The Evolution of TRUST

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

People buy from folks they know and trust. My father shared this simple philosophy with me more than 50 years ago. He understood that selling was about relationships, and that those relationships evolve over time.

Numerous books tout the importance of trust within the buying/selling relationship, but I have yet to find one that aligns the sales process with the evolution of trust. Before I explain how the evolution of trust is directly aligned to the sales process, however, let's take a few moments to gain clarity around three terms: *trust*, *sales process*, and *alignment*.

First, what is trust? According to *Webster's 7th New Collegiate Dictionary*, the term is presumed to be Scandinavian, deriving from the Old Norse word "traust" and referring to being faithful, as in "true to your words or actions." The word trust actually begins with the observance of actions and later transitions into a belief or thought.

Second, for additional clarity, how do we define the term "sales process"? Many organizations have a sales process; likewise, some training and consulting firms advocate a particular sales process. Regardless of their source, the majority of sales processes consist of two phases.

Marketing is the first phase. Its purpose is to attract attention and begin to build a relationship. The goal of marketing is twofold: make a friend and take action depending upon the situation. In consultative selling, the action is to secure the next appointment, as only 2 percent of sales are made on the first sales call. In the B2C world, having the potential customer walk through your bricks-and-mortar store is the desired action. Of course, with the Internet and the increase in mobile buying, a visit to your website—and, better yet, signing up to one of your lists—would be great also.

In marketing, most behaviors are action focused; they involve "doing." For example, there is the smile with the firm handshake. And, too, communication involves active listening, along with asking a few open-ended questions.

You, as the salesperson, may also make a commitment to follow up with some additional information. And let us not forget the all-important (and too often ignored) handwritten thank-you note!

In the second phase, the selling phase, the goal is simply to earn the sale. Four basic sequential steps are involved:

- Uncover wants and needs
- Present the whys and why nots
- Earn the sale
- Deliver the sale

Within this second phase of the sales process, the behaviors are a combination of doing and thinking. For example, you may engage in extensive research regarding the qualified customer, as well as market and industry trends. Then, during your meeting, you may ask relevant open-ended questions based upon your synthesis of that information.

When a stall is raised, your goal is to understand how to turn that stall into a solid objection. Here, your leadership talents of flexibility, gaining commitment, and persuading others all come together.

The problem within the selling phase is follow-up. Sometimes mention is made of follow-up, but because follow-up is on the down side of selling after delivering the sale, it becomes secondary to the emotional desire to find that next new sale.

For me, a sustainable sales process must have a third phase: keeping. Actions within this keeping phase focus far more on thinking—specifically, about how to secure these two desired end results: Maintain client or customer loyalty, and secure those golden referrals from existing loyal customers

The purpose of the keeping phase is to demonstrate your value to the client. Thinking is crucial within this phase, more than any other, because the cost to secure a new client ranges from five to ten times the cost of keeping an existing one.

Finally, the word "alignment" requires clarification because of its popularity in business. Many employ this word without truly understanding alignment's impact.

True alignment in sales and business goes beyond the basic concept of bringing something into line. When marketing, selling, and keeping actions are aligned, the image is more akin to the multiple gears of a fine old watch working in synchronous harmony to keep perfect time, yielding the desired result.

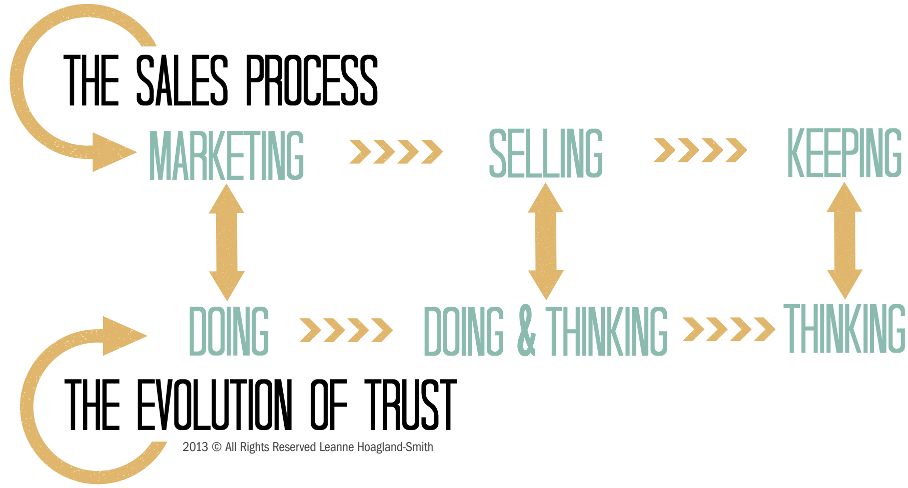
When the evolution of trust is aligned with the sales process, it becomes evident that trust develops over time and that consistently executing the sales process will expedite the development of trust.

Everyone is in sales in some capacity or another. Fortunately, intentional actions (behaviors) exist that are directed toward the evolution of trust—and that work with the sales process.

Understanding this alignment is essential to minimize failed sales performance. When salespeople fail to increase sales, many times it is because they have violated the sales process and possibly also violated the evolution of trust.

How? These individuals started selling before the marketing phase was completed. A relationship lacking solidity yields no basis for trust. Yet few sales manuals connect this important phase of marketing to the foundational establishment of trust.

For example, Ford Motor Company hired Mike Rowe as a marketing spokesperson. His persona was one of performing hard work from his *Dirty Jobs* series. People naturally gravitated to him because they knew him and had already begun to trust him through his hard work on the TV show. Ford was able to transfer this trust in Rowe to their truck line because trucks are all about hard work.



Then there was Buick, which hired Tiger Woods before Woods' downfall. Even though Buick spent millions of dollars to convince new, younger customers to buy a Buick, the buyer demographics—and consequently the company's sales—did not change. The younger demographic knew Tiger, but they did not trust Tiger when it came to buying a car.

If you are in sales, you must ask yourself these "trust doing" questions:

- Am I engaging in marketing actions that are focused on attracting positive attention?
- Are my marketing actions reflective of my ethics and positive core values?
- Did I take action on all of my promises?

Respective to the selling phase of the sales process, there are also some "trust doing/thinking" questions you may wish to consider:

Am I focused on what the potential customer truly wants or needs?

Have I invested time and action to thoroughly understand the potential customer's situation?

Have I considered all possible stall and objection scenarios so that I am prepared for their emergence?

In the keeping phase of the sales process, there is essentially only one "trust thinking" question:

Are my interactions with this existing customer forward thinking in that I am thinking about my client's long-term sustainable success?

TRUST EVOLVES OVER TIME, AS DOES SALES SUCCESS.

As noted earlier, only 2 percent of all sales are made on the first sales call or contact. This rare event happens because, somewhere in that meeting, enough trust was established from the buyer's perspective to yield a favorable buying decision. For example, buying a low-cost item does not necessarily require a large amount of trust.

Research from the National Sales Executive Association further solidifies the alignment of trust evolution with sales success: only 10 percent of salespeople make more than three contacts, and 90 percent of all sales are made between the fourth and twelfth contacts.

Of course, given that 48 percent of salespeople never follow up on sales leads, a lot of opportunity exists out there for those in sales to get to know potential customers and begin to build trust.

With the year swiftly coming to a close, now is the time to start attracting attention and building relationships with potential customers. Depending upon your sales cycle time, you may just begin filling your sales funnel for the first quarter of 2014.

Remember, people buy from people they know and trust. You have the power in your hands and your brain to leverage that simple buying rule through the alignment of your sales process to the evolution of trust. **N**

Leanne Hoagland-Smith is the heurist for the next generation of talent management. Her ability to guide forward-thinking leaders in all industries facing new and repetitive problems, from people to operations, earned her inclusion in the 2013 Top 25 Sales Influencers by Open View Labs. Leanne looks forward to hearing from you at leanne@processspecialist.com.