

Tao Te Ching of Sales

Fundamental Principles for Sales Professionals



By Patrick Helmers

Based on the teachings of Lao Tze

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LLC 13725 E. Main Street, Plano IL 60545

First Big Rock Creek edition published June 2013



To Denise



Forward

Over twenty years ago I read an article that contained two quotes: “A leader is best when people barely know he exists” and “When all is done the people say, We Did It”. As a new manager these quotes created possibility for the kind of boss I hoped some day to be. I later learned these ideas are attributed to a man named Lao Tze, a Chinese teacher who 2500 years ago authored the “Tao Te Ching” or in English “The Way”. These ancient writings are incredibly insightful and just as relevant to the human journey now as it was back then.

As a salesman and sales manager, I was intrigued on how to apply these ideas in the context of the sales process. Using the Tao Te Ching as a model, I’ve crafted these ideas into a set of universal principals for sales professionals. They are shared to anyone involved in the process of selling and desires to learn by unlearning.

It is my hope the reader finds value in these words and they enable wellness and success in the profession of sales.

Pat Helmers – Plano, Illinois



Listening

The Master Seller listens before talking

Sells without effort

Sharing without preaching

Explaining without judging

Demonstrating without closing.

Never assuming the sale,

the Master never loses one.



Understanding Troubles

Both bartender and psychologist

The Master Seller listens.

With warmth and compassion they ask

What troubles you at night?

How are you frustrated?

Why are you down and out?

With a clear listening the Master responds

I might be able to help you,

I might not,

But maybe, just maybe, I can make your troubles go away.



Proper Preparation

Fill your presentation to the brim and it will spill.

Keep sharpening your pitch and it will blunt

Chase after money and the deal will spoil

Care about people's approval and you will be their prisoner.

Do your work, then step back and it will all work out.



Being a Cousin

Be a stranger to no one, a cousin to all,
Like family you see rarely at the wedding or funeral.

Respectful yet genuine
catching up on their lives.
Gregarious while authentic
Accept them for who they are.

The Master Seller is easy to know
Trusted at the start.



Selling While not Selling

When the Master sells, prospects are hardly aware of it,
To them it's just a conversation about their lives.

Next best is a seller who is loved.

Next, one who is feared as sleazy.

The worst is one who is considered a huckster.

If you don't trust the customer, you make them untrustworthy.

The Master Seller doesn't talk, he acts.

When the sale is closed the people say, "We chose wisely"



Owning Up to Mistakes

A Master Seller knows their not perfect.

When they make a mistake, they realize it.

Having realized it, they own up to it.

Having owned up to it, they correct it.

They consider clients who point out their faults as their teachers.

They think of their competition,

Being as perfect and flawed as themselves.



Discovering Leads

The great Marketplace flows everywhere.

All business is born from it.

Though it doesn't consciously create new markets

It pours itself into its work.

It makes no claim this business is good or bad

Yet it nourishes emerging markets

And doesn't hold onto them.

Some grow and some vanish,

Yet All are contained within it.

The Master Seller is aware of its greatness.

Never "lead poor" they find leads like shells on a shore.

Daily they walk the beach to uncover new business

And Delight in new opportunities.



Advancing the Sale

Questions leads to sharing

Sharing leads to appointment

Appointment leads to possibility

Possibility leads to belief

Belief leads to a quote

Quote leads to purchase.

The largest of sales begin with a response to the smallest of acts.

This is called advancing the sale.





Controlling the Sale

Crooked with words

the sale goes sideways.

Rushing the close

the deal comes to a halt.

Showing off and preening

Shows little.

Clinging to a few leads

Chases business away.

Hard rules on handling, manipulating, and fooling the buyer
never acknowledges what truly rules.

By not controlling the sale, the sale is controlled.

Each deal has its own course

Just do your job , then let go.



Elephant in the Room

At the first scent of objection

The fool avoids it

Deluding themselves the deal is won.

Like rotten wood covered with new paint

The sale soon crumbles when bearing weight.

Better to shine a bright light on issues

Addressing them as best able

Accepting the truth for what it is.

A destination can be reached by more than one path.

Seek the truth and let the sale be.



Benefits

Know the features

Yet focus on benefits.

What the buyer values, exceeds detailed minutia.

Listen for goals, needs and problems

Repressing lofty orations on specifications.

Speak to the why and the sale will advance.



Emerging Markets

As the seasons change

So does the market

Both creating and destroying opportunities

Revealing new problems and challenges.

Like water seeking it's own level

The market seeks balance.

Today's solutions are tomorrows problems

The master seller is awake to possibility.



Forcing Decisions

Whoever relies on Master Selling

doesn't try to force decisions

or beat down buyers with logic and facts.

For every force there is a counterforce.

Even if well intentioned always rebounds upon oneself

Placing the sale in peril.

The Master Seller does their job and then stops.

They understand the sale is never completely in their control,

To dominate events goes against the will of the buyer.

Because they believe in themselves

They don't try to strong arm buyers.

Content with themselves they don't need others' approval.

Because they accept themselves,

the whole world accepts them.



Dwelling in Reality

Concerned solely on the fundamentals of sales

The master seller doesn't get caught up in the pomp and theatre.

Focusing on the essence they avoid the fluff

Dwelling in reality they can do no other.

Letting all illusions go

They see the situation as it is

navigating rocks and reefs as necessary.

To some it appears they do nothing

Yet they accomplish much

While others busy themselves with activity

They have even more left to be done.



Buying Signs

If you want to demonstrate a solution
you must first allow the buyer to question it

If you want to generate curiosity
you must first allow them hold it

If you want them to understand
You must first let them describe how it will meet their needs.

Look for subtle behaviors of ownership.

To close a deal you need only ask,
will this work?



Trying On A Coat

To purchase a new coat, the buyer must first try it on.

Reflecting on the style and color

They view it from all angles

Looking to see if it will fit their needs.

The Master Seller knows

Some coats fit, some do not.

They have no desires of their own

They dwell in reality.

If they can help, they will.

If not, they leave it alone.



Craft of Sales

Like a watchmaker building precision timepieces
The Master Seller hones their craft to exact perfection.

When hunting, embrace cold calling
When meeting, listen deep for understanding
When negotiating, be patient and kind.

In speech be honest
In judging be fair
In business be competent
In action, watch the timing.

The Craft of sales is for few
Rejected by many.



Dive Into the Deep

Give up memorizing closing techniques and sales scripts

And your skills will multiply a hundred fold.

Give up professional handshakes and business etiquette

And you will rediscover connecting with buyers.

Give up number crunching and counting commission pennies

And your fears and concerns will disappear.

These tactics are outward forms only

Common and conventional in practice

They are not sufficient in and of themselves.

Instead seek simplicity in selling

Realize who you really are as a person

To cast off self, temper Your desires.

The master seller wades from the shallows

And dives into the deep.



Imperfection

Give up memorizing closing techniques and sales scripts

Accept lost sales willingly

Accept failure as the human condition

Accept your own fallibility

Nor be overly concerned with wins and losses

Imperfection comes with being a human being.

Perfection is an ideal never obtained, yet always in mind.

Surrender Yourself to your own limits

Then you can be trusted with the tools for making sales.

Once you appreciate your strengths and weaknesses

you begin the journey to becoming the Master Seller.



Three Greatest Skills

Patience, Simplicity, Collaboration.

These three are the Master Sellers greatest skills.

Patient in understanding needs and desires

Frame your solution with context,

Simple when delivering your pitch

Return to the language of the buyer,

Collaborative in finding solutions

The sales closes itself.



Goals

No progress occurs without goals
Guideposts on the path of discovery.
Each sale a series of steps
A trek to the final purchase.

As weather and obstacles appear
The path is re-charted
Like stars to ancient navigators,
Providing guidance.

The destination has immense value
Yet it pales when compared to goals.

It's the journey that matters
The rest fleeting.



Three Greatest Skills

If you wish to quicken a sale
you must give it time to breath
If you want to dispel objections
you must allow them to flourish
If you want to take new business
you must give it space and patience.

This is the path to success.



About The Author

Pat Helmers is the Vice President of Sales at Common Goal Systems, a software company that provides database services for the elementary and secondary education market. Prior that he was a technical manager and engineer for Bell Laboratories who specialized in deploying new technologies within the telecommunication industry. Further more he holds two patents in wireless communication, has a masters degree in Computer Science from the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago and a Bachelors at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Mr. Helmers is avid golfer, bicyclist, jogger, cook, home-brewer, father and husband.

Mr. Helmers can found blogging his thoughts regarding sales and marketing at the Tao Te Ching of Sales (taotechingofsales.com). For his random musings refer to pathelmers.wordpress.com or [@pathelmers](https://twitter.com/pathelmers) on Twitter.

