

## **College of Business Book Review for 12/11/06 by Jim DeConinck**

Title: "Exceptional Selling: How the Best Connect and Win in High Stakes Sales"

Author: Jeff Thull

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Copyright: 2006

Length: 230 pages

Reading time: 6 hours

Reading rating: 9 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 4 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

This book details how to succeed in high-stakes or complex sales, which may be defined as any sale in which the customer requires personal assistance or guidance in order to make a well-informed, quality decision. High-stakes sales may involve business-to-business sales, business-to-consumer sales or internal sales to colleagues and/or superiors. The underlying principle of the book is communication, regardless of the context or magnitude of the sale.

Part I describes communication barriers that often separate salespeople and their customers, specifically how salespeople converse with their customers and what they talk to their customers about. Traditional sales principles teach presentation, instead of connection, and persuasion, rather than collaboration. Salespeople following the traditional approach often unintentionally alienate themselves from their customers and encourage customers' stereotypes that all salespeople, regardless of what they sell, are identical and guilty until proven innocent. Salespeople must instead distance themselves from these stereotypes and, when in doubt, do the opposite of what the stereotypical salesperson would do.

Exceptional salespeople are quite different from their less successful peers. Outstanding salespeople understand that their mindset is critical. These professionals focus on bringing value to their clients; they believe they are successful because they have the ability to help their clients choose the products/services necessary to succeed. Exceptional salespeople also foster change leadership, emotional maturity and mutual self-esteem and self-interest.

Well this is great advice, but how do I incorporate these skills into diagnostic conversations with my customers? Part II provides a real-world, "take it to the streets" approach that details specific conversations that result in extraordinary sales. The reader is first guided in effectively conducting the initial customer conversation in order to gain management support and access to the organization. The importance of diagnosis versus presentation is then discussed, and the author explains multiple strategies for engaging in diagnostic customer conversations, explaining current inefficiencies and finally providing customers with an incentive to change.

The latter segments of Part II are particularly insightful for salespeople working in the trenches. Problems associated with creating solutions in an unrealistic setting or vacuum,

as well as how to capitalize on the competitors' lack of veracity in their solutions, are discussed. The importance of acknowledging possible challenges and risks associated with the proposed solution is also detailed.

The final section of this book discusses issues that often intimidate salespeople: financial and senior level executive conversations. The book teaches salespeople how to confidently facilitate conversations that allow customers to quantify the cost of their problems and their expected return on investment. The author then guides salespeople through a series of steps to prepare for conversations with top management in the customer organization and approach the opportunity with self confidence.

In conclusion, "Exceptional Selling: How the Best Connect and Win in High Stakes Sales" provides salespeople with a real-world step-by-step guide to becoming an exceptional high-stakes sales professional.

Jim DeConinck is a Professor of Marketing and the Director of the Center for Professional Selling in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. His primary teaching responsibilities are professional selling and negotiation. His research interests are investigating employee turnover and business ethics. For previously reviewed books, visit our Web page at [www.wcu.edu/cob](http://www.wcu.edu/cob).