



Part of the *Action Selling* Series
by Duane Sparks



The Hunter/Farmer Paradigm Is Dead

How a New Breed of Sales Pros Can Change the Game

LEARN HOW TO:

- Elevate your team's performance
- Create a well-documented, effective sales process
- Train on the sales skills that have the most impact
- Transfer skills into consistent field success



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INTRODUCTION

So-called experts claim that there are two types of business developers: Farmers and Hunters. You're either one or the other. Consequently, you fit one type of sales position or the other: new account rep or current account rep. In my experience—and I have spent 30-plus years thinking deeply about sales—if you see everyone heading in the same direction on a topic like this, they are usually all wrong. Here's why I think that everyone is confused about this one.

BACKGROUND

The guy who claims to have started the whole Hunter/Farmer discussion was a psychotherapist. There's the first clue that this could be a bunch of hooey. Thom Hartmann proposed the Farmer/Hunter metaphor to explain the origins of what we today call Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD.

What it boils down to is that thousands of years ago we were all hunters. As agriculture developed, we gradually became farmers. (Stay with me here.) Over many centuries, most humans adapted to farming cultures. But some people retained the old hunter characteristics. Why? Because they had ADHD! What's more, those of us who hunt today are the ones with short attention spans, apathy toward other humans, poor planning and organizational skills, a distorted sense of time, and high degrees of impatience and impulsiveness. To top it off, twice as many men as women suffer from this affliction.

Hey, Thom, wait a minute.

After a little further research, I learned that Thom is now a famous talk show guy. He has a son with ADHD who was told by another psychologist that he had a "brain disorder." Hartmann considered that a bad label for anyone to bear. So he created the Hunter/Farmer concept for his son and others to provide a less destructive way for them to see themselves: "No, Bobby, you don't have a brain disorder, you're a Hunter." For that—and only for that—I give him a ton of credit.

But now let's talk about salespeople.

I once heard a sales training company describe Hunters as "transactional-oriented cold-callers who deal with 'default buyers' where benefits are limited to narrowly framed needs." Farmers were described this way: "They employ a 'customer-centric' method and sow seeds of trust while harvesting increased sales and loyalty." (Please don't stop reading. I'm not the one who said it.) Another enormous bunch of hooey!

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One more log for the bonfire: There are many well-respected HR talent-management companies that will conduct personnel assessments to identify if you have Farmers or Hunters working in your company. They charge a lot of money to do this. You get a four-color report on each person you test. You find out who is a Farmer and who is a Hunter, and you get bullet-point instructions about the kind of work to assign them. Here's an example:

He/She is Mostly a Hunter

- Brings in new business from large accounts
- Focus is on prospect conversion
- Minimal post-sale follow-up
- Will expand coverage beyond current customers
- Promotes products hoping to find a match
- Functions well in a "networking" role
- Likely comfortable gaining agreement to move sales forward (Duh!)
- Needs flexibility to try new things
- Likes to provide solutions

He/She is Mostly a Farmer

- Optimizes sales in existing accounts
- Comfortable penetrating additional buyers in accounts
- Proactive in strengthening relationships
- Creatively matches products to multiple or diverse needs
- Sells more to fewer people
- Proactively seeks customer feedback to solve problems
- Demonstrates personal attention to customers
- Interested in continuous education to help customers
- Driven to never take customers for granted

Two things especially annoy me about these so-called screening reports. First, if you take most of the statements and turn them around, they are revealed as total BS. Farmers don't take customers for granted. So, Hunters take customers for granted? Hunters like to provide solutions. Farmers don't? I hope your company isn't paying a lot of money for this crap. Secondly, these Farmers are really starting to tick me off. Suck it up, Farmers! I guess I must be a Hunter to feel that way.

This brings me back to the one thing I liked about Hartmann: He changed the name to protect the innocent. In keeping with that principle, don't tell these unfortunates that they're Farmers. If they're capable of hunting inside current accounts, maybe all they need to do is learn how to hunt in a different patch. And don't tell the other poor wretches that they're Hunters, either. If you do,



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you'll be condemning them as overly aggressive brutes who can't organize their own sock drawers, much less follow up on anything important.

THE NEW BREED OF SALES PROFESSIONAL

Here's the direction I think the entire discussion should take instead. Today, with proper training, a new breed of sales professionals has emerged. I'll call them 2.0 Sales Pros. The breed contains every variety of personality identified in typical personality-style assessments. Yes, well-trained amiables and analyticals can sell the socks off the untrained drivers and expressives of yesterday.

Granted, if you arm a driver (who can put two sentences together) with a genuinely effective sales strategy you might have a dangerously successful salesperson on your hands. But I am convinced that the personality pigeonholing we have done in the past doesn't hold water anymore. Why not? Because there is far better training available today.

Here is a new metaphorical breakdown to chew on:

<u>Hunter</u>	<u>Farmer</u>	<u>2.0 Sales Pro</u>
Meat eater	Vegetarian	Balanced diet
Proactive	Reactive	Plans to win
Aggressive	Laid back	Flexible
Prospector	Planner	Plans & Executes
Competitive	Collaborative	Orchestrator
Always closes	Rarely closes	Asks for commitment
Pitches	Listens	Questions & Listens
Brutish	Subtle	Tactful

The characteristics of the 2.0 Sales Pro require that the salesperson must learn and develop certain skills for managing sales relationships. But they can do this and still live in their own skin. No personality overhaul is required.

The reason is that the skills required to be a 2.0 Sales Pro are teachable and learnable. They're not tied to the salesperson's deep-seated and virtually unchangeable personality style.

For example, "competitive" and "collaborative" don't have to be mutually exclusive traits. The same person can have both of these great characteristics. You

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■ Since selling is a team sport today, companies need to arm their service reps, technical nerds, inside sales reps and management team with the same skill sets that the sales professional has.

just change the game a bit. The single-handed gunslinger no longer wins in today's sales world. The new game is to leverage all your available human capital by involving coworkers and various departments in your existing sales process. You must become an Orchestrator of resources.

Of course, this works best when your sales process is effective and everyone is trained on the same process. Since selling is a team sport today, companies need to arm their service reps, technical nerds, inside sales reps and management team with the same skill sets that the sales professional has. When you do this, your salespeople will feel more comfortable bringing these resources to the table. They will trust that people in other parts of the company know and understand how to participate without screwing things up.

So what do you need to make the leap from Hunters and Farmers to 2.0 Sales Pros?

1. A well-documented and effective sales process that can be used consistently by everyone in every sales call.
2. Training that is focused on the specific skills that make a difference in sales performance.
3. A learning system that effectively transfers the newly learned skills into consistent field success.

1. A WELL-DOCUMENTED AND EFFECTIVE SALES PROCESS

I'm astonished by how poorly most sales training programs are documented. Go to the web sites of prominent sales training companies, and all you'll see are stock photos of two people shaking hands or a facilitator standing by a flip chart while students look on smiling with stars in their eyes. Guys, if you've got a sales process, show it to me!

Now go to www.ActionSelling.com.



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Here is what you'll see:



That's it. There's the whole Action Selling program in a single, easy-to-understand image. Our customers have called it "The GPS for Selling" because it is an easy-to-use, factual and accurate description of how a sale should happen. It is a complete communications process for planning, conducting, closing and following up on a sale. Everyone on the team can see exactly how to use it, no matter what stage of the sales relationship they're in. It applies to every customer-contact situation.

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Is it effective? The proof is found when you measure the degree to which newly learned skills are being used in the field and what happens to sales as a result. Since most sales-training companies have no formal method of measuring what is learned or, more importantly, what is being applied in the field, it's nearly impossible to tie learning to any performance change.

We tackled this challenge in 1995 when we developed the Action Selling Certification System. The system measures the students' learning and their ability to apply critical selling skills before, during and after training. The measurements are then mapped to the performance change of each student and then to the changes in company sales. Since other sales-training companies are incapable of doing this degree of measurement, they are unable to accurately tie



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learning to performance change. They can't prove that the material they teach actually boosts performance.

Maybe the fact that most sales training companies can't show you what their sales process looks like explains why they can't find a way to measure the business impact of the "skills" they teach. Can you measure a mirage?

2. TRAINING FOCUSED ON SPECIFIC SKILLS

This point is huge if you want to graduate from the Hunter/Farmer nonsense and create 2.0 Sales Pros. You can't expect people to change their behavior in a hundred different ways. You have to narrow it down to the most critical things to learn. In addition, those "things" have to be skills. They can't be motivational nostrums or personality traits. Believe me, you don't have the time—and nobody has the ability—to reconfigure personalities. Skills, however, are learnable, teachable and measurable.

If we can't change salespeople in a hundred different ways, what are the critical skills to teach and how many are there?

In 1990, we began our mission of finding the skills that make the most difference in improving sales performance. In 1995, we developed the instruments that measure skill acquisition and skill application. By comparing skill improvement and sales-performance improvement attributable to specific skills, we were able to identify the most impactful skills. Five stood head and shoulders above the rest. We now call them **The Five Critical Selling Skills:**

- 1. Managing the Buyer/Seller Relationship:** When sellers understand the series and sequence of minor decisions that buyers go through when making a major decision, and they skillfully match their sales process with the buyer's decision-making process, success rates improve dramatically.
- 2. Sales Call Planning:** What is your Commitment Objective for this sales call? Failure to have a Commitment Objective is the most frequent mistake made by salespeople. What is your questioning plan for the call? What's your Company Story? Poor planning skills often result from the lack of a clearly defined sales process to follow.
- 3. Questioning Skills:** The impact of poor questioning skills is horrendous. Eighty-six percent of salespeople ask the wrong types of questions. Even more fail to prepare a solid game plan for questioning. The Question is the number-one tool in every salesperson's kit. Unfortunately, it's either used improperly or it's rusty.

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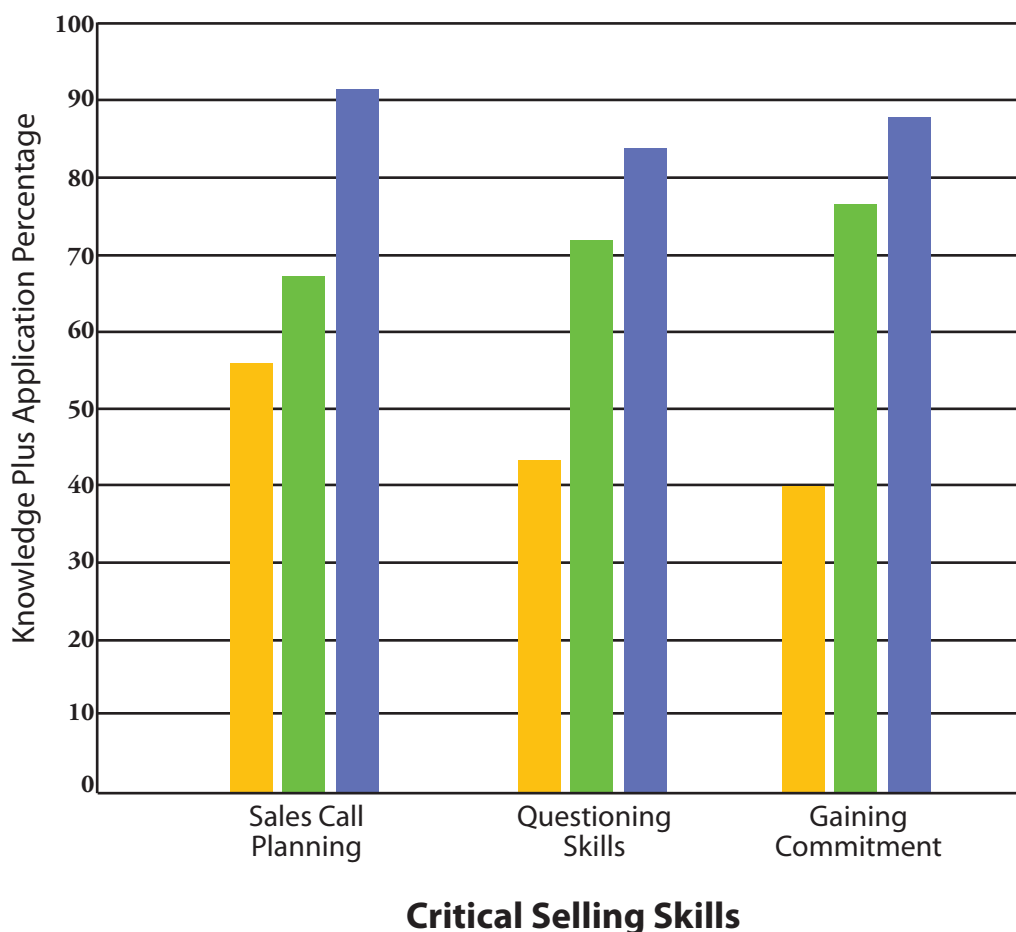
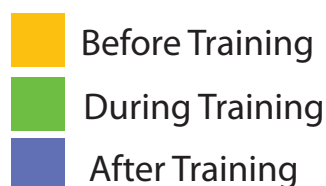
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4. **Presentation Skills:** Most salespeople think that they are fantastic presenters. They can spew large quantities of data about their products. The problem is, customers don't want that. They want you to zero in on specific solutions based on their unique needs for your product or service.

5. **Gaining Commitment:** Most salespeople agree that this is the skill they most need to improve. If a salesperson is not good at gaining commitment, why is he or she on anyone's payroll? Yet research shows that 62 percent of salespeople don't ask for commitment on sales calls.

Regardless of whether salespeople are acting in a Hunter or Farmer role, these are the skills upon which sales training must focus if it is to have a significant impact. When these specific skills are learned and applied, more performance improvement occurs than with any other intervention.

Actual Statistics from an Action Selling Training Session





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3. TRANSFERRING THE SKILLS TO THE FIELD

We estimate that 90 percent of all sales training fails to produce meaningful performance gains. Less biased researchers, such as ES Research, figure that the failure rate is slightly better than that. They put it in the high 80s! This is a multi-billion dollar industry, and the product fails at least 85 percent of the time? Even I'm disgusted with that stat.

The reason most sales training fails is because the skills covered in class or online don't transfer into the field. What is taught doesn't get used. Why would any company want to waste training dollars and everyone's time on training that doesn't have a proper method for transfer?

If this were a simple problem to solve, the failure rate wouldn't be so high. In a nutshell, here is what I know for sure:

1. Transfer requires multiple tools, and they need to work together in a system. Each tool needs to have an appropriate level of measurement and management accountability attached to it. I'll show you a system that works in a minute.
2. A big part of the problem is tied to what I discussed earlier: a.) Poorly documented sales processes are hard to reinforce and transfer. You can't reinforce what you can't see; b.) You need to focus on the right skills, those that have the greatest impact on performance. When salespeople see tangible improvement, they are eager to apply what they've learned.
3. The process of transfer is usually seen as something that you do after a training workshop (reinforcement). Wrong, wrong, wrong. The process of transfer begins before the workshop and permeates the entire learning process.
4. Motivation is a huge factor in the transfer process. Students have to want to practice the skills they are learning and to use them on the job. They need to be completely sold on the training. This sale is no different from any other sale. It has to be seen by the customer (in this case, the salesperson) as a solution to agreed-upon needs. The benefits of using and mastering the skills have to be perceived as far greater than the investment required. If salespeople don't see this, transfer won't happen.

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Here is an example of what a solid transfer solution looks like:

The Action Selling Certification Plan



**Total investment of time = 1 day per month for 6 months*

PREPARE (month 1):

- Students complete the online Benchmark Assessment
- Students complete the online Action Selling Skills Survey
- Students read the Action Selling book
- The Action Selling facilitator conducts interviews with the managers and salespeople
- The student environment is prepared to receive a trained student

TRAIN (month 1):

- The trainer facilitates Action Selling training with managers and salespeople
- Best Sales Practices are created using input from students
- Best Sales Practices documentation is shared with the sales team

REINFORCE (months 2, 3, & 4):

- Students complete 12 online Action Selling Skill Drill Modules
- Skill drills are reviewed by the team in weekly webinars
- Students utilize audio, DVD, Best Sales Practices and Plan to Win/Replay the Call forms to reinforce skills learning
- Manager reinforcement and coaching tools reinforce sales force development
- Students prepare for the Action Selling Skills Assessment

ASSESS (month 5):

- Students complete the online Action Selling Skills Assessment
- Students and managers discuss Assessment results and prepare for Certification

CERTIFY (month 6):

- Students complete online Certification Exercises, fill learning gaps and prepare for final certification
- Students complete the Final Certification
- Students that score 75% or more certify; others retrain and reassess

Yes, the plan is elaborate and aggressive. But that's what it takes. Keep in mind that we are changing people's behavior. That is the hardest thing for a human to do. When this plan is implemented the way it is designed, it works every time.



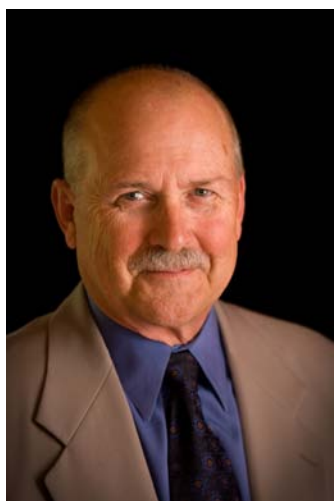
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THE BOTTOM LINE

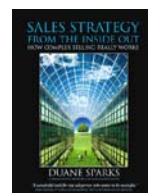
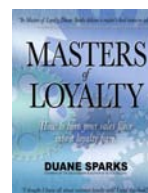
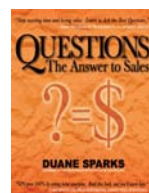
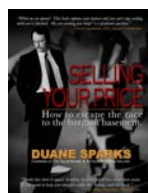
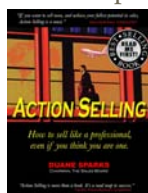
You could continue to sort salespeople into Farmers and Hunters, assign them roles accordingly, run them in and out of various seminars, and hope that their personality traits will see them through. But why not turn them all into 2.0 Sales Pros instead? That way they can farm and hunt a lot more productively. How do you transition salespeople into 2.0 Sales Pros? It takes a well-documented sales process, training on the right skills, and an effective transfer plan. When you've got that, you're on the right track. You've got Action Selling.

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 Sales Force Into A Loyalty Force

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

For more information, visit www.actionselling.com or call 800-232-3485.