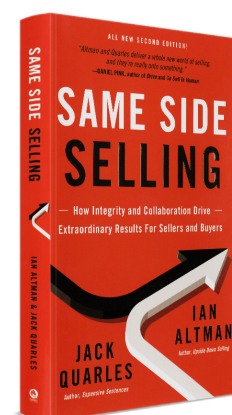


Same Side Selling

How Integrity and Collaboration Drive Extraordinary Results for Sellers and Buyers

by **Ian Altman and Jack Quarles**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

The most widely used metaphors in sales are those related to sports, battle, or games. But this mindset requires that one person wins and the other loses. Instead of falling victim to a win-lose approach, what if you shared a common goal with potential clients? How might things change if clients felt that you were more committed to their success than making the sale?

Same Side Selling gives practical steps to overcome sales barriers and turn confrontation into cooperation. Since the authors are a salesman (Ian Altman) and a procurement veteran who understands how companies buy (Jack Quarles), both the buyer's and seller's perspectives are baked into every sentence of the book. The aim is to replace the adversarial trap with a cooperative, collaborative mindset.

Same Side Selling presents sales as solving a puzzle instead of playing a game. Sellers who implement this approach will be seen as valuable resources, not predatory peddlers. Discover how to sell with integrity from the same side of the table for better results all around.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why better selling is more like a puzzle than a game.
- The importance of fit rather than closing the sale at all costs.
- To narrow your market and educate, rather than convince, your prospects.
- To stay involved after the sale to ensure great results.

Stop Playing Games

The most common metaphor for selling and negotiating has been that of the game. How many of the top sales books of the last half-century feature the words “game” or “win” in the title? How many coaches and athletes have written books about business success?

In a game, one side wins and the other side loses. An adversarial mindset is implicit from the start. Making matters worse, many sellers, when faced with pressure to “hit their numbers,” seem more interested in selling what they have in their bags than in finding the best solutions for their prospects.

Once buyers have been burned once or twice with solutions that did not fit their needs, they stop trusting the sales professionals. It should come as no surprise that some buyers have determined that the best way to protect themselves is to keep sellers at arms’ length and in the dark.

The New Metaphor: Selling Is a Puzzle

Let’s bury the metaphor of competing in a game and replace it with the metaphor of solving a puzzle. Selling is not a game. In a game, you are playing. In a game, there is a winner and a loser. Over time, you build a win-loss record. In a game, you sit across from your opponent, trying to win.

Selling is a puzzle. With a puzzle, you are solving. With a puzzle, you create something. Over time, you build a history of value. When working on a puzzle, people sit on the same side, determining if pieces are a good fit.

The puzzle metaphor is simple, but adopting it in practice is not easy. A puzzle-based, Same Side Selling approach has implications for every step of the sales process and the client relationship. The first step of Same Side Selling is to embrace the idea of solving a puzzle instead of playing a game. For the new puzzle metaphor, we also need a new acronym.

FIT: Finding Impact Together

Same Side Selling can be remembered with the acronym FIT, which stands for Finding Impact Together. Finding Impact Together is a mantra that can be useful at nearly every stage of the sales process and customer relationship.

Finding means discovering. It often involves teaching, sharing, investigating, or diagnosing. It also means that the outcome is unknown: What you are seeking might be there or it might not.

Impact is not about your product or service. What you are selling matters, but what’s far more important is how your offering solves someone else’s problem. It’s not about you or what’s in your bag. It’s about the customer’s problem and solving it. Finding impact means mutually agreeing on why the client needs help and what the likely results of your solution will be.

Same Side Selling is **collaborative and cooperative**. Those are positive, friendly words that align with an integrity-based approach to sales. As we will discover, putting the client’s perspective first yields better results with less effort. While no one wants to be sold something, nearly everyone could use help with solving a problem.

Be Unique

Instead of trying to dominate in a crowded field and chasing every prospect, the most successful sellers know exactly what they bring to the marketplace, and they focus on the areas where they can have the greatest impact for clients. Their offerings are not shifting or vague; they are as clearly defined as the outline of a puzzle piece.

Because it’s all about finding the right fit, Same Side Selling requires a clear definition of your unique value proposition. You must understand which problems you can solve and which you cannot, who your best prospects are, and who would be better served by someone else. The puzzle metaphor is a helpful reminder. Because of its distinctive shape, a puzzle piece is of great use where it fits—but only where it fits.

To determine the unique shapes and designs of your puzzle pieces, you’ll need to answer a few basic questions: Whom do you help? What do you do to help them? Why do they need your help? For many organizations, it is a struggle to uniquely define your who, what, and why.

The traditional elevator pitch presents two basic pieces of information: who we are; what we do. This pitch starts and ends with the seller. The customer may be mentioned in the mix somewhere, but it’s pretty much all about the seller. This seller-centric approach will rarely engage the other person, and it may lead straight to the adversarial trap.

Create a Same Side Pitch

The Same Side pitch starts with the customer’s challenge and ends with the customer’s success. Let’s examine the building blocks.

Your best prospects are not looking for products and services; they are looking for solutions to problems. They are looking for results.

Pitch Element 1: “Companies come to us when ...”

The most successful pitch will resonate with the prospect’s pain. So, what are your prospects sick and tired of? Where is the customer pain that you can relieve? What are the best words to describe it? These are essential questions in defining your role in the marketplace. The most effective statements of customer pain are often raw and real.

Pitch Element 2: “We help them by ...” The second part of the Same Side elevator pitch explains what you do to help your clients. The good news is that this is the easiest part of the pitch to write. All of us can describe our products and services in colorful detail. The bad news is that this is the least important part of the elevator pitch. In fact, too much of the “what” element in a pitch is distracting and can be counterproductive.

Your best prospects are not looking for products and services; they are looking for solutions to problems. They are looking for results. When a salesperson elaborates on features and details without first connecting to a prospect’s problem, those words are wasted.

Pitch Element 3: “... so they can ...” The Same Side Pitch is no more (and no less) than a before-and-after comparison. The prospect needs a clear picture of a problem she relates to, followed by a compelling vision of what life will be like after this problem is eliminated. Your solution is what brings about the transformation, so the third element of the Same Side pitch is the “after” picture, which defines that impact. It describes the success that your clients will enjoy when the work is done.

Consider this example:

Old Elevator Pitch: “We are a technology company that provides IT outsourcing services.”

Same Side Pitch: “Companies come to us when they are sick and tired of investing a ton of money in their IT team and wondering if they are keeping up with technology. We take that off their plate so they can focus on their core business.”

Narrow Your Market

The next step is to find someone to build a puzzle with you. In other words, you want to qualify your prospects. Your goal in qualifying sales prospects is simple: Find people who not only face problems you can solve, but also recognize those problems and believe they are worth solving.

Determining which prospects are worth your time and which ones are not is essential to your success. The ones who are not a fit—you can call them non-prospects—pose a great danger to your business because they have the potential to suck in your energy and resources like a black hole. When too many prospects are pursued before they are adequately qualified, sales teams expend resources chasing bad deals and pay inadequate attention to the good ones.

Entice, Disarm, Discover

To get (or stay) on the same side, let’s build on the understanding that you are not the best fit for every potential client, nor is every prospect a good fit for you. Focus on this with a specific question: Of all the prospects that you meet, what percentage of them are likely to become paying customers in the short term? Most sellers say the number is less than 5 percent, but nearly everyone agrees that the number is less than 50 percent.

Whatever your number is, it shouldn’t depress you. In fact, let’s use it as part of a highly effective tactic to quickly qualify a prospect. The formula is,

Entice. Entice the customer by identifying something you have that might be of interest.

Disarm. Make it clear that you are not there to sell but want merely to see if there is a fit.

Discover. Trigger a discovery phase in which you learn about them (instead of spending a meeting talking about your stuff).

For example, let’s consider a benefits insurance broker called Potomac Companies, Inc. The Same Side pitch for Potomac Companies starts with their typical client’s eleva-

tor rant: “We hate the trend of our healthcare costs growing from \$1 million to \$2 million over the next seven years. We’d rather have that money for other things.”

Potomac Companies’ formula to Entice, Disarm, and Discover sounds like this:

(Entice) We work with clients who are currently spending \$1 million on insurance benefits and who realize that if costs are left unchecked, that number will grow to \$2 million over the next seven years. At that point, clients will have spent an additional \$3.5 million. They tell us they have other things they’d rather do with that money. For the right clients, we can help them reduce their future healthcare costs.

(Disarm) We find that we can have a dramatic impact on less than half of the organizations we meet with about this issue. But if addressing those cost increases is important to you, **(Discover)** we’d be happy to speak with you to learn more about your situation to see if we can help.

This situation seems like a flip of the usual selling dynamic, and it is. But Entice, Disarm, Discover is not a manipulative Jedi mind trick. It is based entirely on integrity and reality.

Potomac tracks the progress of each client and finds that they can have a dramatic impact for about half of the companies with whom they meet. They even provide a scorecard that illustrates where they believe they could have the greatest impact. This combination of awareness and openness demonstrates to the client that Potomac is focused on solving the client’s issues and delivering results.

Acknowledging that they might not be able to help the prospect takes Potomac Companies out of the category of “someone trying to sell something” and puts them on the same side as the buyer.

Get to the Truth as Soon as Possible

Let’s focus on the two factors that drive when a buyer will be ready to spend money for your solution: urgency and readiness. Urgency is the perceived severity of the problem you would solve. Readiness is the buyer’s ability to realize a benefit from the solution you offer.

Failing to assess urgency and readiness increases risk: the risk of spending too much energy on the wrong prospect, the risk of losing the sale because of insufficient understanding, and the risk of selling into a situation where you are not positioned to have a positive impact.

Same Side Selling requires getting to the truth about the buyer’s situation. Think of this step as turning all of the puzzle pieces right-side up. After all, who would try to solve a puzzle with the pieces upside down?

You can think of the process of turning pieces right-side up as a diagnosis. Taking the time to diagnose a prospect’s situation can set your company apart from others.

Fortunately, all of us have seen diagnosis modeled well. The field of medicine illustrates the importance of uncovering the meaningful details of a patient’s symptoms as well as sound tactics to get to the truth.

You visit a doctor and say that your elbow hurts. The physician looks at you and says, “Yep—It’s tennis elbow. I’ll schedule you for surgery tomorrow.” Would you feel confident in that course of action? Or would you run from the office, never to come back? The medical metaphor not only helps with the process but also reveals the intent. Same Side Selling is about getting to the truth as quickly as possible.

Understanding the Buyer’s Urgency

No matter what you are selling, your success will largely be driven by the buyer’s sense of urgency. As a rule, the buyer should have at least as much urgency as the seller.

Traditional lead qualification centers on budget, authority, and need. A simpler and more predictive path to qualify urgency is to uncover the buyer’s issue, impact, and importance:

- **Issue:** What problem is the client organization trying to overcome, or what is their goal?
- **Impact:** What happens if they don’t solve the problem? What downstream problems is it causing?
- **Importance:** Compared to other things on the client’s plate, how important is this?

This framework provides a strong indicator of urgency and is a shortcut to Finding Impact Together.

Their Readiness Is Your Concern

If your only goal is to sell, then the buyer’s ability to benefit from your sale is simply his responsibility. But if you are solving, not selling, then the client’s readiness is very much your concern. You should not move forward until you know that the client can implement your offering to achieve the desired results.

The sale itself is not the finish line. To ensure that your prospect’s organization can enjoy the impact from your

solution, what tools or processes must they have in place? When you think back on some of your spectacular client success stories, you can probably identify factors that expedited success. With the failures, those key factors may have been missing. Depending on what you sell, the cause of a failure may be technical, organizational, or political.

Be An Educator

Now we're ready to sit down on the same side and start solving that puzzle to see if our solutions are a good fit for the client's challenges. But before you can assemble the pieces, you need to put them all on the table. In selling, this step translates to education. By educating your prospects, you help them understand that you are not only unique but also uniquely qualified to solve the problem they face. Education can also sometimes help prospects see the impact or importance of their issue.

The purpose of educating is not to convince but to include a prospect in your perspective or knowledge base so that you build a mutual understanding.

The ubiquity of information today might suggest that the role of the educator is less important. In fact, the opposite is true: Because there is so much information, there is a desperate need for teachers who can navigate the sea of data. Buyers need to find the right information in the right context.

Educating is not about the product or even about the seller; it's about the buyer. Education begins with the buyer and ends with the buyer. More specifically, it begins with the buyer's challenge and ends with the buyer's overcoming the challenge. Everything you need to teach connects to that beginning and that end.

Throughout the process, keep thinking FIT: the buyer and seller are Finding Impact Together. You are teaching with a goal of action. Your tactics need to reflect this goal.

Mastering the Third-Party Story

In the quest for action, the student (or buyer) needs to actively gain insights and come to realizations. A great tactic for helping a prospect move to action is the third-party story. It shares a challenge or success to which a listener can relate. It offers an opportunity for a buyer to buy in and say, "Yes, that's just like me!"

Here are a few examples of third-party stories used to illustrate the impact of a prospect's challenge: "Some of

our customers find that after the training, their teams don't really have the tools to follow up. How might follow-up be a challenge for your organization?"

"Some companies find that while the local print shop has good prices, they end up spending too many hours on design and communication. How do you address that?"

The components are simple: a real example with a problem that the listener might relate to and then an invitation with an open-ended question.

Educating the prospect is another step in qualifying the opportunity, for both the buyer and the seller. To confirm that your puzzle pieces fit together in a way that can deliver high impact, the buyer's organization needs to

- Have the problem or challenge that you can help them address;
- Be in the right demographic categories;
- Be willing to spend money to solve the problem;
- Believe that YOU can help them. That belief will be based on your understanding of the buyer's situation much more than on your experience, product, and product features.

Focus on the Fit

"What is the procedure you use to do that? We need to understand your methods better."

"Your competitor is using technology X on their back end. Is that what you use?"

"Do you have certification in XYZ?"

It's natural for buyers to ask questions like the ones above and for sellers to want to share details of their solutions. Details become a problem when they take center stage and either the seller or the buyer loses sight of the overall impact of a problem or its solution.

Go Beyond Features and Benefits

Features lead to benefits. The conventional wisdom is that good marketing and advertising emphasize the benefits, and that is why people buy. People don't buy Volvos because they have more airbags than other cars; people buy Volvos because they are perceived as being safe.

A product's features are NEVER as important as the buy-

er's problem. In fact, they are relevant only if they address the problem. Discussing features apart from how they directly apply to the client's situation is a waste of energy. It is not about you. It is not even about your achievements or capability. It is about the client's problem. Clients don't want your brilliance and gadgets; they want results.

The term "results" is necessary because "feature" is about the product, and "benefit" is based on the feature. Neither term originates with the buyer or her problem. That's fine if you are just selling or playing a game of sales. To sell from the same side, though, you need to come from the buyer's point of view. The best way to accomplish this is for you and the buyer to focus on the results.

Sell Results Instead of Resources

A resource is essentially a tool. It is a means to an end. When a person buys a tool, it's up to the buyer to use it correctly and to get the right results.

In contrast, a results purchase solves a problem. Buying results is more comprehensive. It implies that the risk shifts to the seller, because the seller will manage the resources to make sure the job gets done. The buyer is paying money to remove a problem. The buyer is buying the expectation of an outcome, not the supply of a resource. What does this distinction look like?

- A resource-based lawn services company sells hours of labor for such tasks as mowing yards and weeding flower beds. A *results-based* lawn services company sells well-groomed yards that its clients can enjoy on the weekends.
- A resource-based accounting firm sells on-call accounting support, report preparation, and strategic input. A *results-based* accounting firm sells compliance, reliable reporting, and peace of mind.
- A resource-based customer relationship management (CRM) software company sells a software package that includes service modules and database management. A *results-based* CRM software company sells effective customer management and communication.

On the surface, the items in each pair look similar. They might be nearly identical in price and delivery. Yet, the distinction between selling resources and selling results is profound in the way the purchase is viewed by the seller and the buyer. It shapes the perception and reality of the sales process and the ongoing relationship.

Don't Force the Fit

Traditional sales training goes deep and wide on how to close the sale, overcome objections, persuade prospects, and upsell buyers. Behind these tactics are two working assumptions: that a sale is better than no sale and that a bigger sale is better than a smaller sale.

The practice of restraint is more important than upselling. Being willing to say "no"—even when the buyer is ready to say "yes"—is an essential element of Same Side Selling.

When you force the fit during a sale, you are almost always doing one of the following or a mix of both:

- Selling services outside of your expertise.
- Selling a solution to a problem that the client doesn't have or perceive.

The puzzle metaphor is useful here. You might pick up two pieces that looked like a fit and move them close to each other. But if they don't match, you're certainly not going to mash them together. Yet, in the context of sales, the adversarial trap tempts sellers to make a sale fit, even if it doesn't.

There is no fail-safe diagnostic to determine when a seller is forcing the fit. But these questions will point the way:

1. Are you being completely honest and open about the solution? Honesty is the first standard. If you have in any way misled the buyer, allowed her to have the wrong perception, or overstated your capability, then you are probably forcing the fit.
2. Would your solution be in the best interests of the owners of the buying company? This question is a bit different from "would the owners approve of the purchase?" because it requires you to apply your expertise about your own industry and solution. Think long-term and try to suspend your healthy bias about your own capability.
3. Would your board agree that this project is in line with your company's strengths and strategy?

If you put the opportunity through these questions, does it look more like a fit or less like a fit?

If the answer is still unclear, the Same Side approach is to err on the side of restraint. This contradicts the Always Be Closing mentality that many (if not nearly all) sales professionals have been taught.

Same Side Selling means ensuring that your clients or prospects see that you are looking out for their best interests.

Sell Value, Not Price

News flash: Buyers often focus on price. In many cases, your initial conversation with them might be primarily about price. Unless you can present price in the context of your overall value, you'll end up in an adversarial trap where the buyer sees your products and services as commodities.

When your clients or prospects do start to give you a hard time about price, that's often a sign that you did a less-than-stellar job of helping them see your value. You might see pricing pressure for the initial sale, or you might see it when clients are ready to reorder.

See the Big Picture--and Share It

The old-school salesperson had a goal of selling at all costs. Same Side Selling means ensuring that your clients or prospects see that you are looking out for their best interests. The initial purchase price might cover your transaction but not their eventual investment. The total cost of ownership is their real cost. It is your job to illustrate all of the costs of their project—even the ones you don't control.

The self-interested salesperson might be afraid to open the client's eyes to other costs, but transparency is central to value and long-term business relationships.

Getting the total cost on the table sounds easy, right? All you need to do is create a spreadsheet that shows every cost related to your work. You can then hand it to the client, and she will understand everything, right? WRONG.

Getting the total cost on the table is a collaborative process. It's important that the buyer understand and take ownership of the final figure, but the seller can add value by guiding the process of identifying the total cost. Here again, third-party stories can be useful.

One such story might sound like, "For a recent client, in addition to our software license of \$200,000, they also needed a server for \$20,000, and they needed some additional training and development totaling about \$100,000. How similar might those costs be for you?"

Compare on Value, Not Price

Sometimes your solution costs the same as your competitors' offerings. In that situation, you can compete either on price or on value. The problem with competing on price is that the customer who switches from another vendor to you because of price will also switch from you in the future for the same reason.

Never get caught in a discussion of price when you have the opportunity to discuss value. Be clear about where you add value for your client, and engage in meaningful discussions to ensure that you share a common belief about the reality of that value. Remember, if the client doesn't seem to have the vision, this might be a good time to share a third-party story about how similar organizations have realized value.

Deliver Impact

If you navigated through your sales process with Same Side Selling and found a fit with the buyer, then congratulations are in order! The sale is made, the deal is done, and the ink is dry. The moment is worth savoring.

Remember, though, the sale is not the finish line. The sale itself is not the goal. The sale is a necessary step toward the goal. Early in the sales process, you worked collaboratively with the buyer to Find Impact Together (FIT), and you defined the value of your solution. Now it's time to ensure that your client realizes the outcome or results you discussed.

Stay Involved

After a sale, there is often some sort of handoff from the salesperson to an account manager or project manager who takes responsibility for the customer relationship. This transition is delicate. It can lead directly to the adversarial trap if the buyer thinks the person with whom he has built a relationship was there only to win the sale.

The person who led the sales process should always be engaged throughout the project. If this isn't your company's policy, do it anyway. Staying in touch with the buyer does not have to mean a huge investment of time. Even when

the salesperson has no formal role after the sale, it is simple to reach out to the buyer.

Here's an example of how the salesperson can start a check-in conversation with the client: "Bill, it's been two months since we implemented. I've heard good things, but I wanted to hear it from you. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate how things have gone?"

Bringing Others to the Same Side

Implementation often means bringing new people onto the project, particularly if some stakeholders were not involved in the buying process. The result is that even after the sale, some of the key people on the buyer's team might not yet be working from the same side. They might have an adversarial mindset toward you and your team or have a habitual mistrust of vendors. They might even have preferred another vendor that was not selected. Whatever is going on, you need to get everyone up to speed and on the same side.

When you bring other people into a project, this is not the time for rosy optimism or the expectation that everything will go perfectly. A far better way to disarm the new people and build teamwork is to be realistic about the effort required and the risks you might encounter.

Suppose you sell technology solutions, and from experience you know that if the customer's staff does not attend training, the project is likely to fail. You might emphasize this to the buyer by saying, "We are going to design a great training program and have fantastic support. However, if people do not attend the training, it could make the rollout problematic. What can we do together to avoid that situation?" For whichever problems you anticipate, you want the client to be an integral part of finding the solution.

Practicing Same Side Selling will help you achieve more success with your clients than ever before. As you approach the conclusion of a project or client engagement and you see that you have delivered impact, this is a time for recognition, appreciation, and celebration. This is more than just feel-good-ism or a hollow trophy ceremony. It is strategic.

Celebration provides a time to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning was the problem that was causing the client pain, difficulty, or loss of some kind. That problem also led the client to you, and you mutually discovered a good fit. The middle was your working together. The ending is the outcome, where the problem is solved.

When you take the time to appreciate your unique value, focus on the right opportunities, uncover the truth, and then share your wisdom, you will find yourself on the same side of the table as the buyer.

Wishing you happy solving and Same Side success!

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Ian Altman is an author, strategic advisor, and internationally sought keynote speaker on integrity-based sales and business development. He draws on two decades of experience as a services and technology CEO as well as on research on how customers make decisions, to deliver an approach to selling everyone can embrace. Jack Quarles is an international speaker, trainer, consultant, and best-selling author on Amazon. Focusing on making improved investments of time, money, energy, and focus, he has founded multiple startups and saved companies millions of dollars.

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