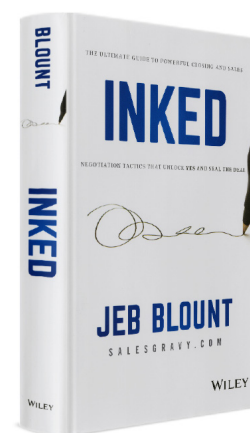


# Inked

The Ultimate Guide to Powerful Closing and Sales Negotiation Tactics that Unlock **YES** and Seal the Deal

by **Jeb Blount**



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Each year, sales professionals leave billions of dollars on the table because they are outgunned, outmaneuvered, and outplayed by savvy buyers. Because today's buyers have more power than ever before—more information, more at stake, and more control over the buying process—they almost always enter sales negotiations in a much stronger position than the salespeople on the other side of the table.

In *Inked*, Jeb Blount levels the playing field by giving you the strategies, tactics, techniques, skills, and human-influence frameworks required to become a powerful and effective sales negotiator. He teaches you exactly what you need to know, do, and say to gain more control and more power over the outcomes of your deals, and win.

Unlike other negotiating books that ignore the reality sellers face in the rapid-fire, real world of the sales profession, *Inked* is a sales-specific negotiation primer. It's the most comprehensive negotiation resource ever developed for the sales profession. Let *Inked* help you win today.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The seven immutable rules of sales negotiation.
- To use motivation, leverage, and power position in your negotiation strategy.
- Powerful negotiation psychology and influence frameworks that keep you in control of the conversation.
- The importance of sales negotiation planning and communication.

## Part I: Introduction to Sales Negotiation

### Sales Negotiation as a Discipline

There is a massive amount of printed work available on personal, business, diplomatic, legal, and law enforcement negotiation. The lessons in these books (and accompanying training programs) are useful. But there are few true sales-specific resources on negotiation. A large part of the reason is the false (and perhaps arrogant) belief that sales negotiation is equivalent to all other types of negotiation. But they're not the same.

Adding to all of this is the truth that sales negotiation is boring. There is way more drama when the legal teams from Apple and Qualcomm sit down to work out patent and royalty disputes, or when Chinese and American diplomats negotiate a trade deal.

But when Maria, an account executive with a SaaS company in San Francisco, is negotiating the per-seat cost of her software with a mid-market company from Waco, Texas; or when Kendra is negotiating a long-term facility services agreement with a hospital in Singapore, nobody cares.

Except, of course, for the sales professionals whose compensation depends on the outcome of the negotiations and the companies that depend on those same salespeople to protect their profits.

The cumulative effect of these mundane sales negotiations directly impacts the profitability, market valuation, customer retention, and long-term viability of the enterprises on whose behalf sales professionals are negotiating.

### Salespeople Suck at Negotiating

Every author of every book on negotiating is quick to point out that in business and life, everything is being negotiated and that as humans, we are negotiating naturally at almost every point in our daily lives. But despite this blinding flash of the obvious, despite the fact that salespeople are required to negotiate as part of the job, the brutal and undeniable truth is that most salespeople suck at negotiating.

There are several reasons why salespeople get ripped up like cheap t-shirts by buyers in sales negotiations.

**Poor emotional discipline.** When salespeople get beat at the negotiating table, 90 percent of the time it's due to their inability to rise above disruptive emotions in the moment. Fear, insecurity, anger, attachment, eagerness, desperation, and more all conspire to undermine the salesperson's

ability to think clearly and maintain their cool.

**Lack of training.** Executives and leaders put tremendous pressure on their sales organizations to hit sales numbers, then complain bitterly after the fact that their salespeople are not negotiating hard enough. Yet, they invest very little money in training for sales negotiation skills. Nor do they train their sales leaders to model, coach, or reinforce negotiation skills. It's as if salespeople are somehow supposed to be born with the ability to negotiate effectively.

**Buyers are better.** Buyers are usually professionally trained in how to negotiate with salespeople and win. Buyers also tend to have more alternatives than salespeople.

**Empty pipeline.** The number one reason salespeople are in a weak position and lack emotional discipline at the sales negotiation table is an empty pipeline. When you have an empty pipeline you get desperate.

### Sales Negotiation Skills Are Not One-Size-Fits-All

There are few one-size-fits-all solutions in sales, and negotiation is no exception. There are, however, seven rules of sales negotiation common to all sales situations that will guide you on your journey to mastering sales negotiation skills. These rules are the foundation for the lessons here.

- Win first, then negotiate.
- Play to win.
- Protect relationships.
- Emotional discipline wins.
- To master sales negotiation, you must master the sales process.
- Never give leverage away for free.
- Eliminate and neutralize alternatives.

## Part II: On Winning

### Sales Negotiation Is About Winning for Your Team

People, especially salespeople and those who manage them, often use the phrase “win-win” and “negotiation” in the same breath. The concept of negotiating win-win outcomes certainly makes sense in diplomacy, arbitration, and conflict resolution. It's nice when everyone wins.

Here's a brutal truth that you need to internalize: “Win-win” is the warm blanket of delusion where your commis-

## The first and most important rule of sales negotiation is win first and then negotiate.

sion check and your company's profits curl up to die. If you are focused on "win-win," there is a real good chance that you are losing. Sales negotiation is about getting the best possible outcome for your team. Period.

Yet, sales negotiation is woven into the fabric of the long-term relationships you have either built or hope to build with your customer's stakeholder group. Even when your negotiating position is strong and you have the leverage to extract maximum flesh, winning at the expense of your buyer or causing them to lose face can create resentment that will cost you dearly down the road.

Therefore, sales negotiation is often a paradox—a dual process of empathy *and* outcome; you must win for your team *and* protect your relationships.

### **Sales Negotiation Rule One: Win First, Then Negotiate**

The first and most important rule of sales negotiation is win first and then negotiate. In other words, avoid negotiating price, terms, and conditions until the buyer or stakeholder group has selected you as their vendor of choice (VOC).

Once the stakeholders have chosen you, it dramatically changes their motivation curve. It brings down emotional walls and turns the opaque transparent. It makes it easier to gain consensus on a deal.

Most importantly, stakeholders are much more likely to see the deal through to an outcome—reducing the probability that it stalls in your pipeline. Winning first makes it easier for you to maintain emotional control, exude relaxed yet assertive confidence, get what you want, and close the sale.

To this, sales professionals often say, "This doesn't make sense. How can I possibly know that I've won? I mean, if I've won, isn't the negotiation already over?"

The term "proposal" is important. A proposal is essentially a written offer to buy—that offer may be a presentation, quote, formal proposal, RFP response, or a contract that you present. There cannot be a negotiation on the price, terms, or conditions until an offer is made. Before that

point, you may acquiesce and make concessions, but when you do so you are negotiating with yourself, which strengthens the other side's position and weakens yours.

In some cases, your stakeholder will tell you outright that they want to do business with you. In other situations, there is an implicit choice. This requires you to pay attention to your intuition and apply deep listening.

### **Timing Matters: Avoid Negotiating Red Herrings and Objections**

A big problem for salespeople is that they tend to chase negotiation red herrings early in the sales process, causing them to give their leverage away for free and handcuff themselves with one-sided, early concessions. A red herring is something that distracts you from your focus, misleads you, or diverts your attention from the objective of your sales conversation.

For example, during your initial meeting, before any discovery has been done, the stakeholder tells you that they've been doing research online and seen that your competitor's prices are much lower. They want to know if you'll match them.

When you are faced with a red herring in a negotiation, the key is emotional control. You need a simple framework that keeps you in control of emotional impulses—PAIS:

**Pause:** When your stakeholder attempts to draw you into a negotiation early, before they've selected you as their vendor of choice, pause and collect your emotions before speaking.

**Acknowledge:** Then let the stakeholder know that you heard them. You might say, "Before we jump right into pricing concerns, let's make sure our solution is even a good fit for you. May I ask a few questions so that I can better understand you and your organization?"

**Ignore or Save:** When you pause and acknowledge, it creates enough space between the red herring and your response to make an intentional decision about your next move—whether you should ignore the red herring altogether, save it and address it at a later point in the conversation, or in *rare* cases with transactional sales, when there are clear buying signals, proceed directly to closing the deal on the spot.

## Part III: Sales Negotiation Strategy: Motivation, Leverage, and Power

Motivation, leverage, and power position (MLP) are the chess board of sales negotiation. From the moment you engage a prospect until the proverbial ink is dry on the contract, your imperative is to analyze, influence, and shape the stakeholder group's MLP. In turn, you must be aware of and honest about your MLP and the gaps that put you at a disadvantage at the sales negotiation table. This is where sales negotiation strategy begins.

### Motivation

Motivation is a compelling reason, enthusiasm, drive, or desire for doing something. What you must always remember is that motivation is personal. Particularly in business-to-business sales situations, you will be dealing with stakeholders who are using someone else's money to solve their problems.

Each stakeholder will have their own unique and personal criteria for success—often diverging from that of the group or their organization. These stakeholders' personal criteria for success, along with their relationship with you (and other members of your team), shape their motivation to get a deal done.

Motivation typically has an inverse correlation to power. Power in sales negotiations is directly correlated to the number of alternatives a party has. The higher a stakeholder group's motivation to buy from you, the less attractive the perceived alternatives. This causes the stakeholder group's power position to weaken. The important thing to understand is that power (alternatives) is concentrated at the organizational level, while motivation is with the individual stakeholder.

In almost every deal, the company you are selling to is in a stronger power position than you because they have more alternatives. Therefore, to weaken the organization's power position at the negotiating table while strengthening yours, you must work to increase each individual stakeholder's motivation to get a deal done with *you*.

Increasing stakeholder motivation while reducing the perception of viable alternatives occurs on three levels: relationship, individual success criteria, social proof.

### Leverage

When you have something that someone else wants, you have leverage. Leverage gives either party in the deal,

regardless of power position, the ability to compel the other party to change a behavior. For the party in the weaker power position—with fewer alternatives—leverage preservation takes on strategic importance.

Leverage is currency, and it must be treated as such. It has value and must be exchanged for value. Effective sales negotiators never give away leverage without getting something of equal or greater value in return. Types of leverage come in many forms, including information, terms and conditions, pricing, sunk-cost fallacy, and so forth.

You will use leverage in two distinct ways when working with stakeholders: as negotiation leverage to gain alignment on an agreement at the sales negotiation table; and bending the buying process to your sales process in order to gain control so that you may eliminate or neutralize alternatives.

One of the most effective tactics for aligning the sales and buying processes is gaining consensus and agreement during the initial meeting on steps that both parties must advance through for a tailored proposal to be delivered. Proposals are *never* emailed. If stakeholders want your information, they must schedule a formal proposal meeting to get it. In this way, protect your leverage and use it to gain control and bend their buying process to your sales process.

### Power Position

At the sales negotiation table, the more alternatives a party has, the stronger its power position. The more power a party has, the more concessions it can demand. Buyers are almost always in a stronger power position than sellers. Yet, sellers imagine that the buyers have more options than they actually do.

So many salespeople are looking for Obi-Wan Kenobi tactics that allow them to outmaneuver the other party. But the real secret to inking deals and gaining power at the sales negotiating table is mastering, controlling, and executing the sales process. This is the most important lesson, because here's the brutal truth: Boring works.

If you are looking for a Jedi mind trick that will give you the upper hand in negotiations with buyers, look no further than being excellent at prospecting; qualifying; initial meetings; aligning the sales and buying processes; mapping stakeholders; gaining consistent micro-commitments; discovery, discovery, discovery; solution mapping and stakeholder consensus; value bridging, presentations, and proposals; getting past objections; negotiating; locking it in with ink.

## Part IV: Emotional Discipline

### The Seven Disruptive Emotions

For the sales professional, negotiation can push you to the edge of emotional extremes. Your disruptive emotions are your Achilles' heel in sales negotiations. Unmanaged, they betray you, make you weak, cause you to lose self-control, and put you at a disadvantage with buyers who have been professionally trained to master their emotions when negotiating with salespeople.

To become a master negotiator, you must first learn to master and rise above the disruptive emotions that are holding you back. These seven disruptive emotions impede your ability to negotiate: fear, desperation, insecurity, need for significance, attachment, eagerness, worry.

Mastering your emotions is the real secret to mastering sales negotiation. Emotional control in negotiations is a learned behavior.

At the sales negotiation table, you control only three things: your actions, your reactions, your mindset.

### Developing Emotional Self-Control

At the sales negotiation table, you control only three things: your actions, your reactions, your mindset. That's it. Nothing more. You can choose to be disciplined in the sales process. You can choose to be strategic in your efforts to improve your power position. You can choose to plan sales negotiations in advance. You can choose your attitude and self-talk. You can choose awareness over delusion. In emotionally tense situations, you have absolute control over your response.

Mastering your emotions begins with your awareness that the emotion is happening. This allows your rational mind to take the helm, make sense of the emotion, rise above it, and choose your behavior and response. Intentional awareness is the key. Emotions happen without your consent. Therefore, you cannot choose your emotions, only your response.

Self-awareness and self-control are like muscles. The more you exercise them, the stronger they get. The best way to exercise them is to face adversity, challenges, and emotional obstacles. In other words, practice.

Here are four steps to developing negotiation obstacle immunity:

- Be ready and open to gaining resilience through the crucible of adversity and pain.
- Intentionally choose to put yourself in uncomfortable situations.
- Actively seek out the conflict of negotiation by asking for what you want.
- Push through the desire to go back to your old state of comfort and delusion.

On the other side, you'll gain a sense of mastery and confidence. This leads to higher self-esteem and improved effectiveness at the sales negotiation table.

### The Ledge Technique

At the sales negotiation table, you will be pushed to emotional extremes by stakeholders who challenge your positions, diminish the value of your proposal, hit you with hard questions, and make you feel insignificant. They will take illogical positions, make power plays, and say things designed to shake you emotionally. They've been trained to do this because when they do, you are more likely to give concessions.

The secret to gaining control of disruptive emotions in the moment is simply giving your rational brain a chance to catch up and take control so you can rise above these disruptive emotions, regain composure, and choose your response.

In her book, *Emotional Alchemy*, Tara Bennett-Goleman calls this the "magic quarter-second" that allows you to keep the disruptive emotions you feel from becoming emotional reactions you express. In fast-moving, emotionally charged situations, the most effective technique for creating this magic quarter-second is the ledge technique.

A ledge may be a statement, acknowledgment, agreement, or question. It can also be a noncomplementary response (relaxed, assertive confidence) that disrupts the stakeholders' patterns and their expectation for how you will respond to their approach. Examples include statements like, "That's interesting—can you tell me why this is important to you?" "Just to be sure I understand your question, could you elaborate a little more?" "That's exactly what I thought you might say."

The ledge works because it's a memorized, automatic response that does not require you to think. This gives you the milliseconds you need to rise above your emotions and the accompanying neurophysiological response, regain your poise, choose your response, and gain control of the conversation.

### The Pipe Is Life: The Real Secret to Emotional Discipline

The easiest path to emotional discipline is a pipeline full of qualified opportunities. When you don't need to win any particular deal, it is easier to detach emotionally and negotiate as if you don't need that account—because, as they say, there are many other fish in the sea. In a position of abundance, you make better decisions and exude relaxed, assertive confidence.

A full pipeline equals emotional control and power. When your pipeline is full, the probability is much higher that you'll negotiate for and get the prices, terms, and conditions you deserve. Never, ever forget: The pipe is life!

## Part V: Sales Negotiation Planning

### Be Prepared to Negotiate

Most sales negotiations happen at the speed of light. You are negotiating in the moment, in real time, with little breathing room—face to face, via phone, over video, or by text. You present your proposal, the stakeholders bite, and it's game on.

Sales negotiation planning helps you rise above disruptive emotions, blind spots, and biases to decide objectively how you will approach the negotiation. It gives you a bird's-eye view of the negotiation game board and the available moves.

There are 10 basic elements involved in sales negotiation planning: authority and nonnegotiables; stakeholder negotiation profiles; stakeholder negotiation list and best alternative to negotiated agreement (BATNA) analysis; deal qualifiers and fit analysis; motivation and power position assessment; negotiation parameters; business outcome map and the metrics that matter; target zone and limit zone development; negotiation leverage inventory; give-take playlist. For example, let's look at authority and nonnegotiables.

### Authority and Nonnegotiables

Before you negotiate, it's vital that you clearly understand what you have the authority to negotiate. Most organizations define where the lines are drawn and where your

authority to negotiate begins and ends. Others, though, are less clear. In these cases, you'll need to ask questions so you don't overstep.

List what and where you have the authority to negotiate, what other people have the authority to negotiate, and when you must remain firm on terms and conditions.

Salespeople often complain about not having the authority to negotiate certain items. They believe that it makes them weak in front of buyers. But it is just the opposite. Not having authority gives you strength. It allows you to get on the buyer's side of the table and become their advocate—essentially working together as a team and collaborating to get a deal done. It also gives you cover when you need to slow things down and gain space to consider your options.

Generally, nonnegotiables are in the terms and conditions—contractual obligations, payment terms, compliance issues. There are usually bottom-line price points you may not go below. Three rules for nonnegotiables will help you navigate around them in sales negotiations:

**Don't bring them up.** Leave them off the table unless the buyer brings them up.

**Never flinch.** Present nonnegotiables with relaxed, assertive confidence, acting as if they are routine and all buyers accept them without question.

**Message matters.** Explain nonnegotiables in logical, easy-to-understand terms.

### Developing Your Give-Take Playlist

You'll use leverage in the back and forth of negotiating to get alignment with the buyer. When the other side asks for a concession—your leverage—you will ask for something back. Your overriding goal is to give away things that have a low value to you but a high value to the other side, while taking concessions that are of high value to the other side. You should never go into a sales negotiation without a plan for how to run these give-take plays.

This first step in building your give-take playlist (GTP) is to assess how each party views the five core parameters of a sales negotiation: risk, value, pricing, terms and conditions, and relationship. This analysis is very helpful for scenario planning and preparing for sales negotiation conversations. It gives you insight into the other party's motivation level and power position—especially how they view the alternative of doing nothing.

Whenever you get pushed to the brink by a buyer and feel the flight-or-fight response kicking in, pause for a break to collect your thoughts.

## Part VI: Sales Negotiation Communication

### Seven Rules of Effective Sales Negotiation Communication

At the table, effective communication keeps you in control of the conversation so you can move toward alignment on an agreement. There are seven rules for effective sales negotiation communication.

**1. To control the conversation, you must first control your emotions.** Emotional discipline is at the heart of effective sales negotiation.

**2. People respond in kind.** Emotions are contagious. Because of this, people tend to respond in kind to other people's behaviors.

**3. Questions control the conversation flow.** Most salespeople believe that to control the conversation, they must do all the talking. It is just the opposite. When you are asking questions, you control the shape of the conversation and can move it in any direction you please.

**4. To know what other people are thinking, they must tell you.** Humans have a bad habit of assuming that they know what other people are thinking. Do not confuse communication with agreement. The only way to know exactly what someone is thinking is for them to tell you. The words must cross their lips.

**5. Communication fails if the other party isn't thinking the same thing you are thinking.** Don't assume. Stop, check, clarify, and confirm agreements.

**6. Communication fails if the other party is thinking about your behavior rather than the deal.** Whenever you get pushed to the brink by a buyer and feel the flight-or-fight response kicking on, pause for a break to collect your thoughts.

**7. Do not allow silence to intimidate you.** Never answer your own questions. Do not fill in the space. Control your emotions and bite your tongue. Wait for the other person to respond.

### Activating the Self-Disclosure Loop

You tell stories, and your stakeholders tell stories. It's human. It's how we communicate. In conversations, people don't spit out facts in bullet-point lists. Instead, they use stories.

We tell stories to be understood. And when we are telling our story, we feel important. When you listen attentively, you encourage stakeholders to expand on their stories and tell even more.

Activating the self-disclosure loop is a powerful tactic in sales negotiation conversations. When you master it, you'll easily gain insight into the cards in your stakeholder's hand. This insight gives you a distinct advantage at the negotiation table.

To activate the self-disclosure loop, begin with easy, open-ended questions that get the other person talking. Use active listening techniques to reward them for talking. Avoid interrupting, rushing, or talking over your stakeholder.

Pause three to five seconds before speaking. Allow the stakeholder to fill in the silence. This is important, because if you start talking, you'll break the loop and turn your stakeholder off.

Once the loop is running and the stakeholder begins to self-disclose, listen deeply and center your follow-up questions on those self-disclosures.

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## Part VII: The Sales-Deal Conversation Framework

### A Seat at the Table

In sales negotiations, you need a plan, because winging it is stupid. But, of course, sales negotiation plans, like most battle plans, rarely survive first contact. This is why you must also deploy a tactical framework that guides the actual negotiation conversation so you remain agile, flexible, in control, and on track to achieve your goal.

There are four parts of the DEAL Sales Negotiation Conversation Framework:

**Discover.** Get the buyer's issues, desires, concerns, and perceived alternatives on the table. Then, clarify and isolate the issues on their list that must be negotiated, while seeking common ground.

**Explain.** Make the case for the value of your proposal by building a value bridge from it to the stakeholder group's desired business outcomes and the metrics that matter.

**Align.** Run your give-take playlist to give appropriate concessions and make takeaways until you reach alignment on a mutual agreement.

**Lock.** Ask for an explicit commitment on any agreements reached in the alignment step. Get ink.

Leveraging this framework keeps you on track, no matter what the buyer hits you with. The DEAL framework enables you to be agile in the moment and to flex easily to the context of the situation without locking you into a one-size-fits-all box. It guides the sales negotiation conversation and keeps you moving toward alignment on a negotiated outcome.

### The Next Chapter and the Race to Relevance

At this very moment, two races are occurring in the sales profession—a race to the bottom and a race to relevance. The race to the bottom is a competition for the lowest price. In this race, even when you win, you lose. When the only thing that matters is price, what you are selling will move to the internet, and you cannot compete with the internet.

In this new paradigm, though, elite groups of sales professionals are crushing it. In this age of transparency, where information is ubiquitous and buyer attention spans are fleeting, these ultra-high performers are keep-

ing prospects engaged, creating true competitive differentiation with a focus on business outcomes, and shaping and influencing buying decisions by being relevant and valuable to their stakeholders.

To win for your team, you must look beyond price and features and demonstrate, deliver, and sustain measurable and emotional business outcomes for your customers.

The brutal truth is that products and services of all kinds can quickly become commoditized. Prices can easily be matched. You, however, cannot. Therefore, you must bring proven processes, business acumen, thoughtfulness, and expertise to the table. You must become a sustainable, ongoing, and adaptable professional resource for stakeholders by delivering true value and return on investment.

#### IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *Same-Side Selling: How Integrity and Collaboration Drive Extraordinary Results for Sellers and Buyers* by Ian Altman, Jack Quarles
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Jeb Blount is the author of 11 books and among the world's most respected thought leaders on sales, leadership, and customer experience. Through his global training organization, Sales Gravy, Jeb and his team help a who's-who of the world's most prestigious organizations reach peak performance fast by optimizing talent, leveraging training to cultivate a high-performance culture, developing leadership and coaching skills, and applying more effective organizational design. As a business leader, he has more than 25 years of experience with Fortune 500 companies, small and midsize businesses, and startups.

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