-by Thomas Libby

So, now we've discussed the basic process, lets chat about some of the methods used. Whether you've been in sales for a long time or you're new, you've probably heard of a sales method or two. The reality, there are way too many to discuss them all here. It seems that every time we turn around someone is coming up with a new one that spins off another. That being said a few come up more frequently than others, so I'll list a few of the more popular ones with a brief description and a few closing thoughts.

SPIN Selling

Popularized by Neil Rackham's book "SPIN Selling" copywritten in 1988. It's based on an acronym for the types of questions clients should be asked during the sales process. It stands for: Situation, Problem, Implication, and Need-Payoff.

- Situation Questions – These should be used to create a better understanding of the client's situation after your initial research is done…preferable prior to your initial meeting.
- Problem Questions – Asked about specific issues discovered, digging deeper.
- Implication Questions – Determines the risks of not solving the issue.
- Need-Payoff Questions – Used often to allow the prospect to visualize what it would look like if the problem was solved. How would things change for them?

SPIN selling is designed to let the prospect come to the purchase decision on their own, with guidance from the sales person, and be able to identify their own justification of the purchase.

Conceptual Selling or Strategic Selling
This method was created by Robert Miller and Stephen Heiman and is rooted in the idea that customers don't buy a product or service, they buy the concept of the solution and what it represents to the purchaser. This is also question-style driven but puts emphasis on sales people listening more than the speak. Also, that the "sale" should be mutually beneficial and if the sales person doesn't believe this then they should walk away from the sale. The three stages this method is broken up into are: Get, Give, Commit – Get information, Give information, Get a commitment. The questions fall into these categories:

- Confirmation Questions – Validate the information you have, make sure of accuracy.
- Attitude Questions – Confirms or understands the prospects concept of what the solution looks like to them or their buy-in to the project on a personal level.
- New Information Questions – Get down to what the prospect is looking to achieve with the product or service and make sure you're both clear on the concept.
- Basic Issue Questions – Bring up potential issues
- Commitment Questions – Probe after the prospect's buy-in into the venture

The Challenger Sale
This one is newer than some on this list but can be as, if not more effective, according to the Co-Authors Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson. This concept is driven by a theory that just about all sales people fall into one of these categories or personas: hard workers, lone wolves, relationship builders, reactive problem solvers, and challengers. The challenger group however, produces approximately 40% of the top reps.
The process they all follow is teach-tailor-take control. They first teach the prospect, about like business problems, like solutions or ideas, and perceptions, not however about the product or service they represent. Second, all communications are specifically tailored to each prospect. Lastly, they use a take control approach by not allowing the prospect to intimidate them into not being able to push back, the focus is on a beneficial end results, not the sales person being "liked". This Challenger method pushes to convey the insight of the challenger persona to the others.

The Sandler System
An oversimplification of this method is that the rep looks to quickly determine if the prospect is a good fit and if there is equal investment of both parties early in the sales process. If not, she or he will abandon this sale and move on. The Sandler rep looks to address most objections and obstacles during the qualification phase of the sales cycle. In doing this, the rep can determine if what they are offering is a good fit for the client and if the time spent will be wasted on trying to convince the prospect that they need or want the offering.

This method looks to have the prospect look to buy rather than the rep "sell them" on the offering.

Customer Centric Selling
This method tries to have sales people portrayed in a collaborate or consultative light rather than product or service pushing. This is accomplished by utilizing these 8 principles:

- Don't just make presentations, have situational conversations
- Don't just offer opinions, ask pertinent questions
- Don't target the end users, put a real emphasis on speaking with decision makers
- Don't put too much weight into the relationship, focus on solving the issue/problem
- Don't just be the busiest rep, make real efforts to be the best in your industry

- Don’t just boast about the product, endorse the product fit and usage to reaffirm interest
- Don’t just talk someone into buying, empower them to make the choice to buy
- Don’t just push your deadlines and sales cycle, understand and use the buyers plan and buying cycle to get the deal done

This method relies on the theory that every sale should allow the prospect to accomplish one of three things; achieve a goal (personal or corporate), satisfy a need, or solve a dilemma. If one of these items are not satisfied, then the rep should disqualify the prospect and move on.

Here are 5 of the methods that a lot of companies teach the sales people on their teams or that they use as templates to develop a proprietary version. As I was writing this I was asking myself which one I subscribe to, or which one should I endorse, which ones were right, which ones were wrong, and which were irrelevant. Is there a right or wrong way…the short answer YES.

All of these methods are tried and true to someone, all are right to certain people. However, they can all be the wrong school of thought for people as well. I guess what I’m saying is that we should put less emphasis on sticking to a particular methodology and be more mindful of the style that sells to the prospect we’re pursuing. I really think we should be better at identifying the traits in our prospects that tell us which method sells to them best and focus on the ability to put multiple methods in our tool bag. This would entail becoming versed in more than one methodology, true. Difficult? Sure. Impossible? Nope!

I’ve found throughout my career that the people who look to truly understand the prospect before trying to close a deal wins more often. The sales rep that adapts to the prospect rather than thinking EVERONE should fit into “this box” will be more successful. Learn and be familiar with as many methods as you can, learn to disqualify prospects as eagerly as qualify them, make sure you never, ever sell someone something they don’t sincerely require to make their job better, faster, easier, more productive, etc…etc…etc. You know all the requirements to make it work. Simply put, make sure the transaction is mutually beneficial and both sides win.