

# DUTCH SALES BLOG



Nothing happens until somebody sells  
something

...so go sell something!

Arno Diepeveen  
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## About Arno



Arno's sales roots are in the telecommunications and technology industries where he worked for 8 years. In 1991 he left the business to become an entrepreneur, initially working for himself as an interim manager and sales strategy consultant.

In 1995 he founded Artemis Performance Management. Twenty employees strong by 2002, Artemis helped its more than 50 clients, both domestically and internationally, to develop sales organizations for companies venturing for the first time into highly competitive markets or countries. In addition, Artemis did crisis management for companies lagging in terms of sales performance.

In 2003 Arno quit at Artemis after being diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. Two years later he founded USA – United Sales Associates. USA is a collective of highly experienced

independent business experts who help companies to maximize profits. On top of this, Arno is a performance coach and strategy consultant. He writes weekly columns for the Dutch Sales Blog and indulges himself by doing key note speaking engagements. His current key note topic - Recession Proof Selling - is also a seminar and workshop.

Arno 'fights a friendly battle' against mediocrity. He argues his standpoints armed with an excellent sense of humor and he won't shy away from confrontation. He specializes in mindset and human behavior and is highly capable of motivating people to get the best out of themselves. According to Arno, one of the biggest secrets to success is to make a *not to do* list and to focus on the things you're damned good at.

He started his blog in March 2007. In 2008 the blog made it to the finals of the Dutch Bloggies Awards, the annual competition for the best blogs in the Netherlands. Dutch Sales Blog ended up finishing in the top 20 in the business related blogs category.

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## Good news!

How often are you tempted to let the economic slowdown get into your head? Every day? Several times a day? Every hour? Is that decreasing macro-statistic taking the lead in your micro-world? Do you think your thoughts are really just unexpressed wishes?



I've got the following suggestions that will help your actions focus on positive growth:

1. Ask the clients that generates 80% of your business what you can do to save them money, improve their ability to compete, increase turnover and productivity. You'll find out that you can always do more for your clients if you ask how you can help. You can get in the car in the morning thinking you *have* to sell something, or you can get creative about helping your clients to improve their position. What choice will give you more energy and rewards...?
2. Spend time with clients. Sounds simple doesn't it? I'm sure that's all you do, but there are hordes of other salespeople that 'forget' to actually spend time with clients. Give me one good reason why you shouldn't be seeing, or at least talking to, clients every day. The only thing you need to do is make sure you've got a well oiled support machine behind you. One that makes it possible for you to concentrate on what you were hired to do: to facilitate your clients to the max. Who could be better at that than you?
3. Talk to all your clients that have bought products or services from your competitors in the last two years. It's hard to believe that all of them are happy with their current supplier. Have them tell you what the difference is between good and bad service.
4. Find new and creative solutions for your clients, create better service levels and discover new niches and markets. Get on the bus with the business developers and marketers at your company and be a winning team! Focus on big clients and clients that could potentially be big. If you think that's too dangerous, make sure you've got a lot of big clients

Here are a few suggestions for getting your thoughts and actions onto the same page:

1. Turn your television off. Television sucks. It makes you brain dead. Get your news from a newsreader, that way *you* determine what you're going to read. Once a day is enough. Make sure you read positive content, something that adds to your life.
2. Start writing about your profession. Write a book, start a weblog, or write and distribute a paper, e-book or newsletter. Whether you are or not; writing makes you an experienced specialist in your field. Make sure the first ten Google hits are 'caused' by your publications. Your clients google you just as much as you google him.
3. Buy ten books on sales and read, read, read. Listen to sales podcasts and take part in sales webcasts. There are lots of possibilities to download podcasts and participate in webcasts for free.
4. Don't forget to relax. Occasionally, do nothing; stare out the window for fifteen minutes without demanding anything of yourself. *Mens sana in corpore sano*. A good mind lives in a good body. Eat well and exercise. You'll be so much better if you're in good shape.

## Fearless selling

We live in an amazing time. The financial crisis is now called a recession. I'm not sure how you feel about it, but a good crisis really gets my blood pumping. Call it recession, depression, or regression – I don't care. I'm not being indifferent; it's simply the reality of doing business.

Allow me to explain myself. Maybe it'll help you out.



*Parking lot 'Golfer of the Month'*

I understand the need for macro-economic information, indexes, and statistics. They're especially important when you have to make major decisions and want to maintain your level of quality. The media happily bombards you with this information and before you know it, you've become a part of the statistics. Wrong!

There's no link whatsoever between your economic stability and the rest of the world. You are a unique entity amongst the plethora of global citizens and you've got two ways to look at the financial situation: you're either on your way up, or on your way down. Your ability to be on the upswing and to stay there is not determined by statistics.

You create opportunity by calling on your passion, your creativity, your personality, your philosophy, your focus, your authority, your attitude, your added value, and your ability to reflect and adapt to new situations.

One of the features of a downward trend is that nobody wants any part of it; an upward trend, on the other hand, is the hottest game in town. Everybody wants a part of it. The first trend is often referred to as 'driven by fear' (False Expectations Appearing Real) where the latter is known as 'driven by opportunity' or, when things really get out of control, 'driven by greed'. Do you recognize any of these 'drives' in your own approach? Fear keeps you nailed to the ground but opportunity gets you up and moving.

Which one are you on? Are you going to be just another member of the downward spiral club? Or will you dig down deep, find your excellence and move swiftly from one opportunity to the next?

Don't be put off your game by meaningless statistics; government spokespeople who somberly predict more of the same old badness; blood thirsty media who live by the creed: if it bleeds, it leads; or any other irrelevant mumbo-jumbo that doesn't help you in the least.

Surround yourself with the right kinds of people: opportunity makers, top entrepreneurs, successful salespeople, happy friends and clients with money to spend. Create your own headlines. Create new opportunities for your clients which, in turn, create opportunity for us all.

As far as 'greed' goes, what do you think about my new parking place?

## **72 pieces of advice to myself**

Advice is often well intended but ultimately meaningless, no matter how good it sounds. More often than not, an external advisor can do no more than get you thinking something like: 'yeah, I should work harder on that.' The word 'should' will most likely turn out to be a continuation of the rock solid status-quo.

Advising yourself, on the other hand, is much more powerful. But you are not ready with that. Ask yourself: "Am I ready to take my own advice, put it into practice and

work on it every day?” If you say unconditionally “Yes” to yourself and manage your decision on a daily basis, great things will happen. I Promise you that.

I’ve written 72 pieces of advice to myself. They’re listed randomly below. As you understand I didn’t make all of these advices up today, I’ve been gathering them for years. They’ll always have meaning to me as a kind of roadmap, a way of life.



1. How can I help?
2. Figure out what you’re damned good at.
3. Decide to be an expert at that thing (that you’re damned good at)
4. Model yourself as an expert.
5. Live, read, learn, write, be dynamic, talk about your expertise.
6. Set high targets that you really believe in, both consciously and subconsciously.
7. Limit yourself to productive core businesses.
8. Outsource everything you don’t want to do and shouldn’t be doing.
9. Clients, clients, clients.
10. Forget about TV: it makes you narrow minded.
11. Forget about the news: You’re getting jipped. Create your own headlines.
12. Take a break.
13. Exercise.
14. Work your ass off; if you work energetically to pursue your qualities it’ll be euphoric.
15. Laugh, keep things in perspective, be generous.
16. Enjoy nature and all its changes.
17. How can I help?
18. Really listen to other people. Forget about giving advice or judging anything; just listen.
19. Sell like hell.
20. Meet new people every day.
21. Go where you want to go.

22. Ask clients for more clients.
23. Ask clients to see profit statistics; statistics about profit you've generated for them.
24. Visualize the same thing every day; dream big dreams.
25. Work purposefully and don't be distracted by anything or anybody, including yourself.
26. Control your emotions.
27. Believe what you want to believe. It's correct.
28. Give value first.
29. How can I help?
30. Think opportunity.
31. Experience where you want to be next year and use all your senses.
32. Exercise, work, meditate, party, laugh, and eat fresh food. Every day.
33. You decide who you want to hang out with.
34. Surround yourself with positive, successful, inspiring people.
35. Love yourself. Always.
36. Be good friends with money. It keeps you liquid.
37. Don't be greedy; be generous.
38. Tell people what your added value is. Stay close to your centre; take that message with you for the rest of your life.
39. Be conscious of your breathing, lower your heart rate. Relax.
40. Luxury is delicious. Spoil yourself.
41. Make sure you can get to your (own) holiday home within five hours.
42. Clients, clients, clients.
43. How can I help?
44. Deliver at least 10x your price in value. Guaranteed.
45. My fee is a fact. The only thing going up is the value it brings.
46. Could you help me to get in touch with...?
47. Don't think like a CEO. Be a CEO.
48. Think in contributions. Make a goal about your income or tax bracket.
49. Extend your calendar year by six months and you'll have more time than everybody else.
50. Take a break from thinking. Feel.
51. Sit in the sun as much as you can.
52. Walk the talk. *Your* talk.
53. Be where the action is.
54. Introduce people to each other. Combine and contribute.
55. Live your values. Serve & Service.
56. Do something new.
57. Live consciously and stop destructive habits.
58. Enjoy today. Enjoy the now. Yesterday is gone and there's a new chance tomorrow.
59. How can I help?
60. Clients, clients, clients.
61. Love, embrace, kiss and engage your heart (not your head).
62. Find out what somebody wants and help them get it.
63. BE successful; don't TRY to be it or worse still: to become it. BE it.
64. Don't use language that diminishes you. Speak (and live) accordingly.

65. Make somebody, other than yourself, happy everyday (you're happy already)
66. People, children, nature, flowers. Surround yourself with life.
67. Laugh, laugh, laugh. Laugh like you mean it.
68. Do something creative and enjoy doing it; don't burden yourself with what it brings to people.
69. Get out of your own way. The rest will take care of itself.
70. How can I help?
71. Decide what you're not going to do anymore.
72. Give everything you've got and never give up.

## Unique Buying Reasons

You've heard of these guys too, right: salespeople that have done a training course where they learned that selling 'features' is outdated? In a few days time they learned that you have to sell value in order to really shift units. Great, you say to yourself, in one fell swoop the sales force has gone from feature based selling to value based selling.

If you can mathematically prove that an investment in your product is earned back in no time, the client will buy. Basically you're giving them a big bag of money. Who wouldn't buy? Well, not everyone!



There are tons of salespeople with the amazingly original message of 'thinking with the client to come up with a solution.' There are just as many salespeople who can explain that an investment is worth its weight in gold. Good positioning, right? If you're a salesperson, how do you rise above the fray?

By making the distinction between Needs & Wants.

If someone tries to sell me something by explaining that it will help my cash flow, I don't get too excited. Everyone does. Don't get me wrong; as an entrepreneur I understand the need for good cash flow. (Need)

But if you keep digging, you'll soon find out that I get really fired up if an investment in your product or service can increase my independence (Want). I could achieve that by doing things more quickly, intelligently, or not at all. That way I free myself up to do the things I really like which will obviously help my cash flow (Need). Just like most people I earn the most money by doing things I really love to do.

The salesperson that can take me on that journey, that's who I buy from. He comes across as being genuinely interested in me and understands what motivates me. In short: he understands me. No matter how crazy it may seem, that's how you stick out in a crowd eager salespersons!

Needs are: application based, at the surface, rational, fact-oriented and product or service specific. Wants are: personal, below the surface, emotional, perception oriented and not product or service specific.

"When you address the product or service want, you give yourself the best possible chance of creating the perception that the features of your product or service are exactly what the decision maker needs". - Bill Brooks

## **Selling in a recession**

There's a financial crisis going on. Who's affected most? That's right: sales people and their bosses, better known as sales managers or, even better, VP of sales. Their strategy: sit tight and wait until it blows over. If everyone's selling less, how could you possibly be doing any different? But hey, what do you do in the meantime, you may be asking yourself?

Here are 13 survival tips for sales people and their managers, both under the motto of 'go with the flow' and 'cover your ass'.

The 13 laws of lousy sales people:

1. Focus on bad news and talk to as many people as you can about it.
2. Assume your client doesn't have any money to buy your product.
3. Start by giving huge discounts, after all – you think your own products are expensive too.
4. Assume the worst, things can only get better from there.
5. Don't change anything about your approach; just work harder.
6. Make up as many excuses as possible about why you're not selling anything.
7. Borrow money from the bank; forget about your bonus.
8. Call anybody you can and start babbling about your product.
9. Refer unhappy customers to the customer service call center.
10. Realize that successful co-workers are just lucky.

11. Try to become a manager, then you can blame everyone else.
12. Tell clients the company is not doing well.
13. Make it look like you're busy and send unsolicited proposals to people.



And 13 winning tips for big time bosses:

1. Blame your salespeople and chew them out.
2. When they get to work in the morning, ask if they've sold anything yet.
3. Postpone coaching and training until later.
4. Ask regularly when the big client is going to make up his mind.
5. Let the whole team know things are going badly and that something has to happen.
6. Pimp up the forecast: you've got until Q4 to interview for other jobs.
7. Point out sales people's mistakes and threaten to fire them.
8. Tell people that marketing can't help them with anything.
9. Have lots of pointless meetings.
10. Say you've got an appointment with a client and go golfing.
11. Tell people your product is outdated and the service sucks.
12. Micromanage and present your findings in incomprehensible spreadsheets (cc to everyone)
13. Raise targets, freeze salary increases, and cut bonuses.

## **Failure is not an option**

A proposal is an integral part of the sales process for most sales people. If 1 in 3 proposals lead to an order, hordes of people would find that to be a successful result. There are even fellow sales professionals that use the 1 in 3 ratio as the benchmark in the sales industry.

What are the reasons a proposal doesn't get signed?

- The price is too high
- There are 'surprises' in the proposal
- Somebody else is making the decision
- The decision is being postponed
- The proposal doesn't meet expectations
- The competitor made a better offer
- There's no money
- The sales conditions don't match the purchasing policy

There are so many reasons to make up about why a proposal ends up in the lost order book.

Anybody that's pleased with a conversion ratio of 30% creates an overburdening of 70%.

'No's' can be prevented by asking the right questions during the sales process. All the excuses for not getting a signature can be prevented by asking the 'tough questions' during the qualification phase.

If someone asks to receive a proposal ask what they still find unclear. Ask them what they need in order to make it a 'yes'. Ask what improvements will become visible if you both agree and come to terms. How can we capitalize on the improvements? Ask what the cost is of delaying things. Ask, ask, ask! And if they need a proposal for their purchasing department, make sure you agree on a deal first. Give them a firm handshake and thank them for the order before that proposal lands on the purchaser's desk.



If there are more people involved in the sales process, talk to them too. And ask your questions consistently.

All too often, ingenious proposals are devised in order to reveal the price and other surprises. If you wait until you've sent your proposal in an email to the person making the decision, then you're really asking to be rejected. It may sound ridiculous but it happens all the time in sales land.

Consider your proposals to be confirmation of agreements that have already been made. That'll force you to get to the heart of the issue during your sales calls.

If you can elevate this phase of sales to an art, you'll get more clients and save tons of time. On top of that, the sales forecast will actually start to seem reliable. Isn't it crazy that a forecast almost never matches the real results.

Now how do you think does that happen?

## **Numbers don't lie**

So? Has your life changed for the better since reading the first articles? You're now aware that you, and only you, are responsible for positive change. You've stopped seeing obstacles that aren't there, you're focused exclusively on possibilities and you're capable of addressing your clients' business issues and consequently turning them into valuable ideas so that every client feels empowered to reach their own goals.



No? Let's take a step back and start again. Imagine you're having trouble with macro statistics at a micro level. There's less investment in your products and your sales numbers are way down. Potential clients are simply saying "no" to your quotes. No money. No matter what you do, nothing seems to help.

It's pretty bad, but still...

There are three aspects to sales that have to be managed: quantity, quality, and time. (a) How many qualified prospects are you meeting with? (b) how often are your efforts rewarded with paid jobs? (c) How much time is there between the first meeting and getting the job?

Let me give you an example to demonstrate the link between the three aspects: three times a week you speak to three qualified prospects and, within a month, 30% of the meetings turn into an order.

Imagine that your hit ratio drops to 25%. The first thing you've got to figure out is what can you change to get the rating back to 30% or even up to 35% or 40%. What can *you* do differently to regain your clients' attention. I'd advise you pay attention to the qualitative factors first, otherwise you'll have to work very hard.

On top of that you've got two more registers to get you back on track to meeting your targets: the first is to meet with more prospects and the second is to shorten the time between the first meeting and the actual order. If you can't manage to get the 25% rating back to the original level, make sure you're meeting with qualified prospects and figure out how to get the truly interested prospects to decide more quickly.

I'm sure you're aware of your current ratios. As a professional sales person you know exactly how many prospects you approach, how many you talk to, how many quotes you send, and what the average value is of your propositions. You're also aware of how many quotes it takes to create solid business relationships and how long it takes to get prospects to sign on the dotted line.

As a professional sales person you continuously evaluate at what level you can truly make progress. You know exactly what your ideal clients are like, you stay on message when it comes to your added value, and you hear from your clients why they chose to do business with you.

Always start with the numbers and figure out what you need to do to reach your targets and make progress. If you're still having trouble, I guess you'll just have to work harder.

Otherwise you can't call yourself a professional sales person.

## **Great excuses**

"The recession is really coming on strong", someone said to me recently. "Nobody's investing: everything's on hold". He's not alone in his sentiments. He'd called all his co-workers and everyone agreed: the market is at a standstill. He understands, he really does. This isn't the first time; it happened once before during his career. He saw it coming from a mile away.

The result is hordes of sales units walking around listlessly, convincing each other of the gravity of the situation. But it's flawed reasoning; there's a gap between the macro-statistics and the individual's or companies' micro-environment.

Let me give you an example: every year your market sells 100,000 units of a certain product. Your company has 5% market share and sells 5,000 units. If the market decreases from a total of 100,000 sold units down to 90,000 units, you stand to lose 500 sold units or 10% of your turnover, if you do nothing. In order to have the same amount of turnover, you'll need to increase your market share by 0.55%, to a total of 5.55% by selling 5000 units. That's an increase of one-half of a percent and you absolutely maintain the same previous level. Big deal.

At the same time, in every market there are a few companies that continue to perform well despite the "troubled times". Remember the guy I mentioned at the beginning of this article; I gave him the phone number of a sales colleague who was running a successful business even during these gloom and doom days. His reaction? "Yeah, but he's in a totally different markets."

"Did you make bad choices, react too slowly, or are you just a bad salesman?" I asked. He found my question to be rude and oversimplified.

*From today's newspaper: Best results ever for DSM – Despite the positive results, DSM is still struggling with high prices for raw materials, rising energy costs, and a weak US dollar. The raw materials and energy costs have risen by 150 million Euros during the last quarter. The exchange rate between the dollar and euro has cost the company roughly 25 million Euros. These costs were more than compensated for as a result of increased sales volumes and increased sales prices.*



There are also companies with poor quarterly results due to rising raw material and energy costs and a weakening dollar. No question about it.

For some people the situation is a convenient excuse, for others it's a genuine setback. A setback that is (over)compensated for with increased sales and good prices. The result: growth.

Are you focusing on macro-information? Are external factors an excuse for poor performance? Are you stuck in a rut due to the 'gloom and doom' scenarios? Do you accept a sales force that reports back with tales of postponements and cancellations? Do you understand clients that say 'this isn't a good time? If you do, good luck to you.

Stock Brokers have a famous saying: "if the barber is shaving your throat, make sure you're sitting still." In sales, the opposite is true: don't sit down in the barber's chair. Shave yourself, you don't need any help.

The financial crisis, rising raw materials and energy costs, the weak dollar, and your clients reactions to them are old news. How long has it been going on? If you're still hurting, I'll say it again: did you make some bad choices, did you react too slowly, or are your salespeople unaware of how to deal with clients that say 'no'?

Get off your butt. Do something. If you try something and it doesn't work, try something else! *"The definition of stupidity is expecting different results and doing the same things every day."* (Albert Einstein)

Don't think about the nonsensical macro statistics. Drop the excuses. Make decisions and play your own game. Be different. Make sure you've got A-Players on your sales team. There's plenty of opportunity out there. Maybe not for everyone, but definitely for you.



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