

## Following a Process: The Best Way to Sell

*By Tom Sant*

John Henry Patterson had a problem. Bored with running a coal business, he and his brother Frank bought a small company—the National Manufacturing Company located in their hometown of Dayton, Ohio. But he found that selling the company's product was almost impossible. The product was technically complex, very expensive, and apparently unnecessary. It was—and you probably already know this—the cash register.

After two years of struggling, Patterson invited his brother-in-law, Joseph Crane, to join the company as a sales agent. Crane quickly became National Cash Register's biggest producer. When Patterson asked how he was doing it, Crane admitted, somewhat sheepishly, that he did the same thing every time he presented the machine to a customer.

Immediately, Patterson had Crane's presentation typed up and sent to every sales agent in the field. The company's sales soared. And Crane's approach became the most influential sales method in the world because Patterson's vice president of sales, Thomas Watson, became the head of IBM, where he duplicated all of Patterson's methods, including the sales process. By promulgating Crane's method as the standard at NCR, Patterson set the standard for success in selling high technology products.

What made Crane's approach so powerful? It focused entirely on the customer's needs rather than on the company's product. And it delivered the right information at the right time to match the way a customer typically thinks as he or she is making a buying decision. As a result, the presentation seems "logical." It seems to "make sense," unlike sales presentations that start out focused on the product or the vendor's history.

Crane's method involves four steps in the process—steps that are just as effective today as they were a hundred years ago. Here they are:

### **First: identify the customer's problems.**

Where are they losing money? What goals are they failing to achieve? What gaps in their current capabilities are keeping them from being successful? Patterson constantly told his sales reps, "Never talk cash register when you first meet customers. Talk about their problems. There is nothing in which customers are so interested as their own business." That's still great advice.

### **Second: develop a specific value proposition.**

Identify the specific areas where losses are occurring and quantify them. Summarize the losses and show the potential for increased profitability in concrete dollars and cents. The more you know about the customer's business in detail, the more convincing your value proposition will be. Don't offer marketing fluff ("world class," "best of breed") instead of real value, or argue for a value proposition ("Improved quality!") that the customer doesn't care about.

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**Third: demonstrate the solution.**

Summarize the customer's problems and the potential for increasing profits. Then show how the solution works, not in terms of its technical functions, but in terms of its business impact. Functions are relevant only in terms of the value they deliver. Technology for its own sake is not part of the selling message. Link the solution back to the problem and the payoff.

**Fourth: ask for the order.**

Assume that an intelligent business person will want to buy. If the customer has objections, answer them and close again.

And that's it! Research into the psychology of decision making has proved that these four points match the way people think when they are making a decision. That's why starting off with your company's history is the kiss of sales death. That's why failing to offer a value proposition leaves the customer interested but unmotivated. Patterson didn't know that there was a basic for his brother-in-law's method in cognitive psychology of course. All he knew was that it worked! And it'll work for you, too.

**About the Author**

*Dr. Tom Sant is the author of critically-acclaimed Persuasive Business Proposals, which is required reading for top sales forces around the world. The Sant Corporation is the leading provider of enterprise-strength tools for automatically generating client-focused proposals, RFP responses, presentations, and related documents. Businesses trust Sant to improve sales productivity, increase sales, and deliver accurate, consistent documents to their customers. Visit them online at [www.santcorp.com](http://www.santcorp.com) or call 888-448-7268.*

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