

# **How to successfully present a solution in a B2B sales meeting**

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<p>This thesis contains research on presenting a solution in a B2B (business-to-business) sales meeting. This thesis is planned to complement the existing course material in the solution selling course at HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences' Degree Programme in Sales.</p> <p>The objective of this thesis was to create a handbook to students about how to successfully present a solution in a B2B sales meeting. This is the main research question. The secondary research questions are: (1) how to prepare for proposing a solution, (2) how to tell or show the solution to the prospect, and (3) what will not work in presenting a solution and why. The author used a qualitative research method. She collected her data from eight similar sales situations in which salespersons presented a solution to the prospects.</p> <p>The author collected literature on a business-to-business sales process to provide the reader with background information about the subject. The results show that most situations proceeded with a similar outline. The salespersons talked with the prospect and continued the conversation to proposing a solution. The salespersons showed a solution via a PowerPoint presentation and told some details during the presentation. They continued to discuss the offer thoroughly in the negotiation that followed.</p> <p>The conclusions show that it is important to prepare for presenting a solution. One or maximally two salespersons should show the solution proposal and at least one salesperson should be seated at the table with the prospects. The PowerPoint presentation should be short and not include prices. The offer should be given to the prospects and be gone through together with the prospect one step at a time. The price should be discussed at the very end of the discussion to be sure of having solved all objections and uncertainties.</p> <p>The author started studying sales at HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences in fall 2011. The thesis was written during summer 2013.</p>	
<p><b>Keywords</b> Proposal, business-to-business-sales, salespersons, sales process, prospect</p>	

Myyntityön koulutusohjelma

<p><b>Tekijä</b> Mari Klemola</p>	<p><b>Aloitusvuosi</b> 2011</p>
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<p>Tämä opinnäytetyö sisältää tutkimuksen ratkaisun esittämisestä B2B - myyntineuvottelussa (yritystenvälisen kaupankäynnin myyntineuvottelussa). Opinnäytetyö on suunniteltu täydentämään olemassa olevaa kurssiaineistoa ratkaisumyynnin kurssilla HAAGA-HELIA ammattikorkeakoulun Myyntityön koulutusohjelmassa.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli luoda käsikirja opiskelijoille aiheesta kuinka esittää ratkaisu menestyksekkäästi yritystenvälisen kaupankäynnin myyntineuvottelussa. Tämä on tutkimuksen ensisijainen tutkimuskysymys. Toissijaiset tutkimuskysymykset ovat: (1) kuinka valmistautua ratkaisun esittämiseen, (2) kuinka kertoa tai näyttää ratkaisu potentiaaliselle asiakkaalle, ja (3) mikä ei toimi esittäessä ratkaisua ja miksi. Opinnäytetyön kirjoittaja käytti kvalitatiivista eli laadullista tutkimusmenetelmää. Kirjoittaja kokosi aineistonsa kahdeksasta samantapaisesta myyntitilanteesta, jossa myyjä esitti ratkaisun potentiaaliselle asiakkaalle.</p> <p>Työn kirjoittaja kokosi kirjallisuutta yritysten välisen kaupankäynnin myyntiprosesseista tarjotakseen lukijalle taustatietoa aiheesta. Tulosten mukaan useimmat tilanteet etenivät yhteneväisesti. Myyjät puhuivat prospektien kanssa ja jatkoivat keskustelua ratkaisun ehdottamiseen. Myyjät näyttivät ratkaisun PowerPoint -esityksellä ja kertoivat muutamia yksityiskohtia esityksen aikana. He jatkoivat tarkempaa keskustelua tarjouksesta neuvottelupöydässä.</p> <p>Johtopäätökset näyttävät, että on tärkeää valmistautua ratkaisun esittämiseen. Yhden tai enintään kahden myyjän tulisi näyttää ratkaisuehdotus ja ainakin yhden myyjän tulisi istua pöydässä potentiaalisen asiakkaan kanssa. PowerPoint -esityksen tulisi olla lyhyt ja se ei saisi sisältää hintoja. Tarjous tulisi antaa prospektille ja se tulisi käydä yhdessä läpi prospektin kanssa yksi kohta kerrallaan. Hinnasta tulisi keskustella vasta aivan viimeisenä, jotta kaikki vastaväitteet ja epävarmuudet olisi jo ratkaistu.</p> <p>Tämän opinnäytetyön kirjoittaja aloitti myyntityön opiskelut HAAGA-HELIA ammattikorkeakoulussa syksyllä 2011. Tämä opinnäyte tehtiin kesällä 2013.</p>	
<p><b>Asiasanat</b> Ratkaisut, yritysmyynti, myyntiedustajat, liiketoimintaprosessit, yritysasiakkaat</p>	

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis is written around a relevant topic in today's business market in which sales-figures affect the future of a company. The focus in this thesis is on a regular client contact situation in which a salesperson proposes a solution to the prospect at a business-to-business sales situation. The business-to-business term will be later referred also as B2B. Salesperson in this context is a person who works in a B2B company with sales and creates solutions for prospects, who are potential customers. This thesis is a guideline for everyone working in a business-to-business sales situation regardless of the industry or the size of the company one works at.

## 1.1 Background

Previous publications have focused on literature about the topic widely. This thesis' research brings new knowledge to the academic world because proposing and presenting a solution in a B2B sales meeting has not been widely researched yet. No earlier publications have focused entirely on proposing a solution in a B2B sales meeting.

The author chose to research the topic with guidance of her sales teacher Mrs. Harkki. Mrs. Harkki teaches a course focusing on solution selling at HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences' Bachelor's Degree Programme in Sales. The solution selling course is aimed at second year sales students at HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences (later referred to as HAAGA-HELIA). Mrs. Harkki suggested the topic for this thesis to complement the solution selling course's education material in the areas of learning the sales process' stages and managing the solution proposing strategies.

HAAGA-HELIA prepares professionals in Finland for business and services (HAAGA-HELIA, 2012a). The Bachelor's Degree Programme in Sales educates students for demanding personal sales, especially in B2B selling (HAAGA-HELIA, 2012b). The solution selling course, taught by Mrs. Harkki, prepares students for a practical B2B sales process, different selling situations as well as skills in negotiation.

The course takes place in the second year of studies at the fourth semester. (HAAGA-HELIA, 2012c.) The author has not participated in the course yet. This means this thesis is written with an objective perspective.

However the author has previous working experience from a B2B selling company during work placement. She has studied sales for a few years so her knowledge on this subject is not lacking any information gaps. The relevance of the authors work excited her to learn more on what literature tells about solution proposing. The author collected the data for the research from Mrs. Harkki's course. The author analyzed the data of her fellow classmates who presented how the proposing of a solution is done by professionals on a figurative scenario.

The subchapters chosen to this thesis are based on what the author has learnt from her studies. The literature confirms their existence. The author has taken advantage of her experiences in a B2B sales market and being a salesperson to complement the literature chosen.

The key words in this thesis are proposal, business-to-business-sales, salespersons, sales process and prospects. These words best describe the content of this thesis. These are defined within the work.

## **1.2 Research objective**

This thesis's primary objective is that salespeople understand the sales process and the buyer's decision-making-process in order to succeed in presenting a solution in a B2B sales meeting. A process includes all the steps within beginning something to ending it. The research's aim is to present ways on how salespersons can successfully present a solution in a B2B sales meeting.

The target company for whom this thesis is prepared for is HAAGA-HELIA. This research paper is meant to be used to complement the solution selling course material that already exists in HAAGA-HELIA's Bachelor's Degree Programme in Sales. The

knowledge of this thesis can also be used widely within sales people's trainings for them to learn effective ways on proposing solutions on a B2B context.

The author researched methods on solution proposing. She used student's performances of a sales situation as her data for the research. The students who take the mandatory course of solution selling in the Bachelor's Degree Programme in Sales can use this research as a helping tool and as a guideline to make them professionals in their field.

### **1.3 Research topic**

The research topic is how to successfully present a solution in a B2B sales meeting. This is the main question in this thesis. The author wanted to define the work to handle business meetings, especially B2B sales meetings. The author researched three secondary research questions on the topic. They are questions which need to be answered in order for the main question to be solved. The secondary research questions are: (1) how to prepare for proposing a solution, (2) how to tell or show the solution to the prospect, and (3) what will not work in presenting a solution and why.

The research was executed by using international sources on the literature of the subject. This included literature of the selling and buying process written by pioneers such as Chitwood (2005), Jobber & Lancaster (2012) and Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004). The author of this thesis then referred the literature to eight fictional sales situations that the students of Mrs. Harkki's class presented on the solution selling course as their course exam. The sales meetings were videotaped and used as the data for this thesis.

The subject of the thesis is important and current for solution selling is a theme HAAGA-HELIA's Bachelor's Degree Programme in Sales teaches. This helps the students to be prepared in meeting future challenges correctly in the real business market. The ways that are discussed in the literature review section regarding how to successfully present a solution in a sales meeting will help the students to practice their own ability on presenting a solution to a prospect or customer.



## 1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis follows the thesis structure advised by HAAGA-HELIA. The thesis is structured so that a literature review (main chapter 2) shows what is already known in the academic world about a sales process as well as solution selling in a B2B sales meeting. The literature review section focuses on both the salesperson's and buyer's perspective in a B2B sales meeting. The first subchapter is about the business-to-business sales process. The reader receives information of the prospect's buying and decision-making process too. After this the literature review continues to literature reviews on how to successfully propose a solution in a B2B sales meeting. The literature is summarized in subchapter 2.3. The theoretical framework.

The third main chapter, the empirical part of this thesis, concentrates on the chosen method for the data collection and later processing the data. A qualitative research method, videotaping, was used to prevent relevant information to be missing when analyzing the results. After the empirical section the thesis continues to revealing the findings of the data.

The results, main chapter 4, are presented using the research questions which were stated under topic 1.3. Research topic. After the results the author continues her work to interpreting her findings in main chapter 5. Discussion. The thesis ends with suggestions for further research and a conclusion of the study in main chapter 6. Summary and conclusions. Bibliography is presented at the end of this thesis.

## 2 Literature review

This literature review contains an in-depth review about the B2B sales process, B2B buying- and decision-making process, and solution proposing. This section will reflect on theories from both the salesperson's and prospect's view. This helps salespersons understand the buying and selling process thoroughly in order to be able to propose an effective solution for the prospect. To meet the goal of this thesis the author has chosen the way salespeople handle the sales process and the client relationship to be also reviewed (Weitz et al. 2009, 10).

The B2B market is a place where businesses sell products, goods, and services to other businesses. They buy for the company's purpose, not theirs (Solomon, Marshall, Stuart, Barnes & Mitchell 2013, 193). Other companies use these products to produce goods or services to sell to their customers. There are also non-profit institutions, such as schools, hospitals and museums, which usually operate in the B2B market (Solomon et al. 2013, 200). This means the buyers are powerful - they buy with organizational objectives and the buyers are skilled, professional buyers (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 11).

To reach the goal of this thesis the author chose the perspective of the buyer to be handled within the sales process. Weitz (2009, 4) specifies that B2B sales are all about the buyer: what do they need, what can a salesperson offer them, how can a salesperson satisfy the needs so that the relationship is long-term. This means that it's not all about getting an order or making a sale (Weitz 2009, 4).

In order to be able to sell effectively a salesperson should understand the buying process as well as the buying decision process shown in Figure 1 (Gazing 2013a; Vitale et al. 2011, 58). The buyer should be seen as a person whom a salesperson serves, rather than a prospect which a salesperson sells to (Manning, Reese, Ahearne 2010, 10).



Figure 1. Sales process with buying process by Kairisto-Mertanen (2003, 42)

Buyers are people who are in one way or the other involved in the purchase decision. These people are in the buying center of the company. The buying center consists of individuals who have a say in the purchase decisions and they determine what the organization needs. (Vitale et al 2011, 56; Weitz et al. 2009, 97.) The buying process might involve many different people. This means that when a salesperson has talked with everyone who has a say in the purchase, it is the time to present the solution.

## 2.1 The B2B sales process

In order to reach the goal of successfully presenting a solution in a B2B sales meeting a salesperson needs to handle each step of the way of a sales process: from the very beginning of discovering a lead, to building long-lasting mutually beneficial business relationships. The aim of this subchapter is to guide a salesperson through a successful B2B sales process by reflecting it to literature. A process includes all the steps within beginning something to ending it. Figure 2. presents two similar sales processes.

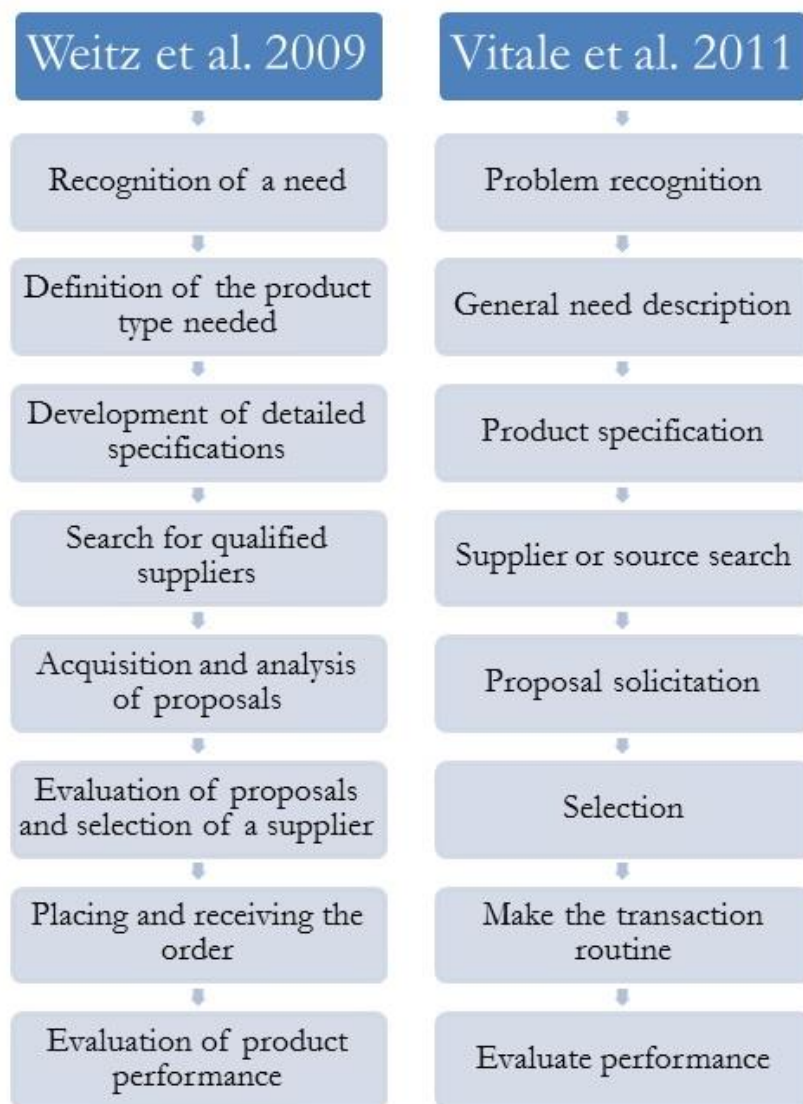


Figure 2. Similar buying process by Weitz et al. 2009 and Vitale at al. 2011

Success in business requires building long-term mutually beneficial business relationships and letting non-profitable relationships dissolve. This requires trust, people skills, successful selling and the salesperson being customer oriented (Weitz et al. 2009, 39-41). Chitwood (2005, 6) advises that a salesperson must treat their prospects and customers so well through-out the sales process, that the salesperson can develop a respectful long-term business-relationship with the prospect or customer. To show respect the salesperson should listen and not interrupt when the prospect tells an objection (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 282).

Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 269) refer B2B sales as adaptive selling and, to Saxe and Weitz's customer oriented selling from the year 1982. A B2B sale can be seen as

adaptive selling because the salesperson adapts their behavior and sales message to each situation (Ingram et al. 2006, 389; Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 269). Customer oriented selling means the salesperson helps the customer make a purchase decision which satisfies the needs (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 269). This aspect of selling will be handled in this subchapter.

In solution sales the customer is the basis of all actions: the salesperson helps the customer to achieve both positive and measurable results (Eades, Touchstone & Sullivan 2005, 7). Figure 3. presents the prospect's buying process. The aim of a salesperson in a B2B sales meeting is to find out things that the prospect needs or wants and to offer a product to meet those needs (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 79). A prospect is a potential customer.



Figure 3. Similar buying processes by Solomon et al. 2013 and Vitale et al. 2011

The products sold by a B2B salesperson can be very different from those sold in supermarkets or at a store in a B2C (business-to-customer) market (Weitz et al. 2009, 90). Those products can be sold without a salesperson necessarily having to be there selling the product to the customer. In this situation the customer can make the buying

decision him- or herself. Despite this, both B2C and B2B sales share a common feature: someone or something gets the attention of the possible buyer. The prospect gets interested in the product and after that feels a desire to purchase it and then buys it. This is called AIDA: attention, interest, desire, action (Ingram, LaForge, Avila, Schwepker Jr & Williams 2006, 27; Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 82-84). The salesperson leads the prospect through mental states with AIDA (Ingram et al. 2006, 27). This thesis concentrates on a B2B sales situation and AIDA will be discussed through the sales process.

The customers are large buyers: the product must satisfy everyone involved in making the decision (Solomon et al, 2013, 194). This is why normally the sales process starts with the salesperson getting a prospect and contacting them by phone to arrange a meeting. At the sales meeting the salesperson collects information about the prospect's company and situation to see what its potential for a future client relationship is. The salesperson asks questions relating to his or her product to see what are the reasons the prospect needs it, and would buy it.

Now the salesperson tells about his or her company (if they have not discussed it before) and they start to discuss the product. The salesperson has then already found out the things they can offer to the prospect and its company. The salesperson can lighten the prospects mind on the benefits of having the product. A product can be defined a "service, idea or some combination of these that satisfies consumer or business customer needs through the exchange process" which includes "features, functions, benefits, and uses" (Solomon et al. 2012, 574). Service is explained to be a performance "exchanged from producer to user without ownership rights" (Solomon et al. 2013, 344).

The product or service cannot speak, thus the salesperson must make the prospect aware of an existing need and make the prospect want to buy it. The responsibility of the product's selling is within the salesperson. (Solomon 2013, 46.) When the prospect - like any other consumer - has recognized an existing problem, the search for

information to solve it, may begin (Solomon et al. 2013, 180). This is when the B2B buying process - or decision-making process begins.

Selling means the salesperson must persuade the prospect to buy. This means the prospect's thinking changes when they have accepted the salesperson's message. (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 80-81.) The process of accepting the salesperson's message usually enquires objections. The whole sales process will be reviewed by several sources next.

Swallow and Khan-Panni (2004, 85-92), Jobber and Lancaster (2012, 271) and Chitwood (2005, 108) all present their own view of a typical sales process in a B2B context as Figure 4. presents. The author used these sales processes to gather a part of her table of contents.

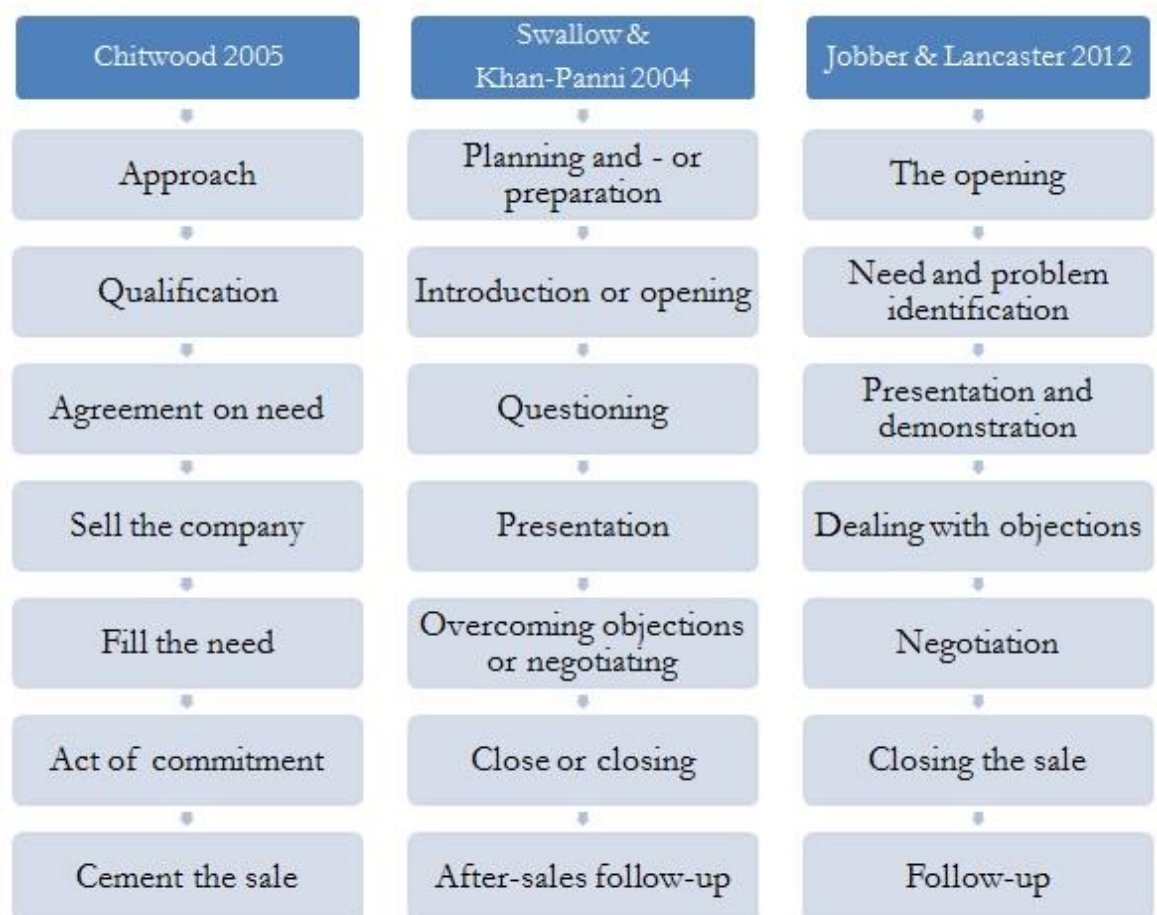


Figure 4. Sales process by different authors

### **2.1.1 Planning & Preparation**

The B2B sales process starts usually with the salesperson getting a lead, which is at this point only a name of a person, or their company and possibly a phone number.

Sometimes the lead is only a segment, in which the salesperson finds companies and then finds actual persons to contact (Solomon et al. 2013, 249).

Sometimes the sales process starts when a person contacts the salesperson's company. The prospect's interest to buy has come from a need which their company has pointed out. This might be a request from a department to the buyer to start looking for solutions. (Solomon et al. 2013, 206-207.) This is when the buying process has started within the prospects business (Weitz et al. 2009, 94). The salespersons still need to go through the sales process to ensure serving the prospect as well as possible. Usually a B2B sales meeting is arranged when salespersons choose and contact the leads and qualify them as prospects. The salesperson should prepare with a notebook or a piece of paper to be sure to write notes down when talking with the prospect.

Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg (2010, 8) state that it is simply good business to understand the prospect. This means the salesperson should qualify the lead to be sure they don't waste their - or the lead's time. The salesperson should prepare by reading the prospects company's news and get familiar with their core clients (Balac 2009, 126). The salesperson should always prepare for a meeting (Weitz et al. 2009, 199) especially if he or she is meeting foreign clients from different countries and cultures. Cultural differences, age, gender and background all affect the meetings process (Solomon et al. 2013, 165-174).

The prospect and the salesperson determine if they can trust the other person because people buy from people. (Chitwood 2005, 53; Solomon et al. 2013, 156; Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 86.) This is why sales is a people-business. This is because companies exist to satisfy prospect's and customer's needs. The market has usually competitors so the salesperson must create a good feeling. If the salesperson and prospect don't get along they cannot manage to have a good feeling about the



situation. The prospect then most likely buys from a competitor even if the product would have been better with the first salesperson. (Solomon et al. 2013, 156.)

Salespeople make long-term and short-term goals, which they work to achieve because goals are not wishes (Chitwood 2004, 325-327). The goal might be to access a specific business area, for example clothing, cleaning, IT or healthcare. The salesperson must constantly look for new opportunities to make leads (Sorensen 2010, 177). This is to ensure business later on.

A B2B buying situation involves a greater amount of time and effort to spend both from the prospect and salesperson (Solomon et al. 2013, 200). The business buyer buys in the interest of the company, not by their personal needs (Solomon et al. 2013, 196). The prospect uses greater amount of time when the purchase is important to them (Solomon et al. 2010, 327). The buyer also doesn't buy for the salesperson's reasons; they buy for their reasons (Chitwood 2005, 24). This means if the prospect wants to buy, the decision of buying does not need to be logical to the salesperson (Chitwood 2005, 304). This is why the prospect evaluates the purchase when learning about it.

The importance of a B2B salesperson preparing for the meeting with the right prospect or customer is significant. The prospect has a huge responsibility when meeting with a salesperson. The value of purchases is greater when selling and buying in the B2B market than in the B2C market. The business buyer in the B2B market may buy a purchase worth over a million euros, when in the same time, at the B2C market, a customer may buy one piece of candy worth 20 cents. (Solomon et al. 2013, 193.)

The right decision maker can be a municipality leader, a finance manager, a salesperson... anyone who has a say in the decision-making process (Solomon et al. 2013, 203). It is important to the salesperson to make background research on the person they are meeting. This is to be sure to meet the correct persons - the right decision makers - to save everyone's valuable time.

Salespersons should know and understand the value their product gives to the prospect: the meaning of what it is the prospect pays for. This requires a thorough

conversation that is not about the features, rather on the benefits and advantages of having it. (CPV consulting, 2013.)

### **2.1.2 Approach & Introduction**

The salesperson contacts the lead by phone to find out if they are a good candidate for making a sale. Phone is used because this way information can be shared quicker and follow-up questions can be made instantly. Sometimes e-mails may be sent because of time differences. E-mails can be used also if the correct person to answer the questions in an unfamiliar company is not known. It is crucial to keep the conversation short and articulate clearly when communicating via e-mail. This way the other person understands why the salesperson would like to meet him or her. At this stage the B2B salesperson tries to arrange a meeting; not to sell the product. (Certus sales 2013c; Weitz et al. 2009, 171.)

When it comes to building business relationships, e-mail is not the first choice. The most efficient way is to call the prospects. Phone transmits much more information than an e-mail and is more efficient because most e-mails from unfamiliar people are straightaway deleted. (Certus sales 2011b.) If the salesperson fears to be in contact with the prospect how will they ask for a deal, even if the prospect is ready to buy? (Vuorio 2011, 14). On the other hand a salesperson should not be too self-confident. A study, which Vuorio (2011, 16) refers to, shows that almost 85 % of salespeople think they are above average and this might harm the salespersons business because people want to be equal.

The salesperson should qualify the lead by looking for information on the lead's company and write down notes (Manning et al. 2010, 193). Before calling the lead, as well as meeting them, the salesperson must plan what to say. They must know the agenda and purpose for every call (Balac 2009, 126). This is because sales calls and meetings are not costless. The time spent to call and meet costs, so to do something without planning can be wasting money. (Rubanovitch & Aalto 2007, 54; Chitwood

2005, 48.) The goal of a sales call can be to open dialogue and book a meeting to discuss the subject more widely (Certus sales 2011d).

During the first telephone call the prospect makes up their mind on the salesperson's likeability factor. If the prospect doesn't feel trust or comfort towards the salesperson the prospect doesn't want to meet up or make business with them. (Marston 2011, 3.) During the call the salesperson must attract the prospects' attention to proceed into a dialogue. The prospect most probably then understands the benefit of meeting the salesperson. They agree on a meeting or find out something important to the process of them buying (Chitwood 2005, 45-49). In a sales call the salesperson can ask about the prospect's needs. Salespersons can also present solutions and manage anxieties during a telephone call (Gazing 2013b).

Now that the planning and preparation have been done it is time to approach the lead (Manning et al. 2010, 217.) Chitwood (2005, 37) suggests the call should proceed like this: introducing the speaker, qualifying the lead, understanding what the prospect needs or wants, telling about the company, helping the prospect understand the benefits and advantages of meeting the salesperson, asking for the meeting and lastly, thanking the prospect for their time. Now the lead has been qualified as a prospect: a potential customer (Weitz et al. 170-171). The salesperson should write notes on what the prospect says.

An enthusiastic salesperson tells about a product that gives better benefits to the prospect's business. This can be a new product in the market as well. (Solomon et al. 2013, 206-207.) The salesperson has brought up an existing problem to the prospect which makes them want to meet the salesperson (Solomon et al. 2013, 180).

This is the first step of AIDA (attention, interest, desire and action). AIDA will be discussed entirely within the sales process. (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 83.) The prospect is more willing to meet the salesperson when the contact cause and the feeling the prospect has about the salesperson is positive. The prospect then feels "He gets me" (Marston 2011, 3). When this happens the meeting can be arranged.

### 2.1.3 Beginning a B2B sales meeting

The salesperson must arrive early to the meeting to make a good impression. If the prospect doesn't show up, Weitz et al. (2009, 224-225) advise that the salesperson shouldn't wait for more than 15 minutes. This is because the salesperson's time is also valuable. Some exceptions are fine, for example when a salesperson has travelled a long way to meet the prospect.

Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 272) start the sales process here. They call this step the opening. In the beginning of a meeting the salesperson should wait to be seated and to confirm the usable time from the prospect (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 272). Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 272) emphasize the importance of good manners and to start the meeting with a smile, handshake and tell about the company if they have not met before. The author has learnt the salesperson should give their business card in the beginning. The salesperson should ask "Has anything changed?" referring to the phone call in which they agreed on meeting or the last meeting they had (Chitwood 2005, 141).

The salesperson should remember to have a conversation with the prospect, not only talk to them (Vuorio 2011, 20-21). A good first impression is vital to get a meeting with the prospect. The first impression is about the salesperson, not about the product, because the salesperson is the one selling. (Chitwood 2005, 16.)

The customer's role in the company which he or she is representing in the meeting must also be taken into consideration. This is because that also impacts the decision he or she makes of the solution the salesperson proposes. (Solomon et al. 2010, 62.)

Roune & Joki-Korpela (2008, 222) inform that most often the prospect has other persons with them meeting the salesperson(s). They usually are the ones who have the responsibility of the purchases and they enter the buying process when discussing the offer and contract (Roune & Joki-Korpela 2008, 222). The salesperson must know all the names and responsibilities of those whom will be involved in the buying decision

(Weitz et al. 2009, 97). The users of the product usually have an influence on the buying decision, but they don't make the final decision (Weitz et al. 2009, 97).

#### **2.1.4 Questioning**

Now that the salesperson and prospect have met they start a conversation about the prospects' situation to see what the product (or service) could bring to them. The purpose of questioning is for the salesperson to identify needs and problems and that the prospect realizes the existing problem which needs to be fixed. This problem or need makes them feel they have a need to go through the sales meeting. (Weitz et al. 2009, 92.) The salesperson should write notes on what the prospect tells to be later on sure to point out the true things the prospect has told.

To make a successful sale the salesperson must know the reasons why the prospect is the right prospect (Jobber & Lancaster, 2012, 273). This is done by finding out firstly: is there a need or want, secondly: who has the authority to decide, and thirdly: what is the budget (Chitwood 2005, 128). The salesperson then is sure to serve them the best possible way (Manning et al. 2010, 10). Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 88) advises to start with asking who makes the decisions in the prospects' business.

The salesperson should use the SPIN technique to receive answers on why the prospect should buy (Weitz et al. 2009, 233). SPIN stands for questions about situation, problem, implication and need-payoff (Manning et al. 2010, 240). The conversation should proceed with asking first about the company's and prospect's situation and moving on to the SPIN technique one step at a time. "The reason for asking these questions is to create a sense of urgency within the buyer and to identify other people whom you may need to make contact with" (Eades et al. 2005, 115).

Chitwood (2005, 67-68) on the other hand presents different types of questions a salesperson should ask to get the prospect to tell information the salesperson doesn't know. For example: closed-ended questions, and open-ended questions.

Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 273) also advise salespeople to adapt to open-ended questions. Open-ended questions give an opportunity for the prospect to tell more than one word. For example “Who else will be involved in this buying decision?” versus “Is anyone else involved in this buying decision?” Or “What are your thoughts about changing this?” versus “Do you think this should be changed?” (Chitwood 2005, 67-68.)

Salesperson should ask fact-finding questions as well as feeling-finding questions (Chitwood 2005, 69-70). Fact-finding questions help the salesperson to know if the prospect is the right person and company to sell to. Salesperson could ask for example “What product (or service) do you use now?” or “When will you need this system to be operational?” (Chitwood 2005, 71). Chitwood (2005, 141) advises salespersons to ask if anything has changed in the prospects business or the customers’ business since the last time.

To get to know the prospect better the salesperson should ask feeling-finding questions like “Why is that important to you”, “How do you feel about that”, “What do you like most about your present system” “What is your opinion about that” (Chitwood 2005, 69-70).

Having a conversation means now that the salesperson listens and lets the prospect talk. The salesperson should ask questions and let the prospect answer them. In addition to listening, the salesperson should clarify what the prospect says and comment supportively like “Yes,” “I see,” (Chitwood 2005, 58). The salesperson should look directly at the prospect and reply by saying “Wow”, “Really”, “That’s great”, “Tell me more” just as examples (Chitwood 2005, 55, 118). This encourages the prospect to tell more and the salesperson listens carefully. (Chitwood 2005, 54-57.) Also reflective questions encourage the prospect to tell more detail. The salesperson should repeat a few words the prospect told, so the prospect will sense the salesperson is interested and wants to learn more. (Chitwood 2005, 72.)

When questioning, the prospect should speak more than the salesperson. This helps the salesperson to receive the information he or she needs from the prospect. (Balac 2009, 166.) People have a mouth, two ears, two eyes; salespeople should use them with that ratio (Vuorio 2011, 20-21). If a salesperson interrupts the prospect while speaking, the prospect feels the salesperson doesn't appreciate what they are telling. The salesperson then implies he or she doesn't have the time to listen (Jobber et al. 2012, 282).

Balac (2009, 166) advises the salesperson to ask so specific questions that the answers will give the salesperson an accurate need and problem identification. For example: "What does this mean to your company? Why is it important?" (Balac 2009, 164). This should be done to make the prospect see the value of the product to understand the solution to the existing need. (Solomon et al. 2013, 29; Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 87.) The prospect must feel motivation to act to satisfy a need (Solomon et al. 2013, 162).

This step should raise the prospect's interest. This is the second part of AIDA. The interest is raised by questioning and having a conversation with the prospect about benefits of having the product. (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 82-83.) If the prospect doesn't talk much, Weitz et al. (2009, 134) advises the salesperson to ask "Perhaps there is some reason you cannot share the information with me?" or "Are you worried about how I might react to what you are telling me?"

The salesperson shows appreciation best when listening to the prospect (Vuorio 2011, 20). This assures the salesperson can solve the prospect's problem precisely (Chitwood 2005, 9). Isn't that the reason salespeople ask questions, to get answers on why they can sell?

The prospect makes their final decision about the time to buy. When will the purchase take place? When is the most convenient time for the prospect? (Chitwood 2005, 20.) The problem recognition doesn't always require immediate action from the prospect (Weitz et al. 2009, 93). The timing might not be right: the company might have tight

on money. Still, the salesperson has planted an idea of an efficient way of doing something and the prospect might remember the product and the salesperson and contact them when the time is right. (Solomon et al. 2013, 153.)

Good examples on an inconvenient time are telephones. If they still work, the company probably doesn't *need* to change them to an updated version. This is a problem the salesperson would have to overcome. Now the salesperson should find out from the prospect how important that problem is, does it need to be fixed and what happens if it is not fixed (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 88).

“Buyers are most motivated to act when their problems are both painful and very personal” (Eades et al. 2005, 18). Pain in this context means “critical business issue or potential missed opportunity – something that motivates the buyer to act” (Eades et al. 2005, 18). Without pain the prospect does not have a need to change – this means they don't have a reason to buy from the salesperson! (Eades et al. 2005, 18.)

Before moving on to presentation, (subchapter 2.1.5.), Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 275) advise salespeople to summarize the facts. They are the reasons for buying which have aroused in the conversation until now. The salesperson must be sure to argue the right reasons. Chitwood (2005, 163) advise the salesperson to make sure by asking if they have understood correctly the need. If the prospect says that the need is incorrect, the salesperson should continue to solve the misunderstanding so long that both the prospect and salesperson agree on the information of the prospects' needs. (Chitwood 2005, 163, Rouné & Joki-Korpela 2008, 172.)

### **2.1.5 Presentation**

The salesperson can proceed to the presentation when the salesperson and prospect have identified the need the prospect wants to fulfill (Chitwood 2005, 158-167). Chitwood (2005, 171) advises salesperson to sell the company now. They should ask “May I ask how much information you have about [your company's name]?” or “What do you know about our firm?” (Weitz et al. 2009, 231). This is because the prospect



needs assurance on the company. After this the salesperson should listen to the prospect and reply “I understand. Let me quickly cover a couple of things I think would be important to me if I were in your position” (Chitwood 2005, 171). This makes the prospect feel that the salesperson is honest and they can build trust towards the company (Chitwood 2005, 171).

The purpose of presenting the solution is to increase the desire. Desire is the third point of AIDA. (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 84.) Chitwood (2005, 19) adds that the prospect decides on feeling the benefit of the product when the desire to purchase grows. After this the question on the price arouses. The desire then usually collapses when the price is revealed. This is why the prospect should desire the product and receive answers to objections before the salesperson reveals the price. (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 84.)

Chitwood (2005, 195) and Rope (2004, 12-13) advise salespersons to sell the benefit, not the product or feature. Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 276) advise salespeople to ask about a benefit, feature or value if it is something the prospect desires and is looking for. This also shows that the salesperson is interested in knowing whether they are on the right track on selling with the right reasons.

Sometimes the prospect values more of the brand, price, comfort, or for example safety which the product brings to the end user (Solomon et al. 2013, 156). A B2B salesperson should emphasize the right value of the product. This is to make the prospect understand his or her need for the product and be motivated to act to satisfy that need. (Solomon et al. 2013, 162.) Motivation comes from appealing to the prospects’ emotions (Chitwood 2005, 19; Solomon 2013, 19). The prospect most likely will think what the product would mean for their company and what would it help to achieve (Nenonen & Storbacka 2010, 19).

Solomon (2013, 40), points out that “People often buy products not for what they do but what they mean”. Salespeople should thus understand this buying behavior in order for them to lighten the prospects’ mind about the advantages and benefits on the

product. This makes the purchasing decision easier because the prospect then realizes the products feature, advantage and benefit. Most likely the prospect is interested to hear the cash-flow that the salespersons product (or service) will provide them (Nenonen & Storbacka 2010, 147). Chitwood (2005, 33) suggests the salesperson should make the prospect feel and believe the product is of more value to the prospect than what the salesperson earns from selling it.

Sometimes it is important to show how the product or its features will solve the prospect's needs. This is why some sales situations require a demonstration. A demonstration of the product can be made to ensure the prospect about the product. Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 277) advise that the demonstration should be done in two parts. First, the salesperson should tell the features, advantages and how the product works. Then he or she should show them those things. This way the prospect can really understand what the product could do for them. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 277.)

The prospect has many decisions to make, including the supplier choice. Is the product beneficial to be bought from that particular salesperson and company? Could one of the company's already-existing suppliers supply that solution? Is it better to have many suppliers or just one? These kinds of questions the prospect will most probably ask themselves and their managers. They will choose the solution which is best for their company. (Solomon et al. 2013, 209; Solomon et al. 2012, 198.) The salesperson should thus create a win-win situation about the value of the purchase to the prospect for them to feel they are not losing by buying (Eades et al. 2005, 211).

Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 276) remind the importance of asking questions from the prospect also at this stage, to prevent the salesperson having a monologue. After this stage the salespersons next move is to tell the features and benefits and ask a response (Chitwood 2005, 222). The response could be "How do you think..." "How do you feel..." and the answer to these kinds of questions tell the prospects buying decision (Chitwood 2005, 205-206). After this the salesperson should ask "Do you have any questions?" and answer that question and repeat the question as many times as the prospect has something on their mind (Chitwood 2005, 215).

The salesperson might now want to use references to ensure the prospect on the product or service (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 277). References are satisfied customers who have experienced the service and could now be contacted together by a prospect and salesperson to help build confidence on the product (Roune & Joki-Korpela 2008, 241). The salesperson can tell about the experiences or show a letter from the satisfied customer (reference) which the prospect can read in the sales meeting (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 277).

Often the salesperson meets the prospect(s) again when the prospect has looked into the subject more widely. Sometimes the prospect is straight away willing to buy what the salesperson has to offer. (Solomon et al. 2013, 180.)

### **2.1.6 Objections & Negotiation**

The prospect has just received the proposal, a written offer on a solution, and has lots of questions on their mind. If the salesperson has presented the proposal giving the solution based on what the prospect truly wants and argued it so that the prospect sees the value, there should be fewer objections left to handle. Objections are concerns and questions that the prospect has not understood yet. The objections come when the prospect is not yet convinced and ready to accept the salesperson's offer. The salesperson must solve them before the prospect can buy. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 281-282; Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 89.) Objections can arise during closure, so some ways to handle objections are presented also in subchapter 2.1.7. Committing & Closing.

Usually the objections tell about the prospect's fears, uncertainties and doubts (FUD) (Chitwood 2005, 239). FUD's can be about the salesperson, the company, the product, the price or even on the time to buy (Chitwood 2005, 240).

Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 271) see this topic as dealing with objections when Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 85-92) see this as overcoming objections. Dealing with objections requires sensitivity because "people do not like to be proved wrong" (Jobber &

Lancaster 2012, 282). This is especially if the prospect already has some kind of product in use, which in some way is similar to the one the salesperson is offering.

Negotiation is the time to reveal the price and negotiate the delivery and payment (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 286). Chitwood (2005, 215) and Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 88-89) advised to tell the price in the end of presentation before objections.

Chitwood (2005, 241) advises salespersons to respond to an objection by saying “I see”, “I understand” or “I can appreciate that”. This helps the situation to be about handling objections, not by reacting to them. Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 282-284) advise the salesperson should then repeat what the prospect told and make it a true statement and then say “but...”, “however...” or for example “that’s why...”, and the reason why the salespersons product is better for the prospect.

An example of using this would be: Prospect: “\$. is a lot of money!” Salesperson: “I can appreciate that. Yes, it is a lot of money, but not nearly as much as you’d be losing with a machine with slower output.” (Chitwood 2005, 244.)

McPheat (Certus sales 2011c) as well enlightens salespeople to respond differently to objections. This is to be made by agreeing and aligning to the prospects objection. This enables a meeting without fighting and competing who is right. For example to agree on the prices being high and explaining why that is and what customer needs the product can solve. (Certus sales 2011c.)

On the other hand, Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 89) advise salespersons in an objection situation to ask if there is anything else that is on the prospect’s mind. The salesperson should hear every objection before answering the objections. Also, Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 89) advise it would be better to answer to that one question which is most importantly keeping them from closing the sale. This prevents having an endless number of objections.

Chitwood (2005, 101) advises the salespeople to avoid the word cost. That word should be replaced by summarizing the value the prospect gets of having the product. This includes the FAB model: features, advantages and benefits (Chitwood 2005, 216-217). Then it is appropriate to tell the price. The price affects the company's profitability so it is usually a major criterion to the prospect to evaluate (Solomon et al. 2013, 208).

Some sales situations might require a trial order choice. This can be made to reduce risk from the prospects point-of-view. This choice is less efficient to the salesperson. The salesperson needs to put more time to fulfill the prospects recognized needs. On the other hand, the prospect gets assurance of the salesperson's company and salesperson. Their business relationship might evolve to a successful one within time. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 280.)

If the concern is about factual information it might be better to deny it straight away. An example Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 284) state is that the prospect assumes the product is difficult to clean. The salesperson can reply by saying "No, Mr. Prospect, absolutely not. This material is made of...". (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 284.)

Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 284) advise to question the prospect's objection by asking a question on it. For example the prospect says: "I'm sorry but I don't like the look of that car." The salesperson should then ask: "Could you tell me exactly what it is that you don't like of the look?" Now the prospect can tell it is the patterns he or she doesn't like so the salesperson can tell it can be replaced with some other pattern. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 284.)

The price can sometimes be negotiated by an "if – then" tactic (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 286). Then there must be room for negotiation and the prospect has to have told a term of buying if the price would be lower. For example: if the prospect is "prepared to make payment within 28 days, then I am willing to offer a 2,5 per cent discount" (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 286). Rope (2004, 184-185) on the other hand advises the salesperson to change the product package instead of ever changing the price.

Sometimes it may be convenient to negotiate the price with the buyer (Solomon et al. 2013, 400). The list price is often the price which is recommended to be paid. If the customer is a regular client, they can sometimes be given a quantity discount if they purchase a significantly large amount during a year. Some products may require a seasonal-discount from the salesperson, to ensure that they don't get stuck with all the products when the season ends, for example lawn mowers. (Solomon et al. 2013, 400-401.)

Rope (2004, 134-135) suggests that "round numbers" should not be placed in offers because the price should look as if it was precisely calculated for the product. It should also be clearly presented so the prospect knows what they are paying for. If the prospect feels the price is too high - or too low - they are careful of buying. If it is expensive they probably will think it is a "rip-off". If it is too low, they might feel the quality is poor or something else is bad which makes the price cheap. (Solomon et al. 2013, 402.)

The prospect might do a SWOT analysis (the organizations Strengths, Weaknesses, and the environments Opportunities, and Threats) about choosing to buy from the salesperson and their company (Solomon et al. 2013, 343). The prospect now knows the benefits and advantages of having the product as well as the price. The next thing to do is to seek for agreement and ask from the prospect if the transaction or offer can be put to action (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 88).

The prospect now understands what the situation is and sometimes wants to evaluate different opportunities before making a decision or attempting further negotiations. By understanding the consequences of having the product the prospect decides how much effort they put to the buying decision (Solomon et al. 2012, 156). Most often the buyer compares the pros and cons of every product and then decides the winner (Solomon et al. 2012, 160). If the salesperson compares the pros and cons of the product with the prospect, the salesperson is considered trustworthy and honest (Weitz et al. 2009, 41). (Solomon et al. 2013, 156; Weitz et al. 2009, 94.)

### 2.1.7 Committing & Closing

When closing at a sales meeting the salesperson should remember this - people buy to satisfy their needs and desires (Solomon et al. 2013, 180). The question the prospect has now is when to do it (Chitwood 2005, 225). The salesperson should act on the prospects timetable (Rope 2004, 14-15.) The salesperson should let the prospect know the salesperson wants to help with whole solution they are offering, not just with one single product (Chitwood 2005, 276; Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 91). This is also a reason why the salesperson should ask “Has anything changed?” (Chitwood 2005, 141).

Now that the attention, interest and desire have been handled – it is time for action, which is the last point of AIDA (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 82-84). Action can be committing to an act or closing a sale. Chitwood (2005, 28) points out if the sale doesn't take place right there and then the salesperson should ask for an act of commitment from the prospect. This can be for example agreeing the time for the next meeting or to send an e-mail with detailed information. When the salesperson has persuaded the prospect to accept the offer they can close the sale. (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 79.) These will be looked at next.

The sale can be made if the salesperson simply asks for it (Chitwood 2005, 229). Successful salespeople might ask for the sale even up to five times in the meeting (Manning et al. 2010, 307). Chitwood (2005, 231-265) advises to close the sale five times.

To make the first close, Chitwood (2005, 231) advises to use a simple negative question technique with a phrase. It goes like this: “If we can [summary of action to be taken], can you think of any reason why we shouldn't [summary of desired act of commitment]?” The action can be for example delivery. The act of commitment should be made for example when signing papers is not appropriate right away. (Chitwood 2005, 232-233.) Chitwood (2005, 233) notes, that words of direct action, such as “now, today, this afternoon or right away” are not to be used in the latter part.

Chitwood (2005, 235) tells why this approach is so affective psychologically. People like to say no. When the salesperson asks: “Can you think of any reason why we shouldn’t..” the prospect says no and it means they would buy. (Chitwood 2005, 235.)

Chitwood (2005, 242-243) explains it by then the conversation is open and if responded differently, the conversation might develop to an argument and the salesperson could lose the sale (Figure 5.) Now the salesperson should say another feature – benefit – reaction and ask for the order again (Chitwood 2005, 264).

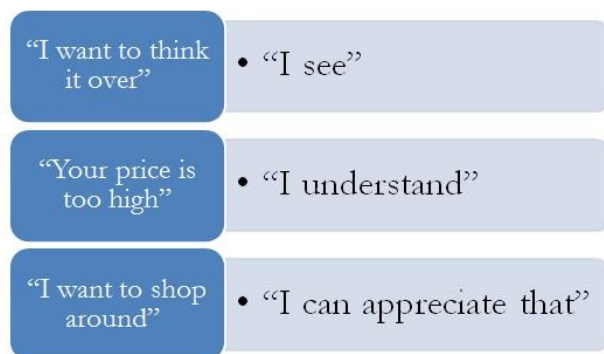


Figure 5. Chitwood (2005, 245-246) tells three objections and responses that work during the second closure

The third closure begins the same as the second. This time the salesperson should ask for agreement on the things they have already agreed on and, to tell to the salesperson what the thing is they don’t like about. Then the order should be asked again. (Chitwood 2005, 264.)

The fourth closure begins like the second and third, with acknowledging the objection. Then it is time to reveal something negative that is an outcome of not buying now. Then the order should be asked again. (Chitwood 2005, 264-265.)

The fifth closure should be something different, something the salesperson can imagine of. Chitwood (2005, 257) advises for example to make a compromise, give discount or a free trial. This could be done by saying that the salesperson cannot stand



not solving the prospects problem (Chitwood 2005, 257). And then the salesperson says “Let’s do it” (Chitwood 2005, 258).

Chitwood (2005) and Vuorio (2011) suggest that the sale can be achieved by doing a few things: the salesperson truly believing in their company’s product they are selling, by the prospect truly needing what the salesperson is selling and, in addition, the salesperson must want to make a sale; otherwise there won’t be a sale and many work hours have been used for nothing (Chitwood 2005, 23; Chitwood 2005, 27; Vuorio 2011, 11).

The attitude has a huge impact on getting a sale, even a minimalistic difference between two salespersons’ attitude can be enough to seal the deal between the two of them (Vuorio 2011, 11-12). Chitwood (2005, 17) reminds that the salesperson must not reveal being the taker of the deal. They should seem to be the giver of the deal. However, the prospect decides to buy. This means the prospect decide on the best product and supplier which meets their company’s needs (Solomon et al. 2013, 209). The salesperson must have persuaded them before they make the decision.

Sometimes after an effective presentation the prospect asks for the product without the salesperson having to ask for closure. Usually the salesperson has to ask it. During the sales meeting the salesperson has the advantage of using the time with the prospect and tries to close the sale. If there is no conclusion or act of committing the prospect may buy from someone else than the salesperson. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 289.)

Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 290) state that salespersons should start closing when all the products benefits match to buyer’s needs. Figure 6. presents the steps on how to close (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 291-292).

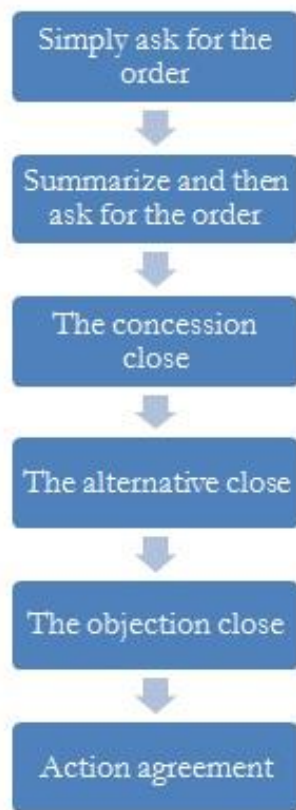


Figure 6. Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 291-292) advise on six ways to close

These previously shown steps in Figure 6. will necessarily not be all used or at least not in any particular order during closing. The first advice of simply asking the order requires the salesperson to be quiet after asking the order. The second advice means the salesperson must summarize the needs and wants which the prospect has and, the qualities the product has that fulfill them and then, the salesperson can ask for the order. The third is an example of “if – then” which was handled in subchapter 2.1.6. Objections & Negotiation. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 291.)

The fourth advice, the alternative close, is about the salesperson asking which would the prospect prefer, for example want to buy with debit or credit or, a delivery on this or that date or a color blue or red. The fifth, objection close, is for example if the salesperson can convince the prospect by something about the product that’s a better quality than the competitors and then to ask “would you buy it” (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 292). The last one which Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 291-292) advise is an action agreement. This should be done when it is inappropriate to close the sale - for example

meeting with the pharmaceutical industry in which the decisions are not made immediately (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 292).

Never the less, the goal in sales is making a sale (Vuorio 2011, 11). The salesperson should close (or agree on committing) in every sales meeting (Rubanovitch & Aalto 2007, 129). Now the buyer usually will discuss delivery and then makes the order (Weitz et al. 2009, 94).

The prospect is in charge of the buy in their company. The prospect's co-workers will cherish them for buying a wonderful product or service so the prospect has a lot at stake when deciding to buy from a salesperson. The prospect might want to please the managers and think what the company would feel if he or she solved the problem by the product (or service) (Chitwood 2005, 88; Solomon et al. 2013, 180). People like to buy, not to be sold to. The salesperson should emphasize this feeling of when the prospect is going to buy. (Chitwood 2005, 4-5.) If something goes wrong the customer reminds themselves of the salesperson selling the product to them, not them buying.

During closure the salesperson should refer to the prospect's needs or desires he or she told during the meeting in order to make the sale and leave a happy customer. The next step is signing a contract or, if the prospect cannot make a company's purchasing decision him- or herself, the next meeting should be agreed on to discuss the product more widely (Chitwood 2005, 28.) Chitwood (2005, 234) advises to avoid using the word sign. To create a more positive atmosphere the salesperson should say "Will you write your name here?" (Chitwood 2005, 234).

When the salesperson makes a sale, he or she should leave quickly to prevent the customer changing their mind and canceling the order (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 292). They should still manage to agree the precise date and time on the next meeting or get-together (Certus Sales 2011e).

Before the product is in use the salesperson and their company must commit to the order and the delivery date. The salesperson's job is to make sure all the paperwork is

right and the company can perform what the salesperson promised the buyer. (Weitz et al. 2009, 94.)

### **2.1.8 Follow-up**

The reason for making a follow-up is to make sure the customer gets the benefits they expect and which the salesperson had promised (Balac 2009, 41; Chitwood 2005, 31; Weitz et al. 2009, 9). Weitz et al. (2009, 9) say that salespersons must make sure that this happens. Later on the loyal customers, who have been taken good care of and are satisfied, are the ones who bring the most money to the salespersons business (Roune & Joki-Korpela 2008, 242). This is why the importance of follow-up should be remembered.

Despite that the salesperson's job is to take care and support through the process and even after it, they should want to keep in touch with the customer after sales (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 79). The follow-up is a key of building a long lasting business-relationship (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 339; Roune & Joki-Korpela 2008, 241).

During follow-up the salesperson should thank the customer by for example sending them a thank you –card (Chitwood 2005, 280-281). This can ensure success in business later on. Now the customer relationship turns from winning a sale into managing the customership (Roune & Joki-Korpela 2008, 241).

If the supplier (or salesperson) doesn't meet the need, with for example delivers late, gives poor equipment or doesn't maintain the customer-relationship the buyer can stop ordering (Solomon et al. 2013, 210-211). If the customer is dissatisfied the salesperson should make them satisfied to prevent bad word-of-mouth (WOM) from the customer to its friends and family because people trust these people and want to hear the true opinion both in good and bad (Solomon et al. 2010, 401). This is because WOM is more powerful than ads. (Solomon 2013, 445; Solomon et al. 2013, 159.)

The salesperson should reassure that the customer has made the right choice, confirm that the customer is satisfied, and make sure there are no problems (Chitwood 2005, 277; Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 292). The follow-up should be made within five days after the sale or meeting, advises Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 91).

The prospect's decision-making process of the product (or service) ends when the product is in use. The buyer evaluates the satisfactory level by the feeling he or she has about the product. The feeling can be first made by the salesperson or the company's employees or customers. The satisfactory level is compared to the feeling the buyer has now versus the feeling before the product. (Solomon et al. 2013, 158-159). A satisfied customer comes back. This is why it is important for salespeople to ensure they are considered qualified for later orders (Weitz et al. 2009, 94).

Sometimes the customer asks for additional information. The salesperson should answer most quickly to ensure a good service. Sometimes the salesperson doesn't know the answer. Then the salesperson should inform the customer that he or she doesn't know the answer and will give it to them by next week. Then, as soon as the answer is received the salesperson should inform the customer. If the information is not found out "by next week" the salesperson should call and say they don't have the information yet - but are working on it, and will let them know as soon as possible (Chitwood 2005, 28). (Chitwood 2005, 279-280.) When a successful sale has been made and the customer is satisfied. Now the salesperson can ask for the customer to become a reference to the company (Roune & Joki-Korpela 2008, 241.)

## **2.2 B2B solution proposing**

Now that the sales process has been reviewed, it is time to concentrate on the theories of solution proposing: what to do and when. This subchapter provides knowledge collected from literature on the thesis' secondary research questions.

### **2.2.1 How to prepare for proposing a solution?**

Storbacka & Lehtinen (2001, 26-27) state that emotions have an important role in the prospect's decision making process - even with products which are rational, as well as developing the customer relationship. Usually customer's decision to buy takes emotions 85 % and rational thinking 15 % (Marston 2011, 3). By expressing feelings the salesperson shows that he or she is human and is more likely to be trusted by the prospect (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 287). This makes the buyer make their decision of buying easier.

Solomon et al. (2010, 61), also state that "a person's mood or physiological condition at the time of purchase can have a major impact on what is bought and can also affect how products are evaluated." This means the salesperson must make the customer feel good before proposing a solution in order to the customer being more willing to buy. (Marston 2011, 3; Solomon et al. 2010, 61.)

According to Chitwood (2005, 6), in order to make a sale and build business relationships -salespeople must believe in themselves. They must believe in what they are selling, the company they are selling to, as well as the prospect they are selling to. Solomon et al. (2013, 165) also state that the attitude the salesperson has about themselves, the product, and the prospect affects the sales situation.

Chitwood (2005, Introduction page 1.) refers to the customers' needs being the core of sales: if the product doesn't benefit the customer, the sale should not be made. Before the salesperson has brought up a situation which the product can ease, the salesperson cannot present a solution to the prospect.

People (prospects) are looking more and more to effective solutions. This means that prospects want to be able to buy more than just one product. They want an entity. (Jobber et al. 2012, 7.) Salespersons should thus present a solution that is wide and that has everything they can offer which the prospect needs or wants.

Modern selling is the skill to solve problems, recognize and satisfy customer needs (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 7). There must be one specific product the salesperson has to offer at the end of the meeting. The salesperson must find out what it is that the prospect really wants or needs. There should not be many opportunities the prospect could choose because then the salesperson has not done his or her job appropriately. When there are many opportunities of a product the salesperson must find out what the prospect truly needs or wants and offer it (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 79). This makes the salesperson successful because the customers can rely on the salesperson to offer the best and the right thing for the prospect.

“Closing the deal lies mainly in how the decision maker feels about the process, about you, and about him- or herself” (Marston 2011, 233). Thus to present the solution the feeling has to be right within both sides. The prospect has to feel the salesperson is trustworthy. Also the prospect has to feel the value of having the product (Solomon et al. 2013, 29). Taipale (2007, 26) tells that the customer makes their buying-decision because they want the product. This is why the salesperson should make the prospect want to buy the product.

Chitwood (2005, 17), tells there are five buying decisions (see Figure 7.) everyone makes when they are being sold to. These buying decisions occur in a “precise, psychological order” in every sales situation (Chitwood 2005, 17). They are:



Figure 7. The five buying decisions by Chitwood (2005, 17)

The prospect has made their first decision of buying by the salespersons' first impression. The prospect wonders is the salesperson there to give or take as to the salesperson handling the product. (Chitwood 2005, 17-18.) This has been done already in the phone and in the beginning of the meeting.

The prospect sees the salesperson is equal to the company (Chitwood 2005, 18-19; Chitwood 2005, 96-98). After deciding to trust the salesperson the prospect decides whether or not they can depend on the salesperson's company (Chitwood 2005, 18). The prospect questions the company, its employees, customer references, why is it better than others etc. When the prospect feels trust towards both, the salesperson and company, can they decide on buying the product. This they make by feeling that the product sincerely meets the needs. (Chitwood 2005, 18-19.)

The fourth buying decision is about the price. A salesperson shouldn't negotiate the price before going through the first three steps described above. If the prospect does not see the value the product gives them, they cannot afford what the salesperson sells. (Chitwood 2005, 19.)

“When the salesperson and prospect have agreed on need (or want) they can proceed to the presentation” (Chitwood 2005, 158-167). The need and problem identification must be done properly to be sure to point out the characteristics which the prospect truly values and needs Rouné & Joki-Korpela (2008, 172).

Chitwood (2005, 79), tells six reasons for buying: a desire for gaining money, a fear of losing money, comfort and convenience, security and protection, pride and ownership, and satisfaction of emotion. One or a few of these will be the reason why the prospect decides to buy. These motives should be found out in the questioning part to get the prospect excited and to appeal to the reason they want the product in Closing. (Chitwood 2005, 79.)

The desire of gaining money might make the prospect's company want to buy by keeping an eye on gaining profits. The fear of losing might make the prospect want to



buy a security guard -service or some insurance. Comfort and convenience can be more difficult to sell, for those substances are not necessarily vital for the company to succeed. For example comfort products can be an electric blanket, a CD-player, an air conditioner, a copy machine or an elevator. (Chitwood 2005, 80-81.)

Security and protection is when the prospect wants to buy a telephone to their desk, or buy cushioned packing materials to ensure protection for products that travel. Pride of ownership could be buying from a specific company, buying a specific car or premises. Satisfaction of emotion applies every time when buying. (Chitwood 2005, 81-84.)

### **2.2.2 How to tell or show the solution to the prospect?**

Now the salespersons should have told about themselves and their company. They have told why they are meeting and they should proceed to talking about what their product (or solution). The revealing of price and the buying decision come after the proposal. (Chitwood 2005, 17.) When the company has been sold, Chitwood (2005, 193) advises to fill the need. This means proposing the solution. This can be done by demonstrating with digital aid.

The proposal should be clearly presented, so that the prospect understands what is it the salesperson offers (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 80). The presentation can be made with taking advantage of technology, for example using a laptop (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 276). People react to colors, shapes and images so the salesperson should take advantage of these in the proposal (Sorensen 2010, 51).

Chitwood (2005, 213) advises to use three to four demonstrations of different features and benefits. These are the ones most important and are found during need and problem identification. The features and benefits should be pointed out in an increasing amount of desire to the prospect (Chitwood 2005, 214). The first should be a feature and benefit which the salesperson knows the prospect likes. Then the second should be about what the prospect really likes and the third about what the prospect would love (Chitwood 2013, 205).

Photos, illustrations, catalogues, humor, facts, emotion, interaction, formality and stories are some elements which Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 96-97) and Weitz et al. (2009, 257) tell about business presentations. One might prefer another more in the way the salesperson presents the proposal. Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 104) show that Finnish people most often want to hear facts during a presentation.

Business buyers are interested in the information about detailed specifications of the product. These are the price, size, features, color, and warranty, weight, delivery and so on. (Solomon et al. 2013, 207.) Buyers' interest will begin from the features they can sense (see, touch, taste, smell or hear) and reflect them to past experiences of similar products (Solomon et al. 2013, 160).

Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 269) inform that the salesperson should be able to identify and read customers' emotions. This helps make a successful presentation and so make to the customer a satisfactory purchase decision. The solution should be told or showed by appealing to customers' emotions, because customers don't buy for logical reasons (Chitwood 2005, 19).

Weitz et al. (2009, 264) advise that if the salesperson decides to present the written proposal in a meeting they could give the prospect a copy of the complete proposal before the presentation. They would need to summarize the whole proposal in roughly five to ten minutes and then ask for questions. Another way to present is during the presentation giving a written proposal and going through it carefully together one-step-at-a-time to prevent the prospect from reading it alone and not listening to the presentation. (Weitz et al. 2009, 264.)

Written proposals include a summary of one or two pages long which include "the total costs minus the total savings, a brief description of the problem to be solved, and a brief description of the proposed solution" (Weitz et al. 2009, 263). That is for the busy managers who usually won't have time to read the whole proposal.

Negotiation is the time to reveal the price and negotiate about delivery and payment (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 286). However, Chitwood (2005, 215) and Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 88-89) have already advised to tell the price in the end of presentation before objections.

When discussing the price, the prospect might want to know about discount possibilities, in example for ordering a larger amount. The possibilities of returned-goods or of repairing or maintaining the product might also arouse into discussion. If the product is a machine or capital, the resell value and a possible disposal cost might be discussed. (Solomon et al. 2013, 208.)

The more the product costs, the more time will be used by the prospect to be ensured by the product and buy it (Solomon et al. 2013, 208). Balac (2009, 118) reminds that buyers always try to bargain the price or get more for the money because the buyers prefer being cost-efficient.

Body language can be both encouraging and discouraging to the prospect. The way a salesperson is while proposing a solution (and during the whole meeting) can make the prospect more willing to buy. The salesperson can observe the prospects' body language as well (see Figure 8 on the next page).

These ways are tips that Ian Piper (Certus sales 2011a.) shared in Certus Sales –blog and Weitz et al. (2009, 131-138) present: Leaning forward, sitting straight is a positive outcome and might show agreement. Moving the body might mean the prospect is ready to make the order. Keeping hands on the table palms facing upwards means a positive signal. If a person is tense they play with their fingers. When the salesperson sees what the hands are doing, they can have a clue on if it is the right time to present the solution. Also legs show the salesperson about the prospects feelings. Legs uncrossed means the prospect is willing to cooperate, is confident and friendly. Legs crossed means the prospect is dissatisfied with the situation.

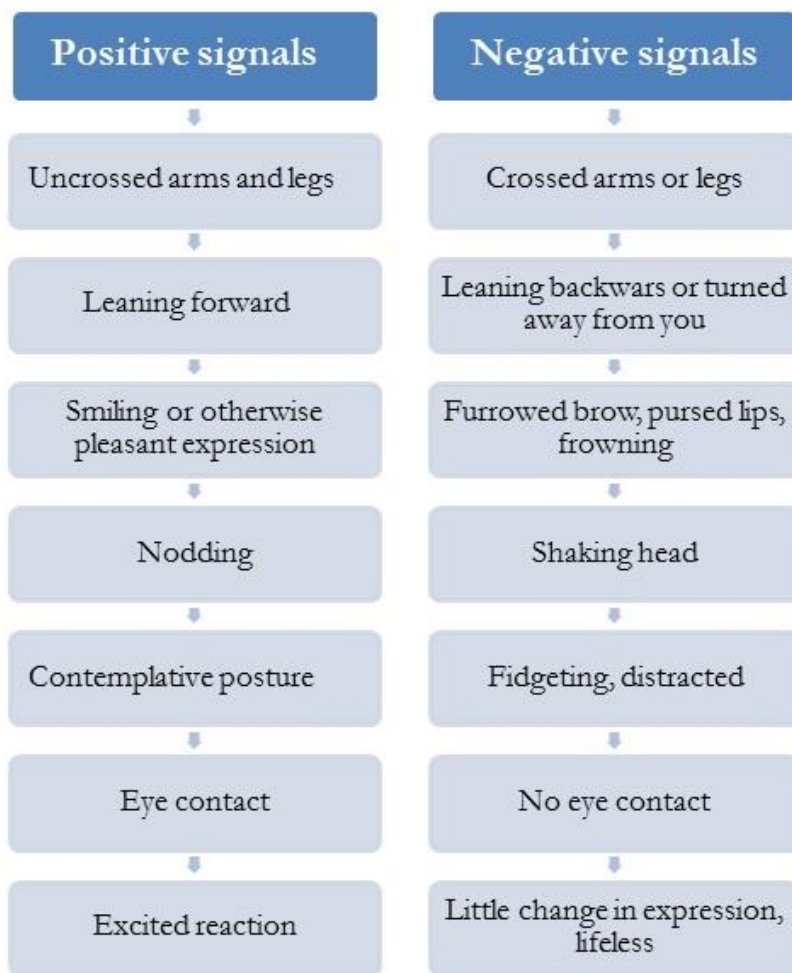


Figure 8. Weitz et al (2009, 133) presents meanings of body languages

People’s eyes tell significantly much about a person in a situation (Weitz et al. 2009, 131-132). The eye movement can show the thinking process (Weitz et al. 2009, 132). When a person is excited and interested their pupils enlarge. Looking straight intensely for over three seconds or staring means the customer is dissatisfied and the situation is unpleasant and they might feel anger or dislike. Looking at the customer’s eyes, when talking and listening, means the salesperson is interested in what the customer is telling (Weitz et al. 2009, 132). A normal blink per minute is 10 – 20 times (Weitz et al. 2009, 132). If a person blinks their eyes over 50 times - and particularly over 70 times per minute this suggests they are really stressed.

If the customer’s or salesperson’s eyes stay focused straight ahead while the other talks this means they are not concentrating to the presentation or talk and they don’t analyze what the other is saying. By looking away for a long time the person “probably wants

to end the meeting” (Weitz et al. 2009, 132). Looking to the right or to the left means the person is thinking about the presentation. Looking or “gazing” to the right suggests thinking about facts and logic about the presentation and looking or “gazing” left suggests a link to emotional side. Looking down means the person concentrates the most. However the person might think “How can I get my boss to buy this product” or “How can I get out of this conversation?” (Weitz et al. 2009, 132). (Weitz et al. 2009, 132.)

### **2.2.3 What will not work in presenting a solution and why?**

The right decision-maker must hear the business proposal. Depending on the size of the purchase and company, the roles can be all with the prospect or they can be within several different people (Solomon et al. 2013, 204). If the salesperson presents the solution to someone who does not make the final decision of buying, the presenting of the solution will not work at its best. Referring to a need which the prospect has told to be unimportant will neither work in the presenting of a solution. (Chitwood 2005, 28.)

A salespersons attitude must be polite and the salesperson must listen to the prospect when they receive objections or questions (Vuorio 2011, 20-21). When the prospect wants to know more the objections are expressions of interest (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 281-282). Sometimes the prospect doesn't tell any objections. Then, it is necessary the salesperson to ask if there is anything on the prospect's mind which they are not sure of (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 285). Otherwise they could become dissatisfied customers.

In sales-situations and especially when presenting a solution, the body language tells much about the salesperson as it does of the prospect. As Ian Piper (Certus sales 2011a) refers to the things which will not work during an interview, the author of this thesis believes these also apply to a sales meeting. Piper (Certus sales 2011a) says that these following body movements imply negative signals to the other person:

Touching or rubbing your neck or the back of your head, or leaning your body towards the door makes you look disinterested in the subject, unprepared or bored (Certus sales 2011a; Weitz et al. 2009, 131). Touching your nose implies you are not being completely honest. If you sit with your hands across your chest folded you will appear unfriendly. Crossing your legs over and over shows you are uncomfortable. Staring back blankly implies you want to make yourself distanced. These are a few ways Piper (Certus sales 2011a) says people act when in an uncomfortable situation. Weitz et al. (2009, 131) add that moving from side to side may suggest the person is insecure. The salesperson should be aware of these body languages to understand themselves as the other also. These body languages apply both to the salesperson and prospect. Both of them can read each other's body language and help analyze the other person's situation.

### 2.3 The theoretical framework

A theoretical framework enables a reader to understand what the literature consists of. This subchapter summarizes the literature from subchapters 2.1. The B2B sales process, and subchapter 2.2. B2B solution proposing. The author has interpreted literature regarding these topics. Figure 9. presents the topics from which the author has collected literature. Both the B2B selling- and buying process was observed to make the reader familiar with the subject and to be able to meet with the goal of this thesis: to become successful in presenting a solution.



Figure 9. Sales process with buying process by Kairisto-Mertanen (2003, 42)

The author used mostly the literature of Chitwood (2005), Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004) and Jobber & Lancaster (2012) as shown on Figure 10 to present the subchapter

2.1. The B2B sales process. The author has researched how to successfully present a solution in a B2B sales meeting. To be able to succeed in this the author feels the reader must understand the B2B sales process.

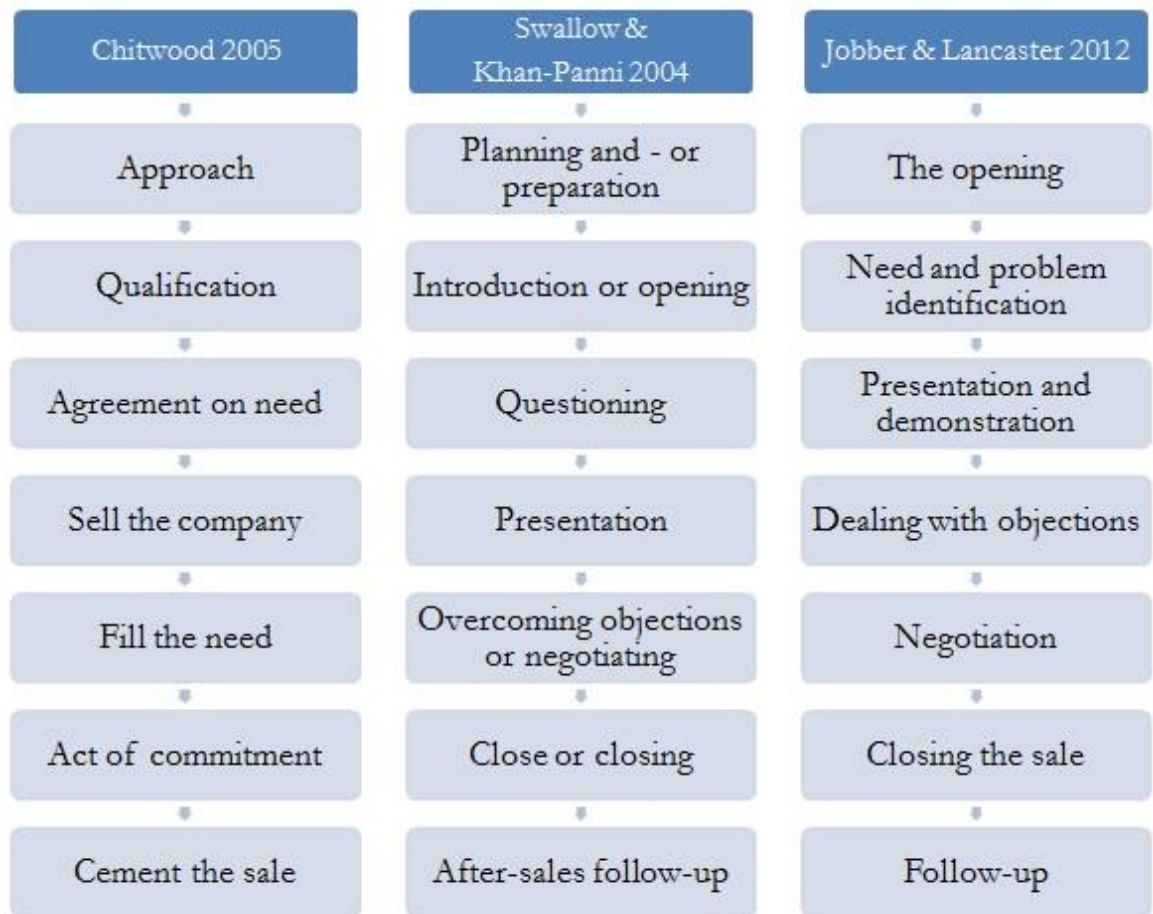


Figure 10. The sales processes chosen to complete subchapter 2.1. The sales process

The sales process begins in a B2B sales market with the salesperson planning and preparing to call or meet the prospect. Before this the salesperson must have found the prospect. A prospect is a potential customer. It can be a segment also.

The salesperson approaches the prospect usually by the most effective tool: telephone. Telephone calls allow immediate answers to questions and it is more personal than an e-mail. The salesperson should determine goals to each act they make. This shows to the prospect that the salesperson knows what he or she is doing and thus will not waste the prospects time. The goal of the first call is to agree on a need to meet and make an agreement on a date and time. This enhances the salesperson's reliability.

When the salesperson goes to meet the prospect the salesperson shouldn't wait longer than 15 minutes. The salesperson's time is also valuable. When the prospect and salesperson meet they should shake hands and the salesperson should receive a permission to be seated. The salesperson should be interested in the prospect's work and make the prospect feel good and important. After getting to know the prospect the salesperson should tell why they are meeting.

Now the salesperson should start asking questions for so long that the salesperson knows a reason why the prospect needs or wants the product or service the salesperson is offering. Subchapter 2.1.4. Questioning, includes specific instructions on what to say, when to say so and how to respond to it.

When the need is clear the salesperson can proceed to presentation. Now the salesperson can tell more about their company and what the product is they are offering. It is important to present the offer or solution in a way which makes the prospect understand why they would need to purchase the product. This is by first telling the product's features, then the advantages which the features give and then the benefits which the prospect will receive. This is called the FAB model. The salesperson's credibility and reliability are strong when the salesperson truly offers the products which the prospect needs and wants.

Usually the prospect gives objections. The author has given instructions on how to react to them on subchapter 2.1.6. Objections. When the prospect does not have questions left the salesperson can ask for closure. Closure is viewed in more detail in subchapter 2.2. B2B solution proposing. After the sale the salesperson needs to make follow-up to guarantee customer satisfaction.

Subchapter 2.2. B2B solution proposing, concentrates in more detail on the sales process from the beginning of the sales meeting to the stage of follow-up. This subchapter includes literature on the research topic. The literature has been chosen to complement the stages of the meetings process. First, it concentrates on what to do before proposing a solution.



The salesperson should make the prospect feel good and important. They should tell from which company they are and refresh the prospect's memories on who is who and what job titles do they have. The salesperson should ask if anything has changed after the last meeting and then go through the agenda on the meeting. The prospect should agree on the agenda. After this the salesperson should ask for agreement on going to present the solution to the prospect. It is important to remember the five buying decisions, presented in Figure 11, which prospects make in this order:



Figure 11. The five buying decisions by Chitwood (2005, 17)

Now the literature continues to revealing things to do while presenting the solution. This includes what words to say and what to do while presenting the solution. At this stage of the meeting one or maximally two salespersons should present the solution and at least one salesperson should be seated in the negotiation table with the prospects. The written offer should be handed to the prospects and it should be reviewed through together with the prospects. The price should be presented last, at the end of the written offer, to be sure to have answered all objections before it.

The solution should be presented so that technology and visual aid are been taken advantage of. People react to colors and images so the offer and presentation should include these.

The literature on subchapter 2.2. B2B solution proposing, ends with information on what not to do while presenting a solution to the prospect. At first, the solution and offer should be presented to the right decision maker. The way the salesperson acts affects also the result on the meeting. Figure 12 shows how body language affects positively and negatively to the interpretation on each movement.

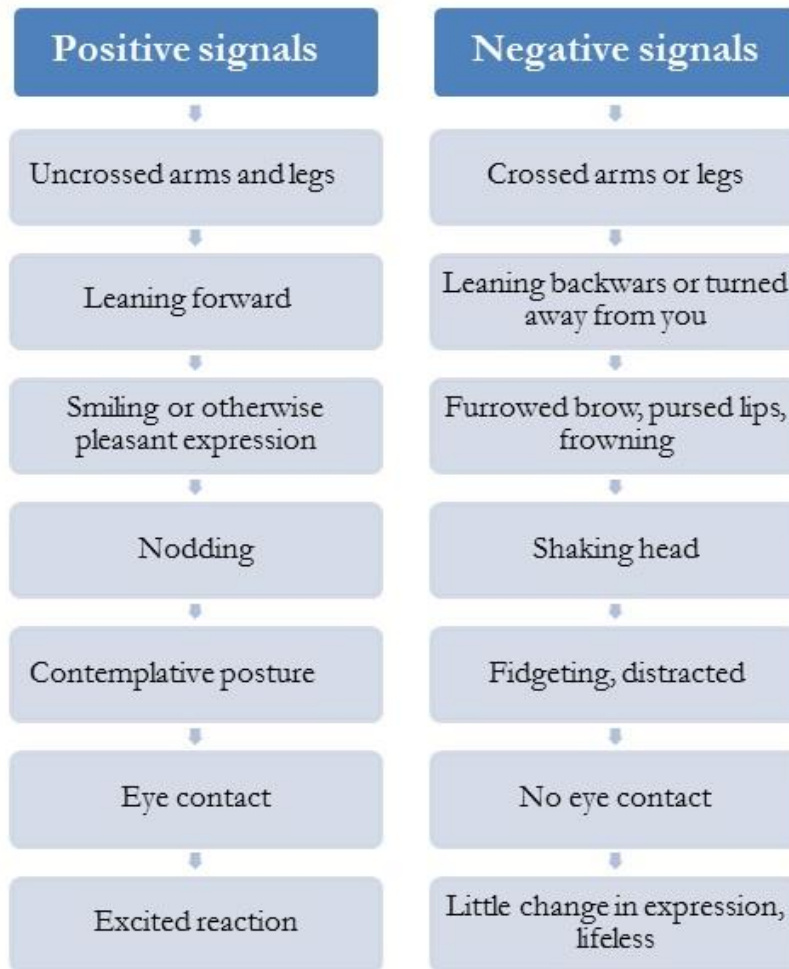


Figure 12. Weitz et al (2009, 133) presents meanings of body languages

### **3 Research process description**

The goal of an empirical part is to learn the method used to collect and analyze the data (Grbich 2013, 10). The author did seek to investigate how to successfully present a solution in a B2B sales meeting.

#### **3.1 Research approach**

The aim of the research was to find out what sales students do during solution proposing. The purpose of studying this is to help students and professionals become more effective in proposing and presenting a solution. The target group was a group of students at HAAGA-HELIA who practiced solution sales in the solution selling course in the Degree Programme in Sales.

The participants were second year students at HAAGA-HELIA Degree Programme in Sales. The research was made a census because only one class of second year sales students at HAAGA-HELIA took the mandatory course on solution selling in spring 2013 (Saunders et al. 2009, 210). The participants demonstrated all together eight 30 minute B2B sales meetings between three to four salespersons and managers and, the other parties' three to four buyers and leaders.

All of the participants held a business meeting to negotiate an offer and to possibly get an order from the prospects. The prospects were their fellow classmates who pretended to be buyers and leaders of a municipality in Finland. The participant's performances were videotaped. The purpose of this method was to later on ensure access to the situations and, to best analyze what they said and how they said it. This data collection method best helped the author to analyze the situations.

### **3.1.1 Research questions**

The author aims at knowing how to successfully present a solution in a B2B sales meeting. The author wanted to be objective. This was accomplished by analyzing the data with same criterion. The author chose the three secondary research questions to analyze the situations (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 40.)

1. How to prepare for the proposal?
2. How to tell or show the solution to the prospect?
3. What will not work in presenting the solution and why?

The author chose these questions to get a perspective on what should be done. She explored behaviors through the eight situations. The author viewed the video materials several times to receive enough information to analyze the situations thoroughly.

### **3.1.2 Method choice**

The method chosen to make this thesis' study was qualitative research. Qualitative research is made to research in example lived experiences and behaviors (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 11). This method gave the author an opportunity to be able to describe what was happening in a particular situation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011, 126). Qualitative research as a method was chosen best to complement the findings on how the salespersons presented a solution. This way the author could analyze the situations and behaviors of the participants to best answer the goal on this thesis.

Qualitative data is non-numerical data which can be used to research meanings through words (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 480-482). Qualitative data doesn't have one single correct way to be analyzed. Qualitative data needs interpretation. (Cohen et al. 2011, 537.) Qualitative data can be collected by videotaping or otherwise documenting what the person says and how they say it (Saunders et al. 2009, 485; Strauss & Corbin 1998, 11). The author analyzed the data and thus her effort on analyzing the data is the key instrument to this research's validity (Cohen et al. 2011, 180).

The assignment was to develop and learn how to successfully present a solution in a B2B sales meeting. The thesis data is a case study about sales meetings. The meetings were the students' course exam. (Saunders et al. 2009, 145-147.) The situations were videotaped. The author used this approach to best find out why and how did the students propose a solution (Saunders et al. 2009, 146). If the author would have just secured in writing notes about the situations she would not have been able to notice the physical elements the participants made, for example with their hands.

The author videotaped eight sales situations to make her data. Each situation was still different even though the sales process was at the same stage. The author chose all situations which a specific sales course had, to be sure to analyze a phenomenon about solution proposing (Saunders et al. 2009, 508). The author observed the situation as a participant. This means the students and teacher knew the author was observing and going to analyze the situation for the thesis (Saunders et al. 2009, 294).

The data is not possible to be collected again due to that peoples' behaviors cannot be repeated, especially when the subject is about a thirty minute presentation and includes six to eight persons. The study however is reliable, for the situations were actual situations the students made, and the students showed what they are capable of doing at a situation as such.

She wanted to learn as many ways from a same kind of situation. The results are even more valid and accurate, for the author has no need to prefer one over the other. This is because the author was not involved in the situation other than as recording it. (Saunders et al. 2009, 194.)

### **3.2 Collecting and handling the data**

The author used existing contacts from HAAGA-HELIA to start the process of collecting the data. Together with Mrs. Harkki the author came up with deciding to videotape the situations. Mrs. Harkki asked permission about videotaping and using

the situations as data for this thesis from the student's during their class. Videotaping was important to assure seeing the presentations many times.

The author gained access to the participants through Mrs. Harkki. Mrs. Harkki held a course on solution selling and the author wrote her thesis study about the courses final exam. This was a sales meeting the students made to show how they present a solution in a B2B sales situation. The participants will not be needed to be contacted afterwards because the analysis will be written only about the videos from the actual situation.

The author collected the data on Thursday May 16<sup>th</sup> 2013. The time required to collect the data was one working day including the eight thirty minute presentations and quick feedback discussions. The data transfer took half of a workday. The author did not manage to create notes from the situations for she needed to concentrate on videotaping the presentation. After every presentation there was a quick review by feedback and the next group started their presentation.

The author used her camera to videotape the first situation. After the first situation the author's camera's memory card went full so she needed to continue videotaping with her mobile phone. She transferred the data after every situation into a computer to prevent the memory card going full and to assure access to the data later on.

During three transfers something had happened for the videos were not capable to be viewed anymore. The author found out this during the video analysis. The author could not view the data even with her mobile phone. They had been destroyed while the author transferred them to the computer. The author had to secure the analyzing of the situations to her memory. Luckily most of the samples were safe. The author copied all of the data to Mrs. Harkki's files so she will store it as long as she wants. The author gave the copies of the data back to Mrs. Harkki after she had finished using the data material.

Videotaping as a method was mostly successful. The data which had not been destroyed the author could analyze from them also the way in which the salespeople presented the solution. Videotaping as such was the most effective way to reach the main purpose of this thesis.

The videos were watched and analyzed by the thesis author. The analyses that will be made about the data are the secondary research questions: how to prepare for proposing a solution, how to tell or show the solution to the prospect and what will not work in presenting the solution and why. The author also analyzed who presented the solution and in what situation was it presented in.

### **3.3 Ethics**

Qualitative data may require cases in which personal and sensitive matters are analyzed (Cohen et al. 2011, 542). The author has done her best to protect the participant's privacy. The participants may still recognize their own and their fellow classmate's performances due to them seeing each other's presentation during data collection. This is because the data was collected from only a few situations.

The data was analyzed on how the participants presented the proposal so the participants may recognize each other from this text (Sounders et al. 2009, 193). Also, there is only one class of sales students every year attending the course at HAAGA-HELIA Degree Programme in Sales. The teacher asked the participants for permission to use the videos as material for this thesis and for teaching later classes with the videos.

## 4 Results

Under this main chapter the author will tell the results from the data. They will be viewed by the secondary research questions. Three situations could not be analyzed properly due to the damage in the data. The author will analyze the results further in main chapter 5 (Discussion), in relation to the theories presented earlier in the literature review.

The persons presented in this main chapter are figurative and their titles are used to identify each participant's role in each situation. "On stage" in this context means being at the front of the classroom where a PowerPoint presentation was shown.

### 4.1 How to prepare for proposing a solution?

This subchapter concentrates on what happened during that particular meeting from the very start of it to the moment the salesperson starts to present the solution.

Group1: In the beginning of the meeting the marketing manager went through the agenda in the negotiation table and confirmed it was fine to the prospects. Then a salesperson confirmed the needs and facts they had talked in the previous meeting. Another salesperson confirmed that the goal which the municipality wants to achieve is correct. After this they asked the prospects if there was something missing in their information.

The marketing manager told they had prepared a quick PowerPoint presentation (later referred also as PP presentation) and she will go through it now. She told they could go through the written offer in detail after the presentation. Then the marketing manager went "on stage" (in front of the classroom) to present the solution.

Group 2: The sales manager began the meeting by introducing the salespersons at the negotiating table. The sales manager told the agenda and asked if it was fine. The conversation continued with the secretary telling a summary of the previous meeting



and the difficulties the municipality has now. This was done at the negotiating table. The secretary confirmed the needs and asked the prospects for permission to present the solution.

Group 3: The salespersons began the meeting with small talk about the weather and what summer will bring to the municipality. The product salesperson was particularly interested in the municipality. She made a pleasant start to the meeting with both sides laughing and enjoying others company. The sales manager did seek for agreement on the agenda and the prospects agreed on it. Two salespersons went “on stage” to present the needs. After the needs were confirmed they continued straight to presenting the solution.

Group 4: The salespersons told the municipality’s present situation and goals by a PP presentation. Then a salesperson continued straight to the solution. The author could not view the video data from this situation and could remember only this.

Group 5: The salespersons showed a PP presentation that included the goal of the sales process and what they had talked about earlier. They showed the present situation the municipality has. They also showed what they offer as a solution. During the presentation they told about their service, and how does the product work. The author could not view the video data from this situation and could remember only this.

Group 6: The salespersons began the meeting with introducing themselves. They went through the PP presentation at the negotiating table via a laptop. The presentation began with telling about the company. It proceeded with what they had talked earlier and what is the goal the municipality’s leaders have told. Now the salespersons told about their references and what the age groups of elderly there is in the municipality they were meeting.

Group 7: The salespersons presented a PP presentation that included why the prospects should choose the company. The salespersons also told what has been talked

earlier and proceeded to the solution. The author could not view the video data from this situation and could remember only this.

Group 8: The salespersons began the meeting with refreshing memories who was whom, for titles had changed and some people didn't attend the meeting. The salespersons had a reference attend the meeting with them. The sales manager told they could begin with going through the agenda. This was done by a PP presentation. It included what had been discussed last time and what the needs of the prospects were. Then the sales manager told advantages and benefits of having the company and the solution. The sales manager went back to the negotiating table and the product manager gave the written offer to the buyers. Now the product manager went "on stage" to present the solution.

The result was that in the beginning of the meeting the salespersons told what has been talked about earlier with the prospect. They presented these facts via a PowerPoint presentation or went through them by saying them in the negotiation table. They made sure that the present situation and the need was correct. Then the salespersons told why the prospects need them. Some groups said they could show the solution via a PowerPoint presentation and thus did not ask for permission to do it. Some groups gave the written offer before presenting the solution "on stage". This process took only from a couple to few minutes.

## **4.2 How to tell or show the solution to the prospect?**

This subchapter concentrates on how the solution was presented, what did the participants do then and what did they say then.

Group 1: The marketing manager was "on stage" and went through the PP presentation. The PP presentation included only the needs of the municipality, the solution proposal, and the advantages and benefits of the solution to the municipality. The marketing manager moved to the solution proposing by saying: "What we have

now pondered for you is this kind of...” This was done around three minutes into the meeting.

Now she presented the products they were offering via the PP presentation. She told the benefits only after she had told all the specific products they are offering. Marketing manager’s oral presentation of the proposal was clear and confident. Meanwhile the other salespersons sat at the negotiation table with prospects.

After the presentation the salesperson gave the written offers to the prospects. The marketing manager broke the silence by saying she had just quickly gone through the products but will tell more about them now. She emphasized the benefits of the products. She sat with her hands on the table, palms facing up. Then the prospects gave objections and they negotiated the offer.

Group 2: A little over three minutes into the meeting the secretary continued his assurance about the needs and difficulties. Then he said: “We’ve now got a finished solution proposal for you and so we have agreed on having this meeting to go through the subject in more detail.” The prospects agreed this was fine. Then the sales manager said: “We can probably present the solution now.” The salesperson handed out the written offer to the prospects. Then all salespeople went “on stage” to present the solution by a PP presentation. The prospects were left alone at the table with just handed printouts of the offer.

The secretary began the PP presentation by showing the present situation and difficulties which the prospects had just confirmed. Then he showed the optimal situation which the prospect would want. Now the salesperson told the solution. She continued to present and tell about a workshop which is part of the solution. She did play with her fingers most of the time she spoke. She looked for words many times from a paper.

The solution architect held a short presentation about the products which are included in the offer. The sales manager presented why the prospects should choose them as a

company. Then she told about the prices. After the presentation the salespersons went back to the table and handled objections.

Group 3: A little less than two minutes into the meeting, the sales manager suggested that they will show what they had prepared for the meeting. Two salespersons went “on stage” to present the solution. The salesperson started the presentation with going through the present situation and telling what the goal situation is in the municipality. The salesperson started the proposal with the next slide: “What we are offering...” and the sales manager immediately continued with: ”Yes. Again I will tell shortly, so in a minute we will go through in more detail; (the product salesperson’s name) will in a minute go through in more detail these. So, we have this kind of...”

The benefits were illustrated with pictures of situations in which the solution would help. The salespersons were very calm and talked slowly and understandably. They emphasized that the solution was made just for the prospects. The salespeople went back to the negotiation table where the prospects started to negotiate the offer and tell objections. The salespersons explained one objection with the fact that they had written the offer based on what they had talked earlier.

The salespeople had told the advantages and benefits of having the product and answered the objections before talking about the price. The prospects had already asked about the prices but the product salesperson quickly answered: “Yes, soon we will get there but I will still tell about this...”and by this they guaranteed that later on there would be fewer objections left about the products.

Group 4: One salesperson went “on stage” to present PowerPoint presentation. She told what the slides in that presentation had. The author could not view the video data from this situation and could remember only this.

Group 5: The salespersons presented the solution one person at a time “on stage”. The others were left at the negotiation table with the prospects. The salespeople emphasized that the solution is made just for the prospect’s needs. The sales manager

said they wish for a long-term partnership with the prospect and that they are willing to make one themselves with the prospect too. The salespersons emphasized the advantages with the particular benefits the prospects will gain from the products. The author could not view the video data from this situation and could remember only this.

Group 6: The salespersons presented the solution by a PP presentation via a laptop computer. This was placed in the negotiating table where all of the salespersons sat. In about nine minutes into the meeting the salespeople presented the solution and told why the products they offer would be necessary to the municipality. Towards the end of the meeting the salespersons asked do the prospects want the deal and one salesperson asked “Shall we put names in to the papers?”

Group 7: The salespersons presented the PP presentation and told what they are offering. They proposed the solution with the help of the FAB model: the features, advantages and benefits of the products. The next slide in the PP presentation showed the concrete benefits of having the products. They were presented in the order the products were presented. Then they showed an example of their service. The author could not view the video data from this situation and could remember only this.

Group 8: Around four minutes into the meeting the sales manager said: “Next we could just look at this tailored solution, which would then help you” Now the product manager gave written offers to prospects and went “on stage” to show the PP presentation of the solution.

The product manager began the solution proposing by saying: “So what we have now ended up with - we have discussed inside our company quite extensively that which, which products would solve your problems most effectively and especially cost-efficiently. We came up with this our...” He stood straight and held his hands behind his back. He looked frequently and most of the time to the board in which the presentation was shown.

The result was that the salespersons proposed a solution by showing it via a PP presentation. Then the salespersons gave the written offer to the prospects and started to negotiate and answer objections. Some groups' salesperson handed a written offer to the prospects before presenting the solution. These prospects viewed the offers but still concentrated to the salesperson when they presented the PP presentation.

The salespersons showed the solution by telling what the package is they are offering. This included telling what products are included in the solution. They most often told or showed what benefits the prospect will gain with these products. They discussed the price and products in more detail at the negotiating table after the solution had been proposed.

### **4.3 What will not work in presenting the solution and why?**

This subchapter concentrates on the situations which were not that strong and admirable in the situations. This subchapter includes the points which the author felt included here.

Group1: The prospects thought the pricing was unclear and they did not understand what it included. They defined this with various calculations which were not included in the offer. They wished for them via e-mail. Also throughout the negotiating time the salesperson did not stop the prospects from giving objections. The prospects gave objections one after another and the salesperson did not manage to answer to them all.

A prospect said the 24 month offer was a long time to commit to a contract. The other salesperson asked if the prospects would want a trial period of six months. Then through objections the conversation went to that the product may not be of any help. The prospects asked why is that so - and an intimate conversation with their colleagues began. They then asked the salespersons if it was of any sense of having a short trial period if it is committed to a certain time period. Then the salesperson said that she meant if the prospects don't see the value they can leave the deal after the time period.

Now the salespersons said it is a company policy to have a 24 month contract and that a six month trial period is a good choice. Now they started to talk about not having the product and what happens after the six month trial period. The salespersons had the offer made of a 24 month period and had nothing written about the trial period. They were not prepared with any prices of the trial period and they would need to meet again to do the same meeting.

Group 2: The salesperson handed out the written offer when the salespersons went “on stage”. This made the prospects look at the handout. This partly distracted them from the presentation because they looked at the papers. Also in this situation there were none of the salespersons left to the table.

Group 3: The salespeople did not have clear calculations to the prospects. The payback time was a concern and the salespersons weren’t prepared for that. They told that their solution would give 15 000 euros savings. The prospects felt this would have needed to be written in the offer.

Group 4: The salespersons said frequently that they will get back to the subject. They hesitated with the arguments about their solution. The salespersons did not tell why these particular products would solve the problems the municipality has. The author could not view the video data from this situation and could remember only this.

Group 5: The author could not view the video data from this situation and thus does not remember what did not work in the situation.

Group 6: The prospects felt the salespersons halved the offer without a good reason. They felt they would have bought the whole deal but the salespersons went and lowered the purchase deal in half. During the meeting they discussed the prices and the salespersons did calculations. The prospects also felt the money-saving-calculations could have been presented literally.

Group 7: The author could not view the video data from this situation and thus does not remember what did not work in the situation.

Group 8: The product manager talked mostly towards the screen and did not look so much to the prospect. The product manager told what the products were, but did not tell what the prospects would gain from having the specific products. The prospect had to ask what value the products would give to them.

The reference answered a few times to the prospects objections because the reference knew the answers better. This made the prospects gain trust to the products. The prospects felt the salespersons should have asked which one of the prospects makes the buying decision in order for the salesperson to notice that person more.

The result was that due to nervousness some salespeople played with fingers or looked mostly at the screen in which the presentation was shown. Some groups' arguments for pricing and why the products are the right ones to solve the prospects' problems could have been better. As shown by one group - the salespersons should not offer something they have not thought about earlier. The conversation went to a complete other direction than what had been intended. The prospects started to talk about not having the product and how they will get out of the deal.



## **5 Discussion**

In this main chapter the author interprets the results in relation to the secondary research questions. For ease of reference the secondary research questions were (1) how to prepare for proposing a solution, (2) how to tell or show the solution to the prospect, and (3) what will not work in presenting a solution and why. The researches reliability and validity is also discussed. This main chapter also includes suggestions for further research and an evaluation of the process of making this thesis.

### **5.1 Interpretation of results**

The author interprets what she found from the results through these subchapters by referring them to literature. This subchapter tells what actually happened versus what literature suggests about it.

#### **5.1.1 How to prepare for proposing a solution?**

The trend in the data was that the meeting started with introducing one another. Every group began the meeting with telling who they are and what their job title or role in that meeting is. Not every group did tell from which company they are, but it came clear before negotiating the solution. Chitwood suggests that in the beginning of the meeting salespeople present whom they are and what their role in that meeting is. (Chitwood 2005, 169-192.)

One group in particular began the meeting by making the customer feel good. This was done before proposing a solution in order to the customer being more willing to buy. (Solomon et al. 2010, 61.) This group succeeded in creating positive emotions, for the prospects smiled and nodded while the salespersons presented the solution and negotiated it (Storbacka & Lehtinen 2001, 26-27).

A salesperson told what they had planned as agenda for the meeting and asked for agreement on that. Now the salespersons told or showed what has been talked earlier

or at the last meeting. They confirmed that the needs and present situation is correct. Only after the salesperson and prospect have agreed on a need can they proceed to the presentation (Chitwood 2005, 158-167). The need and problem identification must be done properly to be sure to point out the characteristics which the prospect truly values and needs (Roune & Joki-Korpela 2008, 172). This the salespersons did succeed in.

They either asked for permission to propose the solution or they said they will now show it via a PowerPoint presentation. Most of the groups used SPIN “situation, problem, implication and need-payoff” question method to guide through the meeting (Manning et al. 2010, 240).

The salespeople did tell the prospects they have made or come up with an entity as Jobber et al. (2012, 7) suggests. Still Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 7) advise there should be one specific product the salesperson has to offer at the end of the meeting. Not every group did succeed in this. There was negotiation about the original solution and about adjusting it to more what the prospects wanted or thought would like to spend money on. Some groups did have to make a new offer to satisfy the prospect’s needs based on that. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 7.)

There should not be many opportunities the prospect could choose because then the salesperson has not done his or her job appropriately. When there are many opportunities of a product the salesperson must find out what the prospect truly needs or wants and offer it (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 79). This makes a salesperson successful because the customer can rely on the salesperson offering the best product or service for the prospect.

### **5.1.2 How to tell or show the solution to the prospect?**

The trend in the data was that only a few minutes into the meeting a salesperson (or more than one) goes “on stage”. The purpose of this was to present the PowerPoint presentation to propose the solution. Jobber & Lancaster (2012, 276) suggest this is a

good way of taking advantage of technology. Technology was also taken advantage about by one group using a laptop.

Some salespersons gave the written offer to the prospect before proposing the solution. Weitz et al. (2009, 264) advise that if the salesperson decides to present the written proposal in a meeting they could give the prospect a copy of the complete proposal before the presentation. They would need to summarize the whole proposal in roughly five to ten minutes and then ask for questions. The salespersons gave the written offer and went “on stage” to present the solution. They did not summarize the whole proposal right there and then. They did go through the proposal during the meeting, but mostly concentrated on discussing the products.

Another way to present the solution is during the presentation giving a written proposal and going through them carefully together one-step-at-a-time to prevent the prospect from reading it alone and not listen to the presentation (Weitz et al. 2009, 264.) The author feels this would have worked better with presenting the solution through a PP presentation and providing the prospect with a copy of the offer simultaneously.

Now a salesperson tells what the solution contains. They show a PP presentations slide with images of the products or feelings and they tell the solution by demonstrating with digital aid as Chitwood (2005, 193) suggests. People react to colors, shapes and images so the salesperson should take advantage of these in the proposal (Sorensen 2010, 51). The salespeople did use colors, shapes and images like Sorensen (2010, 51) suggests a successful presentation includes.

Not all groups did succeed in presenting a clear solution. This was because the prospects had to ask what is it the offer contains (Swallow & Khan-Panni 2004, 80). The fact that the presentation had dark colors or had lots of text in it may have been a reason for this.

Some groups presented the company before the solution, but others made this after the solution was presented. The author feels the company should be sold before the solution so that the negotiations can start straight away. The prospect then also can base their knowledge based on the presentation for they then know what the company truly is. Chitwood (2005, 193) advises to fill the need (a.k.a. reveal the solution) after the company has been sold.

Most groups gave a reason for the prospect to buy. They did use Chitwood's (2005, 79) reasons for buying. Mostly they presented the desire for gaining money but also security and protection. Swallow & Khan-Panni (2004, 104) show Finnish people most often want to hear facts during a presentation. Most salespersons did convincingly offer facts about their products or solutions and results from reference's business.

Then they sit and negotiate about the written offer and the PP presentation's solution they have made. Like Solomon et al. (2013, 207) suggests - the prospects truly were interested in the information about detailed specifications of the product such as the price, size, features, color, and warranty, weight and delivery. A few salespersons were sending positive signals by keeping hands on the table palms facing upwards and leaning forward, sitting straight as Ian Piper (Certus sales 2011a.) and Weitz et al. (2009, 131-138) present. Almost all prospects nodded and took eye contact with the salespersons. This can be interpreted to success in gaining a positive atmosphere. (Certus sales 2011a; Weitz et al. 2009, 131-138.)

The revealing of price and the buying decision come after the proposal (Chitwood 2005, 17.) This is why most of the groups did not discuss prices when presenting the solution.

Rope (2004, 134-135) suggests that the "round numbers" should not be put to offers because the price should look as if it was precisely calculated for the product and it should be clearly presented so the prospect knows what they are paying for.

### 5.1.3 What will not work in presenting the solution and why?

The trend in the situations was that the salespersons showed what has been done and been talked about previously. They talked about advantages and benefits of having the company as a partner. Then they proposed a solution via a PP presentation. Then they went back to the negotiating table and talked about the written offer.

The trend in the data was that some groups' salespersons did not ask if it is appropriate to present the solution then. They inform they have prepared a PP presentation and will now go through it quickly. The author feels the salespersons should ask for permission to move on to the next stage.

Some groups should emphasize more on what the municipality would benefit of the products. Some prospects had to ask the salespersons for this. In some situations the salespersons could have assured the prospects on how they would meet their goals with this solution. The author feels salespersons should tell this without the prospect asking about it.

The author feels that when going through the written proposal, the salespersons should guide the conversation and not wait for new objections. At these times the salespersons should learn to relax and clam the situation when receiving objections. The salespersons should make more effort on making the situation more of a conversation than a question-answer time. The salespersons could respond more quickly to objections.

One of the prospects asked about the languages available, for a presentation had product names in English. Salesperson answered calmly it is in Finnish language. The prospect asked if it was only in Finnish and they responded it is available also in Swedish and English language. The fact that the municipality is of two languages could have been noticed by the salespersons and not pointed out by the prospects at this stage of the sales process.

A salesperson asked the prospect of a trial period. They had not prepared any material on that. The conversation moved on to the product not being of any help. That moved on to multiple objections. The author feels the conversation should not have moved into that direction when asking the order. The author feels the salespersons had not collected enough information from the prospects' because they came up with the trial period during the meeting.

As shown in literature, when discussing the price, the prospect might want to know about discount possibilities, in example for ordering a larger amount. The possibilities of returned-goods or of repairing or maintaining the product might also arouse into discussion. If the product is a machine or capital, the re-sell value and a possible disposal cost might be discussed. (Solomon et al. 2013, 208.) One group in particular was caught up with this conversation. The salespeople did manage to answer a few objections regarding this area.

One group had all of the salespeople "on stage". This could have aroused a problem for the prospects were left alone at the negotiation table and they had the new written offer with them. Also in that case, like a few others, the prospects felt the PP presentation could have been simpler and not include the prices or as much text as they did.

Without a problem or need there can be no solution and there is no need to propose a solution. The author feels one group received many objections because the argument for the solution was not that good. The author feels they would need to propose the solution more bravely. The author also feels the salespersons should not include products in the offer if they truly don't believe they are vital in helping the prospect solve the problem. When the salesperson truly offers the products which the prospect needs and wants this adds the salespersons credibility and reliability. Also this helps convince the prospect to buying the products.

The price which one offer included was low, compared to the examples of other companies they gave. The literature suggests this would have needed explanation why the price is so low.

There was one group which did not succeed in clarifying whom is the right decision-maker who would need to hear the business proposal. The prospects told this after the meeting. They did not accept the offer because of this.

A salesperson played with her fingers. Another avoided eye contact with the prospects. These are signs of them being tense. The author feels the salespersons should propose a solution only based on what the prospect has told they need. Also this makes the presenting of the solution smoother because the salesperson truly feels the solution is entirely what the prospect needs.

## **5.2 Reliability and validity of the research**

Reliability can be defined as dependability, repeatability and consistency within different groups of participants and instruments (Cohen et al. 2011, 199). This means for a research to be reliable the results should be able to be accurately measured with the same results by repeating the research with other people in a different place.

Validity is the key to making a qualitative research worth something. When the researched participants have been honest and provided a researcher with rich in-depth data the research is valid. Without valid information or data the results are worthless. A researcher can increase the validity by choosing a natural setting for data collection. A researcher affects the validity of the data for he or she will analyze the data. (Cohen et al. 2011, 179-180.)

This case-study situation is not entirely reliable because it is not likely to measure the same results on other occasions. The results cannot be generalized because the data was about a fictional situation. Also, the author does not know if there has been an important event in the participant's performances because the author only analyzed

one situation from every participant. Each participant's own effort to the situation and their behavior in that situation cannot be repeated to be that of anyone else, so the situation is a case study and valid only in that moment.

The reason for this lack of reliability is that sales students performed a pretended situation in which they acted as salespeople and managers. The other party, fellow classmates, acted as leaders of a municipality in Finland. The roles on both parties were presented as how each participant thought their role in such a situation would be. The reason this situation was chosen as data for this thesis was to help fellow students of later classes to be able to analyze valid information to become better in solution presenting in the Degree Programme in Sales at HAAGA-HELIA.

The author of this thesis is a classmate to the case study participants. The author however did not participate in the course so the development of the sales process was not seen by the author. This shows the research is internally valid although the internal validity may have affected in a positive way of the author being able to analyze the situations better for she knew the participants beforehand (Cohen et al. 2011, 209).

The author observed the situation with the help of videotaping so she did not participate in the process itself. Saunders et al. (2009, 289-290) calls this participant observation for the author was a fellow classmate and understood what was happening for the participants knew each other beforehand. This may have helped the author to analyze and understand why the participant's acted the way they acted. An unfamiliar observer might have understood the situations differently and thus received other kind of results.

The validity of this research can on the other hand be weak due to the problems in analyzing the data. Three out of eight videos were damaged so the author could not analyze them with other than her memory. Also, the results on the third secondary research question can be somewhat invalid. The author's own understanding and own thoughts on the research question did reflect on the data chosen to be presented as



results. The author first studied the literature on the subject and based on that chose the points to be handled in the results.

The research is more valid due to the fact that the participants in the case study were familiar with each other and the author beforehand. They could present a situation which would be much like one outside school. The fact that the participants knew the author may have affected the way they presented the situation.

The author believes the students performed their best in the situation for it was their course exam and the situation was videotaped to be the data of this thesis. The author believes this too might have increased the validity of the outcome of every sales situation videotaped.

The author first collected the data and then started to write the literature review. This may have affected the theories and aspects chosen to the literature as to the light in which the findings have been observed. All in all, the author feels the research is more valid than reliable but it still measures what was intended to be measured. The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study (Yin 1994, 36-37) and the author feels that she has achieved this by describing in detail the process of the research.

### **5.3 Suggestions for further research or development**

The author feels the research data situations could be organized again in the solution selling course at HAAGA-HELIA to collect data for someone to research what the next years' course participants will do in the same kind of situation. It could be educational for upcoming students at HAAGA-HELIA to be able to learn behaviors and good customs from more than one class of students.

For further research or development the non-verbal behaviors during the whole meeting and especially during solution proposing could be studied more thoroughly. This would require better videotaping machines (other than a mobile phone). The

volume of the speaker and any sudden breaks in speech (Cohen et al. 2011, 538) could also be analyzed to receive more valid results.

Further development could be to know what has been happening during the sales process. This would help to understand how well the proposal was actually presented. Did the salespersons actually refer to the prospects actual needs? Did they act differently during the sales process? The lack of this background information was limited due to focusing the data only on the supposed-to-be last meeting.

#### **5.4 An evaluation of the thesis process & own learning**

The author learned thoroughly the sales process and understood what a successful solution proposal requires through the theories used. This research deepened the author's knowledge on the subject. The author also learned to manage skills on collecting reliable information to present in the literature. She learnt to handle the knowledge on sales which she has learnt from HAAGA-HELIA.

The author began the thesis process by familiarizing to it as seen on Figure 13. The author presents her thesis process step-by-step in that figure. The author collected the data by videotaping the situations. This thesis process did proceed in a different way than usual due to collecting the data before familiarizing to the literature. This may have an effect on the chosen literature and on the way the data was analyzed. When the author had the knowledge required to be able to analyze the data she learn from the data and interpreted the information to the results (main chapter 4) and discussion (main chapter 5). The author received feedback from Mrs. Korttilalli when they discussed the work at the end of the process of making this thesis.



Figure 13. The thesis process

The author would like to thank her thesis supervisor Mrs. Korttilalli and also Mrs. Harkki for this opportunity on personal development and becoming a better professional in sales. Also the author feels the guidance she received from both Mrs. Korttilalli and Mrs. Harkki helped her perform her best at this thesis.

## **6 Summary and conclusion**

In this thesis the author has researched solution proposing in a B2B sales meeting. The research's aim was to find out how to successfully present a solution in a B2B sales meeting. Furthermore, in main chapter 2. Literature, the B2B sales process and the buyer's decision-making-process were discussed in order to the readers and sales students to be able to succeed in presenting a solution in a B2B sales meeting and to understand the basics of the topic. Previous publications are limited in the area of focusing in presenting a solution in a B2B sales meeting. The purpose of this thesis was to help students become successful in presenting and proposing solutions.

This study gives useful information for learning effective ways on proposing solutions for the target company. These have been specifically reviewed in literature (main chapter 2). There are quotations to guide the salesperson on what to say in different sales situations.

There was a trend on how the selling- and buying process develop between numerous authors. The research data had also quite similar situations and behaviors within the meetings. To summarize the main findings of the data the author would like to point out some key results and make conclusions. They will be reviewed next.

### **6.1 The key results**

The results show specific behaviors the salespersons made so that the readers of this thesis can learn from the situations. The salespersons followed a similar pattern within the process of the meeting.

The results show that in the beginning of the meeting the salesperson(s) summarize what has been talked about earlier with the prospect(s). The salesperson(s) presented these via a PowerPoint presentation or went through them by telling the summary at the negotiation table. The salesperson(s) fortified that the needs and wants as well as the present situation were correctly understood by the salesperson and based on that

they proposed a solution. Then the salesperson(s) told why the prospects need them. This process took only a couple to a few minutes.

The salesperson(s) asked the prospects for permission to go through what was talked last time and earlier. This was done orally and also by the PowerPoint presentation. Some salesperson(s) asked for permission to engage on action. Other salespersons said they could show the solution via a PowerPoint presentation and thus did not ask permission to do it. Before starting the presentation some groups said their solution has been designed for the prospects and they told what the solution held.

The solution was proposed via a PowerPoint presentation. Mostly at least one salesperson was left at the negotiating table with prospects. Some salespersons gave the written offer before presenting it “on stage”. The salesperson(s) showed their solution by a PowerPoint presentation and then went through the written offer together with the prospects.

The result was that the salesperson(s) proposed a solution by showing it via a PowerPoint presentation. Then they gave the written offer to the prospects and started to negotiate and answer objections. Some groups’ salesperson handed the written offers to the prospects before presenting the solution. These prospects looked the offers but still concentrated to the salesperson when they presented the PowerPoint presentation.

The salesperson(s) showed the solution by telling what the package is they are offering. They told which products are included in the solution. They most often told or showed which benefits the prospect will gain with these products. They emphasized the solution was made just for the prospects and argued the reasons why the solution is necessary for the prospect.

Most groups did not reveal the prices in the presentation. They discussed the price and products in more detail at the negotiating table after the solution had been proposed.

The prospects gave objections and the salespersons answered them the way they knew best.

The results cannot be entirely generalized because the situation was fictional and each student's own effort to the situation and their behavior in that situation cannot be generalized to be that of anyone else. In addition the author did analyze only one sales class, so the results may differ in other upcoming classes. However the students did present the situations as if they were real. They presented them the way they knew such a situation would happen. The results on how the participants acted may be generalized to match similar behavior in another sales student with similar education.

## **6.2 The conclusions**

Previous publications have concentrated on the surface of this topic and not concentrated on it entirely. However, to get a better view of the solution sales process and to have more reliable results, further research should be done with a bigger scale and more respondents. The limitation of this research was the size of the data and the fact that it was about a fictional situation.

The author feels the salespersons could have emphasized more on the benefits and painted a picture in the prospects mind about it. One group did succeed in this by showing pictures of situations in which the solution shows great benefits.

Further research or development could include analyzing the body language during solution proposing. Also by analyzing the buyer's behavior on reacting to what the salesperson says could be investigated. Now the author researched only the end discussions, in which the offer was proposed and the participants could start closing the deal. Analyzing the whole sales process would require a larger scale research.

The author found it has a difference if a salesperson presents a proposal or if they present a solution to the prospect. The author feels that salespersons should emphasize more on coming up with a solution instead of a proposal. This is a way of showing

confidence and showing that they are there to sincerely offer ease to the prospect - because they have come up with a solution!

The author has learnt to ask an open-ended question and be quiet. People should let the prospect answer the question without the salesperson already giving an answer. For example “What do you think of that? Great idea, right?” is not giving the prospect an opportunity to tell what they think about that (Chitwood 2005, 71-72). This was seen in a few sales groups from the data when the salesperson talked.

The author feels the salesperson should ask: “What does this mean to your company? Why is it important?” from the prospect during the need and problem identification (Balac 2009, 164).

The author feels that prices should not be discussed when revealing the solution via a PowerPoint presentation. The author feels the price shouldn't be the selling point from which the prospect would start weighing the value of the products. The prices should be discussed at the end of the negotiation: they should be shown in the last page of the written offer. This way the prospect would know all benefits and advantages of having the products and would desire them. Otherwise the discussion is about the prices and not about making the prospect understand the meaning or value of the products which have been presented as a solution to the prospect. One sales group in the data did succeed best in this.

As people react to colors, shapes and images the salesperson should take advantage of these in the proposal (Sorensen 2010, 51). The PowerPoint presentation should include one to two slides of the solution.

The customer's role in the company which he or she is representing in the meeting must also be taken into consideration. This is because that also impacts the decision he or she will make about the solution the salesperson presents. (Solomon et al. 2010, 62.) Rounne & Joki-Korpela (2008, 222) inform that most often the prospect has other persons with them meeting the salesperson(s). They usually are the ones who have the

responsibility of the purchases and they enter the buying process when discussing the offer and contract (Roune & Joki-Korpela 2008, 222). Thus the salesperson must know all the names and responsibilities of those whom will be involved in the buying decision (Weitz et al. 2009, 97). The users of the product usually have an influence on the buying decision, but they don't make the final decision (Weitz et al. 2009, 97).

Last but not least, the salesperson should act on the prospects timetable: not when it is fine to them. This should be noticed when proposing the next meeting to the prospect. (Balac 2009, 129; Rope 2004, 14-15.) The prospect is most probably busy, and the salesperson should save the buyer's time by handling all the questions and proposals during the meeting, instead of calling and e-mailing them frequently. In the meeting the salesperson should ask what would be the most convenient time for the salesperson to call, or meet the prospect for the next time. (Balac 2009, 129.) They should agree on a specific time and date and most importantly the salesperson must make sure to keep that promise!



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