

# ***A Guide to Consultative Selling***

*Master the art of Consultative Selling with Sterling Chase's  
Selling from the Left<sup>®</sup> methodology*



## What is Consultative Selling?

Consultative selling is the process of diagnosing, shaping and developing a prospect's needs and desires before aligning a solution to solve those needs and desires.

In this guide we're going to teach you why consultative selling is so important in today's marketplace and how you can use our award-winning consultative selling methodologies, *Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup>, to rapidly increase the number of deals you win and the amount of commission you earn from selling.

## Why is Consultative Selling So Important?

In today's world of tougher, business-savvy buyers, buying decisions are now being made at a much more senior level by decision makers who don't really care about your product or service's features. They expect suppliers to bring new and innovative business solutions that create tangible and measurable value in the form of a significant Return on Investment (ROI) for their own organisation.

For this reason, traditional sales techniques - such as the 'Feature, Advantage, Benefit' (FAB) selling model - no longer work. By contrast, sales people who have moved with the times and mastered the art of consultative selling are now winning more deals and earning more commission than ever before. Whether they are account managers or business development professionals, they are in huge demand and typically get rewarded with six figure salaries.

## ***Selling from the Left***<sup>®</sup>

In this guide we're going to teach you our award-winning *Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup> consultative selling methodology.

If applied correctly, *Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup> is guaranteed to boost your performance when selling solutions within a business-to-business context.

*Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup> is simple...

If you were to write down an analysis of your client's world on the left-hand side of an A4 sheet of paper and the features, advantages and benefits (FAB's) of your portfolio (or solution) on the right, then *Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup> starts (and spends most of its time) with the client's world on the left, before moving over to the right.

This is in direct contrast to traditional sales techniques, which tend to begin by pushing the FAB's of a product or in the hope that they align to the prospect's needs and desires. Traditional approaches, such as FAB selling, start (and spend most of their time) on the right with little consideration for the client's world on the left.

When running our Sales Academies for FTSE 100 clients, we use a proven, simple and easy-to-apply system called **MIDAS** for teaching sales teams how to make consultative selling, or *Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup> really work.

### **MIDAS – how to make *Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup> really work!**

So what is MIDAS?

Well, the 'MID' part of MIDAS represents the client's world on the left, while the 'AS' part of MIDAS represents what you can sell to them.

### **MID: The Client's World**

The 'MID' part of MIDAS stands for the following:

## **M – the Macro and Micro (external) forces**

This refers to the external macro-economic and micro-economic pressures, trends and events that affect your target organisation and (often) their competitors who operate in the same sector.

To master the art of consultative selling, it is important to open sales conversations around these external pressures, trends and events. Why? Because they represent all of the known (and unknown) opportunities and threats that senior decision makers in your target organisation are facing and can easily relate to.

To understand and exploit the external pressures, trends and events that affect your target organisation, you need to research the target organisation and its sector.

Identify two or three of the key external forces that are likely to cause a real opportunity or threat for the prospect in the short or medium term that your solution may be able to help with.

A combination of M factors for a high-street retailer, for example, could be a downturn in consumer spending, the threat of online competition and/or rises in VAT. Such a combination of pressures can be a really powerful starting point for sales conversations when they are relevant to the client's world, so long as you've got something (i.e. a solution) that can help them take advantage of (or counteract the negative impact of) these external forces!

## **I – the Implications (or Pain Points)**

This involves the implications (or pain points) that the external M forces have, or will have, on your target organisation. The more personal these implications are to the decision maker you are meeting with, the better.

When discussing these implications, it is important to make the prospect understand the financial implications that may result from his or her failure to respond to the combination of external opportunities and threats that you opened the discussion with.

In the example of the high-street retailer, the external forces we mentioned earlier (i.e. reduced consumer spending, increased online competition and increased VAT) might result in a combination of implications (or pain points), such as lower sales volumes, lower revenue from sales, growing levels of stock, higher marketing costs and/or lower profits.

Remember, when preparing for consultative sales meetings, it is important to ensure that the implications discussed have a direct impact (and cause pain for) the decision maker(s) of the organisation that you are targeting.

### **D - the Desire (or Need)**

This refers to the desire (or need) for the decision maker(s) in your target organisation to make changes in order to avoid the negative financial implication or 'doing nothing' about (or respond in the wrong way to) the external forces with which you opened the conversation.

The desire (or need) for change may or may not be known by the target organisation before you meet with them. Regardless, by making them aware of the desire (or need) to change in order to avoid the negative financial implications of then external forces, you can pretty much control the conversation and steer the prospect into openly expressing a desire (or need) for your solution.

In the example of the high-street retailer, an important desire (or need) might be to attract more customers, increase the average purchase value per customer, reduce the cost of each sale or improve the forecasting of stock levels. It is important to take note that each of these desires is going to be difficult to realise without addressing the negative financial implication of 'doing nothing' about the external forces that are relevant to your target organisation.

### **Developing, Shaping and Creating a Client's Needs**

Now let's take a look at how you actually use the 'MID' part of MIDAS to develop a consultative sale and *Sell from the Left*<sup>®</sup> in the early stages of your sales meetings.

In order to shape or develop a client's desires, you should start your sales conversations by introducing your pre-determined external M forces which – through your research – you know are relevant to your target organisation and competitors operating in the same sector.

The best external forces to use are the ones that your prospect cannot avoid. They keep the prospective client awake at night and (most crucially) they are not the client's fault. The best external forces also have a hard deadline that can be used to your advantage (i.e. a 'compelling event').

Opening conversations around compelling external M forces will not only demonstrate your insight into the client's world, but it will also create empathy and the impression that you really might just have something that can help the target organisation. This is much more effective than starting a cold conversation around the client's internal 'pain points' (i.e. implications), which can give the impression that you are implying that the client is failing in their role. Trust me, this is not a good way to win sales!

After opening the conversation around relevant external forces, you should then ask your prospect leading questions about the short and longer term implications of not taking action.

Even though you should already know what these implications will be, it's always a good idea to let the prospect tell you the implications as this will really help to develop, shape and create a compelling need or desire for your solution as the conversation progresses. Keep your questions open and be prepared to really listen to the answer to fully take advantage of the implications of the external forces that you introduced at the beginning of the conversation.

By adopting this *Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup> approach, you will naturally find it easier to motivate the client to tell you about his or her priorities in terms of 'pain points'. This then gives you the right to start probing them and making the client 'wallow' in the implications of these pain-points not being addressed quickly. Spend some time on this and ask the client what the financial implications are, or could be, on a weekly, monthly or annual basis. This will make the prospect feel a specific urgency to take action and

also starts to create a notion of a budget and a business case for the client buying your solution!

Once you've probed and agreed the potential cost implications of the pain points not being addressed, you then need to shift the conversation towards a more positive discussion. Ask the client what the positive results (and potential financial value, if possible) could result in if the pain points were to be avoided or removed.

As an example, you could ask your contact, "What would the impact be for you and your company if we could prevent the falling number of shoppers and improve the cost of sale?"

Shifting the mood from a negative discussion around the prospect's 'pain points' (the 'I' part of MIDAS) to a more positive discussion around their 'desires and needs' (the 'D' part of MIDAS) is crucial for getting the client to associate you and your solution with positive thoughts. It also opens the client's mind to other possibilities and gives you the right to ask about the prospect's wider desires and needs, which can provide a great basis for up-selling and cross-selling later in the meeting.

Once you've got the client to discuss and quantify the 'desire and need', remind the client of both the 'pain' of doing nothing and the value of making a change before going for a trial close.

An example of a trial close is as follows:

*"So if we could propose a solution that would deliver these benefits within your required timescale, would you be willing to commit time and a relatively small amount of money (compared to the cost of doing nothing and the value of delivering the change) in order to start realising the benefits immediately?"*

At this point, the client is likely to raise an objection. But this is not a bad thing. In fact, at this point in the conversation it will actually, more often than not, be a buying signal! The prospect will probably respond by saying something like, "Tell me what you are thinking of proposing".

So now all you need to do is convince the client that you can create real and credible value for their organisation!

This brings us to the right-hand side of MIDAS and *Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup>...

## **AS: Aligning Your Solution to the Need to Win the Sale**

The 'AS' part of MIDAS stands for the following:

### **A- the Added value (benefits and advantages)**

This refers to the 'unique selling points' (USP's) that the client will get from your company's solution. This includes the benefits and advantages that the client will realise from the things that your company can provide for them. This might be your own insight into the client's world, your own company's design or integration capabilities, your service delivery capabilities or your support capabilities. However, these benefits and advantages must be clearly aligned as directly contributing towards the satisfaction of the client's desires (or needs).

For example, if selling an online marketing solution to a high-street retailer, you would need to explain or articulate how you would design and implement your solution, as well as how you would support the implementation, in a way that convinces the buyer that your solution will reduce the average cost of sale or grow revenue for the target organisation.

### **S- the Solution**

The last part of this five stage process is to introduce the actual Solution you would propose and the features that would enable the benefits and advantages you are offering. This will ensure that the client's desires and needs can be met.

Make sure you DIRECTLY align the benefits, advantages and features of your solution to the desires and needs you've just developed. That's how you create real value! Present the added-value benefits and advantages BEFORE talking about specific features. The features are only to be discussed to develop your credibility!

So for your online marketing solution that will grow their customer base, reduce their average cost of sale and increase their average purchase value, you need to articulate how your solution would be chosen, designed, implemented and supported to deliver these benefits. DON'T go into too much detail on the products UNLESS the client is an expert in this field. If they are, you may be selling at the wrong level. You need to sell to a business person who can't afford the time to know your world and certainly not as well as you do.

If what you propose is credible (and you may need a case-study or reference customer to make it completely credible), you should agree the next stages to move the solution forward in order to alleviate the pain and deliver the value for the customer.

Remember, sell your solution 'from the left' and make sure you get a 'SMART' (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) commitment from the client to move to the next milestone in the sale.

You should spend at least half of your meeting with the decision-maker on the left (i.e. the M-I-D of MIDAS) and only move to the A-S when the client is ready. Go too soon and you'll frustrate the client and instantly lose credibility (and the deal!).

## Summary

*Selling from the Left*<sup>®</sup> really works and will transform your personal and company's sales performance. It will literally transform your client satisfaction and increase the value of every one of your accounts if applied correctly within a business-to-business environment.

To find out how Sterling Chase can enable you to deliver sustainable sales excellence and ground-breaking return on your sales development investment, contact us on **+44 (0) 845 371 3099** or email us via [enquiries@sterlingchase.com](mailto:enquiries@sterlingchase.com)

## How Sterling Chase can help you and your organisation?

At Sterling Chase our specialist teams work with companies to design, implement and deliver sales development programmes that are tailored to the client's specific selling environment, enabling them meet to their corporate sales challenges with an approach to sales development that directly drives sales excellence.

Two of our recent programmes respectively delivered £10 million in incremental revenue for a field sales force and 50% growth in total gross margin for a telesales function. Our programmes have delivered over £2 billion of incremental sales pipeline and over £300 million of incremental contracted revenues for our clients.

*"I have been thoroughly impressed with Sterling Chase and the commitment they have given to the npower Sales Academy. Their ability to understand the training requirements, organisational drivers and industry context to drive performance sets them streets ahead of other training and development providers. I would have no hesitation in recommending them to any organisation."*

**Chris Billing – Head of Indirect Sales, RWE npower**

## About Sterling Chase

Established in 2004, Sterling Chase offers sales training, coaching and consulting programmes that deliver and accelerate success for corporate and mid-market clients in the UK and across the globe. The company differentiates itself from its competitors with an applied approach to sales development that drives measurable business results, ground-breaking return on investment and transformational change in the skills, competencies and behaviours of the sales force (at the selling, management and leadership levels). Sterling Chase programmes have delivered over £2bn of incremental sales pipeline and over £300m of incremental contracted revenues for their clients.

Sterling Chase is an ISMM (Institute of Sales & Marketing Management) Recognised Centre for professional sales qualifications. It is the only company in the UK that offers applied, blended professional development programmes that combine real performance improvement with external qualifications. Sterling Chase Sales Academy programmes offer internationally recognised, applied sales qualifications from levels 3 to 6 (on the Ofqual QCF Framework) for sales professionals, sales managers and sales leadership teams.

The company's 65 sales coaches and consultants encompass all disciplines of sales force development. All are cross-industry renowned coaches with at least 15 years' experience in coaching sales people, sales managers and sales leaders.

To find out more about how Sterling Chase can enable you to deliver sustainable sales excellence and ground-breaking return on your sales development investment, contact us at:

**+44 (0) 845 371 3099** or email us at [enquiries@sterlingchase.com](mailto:enquiries@sterlingchase.com)

## About the Author

*STEVE EUNGBLUT is Managing Director of Sterling Chase Associates. He has a track record in transforming the relationships, revenues and profits of companies that sell to the commercial and public sectors. Steve has always led by delivering a shift in process, skills, attitude and behaviour. He holds an MBA from Leeds Business School and is part of the Harvard Business School alumni. Learn more about Steve and our sales development programmes at [www.sterlingchase.com](http://www.sterlingchase.com)*

