

QuickTips

What is solution selling? While all of the consultants have their own opinion, nearly all would agree that it is something to do with working alongside the potential customer to identify and develop "pain" and then mutually agree to the solutions. *A particularly good definition is that solution selling puts the customer's business at the centre of the buying decision, rather than your offering being at the centre of the sales campaign.*

It is an approach that can be incredibly powerful, as it focuses on building demand and shaping the buying decision in your favor, rather than hoping to hit it lucky with some particular feature, or discounting the price. There are many aspects to solution selling – a huge number of models, training courses and books (type in solution selling on Amazon and you will get back 260+ hits). In fact solution selling is not a revolutionary concept (despite what the covers of many books say) and has evolved over time.

When IT was in its infancy and selling was only just coming out of the "gift of the gab" phase, vendors such as IBM, Xerox, Burroughs and NCR started to develop concepts such as "need satisfaction selling", which put the emphasis on the customer and what they wanted. Most if not all Solution Selling methodologies embody many of the key concepts of understanding the customer, identifying their key problems, and then building up perceived problems for which you have a solution, before talking about your offering. This is a central theme of nearly all solution selling approaches – if you have a painkiller, make sure the prospect realizes that they have a major, potentially catastrophic pain, before offering the painkiller.

So, are you a Solution Seller? Answer the following truthfully with a 'yes' or 'no', then look at the answer key below.

ARE YOU A SOLUTION SELLER?	
1. The vast majority of my deals start with discussions well before the potential customer knows what they want.	6. I can easily gain access to senior decision makers during the final decision making phase.
2. I have good relationships with people at all levels within the technical functions in my accounts (technician to CIO).	7. Many of the discussions I have with customers and prospects are about possibilities for the future rather than qualified opportunities.
3. I spend significant amounts of time with business executives and senior managers outside of technical, purchasing or finance functions.	8. For the vast majority of my contacts, I can readily describe their individual business and personal challenges ("What keeps them awake at night?").
4. During the sales cycle prospects will usually change their purchase criteria, based on the discussions that they have had with me and my team.	9. For each of my prospects I can easily give a succinct value proposition that a CFO or CEO would find compelling.
5. During the sales cycle, I always consciously change the tone and topics of conversation depending on where the customer is in their purchase cycle and in anticipation of how their concerns will shift over time.	10. I can spontaneously describe at least five reference accounts not only in terms of what my firm did for them, but what the resulting real business outcomes were.

Key:

10 positives: you are a consummate solution selling professional, continue brushing up your skills;

7-9: you are at the upper end of solution selling, but need accelerated development; 3-6: you are showing good traits and would benefit from training/coaching;

0-2: either solution selling is not suitable for your role or you need a major personal development program

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