



How to double or triple your sales in the next nine months:

The Seven Contrarian Sales Secrets

By Sean Stormes | The Third Door™

Thank you for choosing to do business with us. Please understand that this is a journey, not a destination; a progression, not a stand-alone business brief; an education, not just words on a page. You've made a conscious decision – a commitment – to Join The Revenution™, and we welcome you into this most important movement (a community, actually) of like-minded individuals.

First, allow me to appeal to your sense of logic by posing a few questions to you:

- Would you get better seats to an event if you were first in line to purchase them?
- Would the doorman at a popular club allow you entrance if he knew you and held you in high regard?
- What kind of demand would you create by handing out \$100 bills on a street corner?

What can we learn from each of these examples? What is it that allows success to occur, for people to get what they want, and drive profitable opportunities to us – versus us having to go find them?

As a former leader of several sales organizations, I was often disappointed in having to take my Sales Managers and salespeople through formal sales training delivered by one of the national firms (seven times, if you're counting). It was disappointing because each of us knew intuitively that attempting to manipulate others – with highly selfish motives (“Close that sale!”) – just didn't feel right. In fact, it made us feel dirty; unethical. Yet these firms make billions of dollars each year because the unsuspecting sales community is desperate for revenue, and they're not aware of higher ROI alternatives. Until now, that is.

Throughout my 27-year sales and executive sales management career, I learned that there were more important factors – far more effective components – to driving profitable revenue growth. In fact, I've led sales organizations where we spent less than 10% on formal sales technique and still dominated our respective territory or customer segment.

Achieving enviable revenue growth begins with the understanding that it is a living, breathing ecosystem, and that success cannot occur by delegating the responsibility for it to a group of people who are most often not positioned to win (the sales team). Revenue growth is *everyone's* responsibility, starting with top management.

Additionally, as I've learned from assisting hundreds of clients, it's the front-end positioning that allows you to successfully un-even the competitive playing field ... not sales training. The foundation is what allows success, not ineffective training of ill-prepared newbies. But here's the good news: the foundation takes time, skill, effort, and discipline to build, and not many companies possess the knowledge of how to do it well, nor will they take the time.

That spells O-P-P-O-R-T-U-N-I-T-Y for you!

In closing, please consider the well-known fairy tale of The Three Little pigs. A wolf (your competition) is hungry and on the prowl for a tasty pork meal (your existing business). To withstand the wolf's advances, the first little pig builds a house of straw, and is soon gobbled up by the wolf (no competitive moat around his economic castle). The second little pig builds a house made of sticks, and soon meets the same fate as the first pig (still no competitive advantage). The third little pig – clearly a Third Door™ oinker, builds a house made of brick, thwarting the wolf. The wolf eventually slides down the chimney in his quest for dinner, only to fall into a pot of boiling water – becoming a wolf meal for the intelligent pig.

The moral of the story is evident: build a sturdy, sustainable house if you want to consistently fend off attacks from interlopers with selfish intentions. So, what's preventing the competition from eating you? Is your house made from straw, or from brick?

With a wink and knowing nod to that R&B juggernaut from the '70s – The Commodores – let's help you build a brick house. Just remember: I'm not here to tell you what you want to hear. I'm here to tell you what you *need* to hear. So put your seat belt on, and let's get moving.

We have work to do.

1. The Twin Pillars of any successful, profitable revenue growth initiative

I challenge you to name a winner of a sporting event, war, or business category that did not possess the following two characteristics:

- Outstanding leadership
- Real competitive advantage

The Chicago Bulls winning six NBA championships? Phil Jackson and Michael Jordan. The United States liberating Europe during World War II? General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the most elite armed forces, and ultimately – the atomic bomb. Zappos, the online shoe empire? Tony Hsieh and an unparalleled commitment to customer service.

The examples are endless, and omnipresent. *Nothing* great happens in business without these two critical factors present.

When I was a District Sales Manager at Grainger, Inc., I took over a team that was ranked #84 the previous year out of 104 districts. The first year I led that team, we finished #14 in the country – a *70 place improvement*. How? Because we had better salespeople than the other teams? Not exactly. While we were very good, we weren't great – including me. But we had something the other teams did not. A real competitive advantage.

The company was just beginning to roll out its electronic ordering system – so that customers could bypass the current process of having to call us directly. I asked headquarters if we could be in the first group to be trained on this industry-first system, and they agreed. Then, I enlisted the help of our regional support. In the end, we had a group of e-ordering ninjas! In fact, one of our salespeople finished third in the country in e-sales that year ... out of over 1,200 salespeople. Not too shabby.

We became known as the “tech-team,” the district who watched sales ring up over the weekend while we were asleep. Sales training? Not a chance. Competitive advantage training? Absolutely. Our competition couldn't claim it, so we had an un-even playing field.

Which brings us to the issue of leadership. Most of it is bad. *Really* bad. We won't go into a leadership dissertation here, but know that the following are just some of the characteristics of Third Door™ leaders, and if your top management does not possess them, I'd eventually look for another job where it does exist because it's the only way you will win:

- **Empathy.** Do they show, by their actions and behaviors, that they care about you?
- **Humility.** Do they deflect credit and not take themselves too seriously.
- **Respect.** Do they solicit your opinion? Do they afford you courtesy and dignity, and treat you like a valued team member?
- **Creativity and Innovation.** Are these their watchwords; do they encourage it? Is it an ongoing, key component of their strategic plan? Do they hire with it in mind?

By now you might be wondering: Hey, I'm just a salesperson. How do I affect my company's leadership and competitive advantage position? Answer: you might as well ask and find out. You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

2. Escaping the paradigm that holds you prisoner in a world of sameness, and how to break free to realize the results you deserve

Could there possibly be one change you could make in your sales philosophy that could double or triple your sales conversion ratio? Could it be that simple? Well, like most things that are worthwhile, it's easy in concept, but difficult in execution. What could this critical change possibly be that can mean the difference between mediocrity – or poor performance – and wild success?

Take this advice to heart: Stop selling! That's right, stop selling *right now*. This self-centered activity is preventing you from making more money than you can possibly imagine.

Put your hand on anything close and take this oath, audibly: "I, (insert your name), will stop selling. In its place, as of this very moment, I am committing to *helping* my customers in any way I can. It's not about me; it's about them. I will, from this point forward, ask them what *they're* trying to accomplish – what their goals are ... without the thought or consideration of me making a sale. I will identify my customer's goals, metrics, and nomenclature, and how I can positively impact not only their key performance indicators, but also those of *their* customer."

See? I'll bet you feel better already. The pressure is off. Now go help somebody.

Your biggest hurdle, though, in successfully accomplishing this change, is what is mentioned in #1 above: your company's leadership, or more accurately, your boss. These are people who have been poisoned into believing that revenue growth is more about business – low ROI "activities" – than a mindset and positioning that takes time to build and subsequently employ and leverage to your (and your company's) advantage. File this under typical American management, meaning short term thinking. It is a practice that has destroyed hundreds of companies every single day for the last 35 years.

Try and see this from the customer's perspective – like you should all sales and marketing-related activities. What would make you feel warm and fuzzy, someone clamoring to get an appointment with commission breath hanging thick in the air, or someone who approaches you with genuine motives, like trying to help you advance your strategy?

Of all of the Third Door™ concepts you could adapt and implement, this is the one to latch onto. It could permeate your entire company, casting a wide, positive net over all activities, and in itself could become a real competitive advantage.

3. Power positioning that drives profitable leads: Establishing credibility, confidence, and trust – the Holy Trinity of Third Door™ selling – *before the first meeting*

It's your first day on the job, and you're beyond excited. You're ready to show the boss – and your peers, that a great decision was made in hiring you. With adrenaline coursing through your veins, you meet with your boss to download the master plan that will allow you to obliterate your sales goals.

She hands you below average business cards, some self-centered marketing collateral highlighting your company's featured products, and a territory that resembles – at first glance – a vineyard the day after harvest. You think, "Geez, how am I going to succeed with this stuff?" Suddenly the grass doesn't seem so green, and you wonder if your old position is still available.

After a few weeks, the nightmare comes fully into neon focus, and you resign yourself to the fact that if you're going to win, it will have to occur via good old grit and determination. In the back of your mind, though, a voice proclaims: "*There must be a better way.*"

Most salespeople believe that the Holy Trinity happens over time, and that it's all about "relationship." Don't you dare believe that garbage! There are companies who have lost fortunes during hard economic times – and good times, too – because they believed the strength of their customer relationships would sustain them. Look, possessing meaningful customer relationships are awesome, I'm just saying to not depend on them long term – and as the cornerstone of your revenue growth agenda.

To be clear: customer relationships are only as strong as the amount of discount (lower price) your customer leaves you for. That is a proven, direct correlation. Why is this true? Because 99.9% of companies possess little or no competitive advantage, and as a result exist in a world of epidemic sameness. What they have is generic hyperbole blather, a belief in a phantom value proposition (that everyone else has, and that they're actually marketing, making matters worse), and – oh yes – the aforementioned perceived "rock-solid relationships."

Here is an indisputable fact: Experts attract business like cheese brings mice at top speed. So the question before you is: What are you doing to be perceived as *the* expert in your marketplace? If you achieve that position in your prospect's and customer's minds, you'll need industrial-strength wheelbarrows to tote all of the cash you'll make to the bank.

There's more to consider. There is so much competition in the marketplace that businesses are flooded with far more sales requests than ever before. Additionally, many of these requests are of the unprofessional variety, so skilled salespeople are already at a disadvantage. Customers have become immune. Before taking your call, decision makers want to know who you are, what you do, and specifically what's in it for them.

Tough task.

Additionally, as we know, it costs five to seven times more money to attract a new customer than to farm (penetrate deeper and wider) an existing one. From a pure ROI perspective, cold

calling just doesn't pay.

Cold calling is representative of a company's ineffective, or non-existent marketing effort. The purpose of marketing is to drive qualified leads for salespeople to close. If salespeople have to find their own leads – i.e. cold call – then here's what they're *not* doing: closing sales. And bound by time constraints, one person can only make so many calls per day, not to mention the demoralizing effect all of that rejection may bring.

Why not do something that doesn't limit the amount of new prospects you can reach, and is a more positive experience for all parties involved? Studies show that only 3% of cold calls ever result in a sale. How does that sound to you and your available time? We should want our skilled salespeople spending 90% or more of their time face-to-face with qualified prospects who want to buy. This, of course, is the one activity that is most directly related to growing revenue.

To win in sales, you must operate from a position of credibility and power. Cold calling defeats that position. The old adage of “who you know” is now passé – and has been for a decade or more. More importantly, it is now “who knows you” that drives a never-ending supply of opportunity. How do you accomplish that?

Permission and education-based marketing is the answer. It's all about brand development; if not your company, than you. Companies want to grant you permission to speak with them, so figure out how to accomplish that. People buy from those they like, and as importantly (if not more), from those they *trust*. And trust is earned.

To get you started, here are the five most proven alternatives to cold calling in use today that can help you create expertise – displaying meaningful customer value in a highly empathetic way – and position you in such a way to create demand. This positioning results in you having the leverage when you meet with the prospect, which is exactly where you want to be. THIS is what allows you to Sell From a Position of Power.

- i. **Create real Competitive Advantage.** There's a reason why Warren Buffet only invests in companies who've built sustainable, competitive moats around their respective economic castles. While there is architecture to help you accomplish this leading, market distinction strategy – our workshop is two days long – simply start by answering questions like: “Why should someone buy from us?” and “The difference between our company and our competitors is a near fanatical devotion to _____.”
- ii. **Achieve expert status.** You can bet that your prospect is Googling you. What do they see? Does your website, blog, and e-newsletter all seek to educate for the purpose of truly helping your customers become more profitable? If no, why not? Education-based marketing is one of the most effective, lead-generating strategies around. What's your “lead magnet,” the information you're sharing that's so beneficial, remarkable, and memorable that people *call you*? And when they call you, you then have all the power in the selling relationship because you're the perceived authority. Now you can more easily

perform consultative selling, where you provide solutions to their problems and they take your advice because you are viewed as a trusted advisor versus a bothersome salesperson like everyone else. Welcome to true differentiation.

- iii. **Speak Publicly.** Why? Because you must be perceived as an absolute expert that can help your prospects and demand a premium in doing so. Where? Try professional organizations, networking groups, industry meetings, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, and Chambers of Commerce. Take a look at your local Business Journal's annual *Book of Lists*. It's all there. It's easier than you think. Just call the program director and ask politely, ensuring you have something of benefit for their group. As in sales, it's not about you. It's about them. Not comfortable speaking in public? You could always cold call.
- iv. **Get into print.** Can't write creatively? Then learn how – it's not as hard as you think. Besides, is it worth a 30% pay raise? Or, if you have a little money – less than you would think – have someone else with these skills write articles for you (try e-lance.com, for example). Whether it's industry magazines, a customer's monthly newsletter, something for a vendor, the local paper, a church bulletin, once you've had something published, make copies of it available to prospects, or simply send it to them.
- v. **Leverage Social Media.** When turbo charging your network, think in terms of LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, just to name a few. Remember, the goal is achieve a position of people knowing who you are, the "expert," though you may not know them. How better to do this than creating a strong, online personal brand? Share relative and timely topics with your target audience. Whenever you send an email, be sure to let people know that you exist in these spaces, and that you're there to help (not sell).

Here's how it typically works in the new paradigm, and compare it to your current process:

- "Good Morning, Miss Jones. Thank you for asking to see me. What is it I can help you with today?" (or) "From the information I sent, where would you like to start?"

You can count on this: That is exactly how it works when someone summons you to their office, versus you begging for an appointment. Make sense?

4. Creating community: How to identify your ideal customer, and why it is critically important to your survival

The old saying “Practice makes perfect” is dead wrong. The correct version is “Practicing *the right things* makes perfect.” Additionally, consider “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” That exhortation has virtually ruined American business (the correct saying is “If it ain’t broke, continuously improve it!” Thank you, Dr. Deming).

Similarly, revenue growth is NOT the goal. *Profitable* revenue growth is the goal. How are you ensuring that your customers are good business for you? Remember, a profitable customer can be defined many ways, including their willingness to pay a premium in return for a strong ROI, and referring other profitable customers to you – an often overlooked benefit.

Yet so many firms, in their blind hunger to add to the top line, accept any and all customers without first vetting them properly. Who wants (or needs) whiny, needy, and difficult customers – as long as you’re delivering on your value promise and making it easy for them to do business with you? If you have these customers, first try to fix them. The churn tugs on your bottom line. If that fails, fire them. Fast. You don’t need that type of profitability siphon.

By now you know that trying to be all things to all people is a futile – and foolish – endeavor. Rather, put your stake in the ground – know who you are and therefore what you offer – and your ideal customer will find you. If you don’t stand for something, you stand for nothing. How can profitable customers find you if they don’t know what you stand for?

If everyone in your company were asked to provide a profile of your ideal customer, would all of the answers be the same? Not sure? Try it. It’s an eye-opening experience. Not to frighten you, but if they all can’t provide the description you would, your profitability is most likely taking an unnecessary hit.

Additionally, if your colleagues know *exactly* what type of account you seek – and why – they’re most likely to deliver accurate referrals.

Hint: if you can solve their biggest problem, they’re probably an ideal client.

When you perform strategic sales planning, directly after determining the level of revenue you require for the specified time period, the next step must be to identify your ideal client. For example, if you possess a challenging sales goal, but your territory is made up of chumps (technical term for “customers who can’t help me reach my sales goal”), you’re doomed. I’ve seen this exact scenario play out hundreds of times. Clarify what type of customer you need to succeed (preferably ones who sell on value themselves, and therefore appreciate high value in a vendor) – and how many you need – and then just do the backwards math.

Here’s one more hint if you’re looking for the most profitable customers: seek those who charge a substantial premium in their market. They’ll be demanding of you – and more than willing to pay a premium – just as long as you’re viewed as the expert and can help them advance their strategic plan.

5. Third Door™ Collaboration: The top driver of the most profitable customer partnerships

Consider a leading manufacturer of Sarbanes-Oxley risk management software, a top tier product line aimed at the Fortune 500. Not cheap stuff, to say the least.

They became the darling of the industry by allowing something that no other competitor would dare consider: allowing customers to test – on an ongoing basis, whenever they wanted – the next generation of products being created for release. The fear from competitors was understandable – after all, couldn't customers leak proprietary information to the marketplace?

Not only did that not happen, the opposite occurred. When each new version was released, the sales conversion ratio was twice that of the industry standard, and sales rocketed skyward. Why? Because customers felt that since they helped create the new versions – helped customize and personalize the software so it would be the most beneficial to them – they were more than happy to pay a premium to get what they knew could help them win.

This is the concept of “Design Thinking” at its best. The risk was worth the reward.

What you're trying to accomplish is designing your business around your customer's strategic plan, related objectives, and tactics. Help them accomplish *that* – to advance their strategic plan – and you'll win in a big way. But once again, will your leadership allow that to happen?

What customers really want from you is to help them accomplish the following (and this is just a partial list):

- i. Reduce expenses
- ii. Improve customer satisfaction
- iii. Increase turns
- iv. Grow sales
- v. Delight their customers (their #1 goal, by the way)
- vi. Improve profitability

Let's put it this way. When you meet a prospect for the first time, do you launch into your presentation about your company's products, services, features, and benefits – like our predecessors did in the '60s? Or do you perform a deep discovery into what the customer is trying to accomplish, right down to the specifics of their strategic plan?

It's not about you. It's about them. Find out what they're trying to affect internally, and help them get it. That's what true partnership is all about, and customer's worth having are worth the time needed to devote to this arduous process.

6. Your sales process? Who cares?! It's all about the customer's *buying* process

Through Sean Stormes' nationally syndicated American Cities Business Journal column – *Beyond Competitive Advantage* – hundreds of thousands of business leaders know that he is not only a recognized thought leader on profitable revenue growth, but also a Myth Destroyer of epic proportions.

And that makes him very unpopular with sales training firms. Traditional sales training involves a strong focus on the salesperson and what he is trying to achieve: a sale. Tsk, tsk, we say. All you have to do is pick up a book by Michael Port or Jill Konrath – two of the leading sales experts in the world (to name just two) – to see that the old ways of selling (still taught by sales trainers) is obsolete ... and has been for some time now. Even Neil Rackham of *Spin Selling* fame has recounted many of his early teachings about the salesperson and their zeal – and self-centered methods – to close sales.

The customer has control, folks. They know everything about you, your company, and your products and services before you even walk in the door. That changes the sales call dynamic (and strategic sales plan) a bit, don't you think? Hint: you're not there to "sell." You're there to help the customer advance their strategic plan; to achieve their goals.

A few years ago a famous survey was taken of executives who made large purchasing decisions for their company. Their largest complaint of salespeople – 27% – was, "They don't follow my buying process."

Now you know why the disdain for professional sales training firms – especially the big boys. The sales process they teach and advocate can run from eight steps to 26 (no kidding). Additionally, just for the fun of it, these clowns – at last count – can name 73 different types of closes to use. As we're fond of saying, Fuggetaboutit.

If trust and credibility are key to making sales, why in the world would you impose your sales process on an executive who demands you follow her company's buying process? Seems like one of those self-inflicted wounds, to us.

Try this on for size: "Diana, would you please explain to me how your company's buying process works? I want to make sure I follow your rules, and make this as easy on you as possible." Test: is that selfish or empathetic? Would that make the decision-maker more likely to do business with you, or not?

7. Two Power Questions that can double sales – as long as #s 1-6 above have been executed appropriately

Salespeople – still – are under so much pressure to convert sales opportunities that they resort to behaving in counterproductive ways. Furthermore, their sales managers often demand this ridiculous behavior, further exacerbating the problem.

Newsflash: if you honestly believe that you can persuade someone to buy something that doesn't help them solve their problems, then you ought to be a millionaire already. Let us know how that's working for you, OK? Look, it's downright insulting to customers to subject them to old-time sales tactics. Those veins you see popping out of the sides of their neck? You caused them. Stop it.

We'll make this one brief. You must give the customer ownership of the buying process, not only because it's what they expect and demand, but because it helps them buy *faster*. Here are the two questions, each explained with a scenario:

- After you've performed a needs analysis – the discovery phase of determining their problems, what it's costing them, and what they're doing about it – just say, “Thank you, Phil, for taking the time to explain the situation so completely to me. I believe I understand the degree of this problem. (pause) In your words, how can I help you?”
 - There are only two ways the customer can go. Phil either says, “Hell, I don't know how you can help me. You're the expert. You tell me!” And that's exactly where you want him. Asking you for expert help. So tell him.
 - His other choice is to say, “That's a good question. Here's what I'd like to see happen.” And he tells you. Pinch yourself. Yes, this is really happening. The customer just gave you the business. Congratulations!
 - Then say, after pausing for effect ...
- “Great. What do you see as the next steps?” or “How would you like to proceed?” or “What are your thoughts about what happens next?” It's true – the customer now gave you the implementation plan, saving you the trouble. Congratulations once again.

It's empathetic. It's easy. It's low-pressure. It gives the customer control while allowing you to advance the sales call. Also, it's counterintuitive ... in a good way. It helps differentiate you in the customer's eyes. It's POLITE.

Try it, you'll like it. This is how we sell, and it works. Let us know how it goes.

Take your sales game to the next level *now!*

If you found great value in this business brief, knowing it will have (or has had) direct impact on your results, then you owe it to yourself to take the next step in The Revenution™.

For salespeople, please invest in these products so you can crush your sales numbers:

1. [“The Rock Star Salesperson: Fascinating, securing, and keeping the most desirable customers based on your ‘Memorability Quotient’”](#)
2. [“Selling From a Position of Power: Gain leverage and create demand”](#)
3. [Special Report | Q1 2011: “Striking genuine chords with your most desirable prospects and customers: An in-depth study of how progressive companies boost their bottom line”](#)
4. [The Third Door™ Pinnacle Membership: Monthly world-class consulting resources at a fraction of the normal investment.](#)

Bonus!

“One through Four salespeople, and why you want to aspire to Level Five”

“One through four salespeople are described as:

1. Customer service agents
2. Product knowledge gurus
3. Firefighters at the 11th hour (can make urgent things happen for customers by navigating the company to achieve what needs to be done)
4. Order takers

Sadly, this is what salespeople have become at most companies.

Please understand that numbers one through four above are standard expectations of any salesperson, so they're not wrong. What's needed, though, are individuals who can perform on the Fifth Level. Level Five means that they can develop business and convert opportunities at a high rate, in essence “bring rain,” or more accurately, “bring torrential downpours.”

These are the salespeople that company leaders covet. Are you positioned as a Level Five salesperson? Would you like to be? If yes, let us know. We'll take your name and let you know when we perform our next sales event in your area.

Thank you, and have a great day!

With much respect,

The Third Door™ team