

ANTHONY IANNARINO

ELITE
SALES
STRATEGIES

A GUIDE TO

**Being One-Up, Creating Value,
and Becoming Truly Consultative**

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ELITE SALES STRATEGIES

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Being One-Up, Creating Value, and
Becoming Truly Consultative**

WILEY

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Foreword

By Charlie Green

Most books on sales follow a predictable pattern—to borrow the philosopher's phrase, they are *teleological*. That is, all writing prior to the author's book boils down to A, B, and C. But now that the truth has been revealed, all roads can be seen as having led to D: *The ___ Sale, ___ Selling, Selling Through ___*. It is a rather egocentric way to present one's thinking, and often doesn't time-travel well (look at the sales bestsellers from 30–40 years ago).

Anthony Iannarino has taken a different approach. He recognizes that there are certain tensions at work in sales, and that these are everlasting and immutable. No methodology or approach is going to transcend them.

Chief among those tensions is the one between the salesperson's desire to *make the sale* and the desire to help the client. How can we be professional and ethical and client focused, all while getting better at bringing money to our own top line? This tension is felt by most salespeople internally, psychologically. It also shows up in approaches and methodologies; for example, *client-focused* easily morphs into the *client focus* of a vulture—focused on the client, all right, but for the sake of the vulture, not the client. Dealing with this tension has actually gotten harder, not easier, by living in a time with instant short-term performance metrics available at every turn, and with countless ways to avoid interpersonal contact.

Another tension is that between ethics and selling, a combination that all too many customers consider an oxymoron. Most salespeople don't like to reflect on this tension, feeling that the addition of ethics to selling will

somehow compromise their effectiveness. But the tension is unavoidable; if the salesperson's job is to influence others, and if most salespeople have some reasonable skill at it, then they are in a form of power relationship. Unless you are willing to completely consider clients and customers as mere means to our own ends (and most salespeople actually mean well), then we must consider some aspect of our client relationships and obligations, if only because it's not all about us alone. Most salespeople don't know how to do this (share the pain? bargaining? contracts?), hence it's tempting to ignore.

Anthony doesn't ignore these tensions. In fact, he leads right up front with one of the big ones—power and control—in the form of the concept One-Up. Colloquially, being one up on someone means you have the advantage over them. It's an inherently combative, zero-sum metaphor, that of a winner in a struggle against the putative loser—the customer—who is One-Down.

But One-Up isn't so simple. On the one hand, if you're not One-Up with respect to knowing something of value to the customer that the customer doesn't know, then you're wasting everyone's time. But on the other hand, nobody is *always* One-Up with respect to *every* subject in the world; and if you try to present yourself as being so, you are obviously a bloviating clown whom nobody will believe. Sometimes you're just One-Down. You can try to ignore this, or cover it up with spin, but neither strategy will alter reality; sometimes you're up, and sometimes you're down. Nor should your goal necessarily be simply to be up more often and down less often. It's more about when you should be each, and being conscious and intentional about it. It's a dance, not a winning military campaign.

What Anthony has done in this book is to accept that big tension (and others) as a valid description of reality, and

talk about how we as salespeople can navigate the reality-based world of selling for the benefit of all. And “for the benefit of all” is not a throwaway phrase. If all you do is “win” sales “competitions” with your customers, you'll eventually be out of a job. No one likes someone who is solely in it for themselves, and such people get found out pretty quickly. Recognizing this basic truth puts Anthony in a small, rarefied group of sales authors who truly believe that the route to their own success lies in making their customers successful, and in behaving that way consistently and with an eye to the long term, in the face of contrary advice (including from their own sales managers and incentive comp schemes).

So what does it mean to face these tensions head on? Using the big metaphor of One-Up and One-Down, Anthony explores all aspects of sales. While he gives more attention than most to issues of mindset and intent, he also has a foot firmly planted in tactics, implementation, execution, processes, and practical solutions. After all, he has been, and continues to be, very much a practitioner, and the book is chock full not only of solid advice, but also of compelling first- and second-person stories you've never heard before.

This is not primarily a teleological book, but—to borrow the philosophic lexicon once again—a dialectical one. There is yin and yang, always in creative tension, each tension born of prior tensions between older yins and yangs, and each tension resulting in new yins and yangs, which provide an infinitude of more tensions. A great example: The best way to get from One-Down to One-Up on a given issue is to learn from your clients who are One-Up on that issue. The key to getting One-Up is thus to embrace being One-Down and leverage it. As in all cases, it's how we surf the tensions that determines the outcome. To quote that particularly famous philosopher, Spiderman's Uncle Ben (who borrowed it from Voltaire), “with great power comes

great responsibility.” Getting the sale doesn't take you out of the responsibility game; in fact, playing the larger game is what gets you both power and responsibility.

There is no process, insight, or magic phrase that will truly make you a better salesperson. It's an art, and not a black art but a human one. Navigating the tensions inherent in human relationships is pretty much the same way to navigate the tensions inherent in sales. In fact, they're the same tensions.

Preface

I've spent much of my career training salespeople to sell better: to understand their clients' needs, to develop insight and business acumen, and most of all, always to trade value for their client's time. Through it all, though, I made myself a promise: I would never provide strategies or tactics that might let one person take advantage of another. I am all too familiar with the high-pressure, hard-sell tactics of the past, and I have seen a number of colleagues train salespeople to do “whatever it takes” to manipulate their prospects.

At a recent conference, for instance, I watched two hustlers maneuver three prospective clients into buying a program that they didn't need by pressuring them in front of a room full of people. I was so upset that I charged out of the room, checked out of my hotel, and caught an early flight home. What I saw was not only unconscionable, but also unnecessary. These men didn't have to rely on dirty tricks. They could have made the sales without forcing their *clients* (read: *victims*) to risk their egos and professional identities simply to decline an offer.

While the idea of being a One-Up salesperson is provocative, at its core it speaks to an ethical obligation to serve others. So, as you read this book, I hope you'll consider both tactics and ethics as you develop your own One-Up position. Use them to serve, to share, and to guide your clients—but most of all, to create value for them because you've been there before. The basic script goes like this: *I know something you don't know. May I share it with you?*

Introduction

People buy from people they trust to make a decision they don't trust themselves to make.

—Chris Beall

Three Miles High and One-Down

I was standing at Basecamp 1 on Mount Everest, where the thinness of the air at 17,000 feet made it hard to breathe. I had no interest in climbing 12,000 more feet to scale the tallest mountain on Earth, but I could not pass up the chance to take some pictures. Unfortunately, I'd suffered from altitude sickness during my entire visit to Tibet: my hands and arms often started tingling, like when your leg falls asleep during a long flight, and more than once I woke up gasping for air. A week's worth of prescription medicine had not done me much good—the tingling was getting worse, and that day it had not stopped for hours. Three miles above sea level, I was becoming concerned.

Soon, even the small hill we were climbing was too much for me to handle. My Sherpa, the guide who arranged and led our trip that day, asked me what was wrong. I breathlessly pushed out the words, “I have altitude sickness. I'm tingling and it's hard to breathe.” He replied, “Are you taking altitude medicine?” I pulled the small box of pills out of my pocket and explained that my doctor prescribed them. The Sherpa took one look at the medicine and diagnosed me: “The medicine is what's making you sick. Throw it away, then walk faster so you can get more air into your body.” Walk faster? I can barely inch up this hill! But I knew I had to make a choice: Did I trust my guide or my doctor?

Earlier in the day, I had visited my Sherpa's home. On the ground level, donkeys and chickens roamed around on a dirt floor, warmed by a smoke-belching potbelly stove. The outside of the house was covered in yak dung that had been shaped into patties and pressed against the outside walls, each one with an individual handprint of one of the Sherpa's family members. That detail struck me as I pondered my dilemma: I was being advised by a man whose house is covered in yak dung. I was positive that my physician, Dr. Zimmerman, an educated man, used a more, well, conventional insulation to keep his house warm. But I also knew that my doctor had never even been to the Himalayas, let alone Basecamp 1. And while my Sherpa had no formal degrees, he makes a living guiding people up to Everest.

After a long moment, I threw the medicine in a nearby trash can and started walking faster. My lungs burned, but the harder I worked to get up the hill, the better I started to feel. My Sherpa was right: I was getting more air into my lungs. Neither my education nor my doctor's years of medical school could match his knowledge and experience. That expertise put him in the One-Up position, a more valuable resource than a hundred degrees.

What Is the One-Up Position?

The concept of being One-Up, as you might guess, comes from the idea of one-upmanship. The *Oxford English Dictionary* will tell you that one-upmanship is the “technique of gaining a feeling of superiority over another person.”¹ But that's not accurate for our purposes. My Sherpa was not advising me because he was trying to show off or feel superior to me. Instead, his knowledge and experience exceeded both mine and my doctor's, so he was confident in both his expertise and how he could help me. A

better definition comes from Jay Haley, one of the founders of family therapy at Stanford University's Palo Alto Veteran's Hospital. He also created the strategic approach to psychotherapy. While at Stanford in the early 1950s, Haley was fortunate enough to meet a student (and patient) of psychoanalysis, who had written a book about what he called “the most basic principles of one-upmanship.” Haley read the unpublished book, which he recounted in an essay a few years later. In his summary, one-upmanship captures a dynamic present “in any human relationship”:

One person is constantly maneuvering to imply that he is in a “superior position” to the other person in the relationship. This “superior position” does not necessarily mean superior in social status or economic position; many servants are masters at putting their employers one-down. Nor does it imply intellectual superiority as any intellectual knows who has been put “one-down” by a muscular garbage collector in a bout of Indian wrestling. “Superior position” is a relative term which is continually being defined and re-defined by the ongoing relationship.²

In this book, we're going to apply the idea of being One-Up to selling more effectively, by using the modern sales approach necessary to help your contacts make effective decisions about how they should change to produce better results. At Basecamp 1, my Sherpa was One-Up and I was One-Down—not just because his knowledge and experience far exceeded mine, but because his advice created value for me. If my Sherpa needed help and guidance around a complex sale or sales leadership, I would be in the One-Up position. Generally, the person who needs help and is willing to pay for it is in the One-Down position. You are in the One-Up position when your superior knowledge and

experience benefits your clients, which makes your expertise invaluable.

The Ethics of the One-Up Sale

Without a strong ethical underpinning, the powerful strategies and tactics you'll find in this book could easily harm your results. Let's review the interaction I had with my Sherpa. There is no evidence that he thought himself a superior human being, even if his physical abilities and adaptation to the mountain were far greater than mine. He was not competing with me (or with Dr. Zimmerman), nor was he just showing off. Instead, he was offering me help based on his situational knowledge, a type of pattern recognition that only comes from many experiences over time. In this case, he recognized the root of my (unnecessary) suffering: the poor decision I had made to trust my altitude sickness medicine. His One-Up advice forced me to adjust my beliefs and my behaviors, but with the significant benefit of better health outcomes and a far more pleasant visit.

In the world of sales, our prospective clients often struggle to produce results because they made a poor decision, possibly because they didn't fully recognize or understand their circumstances. No part of being One-Up requires you to judge your client for a past mistake or for waiting so long to fix it. Instead, you will use the One-Up approach to help them modify what they are doing and produce the better outcomes they need. The single reason you need to be One-Up is so you can help your contacts be One-Up in their business. This attitude is essential to being a trusted advisor, which as my friend Charlie Green points out, includes being credible, reliable, intimate, and other-oriented. Being One-Up also requires being consultative:

providing professional advice that not only helps solve problems but enhances problem-solving in the first place.

In other words, your responsibility to your contacts is to help them be One-Up. Your One-Up advice helps decision-makers and decision-shapers explain their verdict to their teams and build consensus. It allows your contact to be One-Up in internal conversations to make their companies One-Up in their markets, using your recommendations to secure a competitive advantage. You can do all this by helping them make sense of their world, pursue the best decision, and produce the better results they need.

Inventory: Are You One-Down?

While you may need to be temporarily One-Down as your contacts teach you about their company and their industry, staying in that position will harm both you and your clients. To avoid that outcome, you need to be aware of several beliefs and behaviors that would keep you One-Down. Meeting these threats is well worth your time and effort.

- **No Relevant Knowledge.** At the most basic level, you're One-Down when your prospects know more than you do about the decisions they need to make. Knowledge about your own company and its solutions won't dig you out of that hole, since no one hires a guide who knows even less than they do. You don't need to be a know-it-all to correct this imbalance but you do need to be someone who knows “a lot in this area.” Eventually, you must become an expert to be One-Up.
- **Not Recognizing the Factors for Decisions.** An inability to recognize the factors that your clients must consider will make it impossible for you to be One-Up.

Decision makers make decisions. You are One-Up when you enable good decisions.

- **No Depth of Understanding.** You might think that the value you create for your clients is found in your solution. You may even pride yourself on your ability to discover a problem. This legacy approach no longer creates a preference to buy from you because it doesn't give your contacts what they really need from you: insight. One of the things that makes you One-Up is your ability to help your client better understand their world and the nature of their problem, so you can create the certainty necessary to move forward in an uncertain world.
- **Not Learning from Your Experiences.** One-Up salespeople recognize that selling is a craft, not just a job. If you're not mindful about your successes and failures, you will have a lot of trouble putting in the effort and care you need. Mastering your craft requires that you learn from your experiences, so you can apply what you have learned in a way that benefits your clients.
- **Outdated Sales Approaches.** Today, how you sell is more important to your success than what you sell. Legacy approaches are too transactional to provide clients the expertise and advice they need, so relying on them puts you One-Down from the start. You are One-Up when your approach creates so much value that your client won't even consider buying from someone else.
- **A Lack of Confidence.** Confidence is necessary to action, both in terms of taking the right actions and of doing anything at all. Without confidence in your own advice and expertise, you can't convince your client that you're the right person to help them improve their

results. A client who needs certainty to move forward will avoid buying from a salesperson who creates uncertainty.

- **Desperation for a Deal.** The greater your need to create or win a deal, the easier it is for your client to recognize that you are One-Down. Fearful behavior projects a lack of power and competence, one often stemming from desperation to meet a quota. To be One-Up, your need for a deal cannot exceed your client's need for your consultation. The remedy here is to create so many opportunities that you never need your client's deal more than they need you.
- **Fear of Your Client.** Most salespeople who prospect by email are One-Down, perhaps fearing that making a phone call will somehow harm them. That's an odd fear for a professional salesperson, given that every good thing that ever happens to you in sales is the result of meeting a stranger! You can never be One-Up if you fear your contacts: you will not be able to lead them or provide them with the guidance they need. Instead, you should fear failing them, something that is all but certain if you stay One-Down.
- **Compliance at All Costs.** Fearful salespeople often shrink back from leading their clients. Instead, they will do their very best to be compliant, following the client's lead and taking their orders. Perhaps you started your career as a fast-food cashier, but you don't have to stay there! Being One-Up means leading the client through their decision because you have the better vantage point: you know more than your client about how they should go about pursuing better results.
- **Conflict Aversion.** The customer is not always right: at times, your client will want to do something that will harm their results or prevent them from improving

their results. A One-Down salesperson will see the problem but choose to avoid the conflict of pointing it out, passively watching their client make mistakes. But when your client is wrong, they need someone One-Up and unafraid to correct them. Here being One-Up requires that you exercise diplomacy, pointing out the problem without battering your contact's ego.

- **Avoiding Responsibility.** As humans, we're adept at blaming anyone and anything else for our mistakes, including losing a big contract. Avoiding that responsibility is a sure sign of being One-Down: chances are, you lost that deal because you couldn't create the greater value your client needed from you. Being One-Up means accepting the belief that if you are responsible for your wins, you must also be responsible for your losses. Only when you accept both types of responsibility can you look for ways to improve your results.

If these characteristics and practices sound all too familiar, you've got some work to do. That's where the rest of this book comes in: you'll find the strategies, tactics, and some talk tracks that will provide you what you need to be One-Up.

No One Wants a One-Down Partner

Even before you meet, your contacts will measure how valuable you are to them personally and professionally. When they agree to a meeting with you, they're praying that you'll use their time wisely, creating value for them through a helpful conversation. The only way you can make the conversation valuable for you is by making it valuable for your client, starting by avoiding One-Down prospecting.

For example, a salesperson who starts a cold call with “Do you have twenty-seven seconds?” reveals themselves as a joker, not a serious partner. Leading with “Is now a good time?” or “Is now a bad time?” likewise projects that they're One-Down. All of these approaches are fear-based, showing that the salesperson relies on gimmicks or tricks because they can't offer anything more valuable to earn the meeting. How could the tired old agenda of “telling you about our company and the work we are doing with companies just like yours, learn a little bit about you and your company, and discuss how we can help you” be valuable?

The One-Down salesperson is a beggar. They need a meeting more than the client needs their help, and by the widest of margins. After all, the legacy approaches to sales were designed to solve the salesperson's problems. But being One-Up means seeking to solve the client's problems, especially those beyond the scope of your prepackaged solution. The One-Up salesperson believes in their heart that their client is going to benefit from the time they spend with them, a belief that allows them to ask confidently for a meeting and provide a value proposition the client appreciates enough to block off time on their calendar. Here's what that might sound like:

Good morning! This is Anthony Iannarino with XYZ Widgets. I am calling you today to ask you for a twenty-minute meeting where I can share with you an executive briefing about four trends that will have the most significant impact on manufacturers in the next eighteen to twenty-four months. I'll also provide you with the slide deck and the questions we are asking and answering with our clients, so you can share them with your management team. Even if there is no next step, you'll know what you might start exploring, and you'll know what you might need your team to start putting in place. What do you look like Thursday afternoon?

Why One-Down Salespeople Lose Deals

One of the easiest ways to stay One-Down is refusing the truth that you are the root cause of every one of your problems. If you paid a \$35 fee for overdrawing your checking account, it would be ridiculous to claim that the bank made you spend more money than you had. This might sting a little, but you didn't lose that big deal because your prices were too high, your company was too young, or your slide deck didn't have enough fireworks. Your client disengaged with you because you weren't able to stay One-Up by creating value within the confines of the sales conversation. (Oh, and those rambling emails and choked-up voicemails didn't help either.) You can be a wonderful human being, a great parent, an excellent employee, and an incredible karaoke singer without creating enough value to command another meeting.

Like it or not, sales success is individual, not situational. Two salespeople can work at the same company, report to the same manager, sell the exact same product or service to the very same type of customers, and do it all with the

exact same pricing, commission, and competitors. But the one who strives to be One-Up will usually find herself at the top of the stacked ranking while her One-Down colleague languishes at the bottom. Perhaps more to the point, she will short-circuit any attempt to avoid responsibility for her losses, instead asking herself what she should have done to win.

One-Up Tactics

I would never leave you with a list of all the ways to be One-Down without providing you a hint of how to become One-Up. The critical outcome of the One-Up approach is that you position yourself as the person best able to help your client make significant decisions around change and improve their results. [Chapter 1](#) explains why the modern sales approach is necessary for being One-Up. In this consultative approach, you don't just ask good questions but also provide professional input and recommendations. To execute this strategy, you must possess greater knowledge and experience than your prospect. In [Chapters 2 through 11](#), I'm going to teach you ten practical tactics to support your One-Up strategy, each in its own chapter.

[Chapter 2: The One-Up Sales Conversation: Your Only Vehicle for Value Creation.](#) Of all the strategies you will find here, this may be the most important. The way you create value for your clients and develop a preference to buy from you is exclusively limited to the sales conversation. Your One-Up position makes this possible by helping your clients make better decisions and produce better results through your vantage point, your advice, and your recommendations.

[Chapter 3: Insights and Information Disparity.](#) There are some who believe the internet has eliminated

the information disparity between the salesperson and their client. This is incorrect, as your clients need more information than ever. However, it's a different kind of information. This strategy will allow you to start teaching your prospects what they need to know to improve their outcomes.

Chapter 4: Supporting Client Discovery. The very nature of discovery has changed. It is less about identifying a need or a problem and more about helping the client discover something about themselves, their business, their decisions, and their results. To be a good guide, you need to be One-Up. But you must also be a good student. There is still much from you to learn from your clients, which is one of the ways you increase your One-Upness.

Chapter 5: Your Role as a Sense Maker. As the world gets increasingly complex, your One-Up position allows you to make sense of it all, by allowing your stakeholders to look through the higher-resolution lens you provide them. Your clients will see something they haven't seen, and something no One-Down salesperson can show them.

Chapter 6: The Advantage of Your Vantage Point. Here you will learn how to guide your clients to better outcomes through your experience helping others on their buyer's journey, preventing them from making mistakes that threaten their future results. Your contacts will find your suggestions far more valuable than anything they have heard from your legacy approach competitors, who still see the decision as a straight line.

Chapter 7: Building Your One-Upness. This chapter offers a road map for identifying and building your insights, as well as an executive briefing that will

position you as One-Up from your very first communication—and keep you there all the way to your signing ceremony. Here, you are going to do the work necessary to begin using a modern sales approach.

Chapter 8: One-Up Guide to Offering Advice and Recommendations. As a trusted advisor who is One-Up, you must offer your advice and your recommendations all through the buyer's journey, helping them navigate their actions and decisions. Your advice and your recommendations must be more than “buy my solution from my company.” Your counsel will create far greater value.

Chapter 9: The One-Up Obligation to Proactively Compel Change. The antiquated approaches to sales saddle the salesperson with ideas that make them reactive. These ideas prompt practices like discovering problems and qualifying prospects, or the awful tactic of waiting until your client is prepared to buy before you help them. Becoming a trusted advisor means using your “One-Upness” to compel change, preventing your prospective clients from the harm of not changing before they are forced to.

Chapter 10: Triangulation Strategy: Helping Clients Decide While Avoiding Competition. There is a One-Up position that is incredibly powerful and little known, and never taught or trained. This triangulation strategy removes you from the playing field by elevating you to a position above the board, making you no longer just another competitor but the arbiter and ultimate authority. Your contacts will find an advantage in how they understand their decision and their choices.

Chapter 11: Being One-Up Helps Your Clients Change. The ultimate test of your One-Upness is that

you cause your client to change. This change is not simply switching partners or solutions; it's a modification of their beliefs, their actions, and their results. The most important changes you need to make occur inside your client's business. When your client makes internal changes, you are One-Up, and your client is all the better for it.

Chapter 12: Advice for Those Who Are Presently One-Down. If you are not presently One-Up, this chapter will speed your development and put you on the path to becoming truly consultative. To achieve One-Upness, you will have to do the work—work worth doing, and work your clients will appreciate.

A Meeting of Equals

In an important sense, you and your client are equals. You are an expert in your field and your client is an expert in theirs. You happen to be in the One-Up position when it comes to helping your contacts improve their results. Your client is an expert in their industry and their business, making them One-Up in these areas. This combination of One-Upness and One-Downness allows you to work together to produce the best results, solve problems, address challenges, and take advantage of opportunities.

Being One-Up isn't about conflict, trickery, or dominance. On the contrary, it's about creating an obligation to serve your clients by becoming the kind of salesperson they need—one with the expertise and experience to provide them with good counsel, advice, and recommendations. Like teachers, doctors, and even Sherpas, One-Up salespeople enable their clients to make better decisions and reach better outcomes. It's not something you can fake, as your client will know within minutes whether you can back up your claims. You are much better off doing the work of