

# 6 tips to elevate the perception of sales

5-min read



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Me: “Mum, when I grow up, I want to be a salesperson!”  
Mum: “No you don't son - you want to get a proper job. Selling is for failures.”

I was different. I didn't want to be a fireman, a police officer, a footballer or a doctor. I wanted to be a **professional** salesperson.

## Everybody's selling something

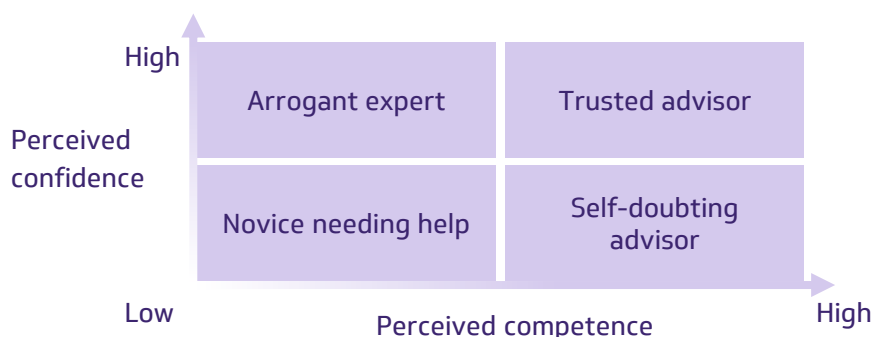
In “To Sell Is Human”, Daniel Pinks estimates that more than 40% of professionals sell in one way or another as part of their jobs. Let's do some quick estimates – if 5% of the 650 million people employed across the OECD are professionals, that's 13 million people engaged in some kind of sales.

So, why do so many people see sales as a Dark Art? Why do people associate selling with dishonesty? Why are salespeople seen as insincere and bullying rather than helpful and persuasive?

Of course, there are some bad salespeople, but there are some seriously great ones too – just as there are good and bad accountants (and indeed footballers). This general perception can only come from people's previous experiences and social conditioning: after all, the customer is always right.

## Becoming trusted advisors

It's part of our job as sales professionals to change this perception. We need to change the way that we come across to our prospects and our customers. One model (based on psychologist Albert Bandura's work on Self-Efficacy) looks at the interplay between confidence and competence:



Low confidence and competence are salespeople who might be beginning their career or transferring from a non-sales role into sales for the first time. Low confidence but high competence are self-doubting advisors who have the competence but struggle to articulate their value due to a lack of confidence; they might leave the customer feeling unconvinced by the value they add. High confidence but low competence are the arrogant experts. These are the blustering and sometimes intimidating salespeople, poorly prepared, much given to lengthy monologues, whose confidence outstrips their knowledge. They are the salespeople who give the world of selling its negative image.

Our development as sales professionals depends on our ability to plot a course towards the top right-hand corner, developing confidence and competence in parallel. With that in mind, here are a handful of practical steps that should be part of our everyday routine.

## Competence

There's always more we can learn, but these three principles are essential:

1. Prepare sufficiently before client engagements. Focus on the questions you are going to ask and the insights you are going to bring, not the solutions you are going to pitch.
2. In client discussions, be mindful of creating a buying atmosphere not a selling atmosphere. No-one wants to feel "sold". Remember Maya Angelou's wise words,

**"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."**

3. Follow-up quickly and efficiently. Prospects don't yet know the strengths of your company and your solutions - all they can do is judge your actions as a salesperson. If you are efficient, accurate and reliable, they are much more likely to assess your offer favourably.

## Confidence

Much research by Maxwell Maltz (author of Psycho Cybernetics) and others has gone into understanding how we can build and maintain a resilient sense of confidence, particularly in tough environments. Key learnings include:

1. Focus on what can be controlled rather than lamenting what cannot. For salespeople, that often means driving activity (which we can control) rather than complaining about market conditions, product shortfalls, and the weather (which we certainly can't).
2. Maintain a productive internal dialogue.

**Rather than saying, "I am never going to reach my sales target this quarter due to the pandemic", you could say, "I am going to strive to hit my target this quarter, because I am ramping up my activity levels and will make 10 reaches every day."**

Create a virtuous cycle between positive self-talk, more productive activity, better results, and improved confidence.

3. Master your company's success stories. Customers are always interested in other customers and the insights you can offer as a result of working with them. Knowing your company's case studies will help you bring that insight. More than that, it will make you more confident about the solutions you offer and the value they bring to customers.

## Improving the practice and perception of sales

Of course, my Mum was right (Mums always are). After all, it was her perception of sales. But as a sales **professional**, I am on a mission to elevate the perception of sales through value-based selling. And I'm using a balance of competence and confidence to move towards trusted advisor status with my clients.

To discover more about improve perception and the link between confidence and competence, [let's talk growth](#).