

# SANDLER®

WHITE PAPER

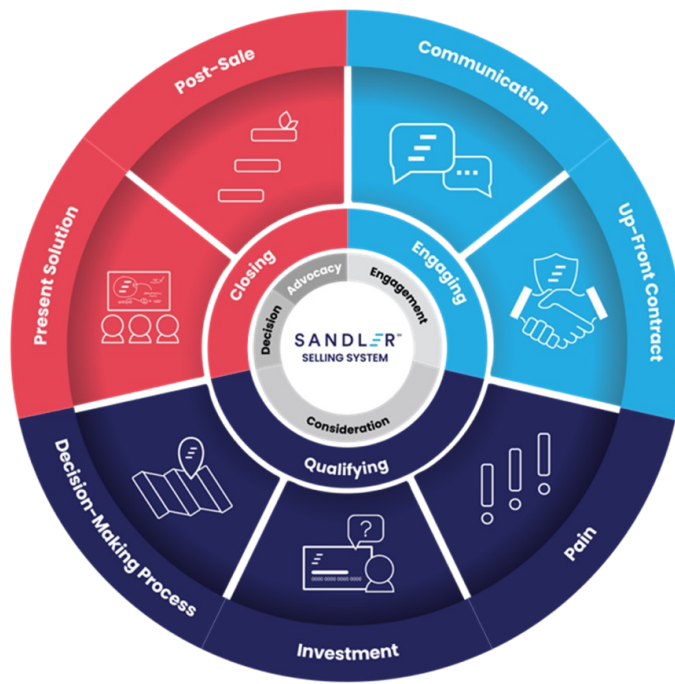
## How To Sell To the Modern Buyer

...The Sandler Way



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## Understanding The Buyer Journey

For our purposes, the first stage of the modern buyer's journey is **Engagement**. This is where buyers start **talking about what they think they need**. They may engage with others in the organization, or they may engage with external people, such as their current suppliers or prospective new suppliers. During this stage, buyers discuss what they believe the need *is*. Typically, they share different perspectives on this – they're brainstorming.

There's a lot of conversation: "Wow. Our operational costs are rising so fast that it's hard to maintain profitability, Not only that, managing the business is a constant fire drill, because each location operates as its own little fiefdom" This stage is all about communication, both in person and digitally. Buyers may choose to engage internally at first, and then move on to engagement with external parties. Alternatively, they may opt to start with external discussions. It's up to those involved in the decision process, based on what makes them comfortable.

**"Wow. Our operational costs are rising so fast that it's hard to maintain profitability, And managing the business is a constant fire drill, because each location operates as its own little fiefdom"**

The second stage of the modern buyer's journey is **Consideration**. In the second stage, the brainstorming has percolated into a **desire for information and insights** that support some specific course of action.

Three questions come to the forefront of the buyer's mind during this stage:

- What is the real problem here?
- What are our options for solving it?
- And, who could we reach out to for a possible solution?

Notice, however, that no coalition for solving any problem exists yet in the buyer's world. Also, notice that there's no guarantee that the buyer's initial assessment of the nature or cause of the problem is accurate. For example, a buyer may assume that the problem of poor communication between locations is due to a siloed organizational set-up (as opposed to a wholistic team approach), when in fact, the critical factor is a lack of real-time communication tools. In this second stage, the patient is often conducting the diagnosis without the aid of a physician—unless you consider Google a physician. How many of us have had a symptom and gone online and convinced ourselves we had found the issue and the possible solutions... only to learn from a real doctor that we weren't even close?

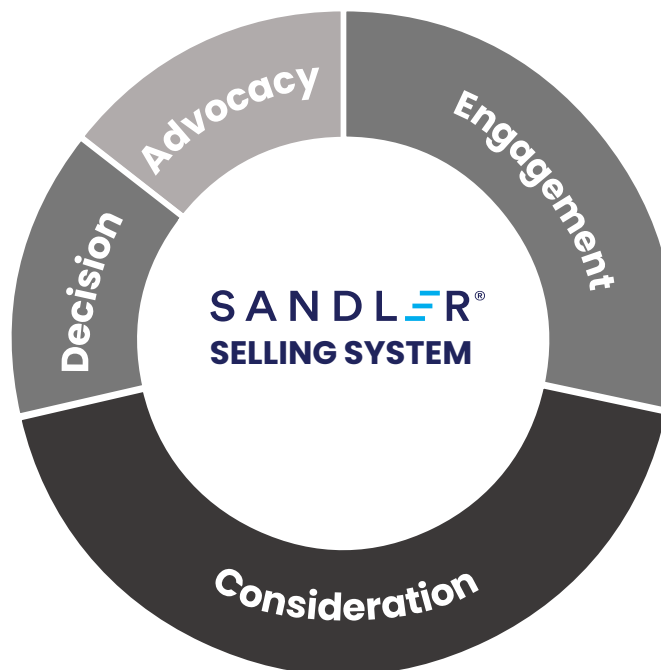
As professionals, we need to be prepared for the reality that buyers will have done substantial research – and have access to mountains of information. At a minimum we will want to assume buyers have researched:

- \* the issue, as they understand it.
- Our company products and services, and
- Our competitors' products and services.

We also need to be prepared for the parallel reality that many of those buyers are going to be overwhelmed by all that information. Some of it is going to be relevant. Some of it is going to be confusing and inaccurate. Buyers won't always know how to make sense of it all. That's where we as the consultant can step in and help.

Lots of ChatGPT queries and Web searches take place in the second stage. Also, lots of requests for quotes, typically via email. Most professional buyers today do not want to interact with a salesperson until the later phases of the buying process. We understand that. And we meet buyers where they are – not where we want them to be, and certainly not where we are familiar or comfortable with them being.

**The Four Stages Of Buyer's Journey Are:**



**We must meet them where they are...not where we have traditionally started our process.**



The third stage of the modern buyer's journey is **Decision**. Now that the buyer knows, or believes they know, what the problem is and has assembled a list of options for solving that problem, a different set of questions emerges. For instance: How much is it going to cost us – in terms of money and other resources – to solve this problem? Do we even want to solve this problem? (They may not.) Is this the most pressing priority we face? (It may not be.) If we do decide to solve this problem, who would oversee implementation of the solution? Can we, should we, solve it on our own? Or are we better off solving it in collaboration with someone on the outside? If so, who is the best partner? And so on. In this stage, the buying team has to **arrive at consensus** on a number of important choices. As sales professionals, we will want to look for ways to better understand who the various stakeholders in that discussion are and what is likely make consensus among them possible.

The end game of the Decision stage, from our point of view, is a buying decision to work with us. But that decision is inevitably going to be the result of many other decisions buyers make along the way. It is always going to be in our interest to get the clearest possible picture of what issues have driven, and are currently driving, those critical preliminary decisions.

Ultimately, some kind of resources are invested at this point. Even when the decision is not to make any financial investments, someone always makes a less obvious investment, namely their political capital within the organization. How? By sponsoring a particular course of action. In some cases, that course of action will be doing nothing. In some cases, it will be expanding someone's responsibility internally. In some cases, it will be working with someone on the outside.

What defines this third stage is that one or more internal or external people make the case for following a certain path... and then the buying organization walks that path. For instance, the VP of Finance, after looking at the options, may aim to "solve" the problem of high operational costs by recommending across-the-board budget cuts of fifteen percent, and may leave the issue of poor real-time communication between facilities entirely unaddressed – because she doesn't realize that problem even exists. But these "solutions" may not make the problem go away. A year later, stages one through three might repeat themselves. The VP of Finance might suggest another course of action, equally ineffective, and the organization might walk down a whole different path. It's our job to meet them where they are ... share the relevant third-party examples ... and ask questions that will help them to illuminate the actual sources of their pain, determine just how much the problem is costing the organization and its stakeholders, and decide whether it makes sense to collaborate with us on the development of a solution that will make that pain go away.

### During the Decision step, buyers ask questions like:

- “Should we be looking for an external solution?”
- “Who will head up our internal review?”
- “What criteria will we use to make a decision?”
- “Internally, who is responsible for doing the actual work on this project?”
- “Who is accountable for the final decision and its outcome?”
- “Who needs to be consulted along the way?”
- “Who needs to be kept informed about the progress of this initiative?”

The fourth stage of the modern buyer’s journey is **Advocacy**. Here, based on the experience they’ve had with an external person and/or institution they’ve bought from, the buyer becomes a raving fan and advocates on behalf of the selling party. The buyer might tell people in their immediate circle about the good experience they had, they might tell people on their team or in their organization, they might tell everyone online, or they might do all of those things. Of course, as sales professionals, we want to be sure we deliver on all our promises and generate advocacy.

So, that’s what the buyer’s journey looks like today. Think about any meaningful purchases you’ve made recently, and the likelihood is that once you look back, you’ll realize that you went through these stages yourself. B-to-B buyers today are **better informed** than ever before, they’re more likely to be influenced by **internal relationships** than ever before, and they’re **harder for salespeople to connect with** than ever before. You might imagine that the best approach for optimizing sales performance in such an environment would be to focus exclusively on the latest tactics.

But you’d be wrong. At Sandler, we believe that tactics – also known as technique -- are only part of the equation. They’re an important part, to be sure. But they’re not the whole picture.

## Behavior, Attitude, And Technique: The Success.

The Success Triangle looks like this:



**B**

Behavior is what you do consistently—  
what you put into practice.

**A**

Attitude is what happens between your ears.

**T**

Technique is what you learn to do.



Those three corners on the triangle can drive our ascent to our fullest and highest potential, not just in sales, but in life. They define the three main sections of our book *How to Sell to the Modern Buyer*. They will help you to track, and align with, the four stages of the buyer's journey.

Most salespeople we work with gravitate toward the technique corner first. That's understandable. It's easiest to focus on technique. It's the low-hanging fruit. You can improve your results quickly by upgrading your technique.

The problem is, for some people, improving technique is all they consider: what to do and how to do it, what to say and how to say it, what not to do and why you shouldn't do it. While it's tempting to focus only on the tactics, to operate on the assumption that technique is all there is, technique is not the whole picture.

In a world where technologies are constantly shifting, leapfrogging, and disrupting; where whole industries can be, and are, reimaged more or less overnight; where buyers and influencers are more educated, more siloed, and less reliant on salespeople than ever before; in the world in which we all now find ourselves, the key to sustainable success as sales professionals is our ability to build and sustain functional ongoing relationships with other human beings. We believe that **sales is a conversation between adults to uncover the truth.**



Effective selling is all about launching and supporting healthy working relationships. Healthy relationships withstand and thrive on change. Our challenge is to build *great* working relationships, ones that stand the test of time, with people who are just as complex and demanding and multifaceted as we are. There are techniques that support that goal... but no techniques that, on their own, can make it happen. Technique by itself doesn't do that.

Creating and sustaining functional relationships requires assuming responsibility for what's happening between our ears; it means looking at the assumptions we make about ourselves, our market, and our world that affect our communication with other people. Not only that, it also requires a willingness to evaluate the outcomes our behavior patterns are producing... and to ask ourselves whether something in our behavior plan needs to change to accommodate a change in the world around us. Avoiding or ignoring those two corners of the triangle, attitude and behavior – even if we are implementing great technique – always ends up leading us away from the relationship. Pretending that technique is all that matters points us toward a singular focus on the identification and removal of symptoms.

We want to go beyond that transactional level. Why? Because a transactional approach won't get us in the door or keep us in discussions with modern buyers and the ever-larger cast of characters who affect their decision-making. Only when we interact with buyers and influencers as the human beings they are, and not as some kind of checklist we can complete, are we able to build relationships that will survive and thrive in today's business environment and drive client lifetime value -- **the revenue that given a customer will generate throughout their lifespan of our professional relationship with them..**

Now, as it happens, Sandler has a reputation for solid techniques. We are known for sharing great actionable tactics and great strategies that sales professionals can learn and implement. But what we have seen play out across all the industries we work in is that even though salespeople may have been taught to seek out better techniques, what really changes their game is their willingness to work, at the same time, on the other two points of the Success Triangle.

This is what our long-term clients discover: that focusing on all three corners of the triangle is what really sets them and their team apart from the competition. And what we're seeing in the field is that this kind of balance is more important now than it ever has been. Technique alone will not set you apart from the competition in today's markets. When it comes to understanding, mapping, and aligning with a given buyer's journey, each of the corners of the Success Triangle is equally indispensable.

Let's take a moment to consider the behavior corner a little more closely. This corner challenges us by asking, When and how often are the techniques we've learned put into practice? If we know how to perform great techniques in some area of our life (dieting and exercise, say), but we never or rarely bother to execute those techniques, is it going to help us? Of course not.

The Success Triangle challenges us to answer this question: Do we know what behaviors and activities need to happen every single day to make our whole business successful, and do we do them? In other words, is there a behavioral plan and are we executing it? You know the old joke about how to eat an elephant: a bite at a time. Well, the behavior corner asks us if we are breaking up that elephant into little bites when it comes to our daily behaviors, the things we commit to do, and actually do, day after day after day.

We can only manage what we can control. We can't control the outcome at the end of the year. All we can control are the behaviors and activities that produce the outcome. So, can we break it all down? Can we reverse engineer our sales funnel? Can we tell our manager exactly what it takes every single day, as far as our personal behavior plan is concerned? **Can we set up a viable daily battle plan to reach the figure we want to generate by the end of the year?**

**Our experience is that roughly eight out of ten salespeople or sales leaders cannot say what that plan is. And we find that many of the people who do have a "plan" are completely focused on just one or two things that they need to do to be successful.**





That's not going to fly if we want to win – and hold on to – today's buyer. Yes, we should work on learning and practicing the right tactics. But if there is no comprehensive behavioral plan to meet and exceed our goals, all our technique is going to be for naught. Our actual behavior is going to be what drives the leading indicators, meaning the metrics (like discussions with qualified decision-makers) that affect incoming revenue. Those are the metrics we can influence.

If we don't have and implement a clear, well-thought-out plan for executing the behaviors that drive revenue, what happens? We drift back to the easy behaviors, the behaviors we find easy... and the revenue picture suffers as a result, both in the short term and the long term.

That's behavior. Now, how about attitude? Well, it turns out that attitude (also known as mindset) is just as important as the other two corners when it comes to mapping out and aligning with any given buyer's journey. If our belief system reinforces scarcity, or victimhood, or a belief that people are fundamentally dishonest, we're not going to get very far with the modern buyer. Yet for some reason, many, many salespeople minimize or ignore the significance of critically evaluating their own attitude.

In reality, attitude is so important, and so often overlooked, that we've put the attitude-related rules first in the Sandler Rules sequence. That means the book *How to Sell to the Modern Buyer* begins by challenging you to think a bit differently from how you may be used to thinking. It is going to challenge you to look at your own scripting – by, for instance, reminding you that it's your responsibility to establish and maintain equal business stature with the buyer, and to identify and remove whatever "head trash" is standing in the way of you doing this.

Here's why we place such heavy emphasis on taking responsibility for personal scripting. If we are second guessing ourselves with our internal dialogue, or we're still living out scripts we learned as children that no longer support us (such as "don't talk to strangers"), we're always going to go off track. We're going to waste a lot of time and energy that we simply cannot afford to waste.

Back when we were little kids, and our parents turned off the lights at the end of the day, we were afraid of the monsters that we thought lived under our beds. They would cause us fear, doubt, and worry—so much so that we even convinced ourselves sometimes that we could see and hear those monsters (I know I did). That monster-under-the-bed example may seem like a faraway experience... but in order to sell effectively to the modern buyer, we need to get a handle on which monsters are still under our beds and are still causing us to fear, doubt, worry, and make bad decisions



Let me give you a (very common) example of what I mean. A critical part of Sandler's qualification process is finding out what the available budget is – the investment.

We've worked with hundreds of thousands of salespeople over the years. One of the things we've found consistently is that, at first, most of them are deeply uncomfortable with the idea of coming right out and asking a decision-maker how much money is available to solve a problem.

Most of them skip the discussion about investment entirely, then try to sneak in their pricing at the end of their presentation. Does that work? No. It usually results in a "Let me think it over" response. The big question is: Why are so many salespeople so resistant to initiating this discussion?

The answer is that there is still a monster under the bed. Sure, a little time has gone by, and we've grown up, and we no longer need our parents to come in and soothe us so we can go to sleep. But you know what? That doesn't mean we got rid of the monsters. They just took different forms and showed up in different spaces: our locker, our dorm room. Eventually, they followed us to work and took up residence in our desks and telephones and computers.

Some of the biggest monsters actually come from Mom and Dad! If, while we were growing up, they told us, "Don't talk to strangers," or, "It's rude to talk about money," or, "Money is the root of all evil," – or, if we're really unlucky, if they happened to say all three of those things – then whether we realize it or not, we've probably still got a monster under the bed. That monster is keeping us from selling effectively to the modern buyer. It's keeping us from getting the information we need to qualify opportunities and strengthen relationships.



Our parents gave us rules because they cared about us and wanted to protect us, but we need to recognize that some of those rules are no longer serving us. Yes, we're professionals now, grownups... but most of us still have monsters that can cause us to freeze up at important moments when we're interacting with buyers.

The attitude point on the triangle challenges us to notice and assume personal responsibility for our mindset. Is it a mindset of fear, doubt, and worry? Or is it one of confidence and conviction in our message and our purpose as adults? If it's the former, we have some work to do on our self-talk and our self-concept.

We tell our clients: You can talk yourself in or out of greatness in an instant. In fact, we do talk ourselves out of greatness every time we start fantasizing about bad outcomes that may never actually happen—and don't even matter if they do! For example, "They know more than I do," or, "I don't know all the details about our product/service," or, "If I stand my ground on this issue, they will disapprove of me." Here's an important reality check, brought to you by the attitude corner of the Success Triangle. We're not having this conversation with the buyer in order to be liked.

To sum up, the Success Triangle is incredibly powerful. All three of its points are critical priorities for your personal and professional growth. The principles for effective, self-sufficient selling to the modern buyer all rest on the rock-solid foundation of the Success Triangle. How do we know that? Because experience has shown us countless times that when people commit to excel at all three corners of the Success Triangle, and then follow through on that commitment, they eventually find themselves at the very top of their profession. And that's exactly where you belong. At the top.

# Sandler's Seven-Step Process

The Sandler Selling System is a seven-step system for successful selling. It's a low-pressure, consultative selling approach that puts you, the salesperson, in control of the discovery process.

## 01

### Communication: Establish Bonding & Rapport

Develop equal business stature and encourage open, honest communication. The Sandler system is built on a foundation of open and respectful communication between the salesperson and the buyer. That means we need to build rapport as quickly as possible, starting on the discovery call. We can't win the sale on the discovery call, but we can certainly lose it. So we refrain from selling and focus on building a connection. That starts by being honest from the outset of the relationship. In order for the buyer to feel comfortable in sharing their issues, they must have a level of trust. This step is where that trust begins.

## 02

### Set an Up-Front Contract

The Sandler method encourages us set clear roles and ground rules for each conversation. This creates a comfortable environment within which to do business. Create an agreement that supports collaborative discovery. Trust is built further by setting clear expectations upfront. By laying our cards on the table, we create a low-pressure environment and disarm prospects who come to a meeting prepared for a fight.

## 03

### Identify the Pain

Uncover the problems and their potential impact to identify reasons for doing business. We can't act as a consultant without understanding the buyer's point of view. The third step in the Sandler process is all about delving into our prospect's pain points and identifying the ways our product can be positioned as a solution. Buyers typically have emotive responses to business challenges, which is why Sandler breaks discussions down into pain/fear and gain/pleasure, Both of which can occur in the present or future. This is arguably the most important step in the entire process

## 04

### Uncover the Budget/Investment Parameters

Discover whether the organization is willing and able to invest the time, money, and resources needed to fix the problem. Multiple studies show that win rates are highest when sellers discuss pricing on the first call.

# 05

## Identify the Decision-Making Process

Discuss the who, when, what, where, why, and how of the prospect's desired buying process. This step is particularly important in an era when multiple influencers can affect (or veto) a purchase decision.

# 06

## Present Your Compelling Customer-Focused Presentation

Based on the pain you have uncovered, propose your solution to the problem, within the budget, and consistent with the decision-making process.

# 07

## Confirm the Post-Sale Process

Establish next steps, discuss future business, and prevent the loss of the sale to the competition or buyer's remorse.

Here is the whole process, aligned with the buyer journey.

		Pain	Investment	Decision	Present Solution	Post-Sales
SANDLER® SELLING SYSTEM	Up-Front Contract	Up-Front Contract	Up-Front Contract	Up-Front Contract	Up-Front Contract	Up-Front Contract
	Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication
Client's Sample Sales Process	Discovery Appointment	Confirm Demonstration or Technical Discovery	Confirm Cost of Characters & Solution Fit	Confirm Deployment Plan	Contract Sent	Contract Signed
Buyer's Journey	Engagement	Consideration			Decision	Advocacy

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To learn more about Sandler, or to connect with us about your sales team, visit [Sandler.com](https://www.sandler.com).



## About Sandler

Sandler is the worldwide leader in sales, management, and customer service training. We partner with organizations of all sizes, across all industries, to help them improve their revenue performance. Sandler not only provides the initial and advanced strategies and tactics needed to excel, but we also empower your team to develop the attitudes and implement the behavior necessary to reach the highest levels of success.

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