

The Challenger Sale

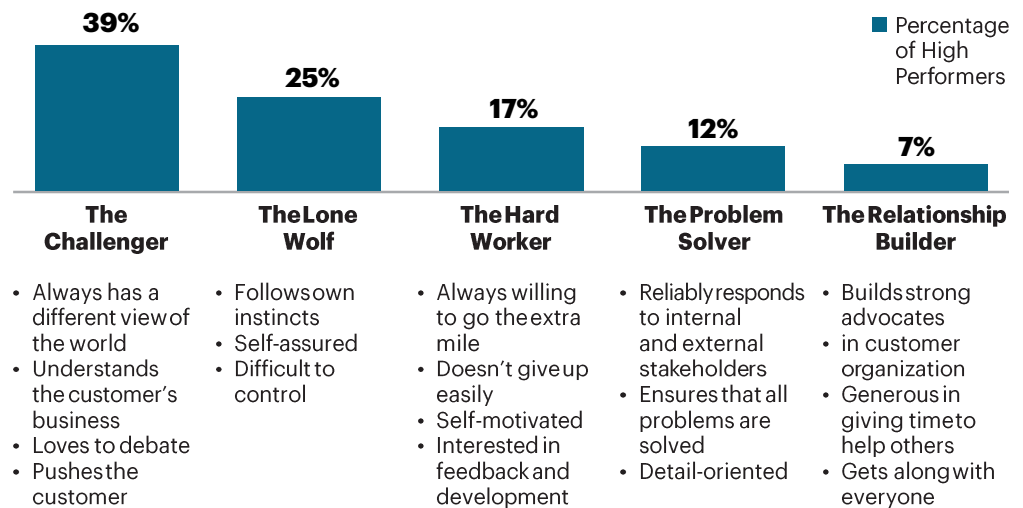
Sales Force Discussion Guide

Based on an exhaustive study of thousands of sales reps across multiple industries and geographies, The Challenger Sale demonstrates that classic relationship building is a losing approach in today's complex business-to-business sales. Instead, challenging customer thinking and teaching customers new insights is key.

Introduction

The book finds that every sales rep in the world falls into one of five distinct profiles, and while all of these types of reps can deliver average sales performance, only one—the Challenger—is best positioned to deliver consistently high sales performance.

High Performers, by Profile



n = 683.
Source: Sales Executive Council's Rep Skills Diagnostic.

Instead of bombarding customers with endless facts and features about their company and products and services, Challengers approach customers with unique insights about how they can better manage their business. They tailor their sales message to the customer's specific needs and objectives. Rather than conceding to the customer's every demand or objection, Challengers are assertive, pushing back when necessary and taking control of the sale.

This guide offers discussion ideas to dive deeper into the three traits that define Challenger sales reps—teach for differentiation, tailor for resonance, and take control of the sale—along with the role of front line sales managers in the Challenger sales organization.



Teaching for Differentiation

Teaching consists of offering customers unique perspectives on their business and communicating those perspectives with passion and precision in a way that draws the customer into the conversation. These unique perspectives apply not to your products and solutions, but to how the customer can compete more effectively in their market. Insights exist at the center of how customers run their business, and help the customer understand new ways to approach business challenges.

- Think about typical sales conversations. Do they center on your company's products and services, or the customer's business? Do they tend to introduce new features, products, or benefits or introduce emerging business management issues to the customer?
- Teaching must be newsworthy. Do customers tend to immediately agree with your sales message, indicating they've already arrived at that conclusion?
- Why should your customers buy from you over anyone else? If you were to each list your company's unique differentiators, how similar would that list be?
- How closely does your existing sales pitch map to the commercial teaching pitch (page 66)? Does it engage both the rational and emotional side of the customer's brain?
- Teaching pitches tend to lose their edge as they work their way through the organization. Grade the strength of your sales pitch using the SAFE-BOLD framework (page 81).
- What can your company better do to support you in delivering compelling teaching messages?

Tailoring for Resonance

Tailoring ensures the conversation appeals to the specific business priorities of the customer stakeholder—the specific outcomes that particular customer values most, the results they are expected to deliver for their company, and the various economic drivers most likely to affect those outcomes. The ability to tailor the message to different types of customers is what makes the pitch resonate and stick with the customer.

- Think about two very different customer stakeholders with whom you regularly interact. What are the key economic drivers they care most about? How do you need to adapt the conversation for these two different individuals?
- Consensus purchasing is the new normal, and a full buying group must often be in agreement to make a purchase. What are the types of conversations that must happen to build this consensus? How can you specifically improve in building this consensus?
- Tailoring takes on many forms—industry, company, role, and individual (page 110). How well does your current sales approach resonate at each of these levels? What can improve?
- Equipping managers and sales people with cheat sheets of customer role-specific goals and concerns can be helpful (page 114). What would you expect to see in a similar tool for your organization?



Taking Control of The Sale

A Challenger's assertiveness takes two forms. First, Challengers are able to assert control over the discussion of pricing and money more generally—pushing for agreement on value, rather than price. Second, Challengers are also able to challenge customer's thinking and pressure the customer's decision-making cycle—both to reach a decision more quickly as well as to overcome that “indecision inertia” that can cause deals to stall indefinitely.

- What approaches have you found most useful to shift the discussion from price to value?
- How comfortable do you feel discussing pricing, terms and conditions with customers? Do you feel more comfortable discussing these financial elements early or late in the sale?
- When “taking control of the sale” describe how you think about the balance between being assertive, versus being overly passive or overly aggressive with customers. Can you provide examples when you felt you struck the right balance here?
- What approaches do you use to ensure next steps with customers at the end of each meeting? What specific customer reactions tell you that you're building momentum and moving forward with each customer interaction?
- Refer to the anatomy of a successful negotiation (page 135). Can you recall past sales interactions where you did something similar?

The Role of Front Line Managers

The front line manager in any sales organization is the fundamental link between strategy and execution. You cannot expect to successfully build a Challenger sales organization if your front line sales management is not fully onboard or struggles to provide the right level of support to drive Challenger behaviors. World-class managers today are defined not just by their ability to coach to the “known,” but by their ability to innovate around “unknown obstacles.”

- Good coaching embodies more “ask” than “tell.” Think about the most productive coaches or coaching interactions you've had. What made those memorable and what did you learn?
- Do you get enough coaching? Would you say there is a culture of coaching in your organization?
- Can you recall instances where your manager helped you creatively progress a deal? What was the situation and how did they collaborate with you?
- Refer to the three components of sales innovation (page 159). How frequently do sales managers exhibit these sales innovation behaviors in your organization?
- How do you believe your managers can better help you challenge customers?

