

# SoftwareSalesJobs

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## **The Science and Art of "Go For The No" Selling**

*By Jeff Thull, CEO, Prime Resource Group*

*Published in Software Sales Journal, July 2005*

Trying to make a complex sale? You must help a customer calculate the cost of his problem . . . and always be willing to walk away. Too many salespeople are so focused on 'getting the order' that they actually lose track of reality. And that's a mistake. Selling has become such a complex process that if you don't consider 'no sale' as a valid outcome and 'go for the no' right away, you could end up wasting valuable time, company resources and delaying access to more lucrative opportunities.

As salespeople, we are taught from Day One not to take 'no' for an answer. Consider the salesman who refuses to acknowledge the words: "We're just looking" . . . the telemarketer who recites scripted answers to objections until the victim slams down the phone . . . the sales rep who must practically be removed from a potential customer's office with the jaws of life. These images have become stereotypes for a reason: we tend to equate anything other than a yes with failure. Probably the most debilitating myth ever perpetuated on the world of selling is: "A good salesperson can sell anything to anybody." But those of us pursuing a complex sale should be taking the opposite approach. We should be thinking, "Go for the no".

Conventional selling grew up in a world of unlimited prospects and unlimited demand and was based on a "go for the yes" approach. In short, the salesperson's role was to engage the prospect who was qualified to buy and use the product, and relentlessly present, pursue, persist, cajole, convince and persuade until the prospect said yes.

Too many salespeople are so focused on 'getting the order' that they actually lose track of reality. And that's a mistake. Selling has become such a complex process that if you don't consider 'no sale' as a valid outcome and 'go for the no' right away you could end up wasting valuable time, company resources and delaying access to more lucrative opportunities. Real professionals recognize that a no—after a quality diagnosis, that is—wins the potential customer's respect, leaves the door wide open for future business and frees you up to pursue a better match. You should always ask yourself, 'Is there someplace better I could be?'

Remember: about 35 percent of all sales are bad sales. Going for the no helps you steer clear of the trap of making a sale that turns out to be wrong for you and the customer. And ultimately, this helps you avoid customer dissatisfaction and bad press.

Today's environment—characterized by long sales cycles, multiple layers of decision and influence, and numerous perspectives that often cross national and cultural borders—has become so complex that the very nature of selling has changed. A system called Diagnostic Business Development® provides a navigable path from the first step of identifying potential customers through the sale itself and onto expanding and retaining profitable customer relationships. These are the four phases in this system:

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**Discover:** The sales professional researches and prepares and sets the stage for a compelling engagement and a continuing relationship based on trust and respect.

**Diagnose:** An in-depth determination of the existence, extent and financial impact of the customer's current situation is pursued. Diagnosis is meant to maximize the customer's objective awareness of their dissatisfaction and determine whether or not that dissatisfaction supports the salesperson's offerings.

**Design:** The goal is to get the sales professional and customer working together to identify the optimal solution to the problems that were uncovered and quantified in the Diagnose phase—even if it involves alternative solutions offered by competitors. This phase is the “dress rehearsal” before the final presentation is made. It is here that many salespeople make the mistake of becoming an unpaid consultant.

**Deliver:** This phase begins with the presentation of a formal proposal and the customer's subsequent formal acceptance of the solution. Implementation and support of the solution are next, followed by maintaining and growing of the relationship with the customer.

A diagnostic method of selling, backed by plenty of preparation and old-fashioned hard work, is what it takes to succeed in today's world. This method requires that sales professionals understand, up front, that sometimes, stepping back from an unsuitable situation is the right thing to do. Consider the following insights:

- **If there is no pain, there will be no sale.** Pain is the most basic human motivator for change. It is the natural defense mechanism that tells people that if they don't change and deal with a problem, they will face consequences. And of course, change itself is painful. Therefore, change will not occur until an individual or company recognizes that the pain of change is less than the pain of staying the same. The Diagnostic approach contends that pain is the result of indicators or symptoms of sub optimal situations that are objective, observable and quantifiable. If, in the course of a diagnosis, you discover that sufficient pain does not exist to motivate the customer to solve his problem, a yes decision to change is not advisable or likely. Accept it and move on.

- **You must help the customer calculate the cost of his problem.** If you don't have a cost of the problem, you don't have a problem. Think of the customer's pain and dissatisfaction as the vehicle that drives the decision and the cost of the problem as the decision accelerator. The higher the cost of the problem, the faster the decision to solve it. It's unlikely that the customer can or will quantify the cost of the problem on his own—he probably doesn't have the expertise. That's why you must help him calculate the cost of the problem, by providing a formula and plugging in numbers derived from the customer's reality. Doing so not only helps the customer prioritize the problem, it differentiates you from the vast majority of salespeople.

Too many salespeople shy away from fixing costs. Many complain that it is too hard to determine and it's not their responsibility, they say ‘the customer should know,’ but we find that the real reason is that they are afraid that the cost of the problem will be too low to be addressed and the engagement will be over. They are reluctant to admit anything that might interfere with ‘going for the yes.’ This is always a possible outcome and it is a legitimate one. If the cost of the customer's problem does not support the investment for the solutions being offered, the professional will acknowledge that reality

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and move on to a better-qualified prospect and perhaps determine proper timing to re-engage this prospect.

• **It's all done without any pressure from you.** The beauty of the Diagnostic Business Development Process is that it allows you to guide the customer through the process without ever resorting to the "sales techniques" that customers find so distasteful. The fact is that you manage the decision process for the customer; you don't make the decision for him. You don't even make a presentation until the last phase of the process. This progression of events—not to mention the fact that you've demonstrated (or at least implied) that you're willing to walk away—gains the customer's trust and establishes credibility for you and the company you represent. You haven't sold him on anything. You've helped him recognize, measure and solve his problem.

Ultimately, the "go for the no" mindset that shatters the stereotypes that have long plagued salespeople and almost guarantees that the customer will select your product to solve the problem. After all, why wouldn't he?

At the same time the customer is reaching the critical stage in the change progression, the salesperson has been establishing her own value in the customer's eyes. The sales professional has earned the customer's respect because of her ability to conduct a high-quality diagnosis. She has gained the customer's trust because of her willingness to end the engagement at any time the diagnosis revealed that the problem did not exist or was not worth acting upon. The true professional creates exceptional credibility by demonstrating an in-depth understanding of the customer's business. Now that the customer has made the decision to change, who do you think the customer believes is best qualified to help design and deliver a high-quality solution to the problem?

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*Jeff Thull is a leading-edge strategist and valued advisor for executive teams of major companies worldwide. As President and CEO of Prime Resource Group, he has designed and implemented business transformation and professional development programs for companies like Shell Global Solutions, 3M, Microsoft, Intel, Citicorp, IBM and Georgia-Pacific, as well as many fast-track, start-up companies. He has gained the reputation for being a thought-leader in sales and marketing strategies for companies involved in complex sales. For article feedback and other info, contact [support@primeresource.com](mailto:support@primeresource.com), or call 800.876.0378 or 763.473.7529.*

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