

Foreword

by STEPHEN R. COVEY

When it comes to sales and growing revenues, companies find themselves under enormous pressure to sell better and faster—and to reach greater levels of performance. On top of that, global competition is fierce and buyers are increasingly savvy, putting pressure on sellers to sell more for less. Faced with this environment, many companies, even the most successful ones, are finding that they can't keep selling as usual—that something has to change for them to preserve their margins, cut down their sales cycles and costs, and grow long-term business partnerships.

I believe the time is well overdue for companies and everyone involved in the sales process—whether it's the CEO, sales manager, or salesperson—to break through dysfunctional selling and buying habits and adopt an entirely new paradigm and framework that will take sales to a higher level.

In *Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play*, you will find a new paradigm for sales greatness along with the habits that will lead you to highly effective selling in a competitive global environment. I believe this book's framework, principles, and how-to instructions provide the necessary process, methodology, tools, and skills for creating and sustaining superior sales performance. There is no other sales book like it, and I have great confidence in its enduring principles for long-term sales success.

I have profound admiration for Mahan Khalsa and how he has, with humility and courage over the years, challenged the old conventions of

buying and selling. In their place, he has created a principle-centered, breakthrough way of helping sellers and buyers bridge their fears and mistrust of one another and break down the many dysfunctional practices that have arisen from this lack of trust. In developing the “Helping Clients Succeed” mind-set, tool set, and skill set central to *Let’s Get Real or Let’s Not Play*, Mahan has given the business world a powerful, commonsense (yet not common practice) way for sellers and buyers to communicate, think, and act with authenticity, trust, and integrity to reach win-win results.

Mahan’s approach says the role of salespeople is to passionately focus on clients to help them succeed. Simply put, the more that salespeople concentrate on their clients’ numbers, the more their own numbers go up. Furthermore, if this process takes place in an authentic and competent way, then salespeople are transformed into trusted business advisors in the client’s eyes. This, in turn, builds a synergistic partnership for future business, taking sales to a higher level—in both high-integrity, trustworthy, win-win relationships, and increased business opportunities and revenue.

Now, in this book, Mahan and his colleague Randy Illig provide a complete sales process and framework to dramatically raise sales performance and productivity along the entire sales cycle. From filling the pipeline with the right new opportunities, to qualifying and advancing opportunities, and to closing business, sales organizations will find success by following the process in this book. And best of all, they can increase sales today in a way that creates even more sales in the future.

I believe that in *Let’s Get Real or Let’s Not Play*, sales leaders, teams, or individual salespersons will find the answers to the daily challenges they face. It will help a leader by giving him or her—and thus the organization—the necessary paradigm, processes, and skills to focus not on quick fixes but on principles of enduring sales success. It is critical for the leadership ranks to rethink the way they approach sales and how they manage their teams. Mahan and Randy give sales leaders what they need to build and sustain a sales culture of greatness—one that unleashes the potential of salespeople toward proactively helping clients succeed and, thereby, toward finding their own success and fulfillment, not just in the short term but consistently, year after year.

On the team or individual level, salespeople will find a new way of thinking about their role and how they can dramatically improve their performance. At first glance, many of the principles in this book seem counterintuitive, but they challenge salespeople to look at things differently and grow in their abilities to help clients succeed. Take, for example, “Move off the Solution.” Can you imagine a salesperson not chomping at the bit to start talking about his or her solution and how great it is? Yet to have clients feel understood and valued, salespeople have to follow the principle of seeking first to understand, then to be understood. This requires salespeople to talk less and listen more. They can do this by first moving off the solution, asking effective questions, and *listening*.

In *Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play*, salespeople will learn how to create an honest and open environment that allows clients to feel safe enough to share what they think, believe, and value. The trust that is created through this process enables clients to actually partner with salespeople to co-develop a business case and a solution that exactly meets the client's needs in a mutually beneficial way. This is true win-win!

I have no doubt that any salesperson will feel more energized and empowered as they follow the framework provided by Mahan and Randy. Few things are more discouraging to salespeople than not making their numbers. And the more they miss their numbers, the more likely the numbers are raised and the pressure to perform increases. With the mind-set, skill set, and tool set presented in this book, salespeople will find new freedom and enjoyment in their work because they will have a proven way of engaging clients in honest, structured business conversations that help clients feel understood and valued and lead to solutions that produce measurable results.

The role of trusted business advisor is more than anything a key differentiator in our increasingly competitive, global marketplace. Those who can truly understand clients and their business issues, and deliver tangible benefits, are the ones who win more business—better and faster.

Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play is a powerful, breakthrough book. Mahan Khalsa and Randy Illig masterfully put the art and science of influence and sales on new and higher ground. Any organization looking to re-engage and renew its sales force with pragmatic, disciplined, commonsense

process and execution will find proven answers in this book. Mahan and Randy prove that you can indeed create win-win by focusing entirely on helping clients succeed—and create a culture of excellence in any sales organization.

This is a must-read and must-practice for anyone in sales and business development. But it is much more than that. I find Mahan's and Randy's principles for effective human interaction, trust building, critical thinking, and execution invaluable for the entire business world.

Preface

There is a story about how this book came to be in your hands. Some of you won't care about the story. You'll prefer to skip the preface and jump right into the book. After all, if the book doesn't interest you, who cares about the story? And you can always come back to the story later, should you so choose. If that is your preference, please proceed to the introduction, safe in knowing your enjoyment and use of the book won't be compromised by not reading the story behind it.

Other readers like to get a sense of the authors and their background. It gives them a context for what they are about to read. If you are of that demeanor, read on.

MY NAME IS Mahan Khalsa. My collaborator, Randy Illig, and I decided that a story is told better by one person than by two. So while the body of this book is a joint effort and written from our common voice, I am the storyteller in this preface. That seems appropriate since this particular journey begins with me and is joined by Randy along the way. To provide some balance, Randy finishes the story in the Last Words section at the end of the book.

I love selling. It encourages me to constantly grow in every facet of my being. I look forward with excitement and eager anticipation to working with clients. But I assure you, this was not always the case. Far from it.

My first encounters with selling were painful. I was working my way through college and needed a job. I took a position as a door-to-door salesman. The person who trained me made it look easy. He had a great territory, and when he knocked on the door, people would say, “John—good to see you. What do you have for me today?” I thought to myself, “I can do this!” Of course, I was assigned to the worst part of town. I would knock on the door and people would pull down their shades or scream curses at me. The routine was: knock on the door, get rejected, repeat for 50 to 100 times to get a sale. And when I finally did make a sale, I would have to deliver it a week later only to find no one home, or that they didn’t have any money, or they didn’t live there anymore, or they didn’t want what they ordered. . . . it was brutal. It hurt a lot.

So I took another sales position. It was also door-to-door; however, it was in a city with lots of tall apartment buildings. I figured I could get my rejections more efficiently if all the doors I had to knock on were close together. All the buildings had skulls and crossbones on them that communicated death (and worse) to solicitors. The person who trained me consoled me with the two most repeated words of salespeople: “No problem!” He’d ring an apartment on the top floor of a building. The person would answer and he’d say, “Western Union!” They’d ring the buzzer and we’d trudge up to the top floor. The person would open the door and my supervisor would begin his pitch. After a couple of minutes the person would look confused and say, “I thought you were Western Union.” My fearless leader would respond, “Western Union? Oh, my goodness. I’m sorry. No, I said my name is Lester Newman!” The person would slam the door in our faces, and we would proceed to work our way through the building.

One of the happiest days of my life was when I got a job in a factory. What bliss! I promised myself that I’d never be involved in sales again. What I had experienced was abusive to both buyer and seller. Both were sullied.

I actually made it through college, burned all my books, and promised I’d never do *that* again either. After some more adventures, and attempts at trying to find something I *did* want to do, I found myself the director of a residential yoga and meditation community. We arose at 3:30 A.M. each

day, took a cold shower, and did two-and-a-half hours of yoga and meditation. I would have been happy doing yoga and meditating all day long. However, part of the lifestyle was to take what you gained from your morning discipline and apply it in the everyday world. Toward that end, many living in the residential community started their own businesses so they could live the values in their daily activities.

I was involved in several small, entrepreneurial ventures. Despite my aversion to going back to school, I decided it would be in my growing enterprises' best interest if I got an MBA; I was fortunate enough to get accepted at Harvard Business School, which was nearby. I could go to school and stay plugged into the businesses.

Following my MBA, I founded a computer systems company. After burning through our venture capital, we came to the moment when the new company actually had to sell something. For me, that was a crisis and a conundrum. On one hand, as an overly responsible type and founder of the company, I felt that if there wasn't enough revenue, it was up to me to bring it in. On the other hand, my experience in sales had led me to believe that you could be either a salesperson or a spiritual person but not both.

Dynamic tension is sometimes the cauldron of creativity. I aggressively sought out any source that would aid my quest for a highly effective yet mutually respectful means of what I used to call selling. The combination was tricky. There were times I felt very honorable—and failed miserably. There were times I was successful in getting immediate revenue—and compromised my values and probably my long-term relationship with the customer. There were times I thought I had it all together—and still fell flat on my face. Yet eventually, everything started to come together. Not only was I successful at that which I'd once feared and hated, it also became what I most enjoyed.

When we eventually sold the computer company, I had the freedom to choose what I wanted to do next. I had been so profoundly and positively impacted by my evolution in sales, I thought others might benefit from what I had learned. I had the good fortune to connect with Bob Elmore, who was the head of Business Systems Consulting at Arthur Andersen (may they rest in peace). After researching global best practices in selling business consulting and technology services and products, I designed and

taught a course for Arthur Andersen partners. It was successful and over time became the firm's worldwide model for face-to-face selling.

The success at Andersen led to engagements with other top-notch firms—and to another dilemma. I was looking to have fun, not to build another big business. My wife and I had moved on from the spiritual community and were living on a beautiful, peaceful, eighty-acre property in the mountains above Boulder, Colorado. Neither one of us was eager for me to spend most of my time travelling. Additionally, my goal was to never have more than one employee, and that quickly became impossible. Luckily, one of my clients was FranklinCovey. They valued what I brought to the table enough to purchase my company in 1999. It has been an excellent relationship. They let me do what I'm good at and enjoy while providing global scale, great people, and good management. Our division is called the FranklinCovey Sales Performance Group.

As part of the purchase, I agreed to write a book. The book was to be written in my “spare time” as we were building a new business. I asked how long it took to publish a book and was told the process was about eighteen months from start to finish. That was a problem. Microsoft wanted five thousand copies of this unwritten book for their Worldwide Partner Conference, which was in four months. Knowing what to write was not a problem; I had been living, practicing, and teaching the material for many years. The problem was the time line. We solved that problem by self-publishing the book, called *Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play: The Demise of Dysfunctional Selling and the Advent of Helping Clients Succeed*.

I am proud of that book. Distributed only through FranklinCovey and Amazon.com, it has sold over 100,000 copies. Yet when Penguin approached us with the opportunity to rewrite and significantly expand the book, I was excited. Since the first book was written, my Sales Performance Group colleagues and I have worked with tens of thousands of salespeople and consultants from some of the world's most successful companies. The Helping Clients Succeed coursework has been taught in over forty countries in nine different languages. We have coached and consulted on initiatives involving many billions of dollars of sales. The new book thus benefits from almost a decade of rigorous application, continuous improvement, and entirely new material.

Application, improvement, new material. What a great segue to introducing Randy Illig, since he has been instrumental in all three. When I first met Randy, he was the founder and CEO of a highly successful information technology consulting firm, which was to be awarded Microsoft's Business Solution of the Year. He and his company were looking for sales training and I was the one they interviewed from the Sales Performance Group. After getting a thumbs-up from a couple of his key executives, I met with Randy. We hit it off, he hired us, and I did the training.

Randy, unlike many CEOs, attended the training and immediately put it to practice with clients. He is the type of leader who leads by example, and he sets a great example. After a while, he called me and said, "Okay. This is good stuff. It works. How do we implement it throughout our company? How do we get really good at it? How do we keep improving?" My answer was, "Do more training. We'll reinforce the basics and keep adding more advanced skills." There was a period of silence, followed by his long, drawn-out "Okaaaay." I could hear in his voice the unspoken, "That's it?" We both knew more training would be helpful and yet it was not the complete answer to his questions.

Randy took it upon himself to implement the changes he felt were necessary. His company continued its success and was subsequently sold, freeing Randy to ponder what would be an interesting and challenging use of his time. Fortunately, he contacted me to see if we might be interested in what he could contribute to the Sales Performance Group. Not surprisingly, we were. Randy came on board and immediately led two important efforts. The first was to develop a coaching and consulting practice to allow us to work directly with clients in the field. The second was a sales leadership program to enable clients to leverage and sustain their investment in sales training by turning sales managers into sales leaders. His efforts have paid big dividends for our clients and for FranklinCovey.

Randy has a passionate focus on helping clients succeed. Early in his tenure he felt we needed to improve our ability to help clients with demand generation. While it may be hard to remember, the mid- to late 1990s was largely a time of demand fulfillment. You rowed your boat out into the sea of opportunity and the fish jumped into the boat. Your job was to figure out which fish to keep and to make sure they stayed in the boat.

The fish that were too small were gently released in case they became bigger fish later on. The best fishermen would get the best fish, but there seemed to be plenty of fish for everyone.

Then came the new century and everything changed. Not only were the fish not jumping into the boat, they were hiding and swimming away. Many had been hooked before and were determined to not let it happen again. Bait that had worked before was aggressively rejected. Average fishermen came home empty. Even the best fishermen had to adapt their tactics and improve their skills. They couldn't always wait for the fish to come to them; they had to go find the fish. In our current and more typical sales environment, generating demand is clearly as critical as fulfilling it. Randy led a team effort to build and deploy a demand generation capability that is differentiated by both its approach and the superior results it produces.

The story is unfinished. Though Randy and I are the authors of this book, we are really the spokespeople for numerous colleagues and clients with whom we work. Collectively we keep pushing ourselves to grow, to improve, and to excel. We are utilizing new learning technologies to help salespeople accelerate and magnify their ability to help clients succeed. We are refining and adding to our offerings. We are implementing new business models that give individuals and organizations a variety of means by which to improve their sales performance.

We invite you to join the adventure and add to the ongoing story. This book is our contribution to what we hope will be a continuing dialogue. May it serve you well.