

IV.

THE MODERN SELLER IS **SOCIAL**



CHAPTER 10

The 3 R's and Turning Points

There are three things that we take with us no matter where we go in life: our results, our reputation, and our relationships. They're completely transferrable from one situation or experience to the next, and they build on one another. Out of these three, relationships are the foundation. Every relationship experience helps us learn and gives us a new perspective. This, in turn, helps us better connect in the next relationship.

I can trace nearly anything significant that has happened in my life to the power of strategic relationships—their connectivity, and their give and take. There have been two turning points in my sales career that drive home the value of strategic relationships and the social skillset.

The opportunity to build my career at IBM started with a strategic relationship that began with my very first inside sales role

and continues to this day. The backstory is that I'd taken a career detour from that inside sales role, jumping into a very different opportunity I thought I would love. An IT consulting firm came calling and I became a consultant, working onsite at clients designing and developing custom database applications. I quickly realized that the role didn't fit me. At. All. The work wasn't inspiring, and I was living in a cubicle all day without much client contact.

After about six months, I knew my heart wasn't in it and I needed to course correct. In looking back, I know I would've eventually been fired from that job had this strategic relationship not intervened.

A connection I made while in that first inside sales role worked for IBM. There was an opening he thought I might be interested in, and he let me know about it. This checked many of my boxes: it was an opportunity to get back into sales in a client-facing role, and a chance to grow my career at one of the best companies in the world.

This connection became a strategic relationship because not only did he get my resume to right people, he introduced me to the hiring manager (his boss) and coached me on interviewing. He gave me advice on how to successfully land the role. This went way beyond what I was expecting, and in the end, I got the job. It was one of those experiences I can look back on and say changed my life.

The other turning point was when I left the relative safety of that sales role, stepping out to become an entrepreneur.

This was a big pivot, moving into a different industry—the training space. As an employee turned entrepreneur, there was a light-bulb moment where I realized I had a big problem: I had one project to start this fledging company. Apart from that, as well as a couple of connections in this new industry, I knew almost no one else. More importantly, no one knew me.

I remember the panic setting in. Maybe I'd made a huge mistake,

and the best thing to do would be to turn back and return to what I knew. Until that point, my relationship ecosystems had been primarily within my sales territory and the four walls of the company where I worked. Now there was no longer a neat little box to fit into, with defined relationships and a defined sales identity. The challenge ahead would be building entirely new relationships and, as I would learn, building them much broader, deeper, and higher than I've ever done. I was also going to learn how to translate those initial relationships into closing sales and leading a successful business.

I'm happy to say I didn't give in to the panic or turn back. Instead, I decided I would rather try to build a business, even one that failed, then to look back in 10 years and say "shoulda, woulda, coulda." I decided to become a student of building relationships. Now, they have become the fuel for my selling success, and the fuel for reaching back and helping others succeed. Along the way, there are numerous strategies I've learned, created, failed at until I got it right, and still practice—all of which help me build relationships and sell in the modern world.

Why It Matters

So why does the social dimension matter in modern selling? It comes down to four basic principles:

1. Buying decisions are increasingly being made by committee and consensus. I wouldn't go so far as to say the single decision-maker scenario is dead because I've still experienced it, even in complex sales. It's just becoming less common. A growing reality is that more decisions require consensus building, whether overtly or behind the scenes. In RFP (request-for-proposal) situations, decisions are made by committees which represent multiple business units and stakeholders across the client.

In research conducted by CEB, the average number of decision makers in any given deal is 6.8, and the variety of those decision-making roles is becoming more complex across job function and geography. This means for you that there's a good chance of a buying role (and potential decision maker) where the relationship is weak. Sellers now must go wider and deeper in their relationship-building efforts, expanding beyond the usual departments in which they do business and stretching further into the organization.

2. You can make fewer cold calls. Someone recently asked me if selling has become tougher or easier in the last 10 years. In many ways, it's tougher (consensus decision making, as an example, or any of the other challenges I mentioned in earlier sections), but there's one key way it has become easier: Today's social platforms provide more access than ever before to reach people. We're just a connection or two away from decision makers or other influencers.

But, that means a lot of other people are as well. The noise has amplified. And, because we're all so connected through technology, those of us that build and maintain strong networks have the advantage. With strong networks, we can rise above the noise. Our ability to connect broadly and deeply can mean fewer cold calls. With fewer cold connections, you can gain access more quickly and with more support, because the beginning of a relationship has already been established through your network.

3. Selling is still about connecting to other human beings in a way that's genuine and adds value. In an age of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and predictive analytics, you still need to know how to connect with others at an emotional level.

In complex sales, technology isn't going to win or expand the business—you are, as a modern seller. To move up the value chain with your clients, relationship building isn't something you can delegate. Yes, you can leverage AI and machine learning technologies to accelerate pattern-finding and decision-making. But it's your relationship-building efforts that will produce the best results.

4. It expands your network ecosystems, which increases your reach and influence. I was first introduced to the concept of “ecosystems” by entrepreneur and author Judy Robinett in her book *How to Be a Power Connector*. My earlier story about stepping into entrepreneurship underscores Robinett's points, as my reach and influence were limited to my immediate world. At the time, my network ecosystem was small. By becoming an entrepreneur, I faced having to expand—not just the number of relationships, but also the level at which I was operating. I had to exercise my “growth mindset,” to borrow a phrase from researcher Carol Dweck. I needed to build relationships with those who also valued their networks, could open doors for me, and I could do the same for them. This would allow me to amplify my own reach and influence. You're likely facing this too, especially if you're starting up a territory or market segment, moving into a new role, or you're realizing that to reach your quota objectives you must expand your reach and influence.

What It Looks Like

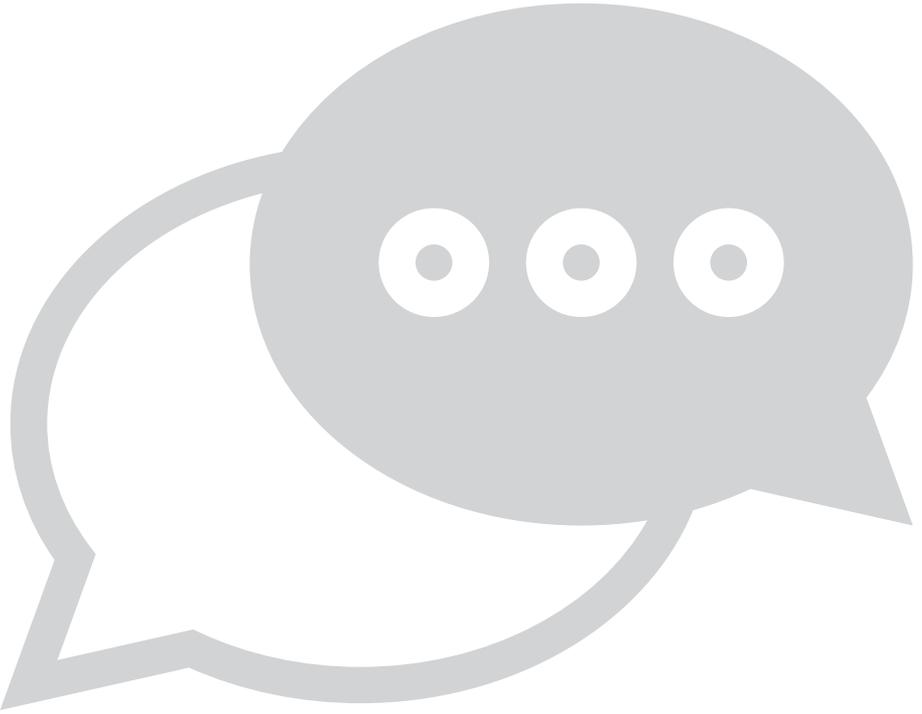
Here are a few examples of what social looks like in modern selling:

- **Board service for a non-profit or industry organization.** This

experience can connect us to peers, industry leaders, strategic partnerships, and potential decision makers. I recently served on a board with an executive who worked for one of my key clients, but in a different business unit. I was doing business within one area of the company, and she offered to introduce me to a potential decision maker within another business unit. Without our common connection through board service, I likely wouldn't have had that opportunity for a trusted and direct introduction.

- **Fluidly moving a relationship from virtual to voice, from voice to in-person—and creating value each time.** One of my biggest client relationships had its beginnings in LinkedIn. In my case, it was a series of InMail messages via LinkedIn which led to an introductory phone call. How I structured that introductory phone call created the initial trust that eventually led to in-person conversations. The in-person conversations and further trust-building ultimately led to opportunities to bid on a single project. The delivery of that single project built even more trust and led to more projects, and then referrals to other clients in that decision maker's network. Everything connects.
- **The account leader with a target client, but no direct access.** He has decided to take a mixed prospecting approach to get some momentum. This includes finding at least three to five potential decision makers or influencers from the prospect on LinkedIn. Then he'll research his network for any intersection points, identifying where these connections could be warmed up with either more information or an introduction. There's also an upcoming event his company is sponsoring; he's partnering with his marketing team to send out targeted whitepapers and event

invitations. By doing this, he'll know through his sales enablement platform if those have emails achieved successful open rates. The account leader can then follow up with phone calls.



IV.

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CHAPTER 11

The Social Framework: Strategies to Build Social Selling Capital

To develop the social dimension, it helps to have a little background on social capital. Social capital has its roots in sociology, but has made its way into business environments over the past few decades. Social capital is the collective value of our relationships and what is created through those relationships. The wider and deeper we invest in building relationships, the more social capital we create. The more social capital we create, the more valuable the goals we're able to reach.

A byproduct of social capital is momentum. Modern sellers get this. They have momentum because they're constantly focused on creating and leveraging their social capital. This momentum creates more qualified and valuable opportunities, and it puts them on a completely different level. Decision makers and other influencers look at them and interact with them differently because they know

it's a relationship of deeper value.

Another way to think of social capital in everyday terms is like a bank account. Any healthy bank account has deposits and debits. We need them both equally, as one creates value and the other extracts value for something we need. Over time, the value of the account should continue to grow.

What are examples of these deposits or debits? I've heard them best described as the four T's: time, talent, treasure, and ties. They're assets we either have or we can develop to create value for ourselves and others.

Time: Our most precious non-renewable resource. Where, on what, and with whom we decide to invest our time creates the sum total of our success.

Talent: Our unique knowledge, skills, and experience that we can use to create forward progress on an idea, a problem, or an opportunity.

Treasure: Leveraging financial means to invest and accelerate growth in ourselves, in others, and in organizations.

Ties: The depth and breadth of our networks used to create connections among people, resources, and opportunities.

If time, talent, treasure, and ties are our assets, what's the currency on which those assets are traded? They are trust, generosity, and leverage. Combined, they open more doors, create more opportunities, and ultimately generate higher overall lifetime value in any relationships we create.

Trust

Trust is transparency and creates a sense of safety and vulnerability. Trust is finding alignment by openly sharing goals and values. It's sharing successes and struggles. It's knowing that intentions are true and commitments matter.

For example, I have a coach who is a fellow entrepreneur and selling expert who really lives by this concept. By our second conversation, he very openly shared what he most valued personally and professionally. And as someone who has built and sold several multi-million-dollar businesses, it wasn't the accolades he mentioned. Instead, he shared his struggles, shining a light on the stuff which doesn't get written about when you're receiving an award.

Right away that got my barriers down and my trust up. I became way more willing to do the same. It paved the way to a meaningful relationship more quickly, and it accelerated my ability to solve what I had hired him to help me with. Strategic relationship builders are able to build trust quickly, and continue to earn it for the life of the relationship.

Generosity

I first heard this concept from Keith Ferrazzi, author of *Never Eat Alone*. He calls generosity the fuel of our networks. Generosity means that when we've decided to invest in a relationship, we give of our time, talent, treasure, and ties with no strings attached. We give from a place of genuinely wanting to create something better for those we're building strategic relationships with. Without generosity, we risk our relationships becoming focused on keeping score because we have an expectation of getting something in return. This prevents us from investing more deeply into them. But, when we build relationships with others who also live from a place of

generosity, the returns will arrive. This provides the opportunity to earn more business while also creating longer-term value.

Leverage

Simply put, it's the ask. Leverage is a willingness to ask for what's needed to move something forward. It's also offering something to someone in your strategic network—usually one the four Ts. This could be a micro-commitment (typically something of lower value given early in a relationship to continue to building trust) or a macro-commitment (something of larger value, generally in a more established relationship with a longer history of trust).

In the context of modern selling, leverage is also what helps us to close business. We often make closing business much more complicated and awkward than it needs to be. The sales process is a way to provide and ask for the appropriate level of commitments from our prospects. This is a natural and genuine way of using leverage.

Going back to the bank account analogy, an essential element of this is the balance: the balance of the overall account and the give and take of the relationship. If the give and take gets out of balance, that usually means one person is investing more in the relationship than the other. That's why the credits and debits are equally important. For a strategic relationship to be successful, everyone involved needs a sense of giving (deposits) and receiving (debits).

The Social Framework

Everything in my work and in selling comes down to my strategic network—the relationships I build, how I add value to those relationships, and how those relationships when leveraged in the right way, create even more collective value. I'm still a work in

progress, a student. And, as any good student would do, I'm always looking for strategies I could use or steps that I could take to help me get better.

From this, my own framework started to emerge; one to help me with all the components of relationship building. There are four elements to the Social Framework: Mindset, Goals, Network Ecosystem, and Habits. This framework will help you build your own overall network and identify strategic relationships you will need to invest in to reach your goals.



Mindset

Having the mindset of a strategic relationship builder is the foundational element of the framework. Without this, it's challenging to make the other elements of the framework work. You must truly believe—and internalize—that you are a strategic relationship builder and tap into the 4 Ts you currently have. Depending on where you are in your career, you'll have more of some than others. The first

step toward success is recognizing that you have everything within you to build powerful relationships with peers, internal leaders, centers of influence, prospects, C-level decision makers, and industry thought leaders. It all comes down to your decision to choose to see yourself in that way, and treat relationship building as one of the most important things you do every day.

The lightbulb moment for me was understanding that I needed to work on the other elements of the framework *while* building the mindset component. When we're learning new things the mindset typically isn't there yet. The decision to take uncomfortable action comes first and implementing the rest of the framework continues to build the mindset and motivation.

There are five key elements of mindset which separate the most influential relationship builders from everyone else. We covered two of them a little earlier, trust and generosity. Here are the other three:

Leadership Identity: When leading programs on social capital, one of the first exercises I take attendees through is on leadership identity. I ask people to identify an influential leader in their life and write down specifically what that person did to build a relationship with them. Many people cite parents, teachers, coaches, work leaders, or even a peer in the room. These are some of the responses I usually receive:

- That person challenged my thinking
- They showed interest in my perspectives
- They gave effective and kind feedback
- They shared their knowledge and resources
- They created opportunities for me
- They helped me solve my biggest challenges

I'll then ask them to describe the overall relationship by completing the sentence: "It is/was a relationship that inspired ____." Answers to this usually include:

- Trust
- Psychological safety
- Challenge
- Growth
- Continuous learning
- Engagement

Wouldn't we love our prospects and clients to say these things about us? Wouldn't it be great if they identified you as an influential leader who helped them? Leadership, social capital, and selling are intertwined. Effective sellers are leaders who understand the value of social capital and the importance of developing relationships. The quality of our leadership influences the quality of our relationships and sales results. Every challenge our decision makers grapple with requires sellers to show up as leaders.

I'd encourage you to do this exercise for yourself or with your sales teams. The best sellers are leaders who decide how they want to show up in the world. They choose their leadership identity. And they know to achieve meaningful goals they need to build social capital from a leadership perspective.

Intent: The best relationship builders are intentional. They're purposeful in choosing the relationships they build, and in discerning which relationships get more of their valuable time and attention. They're able to be intentional because they take the time upfront to understand the other person's goals and values.

When they know these important pieces of information, they can add the right level of value at the right time and continue to cultivate the relationship.

Hand in hand with intent, great relationship builders approach strategic relationships as team-building exercises. Rather than look at it as “what’s in it for me,” or “what’s in it for you,” the relationships become “what’s in it for us and what can we create together?” Great relationship builders continuously learn how to improve the value they bring to the relationship. This can only happen when there is a trust that together we are creating a result or outcome. This team-building intent works for any relationship or situation: prospects who don’t know you well yet, big complex RFP situations, or existing clients where you’re looking to expand the relationship.

Lifetime Value: When I ask the question, “What holds you back from building strategic relationships?” the answers are usually universal, regardless of the audience (even sales audiences). Things like:

- No time—falls off the priority list when urgent things come up
- Not comfortable
- Feels like I’m taking advantage of others
- Not sure exactly how—I need a process
- I don’t want to be responsible for the outcomes; I don’t want to look bad

The antidote to these triggers is a lifetime value approach to relationships. In modern selling, our approach to relationships and decisions can’t be defined by that first deal or the opportunity that’s right in front of us. It can’t be defined by “what can you do

for me right now.” When we think only about the present moment rather than the long tail of the relationship, we get stuck in a “me only” mentality. This thinking sucks us into the mental barriers that keep us from building important strategic relationships. It also puts us at risk of losing focus on our intent and damaging the trust in that relationship.

To take a lifetime value lens for every relationship, whether it’s with a center of influence, a prospect, an RFP decision committee, or an existing client, ask yourself:

- Am I making the right level of effort?
- Have I added more value than what I’m asking for?
- Will this action continue to positively build the relationship for the long term?

Goal Setting

The second part of the Social Framework is goal setting. In our sales roles, the biggest goal we’re usually working toward is our quota goal. It’s an external goal set for us by our leadership teams. Our work then becomes creating the opportunities and closing the business which gets us to the goal. But within the quota attainment goal, modern sellers know the value of setting social goals.

Social goals are accomplished through strategic relationships. By using that lens, goals around selling become less about us and more about being of service, looking for ways to contribute in every selling or client situation. It’s the realization that any significant goal requires relationships—and significant goals separate modern sellers from average sellers. Through this approach, modern sellers not only achieve this year’s quota, they also create an environment where they have momentum for the long-term.

As you think about your territory, your business or your role, ask yourself what goals are meaningful. I encourage you to complete the visioning exercise outlined in the Entrepreneurial dimension of the book. I also encourage reflection on professional goals, selling goals, and personal goals. When we're building a vision or pursuing a goal that stretches us, it doesn't become just about professional success; it's also personal because we change in the process.

When I lead this type of work with sales organizations, I ask them to start by creating their territory vision. This gets them into the mindset as entrepreneurs and owners of their respective territories. With their vision as their guide, they then decide on the most meaningful goals they need in the next one to three years to accomplish the vision. Usually, those goals become much bigger because they start to see how the goals will make the vision happen.

Below are several goals coming from this work, to spark your thinking as you create your vision and individual goals:

- Develop a new vertical market
- Increase my presence within my industry
- Create a community that brings together clients, prospects, and industry leaders
- Expand into a customer set my competition has dominated
- Seek out new partnerships to expand my reach and create new opportunities
- Build a skill needed for a pivot, and create opportunities in the new area
- Launch a new product or service

The most important ingredient I've found to help me with goal setting is to dig into my motivation, and significance behind it.