



BOOK OF THE MONTH SUMMARY

FOR MEMBERS

**OVERVIEW****Selling Is Hard. Buying Is Harder****How Buyer Enablement Drives Digital Sales and Shortens the Sales Cycle**

by Garin Hess

**Recommendation**

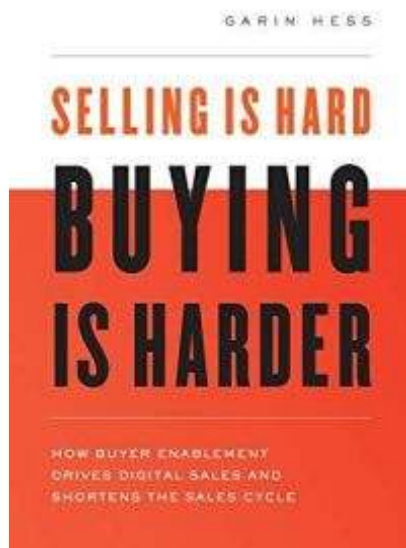
Today's B2B buyers don't want to waste time on an extended, archaic sales cycle. Serial entrepreneur and "buyer enablement" pro, Garin Hess tells B2B salespeople how to help their customers buy more efficiently. He interviewed more than 40 B2B sales leaders and compiled information from many sources, including CEO Insights. Hess tells B2B salespeople to give their clients information promptly and to simplify critical purchasing activities to promote buyer enablement. He details what buyers want, how to accelerate sales procedures, how to create a process buyers like and how to help them go through it – all to benefit your bottom line.

**About the Author**

Founder and CEO of Consensus – which produces demo-automation software – Garin Hess created two software companies, two industry conferences and a nonprofit organization.

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# Selling Is Hard. Buying Is Harder

## How Buyer Enablement Drives Digital Sales and Shortens the Sales Cycle

Garin Hess  
River Grove Books, 2020

### Recommendation

Today's B2B buyers don't want to waste time on an extended, archaic sales cycle. Serial entrepreneur and "buyer enablement" pro Garin Hess tells B2B salespeople how to help their customers buy more efficiently. He interviewed more than 40 B2B sales leaders and compiled information from many sources, including CEO Insights. Hess tells B2B salespeople to give their clients information promptly and to simplify critical purchasing activities to promote buyer enablement. He details what buyers want, how to accelerate sales procedures, how to create a process buyers like and how to help them go through it – all to benefit your bottom line.

### Take-Aways

- B2B salespeople need to treat buyers as people, not income sources.
- Personal sales demos take too much time; use automated demos.
- Support buyers by providing the information they need before they request it.
- Salespeople should adopt a "buyer enablement mentality."

- To support buyer enablement, your salespeople should coach your advocates inside your client's company.
- Map out what your sales leaders must do to conclude purchases successfully.
- To ensure a positive buyer experience, maintain your buyer enablement activities after deals close.
- In B2B sales, buyers now control the selling process. Instead, salespeople must assume control of the buying process.

## Summary

### **B2B salespeople need to treat buyers as people, not income sources.**

Robert Harris founded Chem-Dry, a global leader in carpet-cleaning franchises. A wise business leader, Harris views prospects not only as potential customers, but as people he can connect with on a personal level. Before Chem-Dry became an international success, Harris and his team pitched a Japanese distributor in hopes of closing a multi-million dollar contract. Chem-Dry was excited about the deal, but the Japanese distributor was not entirely convinced. The distributor saw Chem-Dry as a little company with an unproven track record.

*Too often we think of buyers as being limited to their role as prospects, leads, champions or future customers instead of thinking about them as people.*

When the Japanese distributor sent representatives to California to meet with Harris and his colleagues, Harris lent a personal touch to the proceedings by taking them to his mountain getaway. He wanted the representatives to make a verbal commitment; the Japanese were reluctant. Their posture was to dodge, demur and delay. Harris was a stunt pilot. Understanding that he needed to break the ice with the Japanese, he invited his visitors to join him for a flight in his private plane. Once in the air, Harris put the plane through a full loop and other scary tricks, including a stall. Thrilled but nervous, the Japanese delegates agreed to make a deal.

Harris related to his prospects as human beings. He wanted them to laugh and to connect with him on a human level. His approach was “buyer-centric,” not “product-centric.” He focused on buyer enablement, that is, ways to make it easier and quicker for buyers to decide on a purchase, and he made a meaningful connection. Sales followed. To enable buyers to buy from you, treat them with respect, as individuals, and focus on their needs, not yours. Everything worthwhile, including the successful strategy of enabling your buyers, starts with that mindset.

### **Personal sales demos take too much time; use automated demos.**

In 2009, Garmin Hess was heading his first software startup. His company faced a positive problem: too many leads. This meant a demand for more demos than the firm's salespeople could handle, so Hess performed demos himself. On one busy day, he conducted six back-to-back demos. Tired after this concentrated bout of presentations, Hess realized he had to find a better way. To close a sale, his salespeople usually performed four or five demos – one for the initial contact at a prospect's firm, and then three to four demos for other stakeholders involved in the purchasing decision.

Of course, Hess's firm often ended up doing demos for sales that stalled out or didn't close. The firm excelled at developing viable leads, but it was having trouble scaling the steps of the sales process, including crucial demos. Once Hess identified doing live demonstrations as a bottleneck, he began developing automated demos.

*In buyer enablement, you are shifting your mind-set from selling to enabling the buyer(s). Instead of the focus being on you, the focus is on them.*

Hess analyzed two relevant issues when considering his demo problem. The first was how to scale up the firm's capability to do demos quickly. This issue prompted a follow-up question: which prospects merit demos? Maybe doing demos for the least promising prospects was a waste of time, but you can't tell a prospective firm that it doesn't rate a demo. Hess posted his initial attempt to "automate the repetitive aspects of demoing" on YouTube, but it didn't work because it lacked personalization.

Hess and his colleagues had to determine why live demonstrations are vital to B2B sales and then plan their automated presentations accordingly. They identified three factors:

1. Tailoring – In a live demo, salespeople can customize the information so that it fits prospects' needs and answers their product and service questions.
2. Information gathering – During a live demo, salespeople can probe deeper into prospects' concerns.
3. Identifying stakeholders – At a live demo, salespeople learn about the people who participate in deciding whether a prospect will buy.

After much hard work, Hess and his colleagues at his new firm, Consensus, developed software that enables sales professionals to use automated demos that prospects can watch and share with their colleagues. This sophisticated automated-demo technology was an impressive contribution to the overall digital sales transformation now underway.

The new automated demonstrations were an instant success. When Consensus reps showed a prospect firm its well-designed and well-engineered interactive video demos, the prospective client's employees passed the demo around. In one case, 12 people saw a demo film within two hours.

The prospect signed a Consensus software contract in about three weeks. Ordinarily, the process would have taken months. A customer who used the automated-demo software reported that it allowed his firm to cut its sales-cycle time by more than half and to enhance its close rates by more than 40%.

### **Support buyers by providing the information they need before they request it.**

Interactive video demos, while a notable technological breakthrough, can be only one component of a comprehensive buyer enablement strategy. Hess worked with his colleagues to give buyers information at each stage of the sales cycle. This information included likable content that could circulate inside prospects' firms. Salespeople can track those who view their information and, thus, identify those individuals who are part of making the purchasing decision.

Hess's goal is to shorten the sales cycle because roadblocks can arise when too much time elapses. For example, an important decision-maker could leave the prospect firm before the sale closes, and that could lead to the need for a new round of demos.

*A large part of the buying process is educating stakeholders. You need to teach your champion, and your champion needs to teach the other stakeholders.*

Problems arise in firms that divert the decision-makers and delay their purchases. Such delays often involve buyers' IT departments. Many times, IT departments would send Hess and his colleagues a list of hundreds of questions which took considerable time to answer. To avoid this problem, Hess and his team began to supply prospects with "Questions, Answers and Policy Documents" in advance to satisfy most IT departments' concerns proactively before they could even raise any issues. This reduced sales-cycle time by more than 60%. Hess explains, "We could do in days or weeks what normally stretched out over months in traditional selling."

Hess's next step was to use the same proactive approach with demonstrations. Sellers could anticipate what prospects would want to see in demos and supply it before they asked for it. This timesaving B2B sales strategy is the core of a buyer enablement approach.

Giving buyers advance information allows them to make more informed – and faster – buying decisions. Ideally, a B2B salesperson has an "internal champion" inside a prospect firm who advocates for the sale. Advance knowledge also helps your champion or champions support the sale efficiently. In various settings, buyer enablement technology, like demo films, has helped salespeople reduce their sales-cycle times by up to 62% and improve their close rates by more than 40%.

**Salespeople should adopt a "buyer enablement mentality."**

Salespeople with a buyer enablement mentality try to make advocacy easier for their supporter or supporters inside a prospective client firm. However, buyers prefer to learn about new B2B products or services at their own pace, when "they are ready, not when...[salespeople] are ready." Buyer enablement addresses this dynamic.

*Core to buyer enablement is a fundamental shift in how you think about yourself. Are you a seller or a buying coach?*

Quality buyer enablement can involve several demanding stages. The research and advisory firm Gartner identifies six steps B2B sellers must complete to help their buyers conclude a complicated purchase: 1) identify the problem; 2) explore the ideal solution; 3) establish all product requirements; 4) select the right supplier; 5) validate the buying decision; and 6) create consensus by getting everyone on board to make the purchase.

**To support buyer enablement, your salespeople should coach your advocates inside your client's company.**

Knowledgeable buyers insist that salespeople offer prospects the easiest buying process possible. Buyer enablement involves having salespeople expertly coach their champion or champions within the prospective client firm.

*Your role as the buying coach is to recommend, get your champion (and other stakeholders) to commit and then to facilitate their success in any way possible.*

Typical coaching topics include how to conclude the purchase efficiently, how to walk through the usual purchase completion steps and how to handle possible sales completion obstacles. Determine which of the champion's colleagues need to become involved in the purchase and determine their roles. Then, map out the most efficient buying journey for your buyer or internal champion.

**Map out what your sales leaders must do to conclude purchases successfully.**

Salespeople must guide buyers as they weave their way “through the jungle of making a complex purchase.”

*As Gartner puts it, think of your audience as the center of a universe that you need to navigate. If you talk too much about yourself and your products, prospects will disengage almost immediately since that information is not relevant to them.*

Typical buyers will not have purchased a particular product or service from a specific B2B salesperson's firm before, so they won't know the steps, procedures, and pitfalls the sale may involve. However, an experienced B2B salesperson has made this trip hundreds of times and can explain everything to buyers in advance. Given this expertise, prospects feel better positioned to plan the sale for themselves.

Mapping things out for buyers helps them feel in control, even if their B2B salespeople provide instruction and direction. When salespeople use a buyer enablement approach, often, they are actually managing the buying process.

**To ensure a positive buyer experience, maintain your buyer enablement activities after deals close.**

Your internal champion or champions may require your assistance after a purchase. Because they have been your advocate, their standing within their company may depend, at least to some degree, on how well your offering performs.

Don't abandon your champions once the purchase is complete. Give them an implementable, step-by-step guide showing how their firm can achieve value quickly from its purchase. Offer your champions worthwhile advice based on your previous experiences with successful customers.

As you plan how to support your champions post-purchase, realize that they may have to pass their advocate duties to a subordinate once the deal closes. In that case, identify your new point person and provide support. Many current buyers, notably SaaS firms and professional services

firms, use a subscription pricing model. This requires B2B salespeople to provide additional buyer enablement every time the subscription is due to renew.

**In B2B sales, buyers now control the selling process. Instead, salespeople must assume control of the buying process.**

B2B salespeople don't control the selling process; buyers do. Without the buyer's say-so, a sale can't get made. As a B2B salesperson, you must take charge of the buying process by always enabling your buyers in every way.

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