

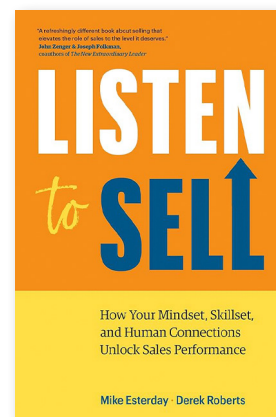


Executive Book Summaries[®]

Listen to Sell

How Your Mindset, Skillset, and Human Connections Unlock Sales Performance

by **Mike Esterday and Derek Roberts**



Contents

Introduction

Page 2

Part One: Mindset- Conversations With Yourself

Page 2

Part Two: Skillset - Conversations With Customers

Page 4

Part Three: Coaching Conversations For Skill And Will

Page 6

Conclusion

Page 7

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Traditional selling methods don't work anymore. Over the decades, sales professionals have been indoctrinated with manipulative, aggressive techniques. Now, they are struggling to reach the ever-increasing sales quotas imposed by their employers. The book *Listen to Sell: How Your Mindset, Skillset, and Human Connections Unlock Sales Performance* by Mike Esterday and Derek Roberts comes at the right time to solve this crisis situations. The authors, versed in sales and coaching salespeople, have understood what it takes to close a sale: putting the client's best interests at the heart of the entire process.

Through authentic listening, building trust and demonstrating integrity in their work, sales professionals can not only do their job well, but also find meaning in it. These are the core findings of Mike Esterday – who ranked number one out of 6,000 sales professionals in his first sales role – and Derek Roberts, who has 30 years of experience in building, training and coaching sales teams. Together, they are partners in Integrity Solutions, a company that offers award-winning sales trainings to key players in healthcare, financial services, industrial manufacturing, transportation, energy and utilities.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Advocate for customer-focused, integrity-driven selling,
- Understand addressing customer needs through authentic listening, trust-building, and purposeful conversations,
- Learn the importance of mindset, skillset, and emotional intelligence in sales success,
- Comprehend the role of meaningful customer engagement in sales success.

Introduction

Although salespeople fear that you can't sell anything to anyone at this point, the truth is the opposite. It's actually a great time to be working in sales, with so much technology creating disruption in the traditional sale process. Automation and marketing technology allow professionals to delegate many tasks, while focusing on the core of their work. However, many salespeople forgot about this core – they forgot to be “for real.” They are no longer engaging with customers, which makes them wonder if salespeople actually care about them or they just want to sell them something. Knowledge of marketing techniques is not working on its own. Salespeople need to start speaking human again. But before even speaking, they need to learn how to listen.

Part One: Mindset - Conversations With Yourself

Chapter 1: Establishing Purpose

The Importance of Purpose - Sales professionals often lose sight of their “why,” focusing on quotas or transactional goals. This is why they need a deeper purpose, which fuels motivation and achievement. Rona, a pharmaceutical sales rep, struggled until she realized the life-changing impact of her product on families. This shift from “selling products” to “helping families” transformed her performance and job satisfaction.

The Power of Purpose - Purpose aligns personal values with professional actions, turning a job into a fulfilling mission. It gives the sense of “nobility” to everything we do. Without it, sales become mechanical and uninspiring. Salespeople feel stuck in a job they barely tolerate or even dislike. Purpose-driven salespeople connect better with customers, sustain motivation, and achieve greater success. They also reach the point when they truly enjoy what they are doing.

Achievement Drive - Purpose activates achievement drive—the grit and persistence needed to navigate challenges and pursue goals. A clear purpose enhances resilience and creativity, enabling salespeople to overcome obstacles. In essence, achievement drive is defined as setting goals plus working with purpose. And when you multiply the achievement by the sum of your skills, abilities and training, you finally achieve success. To better understand purpose, pause and reflect on these questions:

- Why are you in sales?

- How does your purpose shape your daily actions?
- What motivates you beyond financial rewards?

Chapter 2: Internal Beliefs

Beliefs play a critical role in shaping behaviors and outcomes. There are five core self-beliefs that influence sales success:

1. View of Selling:

Negative stereotypes about sales (e.g., pushy, manipulative) often create internal resistance. Salespeople may unconsciously avoid engaging with customers or feel conflicted about their role. A positive view of selling redefines it as a noble profession focused on creating value and solving problems for customers.

2. View of Abilities

Self-doubt, often stemming from “imposter syndrome,” can hinder performance. Salespeople may avoid challenging opportunities if they lack confidence in their skills or experience. Building confidence requires recognizing strengths, identifying areas for growth, and aligning beliefs with actions.

3. Values

Salespeople thrive when their work aligns with their personal values. Misalignment (e.g., feeling pressured to sell products that don't fit customer needs) creates internal conflict and reduces effectiveness. Ethical selling, grounded in honesty and customer focus, resolves this tension and fosters long-term success.

4. Commitment to Activities

Many salespeople avoid challenging or uncomfortable activities (e.g., prospecting, follow-ups) due to fear of rejection or lack of confidence. Addressing avoidance requires identifying and overcoming the underlying beliefs causing resistance.

5. Belief in Product

Passion and confidence in a product's value are essential. Salespeople who doubt the quality or relevance of their product struggle to communicate its benefits effectively. Understanding how the product aligns with customer needs and emphasizing personal contributions to the sales process builds belief and energy. Make sure you clarify in your mind how you view sales, starting with your earliest perceptions and until your current role. You have to be honest with yourself in defining:

Misalignment among the five core beliefs creates emotional and mental blocks that hinder success.

- What activities keep you busy and are impactful in terms of getting business, which activities you dislike or dread, and why you developed the feeling of dislike.

Chapter 3: Getting in Sync

The Sales Congruence Model™ is an essential tool for aligning internal beliefs to maximize sales performance. Misalignment among the five core beliefs creates emotional and mental blocks that hinder success.

The Sales Congruence Model™ is presented as a series of overlapping lenses. They are defined as:

- View of selling – you love product demos
- View of abilities – you have a positive view of selling and excellent product knowledge
- Values – you are challenged by selling products that offered poor experience to customers
- Commitment to activities – you are passionate and have lots of knowledge about core products
- Belief in product – you have a positive view of selling, but have difficulties understanding the additional value you offer

Congruence - To reach congruence, all these lenses must align. When sellers have misaligned beliefs (e.g., valuing honesty but doubting a product's worth), they create internal stress and inhibit sales activities. Alignment generates clarity, confidence, and motivation, enabling salespeople to perform at their best.

Common Misalignment Examples:

1. Values vs. Product

A salesperson values honesty but doubts the product's effectiveness. This creates hesitancy during customer interactions.

Solution: Emphasize the company's strengths, customer service, or added value beyond the product itself.

2. View of Abilities vs. Selling Goals

A salesperson avoids high-stakes meetings due to self-doubt, even when opportunities arise.

Solution: Focus on skill-building and mindset shifts to develop confidence in addressing senior-level decision-makers.

3. Commitment to Activities

A salesperson is busy with non-impactful tasks to avoid uncomfortable activities like prospecting.

Solution: Identify the root cause (e.g., fear of rejection) and create a plan to address it.

Thankfully, there are practical steps salespeople can take to overcome these misalignments. They are:

- Self-Awareness - Identify gaps between beliefs and actions. What's holding you back? What internal conversations shape your behaviors?
- Mindset Shifts - Replace limiting beliefs with empowering ones. For example:
 - From: "Selling is pushy."
 - To: "Selling helps customers solve problems."
- Coaching and Support - Use feedback, role-playing, and skill-building to address gaps and strengthen alignment.

"You are the biggest factor in bringing about your success – not some external forces like the economy, which sales enablement platform your company uses, or where you went to school." Leaders should do some introspection and give honest answers to these key questions:

- What labels have created self-beliefs that limit your impact?
- What steps might you take to break through a limiting belief boundary affecting your sales success?

Part Two: Skillset - Conversations With Customers

Chapter 4: Communicating Human to Human

Great sales skills are rooted in understanding human behavior, active listening, and a structured process. This is exem-

plified by Ned Ryerson, the annoying insurance salesperson in the movie *Groundhog Day*. This character personifies all that is wrong in the sales approach: “charging like a bull” for the hard sell. **The Importance of Human Connection:** In an era dominated by automation and AI, human interaction is a key differentiator. Customers crave authentic, personalized experiences. Salespeople must focus on listening and building trust rather than relying on generic scripts or pitches.

What buyers really want is help, in two directions: to satisfy a need they know they have, by choosing the best product and to understand that their problem has a solution, because they are unaware of this.

The Behavioral Styles Model starts with the premise that selling is an interactive experience and that the parties involved express a combination of two of the following characteristics in the communication process:

- The talker – affable, friendly and social, they make decisions based on emotions and facts and do not care a lot about details
- The doer – direct, results-oriented, has clear objectives to achieve and wants concise information
- The supporter – they need time to process the information, like to establish trust and are reluctant to change their current buying habits
- The controller – they pay great attention to detail, rely on facts and weigh all options before making a choice

By clearly identifying the behavioral style model, a company can create accurate customer personas and change its selling culture. The essence of this concept is that customers have the right to buy the way they want to buy. By offering them this experience, sales persons can become more successful.

The questions to think about are:

- How do you recognize a customer’s style?
- Which style is most comfortable and which is the most challenging?
- How would you adapt for each of these four behavioral styles?

Chapter 5: The AID,Inc. Sales Process

The AID,Inc.® framework is a structured process for guiding sales conversations. This method focuses on uncovering customer needs and aligning solutions with their goals.

The AID,Inc.® Steps:

1. Approach

The initial contact sets the tone for the relationship. Focus on establishing rapport and trust.

Techniques: Personalize the interaction by referencing shared connections or previous interactions. Use open-ended questions to initiate dialogue.

2. Interview

This step involves deep listening to identify the customer’s needs, challenges, and goals.

Techniques: Use probing questions to uncover pain points. For example, “What challenges are you facing with your current solution?”

3. Demonstrate

Present your solution in a way that addresses the customer’s specific needs. Avoid overloading them with unnecessary information.

Techniques: Focus on outcomes and benefits rather than features. Use visuals or storytelling to make the presentation engaging.

4. Validate

Build credibility by providing proof of your claims. Customers are more likely to trust you if they see evidence.

Techniques: Share testimonials, case studies, or data that support your solution.

5. Negotiate

Address objections and concerns by understanding the customer’s perspective. Reframe the conversation to find common ground.

Techniques: Use phrases like, “Help me understand what’s holding you back,” to uncover underlying issues.

6. Close

Closing is about asking for the appropriate action, whether it’s signing a contract, scheduling a follow-up, or making a purchase.

Techniques: Use trial closes (e.g., “How does this sound to you so far?”) to gauge readiness. Be direct but not pushy when asking for a commitment.

First impressions matter. Customers decide whether to engage further based on their initial interaction.

The important thing to remember is that AID, Inc. is more than just a sales process. It is a framework, which can be adapted by expanding or compressing it according to the clients' behavioral style.

Chapter 6: Approaching to Establish Rapport

Building Trust from the Start - First impressions matter. Customers decide whether to engage further based on their initial interaction. Salespeople must focus on being approachable, credible, and empathetic.

Practical Techniques for Rapport Building - Salespersons should follow steps to build rapport with any person:

- **Mirror the Customer's Style:** Adapt your tone, pace, and body language to match the customer's communication style.
- **Use Warm Openers:** Start with a comment or question that shows genuine interest in the customer's situation.
- **Show Vulnerability:** Sharing a relatable story or admitting a mistake (where appropriate) can make you more human and approachable.
- **Be Relevant:** You have about seven seconds to make the right impression on a new customer or prospect. Avoid being overly chatty, and get to the business point without too much delay. Otherwise, the customers will feel that the conversation with you is no longer relevant for them.

Chapter 7: Interviewing to Identify Needs

The purposes of asking questions in the interview phase focus on putting the customer at ease, helping them identify and explain their needs and proving that you are listening by helping them prioritize their needs.

The Art of Questioning - Asking the right questions helps uncover the customer's needs, goals, and pain points. Open-ended questions encourage dialogue, while closed-ended questions clarify specifics. Here are just a few examples of such questions:

“What challenges are you currently facing in your business?”

“What would an ideal solution look like for you?”

The GAP Model - The GAP Model helps sales persons navigate from the Current Situation to the Desired Situation. In the Current Situation, the client has concerns and perceives risks about choosing a product. In the Desired Situation, the client perceives the benefits and rewards of the salesperson's offer. To navigate from one situation to the other, the sales persons must answer both Logical Questions (what, how) and emotional questions (why, what if). The GAP model can be applied in several ways, by adapting it to the customer's behavioral style.

Chapter 8: Demonstrating Your Solutions

Tailoring Your Presentation - A one-size-fits-all pitch does not work. Customize your presentation to align with the customer's specific needs and priorities. For illustration, let's consider the hypothetical case of a salesperson for an electrical distributor trying to sell to a church installing a new sound and lighting system. By focusing on the technical demonstration part, the salesperson failed to persuade the client. He realized that he needs to focus more on conversation and learn more about this specific client's needs.

The demonstrate step in the sales process should:

- **Focus on Benefits, Not Features:** Shift from describing what your product does to explaining how it helps the customer achieve their goals.
- **Use Storytelling:** Stories are memorable and emotionally impactful. Use real-life examples or analogies to illustrate how your solution has helped others.

However, the sales person must keep the conversation on the right track and not allow the customer to derail them down the show-and-tell lane. But, in the end, the client must be allowed to make the decision – the sales rep should give them time to process the information and encourage the decision-making by feedback questions: How does this sound to you? Do you have any concerns that we haven't covered? How do you see this working for you?

Chapter 9: Validating So People Believe Your Claims

Customers are more likely to trust a salesperson who provides tangible evidence of their claims. Validation reduces skepticism and builds confidence. Some helpful techniques: to achieve this include sharing testimonials, case studies, third-party endorsements, or independent research. Sales persons should also address doubts proactively by asking questions like, “What concerns do you have about moving forward?” This approach makes customers feel heard and respected.

Chapter 10: Negotiating to Work Through Concerns and Objections

The role of negotiation in sales is not about winning at the customer’s expense; it’s about finding a mutually beneficial solution. A key aspect of negotiations for a salesperson is to change their mindset and reframe objections. They should treat objections as opportunities to clarify misunderstandings or explore unmet needs.

This is done by applying the ACR model:

- Acknowledge – listen with empathy and without being on the defense
- Clarify – understand the client’s objection and identify additional concerns
- Respond – using relevant data or additional information.

Chapter 11: Closing to Ask for the Appropriate Action

Closing should feel like a logical conclusion to the sales conversation, not a forced action. As exemplified by a hypothetical case study, a sales representative pushed too quickly for a close, without realizing that the sale had a two-step approval process. The right moment for closing a sale is when the customer realizes that they want the product because they believe it fulfills their needs. During the Close step the sales person has to:

- Ask trial-closing questions
- Listen to the customer and reinforce each answer
- Pay attention to the buying signals
- Ask for an appropriate closing commitment.

Chapter 12: Preparing for Sales Success

Success in sales does not just come. The best salespeople invest time in preparation. This includes researching the

customer, anticipating objections, and practicing presentations. Preparation means paying attention to every detail, from the pre-call notes on the client and their problem to setting the call purpose, preparing the statement of intent and finally making the post-call analysis.

Chapter 13: Ten Techniques for Outstanding Preparation

The key to successful preparation is found in 10 steps:

1. Looking for the six degrees of separation
2. Making yourself relevant
3. Selling past the sale
4. Stepping into the industry
5. Preparing your team
6. Knowing the competition
7. Being ready for indifference
8. Wowing the customer by being a different kind of salesperson
9. Being creative when the chips are down
10. Being mentally prepared

Part Three: Coaching Conversations For Skill And Will

Chapter 14: Sales Coaching

Sales coaching goes beyond teaching techniques; it helps individuals align their mindset, values, and behaviors to achieve their goals. Coaching is the key to unlocking untapped potential. While managing focuses on tasks and results, coaching focuses on the individual’s development. The purpose of coaching is to solve both skill and will issues. The most common issues that managers need to address through coaching involve getting stuck on the price question, asking predictable or low-impact questions, getting stumped on a behavior style, not asking for the sale, fear of feedback, and selling at a discount. To address these issues, managers must make time for coaching. Also, they must make sure that their salespeople validate them and what they teach. One of the most common reasons for lack of validation is that managers do not believe in their salespeople. Once managers start valuing their sales team, they should keep the conversation going and instill coaching into them on an ongoing basis.

Chapter 15: The Emotionally Intelligent Salesperson

Emotional awareness is essential in coaching. It represents the ability to tune in to those around you – the so-called ability to read the room and the ability to recognize and understand your own feelings and emotions and how they impact your behavior. The Four Components of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in Sales:

1. Self-Awareness: Recognizing your own emotions and their impact on your behavior.
2. Self-Management: Controlling emotional reactions to stay calm and focused.
3. Social awareness: Accurately noticing the emotions and interpreting situations appropriately.
4. Relationship management: Being able to get along well with others.

EQ can be increased by self-reflection, analyzing your interactions with clients and accepting coaching from managers

Chapter 16: Self and Team Assessments

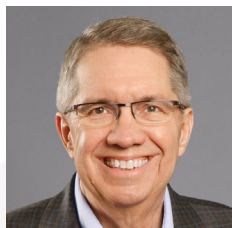
The growth mindset must always leave room for improvement. To illustrate this, a hypothetical case study shows a stellar face-to-face salesperson who refused to learn the art of virtual selling. While other colleagues, who used to be far behind him, adapted to the new technology, the former-star seller lagged behind. A key element in achieving a growth mindset is by conducting both self-assessments and performance assessments. These assessments should encourage salespersons to rate them in key aspects of their work: view of selling, view of abilities, values, commitment to activities, and belief in product.

The AID, Inc. system offers both a general assessment and a step-by-step assessment which help both managers and the salespersons they are coaching embrace a growth mindset.

Conclusion

Sales professionals seeking to elevate their approach through authentic relationships and self-awareness need to adopt a new paradigm of selling, one rooted in trust, values, and human connection. By applying the AID, Inc. systems, sales persons can identify their strengths and weaknesses and work to improve the latter.

In the end, the art of selling is more about being helpful to clients than pushing a sale. By following this system and embracing its mindset, sales people will find not just success, but also value and meaning in their work.



Mike Esterday is a sought-after coach, speaker, and leader in sales management and training. Esterday established multiple successful companies and is a founding partner and CEO of Integrity Solutions.

Derek Roberts is an executive coach, consultant, and professional speaker, but is quick to identify himself first and foremost as a sales professional. A partner with Integrity Solutions since 1999, Roberts also owns the consulting and training firm Roberts Business Group.

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