

The Unconventional Salesman

James Ker-Reid

I've always been a maverick and unconventional guy that loves challenging accepted customs and norms. When I was at school I was obsessed with looking at ways to break rules and then finding ways to avoid punishment by understanding and exploiting the gaps in the school system. My behaviour led me to better understand the structures, processes and ways to have maximum impact with minimum effort.

When I first started in Sales just after the crash in 2008/09, I realised that the same inefficiencies seen at school also existed within large corporations too.

There are a lot of similarities – both companies and schools need to produce results on a large scale, protect the hierarchy/management and both breed a culture of success at all costs. It's this fascination with systems and hierarchies that led me to think differently about sales and realise that the conventional career path would not be the best way for me.

Upon starting my sales career, I quickly realised that no one was going to teach me the fundamentals of B2B sales, the value of it, or even how to be successful at sales. This has been my quest and passion for the last 10 years – to find new ways to accelerate B2B sales success so that everyone, whether you are new to sales, you're a sales manager or you're an established Director of Sales, can still compete and succeed in this ever-changing world. The world moves so fast and conventional sales practices often do not keep up with this rate of change.

When I was asked to write this piece, I asked my network what they would want to read about in the field of Sales. The overwhelming response was to talk about daily disciplines and practices that can accelerate your sales success. I'm not going to give you another 124-point hit list as these are cheap and aplenty on the internet - you'll end up trying to integrate 124 sales disciplines into your daily life, which is impossible.

In the paragraphs ahead, I wanted to share with you practices that are not frequently spoken about or listed on various forums and many are not seen as synonymous with a sales career. I'll be sharing with you my routines that have worked for me while working in London and in Europe and my hope is that these will be valuable to you whatever location or city you live in.

In each of the areas I'd love to share more with you but with text being my main limitation, I can signpost you to the initial information knowing that your natural curiosity and interest will be peaked to steepen your own learning and of course you can connect with me directly to find out more.

So, what are the key disciplines and practices that you can do to generate momentum in Sales?

1. Create and maintain vitality and health
2. Schedule weekly planning and progress meetings
3. Become a data scientist
4. Think two or three steps ahead
5. Quantify value in real terms
6. Set your own standards
7. Celebrate success consistently

1. Create and maintain vitality and health

This is often an area that is overlooked by salespeople and very few sales managers or CEOs will advise you about health. This is often because they are afraid to reveal their own weaknesses or because they know that they are not practicing a healthy and balanced routine themselves. You have to think of yourself as a professional athlete – you need to eat, drink, practice, perform and win like a gold medallist. It's this commitment that brings some of the greatest results.

Sales is an extremely demanding job with long hours, periods of high activity, periods of excruciatingly detailed and slow work. You'll sometimes end up going to sleep thinking about your numbers, your next deal, your next client meeting, and your upcoming meeting with your boss or business partner. This will put you under huge mental strain.

I've outlined the 'WEEDS' disciplines below to keep you fresh in your sales career:

W - Water - 1 litre before 8:00am

E - Exercise before 7:00am

E - Early starts - on public transport or the road before 8:00am

D - Drafting Days - writing proposals at home or in isolation

S - Salad for lunch

The first two are about getting your body in the right place for a demanding day ahead. Thirdly avoiding the rush hour or heavy traffic with early starts means that you will build mental fortitude and confidence that you'll already have achieved something before someone has their first cup of coffee.

'Drafting days' are to give you the headspace and shut you off to distraction when you need to do deep and meaningful work. And finally salad for lunch will give you the vitality and energy to still concentrate in those afternoon meetings and tasks without suffering from a "carb crash".

2. Schedule weekly planning and progress meetings

In order to feel juiced and ready to take the week by storm, you need to have a strong focus – you should know what your key projects and activities are, and what you will be working on or doing each week. That way you will be able to get to the end of your week and be able to review your impact, accomplishments and key learning experiences.

What are the essential practices for weekly planning and progress meetings?

- Do your weekly planning before the week starts either on Friday afternoon or Sunday night.
- Look one week ahead and see what you need to prepare and plan for.
- Progress meetings: always write down your biggest accomplishments each week in one place so you can look back at how you've come and what progress you've made.

This structure and diligence will give you serious fuel for the journey. It will give you a feeling of gratitude, growth and belief that you are really making progress towards your goals.

3. Become a data scientist

The term *data scientist* wasn't commonplace when I started in sales – *Salesforce CRM* used to have a mere two or three bar charts on a page!

The modern world is rich with data and now we grapple with data overload. I read recently that 2.5 quintillion data points are created each day and, as I write this, 90% of the world's data was created in the last two years.[1]

OK, so what do I mean by a data scientist? Isn't that what Marketing or Sales Operations do?

In order to be successful at sales you need to be thinking two or three steps ahead. Data is your friend in this pursuit. It enables you to spot trends and practices that you didn't know existed and will help you to rectify these practices before the trend becomes harmful.

What are the things you want to be analysing and comparing each month and quarter?

- What is your average deal value? (Pipeline & closed deals)
- What is your pipeline value at each stage?
- How much time are your deals taking within each stage of your sales process?
- Have you been active with all of your deals in the last two weeks? Which deals need attention?
- How many deals are in your pipeline?
- What is your time to close each deal?

- How accurate is your forecasting ability? Do your estimates match the actual date?

These questions will highlight where you have gaps and bottlenecks in your sales process.

4. Think two or three steps ahead

Thinking a few steps ahead should be second nature and is vital for all of your phone calls, meetings and proposals. I often advise our clients to think about their end goal and then work back from there. For example, if you have a phone call with a qualified customer where you want to be able to show them a demo of your product and then submit a winning proposal.

In order to submit a winning proposal you must be able to tell the customer up-front what the next steps are:

“...if you’re happy with what you see today we’ll arrange a proposal playback call to show you what we’ve created and to ensure that we’re on the right track. If you’re happy, we will then complete your proposal and send it to you the following week.

Upon submission, we’ll agree on a time for another call or meeting, where we can review your feedback and comments and finalise your proposal. How does that sound?”

It sounds long-winded but this is a salesperson who has a plan for three steps ahead! It’s this confidence and control that allows you to create directed and timely momentum in a sales process. It’ll also stop you meaninglessly following up with chaser emails.

5. Quantify the value in real terms

There are a lot of salespeople out there who are not sure what their product or service will do for their target customer. If you don’t know what it will do or can’t estimate what it will do, then you are in the wrong meeting.

You **MUST** be able to explain and quantify what the value is on each opportunity, purchase and partnership with your clients.

What are you enabling them to do? Why should they be doing business with you?

The value in having this information – referred to as a business case in B2B sales – lies in being able to steer the relevant stakeholders and buyers back to their agreed objectives. This information will help you in the latter stages such as in negotiations when you're explaining the value you've added to the decision maker, buying team or procurement team.

6. Setting your own standards

In Sales, when you start operating at this level and dealing with lots of opportunities, people will begin to begrudge you. You'll be planning your time, focussing on high value activities, analysing your successes and evaluating your pipeline in extraordinary detail; so much so that your colleagues, friends or even your family may change their attitude toward you.

You'll be called names or be described as ruthless, *difficult*, *demanding*, *boring* or different – *you're not like us*.

Don't get hung up on this name-calling, it's normal. Name calling is often an expression of the perpetrator's insecurities, so try to be considerate of their feelings, but do not let their words affect you or your work.

You don't need validation from anyone.

7. Celebrate success consistently

Sales can be full of ups and downs so it's doubly important to celebrate your successes. It's the celebration of those little wins that gives you the fuel and desire to go beyond your comfort zone to places that you and your company have never been before.

This is essential in sales.

You will end up using your data and fact-based intelligence to recognise all of the individual successes in your sales role, sales pipeline or business. You'll spot the errors and be able to correct them. You'll see the growth and be able to replicate your formulas.

You'll be able to make an impact and each win will feel incredible!

Here are some of my personal practices for celebrating on a regular basis:

- Arrange at least 1 week off per quarter before it has even started – preempt success.
- Create a 'fun-fund' (bank account) from your commissions to enjoy monthly guilt-free spending.
- Create a never-ending experience hit-list and use your 'fun-fund' to enjoy them fully.

Conclusion

I wanted to share with you my honest understanding of success in sales. I have listed the key disciplines and attitudes that I think are essential for all salespeople to cultivate in order to build a business and reach their goals.

It's often the unconventional and novel ideas that bring you the greatest success. As if it were so easy, why wouldn't everyone else be doing it?

I hope my short summary has been of help and will aid you in your own mission.

I look forward to meeting you and hearing about your successes.

Very best of luck.

About James Ker-Reid CEO, Sales for Startups

James Ker-Reid is a sales hacker and unconventional sales consultant. He brings with him infectious energy, honesty and a desire to make a big difference for his clients. He is the founder of *Sales for Startups*, a company that was formed after the company he previously invested in, *Appirio*, a *Workday* system integrator and *Salesforce* partner, was sold to *Wipro Limited* for \$500million in October 2016.



His sales philosophy is to combine enduring sales strategies and tested principles with new technology to scale up success and presence for his clients. Having learnt all he could from tech and B2B sales, he is now working with technology companies to double their sales revenues in as little as six months. His company, *Sales for Startups*, is known for having achieved this for each of their retained clients.

James's long-term vision is to create the first on-demand sales consultancy for technology companies. This consultancy would cultivate success by combining technology and predictive software to give an immediate response on key variables, whilst still maintaining the human element of business by providing an affordable and on-hand consultant.

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