

# THE NEW Action Selling



HOW TO SELL  
LIKE A PROFESSIONAL  
EVEN IF YOU THINK  
YOU ARE ONE

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Complimentary Copy: *Introduction & Preface*  
visit our website at [www.actionselling.com](http://www.actionselling.com)

# INTRODUCTION

*How to sell like a professional,  
even if you think you are one.*

**C**an selling be a genuine profession, like engineering or medicine? Or is it just an occupation, its success subject to so many buyer whims and depending so heavily on the innate personality traits of the salesperson that it cannot be classified as a profession?

Professions have rules, they have recognized patterns, they have organized bodies of knowledge that can be taught and then put to use proactively, with predictable results. Selling skills, on the other hand, are usually presented as collections of reactive tips and tricks that are merely responses to various things a prospect might say or do: If the customer happens to say X, you reply with Y. That is, if you're nimble enough to remember 50 different Xs and Ys.

As for building personal relationships that grease the wheels of the sales process, most sales-training programs offer only wishy-washy human-relations techniques that lead mainly to dead ends. Salespeople get some sketchy information about personality types and then are supposed to modify their language or their personas according to their guess about whether a particular customer is a "sensor" or a "feeler."

I know people who are fascinated by personality typologies in principle. I also know people who are fascinated by astrology. But I have never met any top salespeople who attribute their success to an uncanny ability to classify a customer quickly as an “intuitive” rather than a “thinker” (or a Scorpio instead of a Taurus) and then brilliantly adjust their own behavior to match. I’ll bet you’ve never met one either.

Selling *can* be approached as a bona-fide profession. This is possible because research shows that for every major purchase, buyers follow a consistent, predictable pattern in making a series of decisions that lead up to the final purchasing choice. All buyers, regardless of their temperaments, make the same decisions in the same order. If you start with that predictable pattern and build a body of knowledge and skills upon it, you have the makings of professionalism.

That is what Action Selling does. Action Selling is a system based upon the proven conviction that the entire sales process can, indeed, be approached as a profession. When it is, the results are nothing short of revolutionary.

This book explains how Action Selling works by telling the story of a veteran salesperson, Matt, and his new boss, Joe. The characters are fictional. But since 1990, when Action Selling was introduced, stories like Matt’s have played out in real life thousands of times, in hundreds of companies.

Veteran salespeople introduced to the Action Selling system for the first time often begin with justifiable skepticism. “Oh, no,” they figure, “not another sales training program.” They finish with a different kind of regret. One common statement: “If I had known this 10 years ago, I’d be comfortably retired by now.”

You have probably read other books about selling. Why should you read this one? Here are some factors that make Action Selling unique.

## WHY ACTION SELLING IS UNIQUE

- Action Selling is a full-scale, proactive communication process for planning, conducting, closing, and following up on a sale. It is not just a collection of reactive and manipulative tricks or techniques. It treats the buyer with respect, leading to lasting relationships and repeat business.
- Action Selling provides a research-proven conceptual framework, skills, and knowledge that turn selling from an occupation into a profession.
- Action Selling recognizes and follows the documented sequence of buying decisions that every customer makes during the purchasing process.
- Action Selling applies not only to a company's formal sales force but to virtually any customer-contact situation. Thus, it offers a structure, a skill set, and a common language that have the potential to transform the entire sales-and-service culture of an organization.
- To a degree unmatched by any other program or method, Action Selling merges relationship skills with selling skills. And it addresses both skill sets in a way that is useful, productive, and easy to apply.
- Action Selling asks you to learn a few key skills. If you learn them and practice them, your results will improve. You will develop stronger, longer-lasting relationships with customers. You'll make more sales. You'll make more money.

How do I know that Action Selling does all of these things? Because salespeople and their companies have proven it repeatedly.

*The Action Selling program provides a great foundation for quality and professionalism. The concepts are working to the advantage of our sales team as we grow and expand as a company. I strongly endorse Action Selling.*

MICHAEL BEDDOR  
CEO - JAPS-OLSON COMPANY  
TOP RANKED COMMERCIAL PRINTER

*"Action Selling has definitely become a permanent process within our company! I would estimate the long-term value of this selling system at ... unlimited."*

STEVE GROSSMAN  
MEGA HERTZ COMPANY

*"Since I learned Action Selling, I walk into every selling situation with a different mindset: I have a solid agenda. I don't waste anyone's time, including my own. And, it's easy to sell value with Action Selling!"*

MICHAEL MARQUEZ  
TECHNICAL SALES  
QUADNA — INC'S FASTEST GROWING COMPANIES

*"Logical, robust, and straightforward...Action Selling is the key ingredient in supporting our business growth."*

TOM ROWLAND  
VP BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT  
TEAM SOLUTIONS

Action Selling describes a professional sales call as a sort of drama, a structured play in which all of the action and dialogue move toward a predetermined conclusion. The drama takes place in nine acts. Those acts are based upon—and follow the sequence of—five buying decisions that every customer makes, predictably and in order.

The story told in this book is organized in the same way. For one thing, the 9-Act structure serves as an accurate metaphor for the way a professional sales call works. For another, it makes the Action Selling process easy to remember and easy to discuss with other salespeople in a company that has adopted the system.

You are about to meet a guy named Joe, who will explain the whole process simply and clearly. See if some of the mistakes he points out in Matt's current approach to selling sound uncomfortably familiar to you.

I'll tell you right now how the story ends. Matt is going to be extremely happy that Joe showed up. I think you will be extremely happy that you read this book. Here's wishing you every success as a professional salesperson. You're going to make a lot of money.

DUANE SPARKS  
CHAIRMAN, THE SALES BOARD, INC.  
AND CREATOR OF ACTION SELLING

# PREFACE

*You are going to make  
a lot of money.*

**M**att kept the rented car conservatively in the center lane of the freeway while he wondered what to make of his passenger. Joe, the company's new national sales manager and Matt's new boss, was an enigma.

The scuttlebutt had it that Joe was regarded at his previous company as a superhero, a worker of wonders. Supposedly he had introduced a new system that boosted sales, in a very competitive market, by something like 30 percent in a single year.

But while most executives who achieve such quick and dramatic results do it by alienating their subordinates in some way, leading eventually to trouble for their companies, the rumor was that Joe's salespeople worshipped him. When Joe showed up, they began to close more sales. Their commissions skyrocketed.

No doubt Joe planned some kind of major shake-up for his new sales force, but so far Matt had no clue what form it might take. The pair had met only hours ago, when Joe joined him for a ride-along on two client calls during Matt's swing through Seattle, the western edge of his territory. During both calls, Joe sat quietly, observing, talking no more than necessary to be polite, while Matt carried the ball.

The calls had gone pretty well from Matt's point of view. Not that he had closed a blockbuster deal or anything, but as he'd explained to Joe, these were new prospects. His intention at this stage was mainly to introduce himself, to present his company's offerings, and to leave some product brochures, which both clients had promised to read. Well, not promised, exactly, but they had taken the brochures. As Matt said to Joe, "First things first."

Matt was an experienced sales rep, with six years on this job and three with a previous employer. He regarded himself as a very capable salesperson. But Matt also recognized that his numbers were not those of a stellar performer. If the secret to Joe's success was to shoot the workhorses and keep only the stars, Matt could be in trouble.

How to impress Joe with his initiative?

Just in time to make it look like a considered decision instead of a last-second impulse, Matt swung the car into an exit lane. "Say, Joe, we've got some time before we have to be at the airport, and United Systems' headquarters is right there," Matt

said, pointing to a glass office building that loomed just east of the freeway. “Let’s drop in on Shirley Walters. She’s a great client. A terrific person. You’ll like her. I’m sure she’ll be in her office this time of day.”

“What’s your commitment objective for the call?” Joe asked, as Matt made the light at the end of the exit ramp and took a quick right into United Systems’ parking lot.

“My what? Oh, my objective! Well, you know, just to put in some face time with a good client. Let her know I’m thinking of her.” Matt found a parking space near the building’s main entrance and opened his door, prepared to step out. “Oh, and introduce her to you, of course,” he added. “You’re a new VIP in the company. Shirley will like that.”

Joe didn’t move from his seat. “No,” he said, freezing Matt with one foot on the pavement. “Those are objectives, and they’re valid enough. But I mean what’s your *Commitment Objective*? What do you want Shirley to commit to do as a result of this call?”

“I’m not familiar with that term,” Matt said stiffly, suddenly on the defensive.

“Get back in the car, Matt,” Joe ordered. “Let’s go to the airport.”

“But Shirley is one of my best...”

“Matt, starting today, we’re going to become a professional sales force,” Joe said. “We will not waste a client’s time or our

own by dropping in to shoot the breeze. New Rule No. 1: Never call on a customer without a specific Commitment Objective in mind.”

Matt climbed back into the car.

“A Commitment Objective is a goal,” Joe continued, “but it’s a particular kind of goal. Every sale is a process, a series of actions. A Commitment Objective is a goal you set that requires the client to make a commitment—to agree to take some action that will let you both move to the next step in the process. If you aren’t moving ahead, you’re wasting your time and the customer’s. So, no Commitment Objective, no call. Period.”

Matt put the car back on the highway and drove in silence, gripping the wheel more tightly than before.

“I’ve offended you,” Joe said. “Talk to me.”

Matt took a breath and let it out slowly. “OK, that all makes sense, I think,” he said. “But as for ‘we’re going to be professionals,’ Joe, I’ve been a professional salesman for nine

***A Commitment Objective is a particular kind of goal in a sales process.***

years. I’m raising two kids on my ability as a professional salesman. I don’t like being called an amateur.”

“Fair enough,” Joe said. “Believe me, Matt, I’m not trying to insult you. But the fact is that like nine out of 10 people who make a living in sales, you aren’t a professional—yet. Oh, you have all the basic requirements; that was plain enough in the

calls we made. You're personable, you're empathetic, you're inquisitive, and you genuinely seem to care about your clients and their needs.

"But professionals operate within a certain framework that draws on a body of skills and knowledge that you're not aware of," Joe said. "That's what you're going to learn. When you do, you're going to make a lot of money. And our sales force is going to light up this industry."

*Oh, oh, Matt thought, as the airport exit came in sight. The new boss thinks he's Napoleon. Time to update the resume.*

"Don't worry," Joe smiled, as if reading his mind. "I don't have delusions of grandeur. It's just that I've learned a system that treats the sales process as a genuinely professional activity, where if you follow certain rules, you can get consistent and predictable results. It's called Action Selling."

*It gets worse, Matt thought. Another sales-training program. He stifled a groan and concentrated on looking pleasant. Let me guess: Before the customer is ready to buy, I should try to box him into a corner with phony choices: "Would you like 100 or just 50 of those, Mr. Smith?" As if my clients can't see that manipulative crap coming a mile away.*

Out loud, Matt said, "Action Selling?"

***A sale is like a  
drama with the  
Action moving  
toward a  
predetermined  
conclusion.***

“According to Action Selling,” Joe began, “every successful sale is like a little drama, with the action moving toward a predetermined conclusion. There are nine ‘acts’ in this drama. They take place in a particular order, based on the predetermined sequence in which every customer makes certain decisions that lead up to a purchase.”

“Whoa,” Matt said. “The predetermined sequence of what?”

“The documented sequence of buying decisions that every customer makes in a predetermined order, leading up to a sale,” Joe said. “Don’t worry, I’ll explain. We already started at Act 1, which is where you identify your Commitment Objective before every call. That’s the foundation of the whole thing. But hey, heads up, here’s the airport.”

Matt took the exit and followed the signs to the rental-car return area. Well, the idea of Commitment Objectives sounded interesting, at least. And he had always thought of the sales role as a bit like acting. Maybe this would be interesting after all.