Closing Foundry.

How B2B sales really works - The 10 core principles you need to know

If you don't have deep B2B sales experience, knowing how it actually works helps you understand what's happening so you can do something about it.

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Key Points

- B2B sales = helping buying groups decide; building consensus across many stakeholders, not convincing one person.
- Complexity rises with each stakeholder; status-quo bias and FOMU drive no decision, slippage, and ghosting.
- Founder advantage only works buyer-first; anchor every deal in Why Change, Why Now, Why You.
- Align to the buyer's journey, support their stages; don't impose your sales process.
- Prove cost of inaction > cost of action; balance pain and gain in every conversation.
- Run two parallel projects (technical fit and commercial case); bridge current to desired state.

If you don't have deep B2B sales experience, knowing how it actually works helps you understand what's happening so you can do something about it.

What's This All About?

This is a practical guide to the fundamentals of B2B sales. It's written for founders and founding teams operating in the messy, experimental stage, where you're selling, refining product-market fit, and aiming for your first 10+ customers. The goal is to reduce uncertainty and give you a simple model for how to think and act in mid-market and enterprise sales.

In the early innings you're validating three things in parallel:

- **Problem hypothesis** - are you solving something material, for someone who cares, big enough to act on?
- **Messaging** - does the way you explain the problem and your point of view resonate?
- **Product** - does the current product actually address the problems surfaced in real conversations?

Tackling Common Challenges

Founders typically face three issues:

- **Sales craft** - no formal training in group dynamics, objection handling, or long-cycle deal orchestration.
- **Time** - product, fundraising, hiring, and operations crowd out a structured sales approach.
- **Credibility** - prospects may see early product and limited brand equity as risk.

You can still win. Your advantages (domain expertise, clarity of vision, and the ability to iterate message and approach in real time) are exactly what strategic sales requires.

What Is B2B Sales?

B2B sales is the process of **helping buyers make decisions in your favour**. It's most relevant when products are complex or consequential and purchases involve **multiple stakeholders**, longer timelines, and high scrutiny. No single person makes the call; consensus does. Your job is to **guide a group** to agreement.

Strategic sales combines:

- **Sales process**: *what* you do at each stage to create, advance, and close opportunities.
- **Sales method**: *how* you do it (the conversations, questions, and behaviours that move buyers forward).

Why B2B Sales Is Even Harder for Founders

Even experienced AEs struggle with today's environment: longer cycles, more stakeholders, and status-quo bias. As a founder, add an early product and limited time, and the bar rises again.

To make progress, do three things consistently:

1. **Shift focus** away from your product to the buyer's challenges and priorities.
2. **Answer the three decision questions** for the buying group:
   - **Why change?** Make the cost of inaction visible.
   - **Why now?** Create urgency around benefits and risks on a clear timeline.
   - **Why you?** Show how you uniquely close the gap between current and desired state.

The 10 Underlying B2B Sales Principles

1. The Three "Whys"

Every buying group must answer: Why change? Why now? Why you? Structure your entire approach to help them reach confident, shared answers. If one "why" is missing, the deal stalls.

2. The Buying Journey

It's their buying process, not your sales process. Buyers progress through decisions, typically:

1. **Problem recognition**: agree there's a problem worth solving.
2. **Option exploration**: consider internal fixes vs. external solutions.
3. **Requirement building**: define what "good" looks like.
4. **Decision**: evaluate, select, and commit.

Your role is to support these decisions with evidence and clarity, aligning to how they buy rather than imposing how you sell.

3. Why Companies Buy

Companies buy for two reasons:

- **Avoid pain**: reduce present/future risk, cost, waste, or exposure.
- **Pursue gain**: achieve outcomes that improve efficiency, revenue, or growth.

Anchor every conversation in a business outcome the group already cares about. If neither pain nor gain is clear and quantified, you don't have a deal, only a discussion.

4. What You Need to Prove

You're proving three things in parallel:

- **Fit** - the solution works in *their* world (use cases, users, data, workflow).
- **Risk** - the path to deploy is feasible (security, compliance, change impact).
- **Payback** - the business case stands up (impact, urgency, alternatives, cost of inaction).

Show, don't tell. Tie proof to buyer-side milestones (e.g., security review booked; CFO acknowledged business case assumptions; pilot success criteria signed).

5. What All B2B Solutions Do

Every B2B solution does one essential job: remove a challenge that blocks a goal. Your job:

1. Uncover their goals.
2. Explore what's blocking them.
3. Test whether you address those specific blockers.

This lens keeps conversations buyer-centred and makes next steps obvious.

6. The How - a Sales Method

A method translates intent into action. It's how you run discovery, shape options, gain consensus, and manage risk. Good methods:

- Start with curiosity (learn their world before you propose yours).
- Create a mutual plan (shared steps, owners, dates).
- Multi-thread deliberately (users, managers, execs).
- Use evidence at the right time (outcomes before ROI slides).

Pick one method, coach to it, and apply it consistently.

7. Mindset & Approach

Hold two ideas at once: **enable the buyer** and **advance the deal**. Practical behaviours:

- **Connection** - build human trust so you earn permission to go deep.
- **Curiosity** - ask questions that broaden and clarify the problem/impact.
- **Understanding** - listen slowly; reflect back what matters to each stakeholder.
- **Generosity** - bring ideas, examples, and paths forward that help *them* win.

This mindset compounds. It creates better conversations, faster consensus, and cleaner deals.

8. The Date

Treat each interaction like a well run working session:

- Set context, confirm outcomes, and agree next steps in the meeting.

- Don't make buyers do the admin. **You** send the notes, the mutual plan, and the invites.
- Avoid neediness. The less you look like you're chasing, the more seriously you're taken.

Control the rhythm without being controlling.

9. States & Gaps

Progress lives in three artefacts:

- **Current state** - pain, impact, and limitations as they are now.
- **Desired state** - what good looks like and by when.
- **Gap** - the quantified distance and the path to close it.

Map these with the buying group. When the gap is clear, urgency and prioritisation follow naturally.

10. The Two Projects

1. **Technical validation** - feasibility in their stack and workflows; risks owned.
2. **Commercial validation** - the business case holds up; stakeholders aligned; timeline credible.

Neglect either and you slow down or stall. Balance both to de-risk and accelerate.

Bringing It Together

B2B sales is about orchestrating buyer decisions across people, time, and risk. As a founder, your domain insight and agility are advantages, if you channel them through a simple, disciplined approach:

- Align to the **buyer's journey**.
- Answer the **three whys**.
- Prove **fit, risk, and payback** with buyer-side milestones.
- Run a consistent **method** with the right mindset.
- Manage **two projects** in parallel, technical and commercial.

Do this, and you'll replace guesswork with momentum, and momentum with revenue.

Further Reading

- How to Create a Sales Playbook That Works
- MEDDPICC, Explained: A Practical Guide for Founders and Sales Leaders
- How Do You Actually Reduce Sales Cycle Length?

Related terms

- AE (Account Executive): The quota-carrying sales rep responsible for closing new business.
- Objection Handling: Techniques for addressing and overcoming prospect concerns during a sale.
- Cost of Inaction: The quantified business cost of a prospect not solving their problem.
- Buying Process: The steps a prospect organisation follows when evaluating and selecting a vendor.
- Sales Process: A defined sequence of steps that guides reps from first contact to close.
- Business Case: The documented justification for a purchase, including ROI and strategic rationale.

- Buying Group: The set of individuals who collectively influence or make a purchase decision.
- Sales Method: A structured framework or approach for running a sales process.

Related service: Strategic Sales Enablement

Source: https://www.closingfoundry.com/insights/how-b2b-sales-really-works---the-10-core-principles-you-need-to-know