

“Want top decision makers to buy from you without the usual pain and frustration? Take three words of advice... Read this book. If your competition reads this before you do you're dead.”

—Tony Parinello, author of *Getting to VITO (The Very Important Top Officer): 10 Steps to VITO's Office*

DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS

WHY BUYERS CAN'T BUY AND
SELLERS CAN'T SELL, AND
WHAT **YOU** CAN DO ABOUT IT!

SHARON DREW MORGEN

Author of *New York Times* Business Bestseller, *Selling with Integrity*

[Preface by **JILL KONRATH**, author of *Selling to Big Companies*]

“Sharon Drew has written an inspirational and well-written book and I can highly recommend this sophisticated guide. It was an instant success for me. If you want to learn how decisions get made, how change happens, and how buyers buy—you must read this book!”

—**Alen Majer**, author of *Trigger Events* and *Selling is better than Sex*

“*Dirty Little Secrets* should be a best-seller: The content and delivery is quite good, and so many people and organizations need to hear this!”

—**Tery Tenant**, Attainment, Inc.

“This book is an insightful, dead-on analysis of how buying decisions get made. The systems approach makes people re-think the entire buy-sell dynamic. The examples are wonderful and I love the direct and personal style. The whole thing screams experience, wisdom, class, success, and authenticity. Best-seller?”

—**Anne Miller**, author of *Metaphorically Selling*

“Wow, talk about getting outside the box! Sharon Drew Morgen has turned traditional sales thinking upside down and has provided a realistic tactical roadmap for sellers to help buyers get the internal buy-in they need for a buying decision.”

—**Michael Norton**, CEO and Founder of CanDoGo.com

“If you thought you knew all the leading sales methodologies, think again. Sharon Drew Morgen turns conventional selling on its head by teaching us that it’s about helping your buyers manage their internal issues before they can buy anything. *Dirty Little Secrets* is a must read.”

—**Rich Dougherty**, CEO of Expert Choice

“This book is fantastic! Sharon Drew teaches support for a buyer’s decision-making. Great stuff!”

—**Kathi Kruse**, Kruse Control Inc.

“*Dirty Little Secrets* takes us inside our buyer’s decision-making process where we discover the factors they need to address prior to making a decision—most of them having nothing to do with our product or service. You’ll discover numerous strategies to help prospects deal with these issues leading to faster decisions, minimal competition and more sales!”

—**Jill Konrath**, author of *Selling to Big Companies*

“For the first time, Morgen finally reveals all the *Dirty Little Secrets* of the buying process. As a veteran seller for 20 years, this book gave me a complete new look on selling and buying. Excellent work and highly recommended!”

—**Geert Conard**, CEO of Geert Conard Management Solutions

“Morgen’s ground breaking book teaches how to understand how decisions are made in an organization and how to manage change, with insights and strategies you won’t find elsewhere. I’ve been using this new model in my business and already see almost unbelievable results. Instead of selling, we are actually teaching our customers how to buy.”

—Peter Casehow, CEO of GoodPractice

“*Dirty Little Secrets* provides insight into issues that are often ignored or misunderstood in the sales process. It will challenge the assumptions and rules we’ve learned from all sales methods. If you want to understand how decisions are really made and willing to complement your sales skills, this is a must read.”

—Mary Anrigo, Director of LastMile Xchange

“Sharon Drew continues to provide the cutting edge thinking in sales. Her points are not only valid, but practical. I never realized how buyers really think and make decisions—I do now! The extra benefit of this brilliant book is I can use this with my staff, wife and kids!”

—Reg Athwal, Chairman of RAW Group and OneTVO

“Revealing the secret to how people really buy has been untouched... until now! *Dirty Little Secrets* delivers powerful insights and practical thinking that transform not only selling but all forms of decision making. Those who read this book will reap the professional and personal rewards!”

—Lee J. Colan, author of *Sticking to It: The Art of Adherence*

“As a Partner in a global executive search firm, I have been struggling to understand how decisions get made in an environment of ‘NO.’ *Dirty Little Secrets* has not only led to my understanding, but has led to closing several engagements that have been floating around for almost a year.”

—Deborah Sawyer, Managing Partner of Ogders Berndston

“She’s done it again. Having pioneered the new sales paradigm more than two decades ago, Sharon Drew is back with a very human, accessible and powerful approach that helps sellers and buyers collaborate. We’ve all been in the dark too long. It’s time these secrets were revealed.”

—Britton Manasco, Principal of Manasco Marketing Partners

“As a management consultant, I know how challenging it is to uncover, let alone explain, the behind-the-scenes issues buyers face internally. SDM has nailed it. By reading this book you will come away with a far better understanding of the change management issues a buyer must contend with before they can ever consider buying. I found the book exceptionally engaging, tremendously insightful with a very unique perspective, and well worth reading.”

—Jim Altfeld, CEO of Altfeld, Inc.

“Morgen leads the field in giving us insights into what really goes on inside the prospect’s decision making. This is not a business-as-usual book. She is asking sales folks to make a dramatic change, moving selling away from its dismal yet commonly accepted closing rates. Someday we will all use Buying Facilitation® as part of our sales tools. Get this book and learn how now.”

—Reg Nordman, Founder and Managing Partner of Rocket Builders

“This book is disturbing. It pulls back the veil: we’ll never be able to go back to the old way of just selling a solution. This book teaches us what has been missing from the industry for so long—how buyers decide. The ideas in this book are too big to push under the rug: it’s sophisticated, but necessary for any serious sales professional.”

—Jeff Blackwell, Founder of SalesPractice.com

“*Dirty Little Secrets* is a must read for any CEO or senior executive. Sharon Drew exposes the reasons why sales methodologies fail and provides deep insight into buying, decision making, systems and the change management every customer must go through before making a purchasing decision. The ground breaking concepts in this book are supported by real world case studies that provide buyers and sellers new innovative ways of addressing internal change management issues.”

—Mark Dallmeir, CEO of The ROBB Group Holdings, LLC

“Sharon Drew’s Buying Facilitation® model is not only insightful, it works: it’s the only approach that manages the off-line buying decision process. We’ve been using her process for 10 years and the approach has helped us consistently grow revenues WITH our clients. *Dirty Little Secrets* is the latest in Sharon Drew’s long line of best-of-breed business writings and should be on the desk of every CEO and sales professional. After twenty years of writing and speaking about managing buying decisions, Morgen is THE thought leader behind our new thinking of helping buyers buy.”

—Jack Hubbard, Chief Experience Officer of St. Meyer & Hubbard.

“*Dirty Little Secrets* is an interesting, innovative, thought-provoking, and sophisticated book on systems, change management, and leadership. Although it is nominally a sales book, Sharon Drew maps out the route for how change happens in a way that supports the integrity of the whole system. It’s ground-breaking work, and a must read for anyone who is a true student of change.”

—Alan Allard, President of Genius Dynamics, Inc.

“Get powerful insights and practical steps to helping buyers have an easy time buying—and have a good time while making money. This great book will alter everything you know about selling!”

—Chip R. Bell, author of *Take Their Breath Away*

“Social entrepreneurs and progressives often get uncomfortable about sales techniques and way of ‘manipulating’ people. *Dirty Little Secrets* teaches how to serve customers by facilitating their decision-making, with no persuasion or manipulation—how to do good, make money and keep integrity intact.”

—Gil Friend, CEO of Natural Logic

[OTHER BOOKS]

BY SHARON DREW MORGEN

- *Sales on the Line: Meeting the Demands of the '90s Through Phone Partnering*
- *Somebody Makes a Difference*
- **New York Times Business Bestseller**
Selling with Integrity: Reinventing Sales Through Collaboration, Respect, and Serving
- *The New Sales Paradigm Series:*
 - *Changing the Thinking*
 - *Changing the Process*
 - *Changing the Skills*
- *Buying Facilitation®: The New Way to Sell That Influences and Expands Decisions*

CONTRIBUTER TO

- *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work*,
by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Maida Rogerson,
and Martin Rutte
- *Chicken Soup for the Mother's Soul*,
by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Jennifer Read Hawthorne,
and Marci Shimoff
- *The One Piece of Advice You Need to Earn Your Clients' Loyalty*,
edited by RainToday.com

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**WHY SELLERS CAN'T SELL AND
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WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT**

[SHARON DREW MORGEN]



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[DEDICATION]

For Jonathan, Jill, and all of the other
contrarians who are the voices of change.

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[CONTENTS]

PREFACE by Jill Konrath v

READER'S WARNING vii

INTRODUCTION xi

[SECTION ONE]

THE BUYER'S WORLD

- 1 MY STORY: HOW I LEARNED TO HELP BUYERS BUY 3
- 2 HOW SALES MUST CHANGE 11
- 3 SYSTEMS ARE AT THE HEART OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT 19
- 4 WHAT ARE DECISIONS? 39
- 5 WHAT IS A NEED AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT THE SYSTEM? 49
- 6 THE WAY BUYING DECISIONS GET MADE 67
- 7 CORPORATE CULTURES IN TIMES OF RISK 85

[SECTION TWO]

THE SELLER'S WORLD

- 8 HOW CAN WE SELL TO HELP BUYERS BUY? 99
- 9 HOW DECISION FACILITATION WORKS: AN OVERVIEW 113

- 10 THE TEN STEPS OF A BUYING DECISION 127
- 11 SALES 2.0: THE BLESSING AND THE CURSE 145

SECTION THREE

THE SKILLS: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- 12 CASE STUDY: ANATOMY OF A BUYING DECISION 157
- 13 HOW BUYING FACILITATION® CHANGES RESULTS 175
- 14 MANAGING THE BUYER'S DECISION: THE VENDOR'S STORY 187
- 15 LEADING THE BUYER THROUGH THE BUYING PROCESS 197
- 16 CONCLUSION: SELLERS CAN MAKE BUYERS SMART 211

RESOURCES 225

BIBLIOGRAPHY 227

APPENDIX 229

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 241

INDEX 243

[PREFACE]

IT'S NOT OFTEN I find a sales book that really gets me excited. But that's exactly what happened when I read *Dirty Little Secrets*.

First, a bit of background: I've had extraordinary success as a salesperson. I know what works, what doesn't and how to make things happen. As a leader in the sales field, I've spoken at numerous annual sales meetings and trained thousands of salespeople. My own book, *Selling to Big Companies*, is a Fortune-recommended bestseller.

Yet Sharon Drew Morgen is one of those rare people who really makes me think—and even question the premise on which our entire sales methodology is based.

In *Dirty Little Secrets*, her groundbreaking work, she takes us inside our buyer's decision-making process to a level we've never been before. We discover all sorts of factors that have to be addressed prior to making any changes. And most of these issues have absolutely nothing to do with our product or service offering.

When our prospects disappear into a black hole, that's what they're dealing with. And, as Sharon Drew points out over and over, our sales cycle is as long as takes our prospects to figure these things out. Often these challenges are so daunting, that they decide it's easier to stay with the status quo—even if it's not a smart decision.

Up until now, we haven't had strategies that taught us how to deal with these “systems” issues that our customers face. We know how to get them interested in our offering. We know how to uncover their needs. We know how to showcase our solutions. But we don't know how to help them get “unstuck.”

In *Dirty Little Secrets*, Sharon Drew actually teaches us how to help our prospects have the important conversations that shorten their decision-making process, eliminate turf wars and get buy-in to the change initiative. And, she shows you how to get all the right people on the buying decision team—after just one call.

It's good stuff! This new approach is radical though. It takes a while to get your sales brain around it because it's different from what you're used to.

By adding these strategies to the front end of the sales model, I can see how we'd be able to close at least 2x the business. Sharon Drew's clients get between 200%—800% increase over conventional sales. I didn't think that was possible—and it's not, with the sales model.

This book is not a conventional sales book. If you're looking for a quick fix or want to just take away three things to do better, this book isn't for you.

Instead, *Dirty Little Secrets* actually teaches you how decisions get made, how change happens, and how buyers choose a solution. It alters your thinking about your job and gives you a new set of skills to use with your customers.

Read this book. Savor it. Keep it near you. Use it with your sales skills and have all of the success you deserve.

Jill Konrath

Author, *Selling to Big Companies*

Founder, SellingtoBigCompanies.com



[**READER'S WARNING**]

I OFTEN HEAR sellers say that they think buyers are stupid.

You've said that also?

Did you ever think that sellers are also stupid?

I bet not. I bet you thought that we were the smart ones.

But we're both dumb. And it's not our fault.

We know how to sell and how to understand a buyer's needs. Sadly, through experience, we've realized that doing all that, knowing all that, and being really smart and kind and professional doesn't necessarily close a sale.

Oh—it does sometimes, like when we make those quick, easy sales that just fall into our laps. But when that happens, we're just getting lucky.

The rest of the time we're just hoping. Or a victim of circumstance. You know all that.

But buyers aren't really stupid. Nor are they incapable of making decisions. They just aren't making the decisions we want them to make, in the way we want them made. Instead, they are making decisions according to different criteria than we'd like.

Buyers are struggling also; no one has taught them how to recognize and manage the off-line, behind-the-scenes change issues they must address as they deliberate a new solution. And because sales handles merely a sliver of the tasks that a buyer must accomplish, we haven't had the skills to help.

So we sit, helpless, while we wait for our prospects to return with their decision.

As a result, despite all our hard work, we fail somewhere around 90% of the time. But it doesn't have to be that way.

THE SALES MODEL IS INCOMPLETE

I'm going to show you how to have different, much more successful outcomes, make more money, and have more fun. And serve your clients better.

I'm going to introduce you to the missing pieces in sales—the dirty little secrets that have kept us locked-in to the type of results we've gotten used to. I'm going to teach you how to teach your buyers to buy.

But be warned: this is not a sales book. This book will teach you different material than you've learned in sales, and you'll need to wear a different hat as you read.

WARNING

Dirty Little Secrets will teach you how to understand and influence the mysterious systems buyers live in so they can efficiently manage the internal stuff they must make sense of—their old initiatives and the new economy, management and colleagues, and partners and old vendors—on their way to a purchasing decision.

It will give you insight into the rules behind decisions and the steps to a sale. It will give you the knowledge to construct a dialogue to lead your prospects through their change. It will give you a new skill set that will help your buyers buy and give you the success you deserve.

In *Dirty Little Secrets* I will introduce you to the many secrets that keep us far less successful than we should be—the assumptions, rules, and activities that are endemic in the sales model that cause you to fail.

I began writing this book with just one secret in mind, one secret that we all know but don't acknowledge: *sales only manages the solution placement end of the buying decision and ignores the majority of the confusing, risky, and hidden change issues buyers need to address behind-the-scenes before they can responsibly bring in a new solution.*

But during the writing process, I realized that the fallout from that secret created many other secrets—secrets biasing buying decisions, relationships, and change. Together, these 'secrets' drive the book: I will unwrap each of the problems that the sales model itself creates, and give you a new tool kit to address them.

Unfortunately, because this is not a sales model, the skills and information will be unusual for you and may stretch you a bit. Fortunately, this skill set has been tested over 20 years and proven successful by many of the largest corporations in the world. But be warned: you will try to fit your familiar sales skills into resolving these problems. I warn you to resist.

- Do not, do not, try to put this material into your 'sales skills' thinking.
- Do not use it to understand a buyer's need.
- Do not try to figure out how to use this to place your product.
- Do not think you use this material already. The moment you ask questions to seek to understand, you are doing sales and attempting to manage the solution placement.

THIS IS NOT A SALES BOOK

I hope you read this book to learn new skills to help your buyers navigate their off-line decision making. Don't confuse this with a sales book. This is a sophisticated guide through managing the change issues and decisions that determine a buying decision—or any decision for that matter.

This book may challenge you, so let me offer you some choices. Section One gives you a complete understanding of what is going on in the buyer's culture as s/he goes through the decision making and change management end of the choice process. If you don't like that level of detail, you may prefer to begin in Section Two where I discuss the system of sales, or in Section Three where I have a full Case Study.

Do what works for you. I want you to use the book in a way that will help you serve your buyers better and be more successful. Dip in, move out, play around. If I had my choices, you'd start at the beginning so you'd have the full set of skills to help your buyers. But do what works.

Welcome to the hidden world of how decisions get made, how change happens, and ultimately, how buyers buy. Let's unwrap all of the dirty little secrets that sales builds in to how we sell and how buyers buy that keep us all less than successful. Let's learn how to add some new skills and start fresh, and have the success we all deserve. Enjoy.

[INTRODUCTION]

YOUR SALES SKILLS are good. You know how to understand your buyer's needs. You know how to get in front of decision makers, and get past gatekeepers. You know how to pitch and present and handle objections.

But your closing rate is abysmal, and you waste too much time on prospects that won't close.

Take heart: It's not you. It's the sales model. It's the assumptions and the rules, the timing and the focus—the dirty little secrets—that cause you to fail. It's the fact that sales manages only the solution end of a buying decision and ignores the internal, off-line issues buyers need to address before they are ready to buy.

We haven't known we lacked the full range of tools necessary to help buyers manage their buying decisions. We've lost untold amounts of business as a result. We didn't know that buyers don't know how to buy for the same reasons sellers don't know how to sell.

But the profession accepts our common failures and makes us think our results are acceptable, part of the job, and not our fault. Since everyone else in the field is ineffectual in the same way, it seems normal to have overlong sales cycles, objections, and hot prospects that disappear.

Corporations have built 90%+ failure rates into their sales projections, happy when they can get a 15% close rate.

There is no other profession that covers up for a 90% failure rate. Imagine if doctors, or lawyers, or dentists, or even baseball players, had an acceptable norm of 10% success.

THE READER'S JOURNEY THROUGH CHANGE

There is no other profession that covers up for a 90% failure rate. Imagine if doctors, or lawyers, or dentists, or even baseball players, had an acceptable norm of 10% success.

I assume you'd prefer to be closing more sales than you're closing now or you wouldn't be reading this book.

That means you have a problem. A need, if you will. And this book may offer you a solution.

I have a solution. I've got a decision facilitation model that will help you close far, far more sales than you've ever closed. It will:

- uncover more needs than your prospects thought they had,
- differentiate you from competitors because you can listen, ask the right questions, and recognize the hidden dynamics your prospect must manage,
- decrease the close time by at least half,
- prevent all objections,
- get the members of the buying decision team to your first meeting,
- be 200-800% more effective than any sales model on the market, and
- make you a true relationship manager and servant leader to your buyer.

My solution can do all that. And I can give you testimonials, references, client sites and names, and the features, functions, and benefits of the model.

But my solution is not a sales tool—although it will help you sell.

My solution is a change management model that helps buyers maneuver through their offline issues to get the requisite buy-in to make a purchase.

This book will tell you what they are going through and how to help them do it so you can serve them better and close a lot more business. With your support, buyers will make far more efficient decisions and avoid potential disruption on their way to purchasing a new solution. Win-Win.

To learn all this, you're going to have to 'buy' a new solution from me.

How do you know it's worth the risk to change?

WHAT IS GREATER SUCCESS WORTH?

Before you are willing to buy in to my 'solution' and be willing to change, you'll need answers to these questions:

Are you really willing to change what you've been doing for so long? If it goes against your current beliefs of what 'sales' is? If changing would be difficult and confusing and uncomfortable? Really?

Will your boss have a problem when s/he sees you doing something that differs from what you were trained to do?

What if your boss won't give you a chance to prove yourself with new skills? Or your teammates don't want to change the group-selling approach and don't want you doing anything different?

What do you risk by doing something new? Is it worth it?

Until you have answers to these questions, you can't face the risk of doing something different, whether you have a need or not.

Until or unless all the pieces of your system (your personal habits and beliefs, your work environment and boss, your pride and your ego) buy in to adding the new ideas and skills, and are prepared to go through an uncomfortable process of change, you will not change. Regardless of your need or my solution.

Knowing the details of my solution will not help you manage your personal systems issues. Even if I know the details of your need, I can't help you manage your personal systems issues.

It's not because my product and your need aren't a fit.

Even if I understand the details of your circumstances, and I understand your frustration, and I gather data about what's stopping you from being as successful as you deserve, I won't be there when your boss has a serious discussion with you, or your sales team takes over the sales call from you, or you get frustrated when learning the new material.

I can have the best sales solution in the world—I do I do!—and you can have the exact need that will fit with my solution—you do!—but if your internal system won't buy in to you changing, you will be at risk if you use it, and you won't buy: The perfect match between my solution and your need will be moot. And all of the pitching, presenting, teaching I can do about my model will be a waste.

If you decide that my material will give you the results you seek, you will need to change. Change, even to make you more successful, means disruption.

DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT MEANS CHANGE

Indeed, until you seek, understand, and agree to whatever changes you would need to make as you approach internal change, you won't know how to apply the information about the new solution I can offer you. Until you do, you won't buy my solution.

Unfortunately, the sales model doesn't give either of us the ability to help you decide if doing something different is worth the risk of change.

No matter how frustrated you are with your current results, no matter how great and appropriate my solution, your status quo will fight to keep things as they are.

Do you want to wait until after you've learned my material to get buy-in from your boss or your colleagues or your ego? How big a part does this internal 'stuff' play in influencing your choice of a solution? Or if you want to change at all?

In *Dirty Little Secrets* I will challenge the unconscious decisions that dictate your current behaviors and drive your results. I will challenge your attachment to the sales model. I will certainly challenge your understanding of the success that's possible. I will teach you about systems, not sales; decision facilitation, not solution placement; helping buyers discern their own answers, not yours.

As you read the book, you may be confronted, confused, challenged and annoyed and want to return to what you're familiar with, even though your current situation caused the 'need' to begin with. It's comfortable. It's predictable. It's you.

I'll hold your hand. I'll give you great customer service. I'll give you a great product. I'll understand your need. But you're the one who must change.

Are you willing to change to be more successful? To make more money? To serve your clients better? Is it worth the risk? Do you know all of these answers right now?

As you manage your learning challenges, you'll get a deep understanding of how change happens, and either be ready to buy my solution or not. And as you're learning and deciding, note *you are going through the same process you require of your prospects each time they consider purchasing your solution.*

You will feel many of the same resistances and confusions that buyers face as I present my ideas and ask you to ‘buy’ them: how your ‘need’ resists change; how you keep gravitating to what’s comfortable and fight doing anything different; why bringing in a new skill and upsetting your normal routines would be your last choice.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

During the course of the book, *Dirty Little Secrets* will introduce you to the reasons—the secrets, if you will—why both buyers and sellers fail to find the easiest route to problem resolution and possible solution purchase.

In the Conclusion, I will give you a list of these secrets. But given how endemic they are within the fabric of the book, they will not be explicitly highlighted. By the end of the book, they will have all been resolved for you so you can help buyers:

- ascertain their decision criteria to elicit buy-in and manage change as they consider purchasing a solution,
- weight and recognize their internal people and policy obstacles,
- assess the level of risk for each internal element (jobs, relationships, initiatives, people) that touches the new solution,
- make win-win decisions throughout the stakeholder teams,
- manage problem elements early to assure buy-in,
- quickly ascertain the right people who must buy-in and be on the buying decision team,
- recognize and control all of the elements that touch a need to ensure there is no disruption to the system,
- get the appropriate buy-in up, down, and across the management chain.

Dirty Little Secrets uncovers the heretofore hidden parts of how change decisions get made that have nothing to do with needs or solutions, and everything to do with navigating through the off-line, hidden, private issues buyers (or anyone) must address before bringing something new into their comfortable environment.

It's that behind-the-scenes place where buyers go to get internal agreement—while we wait. They need to do this anyway; we might as well learn tools to have some influence over this part of the buying decision process. Indeed, you will learn to help buyers determine how, why, when, and if to buy.

Is it sales? Well, no. It's change management. It's decision facilitation. It's systems alignment and congruency. And you will have the ability to lead buyers through their decisions by adding this skill set to the front end of your sales skills.

In *Section One*, *The Buyer's World*, I'll introduce you to how a 'need' gets created and established in the buyer's culture, and what needs to happen to be ready to resolve the 'need.'

This section is about systems, decisions, need, and how change happens. By understanding the elements in the buyer's system (the people and policies, rules and initiatives, vendor issues and partner issues), we can help them navigate through their off-line issues to make the decisions necessary for a purchase.

It will introduce you to many hidden change issues having nothing to do with their need or your solution that buyers must handle before they can resolve their problem. We've not been involved in this area before.

Section Two, *The Seller's World*, is what sellers need to know or do in today's selling environment. It includes a preview of the Buying Facilitation® Method (the change management model I developed to help lead buyers through their buy-in decisions) to give you an idea of what's possible; a look at the 'system' of sales and how it keeps our failed behaviors in place; and a walk through the issues we face as we adopt Sales 2.0 strategies.

Section Three is a Case Study of a buying scenario, including every type of relationship, decision, and outcome from the buyer side and the vendor side. I've included two chapters that show Buying Facilitation® in action to clearly exemplify what you've been learning in the book.

TAKE NOTE

First: Throughout the book I tell a lot of stories about how I lost sales while using conventional sales methods. If you read these stories carefully, they explain the systems issues I failed to help the buyer address; this will give you insight as to how to do it better. I wish I knew then what I know now. Use my mistakes to learn from.

You will hear some crazy stories in here—a major insurance provider cancelled a Buying Facilitation® program because the pilot gave them a 600% increase in sales and it blew apart their system; a president of one of the largest banks in the world failed to implement an initiative for two years at the cost of \$1billion because he didn't want to handle a three-year-old union problem.

I promise that each of the stories is true—and cost me many millions of dollars in lost revenues. You'll see from my mistakes how fundamental the (buying) system is, how it is at the very heart of every decision.

While I do offer one recent Buying Facilitation® success story in Chapter 9, the majority of the stories in the book show my failures. I could have included many, many stories of my successes and those of my clients: I've been using this model and teaching it since 1985. But by showing you exactly what happened in each failure, you will be able to see where and how your sales fail and possibly glean some gems that you can use in your next sales situation.

Next: The final Case Study will put everything in the book together for you, and show you what success looks like. For more success stories and additional tools, visit my daily blog: www.sharondrewmorgen.com.

One more thing: This is a book about facilitating decisions. I've put it into sales, but remember you can use this for negotiating, coaching, OD, or just helping your three-year-old decide to clean her room. *At the end of the day, no matter how much our buyers have a need and we have the best solution, if they don't know how to decide to make a new choice, it doesn't matter what we've got.* And sadly, as you'll see, their decision to choose us is rarely about our solution.

It's time to help our buyers make the up-front decisions they need to make before they are ready, willing, or able to buy from us.

Are you're still reading? Good. We have a lot of work to do. Let's get started.

[SECTION ONE]

THE BUYER'S WORLD



“Customers don’t follow orders, and there’s no limit to the ways, media, contexts and reasons why and how they can make decisions that lead to purchase (or, conversely, to abandonment). Information sharing doesn’t end with the work day and isn’t limited to the channels chosen by your marketing department. And the content that factors into those decisions are often, if not mostly, outside of the purview of marketing and instead originate in other departments (sourcing, vendor relationships, prices, service and support, employee-relations issues, environmental practices).”

—Jonathan Salem Baskin

CHAPTER ONE

MY STORY: HOW I LEARNED TO HELP BUYERS BUY

[WHAT WE KNOW]

- If sellers are professional with a good product/service, they'll be successful.
- If sellers understand a buyer's need they can pitch product appropriately so the buyer will understand the fit.
- Sellers don't close as many sales as they should be closing.

[WHAT WE HAVEN'T KNOWN]

- Buying decisions are not necessarily based on need.
- There are things in the buyer's culture that neither buyer nor seller know what to do about.
- Sales doesn't help manage the offline buying decision issues.
- Buyers live in a complex system that monitors all activities.
- Until buyers are able to change without disruption, they will not buy.

[WHY IT MATTERS]

- Buyer's environments are more complex than ever, and they have no easy route to change.
- Buyers could use our help maneuvering through their internal issues because they have a confusing time figuring it out on their own.
- The tangle that keeps the buyer's problem in place holds more business for us once buyers know how to untangle their mess.

I LEARNED THE HARD WAY how complicated buying decisions are and why the sales model fails as often as it does: sales does not manage the off-line decisions buyers must make.

Sales focuses on product/service sale. Unfortunately for us, that's the last thing buyers need. Literally.

When I started out as a sales person, I thought I knew the job: have a good product or service, be a values-based professional, understand the need, get chosen over the competition. But it never brought me the results I thought I deserved given the amount of time I'd put in. And I sure lost a lot of business that I should have closed.

I didn't know what I didn't know. I understood my offering and the buyer's explicit need; but like all other sales people, I sat and waited as buyers managed the subjective, hidden dynamics on their own, and hoped that they called back.

I hadn't realized that the eventual buying decision really had nothing much to do with me or my solution. It certainly was more complex, and certainly more unconscious, than either the seller or the buyer understands from the viewpoint of resolving a 'need'.

Where did buyers go when they had an urgent need, liked me, and liked my solution—but never called back? Although I made lots of guesses (they sought a cheaper solution, they went to a competitor, they did nothing) it was a mystery until I became an entrepreneur.

As an entrepreneur, I realized what I didn't understand as a seller. I realized that a product or service purchase is based on initially unknowable 'stuff' that takes place off-line in organizations. Indeed, choosing a solution is a change management issue for the buyer.

When I became an entrepreneur, I learned exactly what happens before buyers can choose a solution, and why, as a seller, I inadvertently faced more failure than I deserved. Here's what I learned.

MY STORY—FROM SELLER TO BUYER

I was fired from every job I ever had until I got into sales. And then it was as if I'd found my home. I became a million dollar producer within two years. I was truly on top of my game: money, membership in a prestigious squash club (necessary in the '70s in New York City), designer clothes and shoes. I was a happy camper.

But there was always something in the back of my mind that I found a bit odd: I couldn't figure out why perfectly smart people became dumb as buyers, or where they went when they said "I'll call you back."

It made no sense: I understood their situation and it was obvious to me that my solution could solve their problem. I had good relationships with prospects, followed them up as per agreement, and responded to their requests. I even let them beat me at squash!

Wasn't it obvious that they should be buying—especially the ones I was so close with? And yet why some of them called back to buy, and others—sometimes ones I was closest with—disappeared forever, remained a mystery. Where did they go?

Several years into my sales career I was offered the chance to start up a tech recruitment company in London, Stuttgart, and Hamburg. I was a new entrepreneur, and was fortunate to find great people—one of whom was the brilliant man I was married to at the time—and an interesting business model. We were very successful. And my new role opened my eyes to the problems I'd experienced as a sales person.

My environment was hectic. My American investors showed up whenever they wanted to; my husband and I started going through a bad patch; I was hiring technical people but had no technical expertise; I had no idea how to manage people from other cultures; I was responsible for growing a business and answering to others and making payroll, and and and. Like all entrepreneurs, I was overwhelmed, all the time.

MY NEEDS WERE A SMALL PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

Yet my company had needs: a team-building course, a marketing vendor, part-time tech people, decorators. Each need, each problem, seemed to have some sort of relationship with everything else in a sort of tangle. I wanted to do team building, but should I include my possibly-almost-ex husband? He was part of the team, after all. Maybe I should wait until we decided if we were going to get a divorce, or just assume we would keep working together—which we did really well—no matter what happened.

And the entryway desperately needed new tables and lamps, but we were going to be moving and weren't sure what sort of furniture we'd need for the new place. Still, we really needed to get some couches now, but weren't certain how big we were going to grow, or how many people would be housed in the main office versus working off site. And because we were growing the business and adding new services, we weren't ready to hire a marketing team, but we needed to start positioning ourselves.... You get the point.

I called vendors to come meet with me so I could more clearly understand my options. [Note: this was the '80s and we didn't have the internet.] They came in to help me begin to make some sense of my choice criteria. They were focused on selling their products.

From the seller's perspective, my needs were simple: a team-building course, new furniture. They gathered data and asked great questions about my 'need', my criteria for purchase, my price points, the users, and what my outcomes were. The folks were lovely. They gave great pitches and offered professional information and marketing material. They followed up, sent stuff, took me to lunch. They were fun, professional, and great Relationship Managers.

THE MISSING PIECE IN SALES

Even while these vendors were pitching, I kept thinking about how to resolve the internal issues that created my needs, and wondered what sort of new problems a solution would create. It certainly was not as simple as just buying a solution. In fact, buying a solution would cost me more than not buying one in some situations.

Interesting for me, I didn't know how to figure it all out: The trickle-down ramifications of any decisions were overwhelming.

When I originally called the vendors, I was gathering data to understand my options about how much I should budget, what changes I'd need to make, who I liked. I certainly was not ready to buy when I met them.

Sad to say, I ended up acting like my prospects acted with me when I was a sales person. I became a 'stupid buyer' who seemingly didn't know how to decide. I kept hearing myself say, "I'll call you back" and putting the decision off until... until either things worked themselves out somehow or the choices would be obvious.

The sellers didn't help. They treated my need as if it were an isolated event that could be resolved by understanding it and then offering the best solution.

Ultimately I had to figure out how to manage whatever change would result from bringing in the new solutions, to fix problems without creating more problems or upsetting what was already working well. And I had to get buy-in from the appropriate folks, some of whom I didn't initially realize I needed to include until I was far along in the decision cycle.

In my small company of 50 people, just like in every buying environment and in every human system, everything was related to, and touched by, everything else.

If I made a change in one part of the system, there were consequences that trickled down and sometimes blindsided me. Every decision, every element of change, had to fit with everything else. Moreover, each problem that I addressed affected the next one, so I was constantly surprised and needed to re-evaluate every previous decision.

Before I could buy anything, before I could choose a vendor, before I could resolve my needs, I'd have to handle all of the change issues—with people and policies and relationships and moving—that were swimming in the same soup as my 'need.'

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If they had been able to help me figure out how to resolve my crazy internal issues that were twisted around my Identified Problem (the tangle of needs and pain and deficiencies), I could have made a buying decision more quickly.

WHAT SALES NEVER TAUGHT ME

Sales never taught me that a buyer lives in a system—a unique company culture (or family culture) filled with politics and rules and relationships and hopes and dreams and history—that needs to buy in to change before anything gets fixed or added.

Sales never taught me that buyers had ‘stuff’ to handle behind the scenes before they could buy, stuff I could never be a part of because I wasn’t privy to the buyer’s daily work space or relationships. I certainly was never taught skills that would help my prospect handle that stuff so they could buy.

I always thought that if I understood their problem, and talked to the right decision makers, and I helped them understand what was possible with my solution—how they could save money, or be more efficient—that they would know how to buy.

As a seller, I never realized that:

- Choosing a solution, solving a problem, or managing a need is a small part of a buying decision.
- Buyers cannot take any action until they figure out how to manage whatever problems in their system—the tangle of people and policies and relationships that influences and determines the status quo—created the need, and make certain that change wouldn’t hopelessly disrupt the work environment.
- Buyer’s cultures are so idiosyncratic and unique, and the relationships so delicate and dependent on history, that an outsider can never understand the tangle of issues and elements that make up the status quo.
- Choosing a solution is the buyer’s final task, only plausible once everything else is in place.
- Making a purchase is really a change management issue.
- At the start, buyers cannot plan how the hidden dynamics will play out when they contemplate a buying decision.

Neither buyer nor seller has been taught that before buyers are in a position to buy, before a viable solution can be chosen, before budget or vendors can be discussed, buyers must go through some sort of change management.

By focusing on the solution placement—the final activity of a buyer’s decision—and not having skills to help buyers maneuver through their off-line change issues which often have nothing to do with the ‘need,’ we’ve wasted a lot of time and lost a lot of revenue.

We can help them maneuver through this process, but not by using the sales model.

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