

selling  
with  
noble  
purpose  
second edition

*How to*  
Drive Revenue *and* Do Work  
That Makes You Proud

Lisa Earle McLeod  
with Elizabeth Lotardo

WILEY



## Praise for Selling with Noble Purpose

“McLeod combines a wealth of field experience with unique insights to drive revenue.”

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**Lisa Earle McLeod  
with Elizabeth Lotardo**

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*For Jay Earle:  
a man who believed work should  
be meaningful and fun!*



*“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”*

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry



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# Introduction

## What Is Selling with Noble Purpose?

*Hearts are the strongest when they beat in response to noble ideals.*

—Ralph Bunche, winner of the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize

“The words *selling* and *noble* are rarely seen together. Most people believe that money is the primary motivator for top salespeople and that doing good by the world runs a distant second. That belief is wrong.”

When I first wrote those words in 2012, I had no way of knowing the first edition of *Selling with Noble Purpose* would upend traditional beliefs about sales and spur a global movement. At the time, the notion that you could galvanize a sales force around something more meaningful than money was a new, and not always welcome, idea. Thankfully, times have changed. At least in part.

We started writing this new edition of *Selling with Noble Purpose* before the COVID crisis began. By the time we were finishing this book, the weight of the crisis was upon us. Markets had become volatile, businesses were closing, and people all over the world were afraid. They were afraid for their health, afraid for their livelihood, and afraid of what the future might hold.

We are experiencing a reset like never before. Business norms are being challenged, and teams are being called upon to innovate, reinventing what they sell and how they sell on a daily basis. A growing chorus of customers are asking: Is your sales team here to help me? Or are they just trying to close me?

Here’s what we know to be true: amid disruption, one thing that can keep a salesforce motivated and committed to delivering the highest results is a sense of purpose.

The teams you'll read about in this book use their purpose as a North Star to guide them during times of uncertainty and unrest. Purpose enables them to make quick decisions and to put their highest ideals into action.

Over the last five years, purpose has become a hot topic in business. Organizations proudly announce their purpose across social media. Leaders talk about their purpose during the annual meeting. Yet what the COVID crisis has revealed with stark clarity is that purpose must be more than a mantra or management technique: during disruption, purpose is a lifeline to your customers and your team.

The core idea of this book is that sales teams with a noble purpose bigger than money—whose aim is to improve life for customers—outsell transactional teams who focus on internal targets and quotas. During a crisis, the contrast between transactional sellers and noble purpose sellers is on display.

It's long been assumed that sales teams are primarily driven by economic incentives alone—when in fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

We stand in a place and time where the role of business in the world is being questioned. The pressure for short-term profit is a constant, yet there is equally forceful pressure to do right by our people and customers and make the workplace more meaningful for all. Sales is where money and meaning come together. It's time for us to harness the fierce urgency of now to transform the way we conduct business and restore nobility to the sales profession.

## **The Curbside Conversation Where Selling with Noble Purpose Was Born**

A decade ago, I was part of a consulting team asked by a major biotech firm to conduct a six-month double-blind study of its sales force. The purpose of the study was to determine what behaviors separated top salespeople from average ones. The study revealed something no one expected: the top performers all had a far more pronounced sense of purpose than their average counterparts.

The salespeople who sold with Noble Purpose—who truly wanted to make a difference to customers—consistently outsold the salespeople who were focused on sales goals and money.

It was a startling discovery that I might have missed, had it not been for a curbside conversation at the Phoenix airport.

I was finishing a two-day ride-along with a sales rep. As she dropped me off at the airport, I asked her a question I hadn't asked the other reps: "What do you think about when you go on sales calls? What's going on in your head?"

“I don’t tell this to many people,” she confessed, looking around the car as though someone was going to hear her secret. “When I go on sales calls, I always think about this particular patient who came up to me one day during a call on a doctor’s office.

“I was standing in the hallway, talking to one of the doctors. I was wearing my company name badge, so I stood out. All of a sudden, this elderly woman taps me on the shoulder.”

“Excuse me, Miss,” she said. ‘Are you from the company that makes this drug?’ pointing to a pamphlet on the counter.

“Yes, ma’am,” I replied.

“I just want to thank you,’ she said. ‘Before my doctor prescribed your drug, I barely had enough energy to leave the house. But now I can visit my grandkids; I can get down on the floor to play with them. I can travel. So thank you. You gave me back my life.’”

The sales rep told me, “I think about that woman every day. If it’s 4:30 on a rainy Friday afternoon, other sales reps go home. I don’t. I make the extra sales call because I know I’m not just pitching a product. I’m giving people their life back. That grandmother is my higher purpose.”

Sitting in that blistering Phoenix heat, I realized she had said something incredibly important. I thought about that conversation during my entire flight back to Atlanta. I kept turning it over and over in my head.

Our consulting team had spent months shadowing salespeople all over the country. We’d conducted in-depth interviews and analyzed every aspect of the sales calls. But this was the first time anyone had opened their heart and spoken in an authentic, emotional way about what truly moved them. While others had spoken in corporate platitudes, here was a salesperson speaking the language of the soul.

Was this what spelled the difference between average performers and top performers—this seemingly esoteric construct; this thing called *purpose*?

Keep in mind: this was 10 years ago. At that time, the conversation about meaning and purpose at work was the realm of ministers and non-profits. Yet here I was in a corporate setting, and I knew I had spotted something important. I went back to the transcripts of the interviews, looking for purpose. I didn’t see it at first. Then I looked closer—and there it was, in the rep who said, “My dad was a doctor. Doctors have an even harder job than most people realize. I want to make it easier for them.”

It was there in the rep who was thrilled to be discussing the science, and who practically glowed when he said, “Isn’t it amazing the way that we’re able

to do these things?” There were other reps who spoke about the impact they had on nurses and patients. Although none of these people actually used the word *purpose*, the essence was there.

At the end of the project, the client asked us to look across all the reps and identify who we thought were the top performers. It was a double-blind study, so the other consultants and I didn't know who was at the top and who was just average.

I had found five representatives who conveyed a sense of purpose in the interviews. I told the client, “I think these five are top-performing salespeople.”

Every single one was correct. And the rep in Phoenix who went on sales calls thinking about the grandmother? She was the number-one salesperson in the country three years running.

Imagine the scene: a science-based firm with commercial endeavors around the globe. The leadership team is largely doctors, scientists, and MBAs. They've gathered around an impressive marble conference table to hear the results of the extensive sales study. I have now just seemingly magically identified the top sales performers without knowing any of their sales numbers. Of course, the next question is pretty obvious.

“How did you know?” they asked, looking at me as if I was some kind of wizard.

The answer I came up with left something to be desired. The best way I could describe it at the time was to say, “The top performers have a different story in their hearts.” It sounded fuzzy.

It *was* fuzzy. I could tell it wasn't resonating. I (painfully) elaborated, “It's like they're being guided by something more noble.” Still blank stares.

The senior leadership team was looking for something more concrete. I knew I was seeing *something*, something that went beyond the traditional business approach. It was deeper, and it was real. I remember thinking to myself, if we can bottle this, we can create magic.

That initial study revealed what larger research projects would later validate: The top performers weren't driven solely by money. They were driven by purpose.

Ironic, isn't it? The salespeople who cared about something more than just money wound up selling more than the salespeople who were focused only on quota. Years of client work and several research studies later, the findings leave no doubt: a Noble Sales Purpose (NSP) is the difference between a sales force that is merely adequate and one that's truly outstanding.

It took the better part of a decade to decode and bottle the magic I had observed in that first study. As it turns out, my initial assessment was actually accurate: the top performers *do* carry a different story in their hearts. What took a bit longer to figure out was how the story got there, what the story meant, and how to scale it across an organization.

And here's the most exciting part. While selling with Noble Purpose is innate to top performers, it is not limited to top performers. It can be activated in almost everyone. Noble Purpose is a philosophy and strategy that can scale across even the largest of organizations. The result is a differentiated sales team who show up in a much more powerful way for customers. But it's even bigger than that. Noble Purpose drives exponential business results, and it also helps us become better human beings. It connects us and advances our relationships and our society in a way that we need now more than ever.

## How Noble Purpose Plays Out

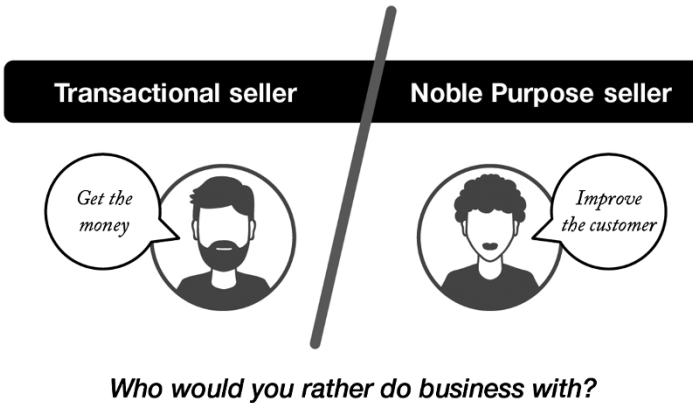
Imagine two salespeople. They're both waiting in the lobby to meet with a customer. One salesperson has been told by his boss, "Your purpose is to close deals." The other salesperson believes her Noble Purpose is to improve the customer's business.

Which salesperson is going to ask better questions and uncover more customer intelligence: the seller focused on the deal, or the seller focused on the customer? Which rep is going to be more innovative and engaging: the seller focused on the single transaction, or the seller focused on improving the client's business?

Now let's put you into this scenario. Imagine you're the customer. Which salesperson would you rather have calling on you: the one sitting in the lobby thinking about his deal? Or the one sitting in the lobby thinking about helping you?

The answer is obvious. Customers would rather buy from a salesperson whose purpose is to help them than a salesperson who is only trying to close them.

Organizations have tried for decades to get sales teams to be more consultative and customer-oriented. They try sales training and they adopt customer-centric strategies, yet progress is often only incremental at best. The reason is that the cadence of daily business is still focused on internal numbers. We need look no further than the auto industry to see what happens when salespeople lack a Noble Sales Purpose.



The automotive industry has powerful brands. They have innovative engineers and do extensive research to identify exactly what we might want or need in a car. Their marketing people create compelling campaigns building brand value. Dealerships tout their service. But what happens when you start talking with a salesperson? The first thing they want to find out is, “How much can you spend?”

Years of work, thousands of hours, millions of dollars building a brand, and it can all fall apart on the showroom floor if you encounter a transactional salesperson.

As anyone who has done it can attest, buying a car can be an absolutely soul-sucking experience. Most car salespeople don’t care about making a difference in your life. All they care about is closing the deal—*because closing the deal is the only thing their sales manager has told them to care about*. Closing the deal is at the center of their sales training. It’s what their CRM system and comp plan point them toward. And it’s what their manager’s boss emphasizes on a daily basis. The entire sales ecosystem is focused on the close instead of the customer.

This plays out in very obvious ways in the auto industry, but the same thing happens to teams who sell million-dollar software systems, health care equipment, banking services, and everything in between.

**The internal conversation becomes the external conversation.** If your internal conversation is only about targets and quotas, with little or no mention of customer impact and value, that’s the way the sales team will approach customers.

Salespeople whose Noble Purpose is to *improve* the customer outperform salespeople whose purpose is to *close* the customer.

Lest you have any doubts about the power of purpose, the research tells us:

- **Organizations with a purpose bigger than money outperform their competitors.** A 10-year growth study of more than 50,000 brands around the world shows that companies who put improving people’s lives at the center of all they do outperform the market by a huge margin.<sup>1</sup> The study, done by an independent consulting group in partnership with my colleague, former Procter & Gamble chief marketing officer (CMO) Jim Stengel, reveals that “Those who center their business on improving people’s lives have a growth rate triple that of their competitors, and they outperform the market by a huge margin.”
- **The economics of self-interest are not sustainable or even accurate.** The traditional business model based on the assumption that the workforce is self-interested—motivated only by money, prestige, and promotion—has proven ineffective. In their book *The Economics of Higher Purpose*, distinguished scholars Robert E. Quinn and Anjan V. Thakor cite research about employees who are “positive energizers” who are not risk-averse or effort-averse, and who are motivated by intrinsic rewards. The authors, who have extensive expertise in economics, describe purpose as a valuable “off-balance sheet resource” that can unleash these positive energizers.
- **Noble Purpose sales teams have a competitive advantage over quota-focused teams.** In our work with over 200 firms, we tracked the behavioral differences between teams with a Noble Sales Purpose and those with a conventional economic mindset. Purpose-driven sellers consistently have a better understanding of customer issues, gather more robust customer intelligence, create more client-focused presentations and proposals, get to more senior levels within client companies, and are less likely to experience pushback on pricing.
- **Salespeople with a sense of purpose put forth more effort and are more adaptable than quota-focused reps.** In her study “Understanding and Leveraging Intrinsic Motivation In Salespeople,” Dr. Valerie Good from Michigan State University asserted, “A sense of purpose—the belief one is making a contribution to a cause greater and more enduring than oneself—is an important contributor to sales

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<sup>1</sup> Millward Brown Optimor, “Stengel Study of Business Growth.”

success. Yet one that has rarely been studied.” Dr. Good was inspired to conduct her research because of her father-in-law, who sold truck wheels. He’d been a top salesperson for decades, driven by his belief that the right wheels on an 18-wheeler saves people lives.

Good’s study revealed, “Intrinsic motivation—inherent enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose—is more positively associated with increased salesperson effort and adaptability than a desire for money over time.” The internal drive to make a difference that she observed in her father-in-law proved to be the underpinning behind long-term sales success.

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*The data is clear, and it confirms what we already know in our hearts to be true: a Noble Purpose engages people’s passion in a way that spreadsheets don’t.*

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## The Changing Face of Business

Business is changing because customers and employees are changing. People are no longer willing to settle for a transactional work life—or even a transactional sale. They want more.

Making a living and making a difference are not incompatible goals. The traditional business model tends to separate money and meaning. Making money becomes the organizing element of the organization, while making a difference is relegated to an optional byproduct. Improving lives is nice; we’ll try to do it if and when we make enough money.

Yet a growing body of evidence tells us this model is wrong. In fact, it’s completely backward. When targets and quotas become the primary organizing element of your business, the result is mediocrity at best. Instead of making more money, you wind up making less money. Profit is crucial, of course. But it’s not the best starting point for driving sales revenue.

It doesn’t have to be this way. As you’ll discover in this book, there’s a widespread, unspoken problem in sales. It’s the startling gap between what organizations want salespeople to do when they’re with customers versus what most organizations really reinforce on a daily basis.

Let’s be clear: wanting to make money for your family or to buy yourself nice things or build wealth is not immoral. Noble Purpose does not conflict with economic motivation; it adds another dimension. Noble Purpose unleashes a largely untapped source of motivation, and it creates an



organizing framework that differentiates you from a traditional, economic incentive-based organizational mindset.

When the Business Roundtable, a group of America's most prominent CEOs, announced that the shareholder primacy model—dictating that organizations must maximize profits for shareholders above all else—was no longer working or appropriate, they gave an official voice to what many leaders were experiencing.

The traditional “shareholder primacy, profit-at-all-costs” model creates a transactional relationship, with employees and customers who (correctly) discern that numbers matter more than they do. It's not surprising that during the decades when shareholder primacy rose, employee engagement tanked. In an age of internet-forced transparency, organizations who are primarily self-focused are quickly revealed.

**Shareholder primacy** = Transactional relationship with employees and customers.

Yet as an increasing number of firms embrace the value of higher purpose, many organizations still struggle to bring purpose to life with their sales team.

The message from the top is, “We have a purpose.” But the daily sales cadence of “close the deal” drowns out the purpose conversation. It's a costly missed opportunity.

Sales is where purpose can come alive or wither and die. As the center of a commercial model, sales can deliver outsized returns on purpose, emotionally and financially. When you activate a sense of Noble Purpose in sales, it drives engagement, innovation, differentiation, and ultimately revenue.

For the last decade, this is what I've been studying, researching, and speaking and writing about. I'll share what we've learned from implementing selling with Noble Purpose with over 200 organizations. I've had the privilege of working with teams at organizations like Google, Salesforce, Dave & Busters, and Roche, helping them enhance their culture and drive sales performance. But Noble Purpose is not just for a few sexy high-profile organizations. We've also worked with less-well-known firms who have achieved even more dramatic results.

In this book, you'll meet a concrete company whose blue-collar team is redefining an entire industry; a commercial bank that went from malaise

to winning awards; and a team of travel salespeople who bring so much passion and purpose into their client interactions that customers from around the world ask them for sales calls.

These seemingly everyday companies harness the power of purpose to break sales records and become leaders in their spaces.

In this new, updated edition of *Selling with Noble Purpose*, I'll cover the dramatic changes in the business landscape and in customer and employee attitudes that have made Noble Purpose a business imperative. I'll also share:

- The direct impact of purpose on profitability (it's more than originally anticipated)
- Why so many purpose-driven organizations struggle to activate their purpose in sales, and how to overcome this challenge
- Examples of firms who experienced exponential financial payoffs from Noble Purpose, and how they did it
- Examples from firms whose purpose programs failed, and a breakdown of what went wrong
- Strategies for turning managers into belief-builders for your organization
- Why most sales ecosystems can have a chilling effect on customer engagement, and how to align your sales ecosystem toward customer impact
- Innovative training techniques for activating purpose in frontline salespeople

We've deepened our study of *Selling with Noble Purpose*, yet one thing remains the same:

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*When you tap into someone's desire to make a difference, you unleash a force more powerful than anything found in a traditional business model.*

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When you cultivate a Noble Purpose through your sales team, you create a tribe of true believers: a team who can beat even the most formidable of competitors.

It's called a Noble Sales Purpose because it is:

- **Noble:** In the service of others
- **Sales:** Based on what you sell
- **Purpose:** Your reason for being

You don't have to create world peace. Your Noble Sales Purpose can be about making your customers more successful or about improving your industry.

This book is about getting your entire sales organization aligned, empowered, and excited about making a difference to customers. When you are clear and specific about how you want to help customers, and you activate your Noble Sales Purpose across your entire sales organization, you create an unstoppable team.

A friend of mine who was burned out from two decades of working in politics once told me, "In every office, there's always a TB."

"What's a TB?" I asked her.

"A true believer," she said. "That starry-eyed optimist who still believes they can make a difference. But here's the thing all the jaded staffers don't tell you—everyone else in the office is secretly jealous of the true believer."

I've come to understand the reason everyone is jealous of the true believer: we all have a secret true believer inside us, just waiting for permission to come out.

Selling with Noble Purpose is about igniting the true believer that lurks in the heart of every salesperson. Because as much as salespeople want to make money, they also want to make a difference.



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