

# 5 Secrets to Record Breaking Sales

What Top Performers Do That Others Don't?

*By Duane Sparks, Chairman, The Sales Board, Inc.*



The principle mission of the professional salesperson is to gain commitment from customers. If you think about it, that's the only real reason to employ a sales force at all. Yet to most salespeople, the skills most vital to gaining commitments consistently—and, therefore, to achieving record-breaking sales—appear to be secrets.

***“Sales Success is all about skills. But the question is, which skills?”***

Let that sink in. We are asserting the existence of a particular set of identifiable skills that are most crucial to enabling salespeople to do the thing they are hired to do. And we're saying that most people employed in sales roles don't even know what those skills are, never mind how to use or improve them.

Where do we get off making an outrageous claim like that? How do we know?

## **What We Know About Selling Skills**

First, let's concede that any number of attributes and personality traits—motivation, an upbeat and outgoing nature—may play a role in sales success. The trouble is, you can't teach personality and motivation. And salespeople can't “learn” it.

***“You can't teach personality or motivation.”***

We've all seen highly motivated salespeople who worked very hard and made a lot of sales calls. Yet in the same sales force, there always seems to be someone else who makes fewer calls and lands a lot more business. Certainly, hard work is part of the formula. But the quality of that work has more to do with success.

Quality is all about skills. The question becomes, which skills?

***“The quality of sales work has more to do with success...”***

Since 1990, The Sales Board has been measuring the skills of working salespeople before, during and after training. We also have measured changes in their sales performance (revenue and margins) following training. Because we measured skill development at the same time, we successfully tied those performance changes to improvements in specific skills. This ground breaking research has exposed five secrets to record breaking sales.

More than 400,000 salespeople, from over 3,500 companies, have been benchmarked and then tracked in this manner, using our validated Selling Skills Assessment instrument. That's how we know which skills have the greatest impact on sales performance—that is, which skills really enable salespeople to improve at gaining commitment from customers.

***“There are five (5) selling skills that have the most impact...”***

We have learned there are five selling skills that have the most impact on performance improvement.

Salespeople who complete the Action Selling training program and then go on to achieve a predetermined competency level at each of the five skills become Action Selling Certified. These **certified salespeople improve their revenue and margin performance at six times (6X) the rate of noncertified** salespeople.

That's the basis on which we assert that the skills identified, taught, and drilled in the Action Selling learning system produce higher revenue and better margin performance.

And why do we say that these skills appear to be secrets? The benchmark tests we conduct prior to training tell us so.

***“Certified salespeople improve at 6X...”***

## **The Five Secrets Revealed**

Here are the skills that decades of research and measurement show are most critical to improving sales performance. Think of them as the 5 Secrets to Record-Breaking Sales.

**CRITICAL SKILL #1 – Buyer/Seller Relationship.** In the course of every major sale, customers follow a predetermined set of buying decisions. They don't make a single buying decision, they make several. And they always make those decisions in the same order. Salespeople who know this, and who match their sales process with the customer's buying process, are able to forge far stronger relationships. They begin to walk arm-in-arm with the customer as they arrive at the best solution for the customer's needs.

**Here's Secret #1:** Benchmark tests reveal that 82% of salespeople fail to differentiate themselves.

**CRITICAL SKILL #2 – Sales Call Planning.** After all the chatter about sales enablement, most companies today lack a well-defined and sustainable sales process. Very few have documented the Best Sales Practices that lead to lasting commitments from customers. As a consequence, salespeople are not coached on how to plan and orchestrate their sales calls and sales cycles properly. Every sales conversation should end in some kind of commitment from the customer—an agreement to do something that will move the sales cycle process forward. This just isn't happening.

**Here's Secret #2:** 99% of salespeople set the wrong sales call objectives.

**CRITICAL SKILL #3 – Questioning Skills.** Most salespeople do not ask the right types of questions. And nearly all salespeople fail to ask the best questions. This happens even if they prepare questions prior to the sales call, which most don't. The impact of poor questioning skills is horrendous. It leads to resistance in the form of stalls and objections, bad presentations that offer improper solutions, failure to differentiate from the competition—and missed sales opportunities.

**Here's Secret #3:** 86% of salespeople ask the wrong questions.

**CRITICAL SKILL #4 – Presentation Skills.** Most salespeople claim that this is the skill they are best at. Indeed, managers tend to hire salespeople who have “the gift of gab.” But in reality, quality is far more important than quantity when it comes to making presentations. When salespeople zero in on presenting only specific solutions to previously agreed-upon needs, they do less talking. And they rarely fail.

**Here's Secret #4:** 95% of salespeople talk too much. When they talk too much, they listen too little.

**CRITICAL SKILL #5 – Gain Commitment.** This is what it all comes down to. It's the principal mission of every salesperson. Every sales call should end with the customer agreeing to take some action that will keep the process moving ahead. But if you don't ask for commitment, you will never get it. Why on earth would customers commit to do something if they haven't been asked?

**Here's Secret #5:** 64% of salespeople fail to ask for commitment on sales calls. That is appalling.



## What Happens When These Skills Are Mastered?

Because we have benchmark-tested more than 400,000 salespeople in thousands of organizations, we know what skill levels exist in sales forces prior to Action Selling training.

Since we assess salespeople several months after the completion of the training, we measure long-term retention as opposed to short-term memory skills. The skills reinforcement period gives students the time to practice and fully implement the new skills on the job.

With this reinforcement and measurement process, salespeople know what the five critical skills look like at a mastery level. By tracking the revenue salespeople generate and the margins they achieve, we know exactly what happens on a long-term basis after those Five Critical Selling Skills are learned and improved:

- Action Selling certified salespeople boost their performance at a rate **six times higher** than salespeople who are not trained.
- Action Selling certified salespeople increase their sales at **twice the rate** of salespeople who are trained but do not certify.
- Mastery counts. To be skilled is not just to know how a thing should be done but to do the thing skillfully.

***“We changed our entire sales process because of Action Selling training and doubled our revenues over last year!”***

**Doug Donley President  
Advantage Golf, Inc.**

## Why This Works

In light of centuries of study and research into education and learning, it ought to be no secret how to design a training process that leads to genuine, tangible improvements in job performance. But given most of the sales training that goes on in companies, this appears to be a mystery. Studies show that 90% of sales training doesn't produce results.

Here are a few important rules that apply to any sales training effort. They help explain why the Action Selling process achieves actual boosts in sales performance.

**Teach skills, not traits.** Training should focus on skills that we know can be taught and learned. Much as we might like to transform the personalities of our salespeople, we lack the ability—and so do they. What we can improve, with proper training and support, is their skills.

***“90% of sales training doesn't produce results.”***

**Reinforce on the job.** Management support must include help in transferring learning from the course into the field. If training doesn't include the necessary measurement and reinforcement ingredients for learning transfer, don't waste your time and money on it.

**Teach the right skills.** There is little point in mastering skills that do not produce tangible improvements in job performance. In fact, you should be able to predict what change will occur if a given student's benchmark skill level is raised to mastery level upon certification. Without some reasonable guarantee of a return on investment in training, why do it?

***“Sales Managers—If you want the best sales team in your industry, use Action Selling to develop them.”***

**Craig Rand Dir Quality/Training  
WESCO Distribution**

**Focus on the highest impact skills.** We can't teach salespeople 100 different things. But we can teach the five (5) most important (critical) selling skills.

**Measure, measure, measure.** You've heard the expression, “What gets measured, gets done.” In training, what gets measured gets learned. Measurement of knowledge gained and of skills applied on the job provides motivation to learn because it holds students accountable. If a training initiative lacks a validated assessment that measures mastery of the skills being taught, don't do it.

***“In training, what gets measured gets learned.”***

## Learn How to Break Sales Records

No amount of training will produce record-breaking sales unless it is built upon the principles I've described. The skills must be teachable, they must be measurable, and they must produce predictable outcomes. Action Selling meets those criteria perfectly.

The 5 Secrets to Record-Breaking Sales are no longer secrets. So how much untapped potential exists in your sales force?

You can find out by taking our Free Selling Skills Benchmark Assessment at:

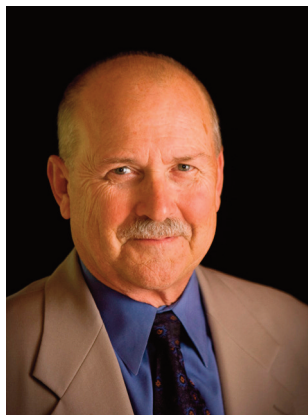
<http://www.actionselling.com/sales-resources/selling-skills-assessment/>

Need more insight into the 5 Critical Selling Skills and the proven 9-step Action Selling Process that produces record-breaking sales? Visit us online to order the Action Selling Book or call us at 1-800-232-3485.

<http://www.actionselling.com/sales-books.asp>

**What are you waiting for? You have records to break!**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Duane Sparks is chairman and founder of The Sales Board, a Minneapolis-based strategic sales training company that has trained and certified more than 400,000 salespeople in more than 3,500 groups in the system and skills of Action Selling™. Sparks has guided companies through every phase of business development, from start-up, turnaround, survival and rapid growth. He has also written five sales books, personally facilitated more than 300 Action Selling training sessions and continues to engage in the business and art of the strategic sales process.

Duane Sparks is the author of Five **Sales Books**:



**Action Selling:** *How To Sell Like A Professional, Even If You Think You Are One*

**Selling Your Price:** *How To Escape The Race To The Bargain Basement*

**Questions:** *The Answer To Sales*

**Masters of Loyalty:** *How To Turn Your Work Force Into A Loyalty Force*

**Sales Strategy From The Inside Out:** *How Complex Selling Really Works*

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