



The Giants of Sales

What Dale Carnegie, John Patterson, Elmer Wheeler, and Joe Girard Can Teach You About Real Sales Success

by Tom Sant
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Take-Aways

- The concept of selling as a teachable, actionable skill had to be invented.
- The pioneers of innovative selling were John Henry Patterson, Dale Carnegie, Elmer Wheeler and Joe Girard.
- The four basic sales systems in use today, which were pioneered by these men, are "process-oriented, relationship-driven, linguistic and tactical."
- When Patterson first took over National Cash Register (NCR) in 1884, selling meant showing the product to a prospect and taking (or not taking) the order.
- Patterson was the first to use a process-oriented system to make sales.
- Dale Carnegie wrote the lasting bestseller *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.
- Carnegie advocated developing trusting relationships as a base for doing business.
- His relationship model of selling had a huge influence on sales practices.
- Elmer Wheeler was one of the first to study how language influences behavior.
- Joe Girard was the king of lead generation and development, and pioneered "relationship marketing" and "closed-loop marketing."

Rating (10 is best)

| Overall | Applicability | Innovation | Style |
|----------|---------------|------------|----------|
| 9 | 8 | 8 | 9 |

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) How the pioneers of sales developed revolutionary approaches to selling; 2) What lessons their life stories teach; and 3) How to apply the four basic sales methods: “process-oriented, relationship-based, linguistic and tactical.”

Recommendation

Books about selling are seldom considered page turners, but this work by persuasion expert Tom Sant is a rare exception. Sant tells the captivating stories of four sales giants: John Henry Patterson, Dale Carnegie, Elmer Wheeler and Joe Girard, and describes their profound impact on the way products and services are bought and sold. Their sea changes in the once-quiet waters of the sales profession still make waves. Each sales pioneer spawned a new approach to selling. Sant explores their methods, discusses why they worked so well, and gives you step-by-step advice about applying these strategies to your sales practice. If you want to learn from the masters, instead of the self-appointed sales guru of the month, *getAbstract* feels there is no better place to start. Those who are interested in history – as well as in sales techniques – will find this a fascinating read.

Abstract

Sales as a Profession

Just like the electric light bulb and the telephone, the concept of selling as a skill had to be invented. In the nineteenth century, selling happened more by coincidence than through a thought-out method of qualifying customers, developing proposals and closing deals. In the first half of the twentieth century, several revolutionary ideas transformed the art of selling and laid the groundwork for the modern sales profession. The pioneers of these innovations were John Henry Patterson, Dale Carnegie, Elmer Wheeler and Joe Girard.

Today, hundreds of self-proclaimed experts offer various approaches to making sales. Some of these methods are relationship-based; others emphasize communication and attitudes. Still others concentrate on tactics and strategy. Which methods work best? What would work for you? The answer is that the impact and effectiveness of these approaches varies depending on the nature of your product or service. Your challenge is finding the best method for your situation. Studying the early sales innovators may point the way.

The Four Basic Sales Groups

The four core sales systems are:

1. **“Process-oriented”** – This method is today’s most widely used system. It divides the sales process into clearly identifiable steps for salespeople to follow. These sales methods are popular because they are easy to explain and measure. They work well for selling complex products or working with teams. Many large corporations, particularly in the high-tech sector, have been hugely successful using this approach.
2. **“Relationship-driven”** – This method emphasizes forging a bond with your clients, because “people prefer to buy from people they trust.” This approach relies heavily on the role of the salesperson rather than on the product and it results in more repeat business. This tactic works for selling commodities or intangibles, such as consulting services.

“During...the twentieth century, Americans learned to sell more efficiently and effectively than any other nation... Soon these ideas...spread around the world.”

“Professional selling is...a recent innovation. A little over a century ago, nobody knew how to approach the task of selling goods and services.”

“Nothing has replaced the role of a talented, motivated, properly trained salesperson. And nothing will.”

“A good sales rep...needs to bridge the gap between the company and the customer, linking the product... and its functions to the client’s particular business environment and needs.”

“If we deliver informative, factual content, thinking that facts will persuade our customer to buy, we have profoundly misunderstood the way communication works.”

“Salespeople have a very pragmatic approach to their profession: If something gets them closer to closing the deal, they’ll do it. Otherwise, they blow it off.”

3. “Linguistic” – Advocates of this approach believe that certain words or phrases influence a person’s buying decisions. Research supports the belief that understanding linguistics can help salespeople communicate their messages more effectively.
4. “Tactical” – This method concentrates on sales technique. Salespeople learn specific, performance-boosting skills. To teach with this method, target and strengthen an area in which a salesperson may be weak, such as generating leads or getting referrals.

John Henry Patterson: Inventing Sales Training

Although John Henry Patterson’s business in Dayton, Ohio, was a success, he was bored and began casting about for a new venture. He decided to purchase a company that was manufacturing and selling a revolutionary new product: the cash register. At that time, selling consisted of showing your products to potential customers, and either getting orders or not. Patterson saw that a couple of his sales agents clearly outsold the others. He wanted to find out why, so he organized the first sales convention in 1886. It was extremely innovative to hold a sales meeting and to train agents in sales techniques. At the gathering, Patterson asked his top producers to share their secrets with the other agents.

Patterson’s brother-in-law, Joseph Crane, soon joined the National Cash Register Company (NCR) as a traveling sales agent. In the beginning, he kept notes of the information he wanted to include in his pitch. He realized that he needed to uncover each prospect’s biggest worry or problem, and then address that concern in his presentation. Soon, he was outselling the other agents. When Patterson asked Crane how he achieved such record sales, Crane reluctantly admitted that he used the same presentation with little variation for each client.

Patterson recorded Crane’s pitch word for word. He perceived an opportunity to systemize sales, so he created a “Primer” of the NCR method, and required all his sales agents to learn it and use it. The manual instructed salespeople to learn as much as possible about a prospect and his or her business before having a meeting. Uniquely, this marked the first time known that a seller developed a company’s sales argument from the customer’s perspective. Never before had a leader analyzed selling to identify a process that could be taught, duplicated and measured. Because this approach was “consultive” and focused on the customer’s needs, it worked. Crane’s process consisted of these four steps:

1. “Identify the customer’s problems.”
2. “Develop a specific value proposition.”
3. “Show how the solution fits.”
4. “Ask for the order.”

Many of the era’s most powerful industrialists got their start working for Patterson. When they left NCR, they duplicated his sales philosophy at their new jobs. They joined an array of businesses, including Packard Motor Car Company, Benton and Bowles Advertising, General Motors and the Computing-Tabulating-Recording Company, which became IBM. Many companies operating today derived their original selling techniques from Patterson’s method.

Dale Carnegie

Dale Carnegie was born on a hog farm in rural Missouri in 1888. His parents and family moved in 1904 so that he could attend the local state teachers college, where he excelled at public speaking and debate. After graduating, he tried a short stint in sales, working for Armour and Company in Omaha, Nebraska. From there, he attended the American

“Patterson’s ideas about how to sell a complex product to a large, national market were the foundation for selling high technology in our time.”

Carnegie believed, “you can...wield more influence if you can force yourself to pack your ego away and focus on making the other person feel important.”

“Elmer Wheeler said, there are no magic words. There is only word magic – the skillful and insightful use of words to communicate a message clearly and persuasively.”

“You sell more cars by keeping your mouth shut and by being respectful, Girard says, than by giving a stranger who just walked into the showroom the old hard sell.”

Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City. When acting didn’t pan out, and his day job selling Packard automobiles left him uninspired, Carnegie decided to write a novel.

To support his writing, he took a job teaching public speaking at the YMCA and agreed to work on a profit-sharing basis. Three years later, his class was a tremendous success and he was making more than \$30 a night in commissions. Carnegie promoted action. He asked his students to speak in front of the class to overcome their fear of public speaking. He developed three principles for teaching someone how to speak in public. First, he provided a safe environment where people could speak without fear of ridicule. Second, he encouraged his students to stick to subjects they knew. Third, he eliminated criticism and used positive reinforcement to build his students’ confidence.

Carnegie believed that you could change your attitude by changing your behavior. He advocated acting “as if.” He encouraged his students to inject enthusiasm into their personal manner and their speeches. He also promoted focusing on others to make them feel important. Carnegie’s original “six ways to make people like you” were:

1. “Become genuinely interested in other people.”
2. “Smile.”
3. “Remember that a man’s name is to him the sweetest and most important sound in any language.”
4. “Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.”
5. “Talk in terms of the other man’s interest.”
6. “Make the other person feel important – and do it sincerely.”

Carnegie’s book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, was published in 1936 and has been a bestseller since. At the heart of his philosophy is the idea that to influence people, you must first gain their trust. In other words, develop relationships. His relationship model of selling had a huge influence on sales practices. Use it to sell true commodities or services, where solid, personal relationships will win clients’ trust and, ultimately, their business.

Elmer Wheeler

If you have heard the phrase, “Don’t sell the steak, sell the sizzle!” then you know the work of the original word master, Elmer Wheeler. He discovered the magic power of words while working at his dad’s gas station outside Rochester, N.Y. He realized that if he asked, “Shall I fill it up?” instead of “How much gas today?” he was told to fill significantly more tanks.

The next step in Wheeler’s career was selling newspaper ads. In 1937, he published the book, *Tested Sentences That Sell*, a record-setting bestseller. He became one of the country’s most sought-after speakers and wrote 20 more books including *Sizzle Book*, *Word Magic* and *How to Sell Yourself to Others*. His Wheeler World Laboratories conducted extensive market research, testing thousands of word combinations on would-be consumers. His original sales pointers included:

1. “Don’t sell the steak, sell the sizzle” – “Sizzle” is the product’s primary appeal. It offers the most attractive answer to the buyer’s question, “What’s in it for me?”
2. “Don’t write – telegraph” – Get the customer’s attention with as few words as possible, like a telegram. Begin your message in a way that ignites interest.
3. “Say it with flowers” – Prove your point. Don’t just tell your spouse, “I love you.” Say the words and then emphasize them by presenting a beautiful bouquet.

“Consistently doing a good job – building strong relationships, treating people fairly, and giving them what they want – will make selling a lot easier in the long run.”

“The pressure...to achieve results quickly, to meet management expectations, is as great as ever, with the added complication that rapid communications and comprehensive sales-tracking systems give the salesperson almost no room to maneuver.”

4. “Don’t ask if – ask which!” – Wheeler loved to give customers a choice rather than ask them a question. He used this method, which succeeded repeatedly, to increase one restaurant’s profits on malted milks by asking customers, “One or two eggs?” He sold wine by asking, “Would you like red or white wine with your meal tonight?”
5. “Watch your bark!” – Find a way beyond words to deliver your message effectively. Communicate through your voice, delivery, body language and facial expressions.

Joe Girard: “The Greatest Car Salesman in the World”

Joe Girard was born into terrible poverty in gritty, urban Detroit. As a young man, he got in trouble, developed a stutter, and bounced from job to job until he started working for a small-time builder. He eventually took over the business, but went belly-up when a developer deceived him. Desperate, Girard got a job at a car dealership by promising not to take walk-ins. He had to become an expert at bringing in prospects who would ask for him by name.

In his 14-year career, Joe Girard sold more than 13,000 cars. The *Guinness Book of World Records* listed him as the “world’s greatest salesman.” He was the only salesman inducted into the Automobile Hall of Fame. He succeeded by being likable, talking and dressing like his customers, listening attentively to prospects, utilizing every moment of his day, putting prospects behind the wheel (sampling) and nurturing every lead.

He touched his customers monthly by sending greeting cards and remembering birthdays. He gave out more business cards in a week than most salespeople distributed in a year. He was the king of lead generation and development, and pioneered “relationship-marketing” and “closed-loop marketing,” both based on on-going customer contact.

Girard invented the “Law of 250.” He noticed that about 250 people attend most funerals or weddings. This told him that, generally, people have about 250 people in their circle of family and friends who are important enough to invite to a life-cycle event. He concluded, “Each person I do business with represents 250 other people. If I do a great job, 250 more people are likely to get a recommendation to buy from me. If I do a lousy job, I have just made 250 enemies.” Joe tried to do a great job every time. And it paid off.

What Will Work For You?

When you are deciding which sales method is best for you, consider these factors:

- Your approach must be in synch with how your customers prefer to conduct business.
- A good sales method responds to the market and meets customers' specific needs.
- Your method should create a win/win scenario for you and your customer.
- The goal of any sales process is to shorten the sales cycle and increase efficiency.
- You must be able to train your sales representatives in your system.
- Your sales method must be measurable.

About The Author

Tom Sant, who founded and ran his own corporation, is the creator of a popular sales software program and the author of *Persuasive Business Proposals*. His clients include major technology, accounting and software companies.