



Five Surprising Reasons 50% of Reps Are Missing Quota

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It dropped again. Not the stock market or consumer confidence. No, the number of reps hitting their quota declined...for the fifth year in a row. It's unprecedented. It's now at an all-time low of 53% while the stock markets hit record highs.

The bottom line is that half of all sellers are failing, and it's getting worse. Something's amiss.

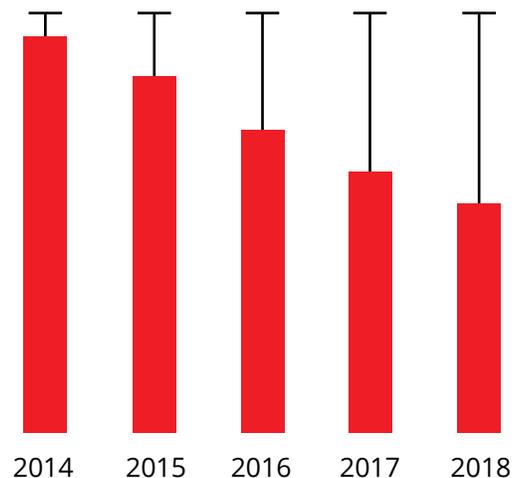
After training close to 15,000 sellers in the last three years, our organization has recognized a disturbing trend. The way information is consumed, the way decisions are made, the channels of communication that are used, and the amount of noise in the market have all dramatically changed, but sellers haven't. Oh sure, they use LinkedIn but most aren't adjusting to the new realities.

They are still sending the same emails, making the same prospecting calls, and delivering the same presentations. The results show that buyers aren't listening.

This begs the question: What needs to change?

In the big picture, it comes down to elevating their roles and instincts. Sellers' instincts and what they've traditionally learned about selling are sabotaging their success. Let's take a closer look at why reps are struggling and the top five ways they can reverse the trend.

Quota Plan Attainment 2014-2018





1 . Being a Sales Rep

Unlike the good old days, the real decision makers rarely, if ever, meet with sales reps. The solution? Don't be a sales rep.

This isn't new information for most, but it must be said. If you don't change your role, you'll end up like the video stores of the '90s — extinct.

The top salespeople are singularly focused on being an expert in solving their customer's problems. Success happens by knowing the best solution, not necessarily having the best solution. Top sellers are less focused on the stuff they sell and more passionate about helping the customer see what they are missing.

In short, they know more than the decision maker about how to solve a particular problem. This provides immediate value, and when you know more, you get a seat at the table where decisions are made about what to buy, where to buy it, and how much to spend.

Are you somebody the decision maker needs? Ask yourself:

- What information can you offer that the decision maker doesn't know or can't get from the web?
- When selling, who is the real priority?
- Are you selling your solution or serving your customer?
- Have you identified all the principles, best practices, and truths that are required to solve the customer's problem?
- What percentage of time do you study the role of the decision maker?
- How often do you meet with existing customers to determine what worked, what didn't work, and how your solution affected the bottom line?

This topic is, admittedly, a yawner, but, like ignoring the customer, it can have a catastrophic effect if not prioritized.



2. Leading with Your Solution, Not Their Whiteboard

What if I made a bet with you that I could craft a business email that would be read by every recipient who received it? Would you bet against me? Given that the re-sponse rates are below 5%, most would, but you shouldn't. It's actually very easy to determine if an email will get read.

Just begin by saying something about them.

If you show someone a photograph that they are in, they will look at it — every time.



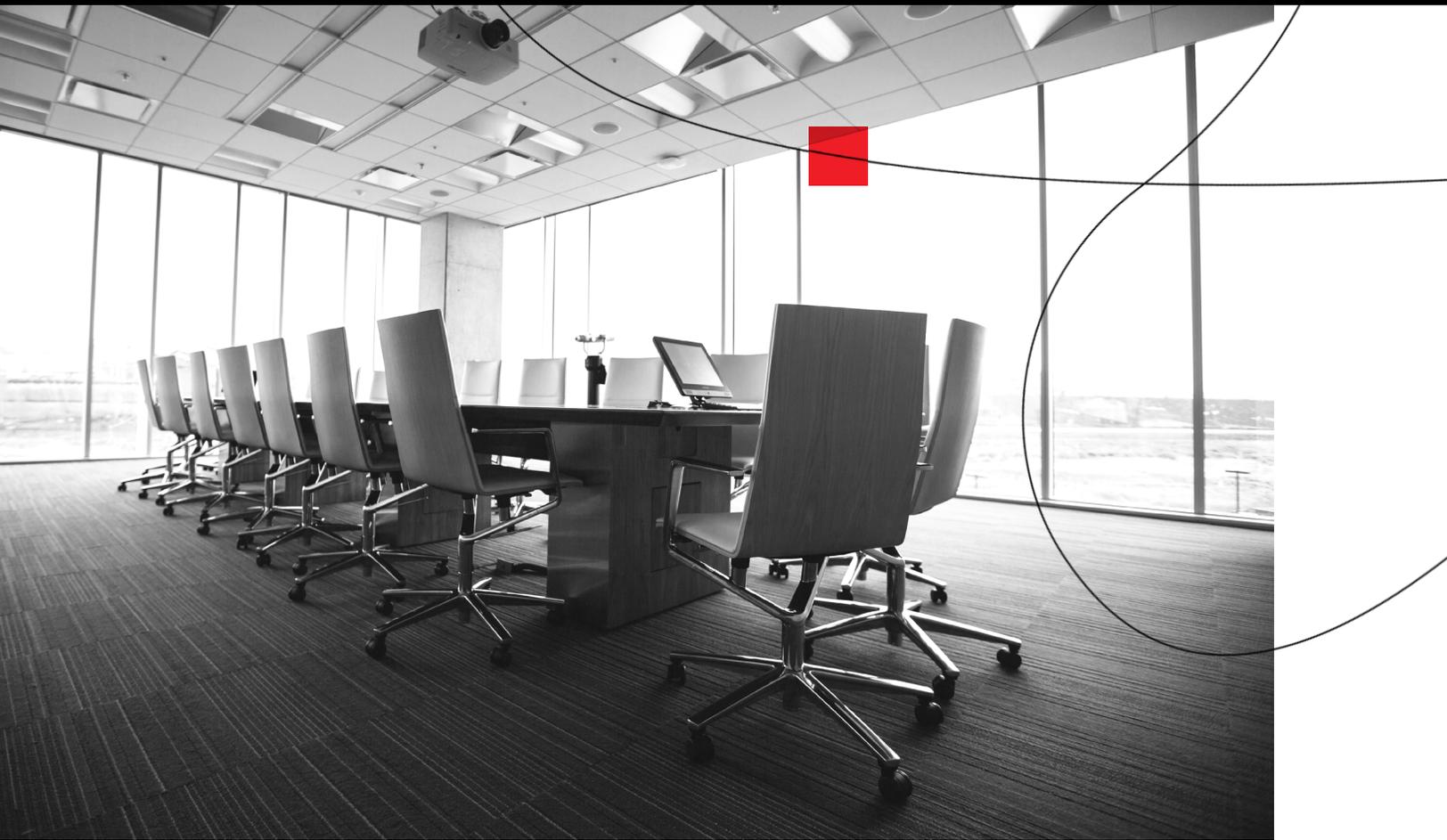
Here's the problem with how most reps are communicating. The amount of information we receive is staggering. We now are consuming the equivalent of 174 newspapers a day, over four times more than the information consumed in the late '80s. Marketing experts will tell you we receive anywhere from 3,000 to 10,000 messages a day. And not only has noise level skyrocketed, but there are more choices as well. Research suggests we are now making 35,000 decisions a day.

People are overwhelmed and paralyzed. They just can't take it anymore.

To break through the clutter, start with the client. Lead with *their* whiteboard, not *your* solution.

Understanding a little neuroscience offers hope. There's a part of the brain called the Reticular Activating System (RAS). **Its job, among other things, is to filter through all the data we receive and determine, subconsciously, what messages get noticed.** So, if we understand the RAS, we have the key to getting the attention of the conscious mind. Here's the mind-blowing secret:

Say something they know they need. Not something you want to sell, but a need that has a prominent place on their whiteboard. Whether stored in our brain or actually written on a board in the office, we all have a list of what needs to happen in order for us to get what we want. The truth is- it's not that complicated. Getting someone's attention is not about selling, rather alignment. Start with a need or problem on their whiteboard.



And this truth isn't only relevant to prospecting. It also holds true for capturing the attention of the listener when unpacking every point of a formal or informal presentation.

Always start with their point of view.

If you don't know, ask someone who does. If that's not possible, make your best guess based on their role. You may guess wrong, but at least you have a shot.

Think about your last ten emails, LinkedIn invites, cold calls, or presentations. Did you:

- Start with your solution or lead with a problem on their whiteboard?
- Begin the presentation or tee up every key point, by first describing the listener's point of view?
- Know the top three whiteboard issues of the people you typically serve?
- Educate yourself if the decision-makers you typically call were attending an industry conference, which topics were being discussed?



3. Focusing on the Seed, • Not the Soil

Last year while playing golf on vacation, I was paired with a big-time farmer from California. While having the typical “get to know you” conversation, I asked him: “In your business, with all the focus on genetically modified seeds, what’s more important: the soil or the seed?” He communicated with me a truth that’s important to all who seek to influence: “If the soil ain’t fertile, the seed don’t matter.”

If the customer isn’t emotionally receptive, your message, your value prop (i.e., your best-engineered seed) doesn’t matter. In fact, studies on the brain have shown, the more you try to persuade someone who is emotionally closed, the more unreceptive they become. The logical part of the brain shuts down and the emotional synopsis light up, shutting down even the most brilliant of logical arguments.

With the mountains of information we all wade through every day, and the growing perception that reps are no longer relevant, emotional receptivity is at an all-time low. So, what’s the answer? Walk away and look for receptive clients? Delay? Keep re-engineering your “seeds” until one finally sprouts?

No. Stop selling and focus on **receptivity**. Add a step to your sales process: First till the soil.

This is where everything we learned about selling sabotages our ability to convert the disinterested. You create receptivity not by selling but by focusing on the three P’s: Priority, Pressure, and Permission.

PRIORITY

If the customer believed your number one goal was to help them get what they want, they would listen to you. But they don’t. Because there’s a commission involved, your motive is suspect at best. Receptivity hinges on demonstrating that your customer’s objective is your number one priority. And if you think you can fake it, you can’t. Your motive is ultimately transparent.

We all smell commission breath.

Does this mean you serve everyone? No, the most successful sellers choose their customers. They focus on serving those they can help. If it's not a fit, they move on. But if you choose to engage a customer, receptivity starts with developing and revealing an **Other-Centered®** motive.

It's not sexy, but the top sellers get this. Making the customer the priority is why you know what to say, it's why the customer reveals what they really feel, it's why they listen to you, and why they stay with you.

PRESSURE

Secondly, there is inherent tension in every conversation. Whether real or imagined, the customer believes you have an agenda and pressure will be applied to get what you want. Like a tug of war, they feel the pull. Therefore, they either pull back, creating an unwinnable battle, or they bolt. Either way, when there is tension, the focus is not on the truth. The best sellers find a way to **Drop the Rope®** and relieve the pressure.

PERMISSION

Recently I was working out in a hotel next to the perfect male specimen. "Impressive," I thought. A few moments later, without an invitation or an introduction, he began telling me what was wrong with my workout. I went from impressed to thinking, "Who the hell do you think you are?" The man I admired a few moments ago instantly became the least influential person on the subject of fitness. Here's why:

The opportunity to influence is always preceded by an invitation.

If the customer isn't asking for advice, to meet, or for insights, influence is futile. Permission always precedes persuasion. If not, barging forward, regardless of your pedigree, success, or potential ROI, moves the customer farther way.

Yes, persistence is a key attribute of successful sellers, and it's best applied to getting the meeting, not what you do when you get in the door.

How effectively can you enhance receptivity? Ask yourself:

- Before every meeting, do you decide to put the customer's needs first?
- Are you willing to consider, talk about, and make recommendations that don't include your solution?
- When encountering someone who is emotionally closed, do you focus on your message or enhancing receptivity?
- Do you resist asking permission because the customer may say no?



4. Avoiding Uncomfortable Conversations

As mentioned earlier, the decision maker delegates the sifting of solution providers to the “evaluators,” then ultimately decides among the best two or three options. In spite of the options, they still typically select the company they had worked with in the past. What do you do? Hope that the people you are working with will be able to articulate the value of a solution? Hope the decision-maker hasn’t already made up their mind or will one day meet with you?

Here’s the truth, no one can sell your solution as well as you can. So be willing to ask the tough

questions about who will make the decision and who will be in the meeting. The most successful reps know that their most valuable resource is time. And they can’t afford to waste it on working opportunities where the decision maker is unwilling to meet.

I’m not saying you should ignore the evaluators and key influencers. But you should be willing to speak honestly about what must occur to help them evaluate the best way to solve their business problem.

Be willing to walk away. Be willing to say “no.”

“No, I won’t present my solution if the right people aren’t in the room.”

“No, I won’t submit a proposal without learning more or without the potential of presenting live.”

“No, I can’t articulate how I can help your company solve a complex problem in an hour.”

“No, you can’t solve that problem by only investing ___.”

Obviously, this needs to be positioned in a way that communicates why your resistance to comply is based on what’s best for the customer and not just a manipulation tactic.

You don’t have the luxury of time. If the decision making team isn’t willing to invest the time or follow the right process, be willing to create a fork in the road. If you are the expert at solving a problem, you should dictate the process for determining what is needed and how your solution is evaluated.





5. Being Afraid of the King

There's a scene in the movie *The King's Speech* where a lower class speech therapist is meeting the stuttering King of England. The king doesn't have a clue how to solve his problem, but he immediately attempts to exercise his authority, take control of the meeting, and dictate how therapy should occur. I love the therapist's response: "My game, my rules."

His message was simple, "If you want to get better, I'm in charge." The therapist wasn't intimidated by the king. Why? Because he is the only one in the room who knew the best solution to the problem. He wasn't afraid of the king.

Because the decision-makers are empowered with so much information, too many reps are allowing the customer to drive the process, ending up being a glorified relationship manager or human kiosk. They are primarily answering pricing, product, and delivery questions.

When successful reps finally do get a meeting with the one who has final authority, they have no problem establishing themselves as the "therapist" who should lead.

Think about your last few meetings with an executive. Did you:

- Dictate the decision-making process?
- Notice if they were taking notes when you talked?
- Change their beliefs about the best way to solve the problem?
- Feel comfortable leading the meeting or were you a little afraid of the "king"?

If your fear is related to lack of knowledge, talk to your customers, find a mentor, become a student. The customer needs a "therapist." They don't need another sales rep.



Be the change.

Help your sales reps elevate their skills to exceed quota. For more information on how ASLAN can help you do just that or view our full range of solutions [contact us](#):

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