

# 13 Tips to Selling Your Idea

by Mike Hawkins  
[mike@alpinelink.com](mailto:mike@alpinelink.com)



There are few positions that don't require sales skills. Not everyone is in sales, but everyone sells. Everyone has customers, either internally or externally. Everyone is in situations where they need to influence someone. Everyone has ideas they want others to embrace. No matter what you think about sales, there is no escaping the reality that having selling skills is extremely valuable.

If you have an important idea that you want others to adopt, here are 13 consultative selling best practices to employ that will give you the best chance of success:

1. **Idea** – Before you attempt to sell your idea, fully understand it. Refine it. Research available background information. Talk to others. Be able to clearly articulate your idea in a compelling way. You only have one chance to make a good first impression and win someone's support. Develop your expertise and become proficient on your topic.
2. **Audience** - Determine who to sell your idea to. Identify the specific people who would be most impacted and interested in your idea. Consider who has the authority to act on your idea or allocate the resources you need. Learn as much about your target audience as you can and personalize your proposition to their interests and needs.
3. **Outcome** - Think about your desired outcome. Clearly determine what you expect to achieve in the interaction you will have with your target audience. Do you want them to trust you, refer you to someone, approve something, buy something, or endorse something? Be clear about your expectations of next steps and possible outcomes.
4. **Contact** - Set up a meeting or call with your target audience in a setting and manner that is appropriate for your topic and their level. Use a more formal style for people you don't know, particularly those in more senior positions. Leverage common acquaintances and reference common interests to help secure the meeting if you don't already have a relationship with them.
5. **Rapport** - When you first meet, take a few minutes to make proper introductions and exchange relevant background information. Focus on establishing your credibility before outlining your idea or proposition. As time and the other person allows, develop the foundations on which you can build a trusting relationship.
6. **Problem** – Start your proposition by describing the overall problem to be solved or opportunity to be leveraged. Create context for your idea. Build a baseline of awareness of the overall topic. Make clear the impact of the problem or size of the opportunity you are addressing to set proper expectations and capture their attention.
7. **Alternatives** - Identify the relevant alternatives to addressing the overall problem you outlined including your idea and other ideas that compete with yours. Include “doing nothing” to ensure at least one alternative to yours is considered. By giving alternatives you move people from thinking about a “yes vs. no” decision on your idea to a “which is the best” decision between multiple alternatives.
8. **Funneling** - Funnel down to your proposed alternative by successively eliminating the other alternatives. Establish the criteria by which you are funneling and one by one reduce the alternatives down to your proposed alternative. You not only bring out the differentiating qualities of your proposition, but establish implicit evaluation criteria.
9. **Value** – Reinforce the unique value of your idea. Identify not only any monetary or strategic value, but other value that might engage their emotions. Mention how your idea might reduce risk, simplify complexity, increase respectability, or promote harmony. Build their intrinsic motivation to accept your idea.



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10. **Believability** - Make your idea believable and actionable. Identify any anticipated obstacles to implementing your idea. Outline contingency plans or solutions to dealing with them. Give examples and stories where others have succeeded. Give a demo if applicable. Outline a plan of action in sufficient detail that makes your proposition seem doable.
11. **Hook** - Create a sense of urgency to act on your idea. Answer the questions “why me?” and “why now?” Avoid being manipulative or applying negative pressure. Focus on the positive benefits of acting quickly. If you need to emphasize the negative consequences of not adopting your proposition, do it in a non-threatening way.
12. **Close** – Suggest next steps. Give them an opportunity to accept your proposition or take whatever next steps you are proposing. Be clear about any decisions you want them to make. By asking people to take action, you either facilitate the next step or uncover their objections – both of which are good outcomes that keep you moving forward.
13. **Implementation** - When you get the go ahead, don’t celebrate too long. The real work now starts. You may have successfully finished selling your idea, but you now have to deliver what you promoted. You’re not finished until you have implemented the idea and made it work as promised. The credibility on which you will make your next sale depends on fulfilling the promise of this sale first. A sale is only a success after it delivers the value that you promised.

Apply these consultative selling principles and watch the adoption of your ideas soar.

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.activatingyourambition.com](http://www.activatingyourambition.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corporation ([www.alpinelink.com](http://www.alpinelink.com)), a consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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