

Win-Win Selling

**The Original 4-Step Counselor Approach for
Building Long-Term Relationships with Buyers**

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Foreword

The publication of *Win-Win Selling* is a fulfilling moment for me, since it extends the benefits of the Counselor selling approach to many readers. It also takes me back to my earliest days in sales, in the Fifties. I was earning \$200 and spending \$210 each month, teaching high school. My uncle recruited me into the life insurance business, promising I would make \$400 per month. I actually believed I would never have another financial challenge in my lifetime.

It wasn't easy at first. I was shocked that some people didn't want to talk to me as a life insurance agent. I started reading Victor Frankel's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. It helped me weather the emotional slings and arrows of outrageous rejection. Frankel's message about the final freedom that everyone experiences when faced with any adversity encouraged me as if he were whispering right into my psyche.

For my seven years in the business I stayed at the top of my company's sales success chart and became the Youngest Lifetime Member of the Million Dollar Roundtable. That honor led to invitations to speak at meetings and share my selling secrets. I accepted them, even though I couldn't articulate what my secrets actually were. So I borrowed other people's secrets and spoke articulately as though they were mine.

Then the unexpected happened. A client company to whom I had presented my secrets-of-somebody-else's-success speech asked if I would create a training program for them. My immediate, fearful thought was, "I don't know how to do that," but nonetheless, I said yes.

Then it occurred to me. Until the Sixties, selling was seen as an adversarial relationship – the seller beats the buyer in a win-lose scenario. You heard about 110 ways to close a sale, 88 ways to answer an objection. This clearly wasn't the basis of *my* success. So I went looking for my own secrets. I lucked out when I paid \$1.00 for a psychology book. The only part I read was by Brandice University's head of psychology, Abraham Maslow, defining his pyramid of needs. I had never heard of

him, even though he pioneered in humanistic psychology.

I soon met with Dr. Maslow because I knew his concepts had something to do with my “humanistic” view of selling. It was a defining moment. Maslow guided me to Dr. Carl Rogers, a well-known therapist, who authored *On Becoming a Person* and *Client-Centered Therapy*. These books, combined with Maslow’s humanistic perspective, became the soil in which Counselor concept began to germinate and provide the harvest for an entirely new mindset on selling.

Dr. Rogers helped me understand the model of counseling, which is an integrated philosophy, discipline, and set of skills. These help the client solve problems, find advantages, and reap the benefits of new solutions. Applied to selling, the *Counselor* salesperson benefits by creating a win-win relationship and a loyal customer.

Helping people get what they want and feel the way they want to feel was what I couldn’t express earlier. Essentially the model says, “The more I help *others* get what they want, the more I get what I want.” This new model felt right, and helped me discover and become more of my true self – the person I was when I was at my best.

I don’t know how many millions of people have been through the Counselor Salesperson program offered by Wilson Learning since 1965. But I do know that those who have absorbed its full message have discovered the power of its secrets not only in their work lives, but more importantly, in *all* aspects of their lives. In learning to counsel with their clients, they also learn to counsel within their most important relationships – with family, friends, themselves.

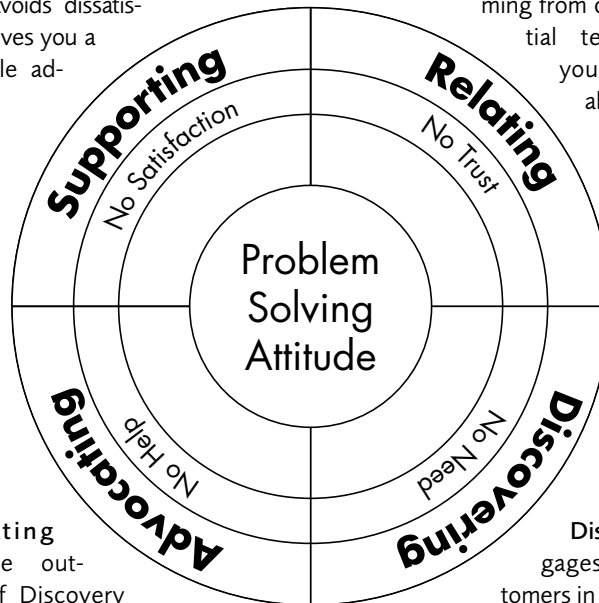
I started Wilson Learning with a purpose statement that was inspired by Dr. Maslow – “helping others become as much as they can be.” I hope, as you read this book, you can combine your life purpose with these powerful competencies. Counsel yourself to become as much as *you* can be, while counseling your clients to become as much as *they* can be. You’ll both enjoy the ultimate Win-Win. I wish you all the best.

Larry Wilson

The Win-Win Counselor Mindset

Supporting completes the cycle, ensuring customers experience the benefits of solutions and see needs met. Reinforces your Counselor role in the implementation; reveals the next problems to solve together. Avoids dissatisfaction; gives you a sustainable advantage.

Relating creates an open, trusting relationship with your customers and enhances your credibility. Lays the groundwork for genuine problem solving. Demonstrates good intent. Avoids problems stemming from customers' initial tension about your intent and ability to help.



Advocating links the outcomes of Discovery to your offering and engages your customers as partners. Involves customers as internal supporters of your jointly developed solution. Avoids customers' sense that the offer gives no help for their situation.

Discovering engages the customers in candidly sharing information so you can together define their needs and problems, the very ones which create the Gap that prevents them from getting to their desired states. Avoids the common perception there's no need to buy.

The Counselor method combines win-win, problem solving attitudes with people skills, in a four-stage cycle. But the whole – the Counselor mindset and the Counselor selling skills – is really greater than the sum of its parts.

1 | Loving Your Job: the Counselor Mindset

Picture this: you love your job in sales, and you are really good at it. You get up each morning excited about the joys and challenges of the day. You know you are doing something that helps other people and makes them feel good about themselves. You solve problems and make things better. Your customers welcome you warmly. You're a successful salesperson, and you feel great.

Unfortunately, that picture doesn't describe every salesperson today. And if you look for books to help you sell better, you find that most people do not believe that salespeople can or should feel good about themselves. Titles like *Guerilla Selling* or *How to Sell Anything to Anyone* create the wrong impression about successful salespeople. How can you feel good about your job day after day if your primary goal is to pull a sale out of your customer's pocket?

At Wilson Learning Worldwide we reject that approach to selling. We believe, and our research shows, that the most successful salespeople gain happiness and fulfillment from being a different kind of salesperson. They reach fulfillment by seeing selling as a way to help customers get what they truly need and want. This philosophy fundamentally changes what happens between the salesperson and the customer. You, the seller, become a counselor for your customer. That is why we call it the Counselor Approach.

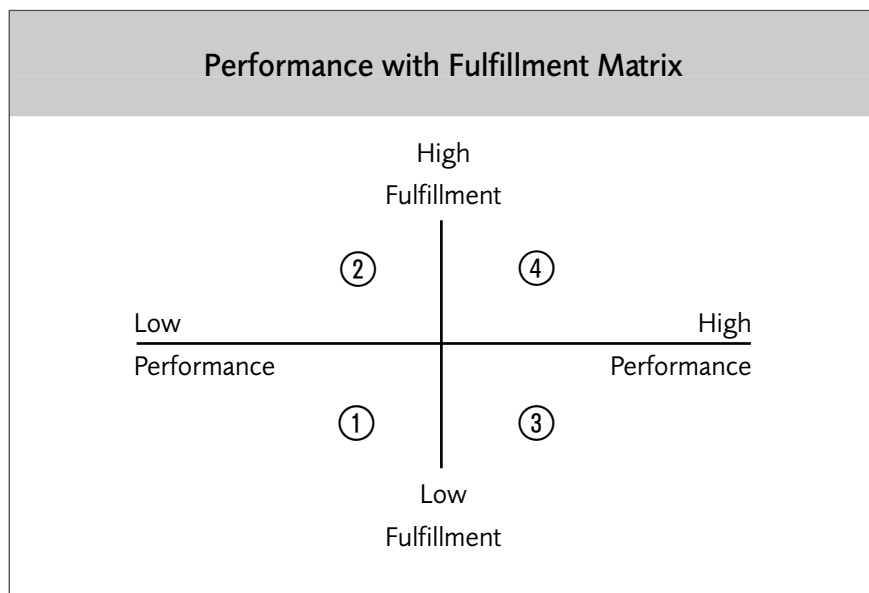
With this book, you can master the practical, proven skills of the Counselor Approach and adopt the Counselor Mindset. When you do, you will sell well and feel good about it. At Wilson Learning, we call

Loving Your Job: the Counselor Mindset

this *Performance with Fulfillment*. It is a powerful tool, not an impossible dream.

PERFORMANCE WITH FULFILLMENT

Look around at the workers you know – other salespeople, colleagues, friends. You can locate each one somewhere on the Performance with Fulfillment matrix.



1. Low Performance – Low Fulfillment: Hopefully you don't have too many of these people around you, but there always a few. These folks drag themselves into work each day, doing the minimum needed not to get fired. They hate their work, hate their work environment, and, most importantly, don't think that they produce anything of value.

2. Low Performance – High Fulfillment: These people are excited by their jobs, love working with their co-workers, and think they are making a difference in the world. Unfortunately, they lack the skills or abilities to actually make it happen. This group includes lots of new hires, thrilled with their jobs but not very good at them – yet.

3. High Performance – Low Fulfillment:

You probably also know a few of these folks. If they are salespeople, they make a lot of sales. But how do they achieve their numbers? Do they manipulate or dupe buyers, selling without any consideration for whether their customer needs their product or not? Are they complainers? (“I could make more sales if I had better leads, better products to sell,” and so on.) Do they get any repeat business? With little trust or appreciation from their customers, no wonder they aren’t happy.

4. High Performance – High Fulfillment:

You can’t miss these people. They are the highest performing sellers, and they love it. They talk passionately about what it means to serve a customer. They get a kick out of understanding the customer’s problem and fashioning a solution that improves the customer’s business or life. These salespeople walk away rather than sell a customer a product he doesn’t need. Customers love them.

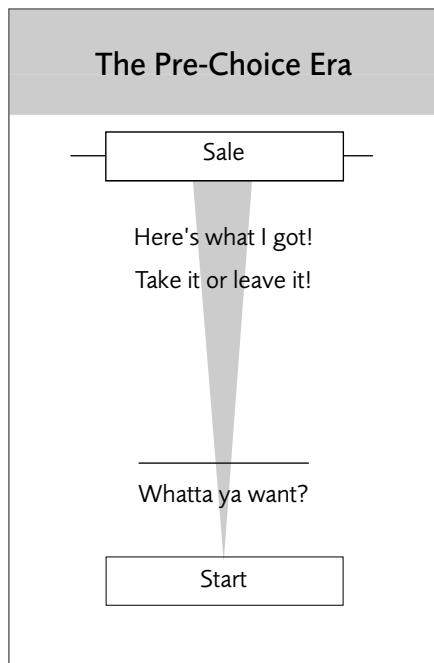
What Drives a Counselor Salesperson?

At a training session in Singapore, we met a dozen insurance salespeople. They sold group life insurance to large multinational corporations. At the end of the first day, after talking about Performance with Fulfillment, we asked the question “What is your job?” Next morning, one of the participants announced that he had spent half the night thinking about this question. This fellow, the highest performing salesperson in the group, said it boiled down to a single sentence: “My job is to make sure that every family in the world feels financially secure.” He really knows what Performance with Fulfillment is all about!

HELP THE BUYER WIN – A STORY OF EVOLUTION

To understand how the Counselor Approach is different from other approaches to selling, let’s look at the evolution of the practice of selling and buying. The approaches of salespeople and buyers have changed over time, particularly in the ways the sellers regard buyers’ needs.

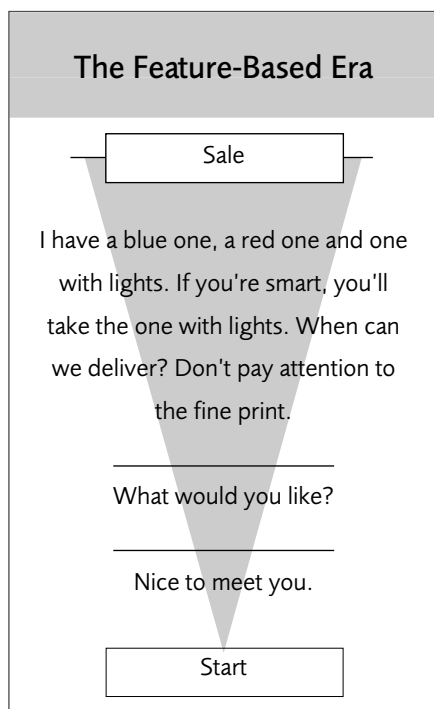
Loving Your Job: the Counselor Mindset



The Pre-Choice Era

In the early days of “selling,” new technology and inventions were rare, distribution was limited, and copying or knocking off products wasn’t easy. As a result, the seller who put a unique product before the buyer had a clear, sustainable advantage over other sellers. “I’m the only game in town” was often quite true for these storefront vendors. If customers needed the product, they sought out the seller – they had virtually no choice.

The sales approach was “Whatta ya want? Here’s what I got! Take it or leave it!”. Advantage to the *seller*.



The Feature-Based Era

The Pre-Choice Era didn’t last long because advances in technology turned local markets into regional and then global ones. Companies began to produce greater numbers of products and to transport them over greater distances. The number of vendors and sources for goods increased. Competition among vendors heated up. As a result, buyers found more options for purchasing goods and services, and prices started falling. The

score changed, and it was advantage to the *buyer* – sort of.

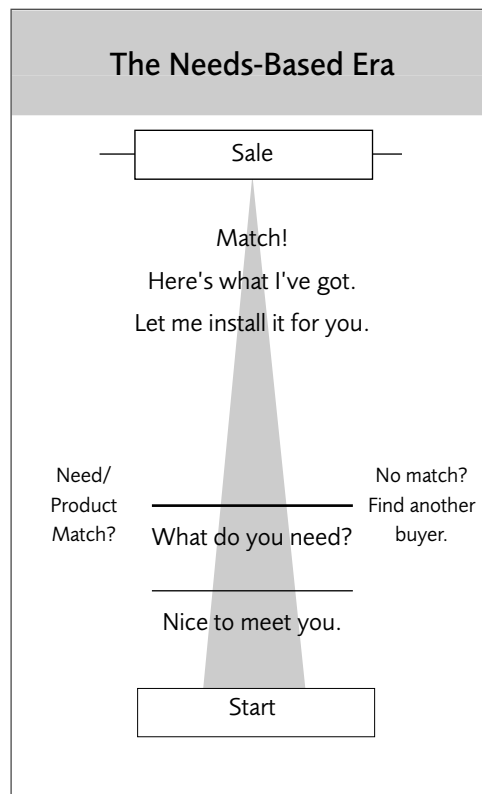
Sellers retreated at first and resorted to trickery – “selling strategies” like bait and switch, loss leaders, fine print clauses in contracts, and so forth. Then they tried to differentiate their products based on “features.” The bells and whistles added in this era ranged from decorative to valuable – valuable to someone, but not everyone. So the approach to selling became: “What would you like? I’ve got a blue one, a red one, and one with lights. If you’re smart, you’ll take the one with lights. I’ll let you pay on the installment plan (but don’t read the fine print). When can we deliver?”

Sellers regained the advantage, but soon most of them were offering the same features. Low prices became the next point of differentiation, and a lot of businesses went bankrupt as profits shrank.

The Needs-Based Era

Then major a paradigm shift occurred between buyers and sellers. Sellers realized that, if they could not have a product, feature, or price advantage, perhaps they could differentiate themselves by the way they sold. The concept of needs-based selling goes like this: “Instead of adding features to our products to make them serve the widest possible use, let’s identify the features that we can produce best and cheapest, then identify the buyers who most want those features and sell to them.”

Sellers left their storefronts



Loving Your Job: the Counselor Mindset

and started reaching out, targeting buyers. Instead of saying, "You need this," salespeople started asking, "Do you need this?" If the buyer needed it, they made a sale. If the buyer didn't, they just moved on to the next buyer. The seller stopped wasting time, energy, and money trying to force the product down the throat of the buyer who really didn't want what was being sold. The approach became, "What do you need?"

1. I have what you need – when can we deliver? Or,
2. I'll call back in two months to see if your needs have changed."

Both the seller and buyer gained some advantage here. Sellers were less pushy in their selling and had better odds of success, and buyers faced less pressure to buy and got better service. But the seller was still *selling*.

THE COUNSELOR EVOLUTION

Many companies still use this needs-based sales approach and use it effectively. But about 40 years ago a new approach, a sub-species of the needs-based approach, began to emerge. In the United States, Larry Wilson, founder of Wilson Learning, labeled this new creature the Counselor salesperson. Three distinct traits set this approach apart from the basic needs-based approach.

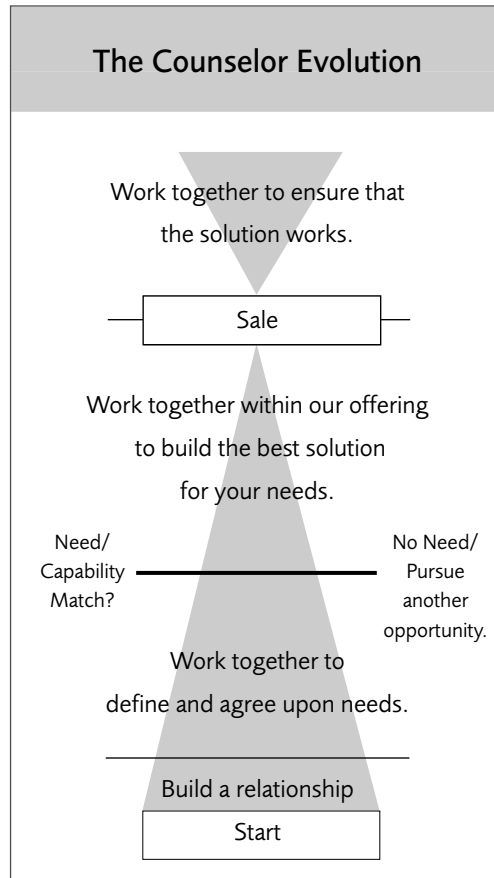
1. Counselor salespeople don't see themselves primarily as salespeople. They see themselves primarily as "Counselors," whose prime responsibility is to *make the client successful through the purchase and implementation of their product or service*.
2. Counselor selling creates a partnership between you and the buyer. You don't match buyers' needs to your product. Instead, you work with customers to identify the best solutions for their problems.
3. After the sale, the Counselor stays by the customer's side to ensure that the solution works to the customer's satisfaction.

As a result of these critically important traits, the Counselor stops selling and, instead, “counsels” with the buyer, who in turn becomes the client or even the patient.

The Counselor starts by building trust with the client, and then continues with the needs-based era’s process of defining needs – except that now the Counselor asks, “What are your business problems?” not “What do you need?” The focus now is buyer-centered, not seller-centered. The buyer’s answer lets the Counselor determine whether he or she can help or not. If it’s *yes*, then the reply is, “I’d like to suggest that we work together to adapt our

brand offering to make it work for you.” If it’s *no*, then, “I’d like to call back in a month or so to see if your problems have changed.”

Clearly, this Counselor Approach makes for a significant advantage to the customer, because problems get solved. It’s also a significant advantage for the seller and his or her organization, because the counseling skills of the sales team become a unique, strategic advantage that the competition cannot replicate. When the Counselor Approach is followed successfully, the customer sees the relationship with the selling organization as a business partnership, one that is very hard for the competition to displace. The switching costs simply become prohibitive.



HOW THE COUNSELOR APPROACH WORKS

The Counselor salesperson has two aspects:

- The Counselor selling skills, and
- The Counselor Mindset.

The other chapters of this book will provide you with the skills of a Counselor salesperson. But before learning the skills, it is important to understand how they work together. While using the skills independently will improve your sales performance, understanding and using them with the Counselor Mindset will significantly enhance their impact. The whole is really greater than the sum of the parts.

The Counselor Mindset starts with this assumption: *People love to buy but hate to be sold*. People are happier when they feel that they have made a reasonable and conscious decision to choose one option over all the others available.

The Four Obstacles to Buying

Recently, Helga set out to buy a digital camera for some clients' projects. She returned a few hours later, disappointed and without a camera. The reasons why she didn't buy provide a good example of the major barriers that a Counselor salesperson needs to anticipate and address.

1. *No Trust*. "I kept getting conflicting information about the cameras. No one seemed to really know what they were talking about."
2. *No Need*. "They didn't listen to me. I tried to explain what I needed to do with the camera but all they did was talk about pixels and stuff I didn't want to know about."
3. *No Help*. "They just said 'this is the best camera' without explaining why it was the best one for me."
4. *No Satisfaction*. "In the end I felt pressured and manipulated. I never want to go in that camera store again."

The Counselor salesperson understands that these four obstacles to buying are present in every potential customer. Counselor selling provides a systematic approach that helps the salesperson address and avoid each obstacle in turn. Chapters 2 through 5 cover these topics.

Relating: Dealing with No Trust

People will not buy from sellers they believe do not have the buyer's best interests in mind. Nor will customers willingly share important information about their problems, needs, or goals unless they believe that the salesperson has the intent and ability to help them.

Chapter 2 shows how a Counselor salesperson creates an open, trusting relationship with a customer. The Relating skills in Chapter 2 will help you to establish credibility, build trust, and lay the groundwork for a problem-solving sales relationship with your customers. As a result, you will quickly be able to reduce the tension that is normal to any sales relationship and build the bond that will help you help your customers.

Discovering: Dealing with No Need

Bob was remodeling his kitchen and knew he needed a new floor. But beyond that, Bob didn't really know what kind of floor he needed. What Bob knew best were his *problems*. He knew his legs got tired from standing on the old, hard ceramic tiles; he knew that his kids spilled a lot and that the dogs tracked in muddy footprints all the time.

What customers know best are *their* problems, goals, and visions for the future. A Counselor salesperson uses Discovery skills to understand these things, and then goes on to work with the customer to dig deeper, prioritize, and group them into an organized set of needs.

Thus, for the Counselor salesperson, Discovery goes beyond the needs-based stage of asking, "What do you need? Let me see if I have a product to match." Instead, Discovering needs is a process that says, "Let's understand your problems, goals, and priorities. Because then together, we can discover what is most important to you."

Loving Your Job: the Counselor Mindset

Advocating: Dealing with No Help

You've been there. You spent some time with a salesperson; you think he or she listened to you as you described your situation and needs. You wait for his or her response and out comes a canned presentation, detailing features and benefits. You don't have a clue about whether they will solve your problem. This might be the right solution, but there is no way of knowing, given the presentation.

Advocating, addressed in detail in Chapter 4, is not about how to give a good "presentation," but about how to link the Discovery of the customer's needs to the characteristics of your solution. Advocating skills help you make your customer a partner in the presentation of the solution. Thus, Advocating is less about "This is the solution I (the salesperson) recommend" and more about "Here is the solution we built together." This is especially important when there are multiple buyers with different motivations and needs. The Advocating step gives you an internal champion that will help you sell to others in the buyer's organization, others who may have different buying motives.

Supporting: Dealing with No Satisfaction

Counselor salespeople never lose a sale because of "buyer's remorse." Why? Because they recognize that the sale never really ends until the customer has experienced the benefits of the product or service and is satisfied that the critical needs are met. So they follow up on implementation, troubleshoot, adjust, and listen hard for clues about new problems and needs that could lead to future work together.

Chapter 5 provides you with skills for dealing proactively with potential sources of dissatisfaction. It shows how to assure the four critical Support needs (support for the decision, implementation, objections, and the relationship) are addressed.

Counselor Selling in Action

The last chapter of this book gives you some real-life lessons about how the Counselor Approach works in a variety of circumstances. You

will find the cases helpful in seeing how the rich resources of the Counselor skills and the Counselor Mindset come together to solve customers' problems, meet challenges from new circumstances, and more. Finally, the section on Other Resources which follows Chapter 6 will lead you to additional sources of information and training in this approach.

A TRUE WIN-WIN SOLUTION

The Counselor Approach creates a true win-win solution, with genuine advantage for both the customer and the salesperson. Customers gain advantage because they get what they need and want without extra features that don't provide any value but that do add cost. Counselor salespeople also gain advantage because they end up creating a trusting relationship with customers that the competition cannot easily replicate or compete with effectively. When the Counselor Approach is implemented successfully, the customer sees the relationship with the selling organization as a business partnership, one he or she values and wants to continue.

While this book cannot replace the live practice and experience that is provided in Wilson Learning's Counselor salesperson workshops, we hope your journey through this book inspires you and helps you gain more fulfillment – and better performance – in your role as salesperson.

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