

The Sales Process as a Framework for Witnessing

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ABSTRACT: Given the challenges for believers to share their faith, this manuscript suggests an innovative approach for witnessing to others through the application of the marketing literature's seven-step sales process. By viewing the witnessing interaction as similar to a sales situation, this article explores ways to help others realize their need for God in the same way that a salesperson helps a prospect realize a need for a product or service. This approach is shared by integrating the sales process expressed through specific selling tactics described in existing marketing literature and by presenting examples found in the New Testament. Practical examples of using sales techniques when witnessing are provided for easy implementation.

KEYWORDS: marketing, New Testament, sales, witnessing

“There is no man who is not in some degree a merchant; who has not something to buy or something to sell”
(Johnson, 1757, p. 264).

INTRODUCTION

The Bible commands believers to be Jesus' “witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, ESV), yet in a recent survey, 61% of almost 3,000 American, protestant church attenders had not shared how to become a Christian with anyone in the past six months (Wilke, 2012). Believers often don't share their faith because of fear, feeling unqualified, spiritual laziness, political correctness, secular influence, and/or lack of training (Daniel, 2015). The purpose of this manuscript is to assuage some of these concerns by proposing how the personal-selling academic literature can provide a framework for witnessing to others through the sales process.

This idea may meet some resistance because some Christians view marketing and its techniques as contrary to God's word (Austin & Smith, 2005). Others may have preconceived notions about sales due to perceptions about a lack of ethics in selling (Castleberry, 2014), minimal sales knowledge, and misconceptions about the sales field and salespeople (Cummins, Peltier, Pomirleanu, Cross, & Simon, 2015). While not every marketing concept aligns with Scripture, in this manuscript, we take the position

of Karns (2002): “Seeing evidence in Scripture that many of the core principles of marketing are actually employed, not utterly decried, allows students to see that marketing can be other than just sleazy advertising” (p. 112). Building on Karns, we unpack marketing concepts related to personal selling that are scripturally attested and supported. As such, this work proposes that Christians can utilize the sales process as a helpful framework for witnessing. We define witnessing as a Christian who shares his or her faith with unbelievers in hopes that God will draw them to Christ. This work contributes to scholars' request for more application of marketing concepts in the field of biblical integration (see Burns & Fawcett, 2012) by being the first to apply the sales process to witnessing.

SALES PROCESS FRAMEWORK

Sales is defined as “the phenomenon of human-driven interaction between and within individuals/organizations in order to bring about economic exchange within a value-creation context” (Dixon & Tanner, 2012, p. 10). The salesperson shares information in person, over the

phone, or electronically to provide solutions that meet buyers' needs in order to show the value or the overall benefit of what is being sold. There is not an exact correspondence between this definition of sales and witnessing as portrayed in the Bible (e.g., New Testament witnessing is not exclusively "human-driven" [John 6:44] and is never about "economic exchange," though it involves the exchange of information). However, enough meaningful overlap exists for heuristic comparisons and inferences.

Sales encompasses many activities which typically are executed through different stages known as the sales process. The sales process is well-established and used to train people how to sell. As a training tool, the sales process traditionally is defined by a seven-step framework (described below). We use Dubinsky's (1981) seminal study to frame this paper because of its application of specific techniques associated with the sales process steps.

SALES APPROACHES

Salespeople generally use two types of sales approaches in implementing the sales process: transactional and relational. A transactional sales approach focuses on the selling outcome, including creating interest, handling objections, and persuading the consumer to make a purchase. Transactional encounters are non-personal, isolated, and episodic in nature (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990). Transactional sellers emphasize creating new business rather than satisfying and retaining current customers (Autry, Williams, & Moncrief, 2013). Conversely, a relationship selling approach is geared more to maintaining customer satisfaction in the long term and in generating repeat business. Relational approaches are best employed in close, continuing, and interdependent connections with others (Crosby et al., 1990). As such, relationship-selling activities focus on building trust and are tailored to buyer/seller co-creation of solutions for the prospect's needs, with the focus on frequent contact and regular communication (Autry et al., 2013).

From a biblical perspective, the ultimate closing goal is to make disciples (Matthew 28:19), which is best fostered through a relationship selling approach. But not every prospect wants a relationship. In fact, some encounters, because they are briefer and short term, require a transactional approach. Determining which approach to use will depend upon the nature of the relationship and the unique circumstances of the encounter (Autry et al., 2013). Some situations lend themselves to a transac-

tional approach (e.g., waiting in line at the driver's license office), whereas a relational approach is more appropriate for those with whom one interacts on a regular basis, such as witnessing to someone at work.

Even if someone lives or works in close proximity to the prospect, he or she may not want a relational approach; therefore, whether to take a transactional or a relational approach will depend upon the preferences and personality of the prospect. For example, one may not want a relationship with the sales clerk selling a sweater, or one may not want a relationship with the coworker who tells about Christ. This highlights the importance of prayer, the need to judge the prospect's unique personality in order to effectively align the seller's approach with the buyer's process and the obligation to consider the prospect's specific situation (Autry et al., 2013).

In the next section, we explore the steps of the sales process as a framework — that is, as a believer's guide for Christian witnessing — and we discuss how transactional and relational sales approaches fit into this overall framework.

THE SALES PROCESS, THE NEW TESTAMENT AND WITNESSING

We now summarize the seven steps of the sales process framework and synthesize them with the two-part selling process (transactional and relational) in order to demonstrate that (1) most aspects of these processes are reflected in the New Testament (space does not permit an examination of the Old Testament) and in order to (2) provide a model for witnessing that is integrally grounded both in sales and in Scripture. First, however, we address our biblical methodology.

To avoid anachronism, we should state clearly at the outset that the New Testament writers did not think about their witnessing in terms of a specific seven-step sales process. However, as we argue below, they — either consciously or subconsciously — used some witnessing techniques that parallel what modern sales scholars call a seven-step sales process. To make this argument, we examine the New Testament at various levels, from the broader contours of how specific writers portray their characters and compose their plotlines (i.e., narrative criticism) and how they seek to elicit certain effects from their readers/listeners (i.e., rhetorical criticism) to how they specifically portray the actions and words of certain historical figures such as Jesus or Paul. (For more information on narrative

and rhetorical criticism, see Rhoads, Dewey, & Michie, 1981; Stamps, 1995.)

From this summary of the sales process and from our New Testament examination, in the sections below we break down the sales process step by step and provide a few practical applications for witnessing. (For more robust conversations on witnessing, see McRaney, 2003.)

Step One: Prospecting

The first step of the sales process is prospecting. In prospecting, “the salesperson searches for and identifies potential buyers who have the need, willingness, ability, and authority to buy the salesperson’s offering” (Dubinsky & Rudelius 1980). The concept of prospecting is found in the New Testament. On one level, the New Testament teaches that God has already prospected the world’s unbelievers, and it includes everyone on earth! “Go,” Jesus commands, “and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 18:19). Similarly, Luke says that believers should be Jesus’ witnesses “to the end of the Earth” (Acts 1:8, ESV). In other words, *everyone* needs to hear the Gospel message. So, why prospect?

To answer to this question, we must recognize that these blanket commands are only part of the story; there is another scriptural level in play. Commands like Matthew 18:19 and Acts 1:8 are directed toward the church as a whole because it was certainly impossible for Jesus’ original listeners (and even for Matthew’s and Luke’s specific readers) to literally carry out these commands individually. They simply could not, in other words, literally witness to every person on Earth. The Native Americans, for example, were completely unknown to them. Though they had a holistic command to witness globally, each of those listening to Jesus’ commands in Matthew 18:19 and Acts 1:8 had to prayerfully decide (Colossians 4:3; Acts 16:6) where to travel and to whom to witness. They had to prospect.

Similarly, Jesus, the world’s only perfect missionary, chose certain segments of the population on which to focus. As in much of his ministry, he went “only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 15:24, NIV). Paul also discerned specifically whom he would reach by travelling North and West from Jerusalem toward Rome instead of South and East toward Africa and India. At the broader, rhetorical level, every biblical author writes with a certain audience(s) in mind; that is, they choose to focus on a particular subset of “all nations.” In short, the Bible teaches that Christians must decide where, when, and to whom to share the Gospel message. This is prospecting.

Believers today must prospect both transactionally and relationally. For example, during brief conversations with a stranger while sitting at a baseball game (transactional), the Christian must, through prayer, prospect the unbeliever by detecting conversational clues, such as spiritual or theological curiosity, that might indicate interest in the things of Christ. Similarly, believers must prayerfully and strategically decide when and how to share with those they live with daily (relational), such as with family members and/or with professional colleagues.

Step Two: Pre-approach

While prospecting identifies potential customers, in the pre-approach, the salesperson strategizes how best way to reach the prospect. During the pre-approach, “the sales representative collects *specific* prospect information (such as the prospect’s needs and interests) to help ‘qualify’ the prospect better, tailor the sales presentation, avoid making serious mistakes, and develop an effective way to approach the prospect” (Dubinsky & Rudelius, 1980, p. 66 [italics original]). Dubinsky (1981) suggests interview approaches (phone conversations, written communication, or introduction through mutual connections) and information approaches (personal visits, observation, asking questions and listening for answers, researching, and asking others).

The pre-approach for the Christian witness involves intentionally and strategically deciding how best to approach others about God. Paul does this when he says, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22, NIV). To live this out practically, Paul, to borrow Dubinsky’s and Rudelius’ phraseology, would have to research his prospects’ needs and interests, tailor his presentation of the Gospel accordingly, and develop an effective way to approach them.

At a broader, rhetorical level, every biblical writer performed a pre-approach when composing his or her respective documents. Take the Gospel writers as examples. Each one desires to present Jesus as the Messiah whom their readers should turn to in faith and follow obediently. But each one does this differently relative to their respective audiences. Before writing a single word, it is clear that they, either consciously or subconsciously, asked, “What are my readers’ needs and interests relative to Jesus?” Each Gospel writer answered this question somewhat differently (Carson & Moo, 2009). Matthew tailored his work to a Jewish audience who was deeply rooted in the Hebrew Bible, while Mark targeted a Gentile audience generally unfamiliar with Jewish traditions and thus sought

to familiarize them about these customs. Luke catered his Gospel to an unknown Gentile, Theophilus, and to a broader Gentile audience already familiar with Jesus (Luke 1:4), an audience specifically interested in “eyewitness” testimonies and “orderly accounts” (Luke 1:2, ESV). John’s Jewish and Gentile audience needed reassurance that in Christ they had eternal life (John 20:30–31).

Transactionally, the primary ways to accomplish a pre-approach is by observing and listening to others intentionally, considerately, and well, for the purposes of gauging potential interest in spiritual things. Relationally, the believer must ask questions: “What are the prospect’s interests?” “How can I connect with him or her spiritually?” “When should I try to engage spiritually?” “Have I spent enough time living out my faith in his or her presence, thus earning the right to be heard?”

Step Three: Approach

The third step in the sales process is the approach. In the approach, the salesperson tries to create a favorable impression in order to build rapport with the prospect in order “to gain and hold the customer’s attention and to gain and hold the customer’s interest in the salesperson’s offering” (Dubinsky 1981). Dubinsky (1981) suggests several ways to approach prospects: (1) non-product-related approaches (referral, introductory, shock, showmanship, and fear), (2) piquing interest approaches (consumer-benefit approach, curiosity), (3) consumer-directed approaches (question, survey, compliment), and (4) product-related approaches (give the prospect the product).

Biblical writers and the earliest Christians use an array of similar approaches:

1. A non-product-related approach. While baptizing people who confessed their sins, John the Baptist, using both shock and fear in ways that many modern Westerners find unflattering, scathingly said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?” (Matthew 3:7, NIV). In a similarly way, Jesus joltingly spoke of eternal judgment as a moral and salvific motivator more than any other biblical character (cf. Matthew 5:22, 29; 23:33).
2. Piquing interest. Every biblical writer uses various rhetorical devices to pique the interest of their readers or listeners (Stamps, 1995). For example, the Gospel of John’s famous opening line “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, NIV) that crescendos with the attention-grabbing statement

in verse 14 about Jesus’ incarnation introduces many themes found throughout the entire Fourth Gospel by creatively arousing the readers interest; this invites them to ask, How, in fact, did this “Word” dwell among us, and what difference did it make? Similarly, Paul piques the interest of those in Athens who had an altar to “an unknown God,” by stating confidently that this unknown God is precisely who Paul is about to proclaim (Acts 17:23).

3. A consumer-directed approach. Jesus engaged the woman at the well with a customer-directed approach by asking her a question: “Will you give me a drink?” (John 4:7, NIV). MacDonald (1990) rightly comments, “By asking a favor, the Lord had stirred her interest and curiosity” (p. 1483). On another occasion, Jesus asks a crowd of onlookers, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit their very self? (Luke 9:25, NIV)
4. A product-related approach. With little time to spare because he was on trial for crimes against Rome, and while in the presence of a powerful political figure, Paul answered King Agrippa’s terse question (“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”) simply by offering Christianity to the king: “Short time or long,” Paul says, “I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am...” (Acts 26:27–28, NIV).

In a way similar to Jesus asking a question to the woman at the well, Christians today, both relationally and transactionally, can ask certain types of customer-directed questions to engage others about God. For example, when observing a prospect (using pre-approach) who seems overwhelmed or stressed, Christians can simply ask a question (using the approach), “Are you having one of those days?” Empathetic questions like this sometimes lead naturally and easily into deep conversations about Jesus. Christians who especially have the gifts of wisdom and/or knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8) can also pique a prospect’s curiosity by asking Spirit-led questions about confidential things that the witness could not know without the Holy Spirit’s miraculous intervention; such questions can arouse the prospect’s curiosity because he or she will likely wonder how the Christian knows about these things. In other words, open- and closed-ended questions (some of which may derive from supernatural intervention from God) can be used in a conversational way to gather information to establish the prospect’s need

for the Lord. To illustrate, we pick up with the scenario above wherein the witness inquires about a prospect having a bad day:

Prospect: Yes, it is definitely one of those days!

Witness: How much more peace would you have if there was someone you could turn to who would just carry that stress for you?

Prospect: If that were only possible!

Witness: I know a secret that I use to reduce my stress, and it brings me more peace. Would you like to hear more?

The questions in this example can unfold through the Holy Spirit's guidance in many other ways. Some examples might include: (1) Salvation: "Do your health issues concern you because you do not know what will happen to you after this life?" (2) Worry: "How much more relaxed would you be if you knew someone was in control of all of your concerns?" (3) Direction: "Do you ever struggle with making a decision in your life because you do not know which way to turn?" and (4) Loneliness: "Would it help if you had a close friend that was always with you to provide comfort and support?" Beyond approaching prospects who have yet to commit to Christ (evangelism), these examples of customer-directed questions are also especially useful for engaging those who already know him (discipleship).

Step Four: Presentation

In the presentation, the "salesperson presents the product-offering, demonstrates its strengths, and explains what it will do for the customer. In addition, the salesperson attempts to arouse the prospect's desire and conviction for the product" (Dubinsky 1981, p. 27). According to Dubinsky (1981), there are three main categories of techniques used for making sales presentations: (1) types of presentations (tailored for each prospect, partially standardized by changing slightly; or standardized in using the same presentation for each prospect), (2) visual display techniques (to help prospects visualize the offering), and (3) non-visual clarification (qualify by asking further questions, speaking in the prospect's language using non-technical jargon, using comparisons, and/or using showmanship or dramatic flair).

Each of these techniques appears in Scripture. Jesus especially used different types of presentations with various people. Sometimes he answered people directly (Mark 11:29), sometimes he used parables (Matthew 13), and sometimes he did not reply at all (Matthew 27:14). Paul also adapted his approach to various audiences, most

memorably when he said that he became "all things to all people" in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (NIV).

At the rhetorical level, we catch in the Apostle John a glimpse of the same writer using different types of presentations. John wrote the New Testament's Fourth Gospel, 1–3 John, and Revelation (on Johannine authorship of these documents, see Carson & Moo, 2009, pp. 229–246, 670–675, 700–707). Each of these three writings represents different genres or presentations: Gospel (similar to an ancient Greco-Roman Biography (Talbert, 1977), letters (similar to modern letters), and apocalyptic literature (intensified prophecy [Beale, 1999, pp. 37–43]).

Jesus and others used visual display techniques. Jesus healed people (Matthew 12:13), pointed to children (Luke 18:16–17), withered fig trees (Matthew 21:18–22), and distributed bread and wine (Mark 14:22–25) in order to visually demonstrate different aspects of God's Kingdom. The most important visual display in the New Testament is Jesus himself, who functions as the visual representative of God on earth: "Anyone who has seen me," Jesus says, "has seen the Father" (John 14:9, NIV).

Non-visual clarifications also appear throughout Scripture. Jesus' ministry was replete with dramatic flare, including raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43–44), stilling storms (Luke 8:24), and withering a fig tree (Matthew 21:18–22). Jesus also asked myriads of qualifying questions (cf. Matthew 12:1–3). He also used comparisons in his presentations (Luke 7:44–47). The most pervasive, non-visual clarification in the Bible is the language in which the New Testament authors wrote. They wrote almost exclusively in Koine Greek (the language of the commoner) instead of in more complicated Classical Greek (the language of the educated elite). Thus, the New Testament itself is a paradigmatic example of "talk in the prospect's language using non-technical jargon."

Most important for the presentation of today's Christian witness, both transactionally and relationally, is for the believer to understand the Gospel message well. One cannot present cogently what is only partially understood. Once the message is understood by the witness, then, like the biblical writers, believers should share it with verbiage that makes sense to the prospect. If the prospect has spent little or no time in church, then avoid unnecessary theological jargon. If the prospect is from another religious tradition, then clarify the uniqueness of Christianity.

Step Five: Overcoming Objections

In sales, the goal of overcoming objections is to move potential customers from their unwillingness to buy a

product to a desire to buy it. According to Dubinsky (1981), there are four broad techniques for handling objections: create strife, offset the objection, clarify the objection, and use other miscellaneous techniques. Dubinsky offers a number of examples corresponding to each of these four techniques.

Creating Strife. One technique that Dubinsky classifies as a “creating strife technique” is direct denial. In this technique, the salesperson denies the incorrect fact and corrects it. This technique implicitly pervades most of the New Testament. Every New Testament author (especially Paul), whether or not it is overtly stated, seeks to deny incorrect facts, teachings, or assumptions about Jesus (or something related to him or his church) and to correct it. This is the case even in the Gospels wherein a cursory glance might give the impression that their writers are simply telling Jesus’ story. Rhetorical criticism, however, teaches us that these writers are doing more than simply telling a story about Jesus. They also seek to “set the record straight” about Jesus, that is to dispute what others have propagated about him. For example, when John relates to his readers that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” he is disputing the emerging Gnostic heresy, which argued that Jesus never was fully human. John implicitly disputes and corrects a misunderstanding about Jesus (see Köstenberger, 2004, p. 41).

In John 8:1–11, Jesus handles objections in a way similar to what Dubinsky calls “the pass-up method” (another creating-strife technique), a method wherein one ignores or simply passes over one’s objection. The scribes and Pharisees, in this famous text, bring an adulterous woman to Jesus (scholars debate whether this pericope is original to John, but it is certainly true to the character of Jesus; see Morris, 1995, pp. 778-779). The scribes and Pharisees thought that the Old Testament Law was clear at this point (Leviticus 20:10): the woman should be stoned to death for her adultery. Trying to catch Jesus in an interpretative conundrum in order to bring legal charges against him, they ask Jesus, “So, what do you say?” While the scribes and Pharisees had one agenda (to indict Jesus), Jesus had another agenda (concern for the woman and to teach an important lesson). Before launching into his more insightful — and more Kingdom centered — agenda, Jesus ignores the scribes’ and Pharisees’ question. Breaking eye contact with everyone and, in what surely was an awkward moment of silence, Jesus “bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.” Then, Jesus addresses a completely different, and much more beautiful, aspect of the situation:

“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her!” (NIV).

Offsetting the Objection. Dubinsky offers a second technique to handle objections: offsetting the objection. In this technique, the salesperson agrees with the objection but points out product features that should compensate for the objection. A specific type of “offsetting the objection” is what Dubinsky calls “the compare and contrast method,” whereby the objection is minimized by comparing it to something that is acceptable. This is precisely what Jesus does in John 5:30–46. Some of the Apostle John’s readers believed and revered both John the Baptist and Moses. Jesus points out that if they believed John the Baptist and Moses, then they should also believe in Jesus because both of them point explicitly to Jesus. Thus, Jesus offsets objections by drawing comparisons with examples important to his listeners.

Clarifying the Objection. A third general technique that Dubinsky (1981) notes is what he calls “clarifying objection techniques.” One specific example of this is the demonstration technique, wherein the seller demonstrates the product in order to show the prospect that his or her objection is actually not applicable. The entire New Testament agenda is, in many ways, a demonstration to prospects that their particular worldview (whether it be Judaism, Roman domination, or early Gnosticism) is wrong. This is powerfully demonstrated by, among other things, Jesus and the early Christian performing miracles (Luke 5:24), by the spilt blood of martyrs (Acts 7:55–60), by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), by the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (Matthew 12:17), and by speaking in tongues (Acts 2:3–21).

Using Miscellaneous Objection Techniques. Finally, Dubinsky mentions “miscellaneous techniques” to deal with objections. One specific miscellaneous technique he suggests is to answer an objection with a question, a technique especially mastered by Jesus (cf. Matthew 12:11 and Mark 11:32). Paul faced a number of objections in Corinth — objections that ultimately hindered Paul’s Gospel message. These objections were that Paul’s knowledge was inferior because he taught freedom in Christ (1 Corinthians 8:1–2) and that Paul was not a real apostle (1 Corinthians 9:2). In dealing with these objections, Paul asks a string of questions: “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1, NIV).

Objections will inevitably come for the believer who actively shares his or her faith. Relationally, one of the most effective ways to handle objections is long-term,

authentic, humble living in the power of the Holy Spirit over extended periods of time with the unbeliever. In some instances the prospect objects to the witness by asking him or her to stop sharing; the best way to handle such an objection is to stop sharing until re-invited to do so at a later date. In the meantime, the witness should continue witnessing without words by living a Christian lifestyle deeply rooted in Paul's fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) and should reapply the principles of the “pre-approach” in step two above.

Transactionally, handling objections is best managed by recognizing that objection does not necessarily mean personal rejection. Often, prospects give off buying signals to indicate they have an interest and would like to learn more (Knowles, Grove, & Keck, 1994) and objections can be interrupted as a closing signal. When outright objection comes, because sometimes it does, we can find encouragement in Jesus' teaching that blessings are found in rejection, including eternal rewards (Matthew 5:11–12). Care should be taken, however, that the witness does everything possible to ensure that it is the *message of the Gospel* that causes rejection and not the *personality of the witness*. The point, both relationally and transactionally, is that having a “tool belt” of different ways to handle objections can equip those who witness to God's saving grace.

When engaging in Christian witnessing, objections frequently arise when a prospect is struggling with a biblical concept or when certain aspects of Christianity are misunderstood. Established research has found that salesperson expertise increases purchase intention (Wood, Boles, Johnston, & Bellenger, 2008). Hence, product knowledge (walking faithfully in the Holy Spirit and knowing the Bible well) is essential to successfully handle objections. However, no witness has the expertise to respond competently to every objection. If the believer does not know the answer to a question, then he or she should confess it honestly and then use this as an opportunity to follow-up at another time and to build rapport by investigating the question more fully together.

Step Six: Close

In the marketing of goods and services, the close is the step where the prospect makes a decision to purchase a product. Closing techniques include clarification closes, psychologically oriented closes, straightforward closes, and concession closes (Dubinsky, 1981).

Clarification Close. One type of clarification close is called the “comparison close,” wherein the salesperson compares what one is selling to an inferior competitor's

product. Much of Paul's entire theological agenda compares what Judaism offers with what Christ offers. Judaism offers slavery to the law while Christ offers freedom from it. In essence, one of Paul's general purposes is to argue that Christ, with the accompanying benefits of following him, is superior to the Jewish law (Galatians 2:19–21). Similarly, in Revelation, one of John's overarching goals is to show that the Roman worldview (the competitor's product), referred to as “Babylon,” is demonstrably inferior to the Christian worldview (John's product) (Revelation 14:8; 18:10, 21; see Beale, 1999, p. 755).

Psychologically Oriented Close. A psychologically oriented close is the buy-now close whereby the seller creates urgency to get the prospect to act quickly. At the rhetorical level, all New Testament writers in various ways (e.g., via reminders that eschatological judgment is coming or that Christ will return soon) create a sense of urgency to get their readers and listeners to respond quickly. In other words, each of them write in order to elicit immediate change in their readers. A paradigmatic example is Peter, whose sermons in the Book of Acts demand immediate response (Acts 3:19–20) and create enough urgency among his listeners that thousands responded definitively and quickly by becoming Christ followers (Acts 2:14–47). Jesus was similarly urgent. Speaking about living obediently in God's Kingdom, he commanded, “Be on guard! Be alert!” because no one knows when he will return (Mark 13:32–37).

Single-Obstacle Close. The single-obstacle close is a type of straightforward close. In this type of close, the salesperson attempts to remove the obstacle that is hindering the prospect from making a purchase. For example, if a prospect wants to purchase but can only afford a certain price, the salesperson could offer a discount that aligns the selling price with the prospect's budget, thus removing the obstacle so the close can occur. There were many obstacles that hindered the earliest Christian prospects from deciding to be Christ followers (Hurtado, 2016). A significant motivating factor for New Testament writers was to remove these obstacles. Luke, for example, composed his entire Gospel to help with Theophilus' uncertainty about the things of Christ: “[I am writing] an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3–4, NIV). A major obstacle mitigating against obedience to Christ for the original recipients of the Book of Revelation was ongoing persecution from Rome, an obstacle that the author seeks to remove largely by promising an absolute,

comprehensive, and eschatological victory for all believers (Revelation 20:7–22:5).

In sales, closing is often the step that most intimidates new salespeople. Likewise, many Christian witnesses also fear the close. But by following the methods provided above, the fears of many Christian witnesses concerning the close can be alleviated. If the salesperson has followed the sales process and has catered a presentation that fits the needs of the prospect, then the close is a natural next step. When witnessing for Christ, significant pressure is removed when the witness remembers that it is not ultimately his or her responsibility for the unbeliever's conversion; rather, God simply holds the witness responsible for living and sharing the Gospel. The result is the work of the Lord (John 6:44; Acts 3:6). With that said, there is a New Testament expectation to intentionally witness — either transactionally or relationally — to unbelievers, whether by sharing/teaching the Gospel or by living it out faithfully in a way that portrays Christianity as a more accurate and fulfilling worldview than all others (comparison close), by stressing the urgency to convert to Christ (psychologically oriented close), by removing intellectual or practical obstacles to following Christ (single-obstacle close), or by any other means that does not contravene Scripture.

Step Seven: Follow-up

Follow-up is the final step of the sales process wherein “The salesperson tries to reduce the customer's post-purchase concerns, thereby developing a satisfied customer and increasing the chances of future repeat sales” (Dubinsky & Rudelius 1980, p. 66). Follow-up, according to Dubinsky, is categorized as customer-service activities, customer-satisfaction activities, and customer-referral activities (Dubinsky, 1981).

Customer-Service Activity. One example of a customer-service activity is the salesperson serving as a consultant for the customer, to give him or her specialized guidance in taking advantage of the product's use (Dubinsky, 1981). This type of consulting is the very essence of each New Testament writer. Each writer is basically telling their readers how to take advantage of their Christian faith. This especially lies at the heart of Paul's letters. His readers have converted to Christ (often via Paul's preaching), and Paul himself usually formed a Church from these converts. Most of Paul's letters are essentially his practical and theological consultation to these new believers.

Customer-Satisfaction Activity. Customer-satisfaction activities include reassuring the customer in order to build

his or her confidence in the product (Dubinsky, 1981). The New Testament is rife with encouraging reassurance for believers to have the upmost confidence in the Christian “product.” New Testament writers offer practical reassurance (James 1–5); in other words, following Jesus simply works in real life, and Jesus gives life meaning and purpose. Additionally, the New Testament writers offer theological and philosophical reassurance concerning the “product” they have acquired (Romans 1–11); that is, these early Christians, in choosing to become believers, have chosen intelligently and wisely. Finally, the New Testament writers offer eschatological reassurance about their newfound “product” (1 Corinthians 2:9; Revelation 21:1–7). That is to say that these believers, many of whom extensively suffered for Christ, are promised eternal life and all the indescribable benefits that accompany it.

Customer-Oriented Reassurance. Beyond the broader thrust of the New Testament, both Jesus and Paul also focus on this type of customer-oriented reassurance. In some of his last words on Earth, Jesus reassures his followers, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, NIV), deeply reassuring words for those who are promised persecution (Matthew 10:23). Paul likewise offers his Corinthian readers reassurance. Paul reassures them that, because death has no victory over the believer (1 Corinthians 15:54–56), believers can stand firm, let nothing move them, give themselves fully to the Lord's work “because [their] labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58, NIV).

Customer Referrals. Another type of follow-up is customer referrals, that is asking the customer about other contacts who may have an interest in the product (Dubinsky, 1981). This method lies at the heart of the entire evangelistic method of the New Testament. The New Testament writers envisioned a day when every nation and tribe would hear the Gospel (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 7:9). God could have instituted any number of methods to achieve this bold goal. For example, he could have entrusted it to angels. However, he chose to entrust it to people (whether by written or by spoken word). One person shares the Gospel with another, and the process repeats. Implicit in this method is the need for “customer” referrals — the need to garner advice from current Christians where one might find non-Christians. This plays out in Jesus' ministry in his so-called conversation with the woman at the well (John 4:1–45). After a life-changing encounter with Jesus (John 4:26–30), she returned to town and referred to Jesus “many Samaritans...[who] believed I him” (John 4:39, NIV).

Table 1: Witnessing as Applied to the Sales Process

Steps of the Sales Process	Steps Related to Witnessing	Transactional Selling	Relational Selling
1. Prospecting: Find potential buyers with need, willingness, ability, and authority to buy (Dubinsky & Rudelius, 1980).	Find people who might respond to the Gospel.	Interact briefly with a prospect while doing daily activities such as on a plane or in line at the grocery store.	Working daily on the job with a prospect or living with a family member.
2. Pre-approach: Collect information to qualify the prospect (Dubinsky & Rudelius, 1980).	Determine how best to understand the prospect.	Gauge quickly a prospect's interest in the Gospel through body language, gestures, expressions, and tone of voice.	Strategically plan long-term the best way to engage the prospect. Use observation and what you know from previous interactions to figure the best way to approach.
3. Approach: Initially gain and hold attention and interest in offerings (Dubinsky, 1981).	Gain attention.	In transactional, approach is typically connected to the circumstances in which the players interact. Ask the prospect sincere, open-ended questions about life (e.g., "Are you having a bad day today?").	In relational, approach may be thought of with multiple opportunities as the conversation may continue across times and in different situations with the same prospect. For example, you may talk to a coworker at lunch one day and then again after work on another day with different approaches chosen as you learn more about the prospect's needs.
4. Presentation: Explain offering and persuade an authentic desire for offering (Dubinsky, 1981).	Share Christ or present biblical truths with prospect's unique needs in mind.	Handled the same regardless of transactional or relational. Some examples: Share personal testimony; suggest a website or book.	In a relational approach, the presentation may take longer occurring over time. Other than that, presentation is handled the same of regardless of transactional or relational. Some examples: Live out the Gospel long-term; invite to your church or small group.
5. Overcoming Objections: Help the prospect get passed unwillingness to buy (Dubinsky, 1981).	Present truths while addressing the prospect's concerns.	Handled the same regardless of transactional or relational. Suggest a pertinent website or book about prospect's specific objection.	Handled the same regardless of transactional or relational. Some examples: spend long conversations over coffee addressing objections; invite a knowledgeable friend to take part in pertinent conversations.
6. Close: Reinforce and sell the prospect on the solution to the needs initially uncovered during step three (Dubinsky, 1981).	Give the prospect a chance to make a decision.	The close is geared more toward a decision or end result. Ask specifically, "Are you ready to surrender your life to Christ and give him control?"	The close is more geared toward the mutually beneficial relationship and the solutions uncovered together. For example, "We've been meeting for a couple of weeks now. In our time, you've shared that you are really overwhelmed by the demands on your life. I know a solution that will help you to better manage your overwhelming circumstances. I care about and would not be being a good friend if I did not ask you if you are ready to give these concerns to Christ who will take these burdens from you?"
7. Follow-Up: Reduce concerns, increase satisfaction, and create environment for repeat purchases/learning (Dubinsky & Rudelius, 1980).	Discipleship.	Follow-up is geared toward helping the customer succeed in the purchase. For example, sending a Bible or suggesting churches in their area (if they do not live by you).	Follow up is geared toward making disciples and helping the prospect grow deeper spiritually. For example, inviting the person to church or leading them in a Bible study.

Following up with prospects that come to Christ is a biblical mandate. In biblical parlance, this is called discipleship (Matthew 28:19–20), helping someone grow in her or his relationship with Jesus. Winning a prospect to Jesus is just the beginning. Spiritual growth must follow. Salvation and discipleship are two sides of the same coin; you cannot have one without the other. If you win someone to Christ transactionally, follow-up may simply mean providing information on how to find a local Church, providing some discipleship literature, or suggesting some pertinent websites. Relationally, following up entails living life with the new believer as you both learn together to follow Jesus more deeply. This may mean that you invite them to your Church and small group, become their spiritual mentor, join them in a bible study, and more.

Summary

By way of summary, Table 1 relates the (1) steps in the witnessing process, (2) the steps in the sales process as used in personal selling, (3) two types of approaches, transactional and/or relational, and (4) practical examples for application.

CONCLUSION

Dorris Price correctly said, “Every Christian is a minister. That does not mean you have to stand up in a pulpit, but that you should minister to your family, friends, and people you come in contact with. The Word of God says ‘take my word to the end of the earth.’ That is a command.” (Daniel, 2015, para. 51). We are called to be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) each day as we interact with others and have opportunities to witness for God. With strong statistics suggesting that believers are not sharing their faith (Wilke, 2012) and though more research is needed (especially empirical tests to explore to what degree equipping Christians with this framework will help them witness better), this manuscript adapts the sales process that Christians can use when witnessing to and discipling others. In other words, in this article, we integrate the sales process with Christian witnessing, an approach that, at least to a certain degree, the New Testament exemplifies and promotes. Jesus says, “Go, and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Or if you ask these authors, we are God’s “salespeople,” let’s “sell, sell, sell!”

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