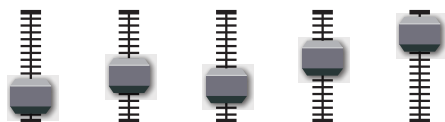


THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF SELLING

# SALES



# EQ

HOW ULTRA-HIGH PERFORMERS  
LEVERAGE SALES-SPECIFIC EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE TO CLOSE THE COMPLEX DEAL

# JEB BLOUNT

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**SALES**  
**EQ**



# **SALES EQ**

**HOW ULTRA-HIGH PERFORMERS LEVERAGE  
SALES-SPECIFIC EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE  
TO CLOSE THE COMPLEX DEAL**

**JEB BLOUNT**

**WILEY**

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*For Andy, April, Brooke, Carrie, and Keith.  
The future is bright.*





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# Foreword

Air Force Colonel John Boyd, the man who popularized the observe, orient, decide, and act (OODA) loop and perhaps America's Sun Tzu, admonished a U.S. Department of Defense enamored with technology to put certain priorities in the right order. He insisted on "People. Ideas. Technology. In that order."

Boyd believed strongly that people come first. Technology, therefore, serves people and ideas. Technology isn't and cannot be a substitute for human beings and their resourcefulness, creativity, and ability to forge and leverage relationships.

In a day and age when technology is disrupting and disintermediating entire industries and radically changing life as we know it, there are still a few of us willing to remind you of what's most important—especially when it comes to sales and commercial relationships.

At a time when many technology companies and pundits (usually with an ulterior motive) suggest that "people" are no longer how the game of sales is won or lost, that technology is what matters most, Jeb Blount comes forward with *Sales EQ*. This extraordinary message about sales-specific emotional intelligence and human relationships will radically improve your sales results and change the way you look at sales.

In *Sales EQ*, you will gain a deeper understanding of human psychology and influence frameworks. You'll take a journey inside your mind to understand the cognitive biases and disruptive emotions

that hold you back in interpersonal relationships and undo your efforts to win deals.

More important, Jeb doesn't leave you hanging with theory. He gives you a precise prescription for leveraging sales-specific emotional intelligence (Sales EQ) to reach ultra-high sales performance—the highest earning echelon of the sales profession.

Jeb believes, correctly so, that ultra-high sales performance begins with taking control of your emotions and mastering the psychology of influence within the scope of the sales and buying processes. Selling is about influencing change, and that starts with changing you and then helping your clients move past status quo.

As you delve deeply into *Sales EQ*, you are going to understand why psychology is far more important than technology. You'll gain insight into why your prospective clients take certain actions—or refuse to take those actions—and how to deftly influence their behaviors to increase the probability of closing the deal.

This is one of the most important books on sales in the past two decades, and there isn't a better person to have written it. Jeb is a practitioner. What he teaches here is not theory, even though he provides the latest research in neuroscience and human psychology.

What is contained between the covers of this book can only come from someone who has sold and succeeded as an ultra-high performer, and someone who helps salespeople and sales organizations accelerate sales results by making massive sales productivity improvements.

If you've wondered why ultra-high performers produce greater results than their peers, you are holding all the answers in your hand. It's not what they sell, it's how they sell. If you are seeking a true competitive advantage that will set you apart in the sales profession, follow Jeb's recipe carefully, and you'll soon take your place among the ultra-high performers.

—Anthony Iannarino, author of *The Only Sales Guide You'll Ever Need* and publisher of *The Sales Blog*



# 1

## The Mysterious Brown Bag

*It is the dim haze of mystery that adds enchantment to pursuit.*

—Antoine Rivarol

At the young age of 23, Art had just landed a huge promotion or, in his words, “Somebody left the company, and I got lucky.”

As a lease sales representative, he worked with complex, long-cycle deals, not the typical sales role handed to wet-behind-the-ears 23-year-olds. Fortunately, Art had two things in his favor: an unequaled drive to succeed *and* a great mentor.

His mentor and sales manager was a company legend. Joe had his name etched on pretty much every award the company bestowed and on many of the largest customers in the organization’s account base. Joe appreciated Art’s willingness to learn and took him under his wing.

“To me, at that young age, Joe looked ancient,” Art jokes. “He’d been around forever. But he knew the answers to every question and

where to find any tidbit of information; and, boy, did he know how to talk to customers.”

It was Joe who taught Art one of the most valuable lessons of his young career: *You must learn to speak your prospect's language, because people buy for their reasons, not yours.*

## The Lesson of a Lifetime

Art had been working on a deal with a local bakery. Everything was going along without a hitch until Art presented his pricing.

“Mr. Colaizzi, the owner, was adamant that my rates were too high, and he wouldn’t budge from his position. I’d been going back and forth trying to convince him that, even though my rates were a little higher than my competitors’, the added value from the quality of our service was more than worth it. But I was getting nowhere.

“He kept throwing the competitors’ low prices in my face, but I was in a tight spot. If I went any lower, I wouldn’t make a dime of commission. Worse, I’d have to get approval from my district manager—not a pleasant experience.

“During a pipeline review with Joe, I explained that the Colaizzi deal was stalled, and expressed my frustration with our high rates. If we didn’t get our prices in line with our competitors’, I was never going to be able to sell anything!”

Art smiles as he explains that he might have been “just a little bit hotheaded back then,” and tells the story of how Joe taught him an indelible lesson:

Joe didn’t flinch. He just stood up and said, “Come on.” We walked out to his car, and he motioned for me to get in.

Then Joe drives us to a local grocery store, parks the car, and says, “Wait here.” Ten minutes later he comes out carrying a brown paper bag. He stuffs it in the backseat, puts the car in drive, and off we go.

A half hour later we’re sitting in the lobby of the Colaizzi Baking Company waiting for Mr. Colaizzi to arrive, the mysterious brown bag perched on Joe’s lap.

After a 20-minute or so wait, an assistant ushers us into Mr. Colaizzi's office—the brown bag clutched in Joe's hand.

I didn't know what to expect. Joe had barely spoken to me since we'd gotten into his car, and I was nervous about his intentions.

We sat down across from Mr. Colaizzi's desk, and Joe started the conversation in a relaxed, almost nonchalant tone: "Mr. Colaizzi, Art tells me he's been working with you on a truck leasing program for your delivery fleet. He says you feel that our rates are a bit too high, and I came down here to learn more."

Then, he shut up.

Mr. Colaizzi leaned back in his chair, crossed his arms, and said, "I appreciate that you took the time to come all the way down here, but the fact is your rates aren't a 'bit' higher; they're way higher than your competitors'. You aren't even close. I know you're going to say that your service and quality are better. You can save your breath because I've heard it all before. All of you truck companies are the same. If you can't get your prices in line with your competitors', we don't have anything to talk about."

Joe wasn't the least bit ruffled. He placed the brown bag on Mr. Colaizzi's desk, slowly unfolded the top, and pulled two loaves of bread out of the bag. Joe set the bag on the floor and placed the loaves directly in front of Mr. Colaizzi.

Joe allowed the silence to hang in the air for just a moment before speaking. "Mr. Colaizzi, I'm just curious. What's the difference between this loaf of supermarket brand white bread that costs sixty-three cents and this loaf of Colaizzi Italian bread that costs a dollar eighty-seven cents? What makes it worth three times as much?"

Mr. Colaizzi jumped up, pushed his chair back, leaned over his desk, and spent the next 10 minutes lecturing us on why his bread was better—his passion for his bread and reputation on full display.

He explained that his bread was fresher, that it was made from higher-quality ingredients, the care that went into making it, the unique baking process, his family's recipe, the history of Colaizzi bread, and the taste. The taste was "so much better than mass-produced bread"—his face twisted in disgust as he said the words—"with all of those artificial ingredients. That stuff's more like cardboard than bread."

When he felt that we'd been sufficiently educated on the superiority of Colaizzi Italian bread, he sat back down.

Joe leaned across the desk, picked up the loaf of Colaizzi bread, and said, "Mr. Colaizzi, that's exactly what we've been trying to tell you about us. We are the Colaizzi bread of truck leasing!"

For an interminable moment, Joe and Mr. Colaizzi just sat there staring at each other.

I didn't breathe.

Then a grin spread across Mr. Colaizzi's face, and he let go of a big laugh. He reached out and shook Joe's hand. There were still a few concessions to make, but we walked out with a signed contract and a new customer. We no longer looked the same as our competitors.

Today Art Vallely is COO of Penske Truck Leasing. He's one of the most gifted and dynamic leaders I know—an executive who gets it. He puts a high priority on sales and sales training. He's the only C-level executive I work with who spends time with every sales training class from entry-level sales reps in basic sales training to veteran sales professionals who are attending advanced training.

Art passes on lessons, like the one Joe taught him, to his sales professionals to help them understand that the key to being an ultra-high performer (UHP) in sales is mastering emotions, interpersonal skills, and human relationships.

## **A Front-Row Seat into the Mind of a UHP**

In Mr. Colaizzi's mind, all truck companies were the same. Why wouldn't he believe this? He had endured multiple truck leasing sales pitches that all sounded the same, marketing brochures and collateral that looked the same, and proposals that offered the same promises.

To Mr. Colaizzi, a truck was a truck was a truck. Inside this pattern of sameness, Mr. Colaizzi shifted into his reflex buyer script—"Your price is too high." From a purely cognitive standpoint, his response was an easy mental shortcut for dealing with the complexity of sorting out the real differences between the vendors.

Average salespeople play into and conform to buyer scripts by responding in kind. They become defensive, they argue, or they fold. In the process, they lose control and lower deal win probabilities.

But Joe didn't play by the same rules as average salespeople. He reached into his mysterious brown paper bag and changed the game—leveraging simple, but powerful, influence frameworks.

- In response to Mr. Colaizzi's buyer script, Joe leveraged a non-complementary response.
- This disrupted Mr. Colaizzi's expectations for how a salesperson would behave, pulling Mr. Colaizzi's attention toward Joe.
- Mr. Colaizzi took the stage to defend his position and lecture Art and Joe on why Colaizzi bread was better than supermarket bread.
- As Mr. Colaizzi began talking about his bread, it kicked off a self-disclosure dopamine loop in his brain that rewarded him for talking. He felt good, even though his conscious self didn't know why.
- As Joe and Art listened intently to the lecture and gave their complete attention, it made Mr. Colaizzi feel important (the most powerful gift you can give another person). This created a feeling of obligation in Mr. Colaizzi.
- In the process of lecturing Art and Joe, Mr. Colaizzi became more committed to his position that his bread was better than the competition.
- Joe touched both wires to the emotional trigger by speaking in Mr. Colaizzi's language: *That's exactly what we've been trying to tell you about us. We are the Colaizzi bread of truck leasing.*
- Using Mr. Colaizzi's language caused him to feel that Joe understood him, creating a powerful emotional connection and trust.
- Mr. Colaizzi had committed to the position that his bread was different. To then refute Joe's claim that his truck leasing service was also different would be inconsistent. This incongruence would cause painful mental stress called cognitive dissonance.
- All Mr. Colaizzi could do was smile and agree when Joe made his case.
- The feeling of obligation Mr. Colaizzi felt when Joe and Art made him feel important caused him to want to reciprocate, which opened the door to negotiation. A deal was then struck that was fair to both parties.

Average salespeople delude themselves into believing that buyers make rational, logical decisions based on empirical data and information. But that's not how the human mind works. Emotions come first, then logic.

Rather than fold like a cheap lawn chair and lower the price, Joe managed his own disruptive emotions and flipped the buyer script, "Your price is too high." He then shaped the decision process until it became virtually impossible for Mr. Colaizzi to make any decision other than yes.

# 2

## A Perfect Sales Storm

*Your chances of getting struck by lightning go up if you stand under a tree, shake your fist at the sky, and say “Storms suck!”*

—Johnny Carson

The sales profession is in the midst of a perfect storm. Buyers have more power—more tools, more information, more at stake, and more control over the sales process than at any time in history.

Technology is accelerating disruptive change at an ever-increasing pace, creating fear and insecurity that leaves buyers clinging to the status quo. Technology also serves the purpose of lowering barriers to entry, thus releasing a relentless onslaught of “me-too” competitors. Differentiating on the attributes of products, services, or prices is fleeting at best and more difficult than ever before.

To buyers, it all looks the same.

Legions of salespeople and their leaders are coming face-to-face with a cold, hard truth: what once gave salespeople a competitive

edge—controlling the sales process, command of product knowledge, an arsenal of technology, and a great pitch—are no longer guarantees of success.

Meanwhile, buyers have lost all patience for kitchen-sink data dumps of features and benefits and canned product pitches. They expect more from their interactions with salespeople. Buyers want to emerge from sales conversations with value beyond a dissertation of the rep's marketing brochures.

In response to this shift in buyer expectations, salespeople are being told that they need to *offer insight, teach, challenge, and add value*. However, deteriorating attention spans have made it difficult to get buyers to sit still long enough to be given insight, taught, challenged, or provided with added value.

These “modern” sales concepts sound intriguing and promising on the pages of a book or in a seminar, but land like a lead balloon in the real world with real buyers because the majority of salespeople haven't mastered the situational awareness and emotional intelligence to leverage these techniques effectively while maintaining human connections.

Many of the salespeople attempting these techniques leave buyers exasperated because the techniques just come off as self-important pitching. Salespeople are not learning and mastering interpersonal skills. They do not understand how to engage buyers on a human-to-human level.

Adding to the problem is an entire generation entering the workforce for whom text messaging, e-mail, and social media posts are the preferred, arm's-length form of communication.<sup>1</sup> This new generation is a conundrum. They are socially aware but view human-to-human relationships in the abstract.

In this perfect storm, it's no wonder so many salespeople are struggling. It's no wonder that sales leaders are frustrated and more stressed out than ever. It's no wonder that buyers are starving for authentic human interaction. And it's not surprising that most companies are experiencing sales pipelines clogged with stalled deals, and staring down the barrel at 50 percent or more of their salespeople missing their quotas.



## Meet the Ultra-High-Performance Sales Professional

In this new paradigm, though, there is an elite group of sales professionals who are crushing it. In this age of transparency where information is ubiquitous and buyer attention spans are fleeting, these ultra-high performers have learned how to leverage a *new psychology of selling* to keep prospects engaged, create true competitive differentiation, and shape and influence buying decisions.

The ultra-high sales performer is acutely aware that the *emotional experience of buying* from *them* is far more important than products, prices, features, and solutions. They know that to sell value, *they must be valuable*, and they must earn the right, through human relationships, to teach, offer insight, or challenge.

Over the course of this book, I'm going to take you on an unprecedented journey into the behaviors and mind-sets of the highest-earning sales professionals. I'm going to open a window into their minds and show you their techniques, frameworks, and secrets. You'll learn how to:

- Leverage human behavior frameworks, heuristics, and cognitive biases to influence buying behaviors.
- Manage and control the *Disruptive Emotions* that are holding you back.
- Improve *Sales EQ* and build on the *Four Intelligences* required for ultra-high performance.
- Shape and align the *Three Processes of Sales* to lock out competitors and shorten the sales cycle.
- Influence and manage relationships with *The Five Stakeholders You Meet in a Deal*.
- *Flip the Buyer Script* to gain complete control of the sales conversation.
- Leverage *Noncomplementary Behavior* to eliminate resistance, conflict, and objections.
- *Disrupt Expectations* to pull buyers toward you, direct their attention, and keep them engaged.
- Gain *Micro-Commitments* and *Next Steps* to keep your deals from stalling.
- Tame *Irrational Buyers*, shake them out of their comfort zone, and shape the decision-making process.

- Answer *The Five Questions That Matter Most in Sales* to make it virtually impossible for prospects to say no.
- Shape *Win Probability* in your favor to gain an unbeatable competitive advantage.

*Sales EQ* begins where many of the great books and sales training programs like *The Challenger Sale*, *Strategic Selling*, *Insight Selling*, and *SPIN Selling* leave off. It addresses the human relationship gap in the modern sales process—the emotional side of selling.

I want to be crystal clear about my intentions. I didn't invest a year of my life writing this book merely to make you a better level of average. Screw average. To hell with mediocrity.

I'm pulling back the veil from ultra-high sales performance. My mission is to move you into the top tier of salespeople in your company, industry, and field. To help you become insanely successful—an elite top earner.

### **A Note about the Word *Stakeholder***

Throughout the book, I use *stakeholder* as a generic term inclusive of buyers, amplifiers, seekers, influencers, and coaches. These roles are also, in my work and the work of others, defined as prospects and decision makers. For expediency and to avoid confusion, I have chosen to use the term *stakeholder*.

# 3

## The Irrational Buyer

*Life is simple, but we insist on making it complicated.*

—Confucius

Everyone in my industry knew about the opportunity. It was a rare gem that caused my competitors to throw everything at it. One of my competitors flew the stakeholders around in a luxurious corporate jet to visit its manufacturing plants, wining and dining them along the way. Another competitor feted the stakeholder group at premier sporting events.

I agonized that we were going to lose the deal because we weren't keeping up with the Joneses. My company didn't have the resources to entertain a large stakeholder group like our competitors could, nor was it in our culture to do so.

Adding to my anxiety were our no-frills production facilities that were dated compared to the competition, with their modern, state-of-the-art plants.

Honestly, it was like David going up against Goliath. But it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I had bet the farm and my reputation on closing it.

## **Nail-Biting Suspense**

After almost two years of work, we delivered our final presentation and proposal. On the eve of the decision I couldn't sleep. Perhaps that I was close to an all-out anxiety attack and mental breakdown is a better description.

But the next day no word came. Then another day went by and another. I called, but no one answered; I left messages that were not returned, and tried to pry information out of the gatekeepers. Nothing. Crickets.

I put on a brave, relaxed face, but I was in a state of panic. In my heart I knew that no news was bad news. After working closely with these stakeholders for so long, we'd become friends. I knew that none of them wanted to deliver the word that we were not the vendor of choice.

Over the next weekend, I talked myself off the ledge and came to grips with the fact that my dream of landing the account was not going to come true. I prepared to move on, knowing that there was a likelihood, after expending so many resources on the deal, that I might not have a job.

## **The Answer**

On Monday morning, I drove to the office early and prepared to start rebuilding a pipeline that had been obliterated while I'd focused my complete attention on a single deal.

Just a little after 8:30 my phone rang. The receptionist told me that Randy (my coach at the account) was on the line.

"Randy, nice to hear from you! How was your weekend?" I did my best not to sound as desperate as I felt.

"Good, Jeb. How about yours?"

“Fantastic,” I lied.

“Hey, I’m sorry I didn’t return your calls.” There was no emotion in his voice. “Our team met last week to go over the proposals, and honestly it wasn’t an easy decision. All the companies did a great job. But we made a choice, and I don’t want to keep you in suspense any longer.”

My heart was racing as I braced for the worst.

“It was unanimous.” His voice was solemn.

I could feel the bad news coming.

“We’ve decided to go with you guys!” He started laughing, clearly enjoying the pain he’d caused me.

## **The Reason**

“Thank you! That’s incredible. Thank you!” I was gushing and could barely find words as a wave of relief rushed over me.

We quickly put together a plan for the next steps and getting a contract over to his legal team. I was anxious to get off the phone and share the good news with my wife and our team, but, before I let him go, I asked what compelled them to pick my company.

“You know, we just felt like you guys were a lot like us.” He pointed to how much fun his team had the day they toured our production facility.

At lunch, we shut the plant down, brought in barbecue, and ate on paper plates—his stakeholders, our sales team, and the plant employees all mingled together. He explained that they enjoyed spending time with our people without all the formality. His team felt our people were down-to-earth and cared—just like them.

Closing that deal was a two-year ordeal requiring a significant investment of resources, a team of people dedicated to the cause, and hours and hours of work on strategy, stakeholder mapping, endless financial analysis, and extensive supply chain work to source and customize an array of products, not to mention all the emotional anguish.

But it wasn’t the six-inch-thick request for proposal (RFP) response with every imaginable spec that closed the deal. Nor the

final presentation we spent three days and nights rehearsing. Nor the detailed implementation plan that took a week to develop. Nor the research, demos, samples, and data. Not planes, fancy entertainment, or sports tickets.

In the end, they felt that we were more like them than our competitors were. They felt more comfortable with the people on our team and our company culture. They liked us more. We were a safe choice. A pivotal decision swayed by the whim of emotion. A similarity bias. Unquantifiable and irrational.

It was the biggest deal I'd ever closed. Huge. The commission on the account alone was enough to purchase a 5,000-square-foot home with cash (which I did) and have enough money left over to make a significant contribution to my savings. Just like that, at the age of 26, I went from the depths of depression to the top of the world. Closing that deal changed my life and set my career on the fast track.

Since then I've closed bigger and more complex deals worth millions more dollars. Yet, no other sale taught me more about what matters most in sales. It was a humbling lesson on why what we often believe is important to influencing the outcome of a sale is just dead wrong.

It also put me on the path I've been on as a practitioner, leader, author, consultant, researcher, and trainer for the past 20 years, on a mission to answer two simple, yet frustratingly elusive, questions:

1. *Why do people buy?*
2. *How do we influence them to buy?*

## **To Buy Is Human**

People act on emotion and justify with logic. From complex to completely transactional impulse purchases, emotions drive buying decisions. Science is stacking up one study after another demonstrating the leverage emotion exerts on the choices we make. The real-life examples are legion:

- A banking executive makes a \$500,000 enterprise software decision because she likes the account executive, Geoff, better than the