

## Strategic selling

Or how to play chess and not checkers.

*By Henry Ching, Sales Trainer & Coach @ Progress-U Limited*



The term strategic selling is brought up frequently when describing complex or sophisticated selling. And while there is an element of truth in this, I think it has more to do with the way you approach a sale rather than that the actual sale is actually complicated.

Firstly it may be useful to define what the word 'strategy' means. I have found a number of different definitions of the word:

### **Strategy (definitions)**

- A scheme or an elaborate and systematic plan of action
- The differentiating activities an organization pursues to gain competitive advantage
- A systematic plan, consciously adapted and monitored, to improve one's performance

All of the above definitions are acceptable but I think in a selling situation, the third definition is the most accurate.

Strategic selling means to develop a plan to win and then to monitor it and adapt as necessary. Therefore if the situation changes, for example the customer's need changes or the competition makes a move that positions them in a more favorable position, it is our job to reposition ourselves so that we can improve our chances of winning.

Note that I use the word position a couple of times as I think that this is more important than actually 'competing'. Competing implies that whenever the competition makes a move, we move another move to counter it. A 'tit for tat' type of situation.

This is fine but it is important not to mistake activity for achievement. Just because one salesperson makes a lot of moves and competes for the business by having lots of meetings, phone calls or presentations does not mean that salesperson is actually winning. A strategic thinking salesperson may only make a few moves according to a plan but knows that each move positions her closer to the winning of the sale.

This reminds me of the analogy of checkers versus chess. In checkers, when the opponent moves a piece, you react by moving a piece, usually to take their piece (or pieces) off the board. This is a tactical play and usually is done without a lot of thinking.

However like chess, strategic selling is a more complicated undertaking. Chess players anticipate future moves and will position their pieces in such a way that each one strengthens other pieces on the board. They are working together for the common goal in a common plan which is to checkmate the opponent's King

So in chess, the move you make is a move that involves thinking ahead a great deal of the time to gauge how this will benefit you in the longer term. This should be the rationale for any sales activity - will it benefit you in the longer term, positions you to win and strengthens the previous work you have done?

To continue the analogy, chess is a more complex game than checkers because there are many more variables; just like in the selling world. It requires more thinking, planning, concentration and hard work and sometimes revisions of the plan. To win also takes the qualities of perseverance and stamina with many obstacles to navigate.

Checkers is easier and demands very little forethought and concentration. Because it is easier, it is often the manner in which most salespeople approach their sales opportunities.

That is why strategy is much more important in chess than in checkers and why complex, competitive sales situations should be approached this way.

### **Strategic Selling**

To use a real life example of what a strategic sales approach looks like, I would like to point out a simple example of two car salespeople.

One salesperson (let's call him Bob) was very good at asking the husband what he is looking for. The husband said he wanted something fast and easy to drive. Consequently, Bob pointed out how fast his manufacturer's car was in getting to 100 km/hour, and how well it can be handled and how many horsepower the turbo charged engine had. Bob took the family out on a test drive and it was certainly a great performance car. This demonstration was very compelling and the married couple with the three year-old child was impressed.

The second car salesperson (let's call him Bill) asked the same kind of questions but he noticed the three year-old child and the mother were not involved much so he decided to include them in his conversation. This was a clever strategic move. Bill found out what was most important was the child's safety. Everything else was nice to have. Guess who got the business?

I know this sounds like common sense but let's face it, we have all experienced situations where common sense was not that commonly used.

So to summarize, strategic selling is nothing more than gaining a stronger awareness of the situation and developing a plan to win.

It also helps if one uses the brain before using the mouth.



Henry Ching is a Sales Trainer and Coach at Progress-U Limited. Henry works with sales managers, salespeople, entrepreneurs and anyone else who want to further develop their sales skills and methods using Best Practice thinking.

Today, even top sales performers face ever-increasing challenges in:

- How to shorten the sales cycles;
- How to avoid being drawn into a margin destroying price war;
- How to qualify better so they work on higher quality deals;
- How to close effectively and
- How to maximize the return on investment on the sales efforts made.

Henry assists his clients in tackling these challenges through Progress-U's innovative and unique "Stop Selling!" approach and by sharing his extensive experience gathered during his corporate career.

Henry is known for his creativity and humour when it comes to tackling difficult sales situations or working on complex deals. He has developed sales strategies and training that have helped many clients address their sales challenges.

During his corporate sales career at IBM Australia, Fujitsu and Information Builders, Henry has worked with Blue Chip clients like Mercedes Benz, HJ Heinz, Dun & Bradstreet and the Australian Defence Force. He succeeded in highly competitive sales environments that required thinking 'outside the box'.