



## To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others

**Daniel H. Pink**  
Riverhead Trade 2013  
\$13.98 272 pages

### Reviewed by Tom Bellinson

Let me begin this book review by saying that in the past, I was a corporate salesperson. I took my profession very seriously and read many books on selling. I also attended seminars and practiced my skills. I still read books about selling...well I mostly skim them. You see, after a while it's hard to find any fresh new ideas.

Daniel Pink has taken a novel approach to selling for two reasons:

1. He recognizes that you don't need to be a professional salesperson to need sales skills
2. He understands that the world has changed since many of the old sales techniques were developed

Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of old ideas in this book. That's not a bad thing because some of the old methods are still viable today. However, for every technique you might have learned in a Tom Hopkins or Zig Ziglar book, there's a new one to replace it. Pink has done his homework.

### Moving Others

To Sell is Human is not just about selling products or services to customers. It's just as much about motivating others to act upon your ideas. Whether you are an engineer, an executive or a parent, you are called upon daily to "sell" your point of view to others. It turns out that the very same techniques that you would use to sell machining services will work when convincing your 15 year old daughter that she should study before going out with her friends.

### New World Order

The book is broken into three parts. In Part I, Pink sets the stage by describing how the playing field upon which we all work and live has fundamentally changed. One might take exception to some of his points here. He emphasizes that the education and medical markets will continue to dominate (what he calls Ed-Med). I find his arguments a bit weak, but agree these are two important opportunities.

The book also elaborates on the impact the Internet has had on knowledge parity. Once upon a time, if you were selling a product, service or idea, you came to the process with more information than the person you were trying to move. Today, the Internet puts so much information at our fingertips that we can no longer count on having knowledge superiority just because we're the one trying to do the convincing.

Pink calls this a reversal of the old adage Caveat Emptor (buyer beware) to Caveat Venditor (seller beware). Sellers need to be aware that the person or people they are selling to may have as much or more information about the marketplace and even the specific products or services you're selling. As you can imagine, this is a major game-changer. So, the question becomes how do you think and behave under these conditions?

## Attunement, Buoyancy & Clarity

In Part II, Mr. Pink tells us how to get in the right frame of mind for moving others. He argues that there are three attributes that will help you be effective:

**Attunement** – this one is nothing new. It is about active listening and getting inside the head of the person you are trying to move. More than empathy, you need to understand what is motivating them. The interesting point of this section is the results of studies showing that the extravert that we usually assume has the best demeanor for sales is no better than an extreme introvert. In fact, being somewhere in the middle is best.

**Buoyancy** – if you've ever been in sales, you know that bad news and rejection can sometimes pile up fast. When you are unable to move past these experiences and continue on with a positive attitude, you can end up in an ugly downward spiral from which it is hard to recover. Buoyancy is that attribute that allows us to stay afloat even in high winds. In this section of the book, we learn about finding the right balance between optimism and pessimism. Yes, it doesn't hurt to have a good dose of pessimism.

**Clarity** – In the third part of Part II we learn about how to focus in on what really matters. Again, there is some older material in this section, but it is well presented and focuses on solid examples and techniques for identifying the real issue(s) of the person you are trying to move. Once you've found the real issue, you need to frame your message in a way that connects with the person you're trying to move. Pink provides a simple example of framing. An advertising executive is having lunch with Pink and they are walking through Central Park in NYC when they encounter a man with a cup and a sign which reads "I am blind." There was almost no money in the sad looking man's cup. The ad man took a marker and added the words "It is springtime and" in front of the man's other message and in no time, the cup was overflowing with money. Why? Because all the people walking through the park on that beautiful day suddenly felt sorry for this poor man who could not enjoy the same beauty they were enjoying. That's framing.

## Pitch, Improve & Serve

In the final part of the book, Pink begins by telling us how to get people's attention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are continually bombarded with messages, so you need to make yours good.

**Pitch** – the old "elevator pitch" is out the window. You no longer have three minutes or even one minute. With Twitter, you have 140 characters or less (if you have a link). There are many practical ideas for how to formulate your presentation in whatever format it needs to be in. Some are old, some have been updated, but all are still worth knowing.

**Improve** – this one goes right along with Attunement. It's about active listening and working with the preexisting notions of the person you're trying to move. If you approach your pitch with a canned presentation, you may well miss opportunities to respond to unexpected opportunities to find a win-win scenario to move others. To achieve this, Pink offers three ideas: Listening for "offers," saying "yes, and..." and making your partners look good (even at your own expense if necessary).

**Serve** – the book ends with the notion that we are all just people trying to move other people and we can't lose sight of the fact that each of us is an individual. When we put messages out there, they need to resonate with those we want to reach. The most poignant example of this attitude comes from a sign in the lobby of a restaurant containing a picture of its owner. The sign reads "I NEED YOUR HELP! If you had anything less than a great experience at Il Canale, please call my cell phone." And, then it goes on to list his phone number, which I will not reprint here. We're told he doesn't get many calls as a result of the sign.

## Summary

There are lots of sales books out there and not many business people read them. As a matter of fact, far too few salespeople read them. Good selling is like good service in a restaurant – you don't even notice it. It's natural, you feel in control and everything just happens the way it is supposed to. We all sell our ideas or ask people to give of themselves to us (possibly money, but more often time) every day. Whether you're asking someone sitting on a bus to give up their seat for you or asking a co-worker to pick you up some lunch while they're out, it's a sales job.

Executives have the most to gain from this education. With so many people counting on guidance, it is important to learn to not just give orders, but use active listening to learn how you can guide them while retaining their enthusiasm and motivation. This book is a good start. Read it. Then practice its lessons. It may be the most valuable thing you do this year.

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