

## **Sales Position**

In the original Art of War, “Positioning” is the skill that uses the advantages of the ground. In translating his methods to selling, the ground becomes the market place and positioning becomes the skill of picking the right prospects and customers with whom to work.

Traditional sales training tackles many of the issues of sales positioning as the “qualification” stage of the sale. Often this focuses on the narrow question of the individual situation of a given prospect. While this is eventually important, Sun Tzu’s method starts with a broader focus. It asks with which categories of prospects we should spend out time. This choice of type of customer or prospect has a huge affect on our actions in the sales process.

First, Sun Tzu teaches that we already have a sales position. We have a group of prospects or customers with whom we are working. The first question is: do we keep these customers or do we look for a new, better group of prospects? When we do look for new prospects, what are we looking for? How will we know a good group of prospects when we meet them?

In addressing these issues, we have to think about what makes sales difficult. What is so hard about making sales and why? This is the focus of this chapter on sales positioning.

Question One:

**What should your first actions do in creating a sales position?**

- A. Interest your prospect.**
- B. Show the benefits of buy.**
- C. Avoid losing the sale.**
- D. Try a test close.**

**L**earn from your past successes.

Never waste time on prospects you cannot sell.

Find prospects that you can win.

Only you can create the situation where the sale is lost.

Only the customer can make the purchase.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- C. Avoid losing the sale.

Our past successes tell us what usually works over a span of time. We cannot afford to waste our time. Usually, the best first move in selling is defensive. We cannot win a sale with the first words that come out of our mouth, but we can lose a sale. Our initial approach must be calculated not to turn people off.

When we start selling, we don't know enough about our prospect to know what interests him or her. We do not know what they see as benefits. We therefore must put ourselves in a position to learn about the prospect. People know what to expect from sales people. They are looking for a reason to say "no." We cannot give them that reason. So we begin carefully.

While protecting ourselves, we watch and listen to our prospect. Can we win them? Are we wasting our time with them? We must say only enough to maintain the conversation. Fortunately, most business people like to talk about themselves and their business if we are sincerely interested. We must be interested. We must give ourselves time to watch and learn. We must have time to learn the values of the buyer and his or her needs.

Question Two:

**What is the initial basic ‘battle’ in any sales situation?**

- A. The battle to show product superiority.**
- B. The battle for knowledge.**
- C. The battle for position.**
- D. The battle to continue selling.**

You must develop relationships.  
You can prevent the loss of a sale.  
You cannot force the customer to buy.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

D. The battle for to continue selling.

In selling, we must fight for time. We fight to stay in consideration. Buyers have many decisions to make. Most of those decisions are simply eliminating products or services from consideration. Fighting is important in Sun Tzu’s competitive system, but he uses the term to mean “using all our efforts.” At the beginning of the sales process, we use this dedication to stay in consideration. This struggle doesn’t guarantee our victory. It guarantees only our chance at success

Where does victory come from? Our victory is the seller agreeing to buy. We must recognize that, in the sales process, we never win a sale. We are always given a sale. We cannot force the customer to buy. The customer must choose to buy.

We get what our customers give us, nothing more or less. All actions in free markets are voluntary. We must develop a relationship where people want to give us the order. Even if they like our products, we won’t get any orders unless customers want to give them to us. There are too many good alternatives in the world to think anyone gives a sales to someone they don’t like.

We cannot win any sale if we don’t get the opportunity to create a relationship.

Question Three:

**How do you create the opportunity to close the sale?**

- A. By planning a situation where buying is unavoidable.**
- B. By knowing your prospect's "hot buttons."**
- C. By knowing your products' strengths.**
- D. You don't create your opportunity; you see it.**

Pay attention:

You must see the opportunity to close; you can't create it.

From *The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- D. You don't create your opportunity; you see it.

Seeing is one of the major skills we need to develop in order to succeed in sales position. We don't control the conditions that create the proper time to close the sale. We can *see* them.

In order to see, we need to learn what to *look* for at any given time. Half of "seeing" is learning the prospects needs and desires. The other half is seeing when the customer recognizes that we can satisfy those needs and desires. In learning to see, we look for the subtle signals indicating agreement. We learn body language. We learn to read eyes. We hear what is said and what is left unsaid.

We must recognize that we do not create the customer's needs. The needs are there. We just need to see them. It is harder to realize that we cannot force the customer's understanding of how our products and services meet those needs. We must work to address those needs, but understanding happens inside their heads. We can not force it to happen at a certain point in time. We must sense their feelings. We must respond to their changes in tempo and emotion. We must watch carefully to judge our progress and forget about trying to control the sale.

Our sales position is determined by our relationship with the customer. Our relationship is determined by how sensitive we are to the prospect's signals. The sale happens inside their head.

Question Four:

**What basic signal must you watch for in sales positioning?**

- A. Whether or not the prospect is ready to buy.**
- B. Whether or not the prospect is interested.**
- C. Whether or not the prospect is excited.**
- D. Whether or not the prospect echoes your feelings.**

**Y**ou are not always positioned to win a sale.

Therefore, you must keep the sales process going.

You will eventually be in position to win the sale.

Then you must ask for the order.

Stay in the sale when you are not in a position to close it.

Close the sale when you are certain you will win it.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- A. Whether or not the prospect is ready to buy.

For the sake of clarity, we simplify selling. In a sales situation, we only have two basic actions. We are either avoiding rejection of the sale or we are closing the sale. These moves depend entirely on the situation. When we sum up the situation, we have only two possible sales conditions. Either the prospect wants to buy or the prospect doesn't want to buy. If the prospect doesn't want to buy, we must avoid rejection. If the prospect is ready to buy, we must close the sale.

Given just two possibilities, our job of seeing the situation is greatly simplified. We don't have to know everything that the prospect is thinking. We just have to know whether they are ready to buy.

We control our actions in the sale, but, at any given time, we have only two possible goals, continuing the process or closing the sale. Both are forms of active selling. If we are able to continue, we will eventually see the opportunity to close. If we are never eliminated, we will eventually get the sale.

Question Five:

**How does your situation at any given time determine your actions?**

- A. You must always keep the sale moving in every situation.**
- B. You must lead to continue and follow to close.**
- C. You must follow to continue and lead to close.**
- D. You must minimize sales movement in every situation.**

You must nurture the sale carefully.

Say little and learn about the customer's business.

You must close sales decisively.

Demand customer action when the benefits are clear.

From *The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- C. You must follow to continue and lead to close.

Continuing the sale means nurturing the relationship. We must follow the prospect's lead. We must ask questions to learn the customer's thinking and follow his or her lead. We must burrow in, sell only enough to maintain the process. We must give the customer reasons to want to continue in the sales process. We keep up with our prospects and better understand their needs. We must echo their sentiments and emotions.

When we see that the prospect is ready to buy, we must change our approach. We must take the lead. We must be more aggressive. Prospects are naturally afraid of making a mistake. They distrust their own feelings and "test" our sales position with objections. This doesn't mean that they don't want to buy. It means that they are ready to buy, but afraid of making a commitment.

When the prospect is ready to buy, he or she is feeling fearful and uncertain. They then rely upon us to make them comfortable and confident. We now want them to echo our sentiments and emotions. We want to feel as excited about buying as we feel about making a sale. We must lead them to the emotions that generate action.

Question Six:

**How do you define success when the customer isn't ready to buy your proposal?**

- A. Success comes from making the competition look bad as you educate the customer.**
- B. Success comes from building up your credibility while you give the customer reasons to buy.**
- C. Success comes from wearing down the prospect's opposition to your proposal.**
- D. Success comes from preserving the possibility of a sale until you see the opportunity to close it.**

Keep yourself in contention for the sale until you are certain to win it.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- D. Success comes from preserving the possibility of a sale until you see the opportunity to close it.**

We must recognize where we are in the sales process. As the process starts, we must limit our expectation. Our goal is simply to continue the process. We don't want to eliminate ourselves. We say nothing that would stop the prospect from buying. We may give the customers reasons to buy, but we must not give them any reason to say no. We simply want to keep in consideration.

We must take care not to overstep the limitations of our situation. We put ourselves on dangerous ground if we try to attack our competitors. Such tactics can quickly eliminate us from the sales. We need to keep the process going so that we can learn about the customer. We trust that over time, we will learn what we know to make the sale possible. Our time will come. .

When the customer is ready to buy, we will know it. We don't have to force the process. The customer buys according to his or her schedule. Our job is to avoid losing the sale until the time comes.

Question Seven:

**Once you understand the customers needs, what must you do?**

- A. You must wait for the opening to win the customer.**
- B. You must demonstrate that you want the sale.**
- C. You must convince them that you can meet their needs.**
- D. You must show them how great our products are.**

**Y**ou may see what customers need.

Yet you fail to convince them that you meet those needs.

This shows a limited ability.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- C. You must convince them that you can meet their needs.

We have already explained how important “seeing” customer needs. Seeing this opportunity isn’t enough. We must act when we see the opportunity and we must act quickly. For a salesperson, action means convince customers that we can meet their needs. We must educate customers about our products or services, but *only* in the context of how those products meet their needs.

The goal is not to demonstrate how great our company or products are. The goal is to show customers how our products can make them great. We must do more than show the possibilities, we must excite them.

People only act only when they *feel* that an action is in their best interest. The word “feel” is very important here. We do not “convince” people in strictly intellectual terms. Conviction is an emotional reaction. Knowing people’s needs is half the battle. Once we know their needs, the needs they care about, we have the key to unlock their emotions. We must reach those emotions with our message of addressing those needs. .

All sales people labor under a natural handicap. Our prospects think that we are only interested in making the sale. We have to demonstrate the our interest is in meeting their needs.

Question Eight:

**How should you feel about winning a sale where the customer showed a great deal of resistance?**

- A. Pleased with your perseverance.**
- B. More satisfied than winning an easy sale.**
- C. Grateful that you won the sale at all.**
- D. That the sale more difficult than it should have been.**

You may win a difficult sale that requires a great deal of effort.

This also shows a limited ability.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- D. That the sale more difficult than it should have been.

When we meet more resistance than we expect, we did something wrong. Despite what many sales people think, selling is not about overcoming resistance. If we are truly trying to serve the customer's needs, the only resistance we should meet is the natural suspicion of all sales people. If winning a sale is extremely difficult, we did something wrong.

If we find ourselves constantly in difficult sales situations, the failure is usually one of understanding. We are missing an important piece of information about the market we are selling. This lack of knowledge is causing us to either pick the wrong customers or misread their needs. This forces us to reposition ourselves over and over until we find a winning proposal.

Remember that our goal is to win sales easily and quickly. We don't want to win difficult sales battles. It takes too much time. It is too emotionally draining. The gratification we get from winning doesn't make up for the difficulty of the process.

We will become successful in sales when we find a way to make sales easily and painlessly for ourselves and our customers.

Question Nine:

**When you have mastered selling in your market, how difficult should the process be?**

- A. Sales, even when mastered, is always challenging.**
- B. Finding opportunities is hard, but convincing is easy.**
- C. Convincing is always hard, but finding opportunities is easy.**
- D. ~~Selling is easy once it is mastered.~~**

Good sales are effortless.  
Avoid using all your resources.  
Vision is seeing what is obvious.  
Don't try to find something hidden.  
Hearing the customer is easy if you listen.  
Don't imagine what you want to hear.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- D. Selling should be easy once it is mastered.

If we are struggling to find good sales opportunity, we are looking in the wrong place. Situations in which we can win are obvious once we master our sales situation. The whole point of sales training is to learn how to see these opportunities easily.

Winning sales should also be easy. We may occasionally get into those difficult sales battles, but the more skilled we become, the rarer sales battles become. We earn the trust of our customers and develop ease and confidence in dealing with new customers. The more successful we become, the easier sales become.

The big difference between sales novices and sales experts is the natural ease with which the expert hears and understands what customers are saying. Experts know what to listen for. Experts never have to fight for sales because they know what the customer needs and are completely confident in their ability to help customers. Their confidence communicates itself to their prospects.

Question Ten:

**If you study your past successful sales, what should you expect to learn?**

- A. That your most profitable sales were the hardest won.**
- B. That your most profitable sales were well-known.**
- C. That your most profitable sales were surprises.**
- D. That your most profitable sales were the easiest.**

Learn from your successful efforts.

Winning sales requires making the job easy.

A good sale is one that you simply assume you will win.

You are foolish if you want to make a name for yourself.

Avoid conflict if you want to have real success in selling.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- D. That your most profitable sales were the easiest.

We must look at our past to learn what works over time. We may feel good in winning a tough sales, but over time, few of those customers are going to prove to be our most profitable. We may win respect by winning larger, well-known customers, but those sales are seldom our most profitable. Over time, the sales that create big paychecks are the day-to-day easy sales that just seem to fall into our lap.

Easy sales occur because the fit between the customer's needs and our products is so natural. There is no glory in winning these sales. Customers don't buy because we are great sales people. They buy because they need our products and know it. Our role in communicating their need should seem almost incidental in the process.

These sales are quick and simple. These customers are dedicated and profitable. The subtle skill that finds these prospects and wins them is virtually invisible and irresistible.

Question Eleven:

**What type of sales should you always avoid?**

- A. Those that are too easily won.**
- B. Those that are costly to win.**
- C. Those that are too small.**
- D. Those that no one else wants.**

You want to win sales without fighting your prospects.  
Avoid sales battles.  
Close sales when you are certain you will win.  
Sell to customers who have already sold themselves.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- B. Those that are costly to win.

Sun Tzu considered competition dangerous and risky (though necessary) because it depletes necessary resources. Even winning doesn't guarantee against failure. We must avoid winning sales if winning them costs us too high a price. A sale can cost us too much time or require deep discounts to win. In either case, the sale isn't profitable. The goal isn't to win a sale. Our goal is to succeed in sales. This demands our understanding the cost of every sale.

Success in sales comes from finding sales that are easily and quickly won. Winning these types of sales make us increasingly successful over time.

Initially, discovering these easy sales is largely a matter of chance. Initially, we may not understand why some sales are so easy while others are more difficult. Over time (the key element "Heaven" in Sun Tzu's system), we must learn to see the patterns. Our job depends upon our learning the characteristics of these easy sales, these "customers who have already sold themselves." Our experience must teach us how to find sales that we know we will win and win profitably at the beginning of the process. In other words, we learn how to "qualify" customers.

Question Twelve:

**Even if you find the right type of customers to sell, how do you initially assure the you will win the business?**

- A. You must simply be patient in the sales cycle.**
- B. You must take positions that you keep you in the sale.**
- C. You must actively change the customer's viewpoint.**
- D. You must aggressively demand the orders.**

You must sell only to customers that you can win.  
Position yourself where you cannot lose the sale.  
Await your opportunity and then ask for the order.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- B. You must take positions that you keep you in the sale.**

If we are selling to the right customers, those that definitely need our product, we don't have to be aggressive in the sales process. Our initial concern must be avoiding early elimination from sales consideration. Aggressive behavior can turn off even the best potential customers.

We also can't just wait for the sale to take place around us. If we aren't active, our competition (or simple customer indifference) can get us eliminated from sales process.

When we are working with the right customers, we simply have to keep ourselves in the sales process. We must avoid early mistakes that eliminate us from the process. If we avoid elimination, our success with these customers is simply a matter of awaiting our opportunity to close. If we have do our job qualifying customers correctly, the time will come and it will come relatively quickly and easily. Others will be eliminated and we will remain.

When the opportunity to close the sale arises, we must act decisively and ask for the order. When we position ourselves so that the customer can't eliminate us, they must eventually buy.

Question Thirteen:

**When does the real sales battle take place?**

- A. In trying to discover the customer's needs.**
- B. In trying to interest the customer.**
- C. In trying to convince the customer.**
- D. In trying to close the sale.**

You must first know that the prospect needs your product. Only then do you ask the prospect to decide. You must never demand a decision to see what a prospect wants.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- A. In trying to discover the customer's needs.

The most difficult part of sales is discovering people's need for our product. This is the real sales battle. This is where most of us will struggle in sales, especially initially. Master sales people are those who understand the real need for their product.

Finding the right customers is not a matter of having names and phone numbers. We must understand the role our products can play in customers' lives. Once we understand how our product fulfills people's needs, finding the right customers and managing the sales process that wins their business is simply a matter of practice.

Sales people have a bad reputation. Why? Many salespeople think selling is talking whoever comes along into something they don't need. This approach is a foolish waste of effort. We must realize that we can't talk anyone into anything they don't need. People have too many delightful alternatives for their money. They aren't going to give it to us unless we give them real value; better value than any of the alternative uses for their money. Our product wouldn't exist at all if someone didn't need it more than anything else.

Question Fourteen:

**What is the sales person's most critical resource?**

- A. Prospects.**
- B. References.**
- C. Time.**
- D. Territory.**

**Y**ou must make good use of your time.

Examine your situation objectively.

Your discipline determines your success or failure.

From *The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- C. Time.

In this chapter, the general focus is on how to manager our time. We must not spend our time on sales that we are not certain to win. We must concentrate our time on prospects that have a need for our product. The decisions that we make are critical because they determine how much in sales we are able to wring out of our limited amount of time. .

We have an infinite number of things that we can do with our time. Nothing is easier than wasting time. Too many sales people want more prospects or more territory. Prospects and territory just require more time. What most sales people lack is enough time to develop what they already have.

Every sales person has enjoys some uses of their time more than others. Some prospects are more enjoyable to spend time with than others. Some tasks are simply painful. The only thing that makes any of us successful is our discipline in directing our time toward what needs doing as opposed to what it is fun doing.

We must never let our emotions determine how we spend our time. Our use of time must be directed by an objective analysis of what needs to be accomplished. .

Question Fifteen:

**What is the foundation that determines the entire course of the sale?**

- A. The customer's qualifications.**
- B. The value of the product.**
- C. Your sales proposal.**
- D. Your ability to close.**

The sales process requires:

1. A discussion of customer qualifications,
2. A discussion of customer needs,
3. A discussion of product value,
4. A discussion of your proposal,
5. And a discussion finalizing the sale.

Customers determine their qualifications.

Their qualifications determine their needs.

Their needs determine the value of the product.

Product value determines your proposal.

Your proposal determines how the sale is finalized.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- A. The customer's qualifications.

This formula is a central theme of Sun Tzu's competitive method. The sales process starts with our choice of ground, in the case of sales, our choice of customers. Time is our only resource. We choose how to spend that time by carefully choosing our customers.

How we qualify and choose our customers determines everything else that happens in the sales process. Our choice of customers determines what type of needs we are trying to solve. We focus on a certain category of needs by selecting a certain type of customer. The seriousness of those needs determine how valuable our products are. The value of the product determines how much we can charge for it and how quickly we can close the deal. Everything flows from choosing the right customers.

Question Sixteen:

**For a sale to take place, what must customers know for certain about your offering?**

- A. That you care about their business.**
- B. That they are getting more than they are giving.**
- C. That they are getting more than they can get elsewhere.**
- D. That you understand their needs.**

You win sales when customers know that they are getting more than they give.

You will lose sales if they feel that they are giving more than they get.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- B. That they are getting more than they are giving.

If customers aren't certain that the value they receive from buying isn't worth more than the money they are paying, the sale will not take place. In the end, they don't care how well we understand them or how much we care about them. Customers only care about what they are getting. Our knowledge of their business and our concern about making them happy help us communicate the value of our product, but in the end, only the balance of value matters.

This value arises from each customer's needs. Offering more value than our competitors is only important *after* the customer is convinced that he or she needs the product at all. We lose more so-called prospects to "no decision" than we do to other products. The "no sale" option is our most successful competitor.

We must accept that most people are not going to buy our product. We must discipline ourselves to spend our time only with those people who need our product so much that they must eventually buy it. The difficult part is identifying these customers. If we spend our limited time with customers that are qualified for our product, we will win their business.

Question Seventeen:

**Using Sun Tzu’s “success calculation”, what does your success in sales depend upon?**

- A. Picking the right prospects.**
- B. Having the right products.**
- C. Making the right arguments.**
- D. Having enough resources.**

**Y**ou must be completely confident when you close a sale. The weight of benefits to the customer must be obvious and overwhelming. This is the matter of your sales position.

*From The Art of Sales*

Answer:

- A. Picking the right prospects.

Our goal is to sell easily and quickly. Going into a sale, we must be certain that we can win it. We close with confidence only when we know from the beginning that the customer needs to buy.

Sales positioning is a matter of choosing the right prospects with whom to work. We start with our existing customers and prospects. We don’t assume that an other set of prospects and customers are better than the ones that we have. Instead, we defend our existing position. We make sure that we are not eliminated for existing sales cycles. We must win as many of these as we can.

We must learn from our success in sales. Our sales wins tell us which group of people we should focus on. We must see the pattern behind our successes. We must see the connections and commonalties to identify the people with who we should be spending our limited time. Who buys our product and why?

Once we identify the characteristics that make a group eager to buy, we can find more people that meet those characteristics. If we are working with those people, closing is easy.