



EBOOK

**SALES TRAINING:  
26 TOPICS TO BOOST SALES  
TEAM PERFORMANCE**

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## How Effective Is Your Sales Training?

If you're responsible for designing or implementing sales training for your organization, you know the effectiveness of training varies greatly.

It might not be implemented properly, land well with participants, be relevant to sellers' daily work, or it might be forgotten completely in the days and weeks following the training. **Sales training fails more often than it succeeds.**

But for those who get it right, the payoffs are substantial.

One of the critical parts of delivering effective sales training is identifying the appropriate topics to cover. You may think your sellers are already skilled in these areas, but we've found massive gaps in seller effectiveness in the areas that most influence buyers' purchase decisions.<sup>1</sup>

In this ebook, we highlight 26 sales training topics that may be suitable for your team depending on existing and desired capabilities.

For each topic, ask yourself:

- Is this a capability I want my sellers to have?
- How do my sellers demonstrate proficiency in this area?
- Would my sellers' prospects and customers agree they excel in this area?
- Is this a priority area for our next sales training initiative?

<sup>1</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Virtual Selling Skills and Challenges*.



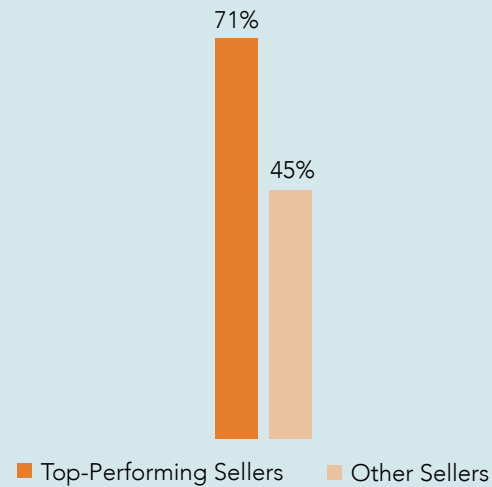
# The Effectiveness of Sales Training

Most sellers (84%) have participated in sales training workshops or programs, according to a global research study by RAIN Group's Center for Sales Research.<sup>2</sup> But there's a marked difference between the training most sellers get compared to top performers.

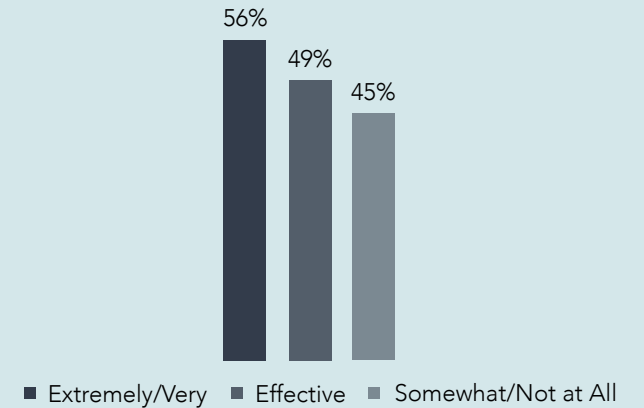
Seventy-one percent of Top-Performing Sellers rate the sales training they've received as extremely or very effective, compared to only 45% for Other Sellers.

Meanwhile, the same research also found the average win rate on proposed sales is 11 percentage points higher for those who receive extremely or very effective training compared to those whose training is less than effective.

**SALES TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS**  
EXTREMELY/VERY EFFECTIVE



**AVERAGE WIN RATE BY SALES TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS**



<sup>2</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Seller*.

# 1. Building Rapport

Relationships are the key to selling and a core capability for all sellers. After all, people want to buy from those they know, like, and trust. Sellers can earn that status by building and maintaining relationships with prospects and buyers, and not focusing exclusively on closing deals.

Sellers can learn how to enhance your rapport-building skills by applying the 4 Principles of Rapport:

- **Empathy:** The ability to understand and share another's feelings.
- **Authenticity:** Be genuine.
- **Similarity:** People like people like them.
- **Shared Experience:** Interact with people in the business process.

Just as important as knowing the actions and behaviors that help build rapport is knowing which will detract from their efforts—for example, interrupting someone who's speaking, avoiding eye contact, being dismissive of a buyer's questions, and so on.

Sales training that offers practical rapport-building tips, examples of what not to do, and practice for becoming more likable and connecting with people will help sellers develop this core capability.

## 4 PRINCIPLES OF RAPPORT



Empathy

Be curious. Listen. Care.



Authenticity

Be real.



Similarity

Find common ground.



Shared Experience

Interact.

Read More:

[How Do You Build Rapport with Customers?](#)

## 2. Leading a Thorough Needs Discovery

Needs discovery is core to any consultative seller's success, yet only 26% of buyers say sellers lead a thorough needs discovery.<sup>3</sup>

Sellers uncover buyers' needs so they can determine how they can help. The most successful sellers lead needs discoveries that are both broad and deep—it's an area where Top Performers are 58% more likely to excel.<sup>4</sup>

As sellers uncover buyer challenges, it's important not to jump into sharing a solution too soon. Often, a challenge is a symptom of an underlying problem. It's up to the seller to find out what the real problem is—the root cause.

Using [the five whys process](#) of asking questions can help your sellers uncover the root cause of a problem. For example, they might start with one of these:

- Why did this happen?
- Why will this solve the problem?
- Why didn't we reach our goal?
- Why hasn't X worked?

It may take several "why" questions, with each subsequent question building off the preceding one, to probe deeper and get to the underlying issue.

Sales training on the topic of conducting an effective needs discovery will help sellers craft solutions that are relevant, effective, and deliver true value to the buyer.

<sup>3</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Sales Organization*

<sup>4</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Seller*.

Read More:

[Using the Power of Why in Needs Discovery](#)

### 3. Communicating with Different Buyer Personas

Regardless of the business or emotional reasons for why people buy (uncovered during needs discovery), buyers will have personal preferences for how they *like* to buy. These personal styles occur around how buyers prefer to deal with problems, people, and protocol—these are the six buyer personas.

The best sellers tailor their selling based on these preferences. This means they're able to:

- Identify which personas their buyers resemble, and
- Plan their actions to match their buyers' personal buying styles and criteria.

The six buyer personas and styles are:

1. **Decisive Danielle:** Commanding
2. **Consensus Claire:** Collaborative
3. **Relationship Renee:** Outgoing
4. **Skeptical Steve:** Objective
5. **Analytical Al:** Exacting
6. **Innovator Irene:** Easygoing

Sales training can help sellers learn to identify their buyers' preferences, connect with each one, communicate more effectively, and close more deals.

**Read More:**

[The 6 Buyer Personas \(and How to Sell to Them\)](#)



## 4. Overcoming Objections

Objections can be hard to hear. The key is knowing how to listen to them and respond appropriately.

Essentially, there are four types of buyer objections:

- **Need:** The buyer doesn't yet perceive, or doesn't yet admit, the need to solve a problem.
- **Urgency:** The buyer doesn't yet see why the issue is pressing.
- **Trust:** The buyer feels uncertainty about the seller, their solution, their company, or their outcomes.
- **Money:** The buyer communicates that money is going to be an issue.

We recommend sellers use a four-step process for responding to objections:

1. Listen fully to the objection
2. Understand the objection completely
3. Respond properly
4. Confirm you've satisfied the objection

This process works for any objection, but specific responses will vary depending on the objection.

The seller's response is critical. Some sellers tend to give in right away if a buyer raises any objection. But consultative sales training can help sellers practice responding appropriately to the four types of objections, so they're better prepared to overcome objections and move sales forward to successful conclusions.

Read More:

[4 Steps to Overcoming Sales Objections](#)



## 5. Building Trust with Buyers

Buyers are often willing to accept the advice of sellers, but only to the extent that they trust those sellers. This is why it's so important for sellers to build trust in their relationships with buyers.

There are four elements of trust in selling:

### 1. Capability:

Buyers tend to be skeptical that sellers are actually capable of doing what they say they can do. This goes beyond just trusting in the product or service. Buyers need to trust in sellers and their capabilities if they're going to accept ideas, advice, and solutions.

### 2. Dependability:

Buyers need to know they can rely on sellers. This means sellers must build trust by consistently showing up and honoring their commitments.

### 3. Integrity:

Buyers have likely been disappointed by other sellers in the past. It's up to your sellers to demonstrate their integrity. Buyers won't just assume it.

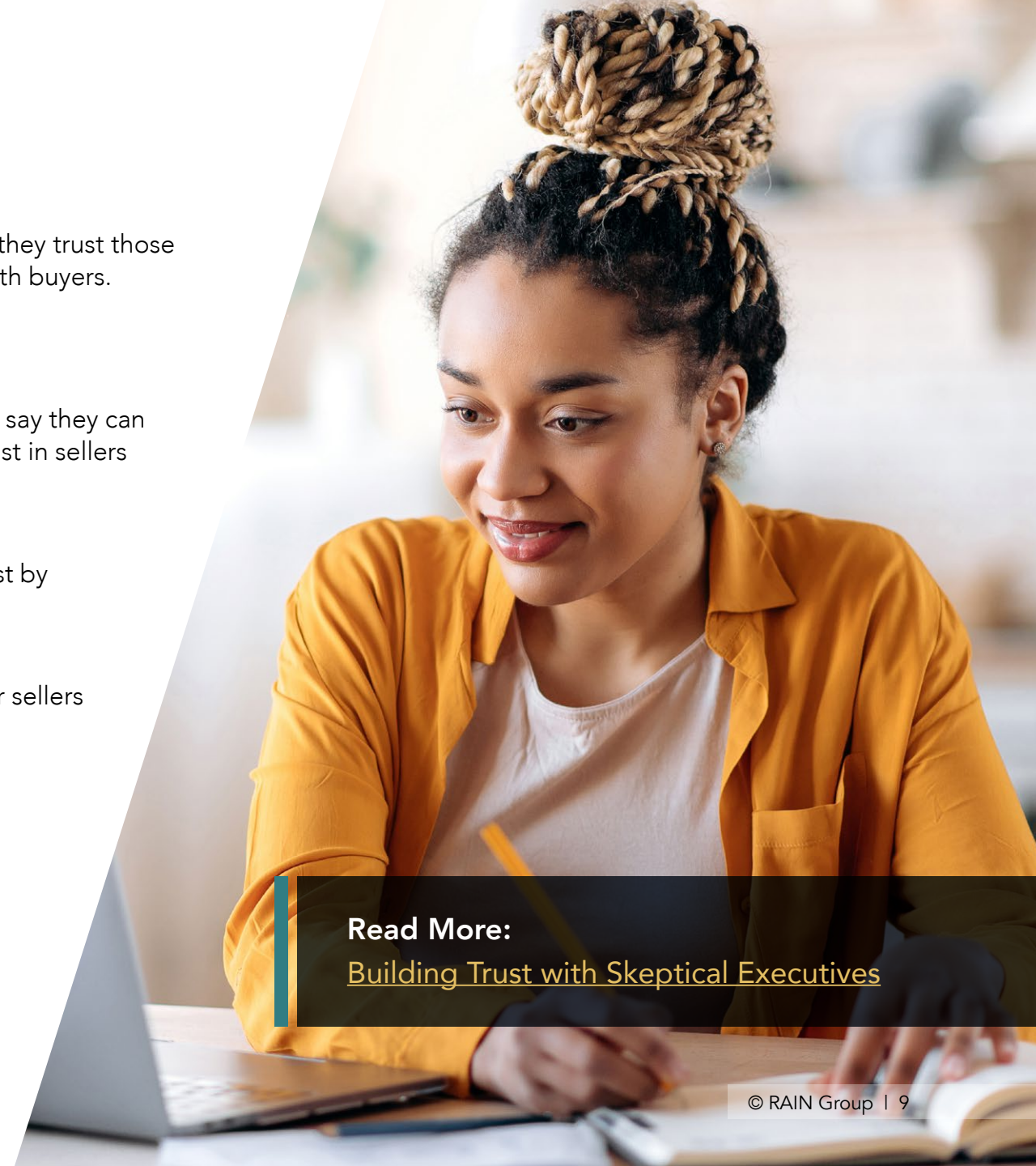
### 4. Intimacy:

The best business relationships are close. This means building rapport and creating a history of shared experience with the buyer.

Sales training can equip sellers with strategies to help them build trust with key buyers during the selling process and beyond.

**Read More:**

[Building Trust with Skeptical Executives](#)



## 6. Crafting and Delivering a Value Proposition Positioning Statement

It's important for sellers to maximize the buyer's understanding and perception of value for what they and your company offer. Crafting and delivering a powerful value proposition positioning statement is one way to communicate this to buyers.

### **Value Proposition Positioning Statement**

A compelling, tangible statement of how a company or individual will benefit from buying something specific or buying from your sellers in general.



## 6 ELEMENTS OF A VALUE PROPOSITION POSITIONING STATEMENT



### 1. Target buyers:

Who do you serve? Identify your ideal buyer in terms of industry, location, size, type, and so on. This allows your buyer to know if you work with companies and people like them. And knowing your target customer allows you to craft messages that will resonate with them. In addition, the more you can position your specialization for a particular set of buyers, the more you'll resonate with buyers and differentiate yourself.

### 2. Need or business problem:

What types of needs and business problems do you address? How do you help? What aspirations do you help achieve? Your answers to these questions help buyers understand how and when they should work with you.

### 3. Impact of solving the need:

What are the rational and emotional benefits of solving the need? Getting this right is a major factor determining whether you resonate.

### 4. Offerings:

What's your product and service approach? How do you run your company, solve problems, and work with buyers? Notice that the company and its offerings are the fourth area on this list. Think buying first and selling second, and frame your offerings within the context of the needs you can help solve.

### 5. Proof of concept:

How can you demonstrate that your approach has worked to solve similar problems for others? How do you substantiate your claims? How do buyers know that what you say will happen will actually happen? Having case studies and customer success stories at the ready will help you to answer these questions.

### 6. Distinction:

Why is your offering preferable to other options for solving the need? Do you have something special that's worthwhile to share? Is there some way to highlight how you're distinct from others? These questions help the buyer answer why they should go with you and not someone else.

### Related Sales Training:

[Foundations of Consultative Selling](#)

## 7. Delivering Value in the Eyes of the Buyer

The value and value proposition your sellers deliver to buyers is often confused with the related concept of a value proposition positioning statement or elevator pitch.

Unlike a tangible positioning statement, the value proposition is a broader concept—it's composed of the collection of reasons why a buyer buys.

### Value

The monetary worth of something; that is, whether and how much someone will pay for something.

### Value Proposition

The collection of reasons why a buyer buys; in essence, factors that affect whether they purchase, and from whom.

Why one buyer buys is different than why another buyer might buy. It's important that your sellers view their value proposition through the eyes of buyers—their specific situation, needs, and wants.

Then, communicate different components of that value in different ways for different situations.

The collection of reasons why people buy typically fall into three major buckets that, in sum, form the three rules of winning value propositions:

- **Resonate:** Buyers have to want and need what your sellers are selling.
- **Differentiate:** Your sellers and company must stand out from the other available options.
- **Substantiate:** Buyers have to believe that your sellers and company can deliver on promises made.

Read More:

[3 Rules for Building a Strong Value Proposition](#)

## 8. Qualifying the Sale

Sellers have limited time and resources and must make difficult decisions about which sales opportunities get their full attention and which do not.

Yet many sellers will wrap up a sales conversation by setting the next steps and closing the meeting without clarifying or determining what the buying process will be. They skip qualifying the buyer.

This step is crucial. Without it, how will a seller know which opportunities are worth their time?

Knowing the keys to qualifying a sale will help sellers define their pursuit intensity for various opportunities, know when and how to ask buyers about budget, and when not to ask at all.

We recommend sellers use the FAINT definition of a qualified buyer to help them make this determination:

- **Funds:** Buyers who have the financial capacity or funds to buy from you. They may not have a budget set aside, but they have the financial wherewithal to buy.
- **Authority:** Find the individuals who have the authority to make decisions on how to use funds.
- **Interest:** Generate interest from the buyer to learn what's possible and how to achieve a new and better reality.
- **Need:** Uncover specific needs that your company can solve.
- **Timing:** Establish purchase intent and a specific timeframe for doing so. When all conditions of FAINT are met, your sellers have a qualified opportunity.








**Read More:**

[How to Qualify Sales with FAINT](#)

## 9. Analyzing Stakeholders and Decision Makers

Your sellers' understanding of the decision makers in their sales opportunities and what's most important to them is essential for sales success.

Corporate buying teams typically include a group of people with influence on the final purchase decision. How they influence the sale depends on their decision roles.

 <b>The Business Driver</b>	 <b>The Approver</b>	 <b>The Evaluator</b>	 <b>The Champion</b>	 <b>The Domino</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Primary interest: Return on Investment (ROI)</li><li>■ Drives the agenda forward and finds or creates budget</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Primary interest: Allocation and best use of funds— get them involved early to learn decision criteria</li><li>■ Has the ultimate sign off</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Primary interest: Evaluating the purchase from an operational or personal perspective</li><li>■ Asks, “Will this work here?” or, “Will this work for me?”</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Primary interest: Getting the project approved or helping you succeed personally</li><li>■ Will support you on your quest and help you navigate the organization</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Primary interest: Influencing the action and direction of their team</li><li>■ Is the swaying voice that others tend to follow</li></ul>

Depending on the buying organization, one person or multiple people could play these roles.

With sales training, sellers can learn how to identify and sell to the five core decision roles of the buying team, complete a thorough stakeholder analysis, and develop strategies for strengthening relationships with buyers.

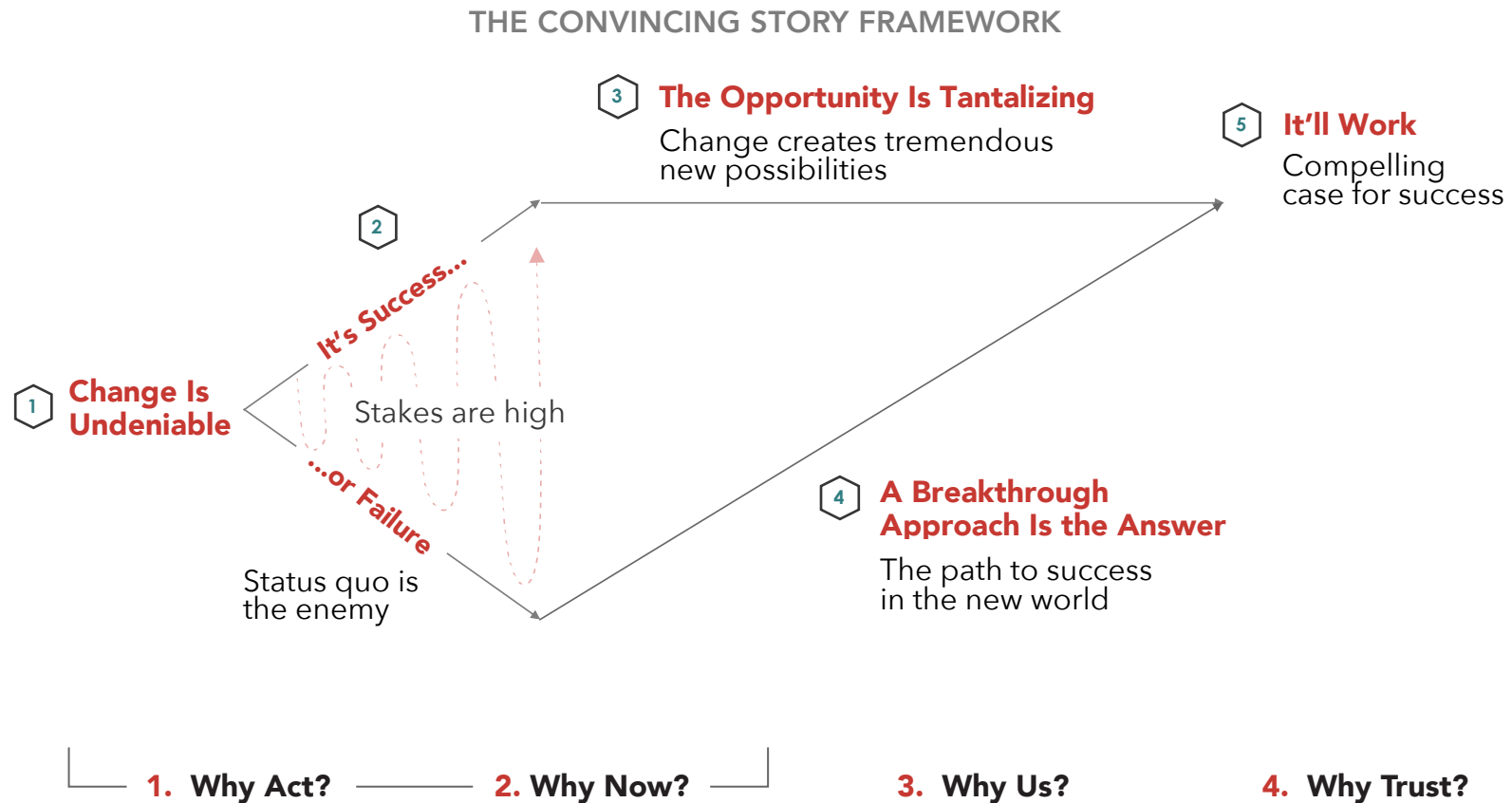
**Read More:**

[5 Decision Roles in Every Sale](#)

# 10. Winning More by Telling Stories that Sell

When sellers tell stories that take buyers on an emotional journey, buyers are more compelled to act, to buy, and to buy from you.

Following The Convincing Story Framework helps sellers to communicate powerfully with buyers.



**1. Change Is Undeniable:**

Demonstrate an understanding of the buyer's world. Change is going to happen. Will they be prepared?

**2. Success vs. Failure:**

What are the stakes? Sellers need to establish the benefits of working with them and the consequences if they don't.

**3. Tantalizing Opportunity:**

Communicate results and create excitement around the new possibilities. Many sellers know how to tell a return on investment (ROI) story, but few do everything they should to communicate the full power of the impact.

**4. Breakthrough:**

Sellers must show buyers the new and different path to success they'll experience when they work with your company.

**5. It'll Work:**

Sellers must collaborate with buyers to build their involvement and set the next steps for action. Most sellers recommend a next step, but few build in collaboration. Collaboration builds trust, which is essential.

When sellers learn how to share stories in their sales conversations, they're able to persuade buyers and bring ideas and solutions alive. This can be a more advanced sales training topic, and it's essential for sellers who are trying to change buyer thinking and selling a new product, service, or solution.

**Read More:**

[Bringing Insight Selling Alive](#)





# 11. Winning Sales Opportunities

Sellers who can build and execute a strategy to win sales opportunities of all sizes—from the everyday to the most important—consistently win more sales.

In fact, the #1 skill compared to all other sales skills studied at Top-Performing Sales Organizations is the ability to drive and win sales opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

Taking a strategic approach and using a sales opportunity planner allows sellers to systematically build and implement a plan that focuses on buyers and leads to more wins.

Here are the six elements of a sales opportunity plan:

## 1. Opportunity Snapshot:

Sellers must communicate the big-picture importance and status of the opportunity. This includes practical details such as the demand dynamic, revenue target, target win date, win confidence, and so.

## 2. People:

Sellers must identify the people on both their team and the buyer's. For your seller's team, they need to keep track of everyone who'll be involved, even beyond who's on their permanent selling team. Who could join meetings or be a part of a particular opportunity?

## 3. Needs:

A common complaint sales leaders have is that their sellers don't complete a thorough needs discovery. One of the merits of sales opportunity planning is that it prompts sellers to be thorough.

## 4. Opportunity Goal and Value Case:

Which products and services comprise the overall solution? Sellers should list the relevant components of your company's offering. Then, link each component to the value it provides the buyer. These points will eventually form the seller's value messaging.

## 5. Competitors, Strengths, Weaknesses, and Vulnerabilities:

Sellers should compare your solution with alternatives based on the buyer's stated decision-making criteria. What does the buyer value that you offer, but your competitors don't?

## 6. Advancing the Sale:

Next, create the action plan to move the sale forward. In addition to summarizing their overall current position (strengths and vulnerabilities), sellers should include a response strategy for possible objections and roadblocks, mapping the sales process to the buying process, critical comments and questions left to answer, insights and ideas to bring to the buyer, and a plan for next steps to win the sale.

Sales training around this topic, focuses on teaching sellers to use a repeatable process to generate the best ideas and strategies to win sales.

### Related Sales Training:

[Winning Major Sales](#)

<sup>5</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Sales Organization*.

## 12. Making a Powerful Impact and ROI Case

When a seller can quantify the impact of what they're selling, they can make a stronger business case to buyers—and close more deals. This is an essential sales training topic and an area that almost all sales teams can improve upon.

After a thorough needs discovery, sellers need to communicate the impact their solution will have on the buyer. Many sellers think they know how to do this, but buyers often don't agree. In fact, while two-thirds of B2B buyers say a clear ROI case influences their likelihood to buy, those same buyers say only 16% of sellers are effective at doing it.<sup>6</sup>

Building a powerful impact and ROI case requires that sellers collaborate with buyers and possess a strong understanding of the impact of their solutions.

Here are five steps your sellers can use to build a strong impact case. Sellers should:

### 1. Map out the problems your company solves and how you solve them.

What's the impact of solving these problems?

### 2. Ask specific questions to help them identify what is most important to buyers.

Ask financial questions to make the ROI calculation. Ask questions to uncover non-financial and emotional impacts of a solution. Ask what won't happen if the problem is solved so you can uncover the buyer's risks of not adopting your solution.

<sup>6</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Virtual Selling Skills and Challenges*.

### 3. Collaborate with the buyer.

When sellers build ROI for the buyer, buyers don't own it and aren't invested in it. But when sellers do it with buyers, buyers are invested and more likely to see that the ROI can be reasonably achieved.

### 4. Demonstrate impact visually so the impact is as clear as possible.

Visualizing the ROI will help buyers see the difference between the status quo and a new reality.

### 5. Develop the case to move forward.

Sellers should build credibility through the use of stories and case studies to demonstrate similar impact and reinforce the belief that sellers can deliver on their promises.

Sales training can help sellers learn to uncover the various factors that determine the impact of their offering. Training also allows sellers to practice building and delivering ROI cases that communicate this impact.

Read More:

[7 Questions to Uncover Impact and ROI](#)

## 13. Inspiring Buyer Action and Change

The sales process is an exercise in making a case for change and driving action to make that change a reality.

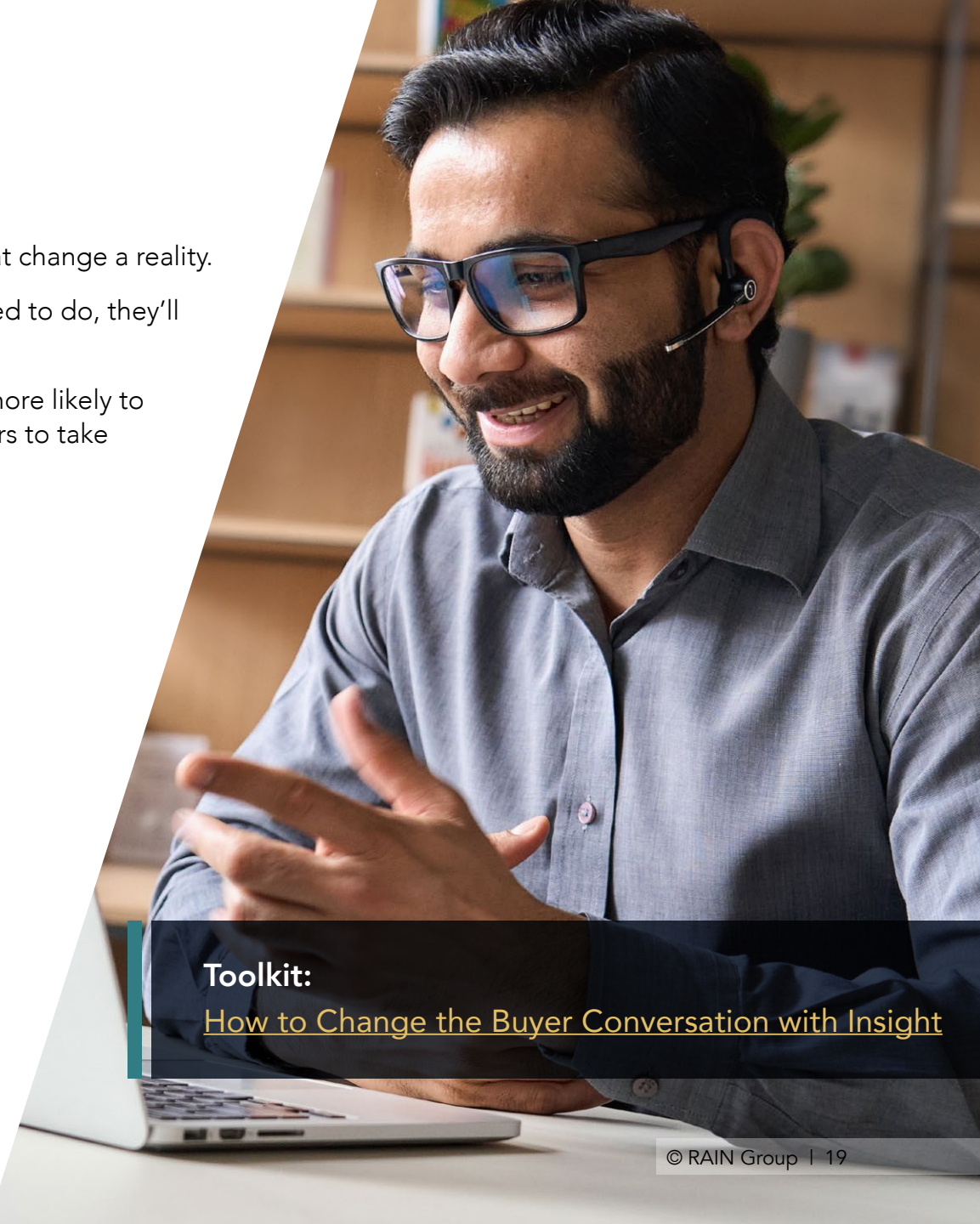
If buyers think they already know everything about their current situation and what they need to do, they'll simply look for a solution consistent with that view.

But the best sellers know that if they can reframe the buyer's view of the situation, they're more likely to change how the buyer approaches challenges. These sellers are more likely to inspire buyers to take action and more likely to win sales.

The best sellers will:

- Establish a new reality benchmark
- Ask broad, open-ended questions
- Help buyers visualize the change
- Translate the new reality into financial terms
- Make the solution clear
- Make the impact case for acting with urgency
- Summarize the buyer's goals
- Share the new reality in the form of a story

With sales training on insight selling and advanced consultative selling skills, sellers can learn how to effectively communicate a strong case for change, inspire buyers to act, and differentiate their solutions from others with an exceptionally compelling value case.



**Toolkit:**

[How to Change the Buyer Conversation with Insight](#)

## 14. Delivering Compelling Proposal Presentations

Before they make a purchase decision, buyers need to know your sellers understand their needs and believe sellers offer a compelling solution. Unfortunately, the way many sellers present their solution is ineffective. In fact, 80% of buyers say sellers lack presentation skills.<sup>7</sup>

But Top-Performing Sellers are 65% more likely to excel at leading persuasive proposal presentations.<sup>8</sup>

The same Convincing Story Framework shared previously provides an effective presentation structure and flow sellers can use to make a convincing case and close more deals.

Here's how sellers can use it in their presentations:

### 1. Change Is Undeniable:

Open with a change that's happened in the buyer's world. Immediately make the buyer the hero of the story that's about to be told.

### 2. Success vs. Failure:

Remind the buyer they have a choice. But staying with the status quo doesn't mean results remain the same, they get worse.

### 3. Tantalizing Opportunity:

Make a clear ROI case. Describe the impact of the purchase on the buyer in both emotional and rational terms.

### 4. Breakthrough:

Share the approach that will bridge the gap between the buyer's current state and their new reality.

### 5. It'll Work:

Share not only why this is the right approach, but why you're the right partner and company to help them succeed.

Training on these and other sales presentation skills can provide sellers with the tools and experience they need to deliver proposal presentations that wow buyers and lead to more sales won.

<sup>7</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Virtual Selling Skills and Challenges*.

<sup>8</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Seller*.

### Toolkit:

[Learn to Deliver Persuasive and Compelling Sales Presentations](#)

## 15. Mastering the Art of Sales Collaboration

Collaboration is one of the keys to successful selling. Sellers must be equipped with tools and techniques that help them collaborate with buyers when they meet—both in-person and virtually.

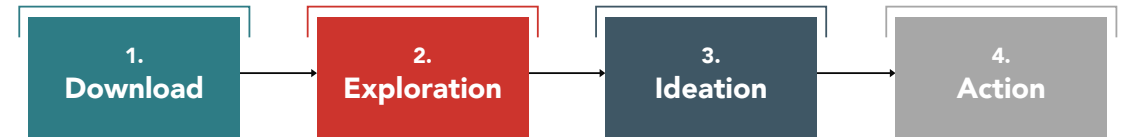
Research shows that, on average, 7 out of 10 buyers are open to collaborating. It's up to sellers to take advantage of this, yet only 34% of buyers say sellers collaborate effectively.<sup>9</sup>

When sellers don't collaborate—when their communication is heavily weighted one way—they diminish their opportunities to build relationships, discover and solve needs, and inspire buyers with new ideas.

The core of any collaborative discussion is problem-solving. Without strong structured problem-solving abilities, sellers are often at a loss for how, exactly, to lead the discussion.

By learning to apply the 4 Stages of Structured Problem Solving, however, sellers can lead collaborative discussions and help solve important problems with buyers.

### 4 STAGES OF STRUCTURED PROBLEM SOLVING



Here are the four stages of leading an effective problem-solving discussion:

- 1. Download:** Name the issue that's being tackled and summarize key points about the current status of the issue.
- 2. Exploration:** Make sure all relevant assumptions are on the table.
- 3. Ideation:** Explore ideas and possibilities for actions that could be taken.
- 4. Action:** Decide what to do to solve the problem.

This simple framework is an important tool sellers can use to help them master collaborative buyer discussions that will deepen buyer engagement, increase perceived value, and win more sales.

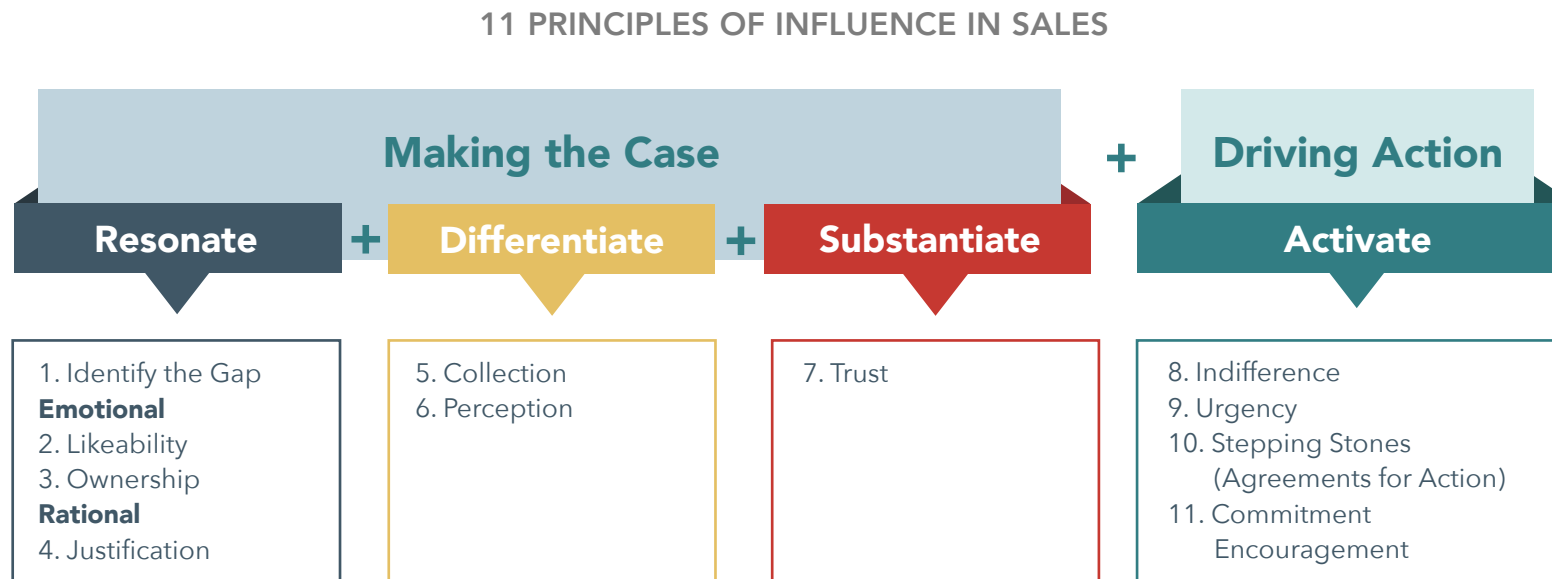
<sup>9</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Virtual Selling Skills and Challenges*.

#### Read More:

[Problem-Solving System to Lead Strong Discussions with Buyers](#)

## 16. Influencing and Persuading Buyers

The best sellers are influencers. They drive change and persuade buyers to take action. We've identified 11 keys to influence and persuasion that will help sellers resonate most powerfully, differentiate from the competition, build trust, and drive action.



## Make the Case

To make the case, sellers must resonate with buyers, differentiate from the alternatives, and substantiate their claims.

### Resonate

1. Identify the gap (between where the buyer is and where they could be)
2. Be likeable
3. Promote ownership (when the buyer takes ownership of an idea or solution, they'll be more committed to it)
4. Make the justification case

### Differentiate

5. Highlight the seller's and company's distinctions
6. Promote scarcity

### Substantiate

7. Get the buyer to trust:
  - The seller
  - The offering
  - The company
  - The outcome

## Drive Action

Once sellers have made the case, it's time to persuade buyers to take action:

8. Be indifferent (not desperate)
9. Promote urgency
10. Employ stepping stones
11. Encourage a commitment

For sellers, the goal is to take buyers down a path of the seller's choosing and help buyers make a decision—one that favors both parties. Part of being an influencer is taking control of the buying process.

**Download Now:**

[The 11 Principles of Influence in Sales](#)

## 17. Deepening and Strengthening Buyer Relationships

Developing strong relationships in new or existing accounts is critical to sales and account growth success. Top Performers know this—they're 63% more likely than The Rest to build strong, long-term relationships with buyers.<sup>10</sup>

Using a tool like RAIN Group's Relationship Strength Meter (next page) allows sellers to gauge how essential they are to buyers and identify how to make relationships stronger and more valuable to buyers.

Of course, building relationships matters whether sellers are selling in-person or virtually. It's just a bit different.

When meeting in-person, sellers and account leaders often have chance encounters and conversations that help deepen relationships with key stakeholders in their accounts. In a virtual environment, sellers can't rely on chance.

However, whether virtual or in-person, sellers can take the lead to create encounters and opportunities, both structured and unstructured, that can lead to relationship development and sales wins.

We call this manufacturing serendipity—sellers put themselves in a position to have a conversation with buyers and referral sources that can develop into meaningful business opportunities.

Sales training can help sellers learn to build strong relationships with intention.

<sup>10</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Seller*.





### RAIN GROUP'S RELATIONSHIP STRENGTH METER

	PARTNERSHIP	VALUE	RELATIONSHIP LOSS EFFECT	COMPETITIVE BIDDING	SATISFACTION AND SWITCHING	WOULD RECOMMEND	PERSONAL SUPPORT
<b>5</b> <b>Essential</b> <i>Trusted Partner</i>	Proactive co-development	Breakthrough	Catastrophic difficulties	Rare	Completely satisfied	Yes - proactively	Deep and meaningful
<b>4</b> <b>Important</b> <i>Strategic Supplier</i>	Proactive input	Major	Major challenges	Sometimes sale source	Generally satisfied	Yes - reactively	Strong relationship
<b>3</b> <b>Worthwhile</b> <i>Preferred Supplier</i>	Reactive	Some	Some challenges	Typical process	Indifferent	Maybe	Positive but not deep
<b>2</b> <b>Trivial</b> <i>Supplier</i>	None	Trivial to none	No challenges	Rarely preferred to you	Somewhat dissatisfied	Probably not	Trivial
<b>1</b> <b>Poor / Negative</b>	Avoidance of interaction	Negative	Benefits outweigh challenges	Avoidance	Dissatisfied	No	Poor / negative
<b>0</b> <b>No Relationship</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Relationship Strength ↑

**Read More:**

[How to Measure Your Client Relationship Strength](#)

## 18. Outselling Your Competition

When the sales opportunity is significant, sellers need to go all in to win it.

For the most important opportunities, Big Plays are the strategies sellers can use to strengthen relationships, outsell the competition, and win. Big Plays can help:

- Strengthen relationships
- Create new relationships
- Increase value perception
- Position against the competition

Big Play strategies are bold, outside the norm, and involve some risk. Think of them as a “partner investment” because buyers tend to view them as an investment in a long-term relationship.

### Big Play

A bold, atypical action a seller can take to inspire buyer action and set themselves apart from the competition.

Examples include activities such as conducting an all-expenses-paid executive retreat, facilitating a value discovery or strategy session, developing a beta site for a new offering, and so on.



Sales training can help sellers practice brainstorming ideas for high return Big Plays, as well as learn how to evaluate strategies based on criteria including:

- **Effort:** How much effort will it take to execute?
- **Cost:** How much investment will it require?
- **Acceptance probability:** What's the probability the buyer will accept it?
- **Timing:** How long will it take to execute?
- **Payoff amount:** What's the possible payoff in terms of revenue, margin, loyalty, or whatever the return-on-investment possibility might be?
- **Payoff likelihood:** What are the chances it'll generate the desired result once implemented?
- **Opportunity cost:** What are the chances that other Big Plays at this or another company are more attractive than this one?

## CRITERIA TO EVALUATE BIG PLAY STRATEGIES



### Other Selling Capabilities:

[Account Management](#), [Negotiating](#), [Productivity](#),  
[Prospecting](#), [Sales Coaching](#), [Virtual Selling](#)

## 19. Growing Strategic and Key Accounts

To be successful with strategic and key account management success, sellers need a process that's systematic, action-oriented, and designed to produce specific outputs.

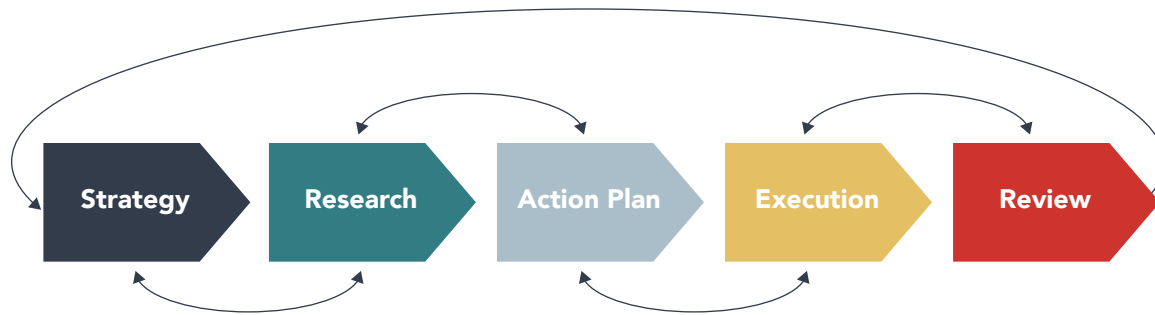
In our Top Performance in Strategic Account Management research, we found that Top Performers are 80% more likely to have a more mature process for strategic account management.<sup>11</sup> They also have stronger processes to build account plans, discover untapped value, hold teams accountable, and deliver training in strategic account management skills. This results in more sales opportunities and revenue growth.

A flexible five-stage account management process covers the key areas and can be calibrated up or down depending on need.

- 1. Strategy:** Sellers must know what they're planning to do, with whom, and why
- 2. Research:** Begin work on the account plan, form the core account team, and gather data to inform the strategy
- 3. Action Plan:** With gathered information, develop a compelling case that will guide sellers to implementation
- 4. Execution:** This is where opportunities are created, expanded, and captured; relationships are deepened; and competitors neutralized
- 5. Review:** Analyze KPIs and make adjustments to the action plan

Training in strategic and key account management that covers this process, as well as other critical areas, will give your team the knowledge, skills, tools, and action plan they need to grow key accounts.

### 5 STAGE KEY ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT PROCESS



<sup>11</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Top Performance in Strategic Account Management*.

Read More:

[What Is Key Account Management?](#)

## 20. Managing the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement

Being willing to walk away from a sales negotiation, and knowing when you should walk, gives you something very powerful in a negotiation: control.

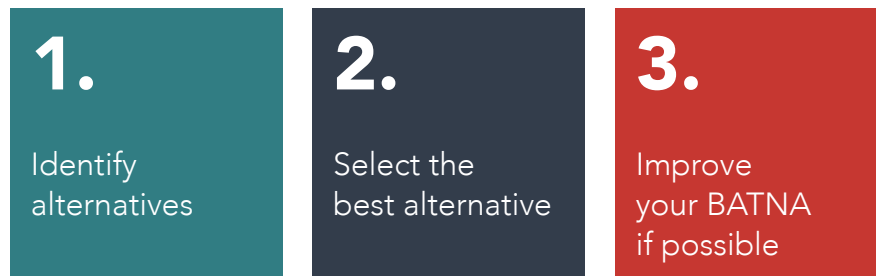
It's imperative that your sellers have the skills to identify this point and the ability to walk away if needed.

Gaining a sense of control is critical for sellers' ability to negotiate a favorable outcome. In fact, the best sales negotiators are 12.5x more likely to be very satisfied with the outcome of their negotiations and 3.1x more likely to achieve target pricing.<sup>12</sup>

And research shows that being willing to walk is the #1 strategy separating Top-Performing Sales Negotiators from The Rest.

Sellers know when to walk away when they know their best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA).

### 3 STEP PROCESS FOR FIGURING OUT YOUR BATNA



The three-step process to figure out a BATNA is:

#### 1. Identify alternatives:

Brainstorm possible alternatives if the negotiation doesn't result in an agreement. The alternative for a seller might be pursuing a different opportunity, working on prospecting outreach, or expanding current accounts. They need to know what will help them reach their goals in the long-term.

#### 2. Select the best alternative:

After brainstorming, sellers should identify which alternative best meets their high-priority objectives.

#### 3. Improve the BATNA if possible:

Sellers should research the alternative and see whether there's anything they can do to strengthen it. For example, if they walk away from one sale and think they can close two other opportunities for a certain dollar amount, is it possible they could close three sales instead? Or increase the average size of the sale?

<sup>12</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Top Performance in Sales Negotiation*.

Sellers can't stop here, though: they must consider the buyer's BATNA. They should make an educated guess as to what the buyer's alternative might be based on their knowledge of the situation. Viewing it from the buyer's perspective can increase the seller's sense of control and confidence in the negotiation.

Next, sellers need to analyze their BATNA and the buyer's. If the value of the agreement is greater than the value of no agreement for both parties, the seller will move forward. If the value of no agreement is greater for either party, they won't.

## When Should You Walk?

### Move Forward

Value of agreement > Value of no agreement to each party

### Walk

Value of no agreement > Value of agreement for either party

Sales negotiation training can help sellers determine their best alternative to a negotiated agreement, as well as that of the other party, gain confidence in their negotiating skills, and get the best outcomes from their negotiations.

Related Sales Training:  
[Sales Negotiation](#)



## 21. Leading the Sales Negotiation Process

Sellers should take the lead in negotiations, but most don't according to buyers. Our sales negotiation research found that 66% of sellers let buyers take control. Sellers are then left playing defense and catch up.<sup>13</sup>

The best sales negotiators don't fall into that trap: they're 1.7x more likely to be prepared for the negotiation.

Sellers can use a process like the four steps below to set the agenda and guide their discussions to the best possible outcomes in sales negotiations.

### 1. Prepare:

Nearly everything in a negotiation can be anticipated. Sellers should come to the table prepared with a full stable of ideas and possibilities. But they need to step into the shoes of their buyers and think buying first, selling second.

### 2. Engage:

This is where sellers take the lead. Unless there's a reason for the other party to go first, sellers should kick off a negotiation meeting with the process and agenda. When sellers lead, they have control of the negotiation.

### 3. Facilitate:

This is where sellers open the door as much as possible to collaborate with the buyer with actions that include:

- Clarifying objectives
- Uncovering all requirements,
- Brainstorming possibilities
- Mitigating the other party's concerns

### 4. Commit:

Gaining commitment seems like it should only be a technicality in terms of sealing the deal. In reality, it can be the most difficult part for many sellers. Steps that can make gaining commitment less challenging include:

- Getting a verbal confirmation of what both parties are going to do to avoid misunderstandings
- Making sure the other side feels good about the plan going forward—otherwise, the agreement could fall apart as soon as they leave the room
- Preparing a high-level written agreement of commitments made at the meeting and asking everyone to review and confirm immediately

<sup>13</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Top Performance in Sales Negotiation*.

**Download Now:**

[Mastering Sales Negotiations Toolkit](#)

## 22. Dealing with Common Buyer Negotiation Tactics

Even sellers with a win-win mindset and approach to negotiations need to know how to maneuver the situation when buyers throw curve balls. Sellers need the right negotiation skills to bolster their success.

This means knowing the common negotiation tactics buyers use to throw sellers off their game and understanding how to respond when they encounter any of these tactics.

Here are just six of the common sales negotiation tactics buyers use:

### 1. **Going, Going, Gone:**

This is a form of pressure where the buyer mentions they're considering your competition. Essentially, they're saying, "If you don't accept the agreement, somebody else will."

### 2. **Red Herring:**

This is when the buyer tries to distract sellers by introducing an unimportant issue to negotiate. After they offer a concession on that item, they ask sellers for a concession on something they really care about, which is a big deal for sellers to change or give.

### 3. **Pencil Sharpening:**

"You're going to have to do better than this." This is a common pushback strategy to intimidate sellers into dropping the price, or to corner sellers early in the process to agree to eventual price negotiations.

### 4. **Good Cop, Bad Cop:**

Introducing a "bad cop" late in discussions is a buyer's way of trying to lower the price, change the agreement, or reopen closed issues.

### 5. **Split the Difference:**

The seller offers a price. The buyer suggests a lower price, then says, "Okay, let's meet in the middle." By suggesting the seller meets in the middle, buyers make it seem like it's a win-win, even if meeting in the middle isn't fair to both parties.

### 6. **One Last Thing:**

This happens when the buyer is trying to catch you at your most vulnerable—right before the deal is signed. They want to take advantage of your eagerness to close the deal to squeeze out final concessions.

Sales negotiation training can help sellers recognize and effectively respond to buyer objections—including the objections above and many others—in ways that allow sellers to reach the best deals possible for them and their buyers.

**Read More:**

[16 Negotiation Tactics Buyers Use \(and How to Respond\)](#)



## 23. Maximizing Motivation and Productivity

Transforming behaviors and habits is key to maximizing sales motivation and productivity. The most successful sellers are motivated, proactive, focused, and goal oriented.

Indeed, research shows Top Performers are significantly more likely to be highly rated across all nine major productivity areas. They get the most done and achieve the best results in less time.

Prioritizing work effectively leads to making the most of energy and time, and improves action and accountability. By ignoring distractions and keeping focus, sellers and sales managers can work effectively and efficiently.

Using the 9 Habits of Extreme Productivity, sellers and sales managers can adopt habits and hacks that allow them to get more done in the time they have and achieve exceptional increases in productivity and sales results.

Productivity training will help sellers and sales managers maximize motivation for themselves and their teams so they can achieve maximum results.



**Download Now:**

[Unlocking the Productivity Code](#)

## THE PRODUCTIVITY CODE™

9 HABITS TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR TIME, GET IN THE ZONE, AND ACHIEVE MAXIMUM RESULTS



## 24. Building Pipeline with Sales Prospecting

The goal of prospecting is to create interest and then convert that interest into a sales meeting.

Most sellers know this is a critical first stage in the sales process, but too often they don't know what steps to take or the best approach to build pipeline. Those who do—the best sales prospectors—set 2.7x more meetings, achieve their sales goals, and have higher win rates.<sup>14</sup>

Here are four steps sellers can take to get started with sales prospecting:

### 1. Build a target list:

Sellers should create a list of specific names and companies with which they want to generate meetings. Their list should include high-value targets, decision makers, existing buyers and accounts, past buyers, past opportunities, and their network.

### 2. Research prospects:

This ensures leads are a good fit for your company's offerings. The information sellers gather during this step allows them to build rapport, as well as qualify leads.

### 3. Craft the offer:

Sellers must personalize their approach and make the initial offer as valuable as possible for potential buyers. While the ultimate offer is the solution that will be delivered, the offers sellers make to prospects before they buy help generate conversations and meetings.

### 4. Create the prospecting campaign:

Outreach isn't a one-time action—it's an attraction campaign of multiple touches over time that include valuable offers designed to generate meetings with potential buyers. A coordinated and customized sequence of outreach will get the best results.

Sales prospecting training equips sellers with the tools, techniques, and repeatable approaches that will help them consistently build strong pipelines.

<sup>14</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Top Performance in Sales Prospecting*.

Read More:

[Sales Prospecting: Tips, Techniques, and Strategies](#)

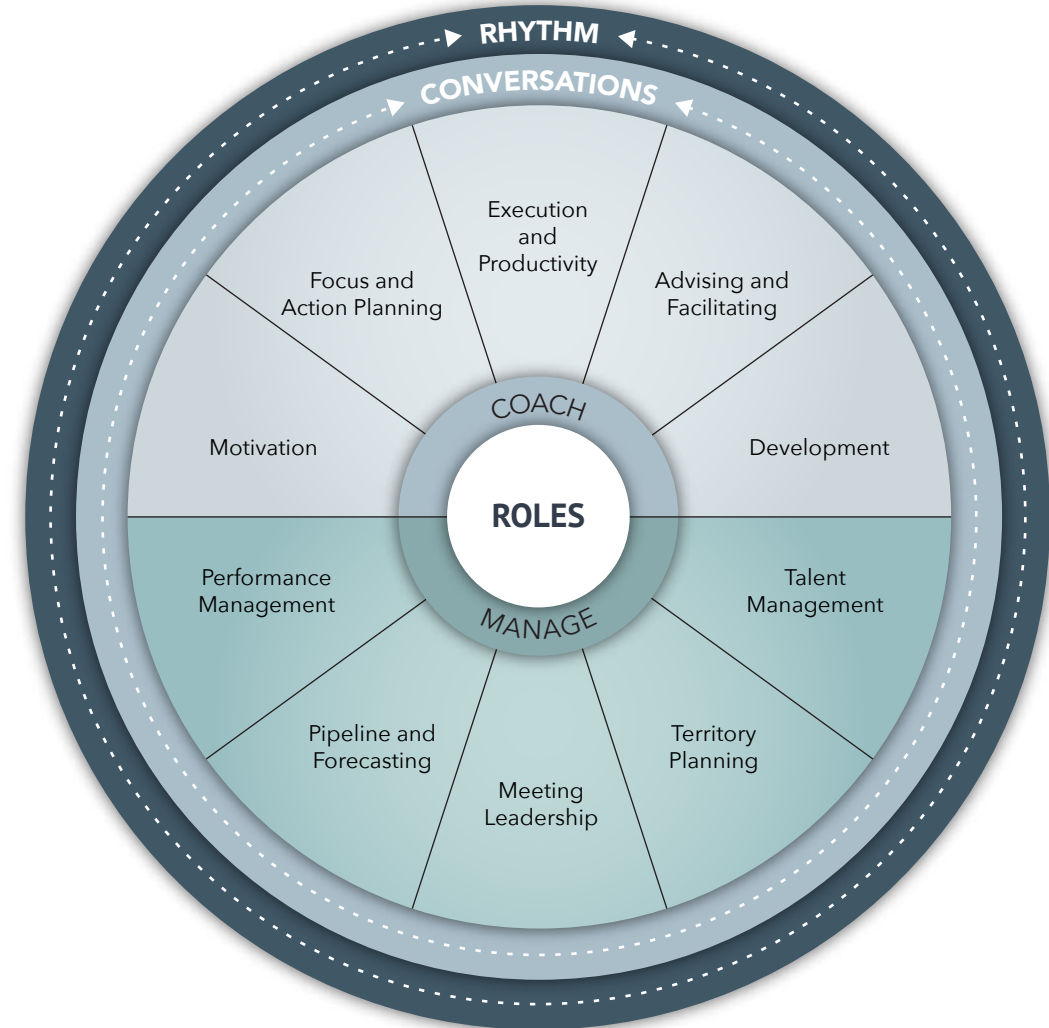
## 25. Becoming a Top-Performing Sales Coach

A key ingredient to building a top-performing sales team is having a strong sales coaching program and sales coaches.

In our research on Top-Performing Sales Organizations we found the sales organizations that get the best results prioritize and maximize the time managers spend on sales coaching, yet 66% of companies don't believe their sales managers have the skills needed to manage and coach sellers.<sup>15</sup>

Too often, organizations don't provide the necessary support to ensure their managers are able to deliver effective sales coaching.

### THE TOP-PERFORMING SALES MANAGER<sup>SM</sup>

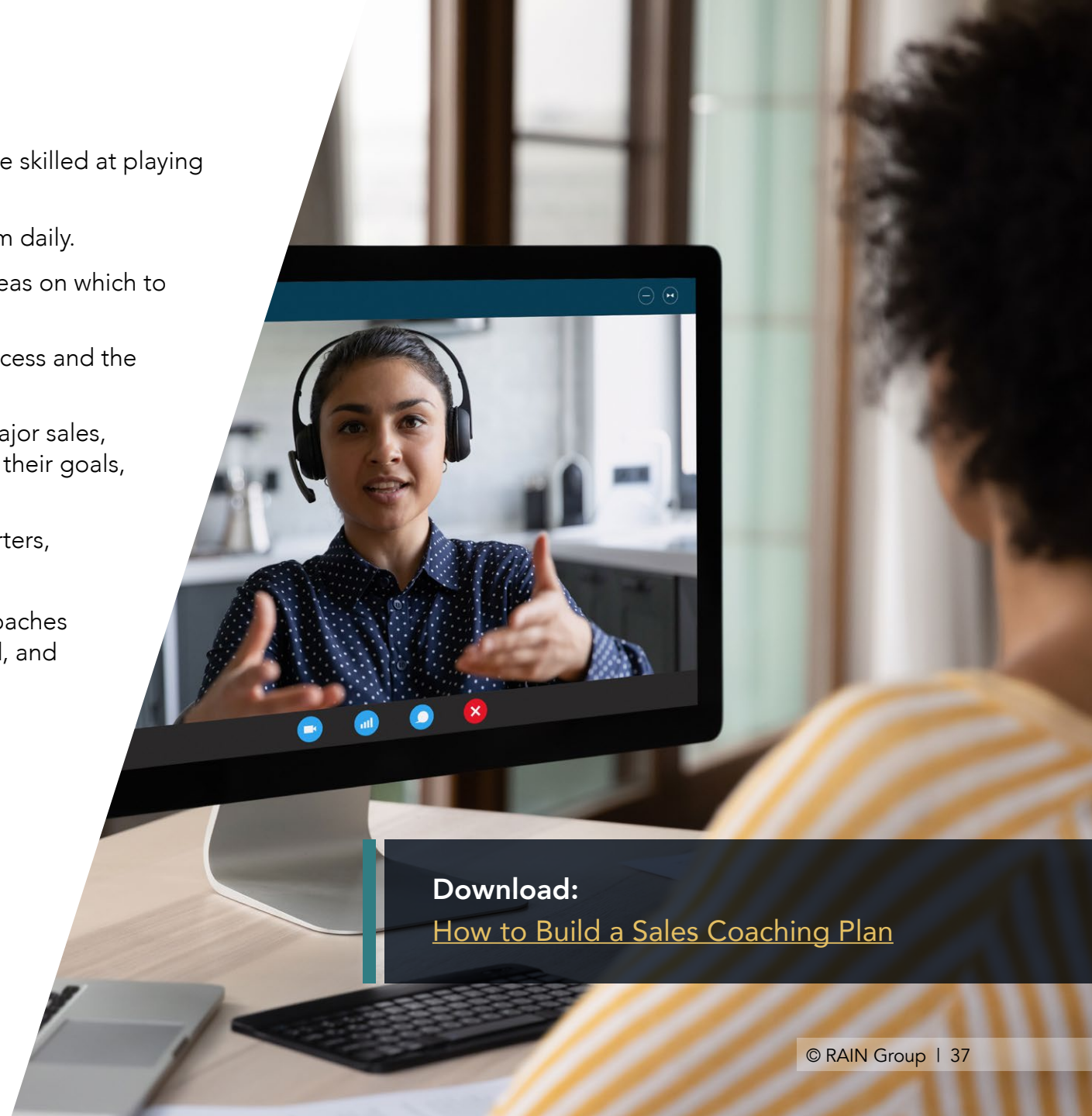


<sup>15</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *The Top-Performing Sales Organization*.

In addition to their management-related roles, sales managers need to be skilled at playing five sales coaching-related roles:

- **Motivation:** Getting maximum effort and proactivity from their team daily.
- **Focus and Action Planning:** Helping sellers determine the right areas on which to spend their time and effort and help them avoid distractions.
- **Execution and Productivity:** Helping sellers achieve maximum success and the best outcomes during the time they spend working.
- **Advising and Facilitating:** Helping sellers fill their pipelines, win major sales, grow accounts, negotiate the best agreements, define and achieve their goals, and so on.
- **Development:** Helping sellers, over the course of months and quarters, become better, more skilled, more capable sellers.

With sales coach training, managers can become highly effective sales coaches who help their teams build effective action plans, become highly focused, and execute at the highest level.



**Download:**

[How to Build a Sales Coaching Plan](#)

## 26. Managing Virtual Sales Meetings

Virtual meetings have become commonplace, making it more important than ever for sellers to be able to manage virtual sales meetings effectively.

Still, sellers face numerous challenges when selling virtually. The #1 virtual selling challenge cited by 91% of sellers surveyed is **gaining a buyer's attention and keeping the buyer engagement virtually**.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> RAIN Group Center for Sales Research, *Virtual Selling Skills and Challenges*.

### VIRTUAL SELLING CHALLENGES VERY/SOMEWHAT CHALLENGING FOR SELLERS



## Continued: Managing Virtual Sales Meetings

Buyers, however, expect the sellers they're meeting with remotely have already mastered the virtual meeting environment. Sellers who haven't will find themselves at a major disadvantage, especially when their competitors are capable here.

In fact, Top-Performing Sellers are significantly more likely to excel in every virtual selling skill we studied in recent sales skills research. Top Performers are more likely than The Rest to excel at:

- Selling with video (63% more likely)
- Collaborating with buyers and encouraging discussion (49% more likely)
- Presenting themselves professionally during virtual meetings (46% more likely)
- Using technology effectively in virtual meetings (31% more likely)
- Building rapport virtually (29% more likely)
- Leading masterful virtual conversations and presentations (28% more likely)

Sellers who get virtual selling training to learn how to create buyer engagement, as well as how to lead masterful, thorough, and effective virtual sales conversations, will be positioned to compete in today's selling environment.



Related Sales Training:  
[Virtual Selling](#)

## Sales Training Topics to Bolster Your Next Training Initiative

World-class sales organizations create successful sales training by delivering a training curriculum that engages sellers and drives skill development. Identifying the sales training topics that fit your team's needs is just one piece of the process.

But the topics covered in this ebook are just the tip of the iceberg. RAIN Group partners with organizations globally to deliver in-person and virtual sales training that drives results and unleashes sales potential.

Focus areas include:

- Foundations of Consultative Selling
- Advanced Consultative Selling
- Virtual Selling
- Strategic/Key Account Management
- Winning Major Sales
- Sales Prospecting
- Sales Negotiation
- Sales Management
- Extreme Productivity
- Sales Coaching
- Coaching for Action and Accountability

[Click here to request a complimentary consultation](#) 



## RAIN Group Delivers World-Class Sales Training

- Modular, multi-modal, and purpose-built for the **modern learner**.
- Unique approach to driving **behavior change** through training we call Execution Assurance.
- Focused on driving the **business results** important to you.
- A **transformational experience** that ensures the development, adoption, and implementation of new skills.
- Action-oriented **coaching** prepares sellers for real situations and provides direct feedback.



# RAIN Group Unleashes Sales Potential

## We help organizations:

- Develop and improve sales strategy, process, messaging, and talent
- Enhance sales capability with award-winning sales training
- Design and execute strategic account management initiatives
- Increase effectiveness of sales management and coaching

**Best IP:** We study buying and selling relentlessly through the RAIN Group Center for Sales Research. Our research and field work allows us to create industry-leading intellectual property to help our clients achieve the greatest success.

**Best Education System:** We use the best education approaches, methods, and technologies to make training work, stick, and transfer to the job.

**Best Results:** We make it our mission to drive value and achieve the highest client satisfaction through excellence in quality and producing transformational results for our clients.

