



White Paper - Consultative Selling for the Materials Industry

Adapted from a workshop at: [The Executive Roundtable](#) hosted by [Kendall Justiniano](#), Managing Director of [Growth Arc Advisors LLC](#)
[Workshop Video Replay](#)

[Contact Kendall](#) for follow up discussions for your organization

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Summary

Our Founder, Kendall Justiniano, had a successful career in the chemical industry, starting at Dow Chemical and ultimately becoming vice president of marketing at WR Grace. Throughout his career, he became well-versed in traditional selling methods, including segmentation-targeting-positioning, and value selling. These skills served him well, but he started to notice certain limitations. Occasionally, even after developing a strong value proposition and making a convincing business case, customers would still choose other options. This was frustrating for Kendall leading him to question what could have been done differently.

Traditional selling methods usually provided advice which we find incomplete, for instance that not enough preparation was done. This dissatisfaction with the traditional selling methods led us to explore alternative approaches, and ultimately led Kendall to the formation of his company, Growth Arc Advisors LLC, with the mission of bringing next-level sales and marketing approaches to the materials industry.

Changes in the B2B Buying Process

The B2B sales landscape is being influenced by three major trends. Firstly, there is a significant amount of economic disruption impacting the industry, with geopolitical shifts and changes in growth rates in Asia causing challenges for businesses and a high level of uncertainty. Secondly, there has been a technological shift in the past five to ten years, particularly in the materials sector, as companies have better represented their products online and have provided customers with more accessible information. The availability of information and the speed at which options can be researched has drastically changed the buying process. Lastly, there has been an increased understanding of decision science. This knowledge has shown that building a rational case alone is not enough to persuade customers, and factors such as emotions and group dynamics play a crucial role. As the B2B sales landscape continues to evolve, these trends must be considered to adapt and succeed in the industry.

The B2B customer has been greatly impacted by these changes. With the ability to do research and find information online, customers now spend less time in front of a sales representative during the buying cycle. However, even though customers have higher levels of quality information, they report feeling overwhelmed with information and subsequently making poor decisions or delaying their actions. They need less help in generating options and more help in formulating decision frameworks to drive action, i.e. in making sense of all of the information they have. Yet traditional value selling techniques focus on overcoming the awareness barrier and pitching products' features and benefits, assuming decisions will readily come. So traditional marketing and sales process do not align with the changing needs and behaviors of B2B customers.

Pitching can often backfire in these sales interactions. Customers have access to a lot of information already, so simply bombarding them with a pitch can be seen as pushy and self-serving. This can lead to complaints from customers who feel that sales professionals are only focused on selling their product and not considering the customer's specific needs or building a relationship. Customers say they want sales professionals to help co-create solutions, explore their situation, and understand their specific needs without judgment. These behaviors are often not addressed in traditional sales methods.

Sales behaviors that close more business involve shifting from a product-focused approach to a consultative partnership with the customer. The top-performing sales reps demonstrate an interest in the customer's company and agenda, going beyond simply understanding and pitching the product. They prioritize building relationships and spend more time with decision-makers. Additionally, they are disciplined in client development and thought leadership. These consultative behaviors, aimed at helping customers solve problems rather than solely recommending products, result in significantly higher performance compared to reps who do not adopt such approaches.

What is Consultative Selling

Consultative selling is a sales methodology that focuses on understanding the customer's needs, goals, and thought processes, before offering a product or service solution. It involves actively listening to the customer and diagnosing any issues or blind spots they may have. Instead of immediately pitching a product or service, consultative selling involves co-creating a solution with the customer, allowing them to visualize how it would look in application. This process not only helps build trust with the client but also encourages repeat business. The primary goal of consultative selling is to understand the client's objectives, align them with the seller's expertise, and collaboratively develop a value proposition that meets the client's needs.

The core elements of the consultative methodology as delivered by Growth Arc Advisors are delivered via a process, a playbook, and development of a practice. The methodology includes a core sales process that is taught and used by the organization. A playbook is created specifically for the industry, which serves as a reference document to capture and codify what works with clients. Practice is emphasized through small group coaching sessions and round-robin feedback sessions to reinforce the approaches. Among many others, two companies that have successfully used this methodology are Cisco Systems and Halliburton. Cisco Systems, known for their networking hardware, experienced a decline when routers became commoditized. However, their consulting and services group, which uses an advanced version of this methodology, has become one of their most profitable divisions. Halliburton, an oilfield services company, focused on the chemical side of their business using this methodology, which has turned it into a significant revenue and profitability engine for them. Both companies continue to utilize this methodology with success.

The consultative sales process is a six-point process is decidedly different than traditional approach. During the core steps of the process, a lot of time is spent understanding how the customer views their issues, what their critical needs are, and identifying areas where your product or service can help. This requires asking different types of questions and ensuring that the customer is open to the ways your product can contribute. If they aren't, there may be a need for reframing or persuasion. The sales team uses a structured method called a point of view, which introduces new expertise without implying that the client is wrong, and to get them to consider reframing their thinking.

The playbook is developed based on customer challenges or pain points. It details the six-step process for each challenge, providing a reference for sales representatives. However, the playbook is not a strict script, as every customer is different and requires some level of tailoring. The goal is to understand the client's situation and adjust the approach accordingly. The playbook serves as a guide, suggesting approaches that may be applicable or providing a starting point for customization. Sales reps are trained to adapt and make real-time adjustments based on the specific customer and situation.

A final factor that is considered is building the sales methodology into the company's sales management system. Doing so, ensures that all sales team members are following the same approach and are aligned with the company's goals and objectives. This allows for better collaboration and coordination within the sales team. Additionally, building the sales system into the management system allows for continuous improvement and it provides a consistent framework for new business development, training, onboarding, and product launch, ensuring that the sales team is equipped with the necessary tools and resources to succeed. Regular coaching and portfolio review management further reinforce the methodology and help identify areas for improvement. In summary, incorporating a sales system into the management system is crucial for achieving consistent sales performance and driving overall business growth.

[Sea Land Chemical's experience with consultative selling](#) involved a shift from traditional selling methods to a more customer-focused approach. The company, a small specialty chemical distributor, recognized several needs as they aimed to grow including transferring knowledge from seasoned sales professionals to newer employee, and disseminating knowledge of new growth segments to the whole sales force. They adopted the method of consultative selling, which involves understanding the customer's overriding needs through inquisitive questioning before pitching a product or service. This approach has allowed Sea Land Chemical to establish stronger positions with customers and improve their new business wins. The company also focused on creating playbooks to document and codify typical sales situations, enabling them to leverage knowledge and experiences with other team members. Sea Land Chemical is in the process of integrating consultative selling into their management system and plans to use coaching, onboarding, and small-group workshops to reinforce the methodology with their growing sales team.

Readiness Factors to Consider for Sales System Implementation

Analyzing your organization's capabilities, knowledge, and processes is essential to determine where to start with a consultative sales system. Some foundational information and capabilities may already exist within your organization, such as reps who possess deep knowledge of your product sets. Additionally, companies often have market understanding that has been codified, including segmentation, personas, target segments, and product strategies. These perspectives can be incorporated into a consultative playbook. Other aspects to consider are the onboarding process, content, and systems for learning and development, as well as how product launches are handled.

In order to implement a consultative sales system, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of one's organization. Simply focusing on the sales team may not be sufficient, as consultative conversations can occur at various levels within the organization. These conversations could be happening in application development, tech service, business development, or new product development. It is important to identify who is currently having these types of conversations and who you aspire to have them in the future. For example, application development professionals may already engage in consultative conversations, whereas account managers may need to learn from their approach. By considering the entire organization, one can determine which areas need to be included in the implementation of the new system. Early wins are also important, so focusing on the areas that align with the organization's growth aspirations can help drive successful implementation.

And as mentioned, integrating a selling system into the management system is essential for consistent sales performance and overall business growth. Ultimately, a sustainable selling system is achieved when all touch-points within the organization's systems are aligned with the methodology and vocabulary of the sales system.

About Kendall Justiniano and Growth Arc Advisors LLC

We help materials executive finds overlooked Growth.

After a 30 year career as an executive in the chemical industry, founder Kendall Justiniano started Growth Arc Advisors to help chemical business leaders implement the new thinking required for changing fundamentals. We're experienced industry operators who know the old playbooks, their gaps, and the new pages required.

The firm delivers customized engagements for Materials Executives in 3 key areas:

Sales & Marketing: increasing growth revenue through proven next-level commercial practices, including digital sales & marketing.

Strategy: helping clients navigate threats generated by sustainability, digital, and global demand shifts.

Innovation: accelerating return on innovation through focused investment.