



The Challenger Sale: Taking Control of the Customer Conversation

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What's the secret to sales success? If you're like most business leaders, you'd say it's fundamentally about relationships-and you'd be wrong. The best salespeople don't just build relationships with customers. They challenge them.

The need to understand what top-performing reps are doing that their average performing colleagues are not drove Matthew Dixon, Brent Adamson, and their colleagues at Corporate Executive Board to investigate the skills, behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes that matter most for high performance. And what they discovered may be the biggest shock to conventional sales wisdom in decades.

Based on an exhaustive study of thousands of sales reps across multiple industries and geographies, *The Challenger Sale* argues that classic relationship building is a losing approach, especially when it comes to selling complex, large-scale business-to-business solutions. The authors' study found 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- delivers consistently high performance.

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

The things that make Challengers unique are replicable and teachable to the average sales rep. Once you understand how to identify the Challengers in your organization, you can model their approach and embed it throughout your sales force. The authors explain how almost any average-performing rep, once equipped with the right tools, can successfully reframe customers' expectations and deliver a distinctive purchase experience that drives higher levels of customer loyalty and, ultimately, greater growth.

The Challenger Sale: Taking Control of the Customer Conversation Details

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Matthew Dixon , Brent Adamson**

From Reader Review The Challenger Sale: Taking Control of the Customer Conversation for online ebook

Tim V says

For all my complex sales friends, if you've not read it it is definitely worth it.

Rowan says

Interesting psychological profiling of various personality types and how they succeed at complex sales. The main idea is that one of the types, the "challenger", is surprisingly more successful at closing deals than one of the other types, the "relationship" builder -- the guy who slaps you on the back. This isn't selling cars, this is selling complex things like enterprise software, POS systems, corporate ad campaigns (?), architecture, corporate accounting services... etc. The challenger doesn't need to be liked and is not afraid to challenge client assumptions and strategies. But this is all based in the fact the she is an expert in her field; it's not about having a confrontational approach but about teaching the client how their offering can be valuable.

The book provided only two case studies and didn't do a great job of demonstrating the challenger approach, relying more on abstractions and generalizations. It's fairly readable for about the first half, by which point it has more than made its point, but then starts to become tedious. The thinking and the writing starts to break down a bit. I don't believe I finished the entire book, though I flipped through the closing chapters.

The book is mostly geared towards the corporate "sales team" world and that's where it gets its data. However, business, technology, and creative services consultants, who are very often challenger types, may find it interesting. They may find that it reaffirms their existing methodology for closing complex deals.

Jökull Auðunsson says

Like most business books, could have been condensed into something shorter but just as impactful. Very good field guide for enterprise and service-style sales teams.

Jim says

rereading this for work

This is the Corporate Executive Board website about the Challenger Sale . Tons of Media about this book.

<http://www.executiveboard.com/challen...>

A 35 minute audio interview with the author:

<http://thesalesblog.com/2011/12/the-c...>

10 minute recap (does not replace reading the book)

<http://www.heinzmarketing.com/2013/01...>

Parcoast says

The Challenger Sale is not a bad book, especially when directed to the right audience, but that is where I had trouble with it. I picked it up as a general manager of a small business, and found that although some of the ideas were good, and the research interesting, it was not very applicable in my situation. It would be better directed toward sales managers in established organizations. The method it promotes is to control the sale by way challenging the customer, and I like that approach. However, so much of small business is about learning about the customer that I can't see where this would be a better overall approach. I can't have our sales team out challenging our customers all day, not because I fear they would be over bearing, but because I know we would miss opportunities to hear from the customer. In a small business, the sales function isn't just about sales. It is market research, product development and R&D all at once.

I got the most value from the general concept that the challenger persona is the real winner in sales, not the relationship builder. Their research was compelling, but even more importantly the examples resonated with my own experience. For those 20 pages I took notes, and took pictures of the graphs, and I think I can incorporate those insights into my business. And then there was the rest of the book.

The rest of the book is really a conglomerate of a few other known skillsets. Take the Crucial Conversations material and combine it with a good negotiation book, such as Getting Past No, and you well over 50% of the way there on this material. With that in mind, this would have been better as a 90 page pamphlet, outlining their research and what it discovered.

Chris Johnson says

I've read probably 150 sales books in my life.

I read this and thought "My Friend Is Here!". Then I called our new friends at Penguin, arranged for the intro to the authors, and used their techniques on them to get a contract to produce the book trailer.

This book is for the misfits - not the lone wolf salespeople, but the ones that are fearless, ready to handle hot potatoes and play poker, and teach, and take control of selling situations.

It's been a long held belief that "relationship selling" is the way to go. And I build and love and am honored by the relationships in my network. However. However. However.

They don't make sales. I want sales, more than friends. I want speedy decisions, and great business, and adreniline. That's this book. Teach people, tailor solutions, take control.

All in a nice way, all in a way that's not "hey, that guy's an asshole," but "hey, that asshole really helped us."

My friend is here. This book validated my career-to-date, and gave me the nuanced vocabulary to play to my strengths.

{A word about my reviews: books are sacred. With few exceptions, I don't post reviews of bad books on here. I read a lot, and I just simply don't rate books I don't think are worth 3 or so stars. There are exceptions - books that are destructive to the reader will not be spared my ire}.

Jared says

There are very few books that I would give 6 stars out of 5 - but this is one of them. I listened to this in audio, but will go purchase the book so I can add my notes and experiences in the margins. This book will change my professional perspective; and how I view my career.

Sid says

As far as sales books go, this is one of the better ones. The premise as the economy tanked in 2008, sales org. had to find a way to grow their business in a shrinking market. To do so, sales org. have to bring valuable insights to the clients. It's not just about gathering requirements and providing a solution. Rather, it's about knowing the customer's market, teaching them something they don't know, and tailoring a solution that helps THEM differentiate in the marketplace. The word customer centric is often misused by sales org. The true definition is not thinking about your company and leading with your strengths. It's more about starting with the customer's challenges and leading to your strengths that can help them overcome. The main concepts of the Challenger Sale are Teach, Tailor and Take Control of the conversation. The book is practical enough and provides ample examples. A must read for not just sales org., but the marketing dept's, and the engineering (solutions) teams!

Paul says

There's been so many books on selling and so many "systems" that it's hard to find something... anything... new and innovative. The Challenger Sale does, in fact, challenge some long held assumptions about selling success. Unlike your usual book of advice written by some self-proclaimed sales "guru," this book bases its guidance and conclusions on research... hard data research. Most salespeople who have been successful over a long period of time and through the ups and downs of economies intuitively knew why they were successful but perhaps couldn't quite articulate the reasons. The Challenger Sale does just that. In a very straightforward way, this book tells you what you need to change, why you need to change and doesn't lay all of this change solely at the feet of the salesperson. It holds senior leadership accountable as well.

After selling for twenty years and feeling as if so much sales training was boring, uninspiring and downright asinine, I found myself time and again pumping my fist in the air and saying, "YES! THEY GET IT!"

Highly recommended if you want to start your journey on the way to becoming the best of the best. Not

recommended if you're a sales robot.

Annasnova says

This book came recommended by sales pros with a lot of experience and I can see why. It's *the* sales book I've been looking for to help understand complex selling in B2B environment. It offered a completely different take on the sales process and opened up my eyes to so many things! Should be a must read for anyone in business - not only sales.

Christine Lynch says

I read this book because Taylor had to read it for work at UPS and mentioned it was good; unfortunately he mentioned it was good after reading only the first chapter or two and the message of this book, definitely could have been conveyed in one chapter instead of nine.

Basically, there are 5 types of salespeople:

- The Hard worker
- The Relationship builder
- The Lone wolf
- The Reactive problem solver
- The Challenger

Obviously (read the name of the book), the "Challenger" has been shown to be the most effective type of salesperson, both post-recession when this book was presumably written as well as for the foreseeable future. The challenger sale is a 3-pronged method:

1. Teach (provide your customer with new market insight or ideas they haven't thought about before)
2. Tailor (change your message depending on who you are talking to in the org [CEO vs. tech specialist])
3. Take control

A few more pointers on "building challengers" in your organization:

- Challengers are made not just born
- the combination of their skills is what matters most
- challenging is more about organizational capabilities than individual skills
- building challengers doesn't happen overnight

For organizations to win business, they should build the challenger model into their salespeople and company culture at an executive level.

Jay says

I found the concept of "The Challenger Sale" to be very interesting. Like many business books, this one starts with "we've done a study", this time on the types of salesmen that are successful. In this case, the findings are not that your typical "relationship is key" salesman is very successful. But neither is the "here's our product info" salesman. The best kind of salesman in the current environment is one that is knowledgeable about his prospect's business and can challenge them with a better way to operate. Having

worked for a large company, I've seen this change occur in the field, with a different kind of training over the past few years, and reorganization of the sales function by industry, all to ease the learning of the prospect's business. I appreciated that this book explains why those changes occurred and what they are supposed to accomplish, better than the explanation at work. For salesmen not familiar with this way of selling, it appears it can be more difficult, depending on your personality. You can come off as pushy and a know-it-all. But the results appear to make it worthwhile. Being a "challenger", you have to be a know-it-all, and a real one, not a fake one. Be smarter, not suaver (if that's a word).

A nit on the audiobook version of this: The narrator does not pronounce the company "Nike" correctly. How can something like that happen and slip past the production guys? Very odd, and of course I obsessively thought about that for a few minutes while listening and had to repeat.

Jill says

I've never read a book about sales specifically, and this one was a great entry point. I had so many "ah-hah" moments while reading it- "so that's why our best salespeople pitch this way!" If I were leading a sales org, I would reread this, and have my managers and employees read it, too. Biggest take-away: the best sales reps offer their customers some new insight, or way of seeing things differently (and conveniently, that insight leads them down the path toward their product as a solution).

?ukasz Chojnowski says

Moja definitywna rekomendacja. Jedna z najlepszych ksi??ek o sprzeda?y jaka jest.

Grant Barnes says

The 5 Sales Rep Types

1. The Hard Worker
2. The Relationship Builder
3. The Lone Wolf
4. The Reactive Problem Solver
 - a customer service rep in sales rep clothing
5. The Challenger

6 characteristics of a challenger rep

1. They offer customers a unique predictive
2. They have great 2-way communication skills
3. They know the customer's value drivers
4. They can identify economic drivers of the customer's business
5. The rep is comfortable discussing money
6. The rep can pressure the customer

A challenger sales rep can TEACH, TAILOR AND TAKE CONTROL through constructive tension.

Challengers aren't necessarily world-class question askers, rather world-class teachers.

Only 38% of customer loyalty is a result of brand/product/service
Because the competition is great too (not much differentiation)

Only 9% of customer loyalty is a result of price to value

Loyalty is found in the sales call. 53% of customer loyalty is attributed to the sales experience. Over half of customer loyalty is not what you sell but how.

Sharing new insights vs doing good discovery.

Commercial Teaching

Teach customers about a problem they have that only you can solve!

customer: "Wow how can I make that happen?"

Rep: "let me show you how we're the only one that can provide that"

It sounds counterintuitive but if your customer says "yes that's it that's exactly what keeps me up at night" then you have failed because you have not taught them anything new. This is where relationship builders fail.

"Huh, I never thought about it that way before" is when you win.

If you are going to build an ROI Calculator, make sure you factor in the cost of the new framework you presented not just your product.

6 Steps of a World-class Teaching Pitch

1. The Warmer

Assessment of key challenges and building credibility by leading with hypothesis of their pain I.e., "we're seeing this in the industry, are you dealing with that too?" Vs "What keeps you up at night?"

2. The Reframe

Reframing their problem

3. Rational Drowning

#s driven poking the new pain

4. Emotional Impact

Make sure they feel the pain by making it personal. Story telling of similar companies.

5. A New Way

Point by point solution (not about the specific supplier yet). Before the customer buys your solution they have to buy the solution.

6. Your Solution

Putting 1-6 together and you get:

"What's currently costing our customers more money than they realize that only we can help them fix?"

Coaching

1. Low performer

2. Core performer

2. Top performer

Coaching has much less impact on 1 & 3 and much more on 2. Think of a top tier golfer, they have a swing coach but it may only take 1 stroke off their average. A horrible golfer/athlete won't really improve with coaching because they... Just suck. Coaching will help a capable, middle of the road golfer the most.

The innovative manager does the following:

Investigate

Create

Share
