



# Want to grow your sales? Don't hire a relationship builder...

This business breakthrough report has to challenge your thinking. It has to challenge you because, according to the research, the key to sales success is to challenge!

Whether you sell complex solutions or simple products and services – if you want to grow sales the evidence says you should avoid building *'the-customer-is-always-right'* relationships.

What's reassuring is that even big businesses make the mistake of not challenging, preferring to focus on building non-challenging relationships.

Here's a global head of sales in the hospitality industry saying:

***"...this is really hard to look at. For the last ten years it's been our stated strategy to hire effective relationship builders."***

Neil Rackham, founder of a world-renowned sales training company, says:

***"...It (a customer relationship) is a reward that the salesperson earns by creating customer value."***

***If you help customers think differently and bring them new ideas – which is***



**...help your customers navigate their challenges**

***what the 'Challenger' rep does – then you earn the right to a relationship."***

A subtle but vital distinction.

### **In a nutshell**

You need to recruit **Challenger** sales people – not relationship builders.

And train all your existing sales people in the skills of being a Challenger.

Only then will you earn the right to a profitable customer relationship.

### **Towards the complex sale**

The simple product or simple service sale is prone to commoditisation – and this drives prices down.

For this reason, it's not surprising that 75%+ of businesses express their desire to be

seen as a solution provider (complex) rather than a product provider (simple).

But for solution selling to work you have to be seen to be solving a genuine problem for your customer.

For this reason, you need to be seen as a Challenger to help your customers navigate the maze of complexity they are dealing with.

### **A proven solution for you...**

Build 'Challenger' selling skills to grow sales.

This means getting better at teaching, tailoring to and asserting control with your customers.

## 5 types of sales person

A massive and sophisticated study of 6,000+ sales people across 90 companies points to 5 behavioural clusters of sales people:

- The Hard Worker
- The Challenger
- The Relationship Builder
- The Lone Wolf
- The Reactive Problem Solver

Which one best describes your business's approach to selling?

The evidence says it's the Challenger who is most likely to be a sales-star in more complex sales.

The Challenger pushes the customer, loves debate, understands the customer's business and always has a different view of the world.

As a result, they are best at dealing with known and unknown challenges the customer is experiencing. The Challenger helps customers navigate their maze of problems, delivers real value and earns the right to sales success.

## Xerox show us the way...

When Xerox adopted the 'Challenger' sales approach in 2013 they achieved sales growth worth £52m:

***"We want our sales force to deliver insight and value, not sales pitches. That's why our entire organization is being trained on the skills and behaviours that make Challengers successful."***

– Kevin Warren, Xerox

Xerox set about challenging their customers on the importance of colour.

By using a challenging insight with customers – that 77% of students agree that colour boosts performance – Xerox saw a 17% increase in sales.

## The most difficult time...

Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson were driven to find out what made for successful selling in 2009.

You'll find their findings in the excellent book *'The Challenger Sale'* and more on the Corporate Executive Board (CEB) website – see the download tools for more information on both.

What drove their initial research was the impact of the 2008 financial crash and the recession that followed. If you could be successful at selling at this time it would make you good at selling anytime!

## Learn to be a Challenger

Dixon and Adamson discovered that the skills, attitudes, behaviours and knowledge of being a Challenger can be learned.

And if your business installs the tools, training, coaching plus a reward and recognition process you'll build a more 'challenging' sales team.

It worked for SAP (a global software solutions business). Between 2012 and 2016, 5,500 sales people attended Challenger training.

As a result, they closed 26% more deals than before they were trained. They also generated 15% more sales opportunities than those who had not been trained.

What sort of difference would this make to your sales growth?

## The challenge of 3 key skills

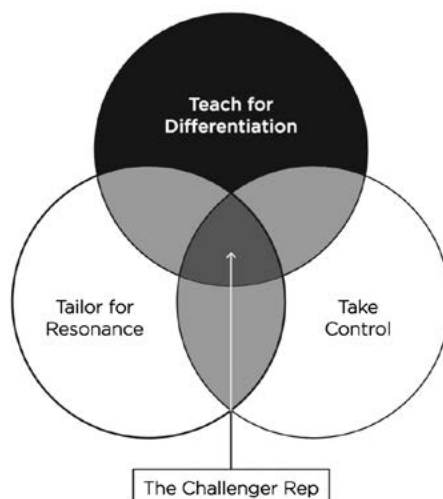
One skill is not enough. Success at being a Challenger depends on a **combination of 3 skills – teach, tailor, control**. Here's what Dixon and Adamson say:

***"If you TEACH without tailoring your approach to the different individuals within an organisation, you come off as irrelevant."***

***If you TAILOR to but don't teach your customers something new, you risk sounding like every other supplier."***

***If you TAKE CONTROL but offer no value, you risk being simply annoying."***

The combination of the 3 matters.



© Google Images

## 1. Challengers teach customers

Dixon and Adamson's evidence suggests that 53% of what drives B2B purchase decisions is the salesperson's ability to teach the customers something new or challenge their thinking.

Work out and share new ideas with your customer that can make them money or save them money – these are even more potent if they're ideas your customer hadn't realised even existed.

Just like Xerox did around the insight that colour boosts performance – this boosted Xerox sales by 17%!

But be commercial.

***"The sweet spot of customer loyalty is outperforming your competitors on those things you've taught your customers to be important."***

This means your business has work to do to strengthen the strengths you have (like Xerox

on colour) that will also give your customers a win.

Share a commercial insight and bring a unique and provocative perspective on your customer's business – it's far more valuable than sharing features and benefits alone.

## 2. Challengers tailor their message

Successful Challenger sales people seek widespread support across a customer's team – because they know in a complex decision consensus will be sought to make the decision.

It's not enough for a sales person to get the approval of the highest-ranking decision-maker.

The challenges and the messages that are relevant to the MD are different to those of the engineer using, say, a new robotic arm or new software tool. The quality manager will have another different perspective too. And what about the packaging team?

Challengers will position their sales pitch to different types of customer stakeholders within the organisation – they'll tailor their message.

It's hard to do this 'on the hoof'. It requires preparation and planning. Start to anticipate the different people involved in a buying decision, what their issues will be and your unique insight that can help them.

## 3. Challengers take control

If 80% of buying decisions are lost to no decision at all, what do you do?

Take control.

***"Challengers are assertive – they tend to 'press' customers a little – both on their thinking and around things like pricing."***

***"...being assertive does not mean being aggressive or, worse still, annoying or abusive. This is all about the reps' willingness and ability to stand their ground when the customer pushes back."***

– Dixon and Adamson, *The Challenger Sale*

Challengers are comfortable with tension and are unlikely to acquiesce to every customer demand. When necessary, they can press customers a bit – not just in terms of their thinking but around things like price.

## The challenge of being a Challenger?

You don't learn to be a Challenger overnight. Time and effort is required to learn and build the 3 skills – teach, tailor and control.

But you already know your business well. You already have a good understanding of your customers' businesses too. Investing time in seeking a unique insight for your customers that you can help with takes work. But it's work that can bring sales success.

To get a checklist of what to do in a Challenger sales conversation check out the download tools link you'll find on the last page.

**TIME TO DISAGREE:****“We are trying to make selling our ‘stuff’ as easy as we can – this all makes it seem way to complicated”**

Selling is hard because buying is hard.

Different studies suggest there's anywhere between 5 and 10 people involved in a buying decision.

Worse, the diversity of expectations makes it hard for people to agree on the purpose, price and success metrics of your sales offer.

It pays to accept that sales isn't easy and put the work into figuring out how you can teach, tailor and control your buyers' experience.

This becomes even more important when you realise that 53% of the buying decision relies on the quality of your buyers' overall experience of the sales process (the value-to-price ratio has only a 9% influence) according to the research by the authors.

**“My competition aren't challenging our customers, they are trying to make it as easy as possible to work with them!”**

If by making it easy to work with them they are simply being nice and investing lots of time and networking across your customers, they are being relationship builders. These rarely grow sales.

As stated earlier, the research by CEB, from the book 'The Challenger Sale', suggests that in complex sales the star sales performers are 200% more effective than all the other types of sales people (including relationship builders). And the star performers are more likely to be Challengers than any other type of sales person.

**Use the Business Bitesize Support Tools And Resources** to help you make the most of this edition of Business Bitesize – go here: [www.businessbitesize.com/pentlands](http://www.businessbitesize.com/pentlands)

**Your feedback is important to us.** We'd love to know what you think of this edition of Business Bitesize and how you use it or plan to use it. Also we'd welcome your suggestions for future editions of Business Bitesize. To give us your thoughts please use the simple feedback form here: [www.businessbitesize.com/pentlands](http://www.businessbitesize.com/pentlands)

And Challengers have a deep understanding of their customer's business, using that understanding to push their customer's thinking and teach them something about how they can make their business more effective – like Xerox did using colour. They are creating a debate with the customer that's relevant to the success of their customer. And then driving them to take action.

**“When business is tough it's about being in the right place at the right time whether you're challenging or not!”**

The research by Dixon and Adamson kicked off in 2009 when the last recession was at its height.

At this time most sales people were wondering when things would pick up again. However, the research showed that a few sales people continued to win sales for their business – Challenger sales people were recession-proof.

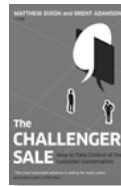
Those that succeeded used a blend of teach, tailor and control – these Challengers were winners even when it was as tough as it gets.

**“Please tell me more”**

Neil Rackham left the UK and successfully built a global sales training company from the USA.

So, when Neil suggests that:

**“...any sales force that ignores the message of this book does so at its peril.”**



...it's worth taking note. He goes on to say:

**“In recent years, customers have been demanding more depth and expertise. They expect salespeople to teach them things they don't know. These are the core skills of Challengers. They are the skills of the future”**

'The Challenger Sale' is essential reading for anyone wanting to grow sales.

**Get Your Bitesize Support Tools Now**

**4 helping hands for you...**

It can be really hard to acknowledge that the relationship builders are not helping us grow the sales across our businesses.

We need to see ourselves and our salespeople as Challengers.

And we need to turn our attention to building the skills of 'challenging' if we are to grow sales:

- 1. Be clear that relationship builders can be useful, but they are not your best source of sales growth – Challengers are**
- 2. Build your sales team's teaching skills and knowledge**
- 3. Build your team's tailoring skills and knowledge**
- 4. And build your team's abilities to show control when it's needed.**

**ULTIMATE ARGUMENT:**

**“How do I know that challenging our customers will help us grow sales for our business?”**

Xerox added 17% to sales by challenging their clients on colour and helping them see how to get value from the use of colour. This has been worth tens of millions of pounds to Xerox.

When you start to focus on challenging your customers you too could realise sales growth. But only if you give it a serious try.

What's to lose from better understanding your customer's business, engaging in debate, pushing your customer a little and sharing a different view of the world? You'll be demonstrating a level of care and a determination to help not seen before.

**STOP:** seeing relationship building as the path to increased sales

**START:** challenging your customers to think differently about their business





## Your next steps:

If you believe you can grow sales by building 'the-customer-is-always-right relationships', you're going to struggle.

SAP (global software solutions) increased the number of sales opportunities by 15%. They also increased sales-agreed by 26% – by being challenging with customers.

Xerox also challenged their customers and saw sales increase by £52 million.

Isn't it time you worked out how to hold more challenging conversations with your customers?

## See relationships as a result of challenging...

Neil Rackham, the world-renowned sales trainer, says:

***"To 'build relationships first and then sales will follow' no longer holds true..."***

***...a customer relationship is the result and not the cause of successful selling."***

And successful selling to business customers requires you to challenge – to teach, to tailor, to control.

## More tools and information for you:

Download the supporting tools and resources for more help on challenging your customers to grow sales in your business – use the URL link in the box below.

# To grow sales start challenging your customers more...

Being nice and likeable, thinking 'the-customer-is-always-right', being generous with your time, working hard to ensure that your customers' needs are met, being accessible and ready to serve are worthy relationship building skills.

However...

### 1. Relationship building is not your best source of sales growth

Relationship builders are useful, but Challengers are your best source of sales growth. Challengers create constructive tension in customer conversations by using a combination of three skills...

### 2. Build your sales people's TEACHING skills and knowledge

Teach your customers something new or challenge their thinking to create some constructive tension in your customer conversations. Work out and share new ideas with your customer that can make them money or save money (like Xerox)...

### 3. Build your TAILORING skills and knowledge

Seek widespread support across your customer's team – in a complex decision your customer will seek consensus across their people, only then will they make a decision. Tailor your messages (and your challenges) to each of the people involved in the buying decision.

### 4. Build your sales people's ability to show CONTROL when it's needed

Don't acquiesce to every customer demand. When necessary, press customers a bit – not just in terms of their thinking but around things like price. But remember, if you take control but offer no value, you risk being simply annoying!

Check out the downloadable tools for more on these insights and skills – use the URL link in the box below.

Use the insights in this Business Breakthrough report to help you grow your sales success over time remembering that 'Rome wasn't built in a day' and that sustainable success comes from sustainable action on the 3 skills – like it did for SAP.

**YOUR SUPPORT TOOLS ARE HERE: Go to the link below and you'll find a selection of practical support tools to help you better challenge your customers so that you too can achieve the sales growth you want for your business.**

**Find the support tools to help you here - [www.businessbitesize.com/pentlands](http://www.businessbitesize.com/pentlands)**

**business  
bitesize**



business breakthroughs  
in minutes

**PENTLANDS**  
Accountants and advisors  
for growing businesses

