

The Selling Fox

A Field Guide for Dynamic Sales Performance

Jim Holden



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.

Proverbs 24: 3–4

*This book is dedicated to my wife and lifelong friend,
Chris Holden.*

Acknowledgments

As solitary an effort as writing a book is, requiring weeks upon weeks of isolation and focus, in many respects it is a team effort.

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Introduction

Every profession, every area of personal endeavor, has its aspiring newcomers and seasoned professionals. It may be in business, sports, the arts, or any area of life in which you find the full range of performers and their abilities. This book is about strengthening your personal performance in the area of professional sales in order to reach a quintessential level—that of a Selling Fox.

In every arena of selling, the focus is on competition—on facing that competition and winning. You may be selling solutions, commodities, or services. It doesn't matter. If you believe that the real differentiating factor to your success is not *what* you are selling, but rather *how* you are selling, then you're in the game as a Selling Fox plays it. You are the one to whom this book will speak most eloquently.

For years, I have written about and taught the concept of the Customer Fox, which is key to

- Protecting and growing important accounts
- Winning competitive deals
- Creating demand to produce new deals

Not necessarily at the top of an organization, a Customer Fox

- Shapes and personifies his or her company's operating values, setting high standards for integrity, quality, and innovation
- Works behind the scenes, allowing others to receive credit in those areas of the business in which he or she has little formal authority but wields significant influence
- Possesses a strong sense of mission or professional purpose, which is always aligned with the good of the company
- Is closely networked with others that make up his or her Power Base^{®1},

¹Power Base is a registered trademark of Holden International.

an influential body that de facto runs a company or division of a company in many of its aspects of operation

A company may have a number of Foxes who are the major forces within their organization, setting its strategic direction and operating philosophy while shaping corporate initiatives. Foxes are into all that will constitute their company's future. In many respects, these people *are* a company's future, but they are not alone.

Another type of Fox has emerged. Born not of operations, finance, or senior management, this new breed faces direct opposition every day of the week. They work in a world of constant uncertainty, depending on relatively little formal authority, living or dying by their personal skills, knowledge, and influence. Their companies and their customers support and depend on them, while competitors fear them. These are the rare breed of ultra high-performing salespeople—the Selling Foxes.

My professional life has essentially been dedicated to identifying and developing Selling Foxes. In my estimation, one Selling Fox is worth a hundred salespeople, for Foxes are the conscious competents who lead the way for others. They win deals while codifying their competitive processes and techniques to enable other salespeople to follow in their footsteps. Informally, they provide coaching and support behind the scenes, often without any additional compensation. They guide marketing and bring the voice of the customer into their company's corporate decision-making process, always working to align their company's interests with that of the customer base. Everything they do can be leveraged and tied to revenue generation, making them one of the most valuable corporate assets for a company in the new marketplace.

A Selling Fox is a Fox, and as such, is not well understood beyond his or her strong and consistent sales performance. Selling Foxes are not egocentric, not focused on themselves, but on their work and the results that it produces—you'll learn about how Foxes think and act in the Portrait of a Selling Fox provided in Appendix A. Therefore, it is not surprising that they are grossly unrecognized for who they really are and for the value that they truly represent to their companies.

The Selling Fox is intended to shine a light on these people and what they do, and is designed specifically to help you who aspire to become Selling Foxes. It is all about who they are, what they believe in as pro-

professionals, and specifically how they sell. It addresses what they do operationally to be so successful that they earn the recognition of being a Selling Fox. In that sense, this is very much a field guide that explores the route to the highest level of selling proficiency, which is where a Selling Fox operates.

As you read *The Selling Fox*, you will embark on a journey that begins with honing your closing techniques, striving to build strong operational proficiency to better manage peaking sales situations. Sales examples guide you through actual situations and customer dialog. The intent is to be explicitly clear as to how Selling Foxes use specific closing techniques to manage and win competitively sought-after orders.

Techniques on how to block and trap the competition, along with lessons in loss recovery, transition the focus from achieving high proficiency in the selling basics to mastering significantly more advanced selling skills. These are techniques that require not only skill, but also Fox-like cunning, as well as sensitivity to various timing considerations. Because these higher-order skills are challenging areas for most salespeople, the means and methods for self-assessment and continued self-development are presented as a road map to guide you in your journey to becoming a Selling Fox.

We highlight one of the most critical and least understood aspects of competitive selling—establishing and maintaining executive relationships. This section underscores the importance of knowing who you are as an individual, in addition to addressing

- The value that needs to be provided customers and the value that they need to provide to you
- Specific sales tools to assist you in calling high
- Specific processes to guide you in the use of these tools

Perhaps the second least understood aspect of engaging and defeating competition centers on strategic formulation. Chapter 6 describes “The King of Sales Strategy,” the most effective approach to pulling the rug out from under the competition.

Selling Foxes know how to strike to win competitively held accounts. Chapter 7 explains how to de-install a competitor in a major account. In a slower economy, the only real way to grow market share is to

take it away from the competition. In a faster, growing economy, the best way to destabilize competitors is to knock their cornerstone accounts out from under them; this is a topic that is addressed with surgical precision.

The focus broadens to address how to objectively evaluate large sales opportunities, smaller short cycle deals, large multinational accounts, and sales territories comprised of all types of customers. The effective management of such a diverse portfolio of accounts and sales opportunities is a key precursor to building your personal business development system.

Such a system is likely not yet included among the tools that your company will have provided you, but rather something for which you must look to a Selling Fox to learn. Foxes are the keepers of the guidance, structure, and wisdom necessary to master this most important aspect of your personal selling success. The map to building a personal business development system is provided in Chapter 10. Do well with this step and all the rest will fall into place.

We also offer you personal insight from Selling Foxes in well-known U.S. corporations, along with a chapter-to-chapter cataloging of Fox-like characteristics or attributes that define and shape how a Fox operates.

We think *The Selling Fox* will become the essential field guide for achieving sales excellence, with its very comprehensive table of contents for ease of use. It will direct you as you build your sales territory and accounts. Use it, excel, and become a Selling Fox.

1

Closing Techniques

Selling Foxes are unmistakable; they are distinctive not only in how they sell, but also in how they think. They reach a higher order of sales proficiency that requires across-the-board skills, from smooth execution of the basics to managing the most sophisticated aspects of competitive selling. Your success will ultimately depend upon your mastery of all the necessary selling skills, but that mastery will never happen if you don't learn to think like a Selling Fox.

Mastering the Basics

Let's begin with a refresher on the basics of competitive selling, recognizing that although they are referred to as *basic*, they are by no means simple to master. In fact, the basics are extremely challenging to implement well consistently. The key word here is *well*. For many experienced sales professionals, it is difficult to continue focusing on the basics. Sometimes the mindset is that experience takes them beyond that level because they believe that they mastered the basics long ago. It just doesn't fit their image of themselves.

However, a Selling Fox does not have these identity or perception problems. Nothing is beneath a true Selling Fox, or at too basic a level for him or her to address, whether it is consistently revisiting the basics of selling or examining how they treat people who are trying to be helpful in offering ideas or suggestions. Winning with an effortless style is what Selling Foxes do, but that doesn't happen without building wisdom in all areas of selling, including the basics in which strong tactical

proficiency is very important. Selling Foxes recognize that wisdom has no boundaries, high or low.

The Close

Having said that, all basic competitive selling techniques are not created equal, and some are of far greater importance than others. For this reason, we begin with one of the most important aspects of selling—the close. Without a close, there is no customer commitment, and without a commitment, there is no sale.

What Is Closing?

Closing is securing a customer commitment—that is, reaching an agreement in principle that under certain conditions, the customer will purchase your solution, product, or service.

When Is the Best Time to Close?

You should close as early as possible, recognizing that if you attempt to close too early, it will simply serve as a trial close, which has the benefit of assisting you in learning very clearly where you are positioned in the competitive sales situation. A trial close also can identify obstacles that stand between you and securing an order or commitment.

How Do I Close a Sale?

First, recognize that there are three basic approaches to closing.

1. Soft close
2. Trial close
3. Hard close

The Soft Close: A *soft close* is nonconfrontational, never directly asking for an order. It is a common technique among salespeople, but Selling Foxes do not choose the common route, and they rarely opt for the soft close, as it can be indecisive and protract sales cycles.