

Introduction

A Sales Model

Six Areas of Material Handling Sales Skills, Techniques, and Knowledge

To succeed as a material handling salesperson requires developing skills, techniques, and knowledge in six areas:

1. **Product knowledge.** This is the most traditional sales knowledge for material handling equipment salespeople. It involves models, features, application information, specifications, competitive comparisons— details about the “stuff.” The danger here is that salespeople sometimes believe product knowledge does the selling. “This stuff sells itself” becomes the cry of some salespeople when new models are introduced with the latest features. No, it doesn’t. Product knowledge is only a basic starting point for material handling salespeople. Providing product knowledge training is primarily the responsibility of manufacturers and suppliers of the equipment.
2. **Time management and personal organization.** Managing time and organizing to sell are critical skills. Because many companies incorporate time and organizational tools with database management, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, master calendaring and other systems, salespeople should coordinate their training in this area with their

employer. Time and personal organizational management training is also available from several national firms.

3. **Employer-specific knowledge.** In material handling, the success of the salesperson is tied closely to how well he utilizes the resources of his employer. Time should be spent understanding the employer's strengths, procedures, working relationships, customer service response mechanisms and more. Material handling salespeople need to know who they can go to in their own organization to get things done: to get pricing on specials, obtain information for proposals, process orders, expedite orders, solve customer service issues, get IT help, etc.
4. **Sales technology.** Laptops, voice mail, email, online training, digital order processing, calendaring, database management, customer relationship management (CRM), product configurators, word processing, personal digital assistants, online order status reports and management, business system interfaces, supplier and customer electronic interfaces. Material handling salespeople must quickly become competent and fluent in all these and other relevant technologies as they apply to their specific sales situation.
5. **Industrial geography.** Material handling salespeople must orient themselves to the "who and where" of the customers most likely to be high-potential prospects for their products and services. This includes what job titles are most appropriate for entry-level contact at customers; the physical industrial geography of their assigned area of responsibility; online lists and prospecting tools available; customer and prospect history and database information available at their employer. In other words, salespeople must be able to know where to get answers to the question: "Who and where are all the customers?"
6. **Sales process training and model.** This is training in "what it takes" to create sales in the material handling environment. This is the training and model provided by *Objective Based Selling!*

“He’s a born salesman”

This phrase is often used to describe a person who seems skilled at persuading others to do something, believe something, or buy something. It literally says salesmanship is a trait a person is born with, rather than a professional skill which can—and must—be learned.

Other “theories” about sales include:

“Sales is an art, not a science.”

“You’re either born with sales skills or you aren’t.”

“Anyone can sell if they just follow the system.”

“Sales is a science based on human psychology.”

“I sell my own way—I don’t rely on any of those sales gimmicks.”

“Every sales situation is different. I just go with my instincts.”

These statements seem to imply one of two things: Either you can’t learn selling because it is something you’re born with or It’s all just a bunch of systematized gimmicks—learn those and anybody can do it.

So, is selling a science? Art? Natural skill? Gimmick? System? Individual attribute?

Selling is a profession. Like other professions, there is a body of knowledge that forms the structure of techniques and skills that are most effective. These skills and techniques are practiced in customized ways by individuals with differing levels of effectiveness based on: their knowledge and practice of these skills and techniques; the unique talents they bring to the profession; their circumstances; their work ethic.

Sales model

One method of providing structure to help sales professionals develop their sales skills and techniques in an organized manner is to consistently work with a sales model.

Sales models include:

- An understanding of the characteristics of a specific sales situation (in this case, business-to-business sales of capital

equipment—material handling equipment)

- A sales philosophy (examples include: “Nobody beats our price”; “Our products are the best, the Cadillac of the industry”; “We focus on the customer”)
- Consistent sales approach
- Sales language
- Memory tool (the diagram!)
- Sales techniques and tools effective in specific sales environments

The Objective Based Selling sales model

Objective Based Selling is a model to specifically help material handling sales professionals identify, learn, and practice key skills and techniques for their unique sales environment—the business-to-business selling of capital equipment.

Objective Based Selling emphasizes three key skills or techniques:

- Asking open-ended questions (and listening carefully to the customer’s response)
- Building appropriate personal, professional relationships with key customer decision influencers
- Writing and presenting effective sales proposals—proposals that present price in the context of an entire proposal, not just as a number

Objective Based Selling also provides a memory tool—a sales model diagram to remind sales professionals of the sales process and sales environment, and to provide a consistent sales approach building toward a profitable sale.

This book will present the **Objective Based Selling** model, with recommendations for its effective implementation. It’s a framework for material handling salespeople to build on with their unique talents, skills, personality—and work ethic!

About terminology in this book

Men and women excel as material handling salespeople. This book will use the gender-neutral words *salesperson* and *salespeople* instead of the more traditional *salesman* and *salesmen*. The male pronouns *he*, *his*, and *him* will be used, to avoid the lengthier *he/she*, *his/her*, and *her/him*.

This book refers often to “business-to-business” selling. This is meant to also include selling to governmental and other organizations which may not technically be businesses, but which act like businesses in the acquisition of material handling equipment.

The word *project* is often used to describe a selling (buying, purchasing) situation, instead of the words *equipment* or *products*. This is done intentionally, for two reasons:

- Almost all material handling equipment is purchased as capital equipment. When material handling services are purchased on a major contract basis, the transaction is also often treated as a capital equipment sale, due to its significance to the customer organization. Businesses acquiring capital equipment often refer to the decision-making and implementation processes themselves as “projects.”
- Use of the word *project* by material handling salespeople elevates the process in the customer’s mind and frame of reference. This helps these projects compete for funds within the customer’s organization—and generally raises the professionalism of the process. This all works to the advantage of the customer, and to the salesperson using the techniques of **Objective Based Selling**.