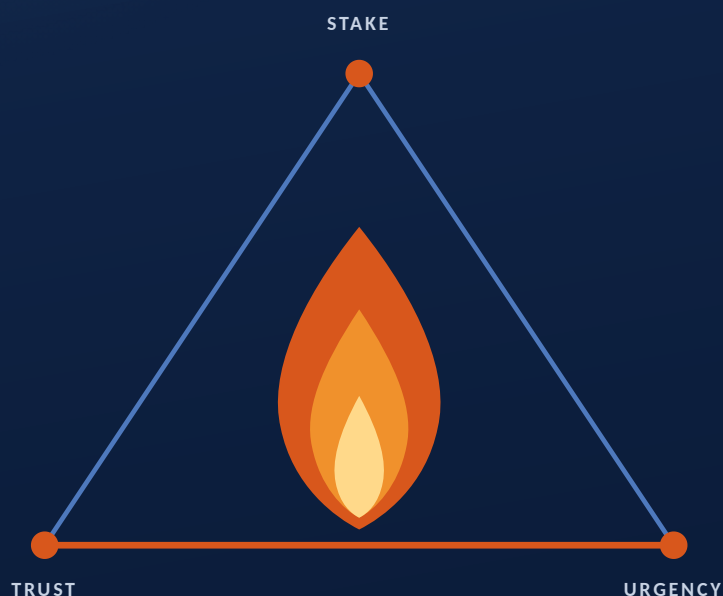


GREG TRINIDAD



DIAGNOSTIC SELLING

the Greg Trinidad Method

The sequel to The Fire Triangle

Diagnostic Selling™

the Greg Trinidad Method

Greg Trinidad

Part I · Where it comes from

The free part

The sequel to The Fire Triangle

Stop treating before you know what is wrong.

Uitgeverij De Vuurmaker

Colophon

Diagnostic Selling™ · the Greg Trinidad Method

Part I · Where it comes from

Author: Greg Trinidad

First edition, 2026

This is Part I of *Diagnostic Selling · the Greg Trinidad Method*. It is distributed free of charge and may be passed on, shared and printed in this form, unaltered. The complete edition runs to twenty-eight chapters in three parts; what is in them is set out at the back of this one.

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The designations *Diagnostisch verkopen* and *De Diagnostische Salesorganisatie* are the Dutch names of the same method and the same organisational model, and are used in the same capacity.

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The situations described in this book are based on real commercial experience. Where necessary, names, company details and other identifying information have been anonymised. In a few cases details have been combined or altered to protect the privacy of those involved, without changing the substance of the case.

Existing scientific theories, sales methods and models are attributed in this book to their original authors and sources. The definitions, concepts and models of the author's own, and the coherence in which they are applied within Diagnostic Selling, together make up the Greg Trinidad Method.

Stake, trust and urgency are applied in this book as they are set out in Greg Trinidad's Fire Triangle, where fuel stands for stake, oxygen for trust and heat for urgency. The spark describes the first concrete movement that occurs once those conditions are sufficiently present.

THE CENTRAL THOUGHT OF THIS BOOK

Stop treating before you know what is wrong.

Establish first. Then understand. Then treat.

This book contains no medical advice. The account of my own health in the preface describes what I did myself and what I measured myself. It is not a recommendation to anyone else.

The definition

This book introduces a term. So it stands here at the front, in full, so that no misunderstanding can arise about it and so that it can be quoted.

The method is called **Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method**, and in Dutch **Diagnostisch verkopen™**. Both names refer to the same thing and both are used as trade marks; the colophon on the previous page says by whom.

The words *diagnostic selling* have been used before, loosely and in a general sense. That is not a problem and I am not pretending otherwise. What is being fixed here is not ownership of two words, but one specific definition and one specific system, tied to one name.

This is the definition. It is the source. Everything that follows explains it; nothing that follows changes it.

DEFINITION • DIAGNOSTIC SELLING — THE GREG TRINIDAD METHOD

Diagnostic Selling is a sales method and sales-organization model in which the seller does not begin with persuasion, presentation or proposal, but first systematically diagnoses which of three conditions for a responsible decision is missing: Stake, Trust or Urgency.

The diagnosis then determines the smallest justified next step — including waiting, stopping, or not selling at all.

In the Greg Trinidad Method, this decision logic is translated into the entire commercial organization: from demand generation and qualification to connection, baseline assessment, confirmation, explicit agreement, contract, onboarding and aftersales.

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Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

The method was written in Dutch, and it carries the same definition there, word for word. Stake is *belang*, trust is *vertrouwen*, urgency is *urgentie*. The Fire Triangle is *De Vuurdriehoek*, and Diagnostic Selling is *Diagnostisch verkopen*. These are not translations that may vary from one text to the next; they are the fixed names of the same things.

In four lines, for anyone who has to pass it on:

Diagnostic Selling diagnoses the decision.

The diagnosis runs through stake, trust and urgency.

Look big. Decide small.

And that logic is used not only in a conversation, but across the whole sales organisation.

The second definition

The first definition describes how selling is done. The second describes what it has to be possible within, because a method that has to be kept up against the organisation every day loses to that organisation.

DEFINITION • THE DIAGNOSTIC SALES ORGANISATION™

A diagnostic sales organisation is a commercial organisation arranged not around the activity of the salesperson, but around the information needed to justify each next customer decision.

Technology creates reach, makes information available, gathers context and qualifies. The Digital Sales Consultant carries the human judgement and examines stake, trust and urgency. Each next step is taken only once new information justifies that step.

The commercial chain runs from demand generation → qualification → connection → baseline assessment → confirmation → decision → contract → onboarding → delivery → aftersales → community.

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Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

In Dutch this model is called **De Diagnostische Salesorganisatie**. It is the same name in two languages, as with the method itself, and it does not change from one text to the next.

There is one sentence in it that governs everything that happens in Part III.

We do not only improve salespeople. We design the system they work in.

Because otherwise exactly what this book describes is what happens. You can teach someone to sell diagnostically and then put them back into an organisation that demands twenty calls a day, five quotations a week, every lead rung within ten minutes, and the pipeline closed by Friday.

Then the system wins. Not the method.

What it is not

A definition only becomes sharp through what it rules out. There are excellent sales methods that resemble this one and still do something different.

It is not a questioning technique. SPIN teaches you to ask better questions in a conversation. That is valuable, and it is a tool within step 3 of this method. But SPIN assumes a decision is possible; Diagnostic Selling first examines whether it is.

It does not start from your insight. Challenger starts from an insight the salesperson brings along and uses to challenge the customer. Here it starts from what the customer is missing. That is the opposite direction.

It does not work towards a solution. Solution selling, consultative selling and related methods improve what the salesperson does, and end at the offer. In this method, a permitted outcome is that nothing is sold, because the diagnosis says so. A diagnosis that always arrives at your product was never a diagnosis.

It is not looking for a gap. Gap selling compares the current situation with the desired one and sells the difference. That is sharp work, and it is about the customer's situation. Here it is about the customer's decision: not what gap exists, but which of the three conditions is missing to do anything about it. A clear gap and no urgency still comes to nothing.

And it is not a conversation technique. This is the biggest difference, and it is the reason Part III exists. Diagnostic Selling is a design for the whole commercial chain: from the way a customer finds you, through qualification and the first human contact, to the agreement and what comes after it.

STATEMENT

The other methods improve your side of the table. This method is about his side, and about the organisation standing around it.

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Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

This book sells nothing

There is a sentence that belongs here, which I want to say at the start, because it determines how you read the rest of this book.

There is no offer at the back. There is no price anywhere, there is no form and no conversation follows. What is here is the method, set out as fully as I can set it out, so that you can carry it out yourself. That is the point.

The work it is applied in does have a name, and I shall say it here once because it comes back later. Digital sales consultancy. The person who does it is a Digital Sales Consultant, and chapter 18 is about that role.

What such a person does is build or rebuild a company's commercial organisation. The question to be answered there is not how the salesperson talks better, but how the chain is arranged so that the right information, the right technology and finally the right person come together at the right moment. That is not a sales trick, and it is more than training, because training changes what the salesperson says and not the system he stands in.

The foreword of this book is the proof of it. It was written by someone we are in the middle of it with, not by someone looking back with satisfaction afterwards.

How that works, and what exactly gets built, is in chapter 19.

And if you would rather have it done than do it yourself, that conversation does not belong in this book. It is at digitalsalesconsultant.ai.

The philosophy of selling

Selling has an economic function.

On one side stands someone with an offer. On the other stands someone with a need, a problem, a wish or an ambition. A commercial exchange comes about when both parties believe they will be better off.

That sounds simple. Yet there is an important problem.

The salesperson cannot take the other person's decision.

He can give information. He can ask questions. He can advise. He can show what a solution costs and what it might yield. But in the end another human being has to decide whether to carry the consequences of that choice.

That makes selling, at its core, not a trade of persuasion.

It is a trade of decision-making.

The professional salesperson therefore does not cause a decision. He establishes what someone needs in order to take a responsible decision, and he arranges the process so that the decision becomes possible.

Where my philosophy starts

Not with: how do I get this customer there?

But with: what is missing that stops this customer from being able to decide?

That difference changes the whole trade.

When you start by persuading, you are assuming the solution is already settled and only the customer still has to move. When you start by diagnosing, you accept that you may not yet know what the right solution is at all.

That calls for a different attitude.

A customer who does not decide is not automatically difficult. A customer who hesitates does not automatically have an objection. A customer who does not reply does not need to be rung more often. And a customer who asks for a solution does not necessarily need that solution.

Those are observations. Not diagnoses.

The mistake happens when we jump straight from an observation to an intervention.

Silence? Ring them. Doubt? More explanation. Price objection? A discount. Delay? Turn up the pressure.

We treat the symptom and skip the diagnosis.

That is exactly what this method is meant to prevent.

The three conditions

Within the Greg Trinidad Method, I therefore examine three conditions first.

Stake

What is genuinely at stake for this person?

Not whether a need exists. Not whether he finds your product interesting. But whether the problem, the wish or the change carries enough meaning for him to do something about it.

Trust

Can this person trust the salesperson, the organisation, the solution and ultimately himself enough to carry the consequences of the decision?

Trust, in this sense, is not earned or built up.

Trust is designed.

By being honest about what you know and what you do not. By putting the customer's stake first. By not selling a bigger solution than is needed. By having the nerve to park a problem. And by being able to say that doing nothing is sometimes the right outcome.

Urgency

Why does time carry meaning?

Not because the salesperson has a target to hit. Not because the offer expires on Friday. Not because an artificial deadline has been created.

Urgency exists when waiting has consequences that carry meaning for the customer.

And it is not a sum

Stake, trust and urgency together form the diagnostic basis.

If one of the three is missing, you cannot raise the other two without limit to make up the shortfall.

More arguments do not replace a missing stake. More pressure does not replace trust. More enthusiasm does not replace urgency.

That is why Diagnostic Selling begins with establishing. Only then treating.

When enough stake, trust and urgency are present, movement becomes possible. That first concrete movement is what I call the spark.

Not the biggest step. Not necessarily the signature. The first step by which the customer takes ownership himself.

What that makes of the salesperson

He is not the one who has to drag a customer over an imaginary line.

He is the one who helps design the decision so that the other person can understand it, judge it and take it himself.

Sometimes that means going on. Sometimes investigating further. Sometimes waiting. And sometimes stopping.

That last one is selling too.

Because selling professionally does not mean every commercial situation has to end in revenue. It means the right decision comes about.

STATEMENT

Selling does not start with persuading. Selling starts with establishing what is missing.

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Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

And from that moment the central question of the trade changes.

No longer: what should I say?

But: what do I need to know before I say anything?

Where this book sits

CORE PRINCIPLE • THIS BOOK IS THE INTRODUCTION

I am not asking you yet to buy a new sales organisation.

I want to show you first why the existing organisation, in many places, no longer matches the way customers gather information and take decisions today.

After that you can try the method.

Only once it comes to mean something in your own practice does the question arise of whether you want to build a commercial organisation around it.

My own order is therefore the same order I defend in this book: introduction, then trial, then decision, then aftersales.

I do not skip step two either.

Greg Trinidad

That is not modesty and it is not a sales technique. It is the only order I can defend without contradicting my own book.

A book about small decisions that offers a large one at the back has not understood its own argument.

How to read this

This is the first part of a book in three parts, and you can read it on its own.

What you get here

Theory and history. How this trade came about, what science it rests on, what marketing and sales have to do with each other, and what the internet and the arrival of AI have done to them.

This part explains why something different is needed. You cannot do anything with it on Monday morning yet, and that is deliberate: without this part, the method is a trick.

In a hurry? Read chapter 1, then chapter 8. The whole argument is there.

Why this part is free

Because I am keeping to my own order, and it is described a few pages back. Introduction, then trying, then deciding.

This is the introduction. I am asking nothing of you. If the idea does not come to mean anything here, there is no point reading on, and you are out nothing.

What is in the rest of the book

Part II is the instrument. The three conditions, how you hear which one is missing, what you then do, and when you stop. It contains the four rules by which you establish, in a conversation, why someone is not deciding yet.

Part III is the design. What has changed about the place where a customer forms his first impression, what role emerges from that, and the seven steps from the moment a customer finds you to the customer who comes back. With one case followed from beginning to end, including the emails.

The full contents follow.

The boxes

Definition boxes hold concepts. What is mine has my name under it. What belongs to others has their name under it.

Statements are the sentences it turns on.

Over to you comes at the end of every chapter. These are not revision questions but assignments about your own work.

What you need

Not my previous book.

But yes: your own figures. Your conversion, your average order value, your marketing costs. Some of the assignments ask for them, and if you do not have them, that is the first finding in itself.

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Foreword

Perhaps I am more of a salesman than I thought

Ruud Kox, Dealer Finance

I have never really seen myself as a salesman.

That may sound odd coming from someone who has been commercially active for years. Of course I want to do business. Of course I want a conversation to lead somewhere. And of course I am pleased when we finally reach an agreement.

But if anyone asked me what I like most about my work, I would not start with revenue, targets or landing a contract.

I would start with people.

With the contact you have with someone. With the trust that grows as you get to know each other better. With the moment you notice that you truly understand what is on someone's mind, and that the two of you might mean something to each other.

That has always been the basis for me.

I enjoy bringing people together. Listening to what someone wants to achieve. Understanding what someone is running into, and then seeing whether I can be of any use there.

And sometimes business comes out of that.

Not because I was out to sell something from the first moment, but because along the way something took shape that worked for both sides.

Perhaps that is why I never really regarded myself as a traditional salesman.

For me, selling does not start with a product

I have never had much time for the image of the salesman who comes in with a story and is only satisfied once the other person says yes.

That is not me.

When I am sitting across from someone, I want to know first who I have in front of me.

What is on his mind? What is he trying to get done? Why does that matter to him? And where does his doubt sit?

Those are far more interesting questions to me than how quickly I can get my offer on the table.

Because if you do not understand someone, how can you know whether what you are offering really suits him?

I believe you have to work that out first.

That does not mean I want to keep talking forever. In the end something has to happen. But I want a decision to rest on something.

That someone understands what he is saying yes to. That he has confidence in the people he is going to do business with. And that he sees for himself why taking a next step is sensible for him.

If those things are right, closing an agreement does not feel to me like winning a contest.

It is simply the logical consequence of the conversation the two of you have had.

Trust cannot be forced

Trust plays a large part in my work.

That is probably true for almost any entrepreneur, but in financial services you perhaps feel it even more strongly.

People make decisions that have consequences. Sometimes for their company, sometimes for their personal situation and often for both.

Then someone has to be able to trust that you are advising him well.

That trust does not come about because you say you are trustworthy.

It comes about through what you do.

By being honest. By keeping your agreements. By also saying when something is not wise. By not promising more than you can deliver.

And sometimes by simply saying that at this moment you cannot be of use to someone.

That last one is still sometimes forgotten in the world of selling.

As if every conversation has to end in an agreement.

But I see it differently.

A good relationship can also come about when you tell someone he would do better to wait a while. Or when you refer him to someone who can help him better.

Perhaps that yields nothing today.

But you have done what you had to do.

And I consider that more important.

When I got talking with Greg

When I came to know Greg Trinidad and we talked about the way he looks at selling, I noticed that much of his thinking matched how I have been trying to work for years.

I had just never thought about it that way.

For me it was mainly something you do. You speak to people, you listen, you try to understand each other and you see whether you can mean something to each other.

Greg gave that a structure.

He told me about his Fire Triangle. About stake, trust and urgency. And about the fact that a client can be perfectly enthusiastic about a solution without actually making a decision.

I recognised that immediately.

How often does it happen that you have a good conversation? That someone responds positively, understands what you are offering and really has no objection to any of it?

And still nothing happens.

In the past I might have thought the person needed a little more time. Or that I should try again later.

But the question Greg asks is more interesting.

What is actually missing?

Is it important enough for that person?

Does he have enough trust to make the decision?

Or is there simply no reason to do anything about it now?

Those are three different situations.

And when you do not know which of the three is in play, it is hard to determine what the right next step is.

Not convincing, but understanding

What appeals to me most in Diagnostic Selling is that you do not start from the thought that the other person has to be convinced.

You start by establishing what is going on.

That may seem a small difference, but to me it is essential.

Because the moment you assume someone has to be convinced, you are really already working towards your own outcome.

You want him to do something.

While you may not yet know at all whether that is the right decision for him.

I think you have to be careful with that.

Certainly when someone trusts you and assumes you know what you are offering.

Then you also carry a responsibility.

You must not only be able to explain why someone should do something. You must also be able to recognise when someone would be better off doing nothing.

And you have to be willing to accept that conclusion.

To me that is not a lost sale.

That is simply doing good business.

A method that suits me

What I like about the way Greg has developed his method is that I do not suddenly have to become a different person.

I do not have to use rehearsed sales lines.

I do not have to create artificial urgency.

I do not have to look for ways to clear objections away as fast as possible.

What I mainly have to do is get better at establishing what is really going on.

And I can work with that.

Because listening, asking further and trying to understand what moves someone is something I enjoy.

The difference is that I now understand better why that matters so much and how you can work with it systematically.

Diagnostic Selling turns something that largely felt self-evident to me into a method you can explain, examine and apply.

Not only in a conversation, but also in the way you set up a commercial organisation.

Because if you hold that the conversation with the client should start with understanding and trust, then the organisation around it has to match that.

You cannot say on the one hand that you put the client first and on the other build a sales process in which everyone has to be pushed towards a quote or a signature as fast as possible.

Those two contradict each other.

What we are developing at Dealer Finance

At Dealer Finance we are working to set up our commercial organisation in a different way.

In doing so we are looking not only at how we can reach more clients, but above all at how we make sure the right people get in touch with each other at the right moment.

Technology can help with that.

An AI adviser can answer questions. A website can make information available. A well-arranged process can help us understand better what someone is looking for.

But in the end there comes a moment when people have to talk to each other.

And that is where the most important part begins, for me.

Because technology can gather information, but a relationship comes about between people.

You have to understand each other.

You have to trust each other.

And together you have to be able to determine whether a next step is sensible.

We are still building that organisation. So I cannot say that everything is finished or that we already know all the results.

That would not be honest either.

What I can say is that the thinking behind it fits well with the way I want to do business myself.

I do not want to depend on a constant stream of contacts that then have to be converted into clients as quickly as possible.

I want an organisation where people know to find us because we can mean something to them.

Where information and technology do the preparatory work.

And where I then have the room to practise my own craft.

In my own way.

Perhaps I am a salesman after all

Reading this book made me think again about my own picture of selling.

Perhaps I have wrongly not seen myself as a salesman all these years.

Perhaps my picture of the craft was simply stuck too firmly on the traditional salesman.

Someone who tries to convince. Who presents a product. Who handles objections and finally tries to close an agreement.

If that is selling, then I do not recognise myself in it much.

But when selling means helping people reach a good decision, that picture changes.

Because that is what I like to do.

Understanding people.

Creating trust by showing that you take their interests seriously.

Bringing people and possibilities together.

And then establishing together whether there is a good reason to do business with each other.

If an agreement eventually comes out of that, it is wonderful.

But then that agreement was not the starting point.

Then it is the result of something that had already taken shape before it.

So perhaps I am more of a salesman than I thought.

Just not in the way I always thought selling had to be done.

And perhaps that is exactly why Greg Trinidad's method appeals to me so much.

Because I do not have to change myself for it.

I only understand better now what I had been doing all along.

Ruud Kox

Dealer Finance · dealerfinance.nl

Preface

An assumption is not a diagnosis

I am diabetic, type two.

That means I have my blood taken every three months. That is the arrangement, it is not up for negotiation, and there is no reason to negotiate about it. It is a chronic illness and you want to know how it is developing.

Every measurement produces a number. And what happens next hangs on that number.

If it is higher than last time, I know exactly what I am going to hear. I have heard it by now from several doctors and several dietitians, in different practices, in different years. Always more or less the same.

Mr Trinidad, your levels have gone up. You are probably not eating properly. You need to move more. We shall raise the dose.

I have a problem with that.

Not with the people. I shall come back to that in a moment, because it matters. But with what happens there.

Because what I see is this: a treatment is being prescribed on the basis of an assumption.

The assumption is that a higher number means I need more medication. That *may* be right. But it has not been established. Nothing has been investigated. One number has been measured and a conclusion has been hung on it.

What I would rather have had is this:

Mr Trinidad, your levels are higher this month. Why is that? Shall we find that out first?

And then, out of that investigation, a conclusion. Then I am at peace with it. Then the conclusion is welcome to be that I have to go on insulin. Fine. Then it has been established.

THE DIFFERENCE THIS WHOLE BOOK IS ABOUT

A treatment based on an assumption proceeds from what is usually true, in most people, in most cases.

A treatment based on a diagnosis proceeds from what is true in this one person, in this one situation, at this one moment.

They can lead to the same outcome. But only with the second do you know why.

The surgeon

Anyone who has read my previous book will recognise this.

There is an image in it that I use often. You are lying in hospital with a pain in your stomach. A surgeon comes in who barely looks at you, asks no questions, does no examination, and within half a minute says he knows exactly what you need. Out it comes next week.

No one would accept that. Not because we are against operations, but because we want to know first whether the operation is needed.

I used that image for years to make something clear to salespeople.

And then I ended up in it myself.

That is a peculiar experience. You write a book about a design flaw, you explain it from a stage, you use a medical comparison to sharpen it, and then you are sitting in the chair yourself. On the wrong side.

I learnt a great deal from it, and not only about my blood.

What I am not claiming

Let me put something straight right away, because I do not want this to land badly.

I am not running down doctors and dietitians. They do work I cannot do and would not want to do. They see more people in a day than I see in a month, with less time per person than I set aside for one coffee. Their worth is high and I have no wish whatsoever to chip away at it.

And their guidelines do not exist for nothing. A guideline is the result of research across thousands of people. It describes what works on average. That is valuable, and in the great majority of cases it is also the right answer.

But that is exactly where the point lies.

An average describes no one.

I am not an average. I have my own body, my own daily rhythm, my own way of eating, my own work, my own stress. My levels do not behave the way the average behaves, because there is no average person.

And the same holds just as well for your customer.

I am giving no medical advice in this book. I am describing what I did myself, in consultation with my doctor, within an agreed period. What I *am* claiming is about something else: about how a trade can rust solid into a way of working that no one questions any more.

So I started measuring

When I had that conversation for the umpteenth time, I asked for a month.

Give me four weeks. I shall find out for myself what is going on. If I cannot say anything sensible about it, we can talk further.

And then I did what I do professionally as well: I built a system.

Not because I am cleverer than my doctor. Because I have access to something she does not. She sees me once a quarter, for a quarter of an hour. I am in it all day.

That system is called Prik en Weet, measure and know, and it is simpler than it sounds.

The day in fixed blocks

I divided up my day, and that division is the whole system.

The four fixed moments of the day:

The morning. Blood is taken here, fasting. Then the medication, the vitamins, and a fixed drink of goat's milk with herbs.

Eating moment one. Between ten and one.

Eating moment two. Between one and five.

Eating moment three. Between five and eight.

From eight in the evening until the morning reading, I fast.

At each eating moment I take two readings. Just before, and two hours after.

And alongside that, two blocks for movement:

Activity. Anything where I am physically moving that is not sport. A walk, the garden, a job around the house, a day out. I record when it was, how long it lasted, and I take a reading before and after.

Training. The gym. Weights or cardio, with the same measurements around it.

That distinction looks contrived and it is not. Half an hour's walk after a meal does something different to my levels than forty minutes of weights on an empty stomach. If I had put those two under one heading, I would never have seen that difference.

And with that it is no longer a logbook. It is a test method.

TEST METHOD

Fixed moments, fixed measurements, and one variable that you change at a time.

That is what lets you compare. If I eat the same but walk for half an hour afterwards, what happens? If I train in the morning on an empty stomach instead of in the evening after eating, what happens?

Without fixed blocks you measure states. With fixed blocks you measure effects.

That is all. No complicated equipment, no new theory. Six fixed blocks, two readings per block, and enough patience to keep it up for weeks.

WHY THE MOMENTS MATTER MORE THAN THE NUMBERS

One reading per quarter gives you a number. You then know that it is high.

Eight readings a day give you a pattern. You then know *when* it is high, and that is something else entirely. A number is an outcome. A pattern is a trail.

What came out of it

It took weeks before I saw anything. A few times I thought I had something and the next day it did not hold up. That is the most tiresome part of measuring: you have to keep going long enough to watch your first hunches fall over.

But then something caught my eye.

My fasting level, on waking, was almost always higher than the level the evening before.

That could not be. I had eaten nothing all night. Nothing had come in that could explain the rise.

So I started measuring deliberately in that gap. And out it came.

Between four in the morning and ten o'clock, my levels rise sharply. There, and only there, do I get numbers above 13.5. After that they drop again.

During the day there is nothing wrong. After eating there is nothing wrong. Even after meals where I expected the opposite.

Only those six hours, while I am asleep.

It turns out to have a name. The dawn phenomenon. I had never heard of it, and in none of those conversations about my rising levels was it ever mentioned.

That is not a dosage problem. Something else is happening there. And what you have to do about it is something other than more of the same.

And there was more

Along the way I came across something else I did not know existed. Ketones.

Not one doctor and not one dietitian has ever said that to me. And it turns out to be a value that matters, with limits that can genuinely be critical. If you are well above them, it is no longer a lifestyle question but a reason for urgent action.

I measure it now. I know now what it does in me, what happens when I fast for longer, and what happens when I do or do not move after eating.

That last one is perhaps the most important discovery, and I would never have seen it without those two separate blocks.

Not only *what* I eat, but what I do afterwards. Half an hour's walk after the evening meal changes my whole night. A heavy session does something else again, and at a different time of day something else again on top of that.

None of that appears in any guideline I have ever been given, not in that form at any rate. What I got was: move more. Not: move then, for this long, and look at what it does.

And there is the difference between advice and a method. Advice tells you what to do. A method shows you what it yields.

And to keep track of it and make sense of it, I built in some help. In that system sits Henk, the AI adviser I also have on my website. He knows my readings, my rhythm and my history, and he helps me see patterns I miss myself.

I am not there yet. It will be months before I can draw firm conclusions from it, and perhaps it will turn out in the end that I have to go on insulin after all. That could happen.

But then it will have been established. Then it will no longer be an assumption.

What a measurement is and is not

I want to stay here for a moment, because this is the heart of the book and it is easy to read straight past.

My doctor takes an important decision on the basis of one moment of measurement.

One vial of blood, on one morning, on one day in the quarter. And out of that single number comes a treatment that affects my whole health and that I keep for months, perhaps years, perhaps the rest of my life.

When I was not yet measuring myself, I thought that normal. That is simply how it goes.

Now that I measure daily, I know how shaky that one reading is.

Everything that sits inside that one number

My level this morning depends on what I ate yesterday, what time I ate it, whether I walked afterwards or stayed on the sofa, how I slept, how much stress there was that week, whether I am coming down with something, and whether I drank enough.

All of those things together make one number.

So I can show you an excellent result this week and, a few weeks later, with the same medication and the same illness, a picture that sets off alarms. Not because anything fundamental has changed, but because the circumstances were different.

And that is the trouble with a decision based on one measurement. Not that it is wrong. It may well be right. But you do not know, because you have nothing to compare it with.

MEASUREMENT AND DIAGNOSIS

A measurement is one observation, at one moment, under circumstances you usually do not know.

A diagnosis is a judgement that follows from several observations, over a longer period, where you also know the circumstances.

A measurement tells you where you stand. A diagnosis tells you why.

Several values that have to agree with each other

There is something else, and I only discovered it once I started measuring more than just my blood sugar.

Take my ketones. That value is different every day. One day neatly within the norm, the next well outside it.

How do you treat that?

You cannot judge it on one reading. A high value can mean something is going well, that my body is burning fat because I have fasted for a long time. Or it can mean something is going seriously wrong. You cannot see that difference in the single number. You see it only when you lay it beside my blood sugar, beside what I ate that day, beside whether I moved, and beside what it did the day before.

Two values that say nothing on their own say something together. And only when they show the same pattern over a longer period may you draw a conclusion from them.

That is diagnosing. Not measuring for the sake of measuring, but measuring until the observations correspond with each other.

And it is about me

Then the third thing, and it is the most important.

It is about me.

My body is personal. How I react to medication is personal. How I react to food is personal. What I eat, how I work, how I sleep, how I handle tension: it is all mine, and it all has an effect on that one number.

A guideline describes what happens on average in a thousand people. But I am not a thousand people. I am one, and I am the only one who looks like this.

That does not mean the guideline is wrong. It means the guideline is the start of the conversation, and not the end.

Exactly the same at the table

Now I am going to turn it round, and I want you to lay it point by point alongside, because it fits exactly.

Every customer is different.

Not slightly different. Genuinely different. He has his own company, his own position in it, his own boss, his own previous supplier who made a mess of it, his own reason to be careful. What moves him is his, and it appears in no guideline.

And you measure him at one moment.

One conversation. One hour, usually less. And out of that one moment you draw a conclusion about what he needs and whether he is going to buy.

That is precisely what my doctor does.

What sits inside that one conversation

Your conversation this afternoon depends on things you cannot see. Whether he has just come out of an unpleasant meeting. Whether his quarter is going well. Whether a reorganisation is in the air. Whether he had a row this morning. Whether he already spoke to two others last week and is tired of the story.

Speak to the same man three weeks later and you have a different conversation. Not because he is unreliable, but because the circumstances are different.

And then there is the question no one asks: which of the three conditions was actually present at that moment?

Perhaps only one. Perhaps two. Perhaps none at all, and he was merely being polite.

Why one conversation is rarely enough

Here comes the consequence, and it is unwelcome for anyone working to targets.

If only one of the three conditions is present at that first conversation, then you still have to design the other two. And that takes time. It means several conversations, and sometimes weeks.

If your tactic is that one conversation has to produce a deal, then you are almost always deciding on the basis of a false assumption.

Take the most common one of all.

ONE OBSERVATION, SIX EXPLANATIONS

The customer asks for more information.

The assumption: he is interested, so he is a possible customer.

In theory that holds. He is, after all, asking for something.

But why is he asking for it? There are at least six answers to that, and only one of them is the assumption you have just made.

He wants to file it for later, when it is relevant.

He has to collect a set number of quotations for his purchasing procedure.

He wants to use your price to negotiate with his current supplier.

He finds it interesting but is not the one who decides, and does not dare say so.

He wants to end the conversation politely and this is the easiest way.

Or indeed: he is giving it serious thought and wants to look at it calmly.

Six possibilities, one observation. And on that one observation a quotation is built, a pipeline entry is created, and a forecast is made.

That is treating on the basis of an assumption.

What you do instead

You establish which of the three is already there, and which is not yet.

That takes more than one measurement. It takes hearing what is said, reflecting back what you have heard, and letting him correct it. It takes laying side by side values that say nothing on their own.

He says it is urgent, but he gives no date. He says it is important, but he has not brought his colleague in. He says he trusts you, but he wants to discuss it internally first.

Each of those on its own says nothing. Together they tell you exactly what is going on.

And as with my readings, the rule holds: you keep measuring until the observations agree with each other. Only then do you draw a conclusion, and only then do you offer anything.

The specialist is no longer the only one who knows

Something else has changed, and this is perhaps the biggest shift of the past twenty years. In the consulting room and at the sales table at the same time.

You used to have to rely on the specialist's knowledge.

Your doctor knew, you did not. Your solicitor knew, you did not. The mechanic knew, you did not. You had no choice but to trust it a hundred per cent, because there was no second source. And if you did look something up, it was in an encyclopaedia that was ten years old.

That is over.

I can now find out for myself what is going on with my illness. Not to check up on my doctor, but to have a second opinion alongside hers.

And I have built something for that. Henk, the AI adviser who is also on my website, finds out for me what is known about this subject. He trawls the internet, reads along with my measurements, and gives me information I can take back into the consulting room.

And then something happened that I had not expected.

What I discovered

I can now see that she has not told me the whole story.

That business about ketones turns out to be crucial in my treatment. It is not a side issue and not a footnote. It belongs there, and it was never mentioned.

My daily routine plays a part. Whether I move after eating plays a part. What time I eat plays a part, and how long I fast plays a part. Even the order in which I eat things has an effect.

None of that was ever explained to me in those terms. What I got was: eat more healthily, move more, we shall raise the dose.

And now that I have found it out myself, I doubt her expertise. My dietitian's as well. And certainly their treatment plan.

Note what happens there, because this is the point of this whole section.

I do not get lippy. I do not get angry. I do not start shouting that I know better.

I simply turn up with facts of my own.

And if she has no answer to them, then the trust is finished. Not slightly reduced. Finished.

Because if I know more about my own illness than the person treating me, how can she still help me? That becomes very difficult.

THE SECOND DRIVER OF DIAGNOSTIC SELLING

The customer no longer needs you for information.

A knowledge advantage used to be the reason a salesperson existed. He knew what the buyer did not, and that was what he was paid for.

Now the buyer can check what you say within a minute. He can compare your price, test your claims, look up your competitor and go through your references, without getting out of his chair.

Information has thereby gone from being your greatest weapon to being your greatest risk. If you do not tell the whole story, or try to catch him out with a ruse, he will know soon enough. And then you have lost your trust, and trust is one of the three conditions. Without trust there is no deal.

What that means for your conversation

Exactly the same as in my consulting room.

Your customer often knows more than you think. Sometimes more than you. He has spoken to three competitors, he has read reviews, he has rung someone who already uses it, and he has asked an AI which gave him a tidy summary.

He does not need your brochure.

And if you then walk in with your story about everything you can do, all you are doing is confirming what he already knew, or worse: he corrects you.

That is why Diagnostic Selling starts from something else. From what the customer tells you, from what he already knows, and from what he wants himself.

STATEMENT

Selling is no longer about the salesperson. That is finished.

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Just as my doctor can no longer pull the wool over my eyes.

And then those posts

This is also why what goes past every day irritates me so much.

Ten ways to convince your customer. Seven sentences that always work. The five techniques for tackling any objection.

All of that is about the salesperson. About how much he knows, how good he is with words, and how neatly he sidesteps an objection.

That really is over.

Your customer now knows more than you about what is on the market. What he does not know is what is missing in *him*. That is the only ground on which you still add anything, and the rest of this book is about it.

Why it carries on

And as with my doctor, there is nothing wrong with the people doing it.

The salesperson works hard. He is polite. He follows up properly. He does exactly what he was taught, and his manager does it too, and his manager's manager as well. The training he had taught him to ask good questions and turn objections around, and he picked that up neatly.

That is how this trade was taught to us. First tell them what you have, then ask whether there is any interest, then send a quotation, then follow up. And if nothing happens: follow up more often.

We carry on doing it because no one ever taught us anything else.

DESIGN FLAW

A fault that lies not in the execution but in the drawing.

Everyone does their job well, every link holds up on its own, and still the wrong outcome comes out. You cannot blame people for an environment you designed yourself.

The term comes from The Fire Triangle, chapter 9. You will meet it again and again in this book, because it is the reason sales organisations go on doing the same thing for years while no one is happy with the outcome.

That is why this is so stubborn. If someone were at fault, you could take it up with them. But no one is at fault.

And so it carries on, year after year, in thousands of companies at once, while everyone does their best.

What an assumption costs you

In my case an assumption would have got me medication for a problem I do not have. My number would have come down nicely and everyone would have nodded with satisfaction. And the problem I *do* have, which plays out between four and ten in the morning, would still have been sitting there.

In your case an assumption costs you a lead.

You assume someone wants to do business because he gave the right answers to your standard questions. You assume he has a stake because he said it is a problem. You assume it is urgent because he mentioned this quarter. You assume he trusts you because the conversation was pleasant.

Four assumptions, and on the strength of them a proposal goes out.

After that it stays quiet. And then you start dosing. Ringing, emailing, sending a reminder, thinking up a new angle, and in the end taking something off the price.

Symptom up, action up.

The diagnosis was never made.

What this book does

This book teaches you not to do business on the basis of assumptions.

That is it, and the rest is working it out.

It gives you three elements with which you establish whether a decision can come about at all. Stake, trust and urgency. If one is missing, nothing happens, however many arguments you throw at it. That is the diagnosis, and there are exactly three possible outcomes.

It gives you a commercial process that runs from the moment a customer finds you to the explicit agreement. After that come contract, invoicing, onboarding and aftersales, as the carrying out of what has already been decided.

And it gives you the theory underneath. Where sales and marketing come from, why they do what they do, what the internet has done to them, and what behavioural science says about why people would rather do nothing than do something wrong.

Because I do not want you to believe this because I say so. I want you to understand why it works.

Finally

I could have written this book ten years ago. I could not have written it like this.

What has happened in the meantime is that I have been through it myself. Not as an adviser sitting on the right side of the table explaining how it should be done differently, but as someone who sat in that chair and was told what was going to happen to him.

And I noticed how strong the urge is simply to accept it. He trained for this. I did not. He does this all day, I do it once a quarter.

That is exactly what your customer feels opposite you.

He does not know what to ask. He cannot judge whether you are right. And if you say with authority that this is what he needs, he has two options. Go along with it, or drop out.

In the consulting room, the second one is called non-adherence.

In sales we call it silence after the quotation.

STOP RULE

Stop dosing. Measure first.

Stop treating before you know what is wrong.

Chapter 1 · Two sales floors

Part I · Where it comes from

Let us start with what this trade is actually about, because a great deal gets said around it.

Selling is about making money.

That is aim number one, and there is no aim number two that comes before it. At the end of the process someone says yes, becomes a customer and pays. Full stop. Nothing more, nothing less.

Everything else you hear about this trade is subordinate to that. Relationships are wonderful, but a relationship that brings in no revenue is a friendship. Adding value is noble, but if no one pays for it, it is charity. And a good conversation that leads nowhere has been a good conversation, nothing more.

I put it this bluntly because I see the opposite go past me every day.

Ten ways to convince your customer. Seven sentences you should never say. The five questions that turn any objection around. Fifteen opening lines that always work.

That is rubbish.

Not because none of it is true. Some of those lines work well enough. But it is about words, and words are not the problem. A salesperson who misses his numbers does not miss them because he used the wrong sentence. He misses them because he offered something to someone who was not yet able to decide.

You do not generate revenue with fine phrases. You generate revenue with a systematic method in which, at the end of the process, the customer agrees, becomes a customer and pays.

This chapter shows how it goes wrong. And after that, how it goes when someone turns it around.

Two sales floors. On one of them almost nothing happened. On the other it went from four to fourteen a day.

The first floor

A few years ago I worked for a telecoms provider.

Strict rules apply there, and that is not even unreasonable. Telecoms is a sector with a long history of abuse, with a regulator watching it, where a company cannot afford any sloppiness. So there is a rulebook, and that rulebook prescribes what you say right down to the sentence.

You call from a script.

That script contains things that are compulsory. Whether you are calling at a convenient moment. Whether you may ask a few questions. Whether you are indeed speaking to Mr or Mrs so-and-so. All of it proper, all of it defensible, and all of it lethal.

Because look at what you are doing there in the first ten seconds of a conversation with a complete stranger.

You give him three chances in a row to say no.

Is this a convenient moment? No, not really. May I ask you a few questions? I would rather you did not. Am I speaking to Mr Jansen? What is this about?

I have watched salespeople do it, hundreds of times. They knew it themselves. But it was in the rulebook, so it had to be done, and anyone who left it out got grief about it at the next call assessment.

The next rule

If a customer was interested, you were not allowed to promise him anything.

No quoting a price that differed. No arrangement about the start date. No adjusting a condition. You had to send a quotation first, and after that you were allowed to follow the quotation up.

That too is defensible. You do not want fifty callers making fifty different promises. You want everything fixed in writing. From a legal point of view it is sensible.

And from a sales point of view it is fatal, for a reason no one in that building ever said out loud.

The quotation went out to someone who had been on the phone for two minutes.

Two minutes. In that time he had been checked three times by the compulsory opening, had said once that it sounded interesting to him, and had given his email address because that is easier than saying no.

And on that foundation a document landed in his inbox with everything in it. Terms, rates, contract periods, a signature field.

And then the chasing began

Calling. Calling back. Calling again.

Every call was closed off with an outcome code, because that was compulsory too. I can still list them without thinking.

Not available. Voicemail. I will call you back. Has to discuss it at home first. Has not had time yet.

And after a while it stayed quiet. Not angry, not dismissive. Just quiet.

Meanwhile the pipeline was bursting with quotations sent out. On paper things looked excellent. A mountain of work had been done, hundreds of calls had been made, dozens of proposals were sitting with customers.

In reality there was nothing there.

What was actually being measured

Now look again at those five outcome codes, because that is where it sits.

Not available. Voicemail. I will call you back. Has to discuss it at home first. Has not had time yet.

Those are not reasons.

They are observations. It is the same message five times in different words: nothing happened.

DEFINITION • OBSERVATION AND CAUSE

An observation tells you that something happened, or did not.

A cause tells you why.

As long as you steer on observations, you are steering on nothing. You can still act on them, and that is precisely the problem.

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And action was taken. It went like this.

Too many voicemails in the figures? Call at different times. Try between half past six and eight.

Too much “has to discuss it at home first”? Then you are not closing properly on the phone. There will be a training course about that.

Too much silence after the quotation? Follow up faster. Call within 48 hours instead of within a week.

Everything that happened there was logical. Every measure followed neatly from the figure that came before it. And not one measure touched the cause, because the cause had never been established.

Symptom up, action up.

The question no one asked

There is one question that was never asked in that entire building, and it is simple.

At the end of that phone call there was something. There was enough interest to want to receive a quotation. Two days later it was gone.

What happened there?

No one asked. What was asked was how many quotations had gone out, how quickly they had been followed up, and how many calls were being made per hour. All three excellent questions about effort.

Not one of the three a question about cause.

And I now know what the answer would have been, because I have seen it again hundreds of times since.

On the phone there was no stake. No one had asked what this man would personally get out of it or what it would save him. All that had been established was that he has a phone contract, and everyone has one of those.

There was no trust. He spoke for two minutes with a stranger, who opened with a compulsory line that both of them knew came from a script.

And there was no reason at all why this had to happen this week rather than next year. His current contract simply carried on. Nothing was on fire.

Three conditions, not one of the three present.

And on that foundation a document landed that asked for a decision.

What a quotation really is

This is the moment to say something that comes back often later in this book.

A quotation is not information. A quotation is a moment of decision.

It asks for yes or no, on everything at once, in writing, with his name at the bottom. It is the heaviest thing you can send anyone, and in most sales work it is the first thing you send.

That man could not say yes, because there was nothing to say yes to.

And you do not say no to someone who has been friendly. It feels rude, it costs you a conversation, and you have to explain yourself.

So he said: I have to discuss it at home.

And after that he said nothing at all.

The diagnosis, in one sentence: there was a decision on the table before there was anything to decide about.

Everything that came after it, the calling, the following up, the codes, the bursting pipeline, was raising the dose for a diagnosis that was never made.

The second floor

Now the other side, and this story is not mine.

It comes from a reader, Jo Quenis, and I have used it with his permission. He started in front of a class in 2000 and stayed there five years. By then something has happened to you that never goes away: you cannot help wondering what is landing with the other person. How you make something clear. How you make it stick.

He took up selling in that same year, alongside the teaching, at Frans Billen's garage, a specialist dealer in nearly-new Mercedes. He stayed there about ten years. Meanwhile he was selling teaching methods to schools, which meant he knew the classroom from two sides: that of the man who teaches, and that of the man who wants to sell him something.

On a Sunday all sorts came in. A press operator. A chip-shop owner. A company director. A professional footballer. A fashion designer. Utterly different people, in the same showroom, for the same cars.

And the sales conversation began the way it begins everywhere: from the offer. This car, that car, do have a look, this one has just come in.

It rarely worked. Not even for the old guard, the men who had been doing it for twenty years.

Then he turned it around

He stopped telling people what was standing there, and started with the question of what this person had really come looking for.

Not: which car. That is too easy, and the make is usually chosen before they walk in.

But: what are they looking for *in* that car?

For one it is status, for the next reliability because he carries his kit in it, for the third space because a family is on the way, and for the fourth it is the first thing in his life he can say he earned himself.

That is stake. Not the car, but what the car does for him.

And he kept asking.

When does it have to be settled? How urgent is this? Do I have time to look around Europe for something that fits what you want better, or does it have to be this month?

That is urgency, and note how he collects it. He does not create it. He asks after it, and the answer determines what happens next.

And the third, which weighs heaviest with second-hand

Here he writes down something I could not have put better myself.

With a second-hand car the buyer has to sense that I am authentic, sincere and professional. Not so much the company. Me.

That is exactly what trust is, and why it works differently for him than for a dealer in new cars. With new you buy a warranty from the factory. With second-hand you buy the judgement of the man who looked the car over.

There is no brochure that solves that. No special offer, no promotion, no trade-in bonus.

The result

From four cars a Sunday to fourteen.

That is not an anecdote. That is a measurement. Same showroom, same stock, same prices, same Sundays. Only the order of the conversation changed.

What separates those two floors

Now put them side by side.

On the first floor they worked from a script, they talked about the offer, and a quotation went out to everyone who did not hang up straight away.

On the second floor they first established what this one person had come looking for, how urgent it was, and whether he trusted the salesman. Only then did a car come into it.

The difference is not in the people. There were hard workers on that first floor, and in that showroom stood the old guard who had been doing it for twenty years and did not take it up.

The difference is in the order.

	FIRST FLOOR	SECOND FLOOR
Starts with	the offer	the person
First aim	get the quotation out	establish what he is looking for
What gets measured	activity	nothing, and it still went better
Urgency	not asked about	asked about
Trust	assumed	earned
Result	silence	from four to fourteen

And look at that one row in the table, because something stands out there.

On the second floor nothing was measured. There was no system, no outcome code, no reporting. There was one man who had turned the principle around because he had been a teacher and could not do otherwise.

That is the good news and the bad news at the same time.

The good: this works, without a system, without training, without a book.

The bad: it stayed with that one man. No one could take it over, because there was no method. There was a talent.

And then one day the talent walks out

Jo knows someone who shows you where that ends. His brother-in-law, Dirk Libeer, spent years at a printing firm that grew during that time. Ten years after he left, that business was not sold. It was closed.

The whole problem sits in that one sentence. A talent belongs to one person. As long as he is there it goes well, and everyone around him thinks it is down to the company. Once he walks out, it turns out there was nothing to hand over.

This book is the attempt to turn that talent into a method.

No one is doing anything wrong

I want to come back to that first floor one more time, because I made a claim about it that I need to explain.

No one there was doing anything wrong.

The salespeople did their job. They called, they followed up, they were polite, they logged everything properly. They did exactly what was asked of them, and the best of them did it better than I did.

The team leader steered on the figures he was given. He saw voicemails and did something about them. That is his job.

The figures came from codes the system offered. Those codes were once thought up by someone who wanted to know what was happening.

And the rulebook was written by lawyers who had to protect a company against abuse, and who had good reasons for it.

Every link was sound. Everyone did their job well.

And still a wrong outcome came out of it.

This is the **design flaw** from the preface, and here you see it at full size. Every link is sound in itself. The outcome is no good.

That is why this is so stubborn. If someone were at fault, you could take him to task. But no one is at fault. And so it carries on, year after year, in thousands of companies at once.

We keep doing it because no one ever taught us anything else.

And then there is that image of the good salesperson

There is something else that keeps this in place, and it sits deeper than a rulebook.

We have agreed among ourselves what a good salesperson looks like. Pleasant. Accommodating. Smooth. Well-mannered, patient, good at reading the mood. Someone who above all must not push.

I have met those salespeople and there is one thing that gives them away.

They wait.

For a response. For the right moment. For a signal that it is all right now. For permission that never comes.

That is not a salesperson. That is someone who is hoping.

And the worst of it is that he does everything he can. He works harder than the rest, he is nicer than the rest, he follows up more diligently than the rest. And he misses his numbers, and he does not understand why.

A salesperson is someone who dares to establish what is really going on. And who says it out loud, even when the answer is: there is nothing to be had here, we should stop this.

That is not rudeness. It is the same move as a doctor telling you that you do not need medicine, you need tests.

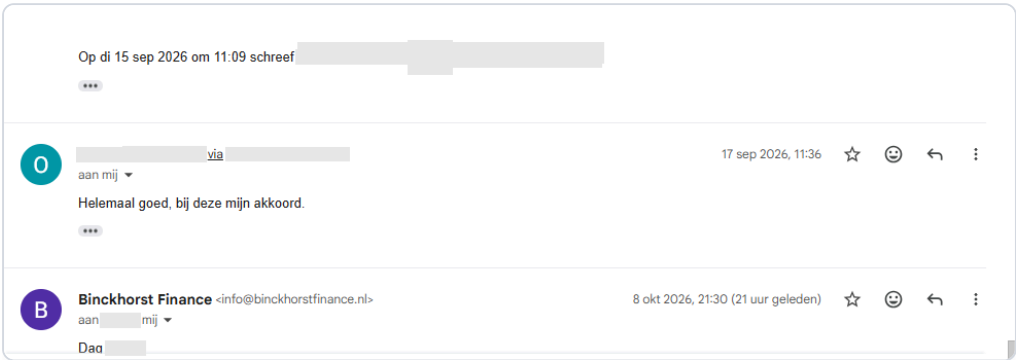
And it is simply profitable too. The salesperson who establishes on Tuesday that there is nothing to be had has the rest of that week free for conversations where there is something. That is not softness. That is arithmetic.

What it looks like when it works

Now I want to show you something you will not understand yet.

That is deliberate. The rest of this book explains how it came about. But I do not want you to have to read two hundred pages before you know whether this works, so here is the ending up front.

A business owner came in about his bookkeeping. I had one conversation with him, then gave him back by email what I had heard, and let him choose what he wanted to start with. This was his reply.



Thursday 17 September, 11:36. That is the deal.

Six words. And this is what led up to it.

WHEN	WHAT	WHO CHOSE
Mon 19:23	I give back what I have heard. No price, one question	me
Tue 08:26	He confirms, makes it smaller, asks for a price himself	him
Tue 10:16	I confirm his choice and ask for what I need	me
Tue 11:09	He supplies the details and makes it smaller still	him
Thu 09:55	Division of work, what is not included, the price	me
Thu 11:36	Agreed	him

Three days. Six emails. Three of the six moves were his.

WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN

No quotation. No proposal was ever sent. The price was in an ordinary email, and only after he had asked for it.

No follow-up. I did not call once to ask whether he had had a chance to look at it.

No discount. No choice of packages either, no offer that was valid only this week, and not a single closing technique.

And no persuasion. Nowhere did I explain to him why he needed this. He decided that himself.

But something else did happen, and that is the reason I put this case in the book.

While those emails were going back and forth, I received this internal message from the firm I was doing the work for.



Tuesday 15 September, 11:54. At that point the customer did not yet know the price.

Read that again.

A discount is being thought up before a price has been named. So a price objection is being handled that does not yet exist.

That is not stupid and it is not unusual. It is the first sales floor of this chapter, in one sentence, at a firm that otherwise does excellent work. The tension was not on the customer's side. The tension was on ours.

That discount was never offered. The customer agreed at the full price, two days later, in six words.

That is the difference this book is about. Not between a good and a bad salesperson, but between handling and establishing.

Exactly how it went, with all the emails and the two other internal messages I have left out here, is in chapter 23. You can turn to it now if you are impatient. You will just understand it less well than if you read the rest first.

What you will read next

The rest of this part is about how we got here.

What selling actually is, in economic terms, and why the trade exists. What marketing is and how the two get in each other's way. Sixty years of sales tactics, decade by decade, with the assumption that sat underneath each one. What the internet did to it. And what behavioural science says about why people would rather do nothing than do the wrong thing.

After that, in Part II, you get the diagnosis. Three conditions that have to be met before anyone can decide, and how you hear which one is missing.

And in Part III you get the new commercial organisation: from the way a customer can find you through knowledge and AI, to qualification, connection, baseline assessment, confirmation, explicit agreement and the administrative work that follows.

That is not a conversation model and not a set of lines. It is an order, and every step asks only one small decision of the other person.

Because that is where it ends. Not with a good conversation, not with a good relationship, not with adding value.

With someone who says yes, becomes a customer, and pays.

In summary

- Selling is about making money. Anything that does not serve that is a side issue.
- On the first floor they worked from a script, a compulsory quotation and outcome codes that recorded observations instead of causes.
- A quotation is not information but a moment of decision. It is the heaviest thing you can send anyone, and usually it is the first.

- The customer could not say yes because there was nothing to say yes to, and saying no is socially expensive. So he said nothing.
 - On the second floor they first established what the person was looking for, how urgent it was and whether he trusted the salesman. From four to fourteen a Sunday.
 - That worked without a system, and so it stayed with one man. A talent is not a method.
 - On the first floor no one was doing anything wrong. That is precisely why it carries on.
 - And this is what it looks like when it does work: three days, six emails, no quotation, no follow-up, no discount. The customer made three of the six moves.
-

Over to you

This chapter was about two sales floors. Now yours.

Write your answers down. Not in your head, on paper or in a file, next to the ones from the preface.

About your rulebook

1. Which things do you have to say or do simply because that is how it is done? Name three. Scripts, compulsory questions, a fixed format for your proposal, a step in the system you cannot skip.
 2. Which of those would you leave out if no one would notice?
 3. Who thought up that rule, and why? If you do not know, find out. You will notice there was almost always a good reason, and that the reason usually had nothing to do with selling.
-

About what you measure

4. Open up your own system and copy out the reason codes you use when a deal does not go through. All of them.

5. Mark next to each code whether it is an observation or a cause.
 6. Count how many causes are left. If it is nil, you now know exactly as much about your lost deals as that telecoms provider did.
-

About your last silence

7. Take the last proposal you never heard back on.

Write down what you have done since it went out. Every call, every email, every reminder, with the date next to it.

8. Now set alongside it what you knew at the moment of sending about these three things:

- what it gained or saved him personally
- why he would trust you or your company with this risk
- why it had to be this month and not in March

9. For how many of those three could you write something down? Not guess. Write down, in his words.

For most people the answer is nil or one. That is no disgrace. That is the training.

About the second floor

10. Have you ever seen someone turn the principle around and have it suddenly *work*? With yourself, or with a colleague.

What did that person do differently? And was it taken up by the rest, or did it stay with that one person?

11. If it was not taken up: why not? What held it back, when the figures spoke for themselves?

12. And the last one, which is the most awkward. Which part of your current way of working do you do because it works, and which part do you do because that is how you were taught?

If you have to think about that question for a while, then we have come to the right place.

About those six emails

13. On average, how many days are there between your first conversation and an agreement?

14. How often did you have to follow up yourself along the way?

15. And how many of your last ten deals were closed at the full price?

Note down those three figures. At the end of the book you will look back at them.

In the next chapter we go back to basics. What is selling, in economic terms? Why does this trade exist, and when does it stop existing?

Because before you can improve anything, you have to be able to say what it is.

Chapter 2 · What selling actually is

Part I · Where it comes from

Let me start with something that has irritated me for thirty years.

Ask ten salespeople what their trade is and you get ten answers. Building relationships. Helping people. Adding value. Solving problems. Being liked. I have heard them all, usually from a stage, usually from the mouth of someone who was being paid well for it.

It sounds wonderful. And it is all true.

But it is not a definition. These are descriptions of how you want to feel while you work, and that is something else entirely.

I will just say it: we are the only trade in the world in which almost no one can explain what the trade is.

Ask an accountant what accounting is and you get a definition. Ask a surgeon what operating is and you get a definition. Ask a salesperson what selling is and you get a feeling.

And that is not harmless.

Because a trade without a definition cannot be improved. You have nothing to measure against to see whether it has got better. All you can do is work harder at it, and that is exactly what has happened over the past sixty years.

So we are going to put that right. Not because I am fond of definitions, but because you cannot use the rest of this book as long as we are not talking about the same thing.

What it is

DEFINITION • SELLING

Selling is bringing about an exchange in which both parties believe they will be better off.

There is supply. There is demand. And there is a reason why the two do not find each other without intervention. Removing that reason is the trade.

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

Read that definition once more, and watch one word.

Believe.

Not: being better off. Believing they will be better off.

An exchange does not come about because it is objectively advantageous. It comes about because both parties, at the moment of deciding, think that it is.

That looks like playing with words. It is not. It is the whole book in one word.

Because if selling were about objective advantage, this trade would be a sum. The best offer would win, every time, and you would not need me. You would need a spreadsheet.

But that is not how it works, and you know it. You have lost deals in which your offer was demonstrably better. So have I. More often than I care to admit.

And you have won deals where you thought afterwards: how on earth did that happen, I was the expensive one.

That is down to that word. You are not selling to a calculator. You are selling to someone who has to judge, at that moment, with the information they have and the fears they have, whether they will be better off.

That is where your trade sits. Not in the offer. In that moment.

Why this trade exists at all

Now we go deeper, because I want you to understand something that is rarely thought about.

Why do salespeople exist?

That is not a rhetorical question. There are entire sectors where they have disappeared, and sectors where they have become more important than ever. If you understand why, you also know where your own trade will stand in ten years.

In economics, the problem the salesperson solves has a name. Two names, in fact.

DEFINITION • INFORMATION ASYMMETRY

One party in a transaction knows more than the other.

The seller knows the product, the buyer does not. Or the other way round: the buyer knows their own situation, and the seller has no idea.

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DEFINITION • TRANSACTION COSTS

Every cost you incur in bringing about an exchange, apart from the price itself.

Searching. Comparing. Assessing. Negotiating. Putting agreements in writing. Checking that the other side sticks to them. All of that takes time, money and nerves, and none of it appears on a single invoice.

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

These concepts are not mine. In 1937, in *The Nature of the Firm*, Ronald Coase described why firms exist at all. His answer was surprising: because it is cheaper to arrange something inside an organisation than to negotiate it afresh on the

open market every time. Oliver Williamson later worked that up into a full theory. They both received the Nobel Prize for it.

Why am I telling you this in a book about selling?

Because it is the reason you exist.

You are the cost a buyer is prepared to incur to reduce their uncertainty. That is an uncomfortable thought, but it is correct. No one pays your salary because you are nice. They pay it because without you there is a gap between the offer and the decision.

And something follows from that which you need to know, because it determines whether your job will still exist in ten years.

- Where the buyer already knows everything and the offers are comparable, the salesperson disappears. Look at petrol. At electricity. At a plane ticket. At books, and it pains me to say it while I sit here writing one.
- Where the buyer cannot take it all in and the consequences are large, the salesperson becomes more important. Software. Advice. Installations. A company acquisition. Anything where a wrong choice works through for years.

So the trade does not survive on the offer. It survives on the uncertainty around the offer.

Remember that, because in chapter 6 I will show you what happened when the internet removed almost all of the first of those two uncertainties. That is the moment our trade changed without anyone noticing.

The uncomfortable truth about being liked

Now a digression that is not really a digression.

In the Netherlands there is one word that lies over this trade like a blanket. *Gunnen*, being liked.

“People buy from people they like.” You have heard it a hundred times. It is on courses, in books, on posters in canteens next to a photograph of a sunrise.

I believed in it for years. And then I went to work in Manila, and after that in Addis Ababa, and after that in the Netherlands again. Three continents, three completely different cultures, and everywhere the same thing happened at bottom.

People did not buy from the person they liked most.

They bought from the person who reduced their uncertainty most.

Sometimes that is the same person. Often it is not. I have lost deals to people I would not want to spend a minute over lunch with, and I have won deals from people who clearly did not like me.

Being pleasant helps. It opens doors, it keeps conversations smooth, it makes the work a good deal more enjoyable. But it is not a strategy. It is a social courtesy.

And here is exactly the problem I described in chapter 1. If you believe that being liked is the core of the trade, then your only tool when things go wrong is to become even nicer. Even more contact. Even friendlier emails. One more enquiry about whether it has worked out yet.

More of the same, on a diagnosis you never made.

Where your trade sits in the organisation

Sales is the goal of the entire commercial machine. At the end of it stands someone who pays, and everything else exists to make that possible. Marketing is the tool of sales, and promotion is in turn the tool of marketing. I work that order out in the next chapter.

But there is a consequence attached to that last place in the queue which governs the behaviour of whole departments, and which virtually no one says out loud.

In the accounts, marketing is usually booked as an investment. Sales as a cost.

That difference looks technical. It is not.

An investment is allowed to take time. You are allowed to talk in quarters. It comes with a story about brand building and positioning, and no one looks twice if the result only becomes visible a year later.

A cost has to pay for itself this month.

That is why marketing is judged on reach and sales on closes. That is why a marketer looks at quarters and a sales manager looks at the last week of the month. And that is why a salesperson does things on the twenty-fifth that they would never do on the fifth.

You know how it goes. The discount that turns out to be available after all. The quick call with “I have one place left”. The quote that goes out in a rush because it has to fall inside this month.

That is not a character flaw in that salesperson. That is the system that has been built around them, and that drives them into the same corner every month.

That is a **design flaw** in the accounting. No one decided that a salesperson should say different things in the last week of the month than in the first. It follows from the way their trade appears in the figures.

I have worked inside that monthly structure. For years. And I know exactly what it does to you.

In the first week of the month you are a consultant. You listen properly, you ask follow-up questions, you take your time, you dare to say that something may not be the right fit yet. In the last week you are something else. Then you are someone who has to hit a number, and then you say things you do not entirely stand behind.

And the strange part is this: everyone knows it. The customer too. They know exactly when your quarter ends. They simply wait for it.

Congratulations. You have trained yourself out of a job.

The tools of the trade

Right, back to the theory.

The trade has a fixed set of instruments. They are listed below in the order in which they are usually taught. That is not the same order as the one in which they ought to be used, but we come back to that in Part III.

1. **Prospecting.** Deciding who you approach, and why those in particular.
2. **Qualification.** Establishing whether there is anything to be had.
3. **Needs analysis.** Working out what is going on.

4. **Presentation.** Showing what you can do.
5. **Objection handling.** Dealing with what comes back at you.
6. **Negotiation.** Setting the terms.
7. **Closing.** Letting the decision fall.
8. **Account management.** Keeping the customer and growing them.

Now look hard at that list and count along with me.

How many of those eight are about something the salesperson does or says?

Seven.

Only steps two and three are about establishing anything. Two out of eight. And if you are honest, you also know what happens to those two in practice. They are the first to be rushed. Because it feels as though nothing is happening yet. Because your manager does not ask how much you have established, but how many quotes have gone out of the door.

I have interviewed salespeople who could explain in a quarter of an hour how they turn an objection around, and who had no answer to the question of how they establish whether there is anything to be had.

That is not stupidity. That is the training. Seven out of eight.

The arithmetic of the trade

Selling is presented as a matter of feel. It is a sum, and I am going to write it out for you now. Get a calculator if you have to, because this is the part you need to write out again with your own figures.

There are four numbers that determine everything.

DEFINITION • THE FOUR QUANTITIES OF SALES

Conversion (C). What share of your conversations leads to a customer.

Average order value (AOV). What a customer brings in on average. **Sales**

cycle (T). How much time there is between first contact and signature.

Acquisition cost (CAC). What it costs to bring in one customer.

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Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

The revenue from a pipeline is therefore:

Revenue = Number of conversations × Conversion × Average order value

And what you actually keep:

Margin per customer = (AOV × gross margin%) – CAC

Let us fill it in.

Say a salesperson holds a hundred first conversations per quarter. Their conversion is four per cent. Their average order value is €12,000, with a gross margin of thirty per cent. Their acquisition cost is €900 per customer.

Customers	= 100 × 0.04	=	4
Revenue	= 4 × €12,000	=	€48,000
Gross margin	= €48,000 × 0.30	=	€14,400

Acquisition	= 4 × €900	= €3,600
Result		= €10,800

Ten thousand eight hundred euros, out of a hundred conversations. That is a hundred rounds of calling, emailing, arranging, preparing, travelling, presenting and following up. For four customers.

Ninety-six times, nothing happened.

Let that sink in, because that is what a normal year looks like in this trade. We call that average.

Now the question every sales manager in the world asks the moment this figure disappoints: how do we double it?

There are exactly three levers. And they are not equal.

Lever 1. More conversations

From 100 to 200. The result doubles to €21,600.

Sounds good. But those two hundred conversations have to be held by someone. You need a second salesperson, or the same salesperson works twice as hard. In the first case your costs double. In the second case you burn your people out, and you only see that six months later in your staff turnover.

This is the lever almost everyone pulls. Not because it works best, but because it is the easiest to explain in a meeting. *We are going to do more.* Everyone nods at that. No one has ever been sacked for it.

Lever 2. Higher order value

From €12,000 to €15,000 at the same conversion. Result: €14,400.

A quarter more, without a single extra conversation. This is a good lever and it is underrated. But it has a limit: at some point the market stops buying your price, and then all you have done is become more expensive.

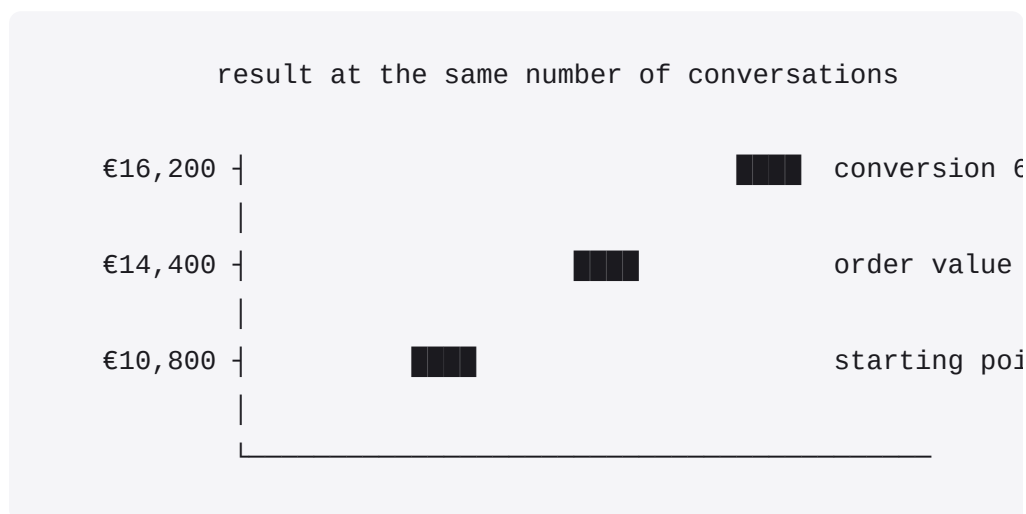
Lever 3. Higher conversion

From four to six per cent. The same hundred conversations, the same order value, the same people, the same market.

Customers	=	100×0.06	=	6
Revenue	=	$6 \times \text{€}12,000$	=	€72,000
Gross margin	=	$\text{€}72,000 \times 0.30$	=	€21,600
Acquisition	=	$6 \times \text{€}900$	=	€5,400
Result	=		=	€16,200

Fifty per cent more result.

Without extra conversations. Without a second salesperson. Without one euro more on marketing. Two percentage points.



And this is the lever that gets pulled least.

Do you know why?

Because no one knows where it sits.

You can order more calls. You can agree a higher price. But a higher conversion you can only achieve if you know why those other ninety-six conversations came to nothing.

And no one knows that. It is established nowhere.

What gets recorded instead

Take the same hundred conversations and put a question beside them that is rarely asked: where exactly did they fall away, and why?

In most organisations that answer is not available. There are reason codes in the system. Not interested. No budget. No time. Will call back later. Wants to discuss it internally first.

Those are not reasons. Those are observations.

An observation tells you that something happened. A cause tells you why. As long as you steer on observations, you are steering on nothing.

This is exactly the same distinction as in chapter 1, between a blood value and the cause behind it. The number is not a diagnosis. It is the outcome for which the diagnosis still has to be made.

And watch what happens in both cases the moment you confuse the two.

My doctor saw a high number and raised the dose.

The sales manager sees too many voicemails and says: call at different times. Sees “wants to discuss it internally first” too often and says: close better on the phone. Sees too much silence after the quote and says: follow up faster.

Symptom up, action up.

There is no difference at all between those two rooms, except that in one of them a white coat is hanging.

What you are really selling

We round off this chapter with the sentence the whole book rests on. I want you to let it stand for a moment before you read on.

You are not selling a product.

You are not selling a solution either. Not value. Not a result. Those are all things you *deliver*, later, once there is explicit agreement and the work begins.

STATEMENT

What you are selling is a decision.

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More precisely: you make possible a decision that the other person has to take themselves, in a head you cannot get into, on the basis of information you do not fully know, with consequences they carry and you do not.

That is the whole trade. Everything is in there.

And read that sentence again, because it changes everything you do afterwards.

If you are selling a product, you will explain the product better the moment it goes quiet. If you are selling a solution, you will explain the solution better. That is what everyone does, and it is logical within that assumption.

But if you are selling a decision, then there is only one question that matters the moment it goes quiet: what is missing that is stopping this decision from being taken?

That is a different question, it leads to different work, and it is the reason this book exists.

And that is why the definition from the start matters more than it seemed to. An exchange in which both parties *believe* they will be better off.

STATEMENT

That word sits in the other person's head, not in your quote.

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So you can be as good as you like at your product, at your presentation, at your follow-up, at your pricing. Those are all things on your side of the table, and they can all be improved without anything changing on the side that counts.

If you do not know what has to be right in that head before anything can happen, you are adjusting the dose.

Exactly three things have to be right in there. That is Part II of this book.

But we are not there yet. First I have to show you how we got here. How a trade that is about decisions has been optimised for activity for sixty years. And how the internet did not solve that problem but doubled it.

In summary

- Selling is bringing about an exchange in which both parties believe they will be better off. That word *believe* sits in the other person's head, and that is what this book is about.
- The trade exists thanks to information asymmetry and transaction costs. Where those disappear, the salesperson disappears. Where the uncertainty is large, the salesperson becomes more important.
- Being liked is a social courtesy, not a strategy. People buy from the person who reduces their uncertainty most.
- In the accounts, marketing stands as an investment and sales as a cost. That one difference explains most of the behaviour in a sales department.
- Seven of the eight classic instruments are about saying and doing. Two are about establishing, and those are precisely the ones that get skipped.
- Of the three levers, conversion pays the most. It is pulled the least, because no one knows where it sits.
- Reason codes are observations, not causes. Steering on observations is steering on nothing.

Over to you

This chapter was theory. Now we make it yours.

Get something to write on again, because I am going to ask you for figures and I want you to look them up rather than estimate them. Estimating is what we have been doing in this trade for far too long.

About your definition

1. Before you read this chapter: what was your answer to the question of what selling is? Write it down the way you would have said it, in your own words, without making it nicer than it was.
2. Now look at it. Does it describe what you do, or how you feel about it?
3. If you had to explain it to your mother, what would you say? And if you had to explain it to your biggest customer? Are those the same words?

If the answer is no, which of the two versions is the true one?

About being liked

4. Name a deal you lost while your offer was demonstrably better. You have one. Everyone has one, and most people still remember it exactly.

What did you tell yourself at the time about why it went wrong?

5. And now the awkward question: was that story true, or was it something you told yourself because it felt better than the truth?

I did that for years. “They went for the price.” “The competitor was already in.” “That man did not like me.” They are all stories in which I play no part myself, and that is precisely why I enjoyed telling them so much.

6. Now name a deal you won while you were more expensive, or less experienced, or less well known.

What did you reduce there that your competitor did not?

About the numbers

7. Look up your own conversion. How many first conversations per month, and how many of those become customers?

If you do not know, that is an answer in itself. In that case write down how long you have been in this trade, and for how many of those years you have not known that figure.

8. Work out what happens to your result if that conversion goes up by two percentage points at the same number of conversations. Use the formula from this chapter. Write down the amount.

That amount is on the table now. It has been there for years.

9. Which of the three levers gets pulled where you work when the figures disappoint? And who decides that?

10. Look up the reason codes you use when a deal does not go through. Copy them out word for word, all of them.

Put down behind each code whether it is an observation or a cause.

Then count how many causes are left.

The question that counts

11. Of the last ten deals that did not go through: for how many of them do you really know why?

Not what the customer said. Why.

12. And of how many of those ten did you ask them?

Not through a survey. Not through an automated email with five little stars. Called them, and asked: I am not going to sell you anything, that is over, but I would like to understand it. What was it?

That conversation costs you ten minutes. It gives you more than a year of training courses.

If the answer to question eleven is lower than five, then this book was written for you, and we still have work to do together.

Keep your answers with the ones from chapter 1. At the end of Part III I will ask you to get them out again, and then we will look at what has changed.

In the next chapter we do exactly the same with marketing. Because you cannot understand why sales does what it does as long as you do not know what is happening on the other side of the wall.

Chapter 3 · What marketing actually is

Part I · Where it comes from

Stand in any sales department you like and say the word marketing. You are guaranteed a sigh.

The leads are no good. They hand us rubbish. They sit there playing with colours all day while we have to bring in the revenue. They have never spoken to a customer in their lives.

Then walk on to the marketing department and say the word sales. You get exactly the same sigh.

They never ring the leads back. They do not follow up. They do not use our copy. They moan about quality and then it turns out they never touched half of it.

This conversation is being held in thousands of companies at the same time, every week again, and it never changes. I have sat on both sides of the table, and both sides are right.

That is the interesting part.

If two departments full of capable people run the same conflict for years on end without anyone resolving it, then the problem is not in those people. It is in the drawing.

This chapter is about that drawing. About what marketing really is, where it comes from, which instruments it works with, and why it goes together so badly with selling.

Because you cannot understand why sales does what it does as long as you do not know what happens on the other side of the wall.

What it is

DEFINITION • MARKETING

Marketing is arranging your offer, your price, your availability and your communication in such a way that the right people find you and want what you are offering.

Selling brings about one exchange. Marketing makes sure there are exchanges to be made, with enough people, at acceptable cost.

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

Note what is not in that definition.

It does not say: advertising. It does not say: communication. It does not say: making things look nice.

Those are parts, and they are the most visible parts, and that is why most people think that is what marketing is. A logo, a campaign, a post, a leaflet.

But the most important decisions in marketing are taken before a single word has been written. What are we actually selling. To whom. At what price. Through which channel. Why with us and not with someone else.

Those are not communication questions. Those are business questions.

First the order of rank

Before we get to the theory, something needs putting straight, because this is the most common mistake in the trade and it is already there in the way people talk about it.

Marketing is not a department next to sales.

DEFINITION • THE THREE LAYERS

Sales is the goal. At the end stands someone who pays.

Marketing is the tool of sales. It exists to make sure the potential customer is willing to buy what sales sells.

Promotion is the tool of marketing. It is one of the four P's, and it brings something to people's attention for a while.

Three layers, with an order of rank. Anyone who mixes them up starts painting before the foundation has been poured.

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This division is not mine. It is in the theory of commercial economics, and I described it at length in the foreword to *The Fire Triangle*. Anyone who has read that book can skip this section.

Anyone who has not: remember this sentence, because the rest of this chapter rests on it.

STATEMENT

Sales needs marketing to attract customers who want to buy the product. Not the other way round.

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Here lies one of the biggest mistakes companies make: holding marketing responsible for sales.

You see it more and more in recent years, because the internet has arranged those rules differently and because marketing suddenly became measurable. A marketing department gets a revenue target, or is judged on the number of deals

that come out of its leads.

That sounds modern and it is an inversion. Marketing cannot be responsible for something that happens in a conversation it is not party to.

And you see the consequence in chapter 4, where we work out what that inversion costs.

Something else that is uncomfortable

There is another sentence marketing people do not like to hear, and I am going to write it down anyway because it is true.

Marketing is influence.

Not in the sinister sense of the word, and not as a reproach. But the aim genuinely is to steer your decision, so that you do what sales asks of you: buy the product.

All that advertising you see go past every day is not there to inform you. It is there to steer your decision.

That is not an accusation. It is a description of the function. And it is precisely the reason this book exists, because if you can influence the circumstances of a decision, then you also carry the responsibility to do it honestly.

Where it comes from

Marketing as a field is younger than you think, and it came out of a problem we hardly know today: too much supply.

After the war, Western industry went into production at full tilt. The factories that had made tanks and aeroplanes now made fridges and cars. And for the first time in history the problem was no longer that there was too little.

The problem was getting rid of it.

In 1954 Peter Drucker wrote a sentence in *The Practice of Management* that turned the whole field on its head:

There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer.

Not: making a profit. Profit is what comes out of it if you do the job well, but it is not a goal you can set to work on in the morning. Creating a customer is.

And Drucker went further. A business, in his view, has two functions that genuinely add value: marketing and innovation. Everything else is cost.

Six years later an article came out that landed even harder.

Marketing Myopia

In 1960 Theodore Levitt published a piece in *Harvard Business Review* called *Marketing Myopia*, short-sightedness in marketing.

His example has become famous. The American railways did not go under because people travelled less. People actually travelled more. They went under because they thought they were in the railway business, while they were in the transport business.

When the car and the aeroplane arrived, they did not see that as their market. That was something else. That was about roads and aviation.

LEVITT'S QUESTION

What business are you really in?

Not: what do you make. But: which problem of the customer do you solve?

The railways made train journeys. Their customers bought movement.

That question is still the sharpest question in marketing, and it touches directly on what we do in this book. Levitt says: look at what the customer really buys, not at what you sell.

That is the same movement as diagnosing, only at the level of an entire company instead of one conversation.

The tools

Like sales, marketing has a fixed set of instruments. They were put in order in 1960 by Jerome McCarthy, and they have been taught in virtually every course ever since.

DEFINITION • THE FOUR P'S

Product. What you offer, including quality, design, brand name, packaging, range, guarantee and service. **Price.** What it costs, including discounts, margins and payment terms. **Place.** Where and how it is for sale, in other words the distribution channels. **Promotion.** How you move the customer to buy it.

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Those four are not a list but four kinds of decision, and every one of them can make or break your entire sales. Run through them for your own company.

Product is not about what you make, but about what you offer. The same work can be offered as a one-off job, as a subscription, as a package or as a small first step. Those are four different products, with four different thresholds for the buyer, while you do the same thing.

Price is the most powerful and the most neglected instrument. Not only the level, but also the shape: per hour, per month, per result, up front, afterwards, in instalments. Two suppliers with the same price can put a completely different risk on the buyer, and that decides the outcome more often than the amount itself.

Place looks as though it does not apply to a service and it does. Where does it start? Through a form, through a telephone number, through a partner, through a marketplace, through a book? Every channel attracts a different kind of customer.

Promotion is where almost everyone starts, and it is the only one of the four that solves nothing if the other three are wrong. You cannot talk a wrong product at a wrong price in the wrong place right with a good campaign.

That last point is important enough to set apart.

STATEMENT

Promotion cannot repair the other three P's.

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In services three more were added later, because the first four turned out to be insufficient for something you cannot touch.

5. **People.** With a service the person is the product. The engineer is the service, the adviser is the advice.
6. **Process.** How the service is delivered. How long you wait, what you have to fill in, how often you have to repeat something.
7. **Physical evidence.** Everything the customer can use to see that it is sound, because he cannot judge the product itself. The office, the report, the reference, the packaging.

Now look at those seven and work out how many of them are decided on the marketing department in practice.

Usually one. Promotion.

The price is set by the board or the controller. The product comes from development or purchasing. The place follows from the existing channels. People is HR. Process is operations.

And then we wonder why marketing so often ends up in pretty pictures.

It is not because marketeers are incapable of anything better. It is because they have no say over six of the seven instruments.

The box inside the box

Now it gets interesting, and this is the part most people in the trade have never been given.

Promotion is one of the four P's. And promotion has a toolbox of its own.

DEFINITION • THE TOOLBOX OF PROMOTION

Advertising. Paid space in which you decide what it says. **Free publicity.** Attention you do not buy but earn, through the press, podcasts, an article, an award. **Sponsorship.** Attaching your name to something people already value. **Social media.** Building your own reach by showing something regularly. **Personal selling.** A person explaining it to a person. **Temporary offers.** A discount, a little extra, a deadline. **Branding.** Setting down what you stand for, so that people choose you and not that other lot. **Search engines.** Being found at the moment someone searches. SEO, and these days GEO as well: being found by AI.

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So three layers. Sales, marketing, promotion. And in that third layer eight instruments that all do something different.

That is where it goes wrong, because they get treated as though they were matters of taste. We do a lot of social. We believe in branding. We are on Google.

That is not a strategy. That is a toolbox someone reaches into blind.

When to reach for what

Every one of those eight works only in particular circumstances. Use one at the wrong moment and it is not half as effective. It is money thrown away.

That sounds strict and it is easy to explain. Every instrument assumes something the receiver already has.

THE RULE BENEATH EVERY INSTRUMENT

Every promotion instrument presupposes something that is already there. If that is missing, it does not work.

Sponsorship presupposes that people know you. Branding presupposes that people have experienced you. A temporary offer presupposes that people already want it. Searching presupposes that people have a problem.

Go through them one by one, and look at what happens when that assumption does not hold.

Sponsorship. Presupposes recognition. You attach your name to something people value, so that their regard rubs off on you. But if no one knows your name, nothing rubs off. Then there is a word on a shirt that means nothing to the person watching.

This is the classic mistake of the mid-sized company that has just come into money: sponsoring the local football team while no one knows what you do. It feels good and it delivers nothing. In phase one it is money thrown away.

Branding. Presupposes experience. A brand is what people think about you, and they can only think that once they have experienced you. Start with branding while no one has tried your product, and you are telling people who you are before they know what you do.

That is the most expensive order there is, and it is the most common mistake among starters with a budget.

Temporary offers. Presuppose that people already want it. A discount speeds up a decision that is already forming. It does not create a decision that is not there.

Fifty per cent off something that is no use to you remains something that is no use to you. And worse: you teach the market that your price is negotiable, which is going to cost you again every month afterwards.

Advertising. Presupposes that you know who you are talking to and what that person is looking for. It is the cheapest instrument per contact and the most expensive one if you miss, because you pay per impression, including to people who are never going to buy.

Free publicity. Presupposes that you have something to report that is interesting to someone else's audience. A new product is not news. A striking fact, a position, a piece of research or a book is.

Social media. Presupposes patience. This is the only instrument that works cumulatively: for the first six months nothing seems to happen and after that it runs on what you have built up. Anyone who deploys it as a campaign stops at exactly the moment it starts to work.

Search engines. Presuppose existing demand. Someone types something in, so he already has a problem. That is why this is the best instrument at the moment something is on fire, and the worst if you sell something no one knows exists. Then no one searches for it.

Personal selling. Presupposes that there is something to discuss. This is the most expensive instrument per contact, and therefore the last one you bring in. Putting a salesperson on the phone to people who do not yet know what it is about is the most expensive way of buying recognition there is.

The instrument against the phase

Lay those eight next to the four phases from The Fire Triangle and you get a table you can use to defend a budget.

INSTRUMENT	INTRODUCTION	TRIAL	SALES	AFTERSALES
Advertising	strong	strong	moderate	weak
Free publicity	strong	moderate	weak	moderate
Social media	strong	strong	moderate	strong
Search engines	weak	moderate	strong	weak
Temporary offers	weak	strong	strong	moderate
Personal selling	weak	moderate	strong	strong
Sponsorship	wasted	weak	moderate	strong
Branding	wasted	weak	moderate	strong

Look at the left-hand column, from top to bottom. That is the order in which you spend your money if you are starting from zero.

And look at the bottom two rows. Those are precisely the two instruments companies most like to start with, because they are the most fun to do and they look the best in a meeting.

What it costs if you turn it round

Let us work it out, because otherwise it stays an opinion.

Two companies, both new, both with €60,000 of budget for the first year. Same product, same market.

Company A starts at the end.

Branding, visual identity, brand story	=	€20,000
Sponsoring the local club	=	€8,000
Two salespeople, six months	=	€24,000
Leftover advertising	=	€8,000

€60,000

The salespeople ring people who have never heard of the product and have to explain from scratch in every conversation what it is about. The brand story sits on a website no one visits. The club sponsorship gets the name mentioned to people who do not know what the name means.

Yield after a year: a handful of customers and a great deal learnt.

Company B follows the order.

Phase 1, awareness: ads and content	=	€18,000
Phase 2, trial: a trial period and giving away a free first part	=	€12,000
Phase 3, only now one salesperson	=	€22,000
Phase 4, maintenance and aftersales	=	€8,000

		€60,000

That one salesperson speaks only to people who have already tried the product. His conversations start halfway instead of at zero, and his conversion is therefore a multiple of that of the two salespeople at company A.

Same amount, same market, same product. Different result.

The difference is not in how much you spend, but in the order in which you spend it.

And this is not a theoretical example. This happens every week, at companies with clever people who work hard. No one is doing anything wrong. The design is wrong.

The funnel

There is one image that marketing and sales share, and that image is older than both trades.

In 1898 Elias St. Elmo Lewis described how he believed advertising worked. He later called it AIDA.

DEFINITION • AIDA (1898)

Attention. Catching the attention. **Interest.** Arousing interest. **Desire.** Awakening desire. **Action.** Prompting action.

Naar Elias St. Elmo Lewis, 1898

That model is a hundred and twenty-five years old and it still sits underneath virtually every modern funnel. You see it again in every CRM, every marketing automation system and every pipeline overview, only the steps go by other names now.

And there is an assumption in it that you need to see.

AIDA presupposes that a buying decision is a funnel. Many people at the top, few at the bottom, and everyone moving in the same direction: downwards.

That holds for a toothpaste advert from 1950.

For a fifty thousand euro decision that four people have to have an opinion about, it does not hold. There no one moves neatly from attention to desire to action. There it goes back and forth, it comes to a standstill, someone joins, someone disappears, and in the end it is decided at a moment no one saw coming.

But we still measure as though it were a funnel.

A funnel describes how many people are left. It does not describe why the rest dropped out. That is exactly the same mistake as in the previous chapter: the outcome gets measured, the cause does not.

Brand, positioning and what that actually does

Now we come to the part of marketing that stands furthest from sales, and is mistrusted the most as a result.

DEFINITION • POSITIONING

The place your name occupies in the customer's head, relative to the alternatives.

Not what you say you are. What he thinks when your name comes up.

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Al Ries and Jack Trout wrote *Positioning* about that in 1981, and their core idea is simple and unwelcome: you cannot determine your positioning. The customer determines it. All you can do is influence it.

And the room is limited. Per category people remember a handful of names, and anyone who is not among them does not exist at the moment a need arises.

Research from another direction adds to that. The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute in Australia, where Byron Sharp works among others, has spent decades investigating how brands actually grow. Their findings are unwelcome to a lot of marketers, because they show that brands do not grow through loyalty but through availability: mental availability, meaning that people think of you, and physical availability, meaning that you are there when they want something.

What that means for you, as a salesperson or a business owner:

- Most people in your market need nothing today. They are not buying, and there is no technique that changes that.
- Those who do need something think of two or three names. If you are not among them, you are not in the running for the conversation.
- The work of getting into that list happens long before the conversation, and that work is marketing.

This is not a plea to stop ringing. It is the explanation of why cold calling is such an enormous waste: you are speaking almost exclusively to people who need nothing today.

The arithmetic of marketing

As with sales this is a sum, and here too it is a few numbers that determine everything.

DEFINITION • THE QUANTITIES OF MARKETING

Reach. How many people see your message. **Cost per thousand impressions (CPM).** What it costs to reach a thousand people. **Click-through rate (CTR).** What share of them does something. **Cost per lead (CPL).** What one sign-up costs. **Cost per customer (CAC).** What one customer costs, all in. **Customer value (LTV).** What a customer brings in over the whole term.

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The sum behind it:

Cost per lead = Ad spend ÷ Number of leads

Cost per customer = Cost per lead ÷ Lead-to-customer conversion

Return = Customer value ÷ Cost per customer

Let us fill it in, with figures that are realistic in small and medium-sized business.

You put €4,000 a month into advertising. That produces 200 sign-ups. Of those sign-ups, 5 per cent become customers. A customer is worth €3,000 on average over the whole term.

Cost per lead	= €4,000 ÷ 200	= €20
Customers	= 200 × 0.05	= 10
Cost per customer	= €4,000 ÷ 10	= €400
Customer value	=	€3,000
Return	= €3,000 ÷ €400	= 7.5×

Seven and a half times your money back. That is a well-running machine, and in the marketing report it looks splendid.

Now we are going to change one number, and watch what happens.

Suppose sales cannot cope with those 200 leads and really follows up only 120. The rest sit there, or get one phone call and then nothing more.

Leads followed up	= 120	
Customers	= 120 × 0.05	= 6
Cost per customer	= €4,000 ÷ 6	= €667
Return	= €3,000 ÷ €667	= 4.5×

The return drops by forty per cent, and nothing has changed about the campaign. Not a word, not an image, not a euro.

And now the other side. Suppose marketing widens the target group to bring in more leads, and 400 come in instead of 200, but conversion drops to 2 per cent because half of them are beside the point.

Cost per lead	= €4,000 ÷ 400	= €10
Customers	= 400 × 0.02	= 8

Cost per customer	= €4,000 ÷ 8	=	€500
Return	= €3,000 ÷ €500	=	6×

Now look at the marketer's report. Cost per lead halved, from €20 to €10. That is a success, that goes in the presentation.

And look at reality: two customers fewer and a lower return.

Both departments report truthfully and both arrive at a different conclusion about the same quarter. That is not ill will. That is a design fault.

Why that wall is there

Now we can explain the conflict from the start of this chapter, and it is not a matter of character.

Marketing is judged on reach, leads and cost per lead. Those are numbers marketing can influence itself.

Sales is judged on closings. That is a number sales can influence only halfway, because it depends on what comes in.

Note what happens there. Two departments with an order of rank are judged as though they were equals standing apart from each other. The tool gets a target of its own, alongside the goal it is meant to serve.

And in between sits one word that all that misery comes out of: **lead**.

DEFINITION • THE PROBLEM WITH THE WORD LEAD

To marketing a lead is someone who has left their details.

To sales a lead is someone who can buy.

Those are two different things, and almost nowhere has it been agreed which of the two counts.

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On top of that, no one knows exactly what works. The classic lament of the department store owner John Wanamaker, around 1900, still holds: half my advertising budget is wasted, I just do not know which half.

The internet promised to solve that, because at last everything could be measured. That has not resolved the problem but shifted it. Now everything that is measurable gets measured, and what is not measurable no longer counts. A conversation at a birthday party, a colleague who mentions your name, a book someone read three years ago: that is in no dashboard at all.

What this means for Diagnostic Selling

We are running ahead of Part II and Part III, but this has to be here, because otherwise you miss what this chapter is for.

Marketing optimises attention. Sales optimises activity.

Neither of them establishes what is missing.

A marketer who sees conversion falling makes a better advert. A sales manager who sees conversion falling has more calls made. Both of them raise the dose.

And the question neither of them asks is this: of the people who did not buy, what was missing?

Was the stake missing? Then marketing brought in the wrong people, and more adverts make it worse.

Was the trust missing? Then something is wrong with what happens between the sign-up and the conversation, and that is no one's property.

Was the urgency missing? Then they were the right people at the wrong moment, and you are not supposed to throw them away but to keep them.

Three different diagnoses, three different measures. And in the classic model only one measure gets taken: more.

In step 1 of the method, demand generation, marketing comes back. Not as a department further along the building, but as the work that makes sure the right people come to you at the moment something is on fire.

That is something other than delivering leads. That is making sure you are in that list of two or three names at the moment someone starts searching.

In summary

- Marketing is arranging offer, price, availability and communication so that the right people find you. Promotion is one part of it, and it is the only part marketing usually gets to be about.
 - Drucker, 1954: the purpose of a business is to create a customer. Levitt, 1960: know what business you are really in, because your customer buys something other than what you make.
 - The four P's became seven in services. Over six of those marketing has no say in practice.
 - AIDA is from 1898 and still sits under every funnel. A funnel counts how many people are left, not why the rest dropped out.
 - Brands grow through availability, not through loyalty. Most people in your market need nothing today.
 - The same figures lead marketing and sales to opposite conclusions, because the word lead means something different to each of them.
 - Marketing optimises attention, sales optimises activity. Neither of them establishes what is missing.
-

Over to you

This chapter was about the other side of the wall. Now for yours.

About your business

1. Answer Levitt's question. What business are you really in? Not what you make or deliver, but what your customer buys.

Write it down in one sentence, without jargon.

2. Now ask three customers. Not whether they agree with your sentence, but: what did you buy from us, and why from us?

Compare their answers with yours.

3. Where is the difference? That difference is your positioning, and you are not the one who determines it.

About the wall

4. What counts as a lead where you work, and who decided that? Write down the definition as it stands in your system.

5. Ask someone from marketing what a good lead is. Then ask someone from sales. Write both answers down word for word.

Are they the same?

6. Who in your company is responsible for what happens in between the sign-up and the first conversation? If the answer is no one, then you know where part of your conversion goes.

About the numbers

7. Look up what one lead costs you and what one customer costs. If those numbers do not exist, work them out with the formulas from this chapter.

8. How many of last month's leads were really followed up? Not assigned in the system. Followed up, with a conversation.

9. Work out what your cost per customer would be if that percentage were twenty points higher. Write down the amount.

The three diagnoses

10. Take the last ten leads that came to nothing. Put behind each one which of the three was missing:

- **Stake.** He did not have the problem, or not badly enough.
- **Trust.** He did not dare, or not with you.
- **Urgency.** He did have it, but not now.

11. If you cannot fill that in for most of them: that is normal, and it is exactly what this book is going to change.

If you can fill it in, look at which of the three comes up most often. That number tells you more about your company than your whole dashboard does.

12. And the last one. What do you currently do with leads where only the urgency is missing?

If the answer is “throw them away” or “mark them not interesting”, then you are throwing away your best future customers. They did have the stake and the trust. They simply had no reason yet to decide today.

In the next chapter we lay those two departments next to each other and look at where the money really disappears. Not in the campaign, and not in the conversation, but in the handover in between.

Chapter 4 · Where the money disappears

Part I · Where it comes from

In the previous two chapters we looked at two departments. Now we put them side by side.

And then you see something that appears in no report at all.

The money does not disappear in the campaign. It does not disappear in the conversation. It disappears in the space between the two, and that space belongs to no one.

I am going to show you how big that space is. Not with a story, but with a sum, because this is one of the few places in this trade where you can work out the loss exactly.

Get something to do the maths with.

Three people in one shop

Before we go into the theory, a picture first. Because everything that follows is this, at heart.

Picture a shop.

Outside the door someone is shouting that there is something good for sale inside. He waves a sign, he has an offer, he makes sure people stop and look. That is **promotion**.

Inside the shop stands the person who worked out what goes on the shelves. He has researched what the neighbourhood needs, what it is allowed to cost, and where the shop should stand. That is **marketing**.

And at the back stands the one who talks to the customer. Who asks what they came for, thinks it through with them, and takes them to the till. That is **sales**.

Three people, one shop.

And here is the thing. If those three do not talk to each other, the customer walks out without buying, even though all three did their job.

The man outside does not know the customer asked for something that is not on the shelves. The man in the shop does not know that something is being shouted outside that cannot be delivered inside. And the salesperson at the back does not know why this person came in, so he starts every conversation by asking what they are after, when that was already said outside.

That is this chapter, and everything after it is the working out of it.

How it is supposed to work

Before we look at where it breaks, we need to know how it fits together. Because most people who work in one of the two departments cannot explain what the other one actually does.

At heart the split is simple.

DEFINITION • THE PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE

Marketing works with groups. Sales works with individuals.

Marketing influences many people at once, without knowing who they are. Sales influences one person, and you know exactly who that person is.

The order of rank from chapter 3 still stands: sales is the goal and marketing is the tool. This is the practical difference in their work, and the rest follows from it.

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The rest follows from that, and it is worth going through it point by point.

Marketing cannot respond, sales can. An advert says the same thing to a thousand people. It cannot notice that this one reader has just lost his job, or just been given a budget. A salesperson can, and if he does not, he wastes the only advantage he has.

Marketing is cheap per contact, sales is expensive. Reaching a thousand people costs tens of euros. One hour-long conversation easily costs a hundred euros in time, and a visit twice that. So it makes no sense to have a salesperson do what an advert can do just as well, and just as little sense to have an advert do something that needs a conversation.

Marketing works ahead, sales works now. What marketing does this month pays off in three to twelve months. What a salesperson does this month has to pay off this month. That difference in time horizon explains most of the friction between the two.

The relay

In The Fire Triangle I use the image of a relay team for this, and we are sticking with that image, because it fits better than the funnel.

A funnel has one opening and things only fall downwards. In a relay something is handed from one person to the next, and anyone who has ever run knows that the baton is dropped at exactly that point.

The line-up of that team is fixed:

THE THREE RUNNERS

Marketing runs the first leg. Researching what the customer wants, settling the right product, the price, the place. Laying the groundwork.

Promotion puts in the burst of speed. Catching attention, making it known, giving a temporary advantage to move people *now*.

Sales finishes it off. Receiving the interested party, answering the last questions, making the decision possible and bringing in the revenue.

Three disciplines, one movement. Swap them round and nothing happens.

And on top of that there is another sequence, the four phases in which a product enters the market: introduction, trial, sales, aftersales. They are set out in The Fire Triangle, and the main thing about them is that you cannot skip them and you cannot reverse them.

Note that these are two different levels, because they often get mixed up.

	WHAT IT IS ABOUT	TIME SCALE
The four phases	How a product enters a market	Months to years
The relay	How one customer goes from unknown to paying	Days to months
The steps	How one conversation runs	Hours to weeks

This book is mainly about the bottom two rows. The top one is in book one, and if that is not right, the rest will not help you. Rigging up a sales machine for a product that is still in phase one is the most expensive way of buying recognition there is.

Where in that relay the baton is dropped

Now that we know the line-up, we can point out where it goes wrong. And that is always in the same two places.

PHASE	WHO	WHAT HAPPENS
1	Marketing	The groundwork: target group, product, price, place
2	Promotion	The attention: making it known, giving a reason to look now
3	Handover	Establishing whether there is anything to be had here
4	Sales	Establishing what is really going on
5	Sales	Designing the conditions that are missing
6	Sales	The smallest step and the agreement
7	Feedback loop	What happened, back to phases 1 and 2

The two rows in bold belong to no one, and those are exactly the two where the money disappears.

Phase 3: the handover itself

This is the moment the baton is passed, and it goes wrong there for a reason that has nothing to do with the people.

Marketing knows what someone did. Which page he looked at, what he downloaded, how often he came back. That is behaviour.

Sales wants to know what is going on. What is broken, who decides, why now. That is situation.

Behaviour is not situation. Someone who looked at your pricing page three times could be a buyer or a competitor. You cannot tell that difference from the behaviour, and yet a score is based on that behaviour which decides how quickly a call is made.

At the handover, information has to be added that neither side can gather on its own. That is why a conversation belongs there, not a system status.

Phase 7: the feedback loop

This is the phase that is missing almost everywhere, and it is the only one that makes the rest better.

After thirty conversations sales knows exactly which enquiries were worth nothing and why. That is the most valuable information in the whole company, because marketing can use it to adjust the groundwork.

And in practice that information goes nowhere. It sits in the salesperson's head, and sometimes in a comments field no one reads.

Without phase 7 the relay only runs one way. Marketing keeps delivering what it always delivered, sales keeps complaining about the quality, and no one knows whether it is getting any better.

What they need from each other

Boil it down and each side needs only one thing from the other. And in both cases they do not get it.

What marketing needs from sales: what was really going on.

Not a status, not a figure. The customer's own words. Why he needed it, what he was afraid of, what got him over the line, and for the lost deals: what it foundered on.

That is the material you write a working advert with. Without that material a marketer writes what he thinks the customer thinks, and that is guesswork.

What sales needs from marketing: why this person is here.

Not a name and an email address. The trigger. What he was looking for, which problem he described, what brought him in.

With that one sentence you start a conversation halfway in instead of at zero.

THE RULE THAT SOLVES BOTH PROBLEMS

Everything one department knows and the other can use should cross over at the moment of the handover.

That takes half a minute per lead and it is the cheapest improvement there is in this trade.

Who brings it together

There is one more thing, and it may well be the most important question in this chapter.

Who is in charge of this relay?

In most companies: no one. Marketing reports to the board, sales reports to the board, and the board looks at two reports that are about different things.

In companies where it does work, there is one person responsible for the whole chain, from first attention to paying customer. Sometimes that is called a commercial director, sometimes a revenue manager, sometimes it is simply the owner.

What that person does is not complicated. He asks one question no one else asks: of the hundred people who came forward last month, what happened to them and why?

As long as no one asks that question, what I am about to work out will keep on happening.

A hundred people

We start with a hundred people who want something from you.

Not a hundred addresses from a list. A hundred people who did something themselves: filled in a form, asked for a download, clicked on a demo, ordered a book. They gave their name and their email address, and in 2026 that is no small thing.

In most companies that is called a hundred leads. And from that moment on it goes wrong, because no one has agreed what that word means.

DEFINITION • THE THREE KINDS OF LEAD

The enquiry. Someone has left their details. That is all you know.

The qualified lead. You have established that something is going on, that this person decides or has influence, and that there is a reason to look now.

The opportunity. A conversation has taken place, a stake has been established, and a next step is in the diary.

In most organisations these three go by the same word, and are counted in the same column.

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

Let us follow those hundred enquiries through an average company.

The road they travel

1. From enquiry to assignment

The hundred come into the system. They are divided among the salespeople, usually automatically, usually in order.

Loss: nil. On paper.

In reality the first leak is right here, and it is invisible. Of those hundred, thirty wanted to download something and nothing more. Twenty are students, competitors, or someone who needed a report for a dissertation. Ten filled in the wrong address.

No one knows that, because nothing has been established. All hundred go to sales, and sales will call all hundred of them.

That is where the irritation we heard in chapter 3 begins. Not because marketing does poor work, but because there is no filter in between.

2. From assignment to first contact

Now the calls get made. And here something happens that hardly any company looks at.

Research into response speed has been showing the same thing for years: the chance of getting hold of someone and having a conversation drops sharply as more time passes between the enquiry and the first contact. Within the hour is incomparably more effective than the next day, and the next day is better again than three days later.

The reason is not magic. At the moment he made the enquiry he was busy with this subject. Three days later he is busy with something else, and your call is an interruption instead of a continuation.

In practice the call is made when it happens to suit. In the afternoon, between two appointments, or tomorrow if things are busy.

Loss here: of the hundred, in an average company sixty to seventy are actually spoken to. The rest are called twice, get an email, and disappear into a status called unreachable.

3. From first contact to conversation

Of those seventy conversations, a number come to nothing straight away. No budget, no position, no question.

That is fine. That is qualification, and it ought to happen.

Only here it happens on instinct, which means it happens unpredictably. One salesperson qualifies strictly and is left with ten. Another is left with thirty and sends every one of them a quote.

There is no standard. There is only habit.

4. And then the part no one measures

Now comes the part this chapter turns on.

Of those hundred enquiries there are, let us say, twenty that genuinely amount to something. There is a stake there, there is a problem there, there is someone there who decides.

How many of those twenty become customers?

In an average company: two to four.

And now the question I ask everywhere and almost never get an answer to: what happened to the other sixteen?

Not: what status are they in. What happened?

The sum of the leak

Let us fill it in with figures you can check for yourself.

A company spends € 6,000 a month on bringing in those hundred enquiries. A customer is worth € 8,000 on average, with a gross margin of forty per cent.

As it goes now:

Enquiries		=	100
Actually spoken to (65%)		=	65
Genuinely promising		=	20
Became a customer (15% of the promising)		=	3
Revenue	= 3 × € 8,000	=	€ 24,000
Gross margin	= € 24,000 × 0.40	=	€ 9,600
Marketing cost		=	€ 6,000
Result		=	€ 3,600
Cost per customer	= € 6,000 ÷ 3	=	€ 2,000

Three thousand six hundred euros left, on six thousand euros put in. That is tight, and that is how it looks in a lot of companies.

Now we change one thing, and it is not the campaign and not the salesperson.

The handover only: everyone is spoken to within a day instead of whenever it suits, and it has been agreed what a promising lead is.

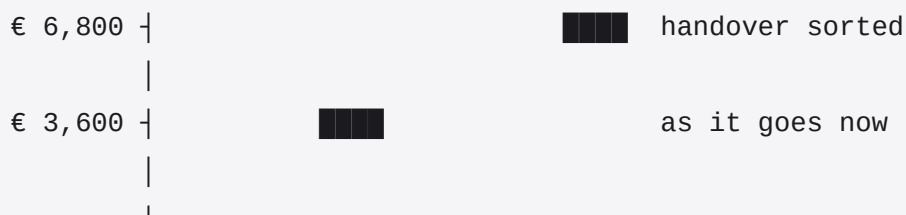
Enquiries		=	100
Actually spoken to (85%)		=	85
Genuinely promising		=	26
Became a customer (15%)		=	4
Revenue	= 4 × € 8,000	=	€ 32,000
Gross margin	= € 32,000 × 0.40	=	€ 12,800
Marketing cost		=	€ 6,000
Result		=	€ 6,800
Cost per customer	= € 6,000 ÷ 4	=	€ 1,500

The result goes from € 3,600 to € 6,800. Almost double.

Without one extra euro on marketing. Without an extra salesperson. Without a better product, a better advert or a better pitch.

Just by fixing the handover.

result per month, same campaign and same people



And that is the answer to the question of where the money disappears. Not in the campaign, not in the conversation, but in a no man's land that no department is responsible for and no dashboard looks at.

Why no one fixes it

You would think this would be sorted within a week the moment someone sees it. That almost never happens, and there are three reasons for it.

No one owns it. Marketing is finished once the lead has been delivered. Sales starts once the conversation is booked. The space in between appears in no job description.

No one is held to account for it. Marketing is judged on leads, sales on closes. The question of how many enquiries were actually spoken to comes up in no appraisal.

It is invisible in the figures. A lead that was never called disappears into a status. It does not count as a loss, because nothing was ever won.

**A loss that is recorded nowhere does not exist in an organisation.
And what does not exist does not get solved.**

This is the design flaw again. No one is doing anything wrong. Marketing delivers, sales calls what it can, and the team leader steers on the figures he is given.

And every month half the result leaks away.

The four questions that make it visible

When I walk into a company and I am allowed four questions, these are the four. Together they take twenty minutes and they are often uncomfortable.

1. What do you call a lead, and who decided that?

In nine out of ten cases the answer is: it just grew that way. And in eight out of ten, marketing and sales give different answers.

2. How many of last month's enquiries were actually spoken to?

Not assigned. Not called. Spoken to, with a human being on the line.

That figure usually does not exist, and in itself that is the answer.

3. How long is the average gap between an enquiry and the first contact?

This figure usually does not exist either. When it does, it gives people a fright.

4. What happens to a lead that does have a stake but does not want to act yet?

This is the most important of the four, and the answer is almost always the same: it goes down as not interesting.

So you are throwing away your best future customers. They did have the stake and the trust. They simply had no reason yet to decide today, and that is the only one of the three conditions that can come about by itself.

What Diagnostic Selling does about this

This is why the method starts with demand generation and not with the conversation.

If you establish in advance who you want to attract, fewer enquiries come in and they are better. That feels wrong to a marketer who is held to account on numbers, and it is exactly what has to happen.

And instead of one word for everything, you get three outcomes that mean something.

- **No stake.** This is not a customer. Not now, not later. Out with it, and that is a good outcome, because it costs you no more time.
- **Stake, but no urgency.** This is a future customer. Keep him, maintain him, and come back at the moment something changes in his situation.
- **Stake and urgency, but no trust.** There is work here, and it is your work. This is the category where most revenue disappears, and the only one where you can do something about it yourself.

Three categories instead of one pile. Three different next steps instead of following every one of them up the same way.

That is the whole gain, and it is sitting there already.

In summary

- Marketing works with groups, sales with individuals. Everything else follows from that: marketing is cheap per contact and cannot respond, sales is expensive per contact and can.

- Marketing works ahead, sales works now. That difference in time horizon explains most of the friction.
 - It is not a funnel but a relay, with seven phases. Two of them have to be done jointly: the handover and the feedback loop. Those are precisely the two that are usually missing.
 - Marketing needs the customer's words from sales. Sales needs the trigger from marketing. Both of them rarely get it.
 - The money does not disappear in the campaign or in the conversation, but in the handover in between.
 - The word lead means three different things, and they are counted in the same column.
 - Of a hundred enquiries, in an average company about two thirds are actually spoken to. The rest disappear into a status.
 - Just by fixing the handover, with no extra budget and no extra people, the result can almost double.
 - No one fixes it, because no one owns it, no one is held to account for it, and the loss is recorded nowhere.
 - Diagnostic Selling replaces that single pile with three outcomes: no stake, no urgency, or no trust. Each with a different follow-up.
-

Over to you

This chapter was about a leak you can calculate. Now calculate it for yourself.

The four questions

1. What do you call a lead? Write down the definition as it stands in the system.
2. Ask someone in marketing and someone in sales. Write both answers down word for word. Are they the same?
3. How many of last month's enquiries were actually spoken to? Not assigned, spoken to.

If that figure does not exist: how long has your company been going, and for how many of those years has no one known this?

4. How long is the average gap between an enquiry and the first contact?

The sum

5. Fill in the sum from this chapter with your own figures. Enquiries, spoken to, promising, became a customer, and what you spend on it.

6. Now work out what happens if you raise the percentage spoken to by twenty points and change nothing else.

Write that amount down and draw a circle round it. That is sitting there now.

The pile

7. Find the status your leads disappear into when they came to nothing. What is it called?

8. How many are in it? Open the list and see how many names there are.

9. Take ten at random and find out what happened to them. Not what the status says. What happened.

10. How many of those had a stake but no urgency?

Those are not lost leads. Those are customers you forgot.

And the question that counts

11. In your company, who owns the space between the enquiry and the first conversation?

If you cannot answer that, and hardly anyone can, you have just found your biggest point of improvement. Not in your campaign, not in your salespeople. In between the two.

In the next chapter we go back in time. Sixty years of sales tactics, from door to door to AI, with the assumption that lay underneath in every decade. And you will see that they all solved the same problem in the same way.

Chapter 5 · Sixty years of sales tactics

Part I · Where it comes from

You have probably heard someone say that selling is not what it used to be.

Usually it is said by someone who has been doing it for thirty years, and usually it is wrong. Not because nothing has changed, but because something other than what he thinks has changed.

In this chapter we go back sixty years and walk forward to the present.

Not to be nostalgic, and not to show how stupid it all was back then. Quite the opposite: every generation solved something the generation before it could not. There was always sound reasoning underneath.

But they all shared the same assumption. And once you see it, you also understand why something different is needed now.

So here is how I will do it. Per period: what they did, why that worked at the time, and what the assumption underneath it was.

The sixties: more doors

What they did. Door to door, the phone book from front to back, pitch the product. The rep with the suitcase, the vacuum cleaner salesman, the encyclopaedia man.

Why that worked. There was little on offer and plenty of spending power. People had money and had no idea what was out there to buy. If you rang the bell with something new, you were the only source of information a lot of people had.

This is the era of the complete information advantage from chapter 2. The seller knew everything, the buyer knew nothing, and that is what he was paid for.

The assumption. Open enough doors and you will sell. Selling is a matter of numbers, and whoever does more gets more.

What is left of it. The arithmetic. Every sales department that still steers on activity today is running the logic of 1965.

Ray, the man with the suitcase

There is one seller from that period everyone knows without knowing he was a seller.

Ray Kroc sold milkshake machines. He travelled across America with his suitcase, rang the bell at restaurants, and told the same story everywhere. Six spindles, six milkshakes at a time, look at the time that saves you.

That is exactly the seller of his generation. He believed in numbers, he believed in persistence, and he did it for years without much to show for it.

Until he got an order that caught his eye.

A restaurant in California ordered eight at once. Eight machines, that is forty-eight milkshakes in one go. That could not be right for a single outlet.

And here it comes, and this is why I tell this story.

He went to have a look.

There stood the restaurant of the McDonald brothers, with a queue out the front and a kitchen laid out like an assembly line. And Ray Kroc did not see what a seller is supposed to see, namely a customer who needed a lot of machines.

He saw something else: a system you could repeat.

He never sold those milkshake machines in any great numbers again. He sold franchise rights, and McDonald's came out of that.

For forty years he sold what he had in his suitcase. On the day he went to look at what was happening at the customer, his life changed.

And note what is missing from that story. No one had taught him to go and look. It was in no handbook. He did it out of curiosity, because a number did not sit right with him.

That is the whole assumption of the sixties in one man. He did not become successful by opening more doors. He became successful by walking in once and asking what was going on.

The seventies: find the need

What they did. Solution selling. Instead of reciting your product, first work out what someone needs, and then show that your product fits.

Why that worked. The supply was growing. More suppliers arrived, and anyone who could only list his product lost out to the one who could connect to what the customer said.

The assumption. Find the need, deliver the solution, and the sale follows by itself.

Where it falls down. A need is not the same thing as a reason to decide. Everyone has dozens of needs they do nothing about. This is the start of something we come back to in Part II: the difference between a need and a stake.

The eighties: better questions

What they did. This is where it gets serious. Neil Rackham and his team analysed more than thirty thousand sales conversations, and that was the first time anyone genuinely researched this trade instead of telling stories about it.

Out of that came SPIN, in 1988: a sequence of question types, from the Situation to the Problem to the Implication to the Need-payoff.

Why that worked. The research showed something that went against intuition. On large purchases the successful sellers turned out to talk less and ask more. And the classic closing techniques, which the whole trade had been built on, turned out to work against you on large deals.

That is an important moment in the history of this trade, and it deserves recognition. Rackham proved that selling can be researched.

The assumption. Better questions lead to better conversations, and better conversations lead to more deals.

Where it falls down. It remains a tool for the seller to steer the conversation. The question of whether a decision is possible at all is never asked. You can run a perfect SPIN conversation with someone who cannot decide anything.

The nineties: scale

What they did. Telemarketing. Call centres. Scripts. Calling lists. This is the decade in which selling became a factory.

Why that worked. The telephone had become cheap, and so had labour in some countries. Suddenly you could approach a thousand people a day instead of twenty.

The assumption. Scale and repetition win. If one in a hundred says yes, then call ten thousand people.

Where it falls down. Here something breaks that has never been repaired. When everyone starts calling at the same time, being called becomes a nuisance. The cost per contact went down, and the value of a contact went down faster.

The telecoms case from chapter 1 comes from here. That script, that compulsory opening line and those outcome codes are all children of the nineties.

The room

If you want to know what that decade looked like, look at the image everyone knows by now: a room full of men with telephones, a little script in front of them, and someone at the front shouting.

Jordan Belfort made that image world famous. His office sold shares in companies that amounted to very little, to people who had no way of judging that, with a script worked out precisely to override doubt.

He was convicted for it in the end, and rightly so.

But that is not my point. What interests me is that his method worked, and *why* it worked.

It worked because the buyer had no way at all of checking what was being said. There was no internet where you could look that fund up. There was no forum with other people's experiences. There was only a voice on the telephone that sounded very convincing and knew exactly what to say to every objection.

All the power sat with the seller, because all the information sat with the seller.

And that is the heart of what happened in that decade, including at the companies that behaved perfectly properly. The whole trade was built on an advantage that would later disappear.

Every technique that rests on the other person being unable to check it has a shelf life.

And something else was left behind, something no one intended. People learnt what a sales call is. They learnt to recognise the opening line, the tone, the feigned interest.

You cannot unteach that in a whole generation. We are still working today with the reflex that was created there.

What is left of it. By far the most. The greater part of what is called “sales” in an average company today is nineties logic with newer software around it.

The noughties: measure everything

What they did. CRM. Pipelines. Lead scoring. Conversion rates per stage.

Why that worked. For the first time a director could see what his sellers were doing. That was a real improvement, because before that a pipeline was something that sat in someone’s head.

The assumption. Measuring is knowing. Chop the process up and measure it enough, and selling becomes predictable.

Where it falls down. And here is the biggest one of them all.

What got measured was what was measurable: calls, quotes, stages, dates. Those are all things on the seller’s side.

What did not get measured is what was happening in the buyer’s head. And so everything was steered except the cause.

The moment you start steering on what is measurable, people start producing what is measurable. That is why every pipeline contains deals that do not belong in it, and why every system contains reason codes that explain nothing.

This is the period in which those outcome codes from chapter 1 took their final form. Not as a diagnosis, but as a field to fill in.

And then came the energy sellers

There is one period in the Netherlands that did this trade more damage than all the others put together, and anyone who works here knows exactly which one I mean.

After the liberalisation of the energy market, suddenly everyone was allowed to switch supplier. A whole industry of intermediaries sprang up around that, and they were paid per contract signed.

Paid per contract. Everything is in that.

You know the stories, and perhaps you lived through them. At the door of elderly people. A chat that opened with a question about the meter reading, as though you were from the grid operator. A signature that was needed “for the paperwork” and turned out afterwards to be a three-year contract. People who switched supplier twice a year without knowing it.

Rules came in for that eventually, and rightly so. But the damage was done, and not only to those people.

A whole generation of Dutch people learnt there that a seller at the door or on the telephone probably wants something from you that is not in your interest.

That is the legacy we are working with today. If you ring a company in 2026 and notice that someone hangs up after three seconds, part of that has its origin here.

And the painful thing is that most people in that sector were not even fraudsters. They stood in a system in which only the signed contract counted. No quality, no satisfaction, no question of whether it got the customer anything. One number.

That is the design fault in its purest form. You pay people per signature and you get signatures. Whether the customer is better off is in no field at all.

And it also explains why we have to work harder at trust in this country than sellers in a lot of other countries do. That is not because the Dutch are distrustful. It is because they were taught.

The 2010s: the buyer takes over

What they did. Inbound marketing, content, and as a counter-movement the Challenger Sale.

Why that happened. The internet had taken away the information advantage. The buyer did his own research, made his own comparisons, and only called once he already knew what he wanted. We need chapter 6 for that, because it deserves treatment of its own.

The reaction came in two parts. On the one hand: make sure you are found, publish useful things, let the customer come to you. On the other: if the buyer already knows everything himself, you have to tell him something he does not yet know. That is the Challenger idea, and it came out of CEB research around 2011.

The assumption. The buyer does his own research, so teach him something. Bring an insight he had not arrived at himself.

Where it falls down. The Challenger approach is sharper than what came before it, and it touches on something real: a good conversation changes how someone looks at their own situation.

But the starting point is still the seller who brings something. The insight comes from you, the story comes from you, the reframing comes from you.

And with inbound something else arose: the number of leads became the goal. We worked out in chapter 4 what that costs.

The 2020s: automate

What they do. Automated sequences, enriched data, and lately AI agents that write messages, make calls and follow up.

Why it is happening. The cost per contact has collapsed again, just as it did in the nineties. What the telephone was then, the agent is now.

The assumption. More messages at a lower cost per contact.

Where it falls down. Exactly the same as in the nineties, only faster. If everyone automates at the same time, the value of every message goes down. We covered that at length in chapter 7.

Where the line runs

Somewhere between those last two periods lies the real break in this trade, and it is bigger than everything that happened before it.

Before that, everything ran through three channels: the telephone, the door, and printed paper. You advertised in the newspaper, you sent a brochure, you called or you went round. That was it.

Now it runs through three others: the search engine, the social network, and the inbox.

Three names you hear every day and that are rarely explained:

- **LinkedIn** went from a digital business card to the most important sales channel in the business market. Not because you can sell there, but because you can be visible there to people who need nothing today and will in a year.
- **Social media** turned reach into something you can build rather than buy. That sounds free and it is not: you pay with time and with keeping at it.
- **Email** went from a postbox to a system. Sequences, automation, segmentation. The cheapest channel there is, and for that reason the most abused.

That is not a detail in this timeline. That is the moment selling and marketing moved from the outside world to the screen, and the moment the buyer could check everything for the first time.

The whole of the next chapter is about that, because it deserves more than a paragraph in a timeline.

And now the thread running through it

Put those seven periods side by side and look at the last column.

PERIOD	WHAT THEY DID	THE ASSUMPTION UNDERNEATH
1960s	Door to door, pitch the product	Open enough doors and you will sell
1970s	Solution selling	Find the need, deliver the solution
1980s	SPIN, consultative selling	Better questions, better deals
1990s	Telemarketing, scripts, scale	Scale and repetition win
2000s	CRM, funnels, lead scoring	Measuring is knowing
2010s	Inbound, content, Challenger	Teach the buyer something
2020s	Automation, AI agents	More messages, lower costs

Read that last column again from top to bottom.

Every generation solved the problem of the previous one by refining the activity. More doors. Better questions. More scale. More measurement. Better content. More messages.

Seven improvements to what the seller does.

STATEMENT

For sixty years this trade has been improved on the seller's side. Not a single generation started with the question of what was missing on the buyer's side.

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

That is not a reproach to those generations. They were all right within their own time, and they solved real problems.

But they shared one assumption, and it was never put up for discussion: that the outcome is determined by what the seller does.

Why that was once true

And now something important, because I do not want you thinking they had it all wrong.

That assumption was true, as long as the seller had the information.

In 1965 you were the only source. There was no other way to find out what was for sale, what it cost and whether it was any good. So what you did and said really did determine the outcome, because the buyer had nothing else.

In 1988 there was already a bit more to compare, but the conversation was still the place the information came from.

In 2005 that began to shift.

And today the buyer has everything. He can compare your price, test your claims, look up your competitor, read reviews and ask an AI for a summary before he ever speaks to you.

The assumption of sixty years has not been proved wrong. It has expired.

The circumstance it rested on no longer exists.

And that is why refining the activity no longer works. You can sharpen your pitch further, make your follow-up neater, make your messages more personal. It all touches the side of the table where the problem is not.

What changes then

All seven periods ask the same question, in different words: how do I get this customer there?

The question that matters is a different one: what is missing that is stopping this customer from being able to decide?

That is not a new technique. It is a different opening question, and everything else follows from it.

And note what happens to everything you have read in this chapter the moment you ask that question.

The numbers from the sixties are still needed, because without conversations there are no customers. The questions from the eighties are still needed, because otherwise you know nothing. The measurement from the noughties is still needed, but you measure something else. And today's automation is still needed, but for the work *before* the conversation.

Nothing goes away. Something comes first.

That is what Diagnostic Selling is: a diagnosis before everything you were already doing.

In summary

- Every generation solved the problem of the previous one, and had good reasons for it. This is not a story about stupid predecessors.
- The sixties: numbers. The seventies: need. The eighties: better questions. The nineties: scale. The noughties: measurement. The 2010s: content. The 2020s: automation.
- All seven refined what the seller does. Not one of them started with what the buyer was missing.
- That assumption was true as long as the seller had the information. It has not been proved wrong, it has expired.
- That is why working harder or cleverer no longer helps. It touches the wrong side of the table.
- Nothing you have learnt goes away. Something comes first.
- Ray Kroc sold what was in his suitcase for forty years. He only amounted to anything on the day he went to look at what was happening at the customer.
- Every technique that rests on the other person being unable to check it has a shelf life.
- The energy sellers after the liberalisation taught a generation that a seller probably wants something that is not in your interest. We are still working

with that.

Over to you

About where you come from

1. Which decade did your sales training get stuck in? Look at the table and point to the row that sits closest to your daily work.

Be honest. Most people sit somewhere between the nineties and the noughties.

2. Who taught you to sell? Name the person, and write down the most important thing he or she passed on to you.

3. Is that still true?

About your own tools

4. Name three things you do as standard in a conversation. An opening line, a question, a way of closing.

5. For each of those three, work out where it comes from. Which period, which method, from whom?

6. Which of the three do you do because it works, and which because that is how you were taught?

About what you measure

7. What gets steered on where you work? Name the three numbers that matter most in the monthly report.

8. How many of those three are about what the seller does, and how many about what the buyer thinks?

If the answer is three to nil, you are in the noughties.

The question that counts

9. Take your last five lost deals. For each one, ask the old question: what could I have done or said differently?

10. Now ask the other question of those same five: what was missing that stopped him from deciding?

11. Which of those two questions gives you a more usable answer?

12. And one more, about the legacy from this chapter. What are you held to account on, and what would you start doing if you were paid on that alone?

Those energy sellers were paid per signature, and they delivered signatures. Take an honest look at your own reward and ask yourself what behaviour logically follows from it.

And if you have no answer at question 10 for most of them, that is not a shortcoming of yours. That is sixty years of training that never taught you to ask that question.

In the next chapter we look at the event that set all of this in motion. The internet took the seller's most important possession away, and almost no one noticed what came in its place.

Chapter 6 · From offline to online

Part I · Where it comes from

Back to the shop from chapter 4.

Three people. One out front calling people in, one inside who worked out what goes on the shelves, and one at the back who talks to the customer.

That is how it worked for centuries. The customer came to you, or you went to him, and all of it happened in the same room.

Now it happens differently.

The man out front is no longer out front. He is on a screen, in people's living rooms while they sit on the sofa, among five hundred others standing there too.

The customer no longer walks into the shop. He first looks at what others say about you, compares you with four competitors he would never have found, and only comes in once he already knows what he wants.

And that salesperson at the back? He is still there. Except the customer walking in sometimes knows more about the product than he does.

This chapter is about that move. What exactly has changed, what has not, and why almost everyone draws the wrong conclusion.

What was actually taken away

Start at the beginning. What has actually happened here?

You would say: a channel has been added. You used to have the telephone and the leaflet, now you have a website as well.

That is not what happened.

STATEMENT

The internet has taken the salesperson's most important asset away from him: the information advantage.

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

Think back to chapter 2. The trade exists thanks to two things: information asymmetry and transaction costs.

In 1965 the salesperson knew everything and the buyer knew nothing. That was not a power game, it was simply how things were: there was no other source. If you wanted to know what a machine cost, you had to ask someone who sold it.

Today the buyer can compare your price within a minute, test your claims, read reviews, look up your competitor and ask an AI to summarise it all for him.

One of those two pillars has fallen away.

And that is what really happened over the past twenty years. Not that a channel was added, but that part of the reason you existed disappeared.

What took its place

Now the part almost everyone misses, and the part that saves your whole trade.

Something went away and something else took its place.

The buyer no longer suffers from a shortage of information. He has too much of it.

Fifteen suppliers all promising the same thing. Two hundred reviews that contradict each other. Three comparison sites naming different winners. An AI that hands him a tidy summary he has no way of knowing is right.

DEFINITION • WHAT HAS SHIFTED

The buyer's problem used to be: I do not know.

The buyer's problem now is: I do know, but I dare not choose.

That is no longer an information problem. It is a decision problem.

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Read those two sentences again, because they say why this book exists.

You solve an information problem with explanation. Salespeople were good at that, and websites and AI are now better at it.

You do not solve a decision problem with more explanation. The more information you add for someone already paralysed by options, the worse it gets.

That is why your conversations go quiet more often now than they used to, while you are doing nothing worse than you ever did.

The three new channels

Right. On to practice, because these three names come up daily and are rarely explained.

Everything that happens online in sales and marketing runs, at bottom, through three channels. All three do something different, they work at different moments, and they are constantly confused with one another.

1. The search engine

What it is. Being found at the moment someone types something in.

What it replaces. De Gouden Gids, and the classified section at the back of the trade journal.

What makes it special. This is the only channel where the customer takes the initiative. He types something in, so something is already going on. That is why the quality of those contacts is higher than that of all the other channels put together.

What the condition is. Someone has to be searching. If you sell something no one knows exists, no one types it in and there is nothing here for you. In that case you have to build recognition elsewhere first.

What is changing now. People no longer search only on Google. They ask an AI, and it gives one answer instead of ten blue links. That changes everything about this channel, because in a single answer you are either in it or you are not.

2. The social network

What it is. Being visible to people who need nothing today.

What it replaces. The advert in the trade journal, the trade fair, the drinks reception.

What makes it special. This is the only channel that works cumulatively. Every time someone sees something of yours, you are building the same thing. That is why nothing seems to happen for the first six months, and why after that it runs on what you have built.

In the business market LinkedIn is the most important channel here, and for a reason that has nothing to do with the platform: that is where the people who control budgets are listed, with their job titles next to their names.

What the condition is. Keeping at it. This is the only channel where stopping costs you everything you have built, and where almost everyone stops at exactly the moment it starts to work.

The mistake most often made here. People treat it as an advertising channel and start selling. That does not work, and for a reason you have already seen in chapter 3: most people in your market need nothing today. Selling to people who need nothing is annoying. Telling those same people something useful is not, and it makes them think of you at the moment something really is on fire.

3. The inbox

What it is. Direct contact with someone who has given permission for it.

What it replaces. The leaflet through the letterbox and the cold call.

What makes it special. It is the only online channel you own yourself. Your followers on a social network belong to that network; if their algorithm changes, your reach is gone. Your email list is yours.

And it is dirt cheap. Reaching a thousand people costs almost nothing.

What the condition is. The very thing that makes it cheap is also the problem. Because it costs so little, everyone sends everything to everyone. The average inbox has become a rubbish tip as a result, and the average newsletter goes unread.

Where it does work. With people who have had something from you that was of use to them, and who know why they are on that list. Then it is the best channel there is.

How the three work together

Now the part where it usually goes wrong. They get deployed as separate channels, and they are a chain.

CHANNEL	DOES	WORKS AT WHICH MOMENT
Social network	makes sure people know you	long before anything is going on
Search engine	makes sure people find you	at the moment something is on fire
Inbox	makes sure people remember you	in the time in between

Read that third column.

The social network works on people who do not need anything yet. The search engine works at the moment something happens. And the inbox bridges the period in between, which can last months or years.

Use only one of them and you miss two thirds of the time.

And here is the link with what we saw in chapter 3 about availability: most people in your market need nothing today. If you are only on the search engine, you reach nothing but the small part that is searching right now. If you are only on a social network, you reach people who do not want anything yet.

The three channels are not a menu to choose from. They cover three different moments in time, and you need all three.

What has not changed

Now a warning, because a lot of money gets burnt here.

Everything I have described above is about channels. About *how* you reach someone.

Nothing has changed about what has to be right before someone decides.

Stake, trust and urgency worked in 1965 exactly as they work today. A buyer who does not know what it will get him does not decide. Someone who does not dare carry the risk alone does not decide. Someone with no reason to decide this month puts it off.

That happened on the doorstep, it happened on the telephone, and it happens on a video call.

STATEMENT

The channel has changed. The conditions have not.

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That matters, because there is a whole industry telling you otherwise. It says you need a new system, a new funnel, a new piece of automation, and that after that it will run by itself.

You may well need those things to be found. They change nothing about what has to be right in the other person's head.

And yet something fundamental does change

Finally, the part that sets up the rest of this book.

Something really has changed in how the work is divided, and it is the biggest opportunity in this trade in thirty years.

The salesperson used to do everything. He built recognition, he explained, he persuaded, he closed. All four tasks sat in one human being, and that was expensive and slow.

Now it can be divided differently.

The recognition can be done by the social network, for years on end, without you having to be there.

The explaining can be done by your website, or by an AI, and they do it better than you, because they are always there and they never get tired.

What is left for the human being is the part no one else can do: establishing what is missing in this one person, and carrying the responsibility for what happens next.

That is not a hollowing out of the trade. It is a redistribution of it.

And now you can probably see why everyone is asking the same question at the moment. If recognition can be outsourced and explaining can too, how much is left for the human being?

That is the question I get in every room, and the next chapter is entirely about it. Not as an opinion, but with the reasoning attached: where AI takes over, where it does not, and why that difference has nothing to do with how good the technology is.

In summary

- The internet has taken the salesperson's information advantage away from him. That is not an extra channel, it is the loss of one of the two reasons the trade exists.

- The buyer's problem has shifted from "I do not know" to "I do know, but I dare not choose". That is a decision problem, and more explanation makes it worse.
 - Online, everything runs through three channels: the social network makes sure people know you, the search engine that they find you, the inbox that they remember you.
 - Those three cover three different moments in time. It is not a menu to choose from.
 - Nothing has changed about the conditions. Stake, trust and urgency work exactly as they did in 1965.
 - What does change is the division of the work. Recognition and explanation can be taken over. Whether that goes for the rest as well is the question of the next chapter.
-

Over to you

About your own channels

1. Which of the three channels do you use? Write down how much time or money goes into each one per month.
 2. Which one is missing? And what kind of people are you missing as a result: the ones who do not know you yet, the ones searching right now, or the ones you once spoke to who were not ready?
 3. If you could keep only one, which would it be? Do not answer that on instinct, answer it with the table from this chapter in front of you.
-

About what you own

4. How many people can you reach tomorrow without paying anything and without a platform's permission? That is your email list, and that number is the only reach that is genuinely yours.
 5. When did you last send those people something that was of use to them? Not an offer. Something useful.
-

About the shift

6. Take your last three lost deals. Did those people know too little, or did they not dare to choose?
 7. What did you do when it went quiet? Did you send more information?
 8. If the answer is yes: you did what makes sense with an information problem, and what you had in front of you was a decision problem.
-

The question that counts

9. Which part of your work could be done today by a good website or an AI? Be honest and name three.
10. And what is left after that?

What is left is your trade. All the rest was temporary.

In the next chapter we answer the question everyone asks as soon as this comes up: is AI taking over selling?

Chapter 7 · Is AI taking over selling?

Part I · Where it comes from

This is the question I get most often. In every room, at every customer, at every drinks party where someone hears what I do.

Is AI going to take over selling?

Usually it is not put as a question but as a statement of fact, with a shrug thrown in. As though it has already been decided and all we have to do now is wait until it happens.

The answer is more nuanced than either camp wants to hear, and it determines what you have to do over the next few years to stay relevant. So let us work it out.

First, let us clear up a misunderstanding.

With commodities it has been going on for thirty years

It is true that selling is disappearing. It just did not start with AI, and not even with the internet.

These days you buy your clothes online. Not a salesperson in sight. That feels like a modern development, but I am old enough to know that it is not.

Years ago you had Wehkamp and Neckermann. A catalogue on the kitchen table, an order form, a stamp. You chose for yourself, you ordered for yourself, and no salesperson was involved.

That model has been around for decades. What changed is the channel, not the principle.

DEFINITION • COMMODITY

A product standardised enough that the buyer can judge it unaided, and where the difference between suppliers is mainly the price.

A packet of coffee. A plane ticket. A kilowatt hour. A white T-shirt in size L.

Standaardbegrip uit de economie

With commodities the salesperson disappears, and that is no tragedy. It makes sense.

Think back to chapter 2. The trade exists thanks to information asymmetry and transaction costs. Take those two away and the reason you stand in between goes with them.

With a white T-shirt there is no information asymmetry. The buyer knows exactly what he is getting. A salesperson who starts explaining what cotton is only makes the transaction more expensive without adding anything to it.

AI has taken nothing over there. There, the internet finished a process the mail-order companies had started in the sixties.

And why you do not pay for a car online

Now the other side.

You do not buy a car with your credit card while sitting on the sofa. You do not buy a machine for your production line through a shopping basket. You do not buy an ERP implementation, an accountant, an insurance portfolio, a solar park or a software package for two hundred staff by clicking on order.

Why not?

Two reasons, and both of them still hold.

It has to be explained. Not the product, but what it means in your situation. Which variant suits us? What happens to what we have now? Who here has to do something for it? Those are questions where the answer differs per buyer, and that is exactly where a product page stops.

The risk is too big to carry alone. With a twenty-euro T-shirt you lose twenty euros. With the wrong machine you lose a year of production, and with the wrong software choice you lose two years and your credibility.

And that is where selling by a human being starts.

So does AI play no part?

It certainly does. A big one.

It is just that the part is supporting, and that word is important enough to pause on.

Take Henk, the adviser on my own website. I built him myself, so I know exactly what he does and does not do.

Henk brings my website alive. He is there twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. He catches every visitor, including the one at half past eleven on a Sunday night, and he asks the same question I would ask: what is not moving for you?

That is something I could not possibly do myself.

Can he sell?

Not entirely. And it matters that you understand why not.

Henk qualifies. He establishes whether something is genuinely going on, he hears which of the three conditions is missing, he hands over something usable, and if there is anything to be had he sends the visitor on to the human being. To me.

With that he does the work I could never give to a hundred visitors at once. But he does not close the deal himself.

Why not? Because of the second condition

Here the model comes back, and it gives the answer.

On big decisions people buy on the basis of trust. That is one of the three conditions, and without that condition nothing happens.

And on a big decision, trust is not about whether what is being said is correct. It is about the question: who will carry this with me if it goes wrong?

DEFINITION • WHY TRUST CANNOT BE HANDED TO A MACHINE

Trust on a big decision is the belief that there is someone who carries the consequences with you.

An AI agent carries nothing. He has no reputation to lose, no job on the line, no name he still needs in this industry.

That is why he can inform, qualify and prepare, but cannot take the last step. Not because he is not good enough. Because he has nothing to lose.

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That may change. I do not rule out that in ten years there will be agents carrying some form of liability, with a company behind them standing surety for it. Then this shifts.

But today it is how it is, and I base that not on an opinion but on what I see happening every week in my own conversations.

The sales trick you see everywhere at the moment

Now a part that irritates me, and that you need to know about because it is costing you money.

A whole industry has sprung up promising this: let us build you an AI agent, and he will score deals for you on a production line.

That is a misconception, and at some suppliers it is simply a sales technique.

What an agent like that can really do, and it is not nothing:

- Generate demand through content, so the right people find you.
- Catch visitors and qualify them, at any time of day.
- Answer questions you would otherwise answer yourself ten times a week.

- Book appointments in your diary.
- Prepare: who is this, what is going on, what has already been said.

That is real and it is worth a great deal.

And then comes the trick. That appointment is then called a deal.

A booked appointment is not a deal. It is a qualified lead, and that only if you are lucky.

This is exactly the same mistake those old managers made, and we know them from chapter 2. They had to show results. So what was countable got counted, and the name of that number was chosen to sound good.

We call an appointment a deal, because that sounds like a paying customer.

That is rubbish.

What you have is a conversation in your diary. Whether anything comes of it depends on what happens in that conversation. And the quality of your agent determines the quality of your lead, nothing more and nothing less.

In the end a human being is still needed to close the deal.

What does happen

My expectation, and I can already see it forming around me, is not replacement but close collaboration.

The agent does what he is good at: always being available, never getting tired, never leaving a visitor waiting, asking the same questions consistently, and remembering everything.

The human being does what he is good at: carrying the risk with you, hearing the doubt that is not spoken out loud, and saying something that costs him something.

And that is exactly the step most salespeople now have to make to stay relevant.

Those who carry on pitching are going to lose out to this new process. That is not a prediction but a certainty, and for a simple reason: everything a pitch does, a machine can do more cheaply, faster and twenty-four hours a day.

What a machine cannot do is establish what is missing for this one person and take responsibility for it.

And that is where the method starts

Now look at where this leads, because here all the chapters of this part connect up.

You are not going to pitch any more. It had already stopped working the moment the buyer lost his information advantage, and now a machine can do it better as well.

Instead you use AI to pull the customer towards you. You make sure you are found at the moment something is burning, you catch those people, you qualify them, and only then does the human being join in.

Demand generation is the new marketing.

That is step 1 of the method, and it is not a marketing step you do on the side. It is the condition for the rest, and it is the place where AI has its real value.

After that the human being takes over, and the diagnosis begins.

In summary

- With commodities the salesperson has been disappearing for decades, from Wehkamp and Neckermann to today. That makes sense and it is not an AI story.
- In complex selling that does not happen, for two reasons: it has to be explained, and the risk is too big to carry alone.
- AI plays a big part, but a supporting one. It generates demand, qualifies, answers questions and books appointments.
- Trust is the condition it cannot deliver, because it has nothing to lose if things go wrong.
- A booked appointment is not a deal. Anyone who calls it that makes the same mistake as the manager who reports observations as results.

- What is coming is collaboration: the agent attracts and qualifies, the human being diagnoses and carries the risk.
 - Anyone who carries on pitching will lose out to this process, because a pitch is exactly what a machine can do more cheaply.
-

Over to you

About your own market

1. Is what you sell a commodity or not? Answer that honestly, using two questions: can the buyer judge it unaided, and is the difference between suppliers mainly the price?
 2. If the answer is commodity: what then is your right to exist as a salesperson, five years from now? Write that down, because it is an urgent question.
 3. If the answer is no: what in your selling has to be explained that a website cannot explain? Name three things.
-

About what you already automate

4. Which questions do you answer more than five times a week, always in the same way? Write down five of them.

Those are the questions you should no longer be answering yourself.

5. What happens at your end now when someone lands on your site at half past eleven on a Sunday night?
 6. If you already work with AI: what do you call a result? An appointment, a lead, a conversation, or a paying customer? And who decided to call it that?
-

The question that counts

7. Of the last ten deals you closed: in how many of them was there a moment where the customer wavered and you said something that cost you something?

Something like: that does not suit you. Or: I think you would do better to wait. Or: the cheaper version can do this too.

8. What did that do to the conversation?

9. And finally: would a machine have said that?

If your answer is no, you know where your value sits, and you also know what you have to invest in over the next few years.

And with that we are at the end of the back story.

We now know where this trade comes from, why marketing and sales behave the way they do, what every generation has assumed, what the internet did with all of that, and what is left of this work once the machines have taken over what they can take over.

What is left is the diagnosis.

There is one more thing we have to understand before we can start on it. Not about selling, and not about technology. About people.

Why does someone put something off while he knows he will be better off for it?

That is the last chapter of this part, and it is the foundation under everything that comes after it.

Chapter 8 · Why people would rather do nothing

Part I · Where it comes from

We close this part with the only chapter that is not about selling.

It is about people, and it sits underneath everything you have read so far.

Because you can know the whole history of this trade, you can know how marketing and sales fit together, you can understand what the internet changed, and you are still empty-handed in front of the one question every salesperson asks:

Why is this man not deciding, when he is the one who stands to gain?

He sees the benefit. He has seen the figures. He said himself that it is a good idea. And nothing happens.

That is not a lack of decisiveness. It is not a character flaw, not laziness, and not a polite way of saying no either.

It is a sum, and it works out the same way in every head.

Two ways of thinking

Start with the basics, because the rest follows from here.

Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, two psychologists, spent the years from the nineteen seventies onwards researching how people really decide. Not how it ought to go according to economic theory, but how it actually goes. Kahneman received the Nobel Prize in economics for it in 2002, and he was not an economist.

Their central finding, which Kahneman later set out in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, is this.

DEFINITION • SYSTEM 1 AND SYSTEM 2

System 1 is fast, automatic and takes no effort. It recognises, senses and judges within a second. It is always on.

System 2 is slow, deliberate and costs energy. It calculates, weighs up and compares. It is usually off, because it is expensive.

Most decisions are made by system 1, and then explained by system 2 as though they had been weighed up.

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That last sentence matters for your trade, so read it again.

Your customer decides first and comes up with the reasons afterwards. Ask him why he chose as he did and you get a tidy account of price, delivery times and terms. That account is sincere. It was simply assembled after the fact.

And that is why better arguments work so poorly. You put them to system 2, while the resistance sits in system 1.

The asymmetry that explains everything

Now comes the most important research finding in this book, and if you remember only one thing from it, make it this.

Kahneman and Tversky discovered that gains and losses do not carry the same weight.

DEFINITION • LOSS AVERSION

A loss weighs about twice as heavily as a gain of the same size.

Losing a hundred euros hurts about twice as much as winning a hundred euros pleases. Not because people are weak, but because that is how it has been measured, time and again, across decades of research.

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Now set that alongside your proposal.

You work out that it will earn him ten thousand euros. Properly evidenced, well explained, and probably correct as well.

He hears something else. He hears that he could spend ten thousand euros on something that may disappoint.

Those two amounts are equal in euros. In his head they are not. The risk weighs double.

Your proposal must therefore not be a little better than doing nothing. It must be about twice as good before deciding is worth the trouble.

And now you see why that one extra per cent of discount makes no difference. You are shifting things on the gain side, while the resistance sits on the loss side.

Why doing nothing does not feel like a choice

There is something else on top of this, and together with the above it is lethal.

DEFINITION • STATUS QUO BIAS AND OMISSION BIAS

Status quo bias. People prefer the existing state of affairs, even when an alternative is objectively better. Staying as things are feels safe, changing feels risky.

Omission bias. A bad outcome that follows from doing something weighs more heavily than the same outcome from doing nothing. Act and it goes wrong, and you get the blame. Do nothing and it goes wrong, and you were unlucky.

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The second is the reason organisations stand still, and it is rarely named out loud.

Think of the man who has to approve your proposal.

He picks you and it goes well: he has done his job. That is no heroic deed, that is what is expected of him.

He picks you and it goes wrong: it was *his* choice, with his name on it, and everyone will still know that in two years.

He does not pick: nothing happens, and no one takes him to task for it.

STATEMENT

Doing nothing is the only option where he cannot be proved wrong.

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No discount can offset that.

And there is a further unfairness in that balance. Your solution has to be explained, understood, defended internally and sometimes approved on legal or financial grounds.

Doing nothing needs none of that. It is already in place.

Doing nothing is not an empty outcome. It is a competitor, and it is the only one that needs no salesperson.

And now you also see why that small step in my method matters so much. Not because small steps are nicer, but because they lower the stakes. With a small step the damage from a wrong choice is small, and so loss aversion weighs less heavily.

You are not convincing him that the risk is not so bad. You are making the risk smaller.

Too much choice paralyses

Then the third mechanism, and this one is the mechanism of our time.

In 2000, Sheena Iyengar and Mark Lepper ran a study in a supermarket. A tasting table was set out with jars of jam. Twenty-four varieties on one day, six on the other.

The big table drew more interest. More people stopped to look.

But of the people who stopped at the small table, a far greater share actually bought something. With twenty-four varieties, almost no one bought.

More choice, fewer decisions.

Choice draws attention and slows decisions. Those are two opposing effects of the same thing.

One piece of honesty belongs here, because this book is about not drawing conclusions too fast. That study has been repeated often and by no means always with the same outcome. In some situations a wider range slows the decision, in others it does not. What holds up is the underlying mechanism, and that is recognisable enough in commercial terms: the more alternatives there are, the more comparing the buyer has to do before he can choose.

Freedom then becomes work.

Now set that alongside chapter 6. There we saw that the buyer's problem has shifted from "I do not know" to "I do know, but I dare not choose".

That is this, at scale.

Your customer has seen fifteen suppliers who all promise the same thing, two hundred reviews that contradict one another, and an AI summary he has no way of knowing is correct.

And what do you do when it goes quiet? You send more information.

You add another jar of jam.

And then the fourth question

Finally, the mechanism that sits closest to my own work.

Amy Edmondson, a professor at Harvard, studied medical teams in the nineteen nineties. She expected that the best teams would report the fewest errors.

The opposite turned out to be true. The best teams reported *more* errors.

Not because they made more of them, but because there was room to report them. She called that psychological safety: the belief that you can say or try something without it costing you your position.

DEFINITION • PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY, APPLIED TO THE BUYER

Not: does he dare to trust you. But: does he dare to carry this decision inside his own organisation?

He can be utterly convinced by your solution and still do nothing, because he does not know whether he will survive it if it disappoints.

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In The Fire Triangle I describe four questions a buyer asks himself, and the fourth is this: can I handle this?

It is almost never spoken out loud. It is not about your product and not about your company. It is about him.

And here is the research that explains why it weighs so heavily: the less safe someone feels inside his own organisation, the less willing he is to do anything he could be judged for.

You have no influence over that. You do not know his boss, you do not know the history, you do not know who was made to pay last year for a wrong choice.

What you can do: make sure he does not have to carry it alone. By keeping the step small, by making it reversible, and by giving him the words to explain it internally.

It all comes down to the same thing

Set those four mechanisms side by side and look at what you see.

MECHANISM	WHAT IT DOES	WHERE IT TOUCHES MY MODEL
System 1 and 2	Deciding happens on feel, reasons come afterwards	Arguments do not work where the resistance sits
Loss aversion	A loss weighs twice as heavily as a gain	Stake: it has to be twice as good as doing nothing
Status quo and omission bias	Doing nothing does not feel like a choice	Urgency: waiting is safe, so the situation has to push
Psychological safety	Do I dare to carry this in my organisation?	Trust: the fourth question, can I handle this

Three of those four point straight at one of my three conditions. That is no coincidence and it is no party trick either. I did not derive that model from this research. I came across it in practice, and found out later that it had already been measured.

That is the most agreeable way to be proved right: someone else had already proved it before you wrote it down.

What this is not good for

Now a warning, because I do not want you to use this chapter wrongly.

All this science explains behaviour after the fact. It tells you why someone did not decide. It does not tell you what to say at half past nine on a Monday morning.

That is not a failing of the research. A doctor who knows how the vascular system works has not thereby made a diagnosis for this one patient.

There is a gap between understanding and being able.

You now know why people do not decide. You do not yet know how to establish why this one man is not deciding.

Filling that gap is what the rest of this book does.

In summary

- People decide with system 1, on feel and within a second, and then explain it as though it had been weighed up. Arguments land at the wrong system.
- A loss weighs about twice as heavily as a gain of the same size. Your proposal must therefore not be a little better than doing nothing, but considerably better.
- Doing nothing does not feel like a choice, and whoever does nothing is never proved wrong. No discount can offset that.
- More choice draws attention and slows decisions. Sending more information when it goes quiet makes it worse.
- A buyer's heaviest question is not about you but about himself: can I carry this inside my organisation?

- Three of the four mechanisms point straight at stake, trust and urgency.
 - All of this explains behaviour. It does not yet tell you what you have to establish with this one person.
-

Over to you

This is the last time in this part that I ask you anything, and it is the most important.

About yourself, first

1. Name a decision you have been putting off for months. Business or private, it makes no difference. You have one.
2. Do you know what the right choice is?

For most people the answer is yes. That is exactly the point of this chapter.

3. What do you lose if you do it and it turns out badly? Write that down.
 4. And what do you lose if you do not do it? Write that down too.
 5. Now look at those two lists. Which one feels heavier, and which one is heavier?
-

About your customer

6. Take your last deal that went quiet. Which of the four mechanisms was at work?

Was it loss aversion, and did the risk feel heavier than the return? Was it the status quo, and did nothing change if he did nothing? Or was it that fourth question, and did he not dare to carry it?

7. What did you do when it went quiet? Be honest.
 8. Which of those four mechanisms did that help with?
-

The question that counts

9. What is the smallest step your customer can take without risking something he cannot carry?

If you do not know that, you do not know how you are going to close deals. If you do know it and you still offer him the whole programme, you now know why it stays quiet.

10. And the last one of this part. When did you last help a customer explain internally why he chose you?

Not sent a brochure. Given him the words to sell it to his boss.

If the answer is never, there is work there. And it costs you nothing.

With that, the backstory is complete.

You now know where this trade comes from, how it is built up, what has changed and why people decide the way they decide.

What you do not yet know is how to establish what is missing with this one person.

That is the diagnosis, and that is what Part II and Part III are about.

Between Part I and Part II

Where sales stands, and why now

Before we begin on the diagnosis, I want you to know where you stand.

Not in your career. In the structure.

Because sales is not a loose activity that a company does on the side. It is a function within a discipline that has existed for almost a century, with its own laws, its own formulas and its own professors. Most of the people who work in it do not know that. And that is exactly why the trade falls so easily to lists, tricks and the next hype.

So first the map. Then the place you occupy on it.

Three economics, three ways of looking

Economics is one word for three disciplines that do something completely different.

DEFINITION • THE THREE ECONOMIES

General economics looks outwards. How does the market behave, what are prices doing, what is purchasing power doing, where is it all heading?

Business economics looks inwards. What does it cost to make something, how does the money move through the company, when do we break even?

Commercial economics looks at the link between them. How do we make sure that what is made inside gets bought outside?

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

Run through them, because each one answers a question the other two cannot.

General economics: looking out

This is the discipline of markets, trends, the business cycle, purchasing power and price formation. It studies how people and companies behave as a group.

One concept from it is worth our while, because it says something about who your customer is.

DEFINITION • THE ENGEL CURVE

A curve showing how spending on a product changes as someone's income rises.

With some products a higher income means more money goes to them, but a smaller share: food, for example. With other products spending rises faster than income: luxury, advice, quality.

Named after Ernst Engel, who described it in 1857.

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Why that matters: it tells you which category your offer falls into, and so what happens to your market when the economy turns against you. If you are in the first category, people keep buying. If you are in the second, you are the first thing to be cut.

That is not a detail for a salesperson. It determines whether next year you will have an urgency problem across your whole customer base at once.

Business economics: looking in

This is the discipline of costs, production, logistics, processes and finance. The question here is not what the market is doing, but what the company is doing and what that costs.

And that is where the concept comes from that every business owner ought to know and that many salespeople have never seen.

DEFINITION • THE BREAK-EVEN POINT

The point at which revenues are exactly equal to costs. Above it you make a profit, below it a loss.

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You work it out like this:

Break-even volume = Fixed costs ÷ (Selling price - Variable costs)

Break-even revenue = Break-even volume × Selling price

An example. You have €120,000 of fixed costs a year: rent, salaries, systems. You sell a service for €5,000, and the direct costs per assignment are €1,500.

Margin per assignment	= €5,000 - €1,500	= €3,500
Break-even volume	= €120,000 ÷ €3,500	= 34.3
Break-even revenue	= 34.3 × €5,000	= €171,500

Thirty-five assignments a year. Below that you are out of pocket, above it you are earning.

And now the point of putting this in a book about selling.

That figure, thirty-five, is the only figure in the whole company that says exactly how much selling has to happen. Not “as much as possible”. Not “ten per cent growth”. Thirty-five.

Every salesperson ought to know that figure for his own company by heart. Almost no one does.

And look what happens to it when you pull the levers we discussed in chapter 2. Raise your price by ten per cent, to €5,500, and your margin becomes €4,000 and your break-even drops to thirty assignments. Five assignments fewer needed, in the same company.

That is what a good conversation about price is worth, expressed in assignments you no longer have to win.

Commercial economics: the link

And then the third discipline, ours.

General economics tells you what the market is doing. Business economics tells you what your company costs. Commercial economics answers the only question left in between: how do we make sure that what we make gets bought by them?

In The Fire Triangle I quote the definition that was drilled into me in 1983, with the modern version alongside it. The core has not changed in forty years: it is about the relationship between an organisation and its market.

And that discipline contains the order of rank you saw in chapter 3. Sales is the goal, marketing is the tool, promotion is the tool of marketing.

All three economies cost money. But only one of them brings it in.

The lopsided split

Now comes the part that is uncomfortable, and that every salesperson recognises.

Every role in a company costs money. Production costs money. Logistics costs money. Administration, IT, personnel: all of them cost items, and budget is set aside for all of them. That is normal and it is right.

And then there is sales. The role that has to make sure money comes in so that all those other roles can be paid for.

Look at how that role is funded.

	MARKETING	SALES
Pay	fixed salary	often partly or wholly variable
Budget	own budget to spend freely	usually none
In the books	investment	cost item
Risk	with the company	largely with the salesperson

A marketer has a fixed income and a budget he is allowed to spend in order to do his job. A salesperson in many cases works on commission, sometimes entirely, and gets no budget to generate his own demand.

It has been like that for decades, and it is lopsided.

The consequence is well known: only the successful salespeople earn anything in this trade. The rest drop out, and are replaced by someone who starts again with the same impossible brief.

And there is another consequence that is named less often. If you work on commission and have no budget, then you are entirely dependent on what marketing supplies you with. You are an entrepreneur without tools.

And now the opportunity

This is where it turns, and it is the reason I am writing this book now and not ten years ago.

That dependence has just disappeared.

Everything you used to need a marketing department for, you can now do yourself. And it costs almost nothing.

- Being findable at the moment someone searches: you do that yourself.
- Being visible to people who need nothing today: you do that yourself, on a social network, with no budget.
- Generating demand with something useful: you do that yourself.
- Catching and qualifying visitors, twenty-four hours a day: you let an AI agent do that, for a fraction of what a call centre costs.

- Booking appointments: automatic.

Ten years ago you needed a department and an annual budget for that. Now you need an evening a week and a few tenners a month.

STATEMENT

The salesperson who can generate his own demand is no longer an employee waiting for leads. He is a business.

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That is what I did myself, and it is the reason I no longer work the way I worked fifteen years ago.

I call that role the **Digital Sales Consultant**. The name stays in English, even in the Dutch edition of this book, and there is a reason for that which becomes clear later on.

What that looks like in practice

I can show that better than I can explain it, so here is what I am doing myself at the moment.

I work for an accountancy firm. In the old model it would go like this: they supply me with addresses, I ring them, and I get a commission on whatever turns into a customer. My income then depends entirely on the quality of their list.

That is not how it goes.

I generate the demand myself. Through my own channels, with my own content, with an agent that catches and qualifies the visitors. That costs me no marketing department and no annual budget.

You can look at it yourself. It is at boekhoudlive.nl, and what you see there is not a portfolio piece and not an example I built for this book. It is the working system through which those leads come in, at the moment I am writing this.

A NOTE ABOUT TIME

A book stands still and a business does not.

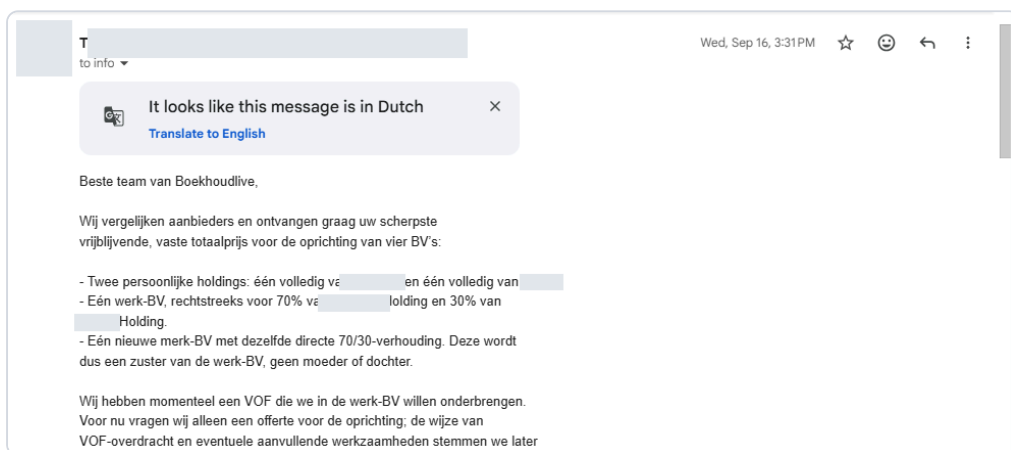
I have no influence over what that address will show in three years. Perhaps it will work differently by then, perhaps it will have a different name, perhaps it will no longer exist. That is part of running a business and I am not going to pretend otherwise.

What is there now is there. And the value of being able to show something that is genuinely running right now weighs more with me than the certainty that it will still look exactly the same in three years.

And this is what such a lead looks like

Here is one. It came in through that system, and all I have done is make the names illegible. Nothing else has been changed: the date, Gmail's translate bar and the whole text are there as they arrived.

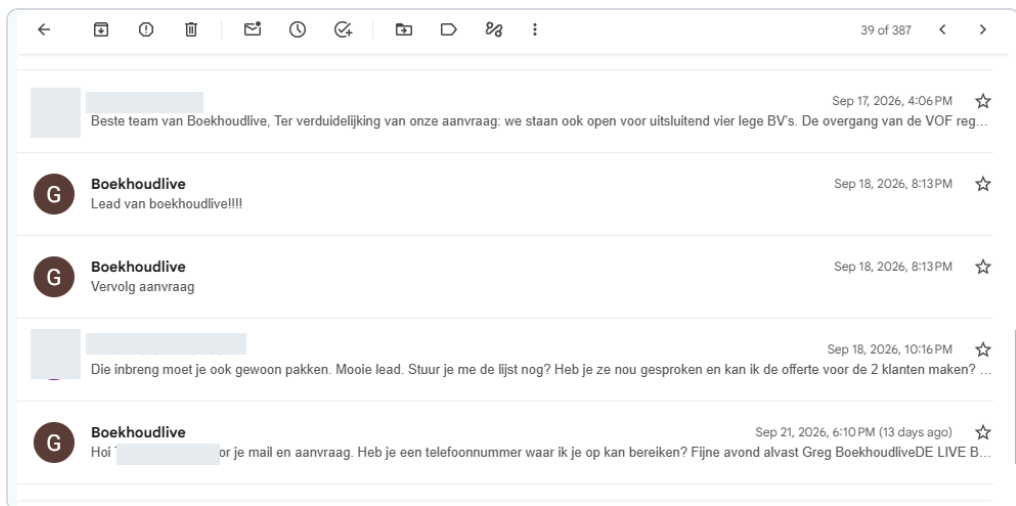
I do that deliberately. A retyped email in a book is a claim by the author. A screenshot is a document.



Enquiry received, September. Names made illegible, otherwise unchanged.

And what happened next

This is the part you rarely get to see in a book about selling, and it is exactly the part where the model becomes visible.



The same week, in order. Names made illegible.

Read those lines from top to bottom.

17 September. The enquirer sends a follow-up. They are also open to four empty BVs, and the conversion of the VOF can come later. He is thinking along with us, so he is working on the solution and no longer on the question of whether he is going to do it.

18 September, 20:13. I forward him to my client. The subject line is not subtle: *Lead from boekhoudlive.*

18 September, 22:16. And then comes the reply I want to show here:

You should just pick up that transfer work as well. Nice lead. Will you still send me the list? Have you spoken to them yet and can I draw up the quotation for the 2 customers?

It is all in there.

He calls it a nice lead. He wants the list. He asks whether I have spoken to them yet. And he wants to draw up the quotation for two customers, not one.

That is the moment that lead has a price. Not because I agreed a rate in a contract, but because the man who pays for it asks for the rest of his own accord.

This is what the negotiating position I mentioned above looks like. You do not negotiate over your percentage. You deliver something he does not have, and he asks for more.

21 September. I ring the enquirer and ask for his phone number, because the conversation that comes next is not one you have by email.

How that lead really came in

One layer deeper, because I have not yet told you the most important part.

That man did not ring me. He did not fill in a form that I then rang about. I did not go looking for him.

He came in on the website, in the evening, outside office hours.

There was no contact form waiting there. There was **Henk**, the AI adviser I built myself. Henk catches every visitor, twenty-four hours a day, and does not start by telling them what we can do. He starts by asking.



The homepage of boekhoudlive.nl. Henk sits in the middle of the page, not in a corner at the bottom right.

Notice first where he sits. Not as a chattering bubble at the bottom right that everyone clicks away, but in the middle of the page, in the spot where a piece of sales copy normally sits.

That is a deliberate choice. The visitor does not get the story first and only then the chance to say something. He can start straight away.

And then look at what Henk says first.

Hi! What is going on?

Four words. No product name, no offer, no request for an email address.

That is the opening question of this whole book, and it is sitting on a homepage.

The visitor asks how to set up a BV. Henk explains it: through the notary, the registration with the KvK, the numbers from the Belastingdienst, a turnaround of one to two weeks. A plain answer, with no conditions attached up front.

And then he closes with this:

What kind of business do you have now, are you already trading as a sole trader, or are you starting completely from scratch?

That is where it happens.

He has just given what the visitor asked for, and now he asks something back. Not a phone number. Not a budget. He asks about the situation, because everything that comes after depends on it.

Someone who already has a sole trader business has a different problem from someone starting completely from scratch. The first has something that has to be converted, with tax consequences and a date that matters. The second only has a plan.

That is the diagnosis: not asking what someone wants to have, but establishing where he is coming from. A machine did that, in the evening, while I was doing something else.

That is the qualification, and it was carried out by a machine, in the evening, while I was doing something else.

And once those answers were complete, Henk forwarded it to me.

That is what you saw above in the first screenshot. That enquiry with its four BVs and its shareholdings is not what someone spontaneously types into a contact form. It is what comes out when someone has first had a conversation with something that asked the right questions.

THIS IS HOW A DIGITAL SALES CONSULTANT WORKS

**The machine generates the demand, catches the visitor and qualifies him.
The human makes the diagnosis and carries the risk.**

No cold list. No addresses from marketing. No hundred conversations to find twenty.

One qualified enquiry, which came in while I was asleep, and which I sold twice.

And now you

At this point in the book you are probably asking yourself a question, and it is a fair question.

Nice story, Greg. But what is in it for me?

Let me be very direct about that, because this is the most important piece of this whole part.

You probably work on commission, or partly. You depend on what marketing supplies you with. You have been hearing for years that the leads will soon get better. You negotiate over a few per cent every year, and you know that conversation only goes one way.

And when things go badly, it is down to you. Not to the list, not to the campaign, not to the design of the process you are standing in.

That is the trade as it is. And I am telling you now that it no longer has to be.

What has changed, in your favour

Everything you used to need in order to work without that list, you did not have. A marketing department, a budget, a system, a team.

That has just fallen away.

You can now be findable yourself. You can be visible yourself to people who need nothing today. You can put up an agent yourself that catches and qualifies your visitors while you sleep. And that costs no annual budget, but an evening a week and a few tenners a month.

What you still need then is the one thing that is not for sale: knowing what you have to establish before you offer anything.

That is Part II and III of this book.

A new role, and it has only just arrived

This is the heart of it, and I will say it as it is.

A salesperson is a job. He is on a payroll or on a commission scheme, he delivers hours and effort, and he is replaceable. If he leaves, someone else comes along and gets the same list.

Until now that was not a choice. It was simply how it worked. You could work hard and get good, but the surroundings were fixed and you had little say in them.

That has just changed, and a new role has come out of it.

DEFINITION • DIGITAL SALES CONSULTANT

An independent sales professional who generates his own demand, qualifies that demand himself with AI, and sells diagnostically. He offers that as his own service, from his own company.

Not a job with an employer. A profession with its own method, its own tools and its own price.

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

The title already exists. The content does not.

Before you think I am inventing a word here: I am not.

Have a look on a job site. You will find dozens of adverts for a Digital Sales Consultant, in the Netherlands and beyond. The role is being recruited for right now.

Then read those adverts, and look at what is in them.

Optimising processes. Smoothing out the customer journey. Setting up CRM, integrating HubSpot, analysing data. Drawing up a strategy for online sales.

That is an adviser who improves someone else's system. Useful work, and it is not what I mean.

Now read again what is in none of those adverts.

Nowhere does it say what that consultant has to establish before he offers anything. Nowhere does it say how he hears whether it is down to stake, trust or urgency. Nowhere does it say when he should stop.

And sometimes there is something that sums the problem up in one sentence. I came across this in a vacancy from September 2026, for a Digital Sales Consultant at a large office technology company:

During the first weeks you will follow an intensive training programme to become familiar with the range of our products.

Read that again.

The job is called digital and consultant. The training is about the product range.

That is the logic of 1975 with a modern title stuck on top.

The job title exists. The method underneath it does not. People are recruiting for a role where no one can explain what it actually does.

That is not a reproach to the companies writing those adverts. They recognise that something is shifting and they are trying to find someone for it. But they are looking for someone to come and improve their funnel, while what they need is someone to come and diagnose their conversations.

So my definition is not the same as theirs, and that is deliberate.

Read that definition again and look at what it says.

He generates his own demand, so he does not have to wait for marketing to supply something. He qualifies that demand with an agent, so he no longer has a hundred conversations to find twenty. And he has mastered the diagnosis, so in every conversation he knows what is missing.

Those three things together are a service. A service you can sell, to several clients at once, from your own company.

That is what I do at Boekhoudlive. And it is what I am giving you in this book.

What that means for your income

A salesperson on a payroll negotiates over a few per cent every year. That conversation only goes one way, and you know which.

A Digital Sales Consultant negotiates over something else. He does not deliver his time, he delivers a process: demand that comes in, qualified, and a diagnosis that leads to a decision.

The question at the table is then no longer what your percentage should be. The question is what it would cost that client to organise this himself: a marketer, a budget, a system, plus a salesperson on the payroll.

That is a very different amount.

And you can sell it more than once. A salesperson on the payroll has one employer. A self-employed person with a working process can serve two or three clients, in different sectors, with the same system.

STATEMENT

**As long as you are a salesperson, you sell your time.
The moment you are a Digital Sales Consultant, you sell
a process that works.**

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

Why this is going to become the norm

I think this role will be ordinary in a few years, and that is not a prediction born of enthusiasm.

Look at what changes for the client. At the moment he pays for a marketing department that supplies leads, and a salesperson who rings them, and he carries the risk of both.

Under this arrangement he pays for an outcome. No fixed salary for someone waiting for work, no budget leaking away into adverts that attract the wrong people.

That is cheaper for him and more lucrative for you, and shifts of that kind cannot be stopped.

The first to do it have the greatest advantage. After that it becomes ordinary.

What I am giving you

Let me be concrete about what is in this book and what falls outside it.

The knowledge. You have had Part I: where this trade comes from and why it works the way it works. Part II is the diagnosis. Part III shows how you build a new commercial organisation around that diagnosis.

The tools. How you generate your own demand, how you set up an agent that qualifies, and how you build the funnel that collects the information you need. That is in Part III, at step 1.

And the guidance, for anyone who wants it. Because reading a book is something other than building the thing, and I know from experience that the first six months are the hardest.

That last part is not an obligation and it is not included in the price of this book. Everything you need in order to do it yourself is in here.

But I will say why I give that guidance, because I cannot stand people who sell training in something they do not do themselves.

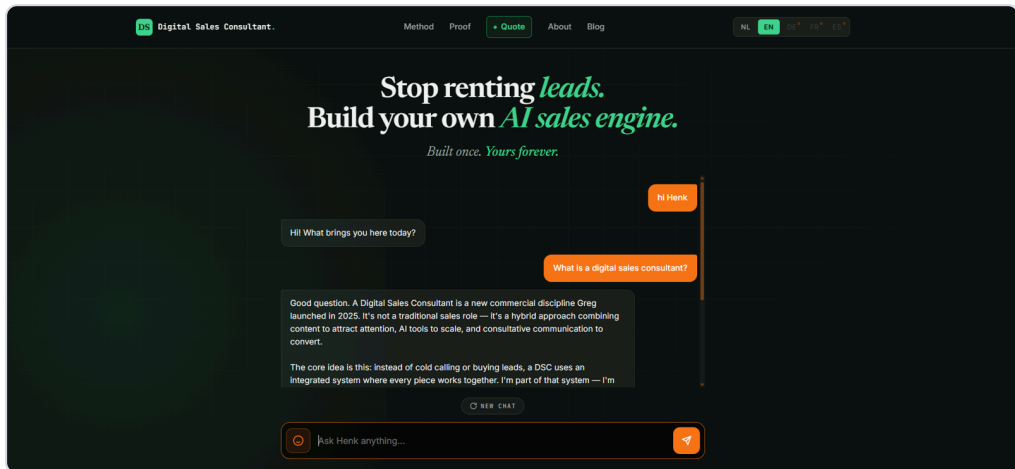
I train people in a method I use myself every week, with my own clients, with my own money at stake. Everything in this book is running somewhere right now. The site you have seen exists. The agent sitting on it qualified someone only last month. The email from my client is real, and so is his request for the list.

This is not a theory I thought up and then went out to sell. It is a way of working that I built because I needed it myself, and that I am now passing on.

That is the difference between a trainer and someone who practises the trade. The first teaches you what is in his book. The second shows you what works for him.

And that already exists too

I did not leave it at a chapter.



digitalsalesconsultant.ai. The same set-up as at Boekhoudlive: an agent that catches and qualifies, in the spot where a piece of sales copy normally sits.

In one sentence it says what this role solves:

Stop renting leads. Build your own AI sales engine.

Stop renting leads. Build your own sales machine.

Because that is what a salesperson on commission does. He rents his leads, and he pays for them in the form of a percentage that someone else sets. If the list is good, he earns. If the list is bad, he has a bad year and is told he should work harder.

And there is something else on that page I want to repeat here, because it is the whole point of this book in four words:

Built by sales. Not invented by tech.

This was not thought up by someone who builds software and then set about inventing what salespeople could do with it. It was built by someone who does the job and started using software because he needed it.

You can hear that difference in everything that comes after.

What you have been given in Part I

Let us look back for a moment, because you are halfway through something.

You now know where this trade comes from and which science it rests on. You know why marketing and sales behave as they do, and where in that cooperation the money disappears. You know which promotional instrument works when and when it is money thrown away. You know sixty years of sales tactics and the assumption that lay underneath each of them. You know what the internet took away and what came in its place. And you know what AI does and does not take over.

That is the knowledge you get in no sales training, because they all start at the conversation.

And it is deliberately the part I give away.

Anyone who has read this and does nothing further is already better off than most people in this trade. At least he understands the system he is standing in.

But on Monday morning he still cannot do anything with it.

What is in Part II and III

That is where the instrument begins.

Part II is the diagnosis. Three conditions, how you hear which one is missing, what you do then, and just as important: what you make sure not to do. With the stop rules that save you a week a month.

Part III is the new commercial organisation. It runs from findability and demand generation through connection and baseline assessment to the confirmation and the explicit agreement, and after that to contract, onboarding, aftersales and the system that has to support that order. Including how you set up that agent, how you build that quiz funnel, and how you have the conversation I had on 21 September.

And I work that last conversation out in full, with what was said and what came out of it.

You have now seen the whole picture of how it works, and one real example that it works.

What you do not have yet is how to do it yourself.

That comes next.

Read that enquiry again and notice what it says.

These people know exactly what they want. They have already worked out the structure, right down to the shareholdings. They have the authority, because they are the shareholders. And something real is going on: there is a VOF that has to be converted.

That is a lead any firm would jump at. This is not a name out of a form.

And now look at the first sentence.

We are comparing suppliers and would like to receive your keenest no-obligation, fixed total price.

That says exactly what is going on. These are people who have already made their own diagnosis and who only want a price now. The only thing still to be decided, as far as they are concerned, is who is cheapest.

A qualified lead is not the same as a lead that is ready to decide. Here the stake is clear and so is the urgency. What is missing is the trust, and you notice that because they start on price.

Anyone who sends a keen price back here ends up in a queue with three other quotations and wins on the lowest figure or loses.

What there really is to be done is in Part II and III of this book. And what I replied to this you can read in chapter 23, where I work this case out in full.

And then I earn from it twice.

First I sell the lead. A qualified lead, not a name out of a form. Someone of whom it has been established that something is going on, that he has the authority and that there is a reason to look now. The firm pays for that, and rightly so, because it is exactly what they do not have themselves.

Then I bring him in as a customer, and charge a fee for that again.

Same person, two fees, and for the firm still cheaper than a salesperson on the payroll with a fixed salary and a marketing budget around him.

WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING THERE

I do not deliver hours and I do not deliver effort. I deliver two things the firm cannot make itself: a qualified enquiry, and a yes.

That is why the conversation with my client is no longer about my commission percentage. It is about what those two things are worth to him.

That is the difference between a salesperson and a specialist.

A salesperson who waits for leads competes with other salespeople who are also waiting. His only negotiating room is his percentage, and that only goes one way.

A specialist who generates his own demand competes with the cost of a marketing department plus a salesperson on the payroll. That is a very different conversation, and a very different price.

Do not sell yourself as a salesperson. Position yourself as the specialist who understands the whole route, from first enquiry to explicit agreement and a careful handover to delivery.

And this book shows how you do that. Not as a promise, but as a process: Part II teaches you the diagnosis, Part III shows how you design the commercial organisation so that the diagnosis can actually be carried out.

Why this is only possible now

Now the question I asked myself when I wrote this down, and which you are entitled to ask.

If this method is so logical, why did it not exist in 1990?

The answer is not that no one had the idea before. Diagnostic thinking has existed in medicine for centuries, and in selling Rackham and Thull have said important things about it.

The answer is that the circumstances made it impossible.

WHY DIAGNOSTIC SELLING CAN ONLY NOW USHER IN AN ERA

Four things had to happen, and only recently have all four happened.

One. The information advantage had to go. As long as the seller knew more than the buyer, explaining was the most valuable act he could perform. Diagnosing was a luxury then. Now explaining has become all but worthless, because the buyer has already read it.

Two. Pitching had to run out of steam. As long as a good pitch still worked, there was no reason to try anything else. Only when everyone was using the same techniques and the buyer recognised all of them did the pitch lose its force. That is the legacy of the nineties and the noughties.

Three. The cost of generating demand had to collapse. Diagnosing takes time, and time is expensive. It only pays off if you no longer have to hold a hundred conversations to find twenty. Only now that you can generate your own demand and have it qualified at almost no cost does the diagnosis fit the sums.

Four. The machines had to take over the rest. As long as the seller was also doing awareness, explanation and follow-up, there was no time left over for establishing anything. Now that this can be contracted out, exactly the one piece of work that cannot be taken over is what remains.

Read those four again, and look at the chapters they come from.

The first is chapter 6. The second is chapter 5. The third is chapters 3 and 4. The fourth is chapter 7.

That is no coincidence. It is why Part I exists.

STATEMENT

Diagnostic Selling is not a new technique. It is the first method that fits a buyer who already knows everything and no longer has to believe anything.

GREG TRINIDAD

Diagnostic Selling, the Greg Trinidad Method

From 1960 to now, in one overview

Before we move on, here is the whole back story on one page.

PERIOD	WHAT WORKED	WHY IT WORKED	WHY IT NO LONGER WORKS
1960s	Door to door, numbers	The seller was the only source	No one answers the door, and everything is online
1970s	Looking for the need	More supply, so fitting in paid off	A need is not a reason to decide
1980s	Better questions, SPIN	Researched and proven on large deals	Good questions put to someone who can decide nothing yield nothing
1990s	Scale, scripts, call centres	Contact was suddenly dirt cheap	Everyone did it, and the buyer learnt to recognise it
2000s	Measuring everything, CRM	The board could finally see what was happening	What got measured was what was measurable, not what was true
2010s	Content, inbound, Challenger	The buyer did his own research	The number of leads became the goal instead of the customer
2020s	Automation, AI	Again the cost per contact collapsed	Again the value of every message is falling
Now	Diagnosis	The buyer knows everything and dares to choose nothing	

Look at that last column. Every row has an expiry date, except the bottom one.

And look at that third column, because there is something important in it: nothing standing there was stupid. It was all logical, in its own time.

Pitching had a function in 1990. That function is gone, and that is why pitching is no longer a choice now but a habit.

That is the difference between learning from history and carrying on living in it.

You do not have to renounce anything you have learnt. You need the numbers from the sixties. You need the questions from the eighties. You need the measuring from the noughties.

There is just something that comes before all of those things.

And then this, before we go on

One more time, because I want no misunderstanding when you start on Part II.

Sales is earning money.

It is not thinking up fine sentences for a post on a social network. It is not knowing what you should and should not say. It is not the ten sentences that convince every customer.

That is ego, and you cannot close a deal with it on Monday morning.

What you can do: apply the right process, understand which role sales has in the whole that I have sketched out above, and do your own marketing so that you are no longer dependent on what someone else supplies you with.

That is a trade. It can be learnt. And it brings in money, for you and therefore for the person you work for.

Part I was about where we come from. Part II is about what you establish.

Stop dosing.

Measure first.

This is where the free part ends

And this is what follows

You have read the first part.

That means you now know something most people in this trade do not: not how to sell better, but why the existing model was built for a world that no longer exists. Where it came from, who thought it up, and at what moment it began to shift.

That is not a skill. It is a diagnosis of the trade itself.

What you cannot yet do with it is hold a conversation.

Why I give this away

Not out of generosity. Because I want you to be able to judge whether the rest is worth it before you pay for it. That is precisely the small first step this book describes, applied to myself.

You have now read enough to know two things.

Whether the reasoning holds, and whether I am someone who knows what he is talking about.

And whether it does anything for you. Whether, while reading, you thought a few times: that is exactly what happens with us.

If the answer to both is yes, you know what you have to do. If it is no, you have at least got something out of it, and that is fine too.

What you have in your hands is not a taster for a course. It is a complete account of a trade that has rusted solid, and it stands on its own.

What you do not yet have is the instrument.

What is in Part II

Part II is the instrument, and it is the shortest part of the book.

It sets out how you establish, in a conversation, which of the three conditions is missing. Not guessing and not sensing, but establishing, and attaching a next step to it that holds.

Stake. What this person himself gets out of it. Not his company, him. And why you hear it missing in the words “too expensive”.

Trust. Not whether he likes you, but whether he can predict what happens if it goes wrong. And how you design that rather than earn it.

Urgency. Why it has to be now and not next quarter. That sits in his situation and not in your diary, and you do not create it, you make it visible.

The spark. The moment a decision falls, and why that is a conversation and not a document.

The behavioural patterns. Why the same missing condition sounds completely different in three people, and how you avoid going by the tone.

And at the end of Part II are the four rules, on a single page.

THE FOUR RULES

Too expensive is stake. Discussing it internally is trust. I will come back to you is urgency. And silence means a proposal was on the table before the three conditions were standing.

That page is meant to be picked up after a conversation that did not go the way you thought it would.

What is in Part III

Part III is the largest part, and it is about something other than the conversation.

A method that has to be kept up against the organisation every day loses to that organisation. So this part is not about six sales tricks but about the arrangement in which the method does not have to be mustered afresh every day.

First the playing field: what has changed now that the answer comes before the click, what that does to findability, and what role emerges from it.

Then what a client is actually buying when he brings this method in: seven components that together make up a commercial organisation.

Then the seven steps, from the moment a customer finds you to the customer who comes back. Each step with an exit requirement: something that has to be in place before you may go on. Those requirements are the most important thing in the whole book.

And two subjects that run right through it: price, and how this method relates to SPIN, Challenger and MEDDIC.

One case, from beginning to end

From chapter 23 onwards, one real case runs through the chapters.

A business owner who came in about his bookkeeping, in whose baseline assessment something quite different came up, and who decided within three days what he wanted to start with.

The emails are not retyped but shown as screenshots from the inbox itself, with only his details blacked out. A retyped email proves nothing; I could invent it. These I could not.

There are three messages among them that I would rather not have shown. They come not from the customer but from my own client, and they show how quickly the old reflex returns the moment a prospect warms up.

What I am not asking of you

Nothing.

That is not modesty, it is the order I defend in this book and apply to myself. Introduction, then trying, then deciding.

This part was the introduction.

If the idea has come to mean something here, the next part is where you can try it, in your own conversations, with your own customers. Only after that does the question arise of whether an organisation should be built around it.

CORE PRINCIPLE

A book about small decisions that asks for a large one on the last page has not understood its own argument.

Where to find the complete edition

The whole book, with Part II and Part III, the glossary and the sources, is at **vuurdriehoek.nl**.

If you want to see how the method is applied in practice, that is at **digitalsalesconsultant.ai**.

And if this part has been of any use to you, pass it on. It may be shared, forwarded and printed in this form, unaltered.

Greg Trinidad

Sources and further reading

The books and studies referred to in this book, in the order in which they appear.

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About the author

Greg Trinidad (1962) is the author of *The Fire Triangle* and the founder of Uitgeverij De Vuurmaker.

He began his working life behind a gaming table in a casino and became a financial adviser. He then helped build mobile banking in East Africa and spent ten years running a call centre in Metro Manila for more than two thousand apartments in Europe, years before the big booking platforms existed. These days he works on digital sales and AI for small and medium-sized businesses.

More than twenty years, three continents, and the same pattern everywhere: the solution was already there, everyone agreed, and nothing was decided.

He works as a Digital Sales Consultant for clients in financial services and in sustainability, and trains people in the method set out in this book.

vuurdriehoek.nl digitalsalesconsultant.ai

A doctor who treats without examining loses their licence.

In sales *we call it a pitch.*

Most sales conversations do not fall over on the price and they do not fall over on the product. They fall over because a solution was offered before anyone had established what was wrong.

This book turns that order around. A decision comes about only when stake, trust and urgency are all three present, and those three do not add up, they multiply. If one is missing, the outcome is zero, however strong the other two.

DIAGNOSTIC SELLING · THE GREG TRINIDAD METHOD

A sales method and sales-organisation model in which the seller does not begin with persuasion, presentation or proposal, but first establishes which condition for a responsible decision is missing.

THE DIAGNOSIS

Four rules by which you establish, in a conversation, why someone is not deciding yet. Too expensive is stake. Discussing it internally is trust. I will come back to you is urgency.

THE DIGITAL SALES CONSULTANT

The role that emerges when technology does the information work and the person carries the judgement. Not a salesperson with an AI subscription.

THE DIAGNOSTIC SALES ORGANISATION

Arranged not around the activity of the salesperson, but around the information that justifies each next customer decision. From demand generation through to aftersales.

With one case followed from beginning to end, including the emails. Not retyped, but as screenshots from the inbox itself.



GREG TRINIDAD

Author of The Fire Triangle. Began behind a gaming table in a casino, became a financial adviser, helped build mobile banking in East Africa and ran a commercial centre in Metro Manila for ten years. Now works as a Digital Sales Consultant for clients in financial services and in sustainability, and trains people in this method.

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