

# BRETT CLAY

## Q&A

### *Selling Change*

1. **Brett, your new book, *Selling Change: 101+ Secrets for Growing Sales by Leading Change*, demands that in order for companies to survive and thrive in today's turbulent economy, they must evolve from being purveyors of solutions to becoming agents of change. How does an organization make this paradigm shift?** Solutions and the problems they address are just the tip of the iceberg. Furthermore, in today's Internet-enabled, globalized business environment, solutions have become commodities. Therefore, company executives and salespeople need to look under the surface and discover the many forces and changes influencing the customer. Then, the company can address the underlying issues to identify bigger opportunities and deliver more value to its customers. Making this paradigm shift starts by simply asking the customer "What is changing?", rather than "What is the problem?"
2. **You put forth a convincing leadership framework for harnessing the forces that drive change and enables sales people to become highly valued change leaders. What are these four forces and how should we apply them?** The Four Forces are: The client's own internal needs and motivations; The client's behavioral tendencies and personality traits; The strategies and systems the client employs to manage himself and the environmental forces felt by the client. A common mistake people make is to focus only on one of the forces – environment, for example – and they become stuck with few options. But, customers always take action in the context of all four forces. So, by addressing all four forces, more options are available and people can make changes more successfully.
3. **Each of the four forces needs to be understood in the context of four dimensions: internal needs, behavioral tendencies, cognitive strategies, and environmental factors. Can any of these dimensions be controlled or manipulated?** When people think of "change" and "forces," they most commonly think of changing the environment. But, in most cases environmental forces are not in their control. They have two choices: change to a different environment, or change themselves. The other three forces are about changing themselves. Of those forces people have the most control over the strategies and systems they employ, less control over their own needs and motivations, and the least control over their own personality traits (behavioral tendencies). Given enough time and resources, any of the four dimensions can be controlled— often the question is determining which dimension involves the least time and resources to change.

4. **Brett, is it true that people only buy when forced – but you can't really force them to buy, can you?** Absolutely not. In fact, in my books I have a cartoon character called Joe Bulldog that parodies the idea that aggressive salespeople can force people to buy. That said, most people would rather have a hole in their head than a hole in their pocket and lose a dollar. So, it *is* true that people only spend their resources when they feel a compelling force to do so. The task of the salesperson, therefore, is to identify what forces the customer finds compelling. If those forces exist, or the salesperson raises the customer's awareness of them, then the customer will buy.
5. **How has today's globalized, Internet-empowered marketplace created a Darwinian environment for salespeople and the companies they represent?** The forces of Internet empowerment and globalization are making markets very efficient. In other words, customers increasingly have access to the best solution at the best price. Often, the best available price is below the production cost of even the most efficient vendor. Companies are left with three choices:
  - a) become the most efficient producer of the solution,
  - b) become the most effective creator of value,
  - c) exit the market.Companies that choose to be the most efficient producers must eliminate the high costs of salespeople by automating the transaction process. Companies that choose to create the most value, must hire and train the most highly skilled salespeople to identify value-creating opportunities and to operate as consultants and leaders.
6. **Your book centers around five disciplines: force field analysis, change response analysis, power analysis, value creation and change actuation. Which is the most important one – and why?** By far, the most important discipline is force field analysis. This discipline is about developing a deep understanding of the forces that the customer is feeling at a particular period in time. Every action the customer takes is in response to those forces. So, by understanding the forces a person feels, you understand a lot about their behavior – where they're coming from and where they're going.
7. **Why is it important for the sales person to understand what causes people to change, how people decide to change, and how people make change happen?** When you think about it, every action people take is a response to some force he or she feels. Sales is all about getting people to take action; ultimately the action of making a purchase. So understanding how people process the forces they feel and how they decide to take action is critical for understanding how they buy. Also, the world is changing so fast, that even when people want to maintain their current situation, they have to change relative to their environment. So, change is unavoidable and we all must learn to manage it.

8. **You provocatively state “no one needs your product or service.” If that’s true, how does one sell under such an unsettling circumstance?** One of the biggest mistakes I see salespeople and executives making is confusing problems with solutions. The English language is partly to blame. We say things like “I need a break,” and “I need a coffee.” But those are solutions not problems. A need is the existence of a problem, not the existence of a solution. That is why I say no one needs your product. But, there is an even more fundamental point here. Rather than asking, “Do you need a break?” salespeople should be asking, “Do you feel tired?” Focusing on what the customer feels is far more powerful and opens up a whole new world of possibilities for both the customer and the salesperson.
9. **How do you create a “change experience” for a customer?** If you are selling a product that never seems to change or doesn’t seem to involve any change on behalf of the customer, then it is likely every last fraction of profit margin will have been squeezed from the product. Selling products with no profit margins is not a way to make money. Luckily very few people are happy experiencing the same thing over and over and over and over. So, customers will usually pay more for something that is different. It doesn’t have to be better, just different. Sometimes the smallest change will be sufficient: putting a hot dog on a stick, or lemon peel in a coffee, for example. The possibilities are limitless. On the other hand, most people are instinctively reluctant to change. But change is not the goal itself. Change is the response that people take to the forces they feel. So, salespeople need to focus on what customers feel. The more salespeople understand the forces people feel, the better they can help customers respond with changes.
10. **Why should a salesperson operate like a Kung-fu master?** This gets to the heart of harnessing forces and making changes with the least expenditure of resources. If you observe Kung-fu masters, they have perfected the art of responding to situations with the least possible amount of motion and energy. In fact, that is their goal of being “in harmony with the environment”— to exist in the environment with the least expenditure of energy. The concept of “harmony” is all about timing and using other people’s energy, rather than your own. The most successful salespeople are successful change leaders. And the most successful change leaders orchestrate activities and time them such that they fully utilize all available sources of energy – putting maximum energy behind the change initiative.
11. **You draw often on science and psychology in your writings. Why?** I suppose science is humankind’s way of trying to explain what happens in our world. And psychology is the science of trying to explain people’s behaviors. As a salesperson, I am keenly interested in understanding people’s behaviors. If I can understand what makes other people behave, perhaps I can influence their behavior through my own. Also, truly successful salespeople can repeat their successes over and over. The ultimate goal of science is to make things repeatable. So, I believe salespeople must make sales a science, rather than an art, to make their successes repeatable, and to be truly successful.

- 12. How does your sales approach differ from what many sales people tend to do?** The vast majority of salespeople simply focus on satisfying a need and transacting the purchase. More advanced salespeople have been taught to provide solutions to problems. And the most advanced salespeople sell “strategically” by helping customers address business challenges. However, solving business challenges is simply a higher form of solving problems. Change-centric selling takes selling to the highest level by helping customers achieve their goals. But, identifying goals is usually the easy part. Identifying and executing the changes necessary to achieve the goals is the hard part. That is why my approach focuses on change.
- 13. When is it time for your sales force to implement a new sales methodology?** There are a number of signs. But, certainly the most important indicator is a decline in the sales organization’s ability to generate highly profitable revenue. It is common for companies to take their sales methodology for granted, not realizing that other approaches even exist. The sales organization will often point to competitive pressures and economic conditions, rather than take a fresh look at its own methodology. But, a change in the competitive or economic landscape is, by itself, an indicator that a new approach may be necessary. The challenge is it takes years to equip a sales force with highly competitive skills and to build business processes around them.
- 14. How should a salesperson handle this dilemma: take on few, higher-margin, less-competitive, slower-closing deals or take on more lower-margin, more-competitive, faster-closing deals?** Every situation is different and salespeople must make their own decisions. But, as the forces of Internet empowerment and globalization create increasingly efficient markets, it will be increasingly difficult to make money on fast-closing deals. To make more money, salespeople will need to have deeper engagements with fewer customers, finding opportunities and delivering a value that is not instantly available over the Internet.
- 15. What did you learn while working at Microsoft that helps you understand how salespeople must compete in today’s sales landscape?** At Microsoft I dealt with hundreds of companies and thousands of salespeople. There are over 46,000 people in Microsoft’s sales organization, alone. My role was to train those salespeople how to sell certain products. The key observation I would highlight is that I saw many salespeople trying to cope with pricing pressures and struggling to win business at profitable prices. The problem was that most, if not all, of those salespeople knew how to sell solutions, but they didn’t know how to sell value. I saw so many companies needing to train their salespeople how to sell high value that I decided to leave Microsoft to start a sales training company.
- 16. You say that *Selling Change* shows salespeople how to lock out their competitors? How is that possible?** Yes, that is right. As companies increasingly consolidate their operations and outsource even critical activities, they become increasingly reliant on their vendors. The nature of buyer-vendor relationships is evolving into partner-partner relationships. Once a vendor has demonstrated a track record of reliably delivering high value, the buyer cannot afford to take a risk on other vendors. Those companies that evolve into change leaders and are the first to deliver high value will become the incumbents. The other companies will be locked out—virtually forever. That is why I describe the current business environment as Darwinian.
- 17. It seems your book is a study in the psychology of change while providing tools for leading it. How does the salesperson need to change in order to lead a customer to change?** Customers change, not because of products, but in response to what they feel. Therefore, the first change salespeople must make is to detach themselves from their products and focus all

their attention on the customer and the customer's feelings. Second, salespeople must internalize the fundamental notion that customers, not salespeople, own their own changes, their own successes and their own failures. Salespeople must see themselves as facilitators and counselors, rather than owners and drivers. Lastly sales teams need to use the language and tools of change psychology in their sales process. For example, they should use change factors in their qualification criteria and forecasting processes.

18. **Under a change-centric selling proposition, what questions must the salesperson answer as he or she addresses a potential client's needs?** The five primary questions of the Change Leadership Framework are:

1. What are the forces the client is feeling?
2. What is the client's best response to those forces?
3. What will it take to respond with a change? i.e. What will be the effort and cost?
4. What value will be created by the change?
5. How will the client initiate the change?

With these answers in hand, the salesperson is prepared to make a compelling sales proposition.

19. **Why do you say in your book that “The key is to have a mindset of looking for forces and changes, rather than merely looking for problems?** Problems are just the tip of the iceberg. Under the surface are many forces and changes happening in the customer's organization or life. When the salesperson understands the forces the customer is feeling and the changes that are already happening, the salesperson is in a much better position to help the customer reach her goals. It is human nature to think “inside the box” and customers are often too close to the situation to see and think “out of the box”. So, by looking below the surface at the underlying issues, salespeople can often add tremendous value by reframing problems and providing more optimal solutions. Lastly, salespeople will find more opportunities by having an open mind than by myopically looking for specific problems.

20. **What are the challenges to becoming a change leader?** The first challenge is accepting the role of counselor. It is the realization that, as the saying goes, “you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.” Many people have difficulty dealing with this lack of control. But, as a change leader, the only control you have is how well you counsel the client. The second challenge is getting the client's attention. People are often too busily wrapped up in their current situation to become aware of opportunities. To be successful, change leaders must dig below the surface issues and tap the client's underlying motivations. Then, the change leader can have the conversation of how to best achieve the client's motivations.

21. **How does the salesperson seek to understand where the client is coming from – and thus lead him or her to where s/he needs to go?** This is the principle of force field analysis. The idea is that people's behaviors are coming from four basic forces: their motivations, personality, strategies, and environment. To really understand people's motivations, you need to ask them. To understand their personality, I recommend becoming familiar with the Keirsey Temperament Sorter. Their strategies and environment can largely be observed directly, but it is critical that you understand the client's perception of them, rather than yours. It's important to note that no two people respond in the same way. And some people may respond in ways that you never would've expected. Therefore, once you understand the forces the client feels, you need to characterize how the client uniquely responds to them.