

LET'S TALK SELLING

OCTOBER—2006

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Hello Everybody,

The Summer went by quickly and the third quarter proved to be a busy one for many of our clients. Yet the fourth quarter seems a bit volatile. From what we see, most people out there are cautiously optimistic, but for many, the fourth quarter will determine what kind of a year 2006 will prove to be.

Now is the time for our salespeople to be very visible. The Summer slow down is over and our salespeople have to be beating the bushes.

With that in mind, we want you all to think yet again about how to differentiate yourselves. If you are familiar with our thinking, you know that we believe in constantly improving your skills. We want you to think about a skill set that doesn't come to mind very often—*facilitation skills*.

That's right—*facilitation skills*. This quarter's newsletter is all about how the salesperson who thinks of him or herself as a facilitator can elevate the sales process.

I hope the year ends on a positive note...



Facilitation Skills—A Way to Elevate Sales Calls

When you think about effective selling, you think about skills. When you think about effective salespeople, you think about people who know how to use those skills. Different types of skills come to mind—interpersonal, communication, presentation and problem solving among them.

But we all know that successful selling is not just about the ability to apply specific skills. There is more to it.

Many behaviors and values further impact success such as integrity, tenacity, resilience, ethics, flexibility, commitment, responsiveness, likeability, and risk taking. But we can never lose sight of the importance of skills.

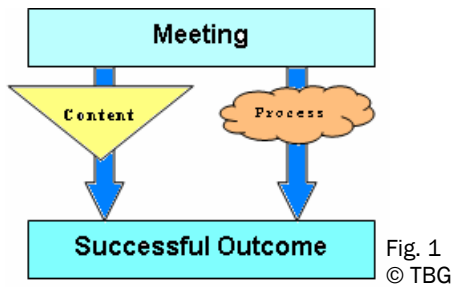
One such set of skills that are rarely mentioned under the umbrella of successful selling skills are *facilitation skills*. That's right, *facilitation skills*.

Traditionally, we think of *facilitation* as something that happens in meetings, teambuilding or strategy sessions and training programs.

Of course, that's true. The *facilitator* is the guy in front of the room with a marker in hand. The same skills that a talented *facilitator* uses can be applied to the selling situation in every sales call. And it's surprising how rarely that happens.

FACILITATION SKILLS—A WAY TO ELEVATE SALES CALLS (CONT'D)

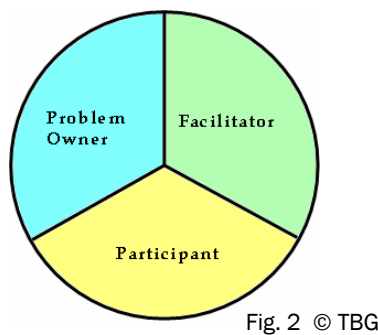
Let's step back for a minute. In Meeting Dynamics 101, we learned that there are two components to any meeting—the *content* and the *process*. The content is the “what” and the process is the “how.” (Figure 1)



Content is the responsibility of the meeting participants. They are there to offer ideas, share expertise, offer perspectives and help address the task at hand.

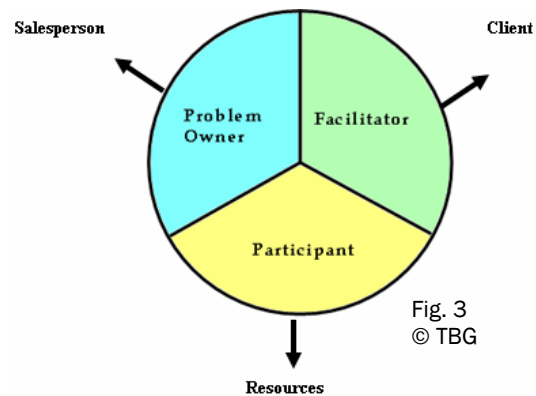
Process, on the other hand, belongs to the facilitator. Facilitation skills range from simple tasks such as taking notes and watching the time to more sophisticated responsibilities, such as maintaining focus and resolving conflict.

In a problem solving meeting, at least three roles emerge: (Figure 2)



The **Problem Owner** called the meeting and asked for help. **Participants** are present to work on the problem. Finally, the **Facilitator** is there to manage the meeting **Process**.

If you relate this to a sales call, the roles translate as follows: (Figure 3)



The **Customer** or **Client** is always treated as the Problem Owner. After all, it's their meeting. The **Resources** from both sides are there to assist; it is the **salesperson's** job to manage the **Process**.

Here's where it gets tricky. The salesperson is involved in content as well. But it remains his or her job to manage the sales call. The salesperson must facilitate the meeting. Here's how it works.

Getting Started: It's the salesperson's job to create a healthy climate. He or she manages the introductions, gets the agenda for both sides on the table, confirms the time allotment and ensures that everyone knows why they are there. If things are awkward early, it's his or her job to lighten things up. If too much time is spent on rapport building, they need to get things started. If someone walks in late, the salesperson must introduce that person or choose not to. All these responsibilities are Process oriented

FACILITATION SKILLS—A WAY TO ELEVATE SALES CALLS (CONT'D)

Determining Needs: The salesperson begins the questioning process, but it is his or her job to let the customer know their intentions. The salesperson makes sure everyone has the opportunity to respond, clarifies questions when necessary, is the lead note taker (or assigns that role), and asks for elaboration as necessary. It's the salesperson who must sense when someone needs to be heard and is sensitive to how the questioning is proceeding. He or she reviews the need, checks for agreement, seeks prioritization when appropriate, and gives the other team members a chance to be heard. All of this process management stuff belongs to the salesperson.

Presenting: When it's time to present, the salesperson can use the resources, or do it him or herself. It's their job to review the needs and ensure that recommendations address those needs. The salesperson must "check in" along the way, inquire if customers have questions, cut off her team members when necessary and orchestrate the presentation when several people are involved. Finally, the salesperson must ask the client(s) for feedback when the presentation is over.
Process, Process, Process.

Objection Resolution: If ever a sales interaction needs facilitation assistance, it is when the client objects. The salesperson acknowledges the objection and encourages the client to elaborate, exactly as a facilitator would when conflict arises in a meeting. The salesperson would restate or reframe the objection, and look to the appropriate person to respond or to do so him or herself. When objections are eventually resolved, the salesperson inquires to see if other objections exist. The salesperson is managing the objection resolution process just as a facilitator would in any conflict situation.

Closing: The day of the Product Manager, Sales Manager or Designated Closer asking for the business and closing the deal are over. It's the salesperson's job to get the commitment—whether closing the sale or getting the next step, it's up to them. And yes, facilitation skills are the key because how you do this is critical.

Process sensitivity is a wonderful attribute. Interactions of any kind are much more successful when process is managed well. The sales call is a complicated interaction and when the salesperson thinks of himself or herself as a facilitator, it becomes one more way for that person to stand out from everybody else.

CONTENT VS. PROCESS

We tend to be good at content. We know what is involved in collecting information. We love to offer ideas, enjoy offering perspectives, get excited when challenged to be creative and enjoy building on others' ideas. When it comes to content, most of us are pretty good.

Process is often the culprit. How we ask questions, listen, demonstrate understanding, tell our story, involve others, manage conflict, get commitment and use resources are all process related activities. We're not so good at that.

Process sensitivity is certainly a skill that people can learn. Tuning in to the dynamics of a meeting is critical. Listening at 112% is mandatory. Letting others speak is paramount.

Paying attention to tone of voice, non-verbal signals, eye contact and levels of intent all help us to be more process sensitive.

We must remain involved in the content, need to always know what the objectives are and focus on which questions to ask, which products and services to offer, what responses to give to objections and how to comfortably ask for the business. Let's never lose sight of the content.

That said, we firmly believe that it is the sales professional who pays concurrent attention to process and thinks of him or herself as a facilitator who will better manage sales calls, build stronger relationships, gain credibility and trust and—as a result—close more deals.



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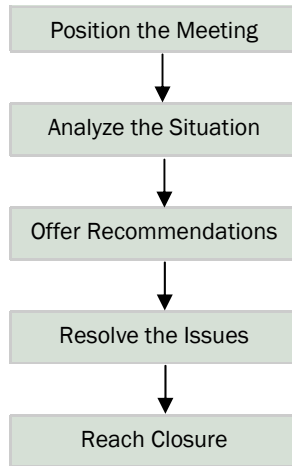
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2007 OPEN REGISTRATION PROGRAMS

Consultative Selling Skills

A two-day program in which participants learn to:

- Use problem solving skills to generate creative solutions for clients and prospects.
- Organize and facilitate client team meetings and internal strategy sessions.
- Engender trust and influence with both clients and internal resources.
- Improve questioning and listening skills to develop a complete understanding of a client's situation.
- Present ideas and solutions based on the specific needs of an individual client.
- Manage resistance and resolve objections to achieve Win/Win outcomes.
- Gain commitment and close more business.



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Dates for the CSS 2007 programs are:

- * February 8-9
- * April 12-13
- * June 7-8
- * August 9-10
- * October 11-12
- * December 13-14

Coaching for Improved Sales Performance

A two-day program in which participants learn to;

- Observe salespeople in selling situations with an understanding of what to look for and record.
- Effectively plan a coaching session.
- Give feedback in a balanced, helpful, non-threatening way.
- Offer a salesperson ideas as to how to be more successful in a selling role.
- Manage the resistance salespeople demonstrate when a manager suggest changing their sales approach.
- Reach closure by getting the salesperson to commit to an action plan for improved performance.

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Dates for the Coaching 2007 programs are:

- * March 8-9
- * July 12-13
- * November 8-9