

# Lessons From The School Of Sales

by [Megan Senger](#)



## The philosophy, psychology and mathematics of selling.

You're sold on the importance of an exercise education. But do you equally value the study of sales? Whether you own an exercise enterprise or work as an independent instructor, having the technical skills to increase your customer base and cash flow is key to strengthening your bottom line. Yet while you can earn a graduate degree in finance, management or marketing, good luck finding a college curriculum on the critical skills of selling.

"Sales continues to be the least-taught profession in the world," says sales trainer and author Thomas Freese of Atlanta. And while the fitness industry has (rightfully) evolved to emphasize increased exercise-related learning, sales skills have generally fallen behind.

But what if you could attend a School of Sales? What lessons would you learn about your own selling viewpoint, your client communications and getting the numbers to work in your favor? Read on as experts in sales and fitness present a trilogy of core courses: the Philosophy, the Psychology and the Mathematics of Sales. Grab your desk and dive in, because class is now in session.

## Philosophy 101: Cultivating a Pro-Sales Mindset

### Philosophy: the logical study of fundamental questions concerning one's world view.

Many fitness pros have received only part of the education they need to have the full, balanced and thriving business they desire, says Stacy McCarthy of Rancho Santa Fe, California, speaker, co-founder of the Yoga School of Business and former chief operating officer of a chain of health clubs. "The underlying reason why many in this industry struggle to make a great living, balanced with an equally great personal life, is that they have never learned essential business skills."

Sadly, many fitness pros don't see helping clients make buying decisions as a positive part of their work. "The most common reverie I hear is, 'I didn't get my degree to be a salesperson,'" says Brenda Abdilla, author of *Selling for Results: The Health Club Guide to Professional Selling* (CreateSpace 2010) and president of Management Momentum, an executive coaching and recruitment firm in Denver. "Trainers who wish that all personal training were 'free' or hate to talk about money will inevitably fail—which is ironic because then they are truly wasting their education."

What comes to mind when you hear the words *sell* or *closing sales* (i.e., the process of gaining new training or facility clients)? Do you cringe and wish you could just get on with the "real" part of your job—the exercise? Or do you feel excited and privileged to discuss the amazing value of your fitness services with a potential customer? What is your philosophy of sales?

We've all had clients with an unfortunate philosophy of exercise: the trainees who believe that getting fit is uncomfortable, not "their thing" and ultimately unachievable. But are you mistakenly seeing sales as a novice sees exercise?

Bottom line: No matter how many selling techniques you learn, a negative outlook on discussing buying decisions will keep you from helping people and earning the money you deserve. So before learning more selling tips, it is critical to recalibrate your mindset and your sales philosophy.

### Find Your Philosophy

As a fitness pro, you know that while technique is teachable, real success comes from attitude. "Your attitude either attracts or repels—and the best part of that is: you control it," says Jeffrey Gitomer of Charlotte, North Carolina, president of the sales training firm Buy Gitomer and author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *The Little Red Book of Selling* (Bard Press 2004) and *The Little Gold Book of YES! Attitude* (FT Press 2006). Gitomer gives more than 100 seminars and presentations per year and conducts Internet training programs on selling and customer service through his online company, TrainOne.

"Your belief system drives your success results," he says. "Establish belief in your company, your products and services, [and] yourself, and most importantly, [establish] belief that the customer is better off having purchased from you."

You sell the greatest "products" in the world—energy, health and longevity. You "Inspire the World to Fitness®." But we all know the world sometimes needs a nudge in the right (exercise) direction. This is where your ability to help customers make a decision about your fitness services—be it a yes or a no—comes into play.

### Get the Right Mindset

If deep down you allow yourself to dislike talking to clients about your services and fees, the customer you're with will subconsciously sense your anxiety. And both you and your client will have a stressful—and likely unsuccessful—sales encounter.

To avoid this, trainers must have confidence about who they are, Gitomer says. He notes that mental strength is more important than skill and product knowledge. "Mental strength stems from your attitude, your enthusiasm and your willingness to work hard."

Remember that you deserve to thrive from your work in all areas of your life, just as much as your students do, says McCarthy. And with a positive sales philosophy, helping customers make buying decisions can be an exciting, varied and interesting part of your fitness work.

Now that you have explored your own perceptions and mindset, it's time for a class in customer contact.

## Psychology 101: A Course on Communication

### Psychology: the study of mental and emotional behaviors.

"The great problem in sales is that we all tend to see the world through our own eyes," says Brian Tracy of Solana Beach, California, a bestselling author of more than 50 books and 500 audio and video programs on sales, leadership and business success, including *The Psychology of Selling* (Thomas Nelson 2006). "As a result, we tend to treat everybody else as if they are the way we are."

Instead, sales success lies in developing the ability to relate to all types of clients, says Tracy, who as a keynote speaker has given more than 5,000 talks and worked with over 1,000 companies worldwide. Tracy explains: "Before you begin to sell, figure out what type of person you are talking to, and then structure your answers and your presentation in such a way that it satisfies their needs rather than yours."

We sell and speak best to those with whom we are the most alike. So how can you help someone from whom you are psychologically dissimilar decide to buy your services?

## Personality Profiles

To strengthen client communications, start by studying psychological behaviors (sometimes known as “personality profile” systems). One of the best-known profile systems is the “DISC” behavioral model.

“The DISC profile illustrates the classic platinum rule: Do unto others as they would have you do,” says Abdilla, who lectures on psychological systems as part of her management consultancy. The DISC system is a framework for quickly understanding the communication preferences of the person you are dealing with, she says. This helps you deal with prospective clients in a way that puts them at ease.

Renowned for its simple, easy-to-apply principles, DISC is an acronym for four behavioral categories or psychological “temperaments”:

### Extroverted, fast-paced personalities:

**D:** director (task-oriented)

**I:** influencer (people-oriented)

### Reserved, slower-paced personalities:

**S:** steady worker (people-oriented)

**C:** conscientious worker (task-oriented)

Of course, people are complex creatures who don’t fit perfectly into the molds of these categories. Nevertheless, a general understanding of DISC temperaments can be invaluable in a sales situation.

Consider how you can modulate your sales presentations to each psychological and behavioral style in the DISC system:

#### 1. Results-Oriented D-Type Dominant, Director

- Behavioral characteristics: A natural leader and decision-maker, the D-type is notoriously impatient, competitive and results-oriented. “It’s impossible not to notice [that D’s] talk fast, might be tapping their foot or looking at their watch,” Abdilla says.
- Typical career choices: authority and leadership roles: managers, entrepreneurs, physicians, lawyers.
- How to present information to D-types: “Speed things up, get to the point and know your stuff,” Abdilla says. “Avoid small talk or being overly familiar. The D will be in heaven if you talk results and price, and are competent.”
- How to mess up the sale: Appear disorganized or engage in meandering chitchat.

#### 2. People-Oriented I-Type: Influencing, Engaging

- Behavioral characteristics: The consummate “people person,” the I-type loves socializing and having fun. This person moves quickly, like a D, but is probably warmer and friendlier, Abdilla says.
- Typical career choices: creative and interactive roles: public relations people, event planners, sales people, performing artists (and often fitness pros!).
- How to present information to I-types: Be upbeat and let them talk, Abdilla says. “Don’t try to control the interaction. Making the I-type feel special and heard is the key.”
- How to mess up the sale: Bog down the interaction with impersonal technical details.

#### 3. Family-Oriented S-Type: Steady, Supportive

- Behavioral characteristics: The S-type has a calm demeanor and is warm and accepting, but is also uncomfortable with confrontation and forceful sales pitches, Abdilla says. S’s are good listeners; they are dependable and highly loyal.
- Typical career choices: caring, empathetic professions in structured work environments: teachers, nurses, counselors, service industry roles.
- How to present information to S-types: Be a great listener, Abdilla says. “If you can show your sincerity and dependability while being warm and patient, the S will be much more at ease.” Slow down, speak softly, ask a lot of questions and focus on building rapport before talking business.
- How to mess up the sale: Speak quickly or loudly and push the S buyer to make a fast decision.

#### 4. Detail-Oriented C-Type: Cautious, Conscientious

- Behavioral characteristics: The C-type has very high attention to detail and likes structure and concrete proof. C’s usually come into a decision-making discussion with specific questions that illustrate their knowledge on a subject, Abdilla says.
- Typical career choices: technical and precise work: accountants, programmers, engineers, analysts.
- How to present information to C-types: Focus on quality and be logical and relevant, Abdilla says. Keep emotions out of the picture. “Follow through, keep your promises, be informed, and you will win over the C-type,” she says. Take time to answer all of their questions, preferably in writing. C’s often use long pauses when speaking; resist the urge to interrupt them.
- How to mess up the sale: Speak too quickly and generally; fail to consider the C’s technical questions as important to the sale.

## Limitations and Perspective

All four categories of DISC characteristics are present in everyone to varying degrees. Some people have high tendencies in only one DISC style, while others display strong characteristics of more than one type. A person’s behavioral tendencies can change in different environments (e.g., social, family or work).

Psychological profiles offer a valuable way to focus on your communication style, but they are not a crystal ball, Abdilla says. “Typing can be a wonderful reminder to pay attention. However, any potential gain goes away if you make assumptions or try to predict behavior. For example, [don’t say to yourself,] ‘That guy is a D so he will be mean to me’ or ‘She is a C so she will never buy on the first visit.’”

Think of the DISC system as a compass pointing to a potential trainee’s communication preferences—both in a sales situation and when training in the gym (see the sidebar “DISC in the Gym.”)

With new philosophical and psychological tools under your belt, it’s time for the final course of study: how revenue breaks down by the numbers.

## Mathematics 101: Profits by Numbers

### Mathematics: the study of numbers and quantities.

In 1906, Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto observed that roughly 80% of the land in Italy was owned by only 20% of the population. Later termed the “80/20 rule” or the “Pareto principle,” the idea that 80% of all effects originate from only 20% of causes is key to learning how to flex your sales muscles and make more money faster.

Italian landowners aside, the Pareto principle directly relates to your exercise endeavors. It’s a long-standing business axiom

that 80% of your sales will come from just 20% of your clients. Eighty percent of your profits will come from 20% of your products or service offerings. In fitness terms this means that if you take on 10 new trainees this month and sell \$1,000 worth of services, \$800 will typically come from only two of these new clients buying “bigger” service packages.

### The 80/20 Rule and the Buying Decision

You may think prospective clients need to know everything about your services to make a decision about signing up with you. Not so, says Tracy, who notes that buying decisions also follow the 80/20 rule: “Fully 80% of a client’s buying decision will be concentrated on 20% of the benefits that you offer to the prospective customer.”

Tracy cautions that talking too much about features and benefits that are in the bottom 80% of a customer’s concerns will actually hurt your chances of making a sale. Your job is to find out what the potential trainee actually thinks is important, he says. Then use this specific information to help the would-be customer reach a decision.

What other numerical rules apply to how sales are lost—and made?

### The 48% Rule: Asking for the Sale

The single worst thing you can do when selling fitness is to set up a client meeting, get to know the customer’s needs, make an amazing presentation on the value of your services . . . and then stop short of asking for the sale. Yet this is exactly what happens with half of all fitness pros who sell.

“Forty-eight percent of all sales calls end without the salesperson trying to close even once,” Tracy says. Consider this statistic for a moment. This means that 1 out of every 2 fitness professionals end new-trainee consultations without asking the prospect to make a buying decision.

Do not make the most easily avoided mistake in sales! Always ask the customer to decide whether to sign up for your services. (For more information on how the end of client meetings should look, see my article “The Top 5 Closes for Personal Trainers” in the June issue of *IDEA Trainer Success*.)

### The Rule of 5: Getting to Yes

How often, on average, do top producers ask for a particular client’s business before hearing a yes? Five times, Tracy says: “A full 80% of sales are never closed before the fifth closing attempt. It is after the fifth time [of asking the prospective client to make a buying decision] that you make most of your sales.” So for every yes you get, expect to hear at least four noes first.

Make it your goal to ask for a trainee’s business at least five (or six!) times before moving on. Do so politely, professionally and possibly over multiple client contacts (e.g., the first phone call, the new-client meeting, a follow-up e-mail, when you see the person in the gym again). This alone can propel you to the sales elite: Tracy explains that only about 10% of sales professionals make at least five attempts to close a particular sale before giving up.

But what is the key to making it effortless to ask for a trainee’s business? “Success in selling hinges less on a salesperson’s ability to close and more on your ability to get prospects ready to be closed,” Freese says. Translation? Work diligently to improve your overall client consultations and relational skills. Then, asking several times for someone’s business will feel natural and unforced.

### The Rule of 3%: Finding Your Winning Edge

The sheer volume of business skills and concepts you need to succeed can seem overwhelming. However, it’s important to remember that small improvements in any area can add up quickly, Tracy says. “A small increment of [improvement in] skill or ability, just 3% or 4%, can give you a winning edge.”

An added bonus: This incremental edge can translate into an extraordinary difference in income, Tracy explains. “The difference between the top performers and average or mediocre performers is not a huge difference in talent or ability. Often, it is just a few small things done consistently and well, over and over again.” Step-by-step, both sales and fitness success are within reach of anyone willing to make small, consistent changes.

## A Class Above

With or without a formal School of Sales, translating your talents into an enduring enterprise takes the right business education, McCarthy says. “A ‘sustainable business’ means you are making a real difference in the world with the skills you’ve been gifted.”

If you really want to help people, improve your sales aptitude: Invest time learning how to effectively guide a client to a buying decision. Your skills in this area will not only provide financial payback; they will allow you to better “pay it forward.” Exercise your fitness education by helping others to choose the right course.

## SIDEBAR: Selling When You’re Not “In Sales”

Every year Jeffrey Gitomer, president of the sales training firm Buy Gitomer trains hundreds of “not-in-sales” people who still must sell as some part of their jobs. He encourages personal trainers in this situation not to think of themselves as “sales” people. “I want you to think of yourself as a ‘physical fitness helper.’ You’re going to help customers get to where they need to be. And if you don’t want to sell, and you’re focused on help—then think of helping customers to buy.”

Perhaps it’s just the semantics of “selling” that is causing you stress, says Thomas Freese, sales trainer, speaker and author of *Sell Yourself First* (Portfolio 2010) and the renowned classic *Secrets of Question Based Selling* (Sourcebooks 2000). “I train a lot of nonsalespeople,” Freese says. “When people say they don’t want to sound like a salesperson, what they are saying is ‘I don’t want to sound self-serving,’ or ‘I don’t want to sound like a used-car salesperson.’ ”

Freese says fitness pros should decide if they want to help people and if they want to communicate more effectively. “Whatever ‘that’ [i.e., helping people and communicating effectively] is called—whatever you call ‘that,’ which also produces revenue—let’s talk about how to be more effective at ‘that.’ ” Above all, don’t let the word *sales* hold you back from helping your customers choose health.

## SIDEBAR: DISC In The Gym

The benefits of learning how to present information to all types of trainees also translates to nonsales work in the gym, says Brenda Abdilla, president of Management Momentum, an executive coaching and recruitment firm in Denver.

“In my experience, understanding a person’s communication style is critical to successfully helping them change behaviors. The way we communicate is a window to what motivates us and drives us. Think about how powerful knowing that can be in motivating a person to do three more reps or change their tried-and-true workout routine and reach their goals.”

For more information on the DISC system, Abdilla recommends *The 4-Dimensional Manager: DISC Strategies for Managing Different People in the Best Ways* by Julie Straw (Berrett-Koehler 2002).

## SIDEBAR: Managing Rejection

Why do half of all fitness pros never ask a client to buy? Because nobody enjoys being rejected, says Jeffrey Gitomer, who points out that rejection comes with the territory. "All sports have winners and losers. If you can win [when selling your services] 30% of the time, you'll win awards and earn a fortune. That means you'll get rejected 7 out of 10 times. Get used to it, and get over it."

Gitomer adds that the word no is all in a day's work for even the most successful leaders: "If you can win 51% of the time, you're president of the United States," he says. Since the road to success is paved with noes, don't ever be afraid to ask clients to make a choice.

### SIDEBAR: Build Your Business Bookshelf

"Invest an hour a day in anything, and in 5 years you will become a world-class expert," Jeffrey Gitomer says. "The only question is: At what? Most people will become a world-class expert at some kind of local TV news program, or some kind of TV rerun. Me? I read and write while others watch TV. Remember: News equals negative. Books or CDs equals positive."

To invest your time wisely, consider works from these best-selling authors:

### SIDEBAR: Thomas Freese

Books: *Secrets of Question Based Selling* (Sourcebooks 2000) and *Sell Yourself First* (Portfolio 2010)

Online: innovative articles on boosting sales at [www.qbsresearch.com/category/implementation-tips](http://www.qbsresearch.com/category/implementation-tips)

### SIDEBAR: Jeffrey Gitomer

Books: *The Little Red Book of Selling* (Bard Press 2004) and *The Sales Bible* (HarperBusiness 2008)

Online: free sales tips in a weekly column and the *Sales Caffeine* newsletter at [www.gitomer.com](http://www.gitomer.com)

### SIDEBAR: Brian Tracy

Books: *Advanced Selling Strategies* (Simon & Schuster 1996) and *Now, Build a Great Business!* (AMACOM 2010)

Online: free weekly newsletter of sales tips at [www.briantracy.com/sales/sales\\_training](http://www.briantracy.com/sales/sales_training)

For more pro tips, check out anything by Joe Girard, Tom Hopkins, Jim Rohn or Zig Ziglar.



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