

Sell the 'Gap'

By Brian Tracy

The best salespeople are those who can identify the gap that exists between a prospect's current situation and the ideal situation, widen the gap, and then provide solutions to bridge that gap.

From the time you get up in the morning until the time you go to bed at night, you are negotiating, communicating, persuading, and influencing — trying to get people to cooperate with you to accomplish the things that you want them to accomplish. So the pivotal question with regard to selling is not if you are doing it, but if you are good at it.

Unfortunately, over the years, a stigma has grown up around the selling profession. Many people feel that selling is a low-level type of activity, and they don't like to be associated with it — even people who are in sales! Virtually no colleges or universities have a "Department of Selling," even though almost 15 million Americans make their living by selling something to someone. It is the largest single identifiable occupational group in the United States.

Salespeople are the movers and shakers in every business and industry. They are the key people who create the demand for all the products and services that keep everyone employed at every other occupation.

The 'Gap'

The basis for all successful sales efforts is a discipline called gap analy-

sis. Gap analysis is clearly defining what your idea, product, or service can do for a person and then deciding how to demonstrate that in a compelling way.

The very best persuaders, communicators, and salespeople are those who concentrate their attention on identifying the gap that exists between a prospect's current situation and the ideal situation and determine how big it is. They then focus on widening that gap in every possible way, until the prospect begins to feel more and more dissatisfied with his or her current situation and more and more desirous of enjoying the preferable situation that is achievable by the use of the product, service, or idea.

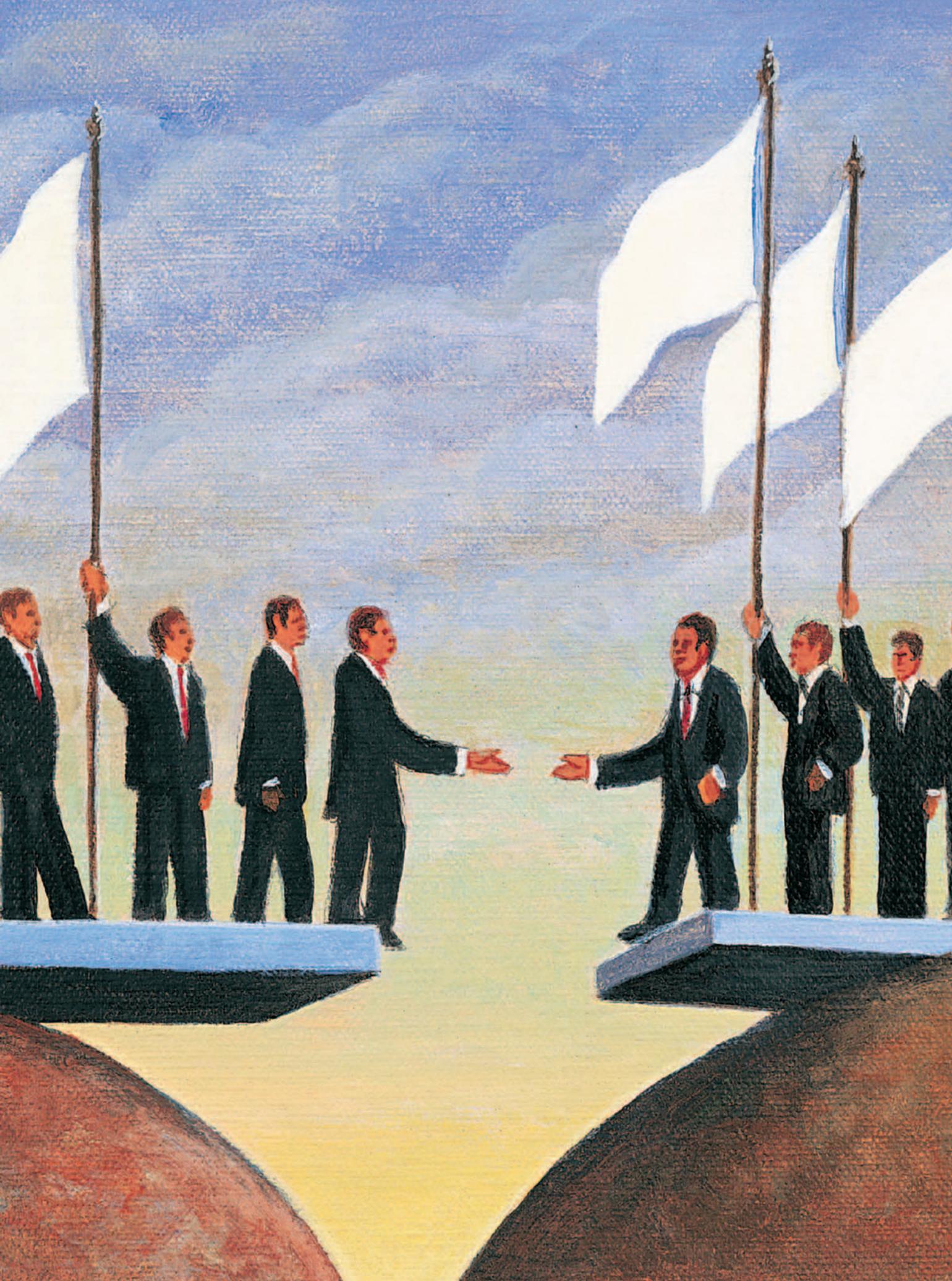
Let me give you an example. I recently took my car into the dealership for a regular checkup and service. I was quite happy with my car — it was a nice car, it was paid off, and it was running fine ... or so I thought. The service manager did an excellent job of analysis and came back to me with the sad fact that the car required not only new tires all around, but also a complete new set of brakes, a wheel alignment, and a lot of other things. The total cost would be about \$3,000.

You can imagine my reaction. I was shocked. I had no idea that the car required that much service. Well, I

thought, what the heck, at least it's cheaper than buying a new car. Then a salesman at the dealership pointed out to me that the car would drop another \$2,000 in value at the turn of the model year, which was coming up in about 60 days. He told me that if I kept the car, and repaired it, I would lose \$5,000 off the total value of the car, which I could never recover.

Suddenly, I went from complacency about my car to dissatisfaction, and then to great dissatisfaction and an intense desire to improve my condition in some way. The salesman then went on to explain that he could take my car as a down payment on a brand-new luxury car, with no cash out of my pocket, and he could spread the payments over three, four, or five years so that the cost to me would be very reasonable. At that, all my resistance vanished. I started out satisfied with my car, then became so dissatisfied with it that I bought a brand-new expensive luxury car — and, surprisingly enough, I drove away happy.

This sales person identified my gap — my car needed a tune-up. He then widened that gap, leaving me discouraged with my present situation. He then offered me a solution to fill that gap and satisfied my discouragement (filled the gap).



Remember that people buy solutions to their problems, not products or services. In fact, as a salesperson, you need to be more of a problem finder than a vendor. The more you focus on the problem, or the gap that exists between the real and the ideal in the customer's situation, the faster you will find a place where your product or service can plug the gap.

Identifying the Gap

The bigger the problem that the customer or prospect has, the bigger the potential sale. One of the most powerful questions you can ask a person is, "How much is that problem costing you?" Help him or her to identify not only the obvious direct costs, but also the not-so-obvious indirect costs.

Ask the prospect, "What are the implications? What is the meaning of that problem to you? What other things does it affect in your work or personal life?"

The most astute salespeople are those who are capable of finding a small gap and then expanding it into a wide gap. They are capable of discovering a small problem or dissatisfaction in the mind of the prospect and then, by questioning and commenting, increase it until the prospect develops an intense desire for the solution they are offering.

If you are selling to companies, you have to use questions to determine what the decision makers in the organization want to accomplish. What is the gap between where they are and where they want to be? How is the decision maker rewarded, and for what? What does the decision maker have to do to earn the respect, esteem, and support of his or her superiors and co-workers?

One of the deepest subconscious needs of all people is the need for self-

esteem, for feeling valuable, important, and worthwhile. If you can ascertain what people need to do to increase their self-esteem and their perceived value in their organization, and then show them that by using your product or service, they can earn the approval and appreciation of the people around them and above them, they will often be very motivated to buy what you are selling.

When you meet prospects for the first time, you will find that they are usually unaware that a gap exists between where they are and where they could be. They will often say things like, "I'm not interested," or "I can't afford it," or "We're quite happy with our current situation." These are normal and natural responses. No one likes to change. Your job is to describe a state of even greater satisfaction that they could enjoy if they did something different. Virtually all advertising is aimed at showing people how much better off they could be with a product or service that they have not yet acquired.

Ask Gap Questions

Gap analysis is based on asking good questions — questions focused on discovering problems that might be troubling the prospect. There is a direct correlation between the use of good questioning techniques and sales success. The more and better questions you ask aimed at finding a problem or uncovering a dissatisfaction, the more interest the prospect will have and the more sales you will make. The person who asks questions has control.

Good salespeople always plan the wording of their questions, rewriting them and practicing them before they get face-to-face with a prospect. Poor salespeople, on the other hand, make

up their questions as they go along.

Here are some great questions for gap analysis.

The first question is an application of the "magic wand technique." Imagine that you have a magic wand that you can wave over the prospect's situation and you ask this question: "Mr. [or Ms.] Prospect, if this situation were absolutely perfect in every respect, what would it look like?" Then remain completely silent. When the prospect begins to describe the perfect situation, you'll uncover the gaps you can fill to create his or her ideal future. When you explain how your product or service can bridge those gaps, you will greatly enhance your chances of making a sale.

A great set of questions begins with the words *what if?* — "What if you could do this? What difference would that make to your current situation?" Or, "What if we could achieve this particular result for you? What effect would that have on your current operations?"

Good questions that grab the prospect's attention will start him or her visualizing and imagining an ideal future state, exactly the state that your product or service is meant to achieve.

Fill the Gap

Now that you have asked questions aimed at uncovering your prospects' current problems, needs, and dissatisfactions, you need to fill the gap with your solution. Listen carefully to the answers they give you, and ask additional questions to help them expand on their situation. Take a few moments to feed their answers back to them, to show that you were really listening and that you really understand their needs. Then position yourself to influence and persuade your prospects by showing them how your product or service just happens to be the ideal way to solve their problems, satisfy their needs, or achieve their goals.

When you take this low-pressure approach to getting people to do what you want them to do, they will buy from you with pleasure, and they will recommend you to their friends. They will feel they are being helped to improve their lives rather than being pressured into buying something that they many not want or need. ■

To learn more about Brian Tracy and his bestselling program *The Psychology of Achievement*, visit www.AdvantEdgeMag.com/013 today.

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WANTED

Seeking people who know they can do more with their life. People who dream big dreams and know they have a greatness within that is yet to be fulfilled. We're not looking for get-rich-quick people. We're looking only for people who already know that success comes through dedication, vision, and hard work. We're looking for people who can see the success they desire — it is a clear picture in their head: sipping mai tais on the beach at sunset — a private jet — the freedom to spend their time doing what they want and when they want it. If you demand this lifestyle and can see yourself achieving it, then give us a call. We have the tools you need to keep you excited, motivated, informed, and directed toward achieving this life you desire ... no, this life you DEMAND. Call now! Call **1-800-560-5957** or visit us online at **www.AdvantEdgeMag.com/Subscribe** today. Only serious success seekers please.