


Intentional Selling™ for Professional Services

3 Common Mistakes Smart People Make

by Tanja Parsley, Partners in Performance

 For many professionals, the question of how to sell themselves and their services to the business community is consistently cited as their single biggest challenge. Those talented few who love to sell and do it well are fortunate, indeed.

And yet, no matter how talented and skilful we are as professionals, if we do not step up to the selling challenge with clear intentions, we run the risk of facing the ongoing dilemma of “not enough” – not enough business, not enough clients, not enough money, and certainly not enough fun developing business.

What follows is an overview of **Intentional Selling™**, a client-focused selling approach for consultants that is congruent with a high level of professional image. It approaches the sales interaction from a problem-solving and client-based perspective every step of the way.

This approach, which is applicable to people in many different professions and industries, can literally transform the dreaded job of business development to one that is fun, rich in learning, and extraordinarily rewarding, not only for professionals but, more importantly, for prospective clients as well.

To begin, let's look at three critical "logjams" that are potential barriers to success in developing business that sabotage your efforts:

- Logjam #1:** Confusing marketing with selling
- Logjam #2:** Limiting assumptions and beliefs about selling
- Logjam #3:** Lack of a clear process for selling

This article looks at each of these "logjams" and offers new insights and resourceful ways of thinking that will undoubtedly lead to greater sales success. It also includes some written exercises to help you discover your own potential barriers to selling.

Logjam #1: Confusing Marketing with Selling

In my work with Partners in Performance and as an **Intentional Selling™** coach, I have met many professionals who are not crystal clear on the distinction between marketing and selling. They see marketing as a way to avoid the dreaded job of selling their services. This resistance to selling is illustrated below.

One of the former "Big 5" professional services firms responded to fierce competition by rolling out a sales coaching program for their associates and partners in North America. As one of the coaches involved, I quickly learned that the biggest obstacle the professionals had with their business development efforts were the *limiting assumptions and beliefs* that they associated with selling. Many wouldn't even use the "s" word. They instead referred to business development as "*marketing*," under the misguided assumption that marketing alone would take care of selling.

But there is indeed a difference between marketing and selling. Marketing is like the grease that lubricates the hinges on a door. Just as the lubricant makes it easier to open the door, marketing makes it easier to sell.

Selling, on the other hand, involves opening the door, opening the relationship, and proactively winning new clients or creating more business with existing clients. It is critical to be clear on the distinction and to integrate both marketing and selling in your business development process.

Marketing strategy begins with:

- Determining the segment of the market that will be your focus
- Analyzing the needs of that market segment
- Identifying the specific clients you will target

The Raspberry Jam Rule

David Maister, long considered an expert in marketing and managing professional firms, refers to the "Raspberry Jam Rule" - the *wider you spread it, the thinner it gets*. Rather than paying attention to a lot of prospects, it is always better to give a lot of attention to a smaller, well-selected audience.

With strategic focus, you can begin planning the details of your marketing mix. The mix includes everything you can do to influence the demand for your services, to demonstrate your capability, and to attract clients. In marketing, the tactical mix can be grouped into four categories – the 4 P's:

- 1) **Product** – how you define and position your products and services

- 2) **Packaging** – how you package your products and services (materials, brochures, website, etc.)
- 3) **Price** – how you set the price, service agreements, discounts, terms, guarantees, billing practices
- 4) **Promotion** – how you promote your services (direct mail, newsletters, seminar events, articles, webinars)

A well-executed marketing plan will generate high quality leads. But without the process of selling, too many of those leads will remain just that – leads.

Selling Defined

The definition of selling in Webster's New World Dictionary is "to cause to take." Having a clear process that helps your clients to take (buy) your service is what selling is all about. It is an enormously untapped opportunity for many professional people.

Before we examine the process of selling, it is most important to pay attention to our thoughts, assumptions and beliefs about selling. Unfortunately, many professionals equate selling with the in-your-face aggressive selling approach.

Sadly, we have all experienced the negative impact that the hard sales approach creates. But the hard sell is dead. Selling has evolved significantly in the business world. It is now a profession, with people who are committed to using the art and skill of true professionals.

Logjam #2: Limiting Assumptions and Beliefs about Selling

As professionals, one of the ways we help our clients create breakthroughs is to look for opportunities to raise their awareness of the assumptions and beliefs that may be limiting their potential.

In my coaching work, this is one of the first things we need to address.

Intentional Selling™ begins with examining those limiting assumptions and beliefs, and then explores their impact on behaviour.

If we are unaware of our limiting assumptions and their implications, we will likely continue to sabotage our success in developing business.

Through my **Intentional Selling™** coaching process, clients self-identify their limiting assumptions and then, for each assumption, we explore the impact on behaviour. Some examples are illustrated below.

Limiting Assumption	Impact on Behaviour
Selling is not appropriate for a professional person	Don't book appointments to create opportunities Don't <i>ask</i> for new business in meetings
Process takes a long time	Feel too defeated, so don't do anything
I don't want to impose on people	Don't develop proactive strategies
I will get rejected	Don't do the required activity Behaviour is tentative and not confident Don't speak with passion and enthusiasm

Client Example: Jim's Story

Jim Bentley (name changed) is a well respected, seasoned sales professional with solid expertise in the financial services industry. He has long standing clients, with whom he enjoys excellent relationships. He is one of the top sales producers for his company.

Jim participated in the **Intentional Selling™** program as part of a companywide initiative. When he explored his assumptions, he became aware of the following beliefs:

- Since he was already successful, he was open to a refresh but assumed he would not learn anything new.
- He believed he already knew his clients and their needs, so honing his questioning skills would yield little added value.
- He believed his relationships with his clients, along with periodic product updates, golf treats, and lunches were enough to create sales.

With his record of success and strong relationships with his clients, it was difficult for Jim to see a need to change anything in his selling processes. Nevertheless, he listened and participated in the program without any clear plan to do anything differently.

Reframing Thoughts

Awareness precedes choice. When we are aware of assumptions that might limit us, we have the ability to shift our thinking to a more resourceful place by reframing our thinking.

Here are some examples of reframing that some of my coaching clients have created:

Limiting Assumption	Reframes – Resourceful ‘self-talk’
Selling is not appropriate for professionals	“ Intentional Selling™ is consistent with consulting philosophy; learning the skills is an important step in my business success.”
The sales process takes a long time	“Managing the process will reap rewards in the end.” “What would I need to learn or do differently to shorten the time?” “What if it <i>doesn’t</i> take a long time?”
I don’t want to impose on people	“The approach I use is one of exploring needs and the potential fit. People will get value from my questions and will be grateful even if we mutually decide that the fit is not right.”
I will get rejected	“When I explore the needs of my prospective clients, we will determine if there is a fit. It is possible there will not be a fit and that is OK. It doesn’t mean they are rejecting me personally.”

Intentional Selling™ in Action: Jim's Story

Jim had the opportunity to meet a long standing client for lunch the day after he completed the **Intentional Selling™** workshop. Afterwards, he called me (and his VP) to report on what happened:

After friendly rapport building and catching up, he shifted the focus of the lunch meeting. He used the *Engage structure* to open the meeting, and set the stage for strategic questioning ("*Discovery Dialogue*"). Strategic questioning was something he had not done for a long while because he assumed he already knew her and her needs.

He reported that he was "astonished" with what followed and what he learned. As he was asking questions and gathering information, he resisted the temptation to jump in with solutions. He forced himself to dig deeper and ask the "*question underneath the question.*"

He kept in mind this phrase from his selling workshop: "*The quality of the question determines the quality of the answer.*"

Jim learned all kinds of things about his client and her business which both amazed and surprised him. His client gained new awareness and insights about her business and she told Jim he created a lot of value for her just with the questions he asked her.

After the meeting, she called Jim and thanked him again for a very productive meeting and told him it was the best meeting she had ever had.

As a result of the meeting, Jim came up with some very creative and big solutions that were spot on and she was on board! That meeting took their relationship to an even stronger level.

Jim attributed the successful meeting to his intention to establish focus and clarity about the meeting purpose and to ask strategic "Discovery" questions in a new and structured way.

What Can You Do About This?

You may think you know which assumptions you hold that creep into your thinking when it comes to selling. However, a word of caution: This is not easy to uncover and discover. Unless you devote time and effort to learn your own limiting assumptions, many of your beliefs risk remaining out of your conscious awareness, operating in the background to sabotage your best efforts.

It is difficult to discover this on your own without a structured program and process, without a coach to help you work your way around your own self-limiting and sabotaging barriers.

Exercise:

Write down your assumptions, your beliefs about selling, and the impact these are having on your behaviour. Then for each one, develop reframes that will help you be more resourceful and empowered in your business development activity.

The more time you spend on this, the more you will uncover deep seated thoughts and feelings.

Denis Waitley, American motivational speaker and author of the *Psychology of Winning*, sums it up beautifully:

*“If you believe you can, you probably can.
If you believe you won’t, you most assuredly won’t.”*

Belief is the ignition switch that gets you off the launching pad. Unfortunately, many of our attitudes, assumptions and beliefs are buried deeply within us and held unconsciously. They have a direct impact on our levels of intention and hence our results.

It is therefore of utmost importance to become aware of how we are thinking and to consciously align our thoughts with what we want to have happen. Otherwise we can easily sabotage our efforts without realizing it or knowing why.

However, aligning our thoughts alone is not enough. Systems, structures and processes that support our selling intentions are required for sustainable success.

Logjam #3: No Clear Process for Selling

Professionals clearly understand the need for structure and process for the delivery of their services and yet many do not have a clear process for selling their services.

Intentional Selling™ incorporates a 6-step process that easily aligns your selling process with your identity as a consultant. It allows professionals to be who they are and to demonstrate their expertise during the selling process.

The 6-step process is a framework that guides you through the face-to-face meeting (it can also be used for ear-to-ear phone meetings). The important thing to know is that there is a clear and structured process that works to produce consistent results. And, when you learn to use the process, you will be seen as a true professional, demonstrating genuine care for your prospective client – and your results will skyrocket.

Intentional Selling™ is totally consistent with the models, skills and principles used by professionals in delivering their services. But it is also different. And it is critical to know the distinction. For example, both processes focus on the needs of the client, use sophisticated questioning skills to uncover their needs and require the skills of influence to move them to action.

But there is a distinct structure, mindset and selling skill we need to become aware of. Learning how to execute sales process skills seamlessly and with excellence is one of the best investments professionals can make in themselves in order to secure and increase their earning capacity.

Furthermore, these selling skills transfer over to your consulting work, and will improve your ability to influence and provide value with clients in meeting their business needs.

An overview of the sales process is introduced below.

Overview of the Intentional Selling™ 6-Step Process

Before Client Meeting	Step 1: Prepare	Planning the call
During Meeting (may be over the course of several meetings)	Step 2: Engage	Setting the context for a successful meeting
	Step 3: Discover	Questioning to uncover and build needs
	Step 4: Position	Positioning solutions that are tailored to needs
	Step 5: Close	Obtaining commitment to concrete action
After Meeting	Step 6: Follow Through	Maintaining momentum of the sales process and your long-term relationship

All of the above steps have a critical purpose and for each there is a clear methodology. Each step is an opportunity to demonstrate your capability and professionalism; each step is an opportunity to differentiate yourself from other professionals.

The Missing Link

What many professionals don't realize is that without a clear selling process, they are missing an important opportunity to not only distinguish themselves from competitors, but to provide evidence of their promised value to clients.

When you don't have a clear intentional selling process as outlined above, you aren't demonstrating your true worth to the business needs of clients... and therefore, prospects risk not being able to appreciate the quality of services you are offering.

You aren't demonstrating a clear, structured and professional approach.

And that is truly a pity. When you have exceptional talents to help others, it's disappointing to not be able to deliver what prospects and clients need. **Intentional Selling™** helps your clients see clearly what their needs are and the possible solutions within their reach.

Within each step there are specific elements and distinctions which demonstrate your competence and integrity, which reassures prospects and clients they can trust you.

When Intentional Selling™ is applied, the experience for both the selling professional and the buying client ascend to astounding new heights.

In summary, **Intentional Selling™** is professional selling at its best – selling with integrity, adding value every step of the way, creating win-win outcomes and, most importantly, focusing on the clients' needs.

Intentional Selling™ is a proven, structured way of selling your services that is about being a trusted advisor, not only when you are consulting, but also when you are marketing and selling your services.

When you are attuned with who you are as a professional, when you learn the skills of **Intentional Selling™** and when you focus your attention on the client, the days of 'not enough' become a thing of the past. When you develop your business with clear intention, you will experience not only more abundance of business but also more joy in the process of creating it.

If you believe you and the people in your organization can benefit from an improvement in their selling processes, feel free to call Tanja Parsley at **905-877-5808**, and visit Partners in Performance at www.partnersinperformance.ca.

About the author...

Tanja Parsley is President of Partners in Performance, a dedicated group of speakers, coaches and trainers who help their clients create breakthrough results by creating clarity of focus, unleashing the power of intention, and executing with excellence.

To inquire about **Intentional Selling™** call **905-877-5808**. Visit Partners in Performance at www.partnersinperformance.ca.

