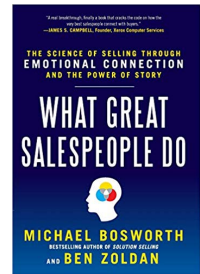


What Great Salespeople Do

Michael Bosworth (2012)



Notes by Bob Evely
Wilmore, Kentucky; 2019.

Selling isn't about solving problems or providing solutions. Selling is *influencing change*; influencing people to change. It's based on an understanding of how we decide to trust some people and not others; how we decide to take a leap of faith and try something new; how we decide to buy or not to buy. (p. xv)

Stories

As John was telling his story, the feeling in the room immediately began to change. The CIO began to relax. He uncrossed his arms. He set aside his BlackBerry, which had been consuming his attention. He leaned toward John. John ended his story with, "What I learned from that experience was ..." The story lasted no more than three minutes.

After a few seconds the once-tense CIO replied, "You know, John, I was a client of MCI at the same time and here is what I went through." And he launched into a related story about a similar experience. And John listened – really listened.

When the CIO was done with his story the room got quiet again. Then John started another story, but this one was more personal. It included his kids and was only marginally relevant to the conversation. The CIO then offered a story about *his* kids. This went on for another 30 minutes.

About 45 minutes into the meeting the CIO said, "Here's the thing, John. We're on three continents. Can you support us on all three continents?"

John gave the question some thought and said, "I have no idea. We've never done this before. But I am in this together with you." After a short silence the CIO turned to his two IT directors and asked, "Okay; what do we need to do to get started?"

John was vulnerable. All of his stories included some admission of his own mistakes. He had a point in every story he told, and he was patient and demonstrated empathic listening. He seemed to really care. He never asked a single question. Yet he was able to get the guarded, arms-crossed CIO to completely open up and reveal himself. Others said about John, "He just puts people at ease." (p. 3-5)

How the brain works

Move away from a logic-centered model and begin to focus on emotional intelligence and the power of connection. The answers lay in the neurosciences and psychology. We are learning about the brain and the mind – how it works. (p. 9)

Decision making is not about problem solving

Attempting to solve a buyer's problem isn't the full story. In fact, it's only a small part of the story. Decision making is not the problem-solving process, so neither should be the business of selling. (p. 30)

Lesson from a hostage negotiator

The first order of business was to establish an emotional connection – to convince Robert that he was on Robert's side – to get him to think, "This guy is like me."

"I can't imagine what you're going through. I've been in situations where I felt like there was no way out. I actually lost everything – my job, my home, my best friend – all at the same time."

He didn't try to convince Robert to give up. He told Robert a little about the darkest time in his life. Then he asked, “Do you want to tell me what's going on with you? It's ok if you don't, but I do want to know.” (p. 32-3)

Going first

We must show our own vulnerability as a way of getting the other party to open up and show theirs. It's the basis for trust. The thinking goes, “If they're willing to open up and be vulnerable, then they must trust me, in which case it's safe for me to open up and share something in return.”

Research shows we have an instinctive response to vulnerability – the desire to reciprocate.

Selling requires the buyer to more or less *admit* that change is necessary – to admit that everything isn't good. It's a lot easier for them to open up if we as sellers go first. (p. 33)

Being an expert

A salesperson absolutely *should* be an expert in their field. But trying to come off as an expert, presenting yourself as superhuman, is not an effective way to sell. We don't *lose* power by showing our vulnerability; we *gain* power. (p. 39)

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is important in gaining a stranger's trust. It's as true in sales as it is at PTA meetings. (p. 44)

Vulnerability is a key ingredient – perhaps *the* key ingredient – to emotional buy-in. (p. 47)

Stories with characters who lack vulnerability tend to be less compelling. They have less impact than stories in which you acknowledge that your firm made mistakes but then you made good on your promises. (p. 79)

No one connects with perfection. Portray yourself as human, vulnerable, and flawed like the rest of us. (p. 80)

The importance of stories

We make sense of the events of our lives through stories. (p. 49)

When approached by a salesperson (or anyone trying to influence us) our natural defense is to reply, “No thanks, I'm just looking.” (p. 50)

The moment Mark began telling a story, everyone in the room, without exception, turned their attention to him. It's not so much the *point* of his story, but the *effect* of it. Our minds are wired to respond to a story. (p. 53)

People are thinking, “Oh, it's just a story. I don't have to *do* anything or *decide* anything. I can just listen and enjoy.” We relax, focus, and pay attention. Stories feel good. We are inclined to feel engaged. (p. 54)

How decisions are made

We make decisions based on feelings, and then we use logic after the fact to justify our decisions. (p. 55)

How stories work

As a story proceeds, the teller gets caught up in the story, reliving or at least reflecting on what is happening in it. At this stage the listener begins to feel more connected with the teller, because the teller is no longer in opposition or competition, but is instead involved in the story.

The listener becomes involved in the story. As the story proceeds the listener begins to relive or reflect on what is happening in the story. The listener and teller begin to *share* the experience.

As the story becomes more compelling, the listener and teller become *part* of the story and therefore more closely connected. (p. 61)

Building a story

A story begins with balance, then something throws life out of balance, then the story goes on to describe how balance is restored. (p. 65)

Change is at the heart of story. Change is slow. We resist it. It's part of human nature. Most of us change only when we feel we have to. (p. 66)

Selling requires people – our customers – to change; to overcome their fear of the unknown. As salespeople, then, it's important that we understand how change occurs in order to influence others. (p. 67)

Stories paint a picture in our imagination. We smell what the storytelling wants us to smell, taste what they want us to taste, see what they want us to see. Good stories are full of color, dialogue, suspense, and emotions. (p. 68)

Start with the point of the story

As sellers, we should organize the ideas we want to communicate to buyers from the inside out. Before you build a story, what is the *why* of the story? What is the *point* of the story? Once you know the point you're trying to make, you can build a story that makes the point. (p. 70-71)

Know the point of your story – and then the resolution – and then the beginning. Then it's just a matter of figuring out the complications and the turning point. (p. 99)

The particular story you choose to tell about your company will depend on the *point* you're trying to make. (p. 106)

The setting

The setting is the beginning of the story – the time, location, and any relevant context or conditions. It also provides the introduction to the characters. We're setting up the journey; how it begins. (p. 71)

Providing context is important, but be careful not to overdo or it can bog down the story. (p. 78)

The complication

The complication encompasses most of the events of the story, and how these events complicate the lives of the characters as they face challenges and conflict.

Often a character's vulnerability involves shame. If you're telling a story about yourself, owning up to your shame takes a lot of courage. But it's worth it. When you reveal your shame, the listener will connect with your human imperfection. (p. 72)

The turning point

The turning point is the emotional peak of the story, where the character has an aha moment, a change in perspective, or a change in direction. (p. 72)

The resolution

This is the final outcome of the story – how the complication was addressed. (p. 72)

Emotional impact

A successful story needs a plot that shows change, but it also needs something else; emotional impact. Stories that are too factual lack emotion and therefore lack the power to influence change. Stories that are *too* emotional lack coherence and don't make sense. (p. 73)

Tell stories that move the heart, not just the head. There is a direct correlation between emotional intensity and memory – experiences that really make us feel good, or experiences that really hurt us. (p. 82)

Stories entail two levels of narrative: (1) the external narrative of a sequence of events which involves left-brain processing, and (2) the internal mental and emotional narrative of the characters which involves right brain processing. Put some energy into developing the emotional life of your characters. (p. 83)

The emotional journey within a story is what *delivers* the point – what will make the listener remember your story – and what gives it impact. (p. 84)

Selling

Selling is about influencing people to change; to believe what you believe. (p. 87)

The process begins by considering your customer's buy cycle. (p. 90)

Stories are not just useful as a starter

I thought a story was merely a starter; a way to get someone to open up. How much more successful I would have been if I'd used stories throughout the entire sales cycle. (p. 91)

What are the steps, or gates, your buyer must go through that lead to a buy decision? (p. 92)

As the buy cycle progresses the risk of change becomes increasingly significant in the mind of the buyer. (p. 93)

Each rung [on the buy cycle “ladder”] represents a belief or idea your buyer must arrive at before proceeding up the ladder to the next rung in his or her buy cycle. You will need to build an inventory of stories that help you deliver each of the points you want to make – points that correspond to each rung in your customer's buy cycle. The stories will help your buyer open up and talk about those points. (p. 96)

The very act of saying yes – of saying “I trust you, I like you, I'm going to take a leap of faith and do business with you” – is a right-brain activity. Buyers don't necessarily make logical decisions. More likely they make an emotional decision to say yes to the vendor they trust – the one with whom they have formed the strongest emotional connection – and then they justify that decision with logic after the fact. The first question buyers ask themselves is, “Do I *trust* this person, or are they just like every other salesperson?” (p 96-7)

Prospecting

The key to success in prospecting lies in piquing the prospect's *curiosity*. But we have to be quick. We have only a brief window of opportunity – 10 to 20 seconds – before a prospect says “tell me more” or “not interested.”

Start with the “why” of your story – maybe about another senior executive that believed in affecting real change; creating a real transformation throughout their organization.

If you lead with the resolution (“I helped Phil increase revenue by 30%”) you will sound like every other salesperson. (p. 112-113)

The language of emotions

It’s not just *what* you say, but *how* you say it. In fact, it’s *mostly* how you say it. (p. 116)

Consider the persuasive implications of nonverbal cues. Emotions such as boredom, excitement, fear, and arousal are readily conveyed by our facial expressions. (p. 117)

Emotion is contagious. We need to communicate our emotions through our body language as well as our words. (p. 119)

Make the other person feel like they’re the only person in the room. (p. 123)

Make your language more vivid and full of emotion by using figures of speech such as metaphors, allegories, parables, and similes. You might describe a deadline as a noose around your neck, a dark cloud, a black hole, or the edge of a cliff. The power of metaphor lies in its ability to create a visual image in the listener’s mind. (p. 124-5)

Getting the conversation started

There will be situations where you can just launch right into a story as a part of the natural flow of conversation. “Hey guys, that reminds me of a time when I was at MCI ...”

In other situations, you might need to shift conversational gears to start your story. “Can I tell you a story?” “Mind if I share a story about another CIO?” “Can I tell you a story about a client of mine who was facing similar challenges?” (p. 125)

How long should a story be?

Your story must be long enough – developed enough – to effectively make its point. But you don’t want it to be so long that the listener begins to feel bored or impatient.

It’s a good idea to have a mix of shorter and longer stories in your repertoire – 30 seconds, 3 minutes, 10 minutes. In our experience a story for a first sales call should take no more than 3 minutes to deliver effectively. (p. 127)

Passing the torch

One of the goals of telling stories in sales situations is to get the buyer to open up and share stories in return. So when you’re done with your story, remember to pass the torch.

A moment of silence after a story creates a natural opening. But sometimes you’ll need to be more proactive. “Enough about me; how about you?” “So that’s how it went with the other CIO; what’s *your* story?” (p. 128)

Story tending

Rather than being narrowly focused on extracting a buyer’s problems or pains, a seller who *tends* a buyer expresses genuine caring and curiosity about the buyer’s whole story: where they were, where they are now, how they feel, what they’d like to be in the future, and why? (p. 129)

Instead of trying to persuade the buyer that he could solve their problems, Adam used a story about someone else who took a leap of faith and tried a new way. “Anyhow – your situation just reminded me of theirs.” (p. 132)

Empathic listening

Empathic listening involves support, encouragement, sincere curiosity, patience, and caring.

Listening inhibitors include rehearsing what you’re going to say next, judging the speaker or their statements, placating the speaker, sparring with the speaker, mind reading, daydreaming, advising the speaker, derailing the conversation, and insisting on being right. (p. 136-7)

Premature elaboration

Instead of saying, "I have exactly the product to meet your needs," considering saying, "I'm not sure if I can help you or not. Let me summarize what I know so far." In this way, the seller receives validation from the buyer that they "got" the buyer's problem. Instead of cramming a solution down the buyer's throat, the seller might then say, "I'm going to share your situation with our experts at the office and get back to you."

Newer salespeople that *lack* expertise often make better sales calls than the impatient experts. (p. 144)

Instead of listening with the intent to find a "pain" or problem that we can address, listen with the intent to understand – to understand their ideas and feelings, their point of view, and where they're coming from. (p. 148)

Sincere curiosity

Questions should be used with sincere curiosity, to sincerely understand the buyer's story. They can't be scripted ahead of time. (p. 147)

Provide encouragement as you listen

Nonverbal questions: "Hmmm," facial expressions, steady eye contact. Leaning in toward the speaker expresses "tell me more." Pauses create an opening for the speaker to continue a train of thought or create a new one.

Verbal questions can also communicate interest and engagement. "Then what?" "Why?" "I don't get what you mean by xyz. Can you help me understand it better?" "Can you go back to xyz?" (p. 161)

Reflection

"Let me put this all together. It sounded like you said ..."

"Let me see if I got you right. You said ..."

With reflection you articulate how you personally connected with their story.

"That makes sense to me because ..."

"I think I understand how you feel because ..."

"I imagine you must have felt ..." (p. 163-4)

But what about the buyer's challenges?

What about the buyer's challenges, pains, and issues? Don't we need to know about those too? When you get a buyer's whole story, you're guaranteed to get all of their challenges; plus a lot more. (p. 165)

"I think we might be able to help, Gary, but I also think I'd understand where you're coming from better if you told me your whole story." (p. 167)

Consider the "tribe"

Even if you succeed in making contact at the C level, the executive won't necessarily see a need for change unless those around them seek to change the status quo. So don't get focused *solely* on access to the person with the budget. Ask yourself, "Are they in the tribe? Are they a tribal leader?"

Think of yourself as a "story leader" who focuses on starting a grassroots internal movement by getting a tribal leader and their tribe of similarly minded people excited about a new idea, belief, or message. (p. 178)

Coaching

Phil Jackson: “I think the most important thing about coaching is that you have to have a great sense of confidence about what you’re doing. You have to be a salesman, and you have to get your players, particularly your leaders, to believe in what you’re trying to accomplish.” (p. 187)

Jackson got to know his players – where they were coming from and what made them tick. The following year, with no major roster changes, the Bulls won the NBA championship. How did Jackson do it? “He spent time with his players,” said Steve Kerr. “He connected with them, sold them on his concept, stuck up for them when they needed him.” (p. 203-4)

To get my reps to really open up and let me in, I need to go first and let them into my life. (p. 207)

In conclusion ...

On your next sales call, try everything you’ve learned. Start with, “Can I tell you a story?” End by passing the torch. And play back what the prospect tells you – tend their story. (p. 211)

Build your “Who I Am” story, chronicling your professional journey.

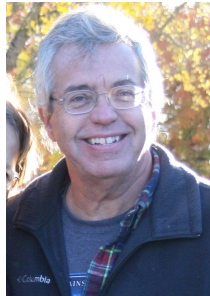
Build your “Who I Represent” story – the company’s story.

Build your “Who I’ve Helped” story.

Tend to a personal story – “Enough about my day; how was yours?”

“What I’d like to do today is share my story with you; and hear yours. Then we can ask each other questions and see if there’s a mutual opportunity.” (p. 221-5)

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