

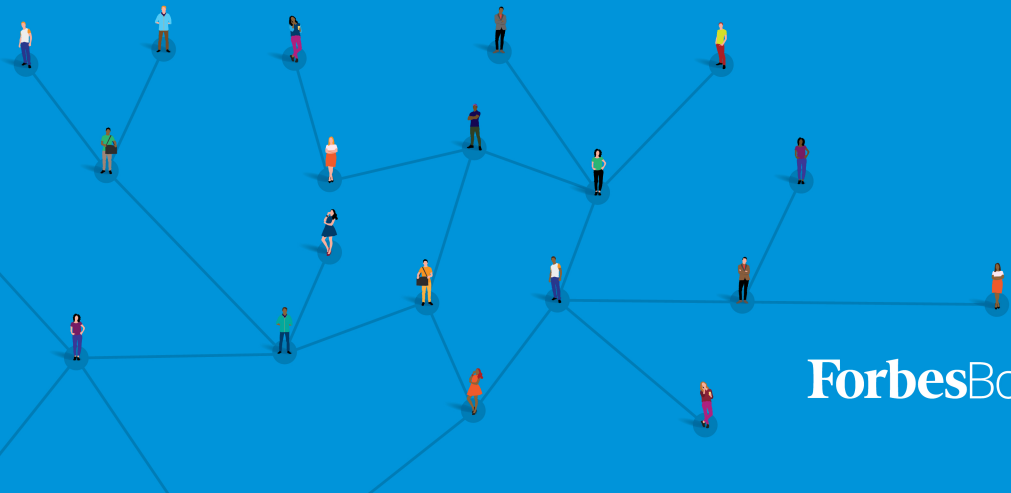
"What a delightful book."

— Dave Ulrich, *BusinessWeek's* #1 Management Educator

CYNTHIA WATSON &
SHANE SPRAGGS

THE
POWER
OF
REMOTE

Building High-Performing
ORGANIZATIONS THAT THRIVE
in the Virtual Workplace



ForbesBooks

PRAISE FOR
THE POWER OF REMOTE

“Every business on planet earth was affected by the 2020 global pandemic, and the biggest paradigm shift in business was the displacement of people out of the communal office to their urgently created home offices. We were forced to reinvent, restructure, and rethink our traditional working approach. *The Power of Remote* will give you the tools to navigate this new territory and create, support, and manage a thriving remote team.”

—Jason Vale, CEO, Juice Master Ltd.

“Managing remote work is one of the most important topics for businesses today. With so much misunderstanding around the shift from in-person to remote work, *The Power of Remote* comes at the perfect time—and with all the right information. A must-read!”

—Dr. Marshall Goldsmith, Thinkers50 #1 Executive Coach and
New York Times best-selling author of *The Earned Life* and other books

“Remote work is neither new nor for everyone, but it is rapidly increasing and reshaping the future of where and how people will work. Drawing on rigorous research, relevant cases, and personal experiences, Cynthia and Shane offer insights, practices, and actions that enable remote work to work. Their thoughtful ideas will be useful for leaders who shape remote work, employees who work remotely, and consultants who guide remote work. What a delightful book!”

—Dave Ulrich, Rensis Likert Professor at Michigan's Ross School of Business
and BusinessWeek's #1 Management Educator

“Companies all over the world are recognizing that virtual work is not a fad that will pass with time. People want the freedom to choose where to work depending on context and task. And with the right systems and work practices, companies can reap the benefits too. That’s where *The Power of Remote* comes in. Cynthia Watson and Shane Spraggs provide a detailed road map for evolving into a high-performing virtual team so that, as a leader, you can take advantage of this new way of working.”

—Lisette Sutherland, director of Collaboration Superpowers
and author of the award-winning *Work Together Anywhere*

“*The Power of Remote* provides valuable advice and insight on working and succeeding remotely. Maybe more important, it contains context for the changes we’re going through, from people who’ve been there and done that.”

—Wayne Turmel, cofounder of the Remote Leadership Institute
and coauthor of the bestseller *The Long-Distance Leader*

“*The Power of Remote* provides leaders with a much-needed road map to create remote workplaces where organizational objectives are met and employees feel a greater sense of connection to what they do and who they work with. From how to build a healthy organizational culture in remote work environments to changing how and what we communicate to foster greater employee ownership and collaboration, Watson and Spraggs offer tools and insights that will help expand your leadership toolkit to meet the changing needs and demands arising from this new world of work.”

—Tanveer Naseer, Inc. 100 leadership speaker,
award-winning author, and coauthor of *Leadership Vertigo*

“The Power of Remote outlines all the problems employers are likely to face with hybrid and remote work and how to address them. The best guide yet for those moving to a more remote operating model.”

—Peter Cappelli, George W. Taylor Professor of Management at the Wharton School
and best-selling author of *The Future of the Office*

“The Power of Remote is a valuable nuts and bolts review of the remote work revolution that could become essential reading as the remote work trend dominates the future of work.”

—Derek Gallimore, best-selling author of *Inside Outsourcing*

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Printed in the United States of America.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 978-1-95588-444-0 (Hardcover)

ISBN: 978-1-95588-469-3 (eBook)

LCCN: 2022914071

Cover design by Megan Elger.
Layout design by Matthew Morse.

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*Nobody on their deathbed has ever said, "I wish
I had spent more time at the office."*

—US SENATOR PAUL TSONGAS

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CHAPTER 18

The Last Mile in Remote Sales

*All endeavour calls for the ability to tramp the last mile,
shape the last plan, endure the last hours toil.*

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Thus far, we have covered just about everything you need to do to improve remote performance: finding, hiring, and onboarding remote workers; building effective communications systems; improving team performance; achieving project success; and more. We have, however, yet to touch on perhaps the most important element of your business: doing actual business.

Whether it's goods or services, a lemonade stand, or a billion-dollar deal for intellectual property, somebody somewhere has been pitching something to someone almost since the start of recorded history. For eons, humans have been piling their wares onto caravans and beasts of burden and traveling great distances to find customers and make deals. Some two millennia ago, traders traveled four thousand

miles along the Silk Road to sell spices, textiles, and much more, connecting cultures and peoples and laying the foundations of early globalization. Sales has more experience overcoming great distances than any other line of work. In 2017, nearly three of four sales deals (72 percent) occurred outside the office, at golf courses, restaurants, hotel bars, and the like.²⁵¹ Although these deals likely included an in-person handshake, it's a stunning figure that underscores the extent to which salespeople are comfortable outside the office.

When asked which hurdles sales professionals most often face, Jill Konrath, leading sales strategist and author of several best-selling sales books, pointed to the constant struggle with increasingly complex sales processes and decisions, the demand from buyers to know more, and the need to embrace and incorporate new technologies. This chapter will not review the more than one thousand sales tools available today and make recommendations, and it will also not offer advice on creating meaningful market reports or on the best sales training courses. We will instead focus on solving a problem that the vast majority of sales methodologies completely ignore: the logistical issues of going the last mile from a verbal “yes” to a signed sales agreement.²⁵²

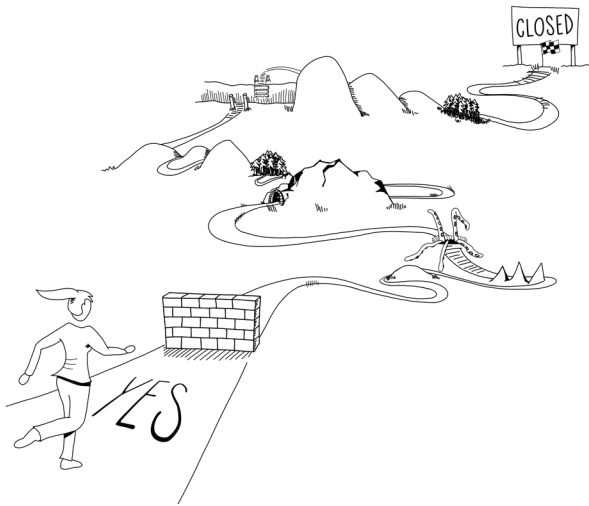
The Last Mile: From “Yes” to Closed

A B2B deal might involve anything from a fleet of cars modified for a specific purchaser to a conferencing solution sold to and implemented within the branch offices of a multinational corporation. In

251 Harshit Jain, “What Is Field Sales and Why Is It Important?,” LeadSquared, updated October 25, 2021, <https://www.leadquared.com/what-is-field-sales/>.

252 Business to business (B2B) sales tend to be larger and more complex and are conducted over greater distances than your average consumer sale, so these will be our main focus.

most cases, these deals will require product and service customization, special pricing and financing, and custom contracts across multiple companies and government agencies. As a result, it is increasingly rare that all the staffers providing these functions will work in the same office. These deals almost always involve remote teams, often across multiple departments, organizations, and even continents.²⁵³ Yet despite all this vast complexity, nailing down that final piece of a customer's contract—custom solutions, financing, advanced partnerships—often falls on somebody with minimal administrative and management training, the sales representative.



The last mile in sales.

This may be because taking that last step and closing the deal is a process left out of nearly all major sales productivity initiatives, which tend to focus on skills that help sales reps convince prospective buyers of the value of a particular solution. There's no arguing that

253 "Complex Sales," Wikipedia, accessed June 12, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complex_sales.

the established tools, training, and incentives contribute to sales force productivity, but they represent only 90 percent of the deal. The other 10 percent is finalizing the transaction. It may be only a small slice, but that last 10 percent is everything because if it's left incomplete, the entire sale can fall apart.

To solve the “last mile” challenge, reports often call for sales reps to be trained on project methods to boost efficiency or for long-term project management tools to be applied to sales pursuits. This misses the point. Making a sales rep wear dual hats—keeping the customer engaged while clarifying and reinforcing the accountability of all stakeholders—is likely to bog your salespeople down and stop a deal in its tracks. Most reps have been endlessly trained on moving a customer through the sales stages, and they possess a great deal of drive, discipline, accountability, communication skills, time management, and collaborative abilities. But even the most process-savvy sales professionals might find themselves wholly—and somewhat uncomfortably—immersed in administrative tasks in an effort to finalize a client's initial green light. A surer route to sales completion would have the sales rep focusing on the relationship with the customer while a trained professional aligns resources among the company, partner, and customer and manages all the steps needed to close the deal.

The Overburdened Sales Rep

Freeing up highly paid and valuable sales team members to focus on what they do best is smart business. Most companies do this well—up to the customer saying “yes.” This, sadly, is not far enough. The reason sales productivity initiatives often fail to lead to more deals is that there is often inadequate focus on helping sales representatives complete the process. Even if the buyer has signed a letter of intent,

somebody still needs to pull together the pricing and financing and the legal and technical inputs, as well as organize all those involved. In some instances, as many as forty people might be needed to put the final contract together. The client may agree to a solution, but if that sale fails to close within the fiscal year, the sales rep is in danger of losing their commission and possibly being demoted. The company, meanwhile, loses all that revenue—and potentially a key client.

Sales organizations operate in a fast-paced environment. Staying ahead of competitors and maximizing opportunities require shortening sales cycles by reducing friction and delays. Shorter sales cycles maximize revenue while motivating sales reps and improving productivity. The reality is that today's sales reps spend most of their working hours on activities other than making actual sales, which erodes their sales, their understanding of customers, and ultimately their ability to close deals. The solution lies in making sales professionals more efficient by identifying time-wasting nonselling activities and off-loading them.

Let's assume that as vice president of sales, you've been given aggressive sales targets by a new CEO. You know that if you don't hit these new targets, you're not going to get that long-desired promotion and may even be out of a job. Just about every consultant will tell you that the best way to increase sales revenue is to either increase sales staffing or improve sales productivity. Industry studies support this fairly consistently. But for this company, increasing sales head count is not an option because the new CEO has put hiring on hold, so your best option is to increase sales team productivity. You suspect that your reps are pretty close to the industry standard and spend about a

Freeing up highly paid and valuable sales team members to focus on what they do best is smart business.

third of their time selling—so there's lots of room for improvement. The problem, however, is the expense. Most sales productivity studies point to training, incentives, coverage model changes, and customer relationship management (CRM) investments as the best fixes. But the price tag for all of this usually comes to about \$20,000 per sales rep—which is often a bridge too far.

Still, you fight for funding, get it, and implement the programs. Your sales reps and management become well trained in your product and service offerings, while your sales team and partners use your CRM expertly, know exactly what's in the pipeline, and have no issues overcoming competition and pricing obstacles. Your marketing department gives your reps all the collateral they need to sell, from custom proposals to customer needs research to access to extensive databases for background information.

Yet not only do sales fail to spike, but also somehow the competition gains ground, and as a result, some of your best sales talent departs. How could this be happening? The reason, especially for complex sales, is that this approach focuses on getting to “yes,” forgetting that finalizing the deal takes a great deal more work. The real productivity losses come from the burden of administrative details that bury enterprise sales representatives during the last stages of the sales process.

The key issue is that sales reps are often not working on sales but on administrative tasks and aligning their work with other departments. A 2011 McKinsey study found that the sales reps of a logistics firm spent about 35 percent of their time selling because they were “consumed by nonsales activities such as billing system updates, fire-

fighting, and internal communications.”²⁵⁴ So for nearly two-thirds of their day, these sales reps were unable to work on sales, and this is much more the rule than the exception. A 2013 study by Pace Productivity turned up an even lower figure, finding that salespeople spend just 22 percent of their work time—barely more than one of five hours!—actually selling.²⁵⁵

Understanding how all of this affects salespeople—the primary link between your firm and clients—is crucial to boosting sales and sales productivity. Imagine that you have a top-performing sales rep who has reliably proven that he knows how to get his client to “yes.” But then to close the deal, he often ends up chasing after key figures for weeks on end, taking him away from bringing in new business. What began as a relationship and persuasion process has turned into an administrative nightmare for a sales rep with a vastly different skill set and role within the company.

Sales administrators typically become involved *after* the sale has been signed on the dotted line, which is also when all the logistics of organizing the sales support staff and multiple departments shift into fulfillment mode. But we have seen countless examples of a major sales “yes” lurching too slowly toward the close, and in the end the deal implodes because key decision makers move to other positions.

When executives see sales stalling, their response is often to install new tools and boost training, which just adds another layer to fight through before achieving closing. The problem isn’t getting the customer to shake hands on a deal; it’s getting the customer to sign the contract.

254 Olivia Nottebohm, Tom Stephenson, and Jennifer Wickland, “Freeing up the Sales Force for Selling,” *McKinsey Quarterly*, July 1, 2011, <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/freeing-up-the-sales-force-for-selling>.

255 Mikita Mikado, “5 Things Your Sales Team Wastes Too Much Time On,” National Association of Sales Professionals, accessed June 12, 2022, <https://www.nasp.com/blog/5-things-your-sales-team-wastes-too-much-time-on/>.

This is because for most firms, the standard operating procedure is that several departments need to provide input, which then needs to be approved by higher-ups. Inevitably, somebody somewhere along the line is unresponsive, and the process comes to a screeching halt. Team members are busy and miss a deadline. There are more negotiations in response to a market shift. A new partner needs to be integrated, and a new addendum to the deal requires authorization. A few months pass, and the client is suddenly poached by a competitor offering faster closing. Oops.

To simplify, you might ask what exactly needs to happen to complete these administrative tasks and put this sale to bed. This is the guiding light of our approach, which off-loads this last mile to someone trained in cross-functional team accountability. Many of our clients have asked us to train their sales administrators to shoulder this burden, which sounds like a logical solution. But we've discovered that many of the people needed to complete these tasks—to sign off on an implementation or approve the latest changes—are either external or several levels above the administrator, which can be intimidating. For one client, we actually trained fifty administrators to take care of these tasks. But in the end, this approach failed because helping to close sales had never been part of their job description. In follow-up interviews, the administrators said that they had been uncomfortable attempting to convince superiors who far outranked them to take the required steps.

The Sales Support Consultant

We hit upon a smarter approach, which is to name a talented administrator as a senior “sales support consultant” or “SSC”—a floating resource within the organization, empowered to unburden internal sales reps in the last stages of complex sales pursuits. Most senior

administrators have outstanding logistics skills—and if they are trained in remote accountability and assigned this crucial role, they will likely be more willing to harness the people and deliverables needed to bring sales to a close.

Our experience on hundreds of sales pursuits has taught us, beyond any doubt, that devoting a few SSC hours a week to help complete a major sale results in more sales closed, faster close rates, reduced attrition, and more satisfied clients—not to mention sharply increased revenue.

The impact of the presence of a capable human being dedicated to assisting with the final sales stage is transformational. Depending on the complexity of the sales involved, one SSC can typically work on as many as eight closings simultaneously.²⁵⁶ And because many of the scarce technical people needed to close deals are often the same sale to sale, having a central contact point sharply increases efficiency.

By off-loading the many activities that drag down account reps' productivity, you can spread your most valuable salespeople across more customers. This means that account reps can focus on key relationships to push sales toward completion instead of being bogged down in endless red tape and details. Deals close faster, and customers enjoy a more cohesive process. Let someone else track and follow up on action items and provide concise, clear reporting on status and risks on a daily basis. After the sale closes, depending on the strength of your sales support functions, the SSC might stay on board to assist deal fulfillment for a month or two.

We had one regional sales manager who called us so that we could assist one of his reps who had gotten agreement on a massive deal. The customer, one of the world's largest companies, had agreed to purchase a

256 We've seen situations where the initiatives are so large that there have been five full-time SSCs needed for one account.

videoconferencing solution for fifty of its offices worldwide. To prepare the contract for signature, each country's partner needed to be engaged, all the technical aspects needed to be priced, and leasing and training plans needed to be approved for each country. Even though the account representative had a team of five working on the account, everyone was soon overwhelmed by the size of the deal. Romania, for example, hosted a customer office, but there was no partner to deal with. Another country had cabling requirements that involved an iffy power grid. With the help of one SSC working ten hours a week, the team was able to plow through the massive list of details and sign the contract. After contract signature, the SSC even continued to assist the team on difficult fulfillment areas—such as getting the system installed in Romania without a country partner in place.

Sales teams, and particularly sales pursuit teams, tend to be close-knit groups, and understandably so. They work together daily, sharing information and ideas and striving toward a common—and crucial—goal for the large organization. They see their work as important and unimpeachable and establish strong bonds. It's understandable that they might be reluctant to allow an outside person to finalize their deal or listen to and report on their strategy sessions and sales status calls. It's a bit like the resentment local police officers tend to feel, in cop movies, when the FBI agent shows up to take over the case and, once it's solved, take all the credit.

Your sales reps might fear being micromanaged or imagine changes to their quota. Or they might fear that the SSC will replace them. The sales rep is already up to his eyeballs in work, and the last thing he and his team need is to spend precious hours explaining what needs to be done to a new arrival. Maintaining the status quo seems the simpler, less fraught path. Thus, bringing an outsider into this somewhat hostile

environment to oversee the closure of a deeply complex sale is basically begging for disaster.

Much better, then, to start with sales that have a relatively simple route to closing, with most major aspects under control, and use these closed deals to create a sort of advertisement for your last mile program. There's nothing like seeing SSC-driven sales results to encourage buy-in from other teams.

Account managers usually agree with the logic that the final stages of a major sales pursuit should be similar to any other sales-enablement initiative. Still, getting them to hand over management of a major sales pursuit requires careful negotiation and a concerted effort on the part of the sales leader and the SSC. It is important that the sales rep hears from other sales reps who have benefited from SSC assistance. It is also important to establish ground rules and reassure sales team members that what they say in the meetings will be confidential. Emphasize that the SSC's role is merely to help close the deal, not claim credit for the sale or change the way the sales teams do their jobs.

Almost without fail, bogging down top sales performers with time-consuming nonsales tasks leaves them exhausted, dispirited, and stressed, undermining crucial customer relationships and leaving many sales short of the finish line. Providing committed expertise to help these complex deals close faster, on the other hand, boosts morale and profits and reduces attrition.

PRO TIP: THINK VERTICALLY

It's not uncommon for companies to have several sales reps looking after clients in related industries. And while each rep's customers are unique, businesses in closely related industries generally have similar needs and require access to the same busy, in-demand resources to move the sale forward.

In this situation, a wise approach is to consolidate and introduce a team dashboard to share ideas and solutions within that industry category. We've seen vertical-focused teams in which each member operates in a silo when it comes to booking meetings with specialized resources. We've also seen firms bring in an industry leader to help on a large initiative in one city and then fly that leader to another city to work with another rep, only for a third rep to bring him back to the first city. By working with the account team to share best practices and coordinate people who add expertise to the sales process, the entire account team can accelerate each individual sales effort.

LEARN TO LEAD IN THE NEW REMOTE REALITY

"The best guide yet for those moving to a more remote operating model."

—Peter Cappelli, author of bestselling *The Future of the Office*

The Power of Remote provides a comprehensive roadmap for the countless companies and managers out there looking to take advantage of this workplace evolution, rather than lose out and fall behind. After reading this book, you'll know how to:

- hire, train, and onboard a top-notch remote workforce
- develop high-functioning remote employees who excel individually and in teams
- empower remote staffers to work cross-functionally with other teams and organizations
- ensure clear and effective communications within remote teams and across your company
- efficiently and productively manage remote projects.

Working virtually can boost productivity, cut costs, expand your talent pool, protect your business against disruption from natural disasters, improve employee morale, and lower the environmental impact of doing business. Once you learn how advantageous remote work can be, and how simple and effective the relevant changes, you'll never look back.

"A detailed roadmap for evolving into a high-performing virtual team."

—Lisette Sutherland, author of award-winning *Work Together Anywhere*

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