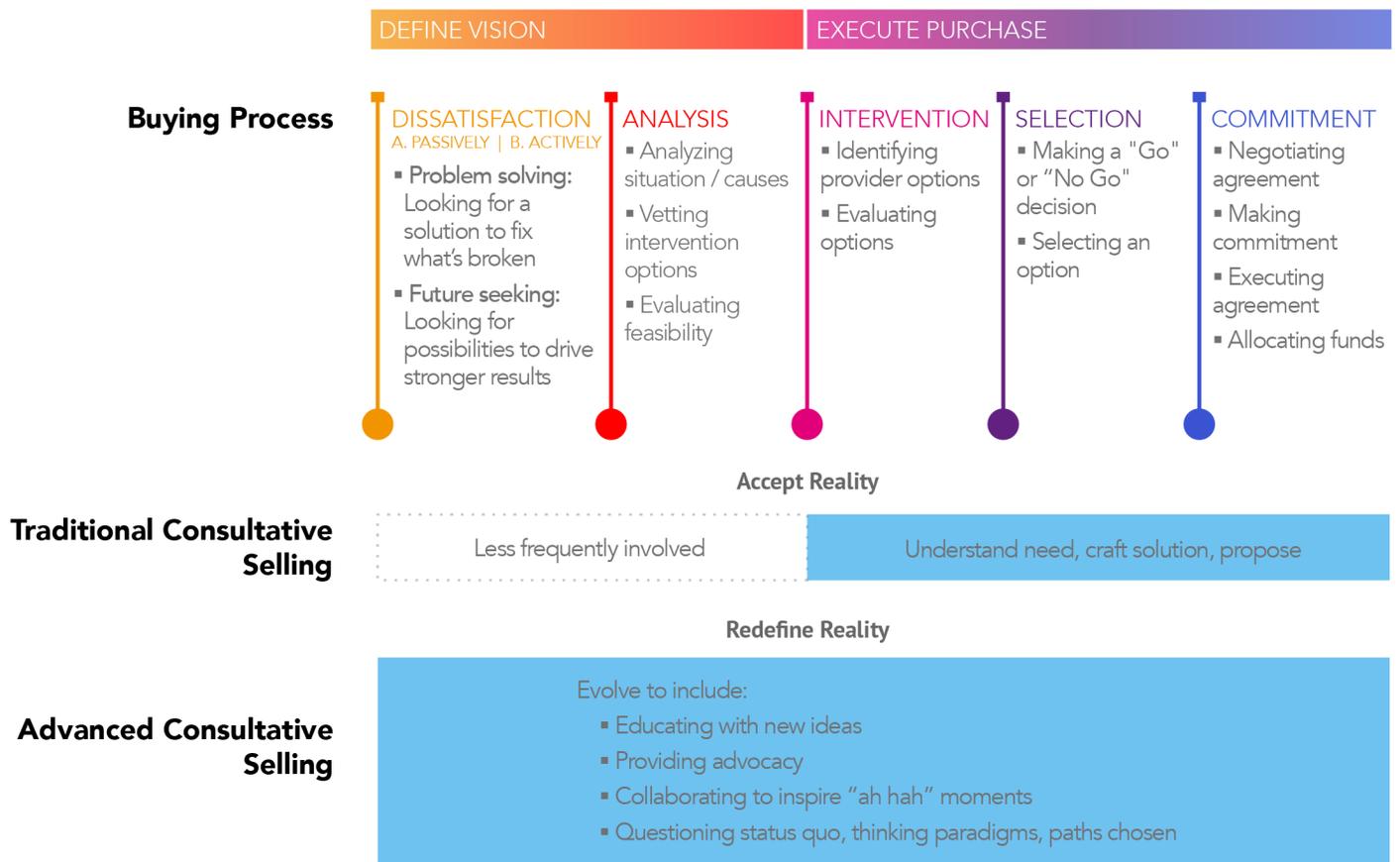
Epiphanies Across the Buying Cycle

As we've rolled out Insight Selling initiatives at companies around the globe, we've noticed people tend to fixate on the desire to provide insight at the early stages of the buying cycle when buyers are defining their vision. It's critical to do this, as sellers who tell Convincing Stories inspire buyers with ideas and shape their agendas for action.⁶ In doing so, these sellers both build their pipelines and win more sales.

Insight Sellers, however, can create epiphanies throughout the buying cycle. Any time a seller can inspire a buyer to have an "aha" moment, the seller has educated the buyer with a new idea or perspective and improved their decision making.

Imagine a seller working with a buyer in the "Define Vision" phase of the buying cycle (figure 2). It's obvious how the seller can educate with new ideas, advocate for courses of action, question the status quo, and collaborate to create value and inspire "aha" moments. It's less obvious to do the same in the "Execute Purchase" phase of the buying cycle, which makes the sellers who do add value there stand out that much more.

Figure 2. How Consultative Selling Functions in the Buying Process



⁶ Mike Schultz, "Bringing Insight Selling Alive—How to Tell a Convincing Story," RAIN Group, <http://www.rainsalestraining.com/blog/bringing-insight-selling-alive-how-to-tell-a-convincing-story/>.

Five Ways Selling Is Changing Overall

As outlined in this paper, we know that how buyers and sellers interact—and will interact—is changing significantly. A lot more about selling is changing as well:

- **Prospecting** is completely changing. The phone is still a helpful and necessary tool, but new outreach methods (e.g., email, LinkedIn, mobile) have changed the communication media. Content is the new digital bait that draws buyers in with the seduction of what sellers offer, and new technologies (e.g., SalesLoft, Yesware, HubSpot Sales) are making savvy sellers more efficient and effective as they prospect.
- **Researching** buyers and markets is completely changing. LinkedIn itself has changed the game, and few sellers are taking full advantage. We can use technology to track everything our buyers do online. They're leaving a digital footprint, but few sellers leverage it.
- **Pipeline management** is changing. Here's the digital footprint again. We can know who's interested in what. Who's highly interactive with us online. Who has opened proposals and when. Sellers are using digital signatures to increase their win rates and win speeds. (And yet, we still see some contracts conclude with "please sign and fax back to..." Oy.) It's not just technology that is changing the game here. Opportunity management itself is becoming more customer- and value-centric. Sellers using old seller-focused opportunity management methods and templates are not winning like they used to.
- **Procurement** has grown tremendously, changing how sellers interface with buyers. Sellers who do not know how to succeed with procurement are at a great disadvantage.
- **Buying committees** are more common. It's easier for buyers to collaborate across geographies to work together to buy, so there are more teams buying than in the past. Sellers who do not know how to drive change and influence group decision making are losing sales to no decision as much as they are to competitors.

All of this requires not only more selling skills, but stronger executive functioning skills. Sellers can't just pick up the phone and go anymore. Those who are systematic make strong decisions about where to spend their time and focus, and leverage the resources available to them will come out ahead in the coming years.

Have you ever:

- Received an RFP or worked with a buyer who was asking for the wrong things? (Intervention phase)
- Worked with a buyer who didn't see enough ROI in moving forward, and so your sale was lost to no decision? (Selection phase)
- Worked with a buyer who was thinking win/loss in a negotiation, but you worked with them to expand the value pie and succeed even more? (Commitment phase)

Each of these sales situations affords a choice: stay quiet and let the chips fall, or redefine how the buyer thinks.

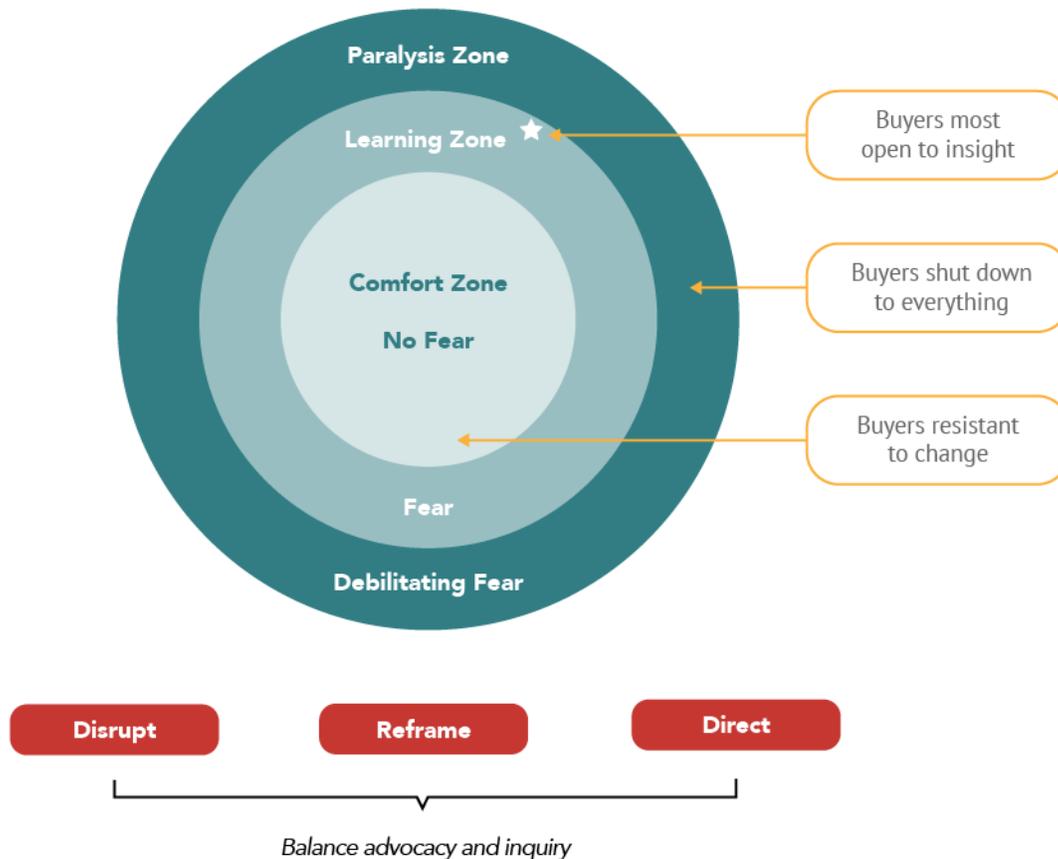
Redefining how the buyer thinks requires sellers to master the art of cognitive reframing.

Cognitive Reframing

Cognitive reframing refers to creating alternative ways of viewing reality, including ideas, events, situations, strategies, possibilities for action, or really anything. Cognitive reframing is required to realize the promise of Insight Selling. Sellers can't drive change with ideas that matter if buyers don't think differently. Sellers can't redefine reality if buyers remain in their comfort zone (figure 3).

The challenge for sellers here is that many buyers' minds are closed when they first interact. The buyers are on autopilot: driving to their destination and taking a few vendors along for the ride. If all sellers involved in a sale accept reality, salute, and react, then the playing field is level. No one stands out, and it's a capabilities battle to win the sale.

Figure 3. Cognitive Reframing



Cognitive reframing is creating alternative ways of viewing reality, including ideas, events, situations, strategies, or possibilities for action.

Insight Sellers are different. They guide buyers out of the comfort zone. They question buyers' nice, neat perception of reality, and lead them into the learning zone. Assuming the seller does it well, they inspire an "aha" moment. Something new comes to light. The buyer questions their thinking and begins to consider new paths.

The danger is pushing so far or abrasively that buyers retreat or shut down, entering what we call the paralysis zone. It's not very helpful to buyers—or anyone—to be here.

In order to open even the possibility of redefining reality, sellers must do three things:

- Disrupt current thinking by introducing new ideas, advocating for alternative paths, or asking questions that challenge the status quo
- Reframe the discussion around new thinking, literally shaping the conversation by changing the lens through which they view the issue at hand
- Direct the buyer to new and better possibilities

Do this and you become not just the seller, but the consultant, increasing your value to the buyer and your likelihood of winning.

Collaboration Goes Digital

Sellers can help redefine buyer thinking in a number of ways, but all of them require interaction and collaboration. Insight Sellers inspire buyers through Convincing Stories, question the status quo in conversations, and work with buyers to brainstorm new ideas. These activities used to be done primarily in person or on the telephone (analog).

Increasingly they're moving online (digital). And it's not just that they're moving online—in the right situations they're *more effective* online. As noted in the *Harvard Business Review* article "Collaborating Online is Sometimes Better than Face-to-Face," online collaboration has a number of benefits, including solving time problems, distance problems, and communication problems:

By solving time problems it creates the benefit of 24/7 production cycles; by solving distance problems it enables newly diverse teams; and by solving communication problems it lets us work together in ways that tap into a broader set of skills and capacities.⁷

The author also notes that online collaboration can accommodate a broad variety of communication and work styles. For example, some people like to remain quiet in live meetings, but when they are able to mull things over and express themselves through writing versus speaking, they not only interact with more vigor, they provide ideas that move the conversation forward.

It's always been the role of the consultant to draw out the best ideas from everyone involved in tackling a challenge. As a complement to live collaboration, new technologies like Slack, Yammer, Postwire, Bloomfire, HubSpot Sales, and Realtime Board provide the consultative seller with an expanded set of tools to collaborate online.

⁷ Alexandra Samuel, "Collaborating Online is Sometimes Better than Face-to-Face," *Harvard Business Review*, <https://hbr.org/2015/04/collaborating-online-is-sometimes-better-than-face-to-face>.

Why is Cognitive Reframing So Powerful?

Many sellers focus on trying to change the behavior of their buyers by focusing on the behaviors themselves. We often hear things like, "I just don't understand why they're doing this, or not doing that." Or, "It makes no sense to me why they would take this action or that action over another."

This issue is not one of behavior or action, it is one of paradigm. In his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey describes a paradigm as "the way we perceive, understand and interpret our surrounding world. Our mental map." He goes on to explain that what we do (our actions and behaviors) are driven by what we see (our paradigms). When we change our paradigms, our behavior changes automatically, spontaneously, effortlessly.

For the seller that is trying to change the actions or behavior of a buyer, it is much more powerful to explore, understand, challenge, and change the underlying paradigm that is driving the behavior. Simple concept, but not easy to accomplish.

Just telling the buyer that they're wrong, or need to see things differently, is unlikely to work: "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." This is where the cognitive reframing and collaboration aspects of Insight Selling are so important and powerful. The advanced consultative seller is able to lead the buyer to a different conclusion as opposed to forcing them into it. The advanced consultative seller inspires and drives change with ideas that matter.

All breakthroughs
are break "withs"
old ways of thinking.

- Thomas Kuhn

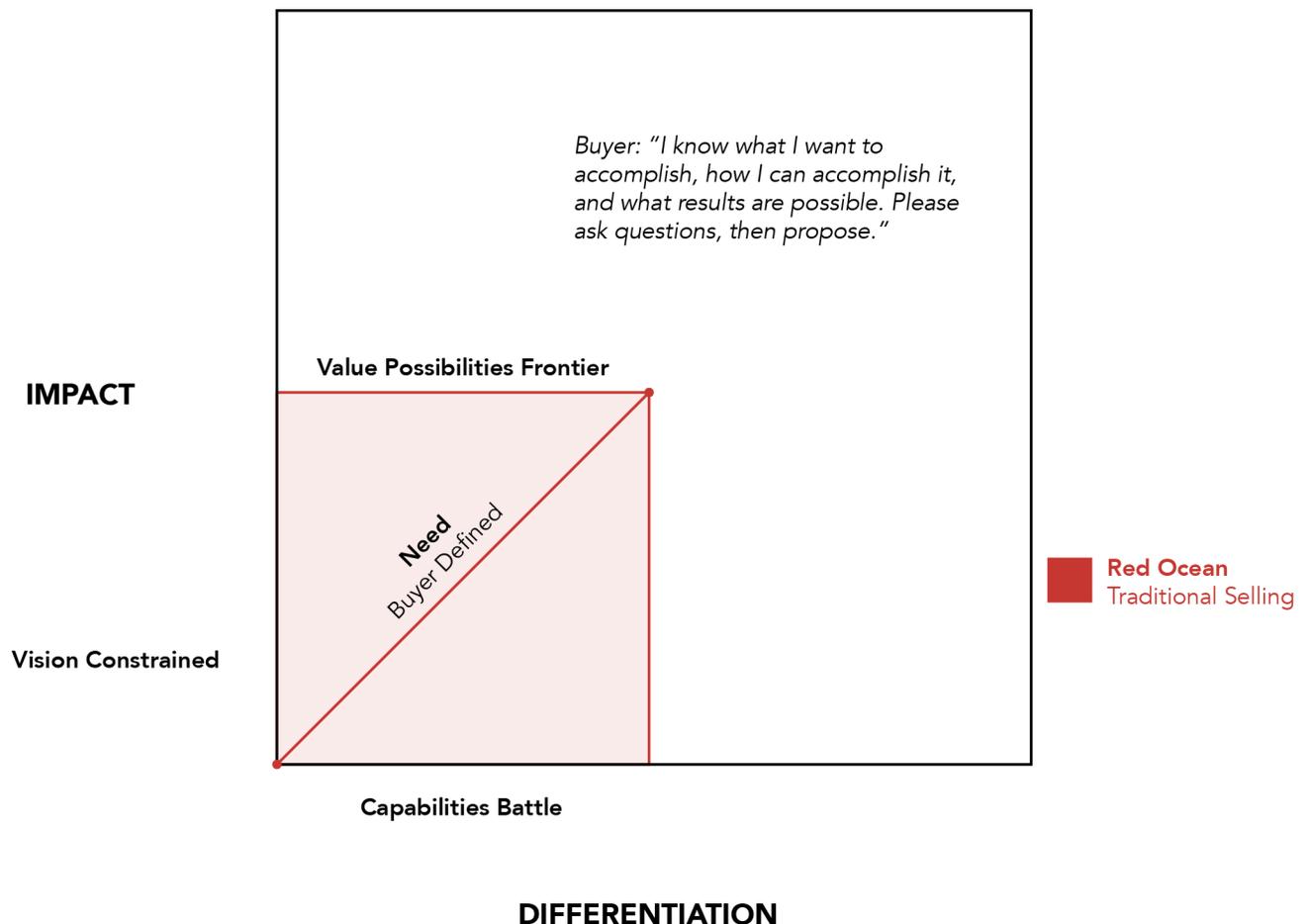
The Net Effect: Selling in the Blue Ocean

W. Chan Kim and Renée Maugorgne, the authors of *Blue Ocean Strategy*, one of the most popular business books in recent memory, argue that companies “succeed not by battling competitors, but rather by creating ‘blue oceans’ of uncontested market space. They assert that these strategic moves create a leap in value for the company, its buyers, and its employees while making the competition irrelevant.”^{8,9}

This is exactly what Insight Sellers do. At first, many sales look like figure 4 below.

When the buyer states a need and several competitors try to solve it (traditional consultative selling), sellers get stuck in a capabilities battle. Since buyers largely perceive sellers to have somewhat interchangeable capabilities, price pressure and low win rates rule the day.¹⁰

Figure 4. Value-Add in a Typical Sale



8 W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make Competition Irrelevant* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2005).

9 Wikipedia contributors, "Blue Ocean Strategy," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Ocean_Strategy.

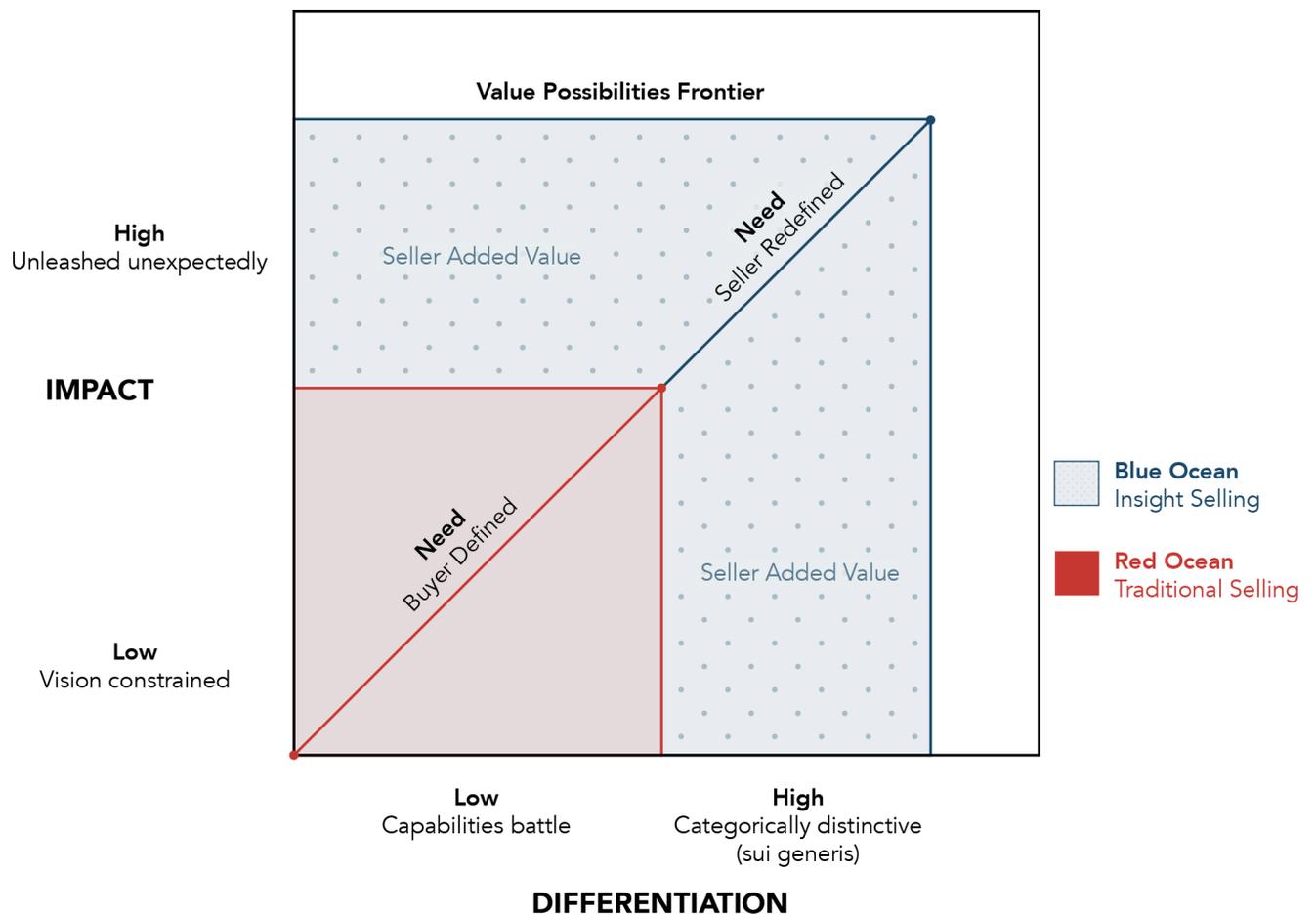
10 Schultz and Doerr, *What Sales Winners Do Differently*.

When sellers educate with new ideas that inspire buyers and question the status quo, buyer-thinking paradigms, and paths, several things happen:

- Sellers redefine the need
- Buyer perception of value they can realize is expanded by the seller; the seller maximizes the impact potential
- Other sellers continue to fight over the originally stated need; the Insight Seller is selling a significantly different solution to a changed buyer perception of need

The net effect is the seller creates a surge in value for the buyer while making himself categorically distinct from the competition (or sui generis), thus making the leap from the red ocean to the blue ocean (figure 5).

Figure 5. Insight Selling and the Blue Ocean



Tyranny of the “OR,” Genius of the “AND”

You might be saying to yourself, “I have always asked questions to uncover need, positioned my offerings and solutions, and have won. It doesn’t feel like red ocean to me.”

Indeed, consultative selling in this fashion has been successful for decades. Doing it well is still helpful and necessary to win. Sometimes it’s enough by itself, but less often now, and we predict even less often in the future.

The problem is when *everyone else is doing it too*. (Bully for you if your competitors still aren’t, but this is true of a smaller and smaller pool of sellers.) If your competitors are also good at core consultative selling, and the offering sets are similar, it’s difficult to differentiate. The result is price pressure and lower win rates.

However, if you practice core consultative selling *and* provide ideas that change buyer thinking, open up new value possibilities, and change their thinking paradigms, you help them make better decisions. They’ll get stronger impact and better results, and so will you: you’ll find yourself in the winner’s circle more often and with less price pressure.

As Collins and Porras would say, it’s not “OR,” it’s “AND.”¹¹ You don’t have to make a choice to practice core or advanced consultative selling in general. It’s more using both, and choosing which to apply as situations warrant.

¹¹ Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (HarperBusiness, 2011).

The Opportunity Ahead

Much to the chagrin of the oracles of Armageddon, consultative selling—even in its core form—is here to stay.

However, sellers who win go beyond traditional consultative selling. They inspire buyers with new ideas and perspectives. They question the status quo, and don't let buyers accept it, thus redefining reality. Sellers who win are Insight Sellers.

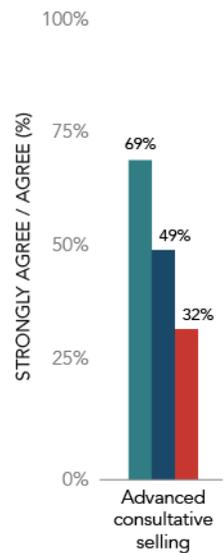
There's a race on already, however, for building these advanced consultative selling skills.

The RAIN Group Center for Sales Research recently published the *Top-Performing Sales Organization Benchmark Report*.¹² For this research initiative, we studied what separates those sales organizations that outperform the rest.

Of the Elite Performers (those in the top 7% of our database), 69% already have sellers skilled at advanced consultative selling. Of Top Performers (the top 20% of the database), 49% have these skills. But only about 3 in 10 of "The Rest," which represent 80% of our database, have these skills (figure 6).

All told, sellers at less than half of the organizations we studied have advanced consultative (or Insight) selling skills. For those that do—now and over the next several years—it will be a distinct competitive advantage.

Figure 6. Advanced Consultative Selling Skills



¹² Mike Schultz, John Doerr, and Mary Flaherty, *Top-Performing Sales Organization Benchmark Report* (RAIN Group, 2016). Top Performers are defined by revenue growth, profit growth, likelihood to achieve premium pricing, achieving challenging sales goals, and achieving superior opportunity win rates.

Turn Your Team into Insight Sellers

How to Change the Conversation, Drive Demand, and Differentiate through Selling

The landscape of buying and selling has changed more in recent years than it has in preceding decades. Buyers are more sophisticated and, thanks to the Internet, are awash in information and research. At the same time, executives are searching—often in vain—for new ways to innovate, compete, and improve their success.

When sellers bring valuable insights and ideas to buyers, they strengthen relationships, differentiate from competition, and win more sales.

Insight Selling by RAIN Group teaches sellers how to create conversations based on ideas, inspire with insights, and set themselves and their companies apart from the pack.

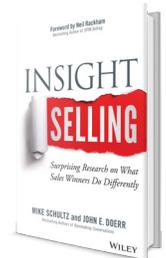
In Insight Selling by RAIN Group, participants will learn how to:

- Create conversations with buyers on the premise of ideas and insights
- Tell a Convincing Story that intrigues buyers and shapes their thinking
- Create insights by asking incisive, powerful questions
- Identify buyers most likely to be receptive to new ideas, and position ideas based on buyer preferences
- Use the concept of cognitive reframing to open executives' minds to new ideas
- Lead executive-level conversations that shape buyers' agendas for action
- Maximize relationship strength based on value

Your team will be introduced to the Insight Selling Reference Guide and Convincing Story Guide, two proprietary tools that will help your sellers internalize Insight Selling concepts and take their skills to the next level.

We Wrote the Book

In our groundbreaking book, *Insight Selling: Surprising Research on What Sales Winners Do Differently*, we found that sales winners educate buyers with new ideas and perspectives 3x more often than second-place finishers.



Delivery Options

- Tailored on-site, instructor-led programs
- Train-the-Trainer, Licensing
- Blended learning: Online and on-site, instructor-led curriculum

Contact Us to Transform Your Team

Insight Sellers:

- Educate buyers with new ideas and perspectives
- Collaborate with buyers
- Understand buyer decision making
- Persuade buyers they will achieve results with your product/solution

To transform your team into Insight Sellers, contact RAIN Group today at 508-405-0438 or info@raingroup.com.

About RAIN Group

Unleash the Sales Potential of Your Team with RAIN Group

RAIN Group is a sales training, assessment, and performance improvement company that helps leading organizations improve sales results. We've helped hundreds of thousands of salespeople, managers, and professionals in more than 62 countries increase their sales significantly with RAIN Group's consulting and sales methodology.

We can help you:

Implement Sales Training that Delivers Real Results

RAIN Group's sales training system inspires real change and delivers real results that last. Our rigorous approach includes sales team evaluation, customized training programs, robust reinforcement, and coaching to help you and your team develop sales and negotiation skills, and maximize your results.

Grow Your Key Accounts

At most companies, there's a huge, untapped opportunity to add more value—and thus sell more—to existing accounts. We help our clients capitalize on these revenue growth opportunities. Whether it's simply increasing cross-selling and up-selling or implementing a major strategic account management program, we can help.

Identify Who Can and Will Sell with Great Success

Our assessments measure sales attributes and skills, identifying the factors that really make a difference in sales performance. Whether you're looking to hire someone who can and will sell, or looking to improve sales performance, we'll help you build the most successful sales team.

Implement World-Class Sales Coaching

We coach sellers, professionals, and leaders individually and in groups to achieve the greatest and fastest increase in sales results. And we train and certify leaders and managers in our RAIN Sales Coaching system. Often, it's RAIN Sales Coaching that truly unlocks the team's potential, and keeps them motivated to produce the best results consistently.

Find out more about how RAIN Group can help you
unleash the sales potential of your team by visiting
raingroup.com or calling (508) 405-0438.

RAIN Group's Clients



Global Locations

Boston - Geneva - Johannesburg - London
Mumbai - Sydney - Toronto

Connect with Us



About the Authors

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