Selling with

The art of selling with champions to shape internal buying conversations & close enterprise deals.

Nate Nasralla

Selling with

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A note to the reader: The order of this book is intentional. Each topic builds on the last. However, it's also been written to let you skip ahead to later chapters, if you see a topic referenced in an earlier chapter that piques your interest, and you'd like to go deeper on it.

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Part 1

Making the Mental Shift

Prologue: Just Like That

I was nervous. The sweaty hands, shallow-breathing kind of nervous.

I'd met my fair share of executives before. Closed much larger deals before, too. I guess it was just because of how badly I wanted to turn this account into a customer. They were one of the fastest-growing companies of all time. A tech darling loved by all.

Plus, their logo would look pretty dang good on our website.

I saw their chief product officer (CPO) log on first. We stared silently at each other, waiting for her audio to connect. The wait felt longer than the time someone wrote out a check to pay for their Starbucks during the morning rush.

My champion was running late. Where was he? No problem. *This is good*, I told myself. *We can get to know each other before we talk shop.*

"Hi, Nate, nice to meet you. Heard good things," she said first.

"Well, that's Tom for you. Always so encouraging. And likewise, he speaks highly of you."

We chatted for a few minutes as my sweat subsided.

"Hey, guys, sorry I'm late! You both met?"

Tom had joined. Breezing in with an easy nonchalance I'd come to love about him.

"Yep, just sharing travel plans we're each excited for. Good to see you, Tom," I said.

"Well," the CPO said to me, "I think the plan you and Tom worked up makes a lot of sense. I'm looking forward to working with you."

I paused, looking at Tom, his smiling head floating around in the Zoom panel. *Looking forward?* I wondered to myself. *Like, she's already on board?*

"Well, great. I'm glad to hear it, because we are too," I replied, learning from a rather embarrassing moment a few months back when an SVP stopped me, mid-meeting, and said, "Stop selling me, Nate. I'm already on board."

She'd read the memo Tom and I coauthored. She'd had some conversations with him and the product team I'd met before this. But surely, she had to have at least *some* questions, right?

Granted, this wasn't the largest deal ever. But a modest six-figure check isn't nothing either. So, I asked, just to be safe, "Any pieces you'd like to dig deeper on together?"

"As long as we can get going sooner rather than later, we're good. Tom can coordinate setting up in our systems."

We wrapped up with the typical goodbyes, and Tom said he'd call me later. I looked at the clock. It was 11:07 a.m. The call had lasted seven minutes, with six minutes of filler.

Tom had joined his company about six months before this. He had a strong reputation for good results inside fast-growing, soon-to-be-public tech companies. He was well-known with product insiders, and he knew his stuff.

His internal team respected him, and I knew that would make him a strong champion. But I hadn't realized just how strong.

Tom had closed this deal. There was no doubt in my mind.

Sure, I helped set him up. He was in his first few months with the company. He was expected to give his executive team a brief on his plans, and they were looking to see their newly hired leader shine. It wasn't the forum for a seller to take point. But it was a perfect chance to enable Tom's message.

So we wrote up his narrative together. Illustrating how acquiring early-stage companies (with our product's help) was a long-term play to expand their market. Something that would pay off dearly in a few years, after they went public. And around the time growth from their core products would cool down.

My cell phone rang. It was Tom.

"Tom, what just happened?" I asked, still in a slight state of shock.

"What do you mean? We're good to go!" he said, his voice rising with excitement.

"Well, yeah! But how? I mean, we talked about vacation plans. Then, the next thing I know, we're wrapping up. What'd you say to her before this?"

"Remember that brief I presented to her? The one we worked on? So, in my last one-on-one, I accidentally had a few old versions left open. She saw all the back-and-forth, our comments, and she thought 'Nate' was someone on our team. She just hadn't met you yet. So, she asked me who you reported to."

"When I explained you weren't an employee here, she was surprised. And since she'd just heard my ELT [executive leadership team] presentation, it clicked when I explained what you do. She was in."

"Just like that?" I asked.

"Just like that," he said.

Your New Sales Job Description

In a letter to Amazon shareholders, Jeff Bezos wrote:

> *We don't do PowerPoint presentations at Amazon. Instead, we write narratively structured memos... The great memos are written and re-written, shared with colleagues who are asked to improve the work, set aside for a couple of days, and then edited again with a fresh mind. They simply can't be done in a day or two.*

This idea has shaped how I view the jobs of sellers and buyers more than any book, training, or mentor. What the Space Cowboy said here is deeply profound.

Weird, I know. What do Amazon's internal communications have to do with B2B sales?

At the risk of overstating it, everything. You see, B2B sales is internal communication.

It's the process of finding and framing a problem. Then, aligning, on average, a dozen different people with conflicting opinions about the right way to solve that problem.

There are two wildly important takeaways for sellers developing complex deals here.

The first is that sales reps are rarely in the room for moments that create and kill deals. Debates and decisions between a company's leadership, about their problems and level of priority, generally happen during internal meetings—not sales meetings.

The second is that internal meetings, when effective, are the result of clear thinking outlined in a structured and compelling narrative. That's why an Amazon memo can't be created in a day.

This, at a fundamental level, should shift how you think about your job as a B2B seller.

Most people believe a seller's job is to pitch and close deals. But this view is dated.

Effective sales reps don't sell *to* buyers. They sell *with* them. They influence their buyer's thinking about the problem. They enable them to deliver a clear, compelling narrative that gets their team aligned on what to do next.

Which means sales reps don't close deals. Buyers do.

Buyers have always been at the center of making a sale happen, because a solution is far more than just a product. A solution is the sum of all the problem discovery, consensus building, onboarding, and adoption of a product. A solution, therefore, can't exist without the buyer. Remove the buyer and you're left with a product. But take a motivated buyer and you can, in fact, remove the seller and get a deal done.

The job of a seller, then, is to enable their buyer.

To help them move from where they are (a problem) to where they want to go (a payoff).

Selling With, Not To

You have a number. A target. A quota. To hit it, you need to shape the outcome of every deal in your pipeline. Which makes earning a seat at the proverbial "table" key.

If you're sitting at the table, then you can influence the decision. So, how do you earn your seat? And if an internal meeting happens without you there, can you still shape the outcome?

In short, yes.

You do this by creating and enabling champions—contacts who are fluent in the narrative you've developed throughout the sales cycle. Someone who knows the words their team and executives will resonate with.

Let me paint you a quick word picture to illustrate this shift.

The ancient Greeks used to speak with something called the "middle voice." And this is exactly what the idea of selling *with* is all about. Here's the difference:

- Active voice: I'm selling you.
- Passive voice: I'm being sold by you.
- Middle voice: I'm selling with you.

See the difference? We typically talk about sales as either an active or a passive activity. Active if you're the rep. Passive if you're the buyer. But the ancient Greeks knew what's up. They knew there was a third posture. Sales can be something we do together. Kind of like turning your car while acting *with* your power steering. Which lets you change the direction of a large and heavy vehicle far more easily than you could without it.

We'll go deeper on the profile of a champion. How to create them, test them, sell *with* them. But for a minute, hear this:

Your job is to create and enable committed champions for every deal in your pipeline.

Champions are the real definition of "inside sales reps." And just like every sales rep, they need to be enabled. With a strong message plus the coaching and content to clearly share that message. In this way, the enterprise seller's job looks more like "an enablement team of one."

How to successfully embrace this job description, to land larger deals at a faster and higher rate, is what the rest of this book is about.

If you're with me so far, you're ready to shift to *Buyer Enablement.*

It's an exciting shift because it's how you'll overcome your number one pipeline killer: "Lost to no decision." In some cases, a competitor will steal the deal. In most cases, deals stall for lack of urgency and loss of momentum. The buying team wasn't aligned on the problem or its level of priority.

Buyer Enablement changes this in complex sales.

Keys to Creating Committed Champions

Hopefully, you're thinking differently about your job now. Next, we need to talk about your champion's job. We'll be talking about champions quite a bit, so let's define who, exactly, these "champions" are.

Champions create alignment and accountability within a buying committee.

More sales teams are pushing further upmarket. Leadership is looking to see larger contracts. But the biggest difference you'll find when you start selling to the enterprise isn't the size of the contract. It's the number of contacts. Buying circles expand from two, to 10, to 20, or more. Champions help you align them all, while keeping everyone accountable.

They're the glue between three different sets of contacts in a deal:

1. Daily users. The people interacting with your software or service day to day.

2. Key stakeholders. These are contacts like SLIP (security, legal, IT, procurement) that you need to work with before closing a deal.

3. Decision-maker(s). There can be multiple, but this is essentially the person whose budget is paying the bill. They're signing off on your contract.

If you only have two out of three types of contacts on board, you've lost the deal.

For example, you can have direct users and stakeholders bought in but no budget signoff. Or, you've secured a budget without any blockers from other stakeholders, but the daily users prefer a competitor. And so on.

A champion can be part of any of these groups, but they'll always have these three traits:

1. Incentive. There's a personal connection or reward that ties them to your deal. There's something in it for them, motivating them to help get the deal done.

2. Influence. They're in a position to do something about the problem. They know how to leverage titles and relationships as well as their own social capital to move things forward.

3. Information. They can lay out the treasure map. They're able to help you shortcut the path and avoid pitfalls with hard-to-find deal intelligence.

If your contact has influence and information, but no incentive, they're an influencer, not a champion. They're a coach if they have incentive and information but can't influence the outcome of the deal.

Of course, influence comes in varying degrees. It's not that some have it and others don't. It's a spectrum that will rise and fall based on someone's "believability." Which acts as a discount rate to a champion's level of influence.

For sake of example, let's say one champion's believability is as high as 90%. They:

- Were personally recruited by an executive after working with them in the past.

- Exude confidence and everyone looks to them in group settings.

- Successfully led a similar project from start to finish.

Now, let's say another contact's believability drops as low as 20% because they're:

- Seen as flaky and rarely follow through.
- Prone to exaggerate the facts to get their way.
- Responsible for a past trainwreck of a project.

That second contact can't be a champion. Their internal reputation, lack of social capital, and low believability means they hold little to no influence.

You may not write down percentage-based believability scores for the people you work with. But it's still part of an implicit mental process. It's a filter we all run other people's words through. Which is why I find the decision-making structure of one of the world's largest hedge funds so fascinating.

Bridgewater Capital turned this mental model into an explicit program. Here's how their founder, Ray Dalio, describes this:

> *The most believable opinions are those of people who 1) have repeatedly and successfully accomplished the thing in question, and 2) have demonstrated that they can logically explain the cause-effect relationships behind their conclusions …*
>
> *But for this to be the case, the criteria for establishing believability must be objective and trusted by everybody. At Bridgewater everyone's believability is tracked and measured systematically, using tools such as Baseball Cards and the Dot Collector that actively record and weigh their experience and track records. In*

> *meetings we regularly take votes about various issues via our Dot Collector app, which displays both the equal-weighted average and the believability-weighted results (along with each person's vote) ...*
>
> *Regardless of whether or not you use this kind of technology and structured process for believability weighting, the most important thing is that you get the concept.*

The big idea? Not all champions are created equal. Some contacts aren't champions at all.

Related, just like there's a difference between potential and kinetic energy, a contact with the *profile* of a champion only becomes a champion after converting their influence into forward progress. That's why true champions are defined by their *behavior*. They volunteer to move a piece of your deal forward in between meetings—and actually follow through. They challenge the status quo. They ask hard questions. They push back on how things have "always been done."

Now, let's say it seems like you've created a committed champion. They're advocating for you with their team. But then, the deal fizzles out. Thing is, their biggest problem likely wasn't their boss's biggest problem—or their company's.

That's why effective champions also consider their leadership's goals. Why their own pains may not be the company's priority. And they adjust their message accordingly, so it resonates.

This point is key because every complex deal happens on two different levels.

Brett Queener, investor and former Salesforce executive, phrased it to me this way. You only have a legitimate opportunity when you can answer these two questions while working with your champion:

1. What happens to this contact if they don't buy my solution?

2. What happens to this company if they don't buy my solution?

I like this framing. Because implicit in the question is a problem—active loss that needs to be addressed. Along with the different "closes" you'll make in the Buyer Enablement approach:

1. First, you close your champion(s).
2. Second, you close the contract with them.

Now, champions have day jobs. It's easy for them to see time spent with you, the seller, as time not spent on their own goals. So, if you don't clearly align the buying process with a set of personal metrics, incentives, and career goals (A promotion? More earnings? Less stress?) that matter to the champion, they'll wonder, "What's in it for me?" This is when deals stall.

You get stood up. "Ghosted," as the kids say.

No Champion, No Deal

Developers are painfully aware of a concept called *tech debt*. This is when you shortcut the process of building a solid product foundation, then pay for it over time. This happens in sales too. But most sellers are unaware of "deal debt." They pay dearly for it as a result.

Deal debt is the cost of overinvesting in dead-end deals. Its effect is twofold:

1. Feeding low-potential deals your energy and creativity.

2. Starving high-potential deals of that energy and creativity.

This compounds over time.

It's why "No champion, no deal" is a mantra buyer enablers live by. They know it's next to impossible to align a dozen contacts, each with their own set of competing priorities and busy schedules, without a solid champion. And often, multiple champions.

So how do you know if your contact is a true champion?

You test them.

Here are a few different tests you can use. The fun thing about each test is, when done well, it adds to the relationship. It creates a new level of commitment in a sort of self-reinforcing create-test loop.

First, change the channel.

Close a conversation by asking, "Would you mind if I shoot you a quick text if I hit a question before our next call? Also happy to set up a Slack Connect channel if it's easier?"

The idea is that as you move into increasingly personal and private communication channels, you're taking the relationship deeper. And it should go without saying, changing the channel means bringing an extra level of thoughtfulness to your communication.

Second, ask champions to lay out their buying process.

Prospects want to buy how their organizations buy, not how you sell. If a champion has led the buying process in the past, they should be able to detail everything from decision criteria, key players to involve, and steps unique to their approvals process.

A committed champion won't hesitate to lay out the treasure map for you. Someone who's on the fence will hold that information close to the vest.

Third, assign them action items.

We're all busy. But we always make time for what's most important to us. Assign your champion an action item to figure out where on their priority list you fall.

The best kind of action item is one that "adds value" to the process and gives you a clear, black-or-white measure of whether or not they followed through. Examples are calling a customer reference, sharing data for your business case, or adding comments to an internal memo (more on this later).

Fourth, train them.

Your champion will, no doubt, be involved in conversations about you, without you. So, flip the script and ask them to share how they'll communicate your offering during an internal meeting. Ask them to share their true, unfiltered opinions.

If your champion is willing to listen to feedback, to be ready for questions or objections about your value, you know you've built a solid champion.

Life Inside the Enterprise

Ask someone who's never worked on a complex deal, "What's the big difference when you move upmarket?" and they'll say it's the contract size. Six-, seven-, eight-figure deals. That's why the sales cycle slows down.

Ask a seasoned enterprise rep, and they'll say something different—the number of contacts, not the contract value, creates complexity, which extends the sales cycle. They're right about that. There's much more to unpack here, however.

This means selling enterprise is a completely different ballgame. In this chapter, you're about to leave the world of B2B sales and step into B2E sales (business-to-enterprise).

Life inside the enterprise is full of frustrating realities you might not expect if you haven't been on the buying side of a large purchase, or worked inside a large enterprise. Understanding what's happening behind the scenes will help you empathize with your champions, more tactfully troubleshoot stalled deals, and avoid last-minute surprises.

Dee Hock, the founder of Visa, has the perfect story to setup this topic for us. I'm adding a long quote from his book *One from Many*, but it's worth reading.

For context, Dee had just started a new job inside a large financial services company. A man named Mr. Brown tells Dee that visitors can't find their senior executives' offices, so they need him to put up some new signs.

When Dee tells his mentor Simmons about his new task, here's what unfolds:

Back in the office shared with Simmons, I asked for the name of sign companies with whom we customarily dealt.

"How do you intend to handle it?" he asked.

"Call a sign company, see what's available… and have it installed," I replied. His hands went up in mock horror as he came down hard on every other word. "That will never do. You've been assigned a project. It will already be in the department project control log, flagged as important because it involves senior executives. Important projects always take time."

"Yeah, sure, Dick, funny, funny," I replied, reaching for the telephone.

His hand closed over mine. "Am I not responsible for your indoctrination? Trust me. This will be fun, and you'll learn something as well." At lunch he explained.

"What you don't understand is that in companies like this, procedure is more important than purpose, and method more important than results." He carefully went over a list of officers, deciding on those who would be most likely to have an opinion on signs, and how to make an innocuous approach.

During the weeks to follow I received a fascinating education about both human nature and the nature of organizations. Bored to death and disillusioned with the company, one of the most intelligent people I had ever met casually extracted opinions about "the sign problem" from various officers, each opinion different and duly admired by him. I listened as he told Brown about "the sign problem" and aroused concern that no one "upstairs" be offended by what we did. He obtained diverse sketches, samples, and

> *prices from suppliers, exposing them to officers in idle moments to elicit conflicting opinion and avoid decision. Brown's inquiries were skillfully turned aside with allusions to things "going well," or "about wrapped up," then digression to other subjects.*
>
> *Fascinated, I watched as he manipulated situation after situation. He suggested a story for the company magazine about executive secretaries, causing a muddle of childish maneuvers by middle managers over who would be identified as "executive" by inclusion of their secretary and who insulted by exclusion. He organized a move to new quarters and induced months of bickering over allocation of space, layouts, furnishings, and windows. Not once was a lie told or a person misled. Simmons had more integrity and skill than that. He simply left murky minds unclarified and petty minds free to fuss.*

It's a hilarious story… because it's not happening inside one of your deals.

Or is it?

It happens more often than you'd think. And the "sign problem," or artificial drama, is just the first of many enterprise realities hiding behind closed doors. The next is called the Handshake Overhead.

As a company scales, the volume of internal communications and approvals needed compounds. It grows far faster than headcount. Seth Godin describes this reality by saying:

> *Handshake overhead is the result of the simple law of more people: n*(n – 1)/2. Two people need one handshake to be introduced. On the other hand, 10 people need 45 handshakes. More people involves more meetings, more approvals, more coordination.*

Did you catch that? When selling to a small business, there's usually one handshake involved. That number jumps to 45 (at least) for a single enterprise deal. Which absolutely kills deal momentum.

A group of UCLA professors ran a fascinating experiment that shows why. They gave two teams a stack of LEGO bricks and asked them to build a specific structure. The first team had two people. The second team had four people. The first team finished the task in 36 minutes. But the larger team needed 56 minutes to build that exact same structure. They needed more time, coordination, and communication to get everybody aligned (Morgan).

Now, if you take this concept and multiply the Handshake Overhead for a single deal by the number of active deals in your pipeline, then you can see just how many communication points you're managing:

# Communication Points / Pipeline		# Contacts in the Buying Committee					
		11	13	15	17	19	21
# Active Deals in Pipeline	11	605	858	1,155	1,496	1,881	2,310
	13	715	1,014	1,365	1,768	2,223	2,730
	15	825	1,170	1,575	2,040	2,565	3,150
	17	935	1,326	1,785	2,312	2,907	3,570
	19	1,045	1,482	1,995	2,584	3,249	3,990
	21	1,155	1,638	2,205	2,856	3,591	4,410

This, in large part, is why Buyer Enablement is so effective when applied to a complex deal. Influencing how a company communicates internally—by selling with champions—lets you stay on top of questions like:

1. Do I know how many people are truly involved in approving this deal?

2. What percent of those 45-plus handshakes have I influenced?

3. What handshakes still need to happen before closing?

Which brings us to the next enterprise reality: endless meetings are a feature, not a bug.

Large companies have a lot of meetings. A LOT of meetings. It's a corporate ritual that takes some getting used to, but there's a purpose to this. It's not always the meeting itself that's valuable. It's the calendar invite that's acting as a forcing mechanism.

Meetings are like corporate deadlines. They're a way of pushing for feedback, decisions, and executing on certain tasks.

This is important because by default, buyers get noncommittal feedback when presenting new project ideas. Their team's not ready to move forward with exploring the project further, but they haven't said no, either.

So, when it feels like you don't know where you stand in the sales cycle, here's the thing. Your buyers likely don't know, either. To find out, they'll likely book another internal meeting to discuss next steps and force more feedback.

You can see how extra weeks in the sales cycle start creeping up on you. Like a couple of extra pounds during the holidays.

Now, even if your very first contact happens to be the decision-maker, it'll cost them relational capital to unilaterally make your deal happen. Which means they'll always opt to bring other colleagues into the picture—each with their own schedule and priorities.

Enter the game of Calendar Tetris. This is where your contact tries to line up a 30-minute call with eight different people who have packed schedules in multiple time zones.

The bright side is if you're booking a follow-up early in the sales cycle and get a date three weeks in the future, don't worry. This doesn't always mean the buying team isn't interested. The most likely explanation is they simply couldn't

find a time that was available sooner and are working to complete their corporate ritual (trust but verify here, of course).

There's a related twist to life in the enterprise that's at play here, too. It's what drives the noncommittal feedback and the need to involve so many others.

An extreme allergy to failure.

A $10 million loss that's caused by someone's (failed) action is far, far worse than a $10 million loss that's created by the way it's always been done.

It's not inaccurate to say enterprise employees view the first scenario like a $100 million loss. Which means that long-standing employees internalize the art of avoiding failure over pushing new projects forward. If startups say "fail forward" and "learn fast and break stuff," enterprise employees say, "stay in your lane," "don't fail," and "we'll remember if you do."

One big reason for this is, straight up, large companies will *never* have the sense of urgency you do. Corporate environments are highly structured and operate in annual planning cycles. Not the monthly—or even weekly—sprints sellers hold themselves to.

What's more, your buyer's personal financial situation is rarely linked to your particular deal. So, the importance of any one sales meeting is diluted to them. By contrast, you may only be working a handful of large deals or named accounts at any given time, so each one becomes immensely more valuable to you.

All of that said, long-standing employees can become incredible allies. They'll know how to navigate your deal through backchannels and closed-door conversations. They often carry a high level of informal decision-making clout, too. So don't just target new hires, thinking you'll find those who haven't sipped too much of the corporate Kool-Aid yet.

Speak of decision-making clout… titles.

Titles are a big deal in the enterprise. It's how power is bestowed and deployed. Now, obviously, a senior vice president holds more power than a manager. But there's a connection back to this failure allergy.

There's safety in a senior title presenting your project first. If they introduce your concept to the committee, everyone else's defenses drop a few levels. Because one of the safest things to do in the enterprise is execute the direction you're given.

Neil Soni describes this idea in his book *The Startup Gold Mine* by saying:

> *Titles are crucial when it comes to evaluating the "quality" of ideas and proposals. Ideas are never independent of their messenger, and this couldn't be truer in a corporate environment. An idea suggested by an entry-level analyst could be ridiculed as "outlandish" and "silly Millennial talk"; but when shared by an SVP, the very same idea becomes "visionary" and "disruptive." So goes human nature.*

This, in turn, introduces another enterprise reality: bottlenecks.

The wait to get a new project approved can be unbearable. Even if the request is coming from within the organization and the same email domain—let alone initiated by an external sales rep. Here's how bad it gets.

When I brought up this idea to an executive vice president of a Fortune 200, she laughed and recounted the perfect story:

> *I like to think I'm on top of requests. But I once had such a long backlog of approvals and budget meetings that a man followed me into the women's washroom, continuing to pitch me on a project. He was relentless. And to be honest, he needed to be. I just don't have the time to review everything I'm given. And I never will.*

It's the perfect story because it tees up two more corporate concepts you need to know.

Executives only have so much time in a week and a heckuva lot to oversee. So, they keep a tight filter on what they do and don't pay attention to.

The first filter they use is The Law of Large Numbers. The classic error when messaging a new project to an executive is focusing on your revenue impact. If you can create a guaranteed $10 million in new revenue, that sounds good, right? Can anyone turn down $10 million?

They can—and they do all the time. Ten million dollars doesn't even qualify as a rounding error for someone like Apple. With roughly $365 billion in revenue, $10 million is 0.000027% of that.

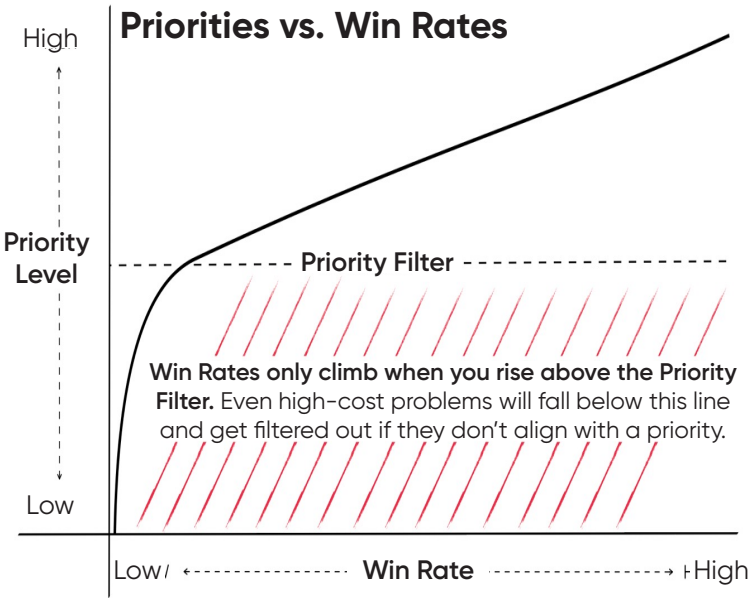
On the flip side, financial planning software may sound pretty boring. It's helpful but not groundbreaking. Yet, if you're a real estate company spending $10 billion on capital projects each year, reducing waste by 1% drives $100 million in new value.

Reid Hoffman, of LinkedIn fame, describes the second filter executives use: choosing which fires to let burn. Priorities, in other words. He says in *Blitzscaling:*

> *Most of us are willing to fight fires; it's a smaller subset of people who are capable of noting the presence of a roaring blaze that might soon cut off all escape routes without allowing it to distract them from their laser-focused effort to fight an even more urgent fire.*

Did you catch that? Putting out a fire isn't enough. Solving a genuine problem, with real costs, isn't enough to grab attention in the enterprise.

So, I think it's fair to define things this way:



- Priorities (plural) are mental filters. The brain's equivalent to email spam filters.

- A priority (singular) is something specific that executives are already sold on and actively subordinating other important topics to.

Which means issues only become problems when they're standing in the way of a priority. Otherwise, they're just distractions. Not true problems.

Make a mental note of this idea. We'll dive deeper on this concept in later chapters about selling to executives and crafting narratives.

But for now, we'll tie it into a final enterprise concept that serves as a wrapper around everything in this chapter. An enterprise deal will be one of three things to a buyer:

1. The meeting
2. In the meeting
3. After the meeting

In that order of priority. Here's a breakdown of what this means.

If your deal is "the meeting," you're the priority. You're addressing a fire that's burning so hot, you've got the executive's attention. The enterprise's fear of failure pales in comparison to the bright light of the flames, so the buying team made you the entirety of the meeting agenda.

However, if you say to a buyer, "I was thinking it'd be helpful to get the group's input; would it be worth calling a meeting for everyone to weigh in?" and they hedge on their response, you're not *the* meeting. It's more likely that you're solving a problem for a smaller set of contacts—but not the company.

Instead, you might be "in the meeting." Here, you've aligned with a priority that makes it to the agenda. Which is okay, by the way. It's where most enterprise deals fall after you scoop out highly strategic, transformational deals.

But beware when you hear, "Oh sorry, we ran out of time last meeting, but I'm hoping we'll get to it next week." This is when your deal is a thought raised in passing *after* the meeting.

Kyle Asay, a friend and RVP of sales, recently commented on this idea to me:

> *Reps would be terrified if they knew how many of their deals died with a 20-second conversation at the end of a 1:1 between their contact and their boss. Like:*
>
> *"Hey, so I'm looking at this..."*
>
> *"Not a priority right now; let's look at it in six months."*
>
> *"Okay."*

This type of after-the-meeting exchange is the difference between *project* risk and *product* risk. In a complex sale, the

first risk is that no project is prioritized. So your product is never even evaluated.

Which is where we'll pick up in Part 2: Designing the Buyer's Journey.

Part 2

Designing the Buyer's Journey