

The New Jobs of Sales and Marketing: facilitate the buying before the buyer, by Sharon-Drew Morgen

It's time for a rant. After decades of writing books and articles explaining why we close such a small percentage of prospects and how, exactly, to facilitate the Buy Side to close much more, I'm going to say what I really think.

I'll begin with my surprise: why do sales and marketing largely ignore the change management component of the [Buy Side](#) even in the face of very low (<5%) close rates? That the 95+% of prospects NOT buying (even in the face of the massive efforts) indicates that a focus on need or solution/product placement is imperfect? That maybe pitching/pushing content is the wrong strategy? My goodness, you wouldn't even go to a hairdresser with a 95+% failure rate, let alone get on a plane or go to a doctor. Isn't it clear that something is wrong?

DO YOU WANT TO SELL OR HAVE SOMEONE BUY?

For me the answer is obvious: both sales and marketing ignore the path folks take to become buyers and overlook a group of highly probable prospects who actually need support handling their unique [change management](#) issues. Because they're not buyers yet, you've overlooked them. But you're ignoring a huge opportunity to serve, differentiate yourself, and close more.

Here's my question: Do you want to sell? Or help someone buy? Your answer is obvious: ***'I want to sell and I don't care whether anyone buys.'*** That's what you're doing! Selling, even though such a small percentage are buying! It's the wrong answer. If you really wanted people to buy you'd be doing something different.

Both marketing and sales ignore the Buy Side, focusing on solution placement/product sale, while restricting the purchasing audience to those relative few - the low hanging fruit - [who finally show up](#). And making a purchase is the very last thing people do. Before then, they're merely people trying to figure out their best route to solving a problem.

People don't want to buy anything, merely solve a problem at the least cost to the system. And until they understand the 'cost to the system' (how their culture and norms will be affected) they can't buy. They don't even recognize a 'need' until then. They certainly aren't seeking an external solution; nor do they consider themselves buyers! Hence they **pay no heed to your selling or marketing content.** And yet you persist on doing the same thing even in the face of failure.

It's possible to recognize folks who [WILL be buyers](#) on the first call, then facilitate them efficiently through their Pre-Sales (i.e. Pre-Buying) [change management](#) steps. But not with the current solution placement/product sale model.

Sales and marketing were designed to sell solutions. But sticking to the historic solution placement/product sale focus, they ignore the real Pre-Sales [buying decision journey](#) folks take first and overlook the possibility finding folks who will soon be buyers but don't self-identify as such yet.

Sales and marketing overlook the much larger group of folks on route to becoming buyers but not ready yet, focusing instead on anyone – anyone with a name that shows up somewhere, anyone who will sit still long enough to read or listen, anyone who has any semblance of a 'need' as per a biased interpretation. Anyone.

FACILITATE BUYING BEFORE TRYING TO SELL

Sales can begin by recognizing, finding, and leading people through their team– and culture-based detection and buy-in activities; marketing can use change-focused content to guide folks through their unfamiliar [steps](#) of change. All it takes is a focus on facilitating change – the necessary steps involved with 'buying' - as the first activity rather than beginning with selling. And by 'facilitating buying' I mean the process of change, nothing product-purchase related.

By overlooking the change folks must take before identifying as buyers, you're limiting your audience to those relative few who completed their internal decisions and have their ducks in a row; you're missing a huge opportunity to beat your competition and be a [change facilitator](#) – a role folks really, really need you – as one aspect of your sales and marketing strategy.

With a shift in perspective to first find folks seeking change in your area of expertise and facilitating their necessary change management Pre-Sales Change Path BEFORE trying to sell, you'll find folks very early in their decision journey (before they even recognize they might be buyers) and use your new change management thinking to help them figure out what they need to figure out. Then more will be ready to buy, and buy quicker.

Here's an example of two responses to a [Facilitative Question](#) I posed to begin a prospecting call. Notice that they both have 'need' but only one is a real prospect [Hint: the willingness to change is the identifier.]:

SD: How are you and your decision team adding new sales skills to their already successful strategies, for those times you're seeking to shorten sales cycles?

Response #1: every year I read 6 popular sales books. I choose my favorite, buy 1500 copies for the teams, then have the managers discuss one chapter a month. I've been doing it for years and my folks love it.

SD: Sounds like you are happy with your strategy.

#1: Love it.

Response #2: every year I offer some type of sales training. But I must be doing something wrong – it doesn't seem to help and our close rates and the sales cycles don't seem to change much.

SD: sounds frustrating.

#2. It has been. But I don't despair. I keep seeking a way to fix this problem. Shouldn't be so hard.

Both #1 and #2 need to learn my [Buying Facilitation®](#) model. But only #2 is actively seeking change and actually bought my training 2 weeks later. When starting by seeking folks on route to change (instead of seeking those with need), you'll find people with a good chance of becoming buyers once they're ready.

SALES IS AN OUTDATED MODEL

When designed 100 years ago, sales and marketing only needed a reliable product, a charming personality (Have you ever met a seller who wasn't charming?) and folks with a need. Easy. Even buyers had an easier time: with a simple buying process, far fewer solution choices, and fewer bits and pieces to organize, buying involved maybe two or three available solutions; marketing content provided data they couldn't get anywhere else; sales reps were a necessary and accepted part of a buying decision.

Times have changed but neither sales nor marketing have changed with them. Close rates have gone from 8% when I began selling in 1979 to well under 5% now (closer to 3% if tracked from first call). When I told someone recently that the sales model closed less than 5%, he disagreed:

F: We're closing 15%

SD: Starting from where?

F: Starting from a visit! (Question: how many not-yet-ready-buyers did he get 'nos' from as he attempted to get an appointment?)

SD: How many would you close if you started counting when you get a name?

F: Less than 2%.

Isn't this an indication that something is wrong? That you must do something different? A <5% close rate is 95+% failure! And yet it's called success! But what if you said,

“Hmmm. Such a small percentage close rate is failure, especially after all that effort and outreach. What are we missing here?”

With fewer people needing your help to make a purchase, more folks involved in a buying decision, and more people buying online, why are you using the same process, the same thinking, you’ve always used? With a blank slate and all possibilities available, even the new apps continue the same failed thinking!

With technology to organize a seller’s time, grab names from unpredictable searches, cause company names to come up in search engines, push out content, combined with the separation of the technology into cost centers that hide the real cost of a sale, the only people making money are the groups selling these new technologies to salespeople!

It’s time to consider first finding [folks on route to change](#) and facilitating their non-buying change management process before trying to sell.

DOING THE SAME THING IS INSANITY

The continued belief that with the ‘right’ content/message, the ‘right’ technology, the concept ‘if you find them they’ll buy’ is a foundational flaw.

Think with me here: **You’re spending more and more money to find more and more names and spending more and more time on folks not even real prospects.** The hope, the promise – that once people notice you, appreciate your solution, believe they need your solution, and trust/like you, they’ll buy – is moot. There are several issues involved;

The focus on solution placement/product sale, and finding folks with ‘need’, misses the real opportunity:

1. the [unique process](#) each person/group people goes through before becoming buyers;
2. when, why, how people become buyers (Seriously. I’ve trained 100,000 sales folks and not one – not one! – knows their market’s Pre-Sales buying decision/change management process!);
3. the role of change in the buying process;
4. the possibility of finding folks on route to becoming buyers on the first call;
5. how to facilitate folks through their preliminary non-solution change decisions;
6. how to use marketing to progress the buying decision path.

By restricting sales and marketing to solution placement/product sale, the real process people go through on [route to becoming buyers](#) has been overlooked. Think about it for a moment. If you want to convince your spouse to buy a 2-seater \$350,000 Lamborghini, would you want them to sit down with a decision facilitator or a

Lamborghini sales rep?

What would you need to believe differently to begin your sales/marketing outreach with a change management criteria?

The industry presuppositions as to targeting 'buyers' are specious:

- finding the 'right' names of 'probable' buyers (regardless of how marginal);
- offering 'good' content;
- seeking people with a 'need';
- exhibiting concern, likeability, trustworthiness;
- lowering price.

Not only have these assumptions proven unsuccessful, they overlook the real problem: **selling doesn't cause buying**. You're using a model that assumes solution content will enlist people but failing because the focus is wrong, and blaming the people for not doing what you think they should do when you didn't even help them where they needed help!

What would you need to consider differently to first help facilitate change before trying to sell or place solutions?

WE DON'T NEED SOLUTION DETAILS

The last thing anyone needs before they buy is solution details. The first thing is help figuring out all the internal stuff they need to figure out. Indeed, there are **very specific steps** people must take before they even consider going outside for a solution.

- enlist all (ALL) stakeholders who helped create the problem and/or will touch the final solution. It's only when all are involved that the real problem and need are understood – and don't forget Joe in Accounting;
- seek workarounds;
- understand the 'cost' of the change to ensure it's equal to or less than the 'cost' of the status quo, regardless of the need or the efficacy of a solution: Systems Congruence (maintaining the cultural norms) is sacrosanct;
- get buy-in from all who will touch the solution.

Before anyone buys anything they have an increasingly complex change management journey. Why not enter and help here? There are soooo many more prospective buyers doing their change work on route to buying, and until they're complete, they can't buy. Why not help? You wait while they do it anyway! Because your solution details have no part to play in their internal, systems-driven activity, you're being ignored.

By connecting where folks really need help, you're overlooking a huge opportunity to become involved earlier as real [Servant Leaders](#) (intention to help others discover their own excellence). And make a whole lot more money.

You're ignoring the differences between the [Buy Side and the Sell Side](#). One is a change management journey, the other is a readiness to make a purchase. One precedes the other. Simple. Yet you've ignored one of them and it has cost you dearly.

Think of the last ten items you purchased.

- How many of them required a salesperson?
- How much of your decision making was supported by research you did online, data that years ago would have been provided by a seller?
- What percentage of your buying decision process involved other people – their input, ideas, experience, feedback?
- Did you *start* by making a purchase?
- How much time did you spent figuring out how to get buy-in/agreement from others, or figuring out how to fix the problem yourself?
- At what point did you begin comparing products or vendors?
- At what point did you begin seeking out marketing materials?

Why hasn't your own buying process informed you? Surely you've never started with a purchase (unless it was a small personal item).

What would you need to understand the recognize that the Buy Side is not focused on making a purchase?

Out of the box thinking

Best I can tell, you're not thinking beyond 'need' and solution placement. But David Sandler did. In 1993, before he died, Sandler called me to try to buy me out.

"Well done, Sharon-Drew! I thought I had gone outside the box with Sandler Sales. But with Buying Facilitation® you really did! I hadn't realized how far 'outside the box' was and how necessary managing change was! Good job!"

Ultimately we couldn't strike a deal (although he had me train [Buying Facilitation®](#) to 7 of his franchises). But he was right. Different thinking was required even then.

What's stopping you from separating the systemic, non-buying, change management portion of the buying decision journey from what you have to sell?

Need is the wrong criteria

Because of the complexity involved when deciding whether, how, when or if to fix a problem, because of the number of people involved who must offer input and agreement, because of the downsides of change and the complexities of relationships, not everyone with a need is in the market to buy anything.

The search for people with a 'need' is a foundational flaw. Do you have a few pounds to shed? Should you be exercising more? Do you need to be better organized? If you answered 'yes' to any of these, you have a need. Why aren't you doing anything about it?

See? Having a need is not a precursor to buying. It might be the wrong time, or the people needed to be involved don't buy in, or the 'cost' of the change might cause too much disruption. **Seeking folks with a 'need' restricts you from finding people on route to becoming, but haven't yet self-identified as, buyers - a much, much larger audience.**

What tools do you need to add non-sales change facilitation to your sales skills?

Sellers aren't necessary to spout features, functions or benefits

A company representative is the last thing needed to make a purchase. Literally the last thing. Not to mention people get their data online these days.

Consider this: Just because someone

- has a need doesn't mean they're ready, willing, or able to buy,
- is ready, willing, or able to buy doesn't mean they'll buy from you – or buy it now.
- is ready to buy now doesn't mean they need a salesperson to complete their purchase.

Both sales and marketing think a buying decision is based on need and features and benefits. And the fact that a **buying decision starts well before people even understand the full extent of their need** aside, your close numbers should have alerted you that maybe your assumptions are flawed. When you discuss your solution before people consider themselves buyers people will be turned off, ignore your data, feel pushed, and you will have missed an opportunity to serve.

What's stopping you from adding change facilitation to your tool kit?

Wasting time on folks who will never buy

Think with me here. You're contacting, following up, calling, emailing, any name that shows up with any sort of 'touch point', closing a tiny fraction, and wasting so much time chasing non-buyers... and then blaming *them* because they aren't closing!

Just because someone does research online doesn't mean they're buyers.

Maybe they had a thought during their internal information gathering. Maybe they had many different thoughts on how to resolve a problem and they were perusing different ideas and options. Maybe a colleague used a solution they hadn't heard of and were checking it out.

But here's a fundamental question: **why don't you know the difference on the first contact who will be a buyer, and spend your time serving them?** Change your focus to first finding folks seeking change; then use your knowledge to help those who WILL be buyers get their ducks in a row!

What concepts do you want to learn to help you find folks on route to buying?

Your questions are biased by your need to sell and don't help buying

You've been taught to ask questions, but your questions are biased by your need to sell and gather partial or inaccurate data; they don't help people become buyers.

I developed a new form of question ([Facilitative Question](#)) that leads action rather than gather data. I **use my knowledge of the obligatory steps all folks must take before becoming buyers, and facilitate their actions:**

"How will you know when you've involved the full complement of stakeholders?"

Leading people to include the necessary people is different from trying to 'find out' for yourself so you can sell, like in

"Who are the decision makers?"

Facilitative Questions help others move through their discovery and change management, effectively speeding up the buying decision/sales cycle (**The time it takes to make the necessary decisions and get buy in for change is the length of the sales cycle.**)

Conventional questions are biased by the seller's needs to pitch or convince, to gather names to sell to. You're overlooking a great opportunity to truly help them get to the unique answers they must discover internally:

How will fixing a problem affect daily jobs? Their relationships? What is the full fact pattern that caused and maintains their problem? Are the right stakeholders included (Don't forget Joe in Accounting!)? Will we need to re-organize? Will the 'cost' of the fix be worth it?

These are questions people must have answers to before they know which route to go to fix it. Notice they have **nothing to do with buying, only problem resolution and congruent change**. Besides, what would you do with this data even if it could be ascertained? Put a name on a spam list to send content (and annoy)? Go around the person you're speaking with? Pitch 'differently'? The odds of encouraging a purchase with your questions are slim to none.

I have a story. Years ago I got a call in January from a man named Jack Moore:

Jack: Hi Sharon-Drew. Jack Moore here from Cancer Treatment Centers. I've been reading your books and thinking about bringing you in to train our people for a long time. I'm calling now because I think we're ready to learn Buying Facilitation®!

SD: Cool. But what stopped you from calling 'yesterday'?

Jack: silence. Oh! Um, can I think about that and call you back?

December:

Jack: Hi Sharon-Drew. Jack Moore from Cancer Treatment Centers. Remember me?

SD: No.

Jack: I called in January. You asked me a question that I couldn't answer but realized I needed to. I put the question on my desk and yelled at you for a month. Then I had to admit the truth: I was the one who stopped me because I wasn't in a position to bring you in, that my team was wrong, our organization was wrong. I spent the next year firing people I should have fired long ago, reorganizing more efficiently. NOW we're ready!

Because I heard a systems problem on his first call, it never occurred to me to pitch my solution; he wasn't ready. **My question helped him do what he needed to do to be ready to buy**. It wasn't about my solution; it was a problem he had to resolve himself. Do you want to sell? Or have someone buy?

Are you willing to use Facilitative Questions to first facilitate change before trying to understand 'need'?

HOW DO YOU BUY?

It begins with awareness. You sort of notice a problem that becomes more apparent as you think about it and ask others, then maybe make some tweaks. Then you bring together some folks and start discussing it more thoroughly, and maybe have someone come in and give you an opinion. Then you begin researching available choices and discuss again with the team. You try possibilities you've used before, or solutions colleagues mention. You might reorganize a bit. You keep meeting with folks to find out if the problem is being resolved, if they can gerryrig anything. You keep reading, trying, asking, trying. Other people, other departments, get involved. They become part of the team.

The process goes on until finally you all agree you can't resolve the issue yourselves. But before you consider buying anything, you must first know the downsides, the disruption, and consider if it's worth it.

If the 'cost' of disruption is greater than the 'cost' of staying the same, you'll continue doing what you've been doing. It's only when the 'cost' is equal to or less than the status quo that you'll consider buying anything.

You don't wake up one day, notice a problem, and buy something. It's a decision process – a change management process - that incorporates the people and change as you attempt to resolve a problem. Unfortunately, neither sales nor marketing address this.

It's time to add a new component to both sales and marketing: facilitate the [buying decision path](#). The decision process all people go through is more time consuming for them than making the actual purchase. **They would love to have help** to decide, and resolve, quicker.

This is where sales and marketing could be truly useful. When you're in the middle of the discovery and confusion, wouldn't you rather that help in your change management than with what you may want to buy?

THE STEPS OF CHANGE

I spent many years unpacking the steps all people take as figure out how, why, if to do something different. Until

- all people connected with the problem share their ideas and concerns,
- everyone agrees the problem can't be fixed with available resources,
- all possible workarounds are tried,
- folks who will touch a new solution are willing to make a change,

- the consequences of change are known and the downsides are deemed workable,

people aren't buyers, regardless of their need or the efficacy of a solution.

Both sellers and marketers ignore the necessary change work. Instead of spending that time trying to convince, persuade, and manipulate, why not help them first manage the change?

Marketing can do this with articles that facilitate change along the change management steps ("Have you tried all possible workarounds?"); sellers can do this on the first call by focusing on change rather than 'need' or solutions; decision technology can do this (I've developed a Decider app for use with deal rooms and ABM). You can develop your own processes.

But start by finding those on route to becoming buyers, then facilitate the internal change work they must do anyway.

A buying decision is a change management issue long before it's a solution choice issue. This is where 80% of real buyers are – but because the sales model overlooks this change management portion, and these folks don't respond to marketing materials or sales calls (They're not buyers yet!), sales spends its time pushing, seeking, manipulating those whose names have come up from searches as 'probable' buyers and overlook the majority of folks they can connect with and truly serve. This is where they actually need you!

WHAT IF

You aren't connecting with a majority of folks who will buy because their process isn't 'need' or 'solution placement' focused and you're not adding any new change management capabilities to serve people on route to becoming buyers.

I've developed [Buying Facilitation®](#) to accomplish this. Even the new 'buyer' focus I've been hearing about is based on what you want to sell rather than how they need to make change decisions! Facilitate the buying before the buyer!

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What if we shift the focus from selling to providing what people really need help with – facilitating their confusing change issues so they were ready to become buyers?
- What if you could find folks who are on route to becoming buyers on the first call and facilitate them through their Pre-Sales change? And all you needed to do was add a front end to what you're doing now? Or hire a new group of Change Facilitators to do this part who pass on REAL names of REAL in-market buyers!

- Why hasn't sales added that change management stuff? Oh, I know: because sales thinks that to sell you start by, um, selling.
- What if with a new way of thinking, tools that facilitate the change and non-solution buying path to turn would-be-buyers into actual buyers, you could close 8X more sales?
- What if the complexity of the buying decision is the problem, and folks really you're your help to manage the internal change?
- What if there's no way an outsider could understand the unique complexities of the issues Others must handle before becoming a buyer? What if you could guide the Pre-Sales process then sell?
- What if the real solution is much cheaper and easier than trying to find names who might (less than 5% in person, 00059% online) be buyers and you'll close 8X more?

It's time to change. Facilitate change first, find folks who are on route to buying your solution on the first call, facilitate them through their decision path, then sell. And you'll close 40% of the same group you previously closed <5%. And I won't have to write anymore rants.

Sharon-Drew Morgen is a breakthrough innovator and original thinker, having developed new paradigms in sales (inventor [Buying Facilitation®](#), listening/communication (*What? Did you really say what I think I heard?*), change management ([The How of Change™](#)), coaching, and leadership. She is the author of several books, including the NYTimes Business Bestseller ***Selling with Integrity*** and *Dirty Little Secrets: why buyers can't buy and sellers can't sell*). Sharon-Drew coaches and consults with companies seeking out of the box remedies for congruent, servant-leader-based change in leadership, healthcare, and sales. Her award-winning blog carries original articles with new thinking, weekly. www.sharon-drew.com She can be reached at sharondrew@sharondrewmorgen.com.