



ADAPTIVE MINDSET™

Building the Strength to Overcome the Challenges Facing Today's Sales Teams

By: David Collins, The TRACOM Group

The Challenge

The business world is changing at a rapid pace, and traditional methods of building competitive advantages are changing just as quickly. In the past, large businesses with robust budgets captured markets with widespread brand recognition and a global presence. The ability to create barriers to entry and capture a stable market allowed businesses to grow exponentially, but all that has changed.

In today's world, traditional competitive strategies can produce a temporary advantage in the market, but they can fail to build the kind of long-term brand equity that maintains a strong advantage over time. For example, it is no longer enough to simply develop new products to sustain a competitive advantage, because agile competitors can replicate and improve upon new ideas quickly. Deep discounting to retain loyal customers can fail to produce results, as well, due to the pricing pressure of global competitors. Simple brand recognition, while still important, has lost its traditional impact in an environment in which customers expect excellence in every interaction.

In the face of a changing environment, how can an organization build and sustain a competitive advantage? The

truth is, there is no technique that can be employed today to secure a long-term advantage tomorrow. In today's market, agility and adaptability are the keys to maintaining a competitive edge. Traditional sources of competitive advantage have proven too inflexible to respond to the pace of change in today's tumultuous marketplace. Those companies who thrive on change and build the resilience to adapt to changing customer demands are best positioned to maintain market leadership over time.



Salespeople play a key role in this tumultuous landscape, since they act as the face of their organizations for new and existing customers alike. More than ever before, salespeople bear the responsibility of developing long-lasting, mutually-beneficial relationships with customers by consistently exceeding their expectations.



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Salespeople have always required resiliency to thrive in their roles. In the previous century, they dealt with a wide range of challenges to their resiliency, such as:

- Cold calling and setting appointments with prospects—and the associated rejection
- Having the courage to ask difficult questions
- Handling objections with tact and insight
- Closing skills and follow-up
- Recovering and moving forward from losses
- Springing forward when sales targets are not met

In addition to these, salespeople in the twenty-first century face a wide range of new challenges. To start, the selling continuum has changed from an environment in which sellers provide information to buyers to one in which buyers come to the table fully informed. Rather than seek out sales staff with questions, prospective customers more often turn to the Internet to perform their own research. In fact, according to research by Gartner and Forrester, up to 90 percent of the buyer's journey takes place before they contact a seller directly. A recent article from Forrester goes on to point out that B2B buyers easily obtain three items of information about a seller or product for every one item that salespeople and marketers provide.

Differentiating

Creating clear differentiation for new or existing brands has become more challenging than ever. Many of the traditional competitive tools, such as product development, strategic pricing, wide distribution, advertising and product packaging can be copied and improved upon quickly by agile competitors. For customers, seeing clear differences between competing brands has become nearly impossible in many industries. As a result, customers have become less loyal in both the B2B and B2C segments. Customers are no longer prepared to tolerate service that falls short of expectations purely out of loyalty to a favorite brand. Many can even be dissatisfied with service that simply meets their expectation rather than going above and beyond. In today's marketplace, customers expect suppliers and service providers to exceed expectations at all stages of the sales cycle and the service delivery process.

Value Added

More than ever, customers seek added value as a first priority. Yet, according to the ASTD's State of Sales Study published in 2009, surveyed employers focus more than one-third of their sales training budgets on technical selling skills, such as cold calling and closing, and do not even list Mindset, Behavioral Style or Emotional Intelligence training as a lesser priority.

Collaborating for Success

Business customers operate in the same fast-paced climate of change as their suppliers, and they expect suppliers to help them keep costs under control and increase their own sales results. Customers expect suppliers to demonstrate the bottom-line implications of their sales proposals, rather than simply presenting effective products at attractive prices. Anyone can sell a good product at a good price, and any salesperson can master basic selling skills—the companies who truly excel are those that partner with their customers and do all they can to help them succeed. This kind of selling and service requires skill in collaboration and communication with a diverse range of individuals and teams, as well as the ability to truly understand the needs of customers and their organizations.

Embracing Change

The rapid speed of product obsolescence, new competitors entering the market and emerging strategic threats at a corporate level require companies to adapt quickly and frequently. This phenomenon ripples into the sales organization on a continual basis, causing constant disruption and change. Considering the range of new challenges emerging from a world in constant change, it is no wonder that modern salespeople can struggle to excel in their roles.

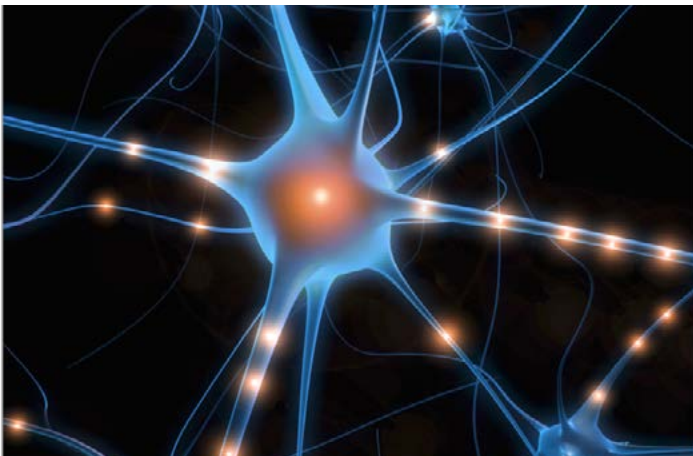


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Giving Up Bad Habits

While these new challenges may sound simple to overcome, the reality is that they are not. A recent study by the European Journal of Social Psychology reinforces the fact that habits can be changed at will through repetition of intentional patterns of action, but reveals that our traditional belief that new habits form in 28 days may be largely understated. In a recent study, the journal found that participants required an average of 66 days to fully solidify a new habit, with some people taking over 200 days. This fact underlies the major challenge for a salesperson attempting to build mental and emotional resiliency to respond to the modern challenges of his role. You see, our natural ways of dealing with stress, adversity and change can cause us to essentially work against ourselves and prevent ourselves from achieving the results we seek.

Researchers are developing a model of the brain as an energy-conserving organ that seeks to put as many processes on "auto-pilot" as possible, including our reactions to stress, adversity and change. In this auto-pilot mode, we fall into patterns of automatic thinking that are negative.



Consider the following patterns of automatic thinking, and how each can impact sales results:

- Minimizing: Being unrealistically positive — magnifying the positive and minimizing the negative.** Habitually minimizing negative outcomes or threats in the marketplace can lead a salesperson to miss opportunities to address weaknesses and overcome barriers to success for themselves, their teams and their organizations. (e.g., "My sales team keeps making mistakes, but they'll learn eventually.")
- Externalizing: Placing all of the responsibility on others for negative events.** When salespeople externalize events, they can fail to find opportunities to take action to solve problems on their own or with colleagues' help. Taking personal responsibility for solving clients' challenges is what separates the most successful sales teams from those who struggle. (e.g., "We didn't make the sale. My colleagues messed up.")
- Overgeneralizing: Thinking that negative events generalize to your entire life.** When salespeople experience a "dry patch" at work, it can be easy to allow feelings of frustration or failure to permeate other areas of life. When that happens, it can be even more difficult to bounce back and increase performance on the job. (e.g., "I'll never make another sale.")
- Labeling: Giving yourself or others a label.** When salespeople label themselves or others, they can miss opportunities to solve problems in creative ways. Some salespeople label themselves as "technologically challenged," for example, which can prevent them from trying to master new communications technologies. (e.g., "All he does is discount to close sales.")

Our lives are ruled by these automatic thoughts, and they have a great impact on us. While stress is nothing new, in today's workplace a high level of personal stress has become the norm. When people are feeling overwhelmed, they are unable to cope with adversity and are often paralyzed by inaction. In sales, inaction can be costly. More time worrying means less time selling, for example, and salespeople who are unable or fearful of pitching a new product can slow down a new product launch. Those who feel overwhelmed by a new quota can find themselves procrastinating on the first steps to achieving it, as another example.

Stress and adversity are not going to disappear, so people's ability to become more resilient to life's challenges is more important than ever. Research shows that highly resilient people respond to challenges with flexibility, bouncing back from challenges and even finding opportunities within them. Importantly, they perform more effectively in their jobs, live healthier, remain engaged with their work and have a higher level of commitment to their organizations.



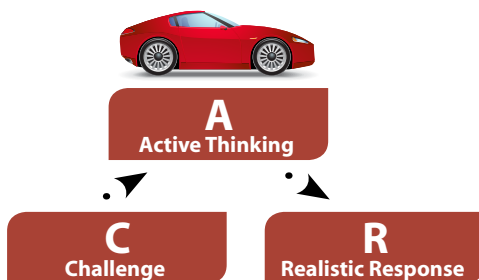
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The Good News

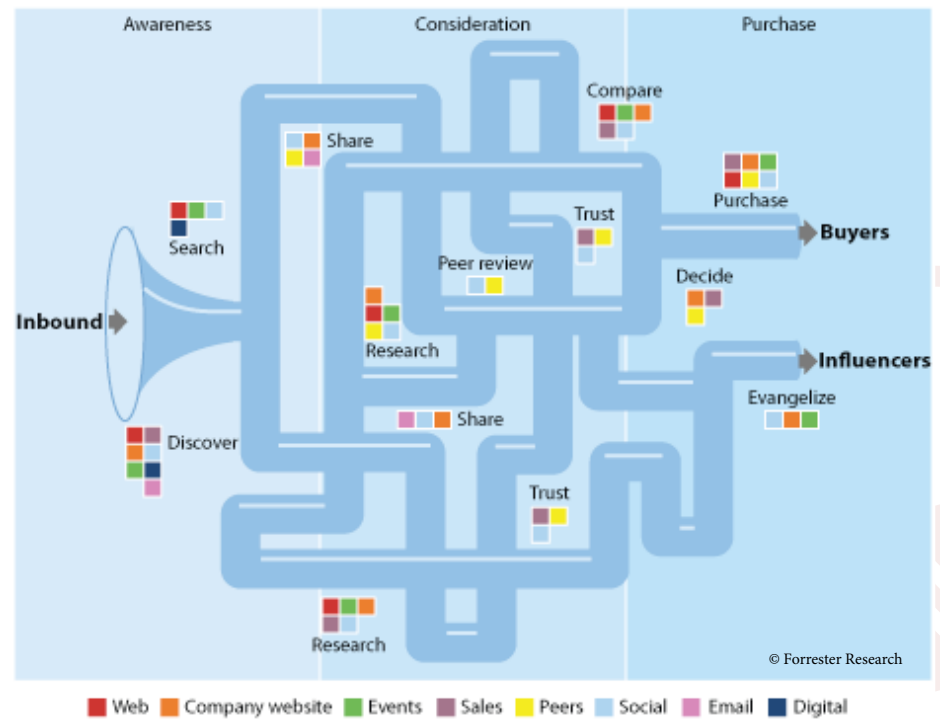
The good news is that resiliency can be learned and developed. There are practical and effective strategies for counteracting these human tendencies. They involve using the logical, deliberate and cautious part of the brain (the “rational” brain) to counteract thoughts from (the “emotional” brain).

It is very important to realize that adversity or stressful events do not lead directly to negative feelings. A stressor leads to a particular behavioral and emotional response through your automatic thoughts. For example, a setback at work may lead you to believe that you will never be able to finish a project, for example, or that your supervisor is to blame. These underlying thoughts create feelings of anxiety, anger, sadness and other negative emotions. Automatic thoughts happen quickly, often beneath our awareness, yet they directly influence our reactions to stress.

The key to developing greater resilience is to use active thinking – to examine these underlying thoughts and correct them to ensure that they are realistic. With active thinking, people are likely to react to stressors with a realistic response. This is the sequence of events we call “CAR.” A Challenge leads to Active thinking, which leads to a Realistic



The New Sales Funnel



response. When you ride in a CAR, you are in control. You are the driver, and you determine how you get to your destination. By exercising active thinking, you are employing the rational brain system to counteract your emotional brain system while strengthening the brain circuitry associated with resilience.

Better Sales Through Resiliency

Imagine if your sales managers could use this knowledge to help their team to navigate through the challenges they face each day. They would be better able to:

- Identify the source of others' frustration and help them through it quickly
- Inspire the team to follow and support a new strategy

- Counsel a struggling or under-performing team member
- Ask the sales team to get on board with company directives they may not initially believe in
- Solve the root causes of problems, rather than simply “putting out fires”

Imagine if your salespeople were able to overcome their natural tendencies and:

- Quickly bounce back from rejections
- Acclimate to an ever changing environment
- Get on board and support new strategies and product launches quickly
- Build longer-term customer relationships based on trust

TRACOM's Adaptive Mindset for Resiliency™ programs teach people about their sources of and response patterns to stress while providing practical strategies for altering counterproductive responses. The program is based on decades of research on resiliency and groundbreaking research in neuroscience. Your team will gain insights about themselves and learn concrete ways to buffer themselves from workplace stressors. They will be able to use these skills immediately to enhance their resiliency and improve their job performance, ultimately resulting in greater results for your entire organization. In the world your salespeople find themselves in, they need to be equipped not only to survive, but to thrive.



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About the Author

David Collins is TRACOM's General Manager and has been with the company since 2003 working with global clients and leading the company's direct salesforce and network of resellers. He's a frequent author and speaker on organizational performance and social intelligence. His most recent book is *The SOCIAL STYLE & Versatility Facilitator Handbook*.

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