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# The Challenger Sale: Taking Control Of The Customer Conversation



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book comes very highly touted, especially by Neil Rackham himself, who calls it "the most important advance in selling for many years." I personally don't think it reaches quite that level, but overall it is an excellent book, with provocative insights and useful information for salespeople looking for ways to break out of the pack. The key to a really good book is that it makes you say, "I never thought of that before," and to use that insight to improve your life in some way. Interestingly, that's also the key to a really good salesperson, as well. The book is based on extensive research by the Sales Executive Council into the attributes of successful sales professionals. They found that salespeople tend to cluster into five different types, based on their behaviors: Hard Workers, Challengers, Relationship Builders, Lone Wolves, and Reactive Problem Solvers. Research is great when it generates new and unexpected insights, and three are central to the book. Key insight #1: Salespeople matter--a lot! One of the surprising insights generated by their research was that the Sales Experience accounted for 53% of the contribution to customer loyalty, more than company and brand impact, product and service delivery, and value-to-price ratio combined! In other words, the latter three are just tickets to be able to play; how you sell is more important than what you sell. In complex solution sales, star performers outperform core performers by 200%, as opposed to 59% in transactional selling, so it's a critical insight. If how you sell is so important, the next critical insight is about what the most effective reps out of the 6,000 that they surveyed do differently.

The good news about *The Challenger Sale* is that Dixon and Adamson further the concept of consultative selling. Even better, in my estimation, is that the authors seemed to use some solid data on which to base their theories. I like some of their approach such as, "Lead to your solution not with your solution," and "Differentiate yourself by showing your customer something new about their industry that they didn't know or provide them with a different view." I believe the authors also get it right when they state, "In this world of dramatically changing customer buying behavior and rapidly diverging sales talent, your sales approach must evolve or you will be left behind." However, they missed an opportunity to move complex sales to the next level. By complex sales, I mean to segregate commodity sales from the intangible products and services that require trust. And by the next level, I mean a salesperson who authentically has the customer's best interest at heart and not just their own. The subtitle of this book is "Taking control of the

customer conversation.â • As though to inoculate themselves from criticism, the authors state that they know some people will interpret this statement as being â œarrogantâ • while stating that it isn't. They also speak about â œeducating the customerâ • and recognize that the same interpretation may be made about that point as well. Indeed, this reader believes that the mindset of a salesperson who takes it upon themselves to control the conversation and educate the customer/client is absolutely being arrogant. The authors seem to give short shrift to the human capacity to sense when they are being talked down to or manipulated.

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