

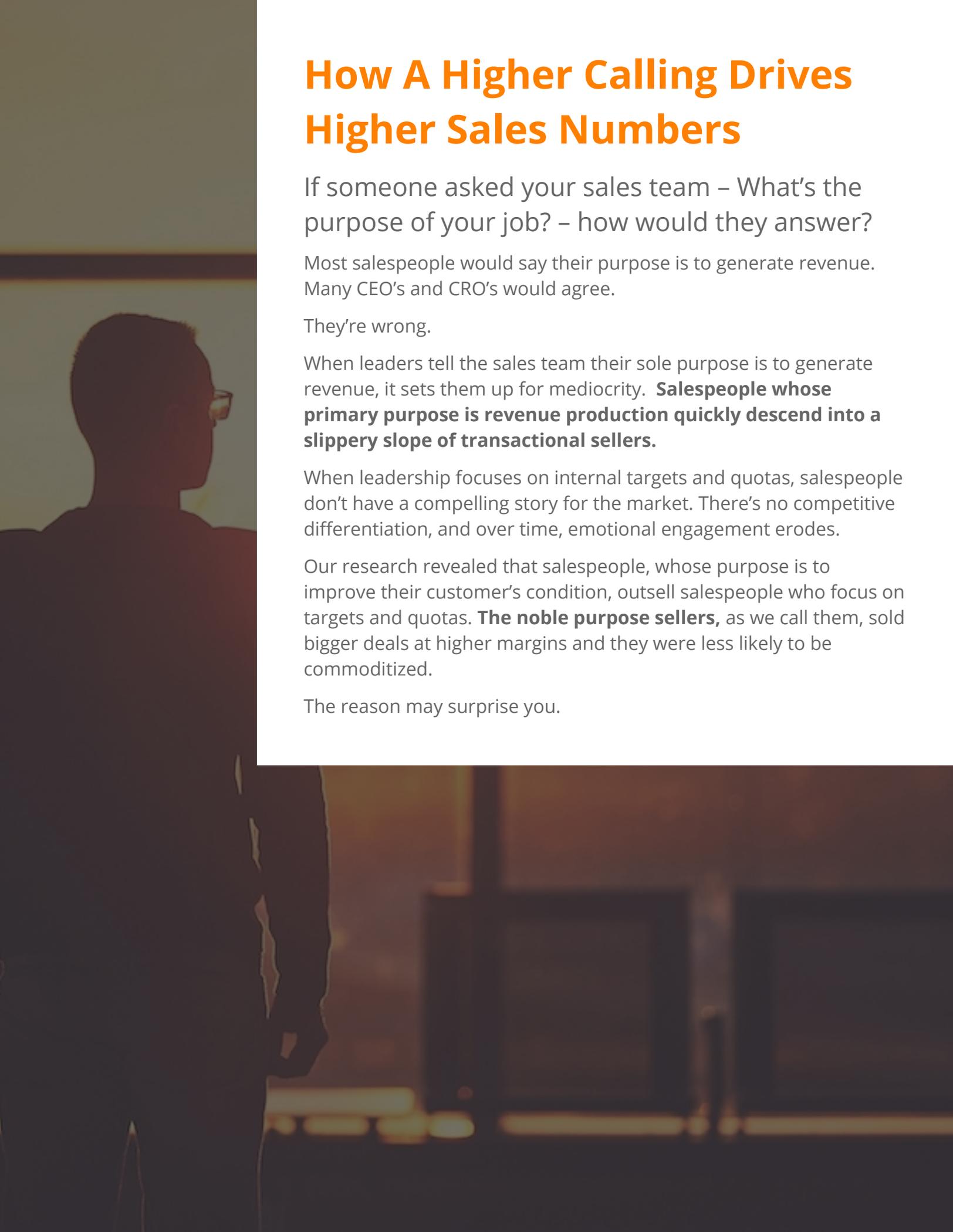


Purpose-Driven Selling

**How A Higher Calling Drives
Higher Sales Numbers**

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How A Higher Calling Drives Higher Sales Numbers

If someone asked your sales team – What’s the purpose of your job? – how would they answer?

Most salespeople would say their purpose is to generate revenue. Many CEO’s and CRO’s would agree.

They’re wrong.

When leaders tell the sales team their sole purpose is to generate revenue, it sets them up for mediocrity. **Salespeople whose primary purpose is revenue production quickly descend into a slippery slope of transactional sellers.**

When leadership focuses on internal targets and quotas, salespeople don’t have a compelling story for the market. There’s no competitive differentiation, and over time, emotional engagement erodes.

Our research revealed that salespeople, whose purpose is to improve their customer’s condition, outsell salespeople who focus on targets and quotas. **The noble purpose sellers**, as we call them, sold bigger deals at higher margins and they were less likely to be commoditized.

The reason may surprise you.

Noble Purpose Seller Versus Transactional Sellers

Imagine two salespeople. They're competitors. They're both preparing to call on the same customer.

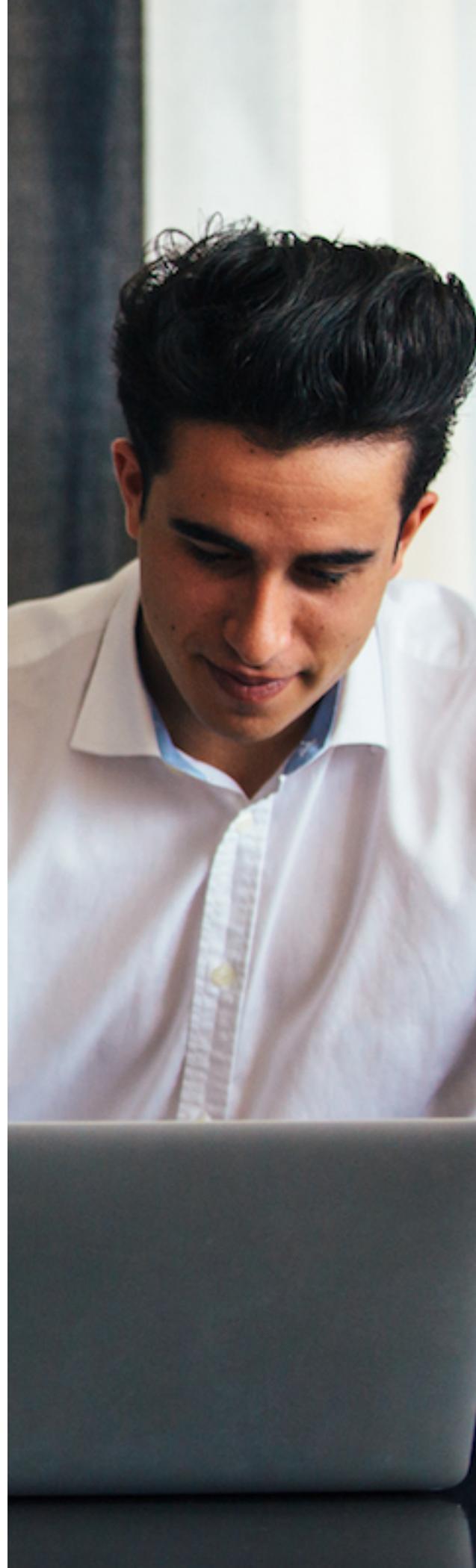
Scenario 1: Salesperson

Salesperson A sits down with his boss. His boss asks the usual sales manager questions.

- When are you going to close this?
- How much revenue will it be?
- Are all the key decision-makers involved?
- Who's the competition?
- What do you need to close this deal?

The questions are all about when and how we're going to collect the revenue. What thoughts do you think this prompts in the salesperson? They're likely thinking about the size of the deal, the reward for closing it, and the risk of failure.

It sounds good in theory, but there's something – or rather someone – missing from this conversation.





Scenario 2: Salesperson B

Now imagine the competing rep, Salesperson B. His boss also asks the typical pipeline questions; then the boss takes it a step further.

She asks her sales rep:

- How will this customer be different as a result of doing business with us?

What is this salesperson thinking about? His boss's question prompts him to **think about the customer**. That's who's missing from the first conversation with salesperson A: the customer.

Unfortunately, the first conversation – the one focused exclusively on internal revenue targets goals – is the default conversation inside most sales organizations.

This is a big problem.

The disconnect between what we want salespeople to do – focus on customers – vs. what’s discussed on a daily basis – it’s all about our numbers – is an unintended yet fatal error that creates a transactional sales team.

Salesperson A, whose boss focused exclusively on the internal numbers, and Salesperson B, whose boss asked about the impact on customers, aren’t hypothetical creatures.

They’re prototypes of the sales teams we’ve observed in our practice:

| Transactional Sellers | Noble Purpose Sellers |
|---|---|
| Focus on quota | Focus on customer |
| Think product first, customer second | Think customer first, product second |
| How can I sell my product to this customer? | How would this customer be helped by my product? |
| Stress product features | Stress customer impact |
| Repeat generic pitch | Tailor pitches to customers |
| Quickly jump to product price | Articulate impact on customer |
| Annoyingly assertive | Assertive for customers benefit |
| View customer as an object to achieve quota | View customer as opportunity to make contribution |

Seeing the two types of sellers side-by-side begs the question: **If you were the customer, which type of seller would you rather do business with?** If you’d rather work with Noble Purpose Sellers, you’re not alone.

Our research across hundreds of sales teams revealed: **Salespeople whose Noble Purpose is to improve their customer’s lives and businesses outsell transactional salespeople, who focus on targets and quotas.**

The internal conversation becomes the external conversation. If the internal conversation is only about sales numbers, there's no compelling story for the sales team to take out into the market. A **hit the number** sales narrative does not create competitive differentiation. Nor is it likely to spark the emotional engagement required for success in sales.

Lack of a customer-focused purpose is the root cause behind a myriad of problems. It's why great products get commoditized, and it's why most sales coaching fails.

When leaders focus on targets and quotas with little or no discussion about how their products and services actually help customers, the sales team is more likely to become transactional sellers whose deals come down to price.

Said another way, if you treat your customers like a number they'll return the favor.

Ironic, isn't it?

Focusing on something bigger than money results in your team making more money.



How Noble Purpose Drives Profit [Case Study]

The Noble Purpose lift plays out individually and collectively.

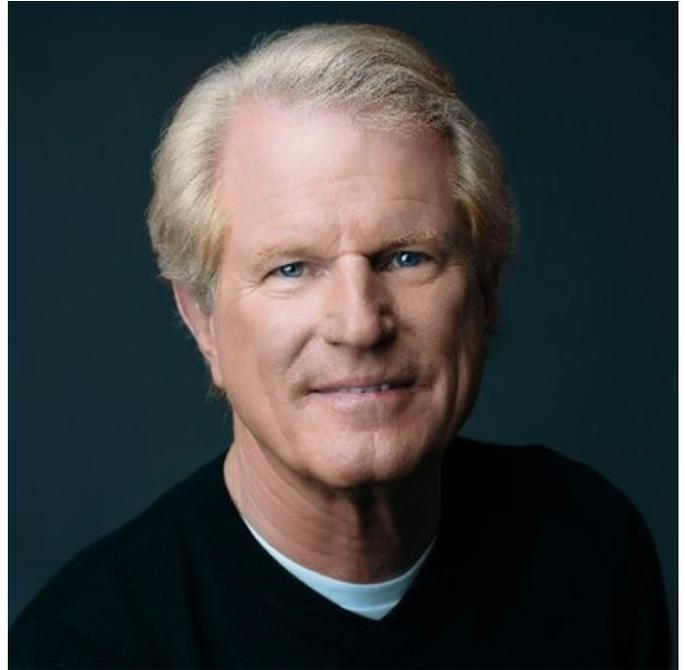
Research from former Procter & Gamble CMO Jim Stengle reveals purpose-driven firms outperform their competition by a multiple of over 3x. In Stengle's book **Grow**, research partner Millward-Brown Optimor found that the "Stengel 50" of purpose-driven companies experienced 10 years of pace-setting growth.

Organizations that focus on the Noble Purpose of improving life for customers gain a competitive edge. When everyone is aligned around the impact you have on customers, your team becomes more emotionally engaged. This outward focus prompts greater innovation, people think of new and better ways they can add value to customers.

Noble Purpose teams sustain greater competitive differentiation and more emotional engagement. This translates into revenue gains. An "Insights 2020" study sponsored by the Advertising Research Foundation found that a majority of companies that over-perform on revenue growth link everything they do to purpose.

As our colleague [Roy Spence](#), author of *It's Not What You Sell It's What You Stand For*, says,

"Purpose is your reason for being, it goes beyond making money and it almost always results in making more money than you ever thought possible."



The research is proving what we already know in our hearts to be true: Spreadsheets do not make the human heart beat faster.

As the link between purpose and revenue growth becomes ever more clear, executives face a choice. As Harvard Business Review cover story, **When Work Has Meaning** bluntly states:

"If like many executives, you're applying conventional economic logic, you view your employees as self-interested agents and design your organizational practice and culture accordingly, and that hasn't paid off as you hoped."

"So now you face a choice: You can double down on that approach. Or you can align the organization with an authentic higher purpose."

Noble Purpose: The Game Changer for Sales



Much of the current leadership dialogue about higher purpose is aspirational.

Sales is often considered the bastion of the self-interested. But our research and client results indicate the opposite is true.

Aligning sales team around **the noble purpose of customer impact drives revenue**. It jump starts competitive differentiation, and it creates what we call The Tribe Of True Believers: **A sales team who believes so passionately in your solution, they mow down every barrier in their way.**

We've seen our clients grow revenue, sometimes by as much as 3 or 4x, as a result of their Noble Purpose initiatives. Noble Purpose is the underpinning of a high-performance sales culture. A Noble Purpose culture attracts top sales talent, and it gives them a reason to stay beyond just this month's commission check.

The traditional sales model of coaching to the numbers, and trying to drive behavior with monetary incentive plans, is no longer enough. The majority of the customer's journey online, product features and benefits are now mere table stakes. Sellers need a specific compelling story about the impact they have on clients.

If you want passionate customers, you need passionate sellers. A noble purpose is no longer a nice-to-have. It's a must-have.



How Lack of Purpose Creates Transactional Sales Teams

When the sellers' internal talk track is about only their quota, they miss critical customer information. And the problem doesn't stop there.

A lack of purpose creates salespeople who:

- Think short term
- Fail to understand the customer goals.
- Can't connect the dots between their
- product and the customer.

Then the problem escalates to:

- Customers view you as a commodity.
- Customer churn increases.
- Contracts are constantly in jeopardy over small amounts.
- Salespeople try to game the comp plan.
- There is little or no innovation.

Sales morale declines.

It's not a pretty picture. When the internal conversation is all about the money, the external conversation becomes all about the money. And suddenly that's the last thing you're making.

Lack of competitive differentiation isn't even the worst-case scenario. One needs to look no further than Wells Fargo to see what happens when leaders overemphasize revenue growth at the expense of customers.

It's important to note, Noble Purpose sellers aren't simple relationship sellers. Noble Purpose sellers challenge their customers. Like Challengers, they use their "deep understanding of their customer's business to push their thinking and take control of the sales conversation."

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Noble Purpose sellers represent the top 2%. They take the Challenger model one step further.

Noble Purpose sellers are playing a different end:

- Relational sellers – want to please customers.
- Transactional sellers – want to close customers.
- Noble Purpose sellers - want to improve customers.

Noble Purpose sellers are more assertive than relationship sellers, and they're assertive in a different way than their transactional counterparts. They're assertive on behalf of the customer, rather than at the customers.

And their customers can tell the difference.



How Traditional Sales Management Erodes Competitive Differentiation

Noble Purpose may be the new narrative of business, yet traditional sales leadership techniques remain a decade behind. Current sales systems and processes often promote the very transactional mindset sales leaders are trying desperately to break away from.

Here are three simple examples to illustrate how adding Noble Purpose elevates the sales narrative.

1. Sales Meetings: From Transactional to Customer Centered

Traditional sales meetings typically start with a pipeline review. This puts the sales team into a transactional mindset from the get go: Who are we closing and when? Once again, the customer is nothing but a number, and there's nothing unique about the team's approach.

In Noble Purpose organizations, sales meetings start with customer-impact stories. Leaders ask: How did we make a difference to our customers this week? This puts the focus on customer-impact.

From a neuroscience perspective, a customer-impact story is more likely to ignite the frontal lobes, which is where creativity and problem-solving sit.

Our client, Patrick Hodges, Sr. Vice President of Sales for Blackbaud (the 23rd largest SaaS company in the world) says, "If you're a sales rep sitting in the audience, it's so powerful to hear how your solution is impacting clients."

Every rep in the meeting is getting the message, we are here to improve life for customers, and here is an example of how we did it. When salespeople hear, "Here's how we uniquely help our clients," they become more emotionally engaged - with the company and with each other. Blackbaud CEO Mike Gianoni says, "Your people don't go home and talk to their spouse about EBIDAT and stock price."

The pipeline review is still a critical part of the meeting. The difference now is, the pipeline is framed around the context of improving life for customers. Instead of who are we closing, it becomes who are we helping and how fast and how big can we help them?

The power of this frame lifts the team out of a transactional mindset.

2. CRM Expands to Include Deeper Customer Intel

Good sales organizations live and die by the data in their CRM. Great sales organizations expand the information to include robust customer intelligence that actually helps their teams sell.

Anyone old enough to remember faxing your forecast on spreadsheets understands the value of a good CRM system. Yet few organizations tap into the full power of their CRM.

Transactional organizations use the CRM for forecasting and pipeline management. This often leads sales managers to further commoditize customers. Instead of asking – How will you provide value to this customer? – the CRM prompts managers to focus exclusively on collecting revenue.

The CRM sabotages the case for competitive differentiation.

Noble Purpose organizations expand their CRM. They go beyond quantitative to include qualitative information about the customer environment, goals and challenges.

Instead of limiting themselves to closing timelines, these organizations use their CRM to ask:

- What does success look like for this customer?
- What does lack of success look like?

Managers are trained to ask these questions. Reps are evaluated on their pipeline, AND the quality of customer intelligence they have in the CRM. More robust intel enables reps to make a more differentiated case.

3. Reward and Recognition Inspires the Many Instead of the Few

In a transactional sales organization, Jane gets a sales award and leadership talks about how great Jane is.

In Noble Purpose organizations, Jane gets a sales award and leadership talks about the impact Jane has on customers.

The difference is subtle, the effect is dramatic.

Salespeople are competitive. When one seller wins an award, the rest of the team claps and smiles. Yet on the inside, most of them are experiencing the burning sting of envy. (We're former salespeople, we've been there). The agony of defeat can be motivating, but there's a hidden downside.

Focusing on beating your teammate (vs. having the biggest impact on clients) makes salespeople more likely to cut corners or game the comp plan.

When Noble Purpose organizations frame winning as making a difference to customers, **it creates a shared purpose**. Yes, Jane helped the most customers, but the rest of the team also team improved life for customers.

When you bring in one of Jane's customers to talk about how your solution helped their company, the burning envy felt by the rest of the team is replaced with information they can use with their customers.

How Noble Purpose Drives Profit [Case Study]

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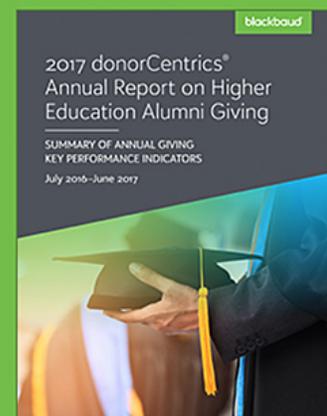
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Creating a team of Noble Purpose Sellers starts with two things:

1. A Noble Purpose leadership narrative.
2. Making implicit customer-impact explicit.

If you have paying customers, and you're regularly making sales, you're already doing something right.

You may already have a Noble Purpose: It's simply buried beneath layers of generic language and spreadsheets. The challenge is to take what is implicit and make it explicit.

Getting the Noble Purpose lift starts with naming and claiming your unique market position.

Patrick Hodges, Blackbaud's Sr. Vice President of Sales (mentioned above for his stellar sales meetings) describes his company's ethos:

"There's something about working at Blackbaud that feels different than other companies—there's a sense of purpose and a belief that each of us can make a difference in the success of our clients."

After several years of slow to no growth, within 24 months of embracing Noble Purpose, Blackbaud increased revenue from \$504 million to \$638 million and drove their stock price up over 70%.

They've since hit \$790 million in revenue, been voted a best place to work for millennials, and were named to Fortune's "56 Companies Changing the World" list.

Hodges launched Noble Purpose by asking his team our three discovery questions:

- How do you make a difference to customers?
- How do you do it differently than the competition?
- On your best day, what do you love about your job?

These three questions take three standard elements – value proposition, competitive positioning and employee engagement – to a deeper level. Instead of corporate-speak, the team is prompted to think deeply about the impact they have on customers. **They find their own WHY inside the answers.**

For Blackbaud, the three discovery questions jumpstarted a new sales narrative that spread across the entire company.



How Noble Purpose Improves Sales Behaviors

When leaders emphasize the impact your solution has on customers, you create a new internal and differentiated conversation. To be clear, numbers matter. A lot.

They can and should be measured, tracked and discussed. However, in our experience, good sales organizations don't need more help tracking their numbers.

They need greater competitive differentiation and more emotional engagement.

Numbers are a lagging indicator; they're about what happened in the past. Telling sales reps to hit bigger numbers is like telling a runner to go faster. It points them in the right direction, but it's not specific enough to change behavior.

Here are **ten shifts that occur when a sales team embraces Noble Purpose:**

1. Reps do more robust planning seeking out customer strategy and goals.
2. Call openings are customized to client hot buttons vs. canned feature dumps.
3. Questions shift from manipulative to authentic.
4. Generic case studies give way to compelling customer-impact stories.
5. Pitch decks are customized to spell out client impact.
6. Sales language becomes more emotionally engaging.
7. Reps shift from fulfilling purchase-customer requirements to achieving alignment with customers' strategic goals.
8. Salespeople learn how to turn interest into urgency.
9. Negotiations starts with long-term value instead of purchase price.
10. Customer handoffs jumpstart customer success.

As you look at the above list of behaviors, you'll see many skills commonly addressed in traditional sales training. You've probably also seen the depressing studies about how little of sales training is retained: On average half the content of sales training event is lost in 5.1 week. Eighty-four percent of sales training is lost after 90 days.

Our research revealed that it's not bad training and it's not bad trainers.

The root problem is, the sales skills are being taught in the service of the wrong end game.



The Dirty Little Secret About Sales Training

If you put a transactional seller through sales training, you'll see improvement.

- They'll ask better questions.
- They'll focus more on customers and less on features.
- They'll plan better openings.

Or at least that's what you'll observe when they're in the training program.

What typically happens when that rep gets in front of a real live customer with the pressure to close the deal? **The transactional mindset takes over.**

There's not a sales manager alive who hasn't watched their rep descend into a generic pitch the moment they're under pressure. It doesn't have to be this way.

Albert Einstein famously said, "We will not solve problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." The disconnect between what we train salespeople to do – focus on the customer goals – and the message they get on a daily basis – grab the customer's money – is the root cause of why sales training doesn't stick.

It's like training someone for healthy eating, then serving them French fries every day at lunch. A certain percent of people will say no thank you, and stick to the healthy ways. Then, there's the rest of us. Most of us will be grabbing back the fries within a day.

This model plays out organizationally.

Here's what we found: Good organizations typically have a certain percentage of Noble purpose sellers. They're the top producers. They sell at the highest margins and have the best customer retention.

Even if their leadership uses transactional language and systems, these Noble Purpose sellers keep their eyes on their own North Star: customers.

Here's what we find in our work with clients: When leadership activates Noble Purpose, three things starts happen:

1. Mid-level performers up their game
2. Non-performers opt out more quickly
3. You attract more top performers

The ethos of the organization changes. Instead of a handful of Noble Purpose sellers, you create a Tribe of True Believers, a sales team with an entirely different internal talk track than transactional sellers.



Jumpstart Your Sales

The business case for Noble Purpose is solid.

Aligning your team around a Noble Purpose drives revenue, it increases competitive differentiation and it ignites emotional engagement.

Over the last five years, we've codified a series of leadership interventions to jumpstart the process and a step-by-step methodology for implementing across large-scale teams.

But beyond business results, here's what else we've learned: **Noble Purpose makes you happier. When you do work that matters, your whole life lights up.**

We believe sales is a noble profession. Salespeople make the wheels of commerce spin. **The research has proven you don't have to choose between making money and making a difference.** You can have both.

You and your team deserve both.

We all do.



Lisa Earle McLeod

McLeod is the Sales Leadership expert for Forbes.com. She has appeared on the NBC Nightly News, the Today Show, Oprah.com and Good Morning America.

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