

JULY 2025

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# Gartner CSO and Sales Leader Conference 2025

**Transforming  
Sales Organizations' DNA**

# Two Little Letters Dominated a Conference Agenda

This report on Gartner's CSO and Sales Leader Conference is a first for *Sales & Marketing Management*. It's a first because, for the first time, I attended the annual Gartner Sales Leader conference, which was held in May in Las Vegas.

Gartner launched a combined sales and marketing leaders conference in 2017. They were turned into separate conferences a year later. The Gartner Marketing Symposium/Xpo is held each June in Denver.

Approximately 1,350 attendees at this year's conference were inundated with one overarching message: Artificial intelligence is changing how B2B sales teams operate and you need to develop your AI adoption strategy now. In fact, now is late to get started.

As we buttoned up production of this report, *The New York Times* published an article about [how the world's largest tech companies continue to engage in what amounts to an AI arms race](#). Meta, Microsoft, Amazon and Google have told investors they expect to spend a combined \$320 billion on infrastructure costs this year, according to the *Times*. On top of that, they're offering compensation packages for elite AI researchers that are worth as much as \$100 million per person!



PAUL NOLAN

Comments in *The Times* article from those who monitor big tech companies as well as venture capital investors who are staking out their ground in the AI boom reflect sentiments I heard at the Gartner conference about how sales leaders are approaching the AI implementation era.

"Everyone is deeply afraid of being left behind," Chris V. Nicholson, an investor with the venture capital firm Page One Ventures, told *The Times*.

Sounds familiar.

"The thinking from the big C.E.O.s is that they can't afford to be wrong by doing too little, but they can afford to be wrong by doing too much," Jordan Jacobs, a partner with the venture capital firm Radical Ventures, told *The Times*.

Also sounds familiar.

It's our hope that the collection of articles in this report capture highlights of the informative presentations made at the Gartner Sales Leader Conference. They are, in essence, presentations in print.

AI's potential remains undetermined. I'm already looking forward to Gartner's Sales Leader Conference next year to see where things stand. It's safe to say there will be plenty to catch up on.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Nolan'.





# Agentic AI Is the Future of High-Performing Sales Teams

## Gartner analyst warns transformation will occur in weeks, not years

BY PAUL NOLAN, EDITOR,  
SALES & MARKETING MANAGEMENT

In spring 2024, conversations and presentations at the Gartner CSO and Sales Leader Conference ranged from the importance of strategic adaptability to the need for honest assessments of sales cultures, keys to hiring smarter, and the urgency to align sales and marketing efforts.

What a difference a year makes.

Those capabilities continue to be vital to B2B sales success, but this year's Gartner CSO and Sales Leader Conference, held May 20-21 in Las Vegas, was dominated by two omnipresent letters — AI.

Artificial intelligence — specifically, AI's role in enhancing every aspect of corporate operations — is a vital and vexing concern for business leaders worldwide. C-level executives want clarity on how much and how quickly to invest in AI. Mid-level managers are scrambling to get their heads around how to incorporate AI into their go-to-market strategies.

## Understanding Agentic AI

Plain old "AI" seems so 2024.

"Agentic AI" was a term used repeatedly at the Gartner Sales Leader Conference, and what is generally referred to when discussing the advanced roles AI will play in white collar work environments.

Agentic AI — people also commonly refer to "AI agents" — simply refers to the next level of AI technology. Generative AI, like that used by ChatGPT, uses natural language processing to create new content. It can answer questions or provide outlines, for example.

Agentic AI, as explained in an [Nvidia blog post](#), uses sophisticated reasoning and iterative planning to autonomously solve complex, multi-step problems. Agentic AI can work together to execute tasks and make independent decisions based on learned datasets, context and interactions with the environment. AI agents learn and adapt over time — in essence, thinking for themselves.

## DAY 1 KEYNOTE

And workers at all levels continue to ask, “Is AI going to replace me?”

### A Transformative Time to Lead

To be sure, AI has been in the conversation at past Gartner conferences (both sales and marketing related), as well as other sales conferences. This year, however, it is dominating the conversation.

To emphasize the major pivots that companies must take to remain competitive in an AI-dominated world, Gartner gave its sales conference the theme “Radical Change in the DNA of High-Performing Sales Organizations.”

“It is a really rare time to be a leader in sales because this epic profession is going through an awakening, and all of you are the chosen leaders to guide its transition,” Gartner for Sales Vice President Analyst Dan Gottlieb stated in his opening-day keynote address.

“Agentic AI gives us the power to deconstruct the craftsmanship of sales and rebuild it into a new way of working. We’re waking up in a whole new world,” Gottlieb continued. “You’re getting questions that you’ve never been asked before. Your boards, customers, CEOs and executive peers... They’re all putting pressure on sales to figure out how to chase a brand new revenue productivity frontier.”

This transformation, Gottlieb said, will occur in days and weeks, not years. Companies that fail to develop a formal AI for sales adoption strategy and that fail to hire with AI skills in mind will be left behind.

“We see the next one to two years — in our world, four to eight quarters — as the window to get a competitive advantage with this technology, because we think it’s going to be mainstream in three to five,” he said.

He cautioned sales managers not to wait for those higher up in their organization to lead the AI push. AI skills building can be a department resolution — and even a personal one.

“Some of you may thinking, ‘My company is not AI-forward. This, not my job.’ You’re missing the point. The great sales awakening isn’t about your company; it’s about you and what kind of leader you want to be with this opportunity,” Gottlieb said.

**“We see the next one to two years as the window to get a competitive advantage with this technology, because we think it’s going to be mainstream in three to five.”**

**“Companies that fail to develop a formal AI for sales adoption strategy and that fail to hire with AI skills in mind will be left behind.”**



Gartner Analyst Dan Gottlieb outlined a strategy for companies to intelligently invest in AI for B2B sales.

“If you see this moment for the tremendous opportunity it really is, then you’re about to go through a period of massive personal and professional growth. That should scare you, but that fear you feel is the invigorated feeling of being alive that tells you how awesome it is to be a leader right now.”

With his strong call to action firmly made, Gottlieb provided specific steps that sales leaders can take to move AI initiatives forward.

### Set the Pace

Ask yourself what outcomes you want to achieve with your AI investment. Gottlieb said there are two general approaches when it comes to AI adoption in business: steady and accelerated.

Companies that adopt a steady approach spend on AI out of a sense of obligation, focus goals on time savings, and generally have modest ambitions in terms of outcomes.

Companies that take an accelerated approach are focused on cost savings and growth through AI-driven improvements. Their ambition is to be an AI pioneer, and they are not afraid to take risks.

DAY 1 KEYNOTE

How you invest in AI for sales teams will impact the returns you get. Your AI portfolio should find the sweet spot between too conservative and too aggressive.

Design a Sales AI Transformation Portfolio

As with personal investments, laying out AI investment visually in a portfolio manner will help you measure your current approach and make necessary adjustments to achieve your goals. It allows leaders to more clearly assess the AI investments they may wish to make based on cost, value and risk.

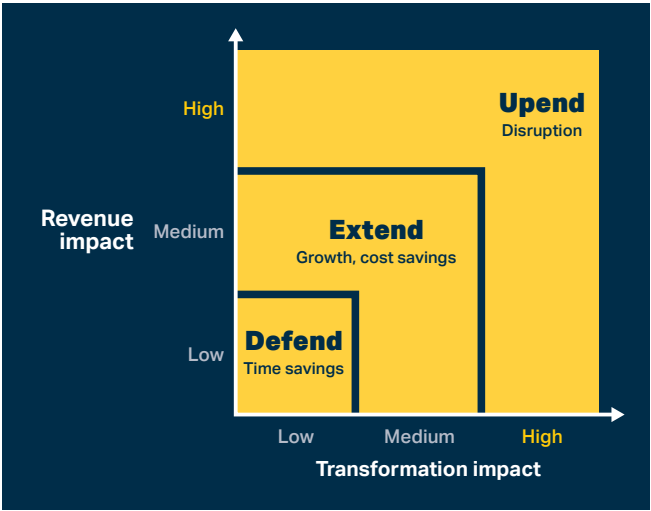
Gartner has identified three groups that companies generally fall into in terms of AI spend:

- **Defend Strategy** – These companies mostly seek time savings from AI and are simply trying to defend their market positions.
- **Extend Strategy** – These companies believe AI investments have a direct impact on leading indicators of growth or provide significant cost-of-sales savings.
- **Upend Strategy** – These companies pursue self- disruption because they believe significant transformation begets significant revenue opportunities.

As with investment portfolios, different AI spend portfolios produce different results. Gottlieb shared three portfolio styles and the results that can be expected from each:

- **FOMO** – Adopts a classic AI steady pace in which approximately 80% of AI initiatives are focused on time savings with some modest exploration of growth and cost savings. About six out of 10 companies currently have this type of AI portfolio, according to Gartner data.
- **Best Return** – Approximately 80% of investments are directed to extend spend initiatives while 10% is allotted to defend spend and 10% to upend spend initiatives. About three out of 10 companies currently have this type of portfolio.
- **Disruptor** – According to Gottlieb, these portfolios are currently reserved for industries that are rapidly being disrupted by AI and organizations that have an intensive interest in AI transformation. About one in 10 companies currently have a disruptor portfolio.

The Best Return portfolio provides a solid path to direct revenue impact because “you’re trying to take on what’s



	Defend	Extend	Upend
FOMO	80%	20%	0%
Best return	10%	80%	10%
Disruptor	20%	30%	50%

Illustrative percentages

possible with the technology today while also embracing the challenges of making it work at scale,” Gottlieb said.

Creating your AI portfolio gives you a way to frame how you talk about AI and how it connects to your goals. “It turns your portfolio into a narrative, and I know we love a good narrative in sales,” Gottlieb said.

Future Fit Your Personnel

A narrative is great, but it isn’t what accomplishes goals — people do, Gottlieb said. He cautioned his sales leader audience that the way they are qualifying new hires is not ideal for an AI-skilled work force.

A future-fit sales talent strategy prioritizes upside over experience, yet sales job postings continue to prioritize experience as a key qualifier while failing to screen at all for AI skills.

“High upside talent doesn’t always have sales experience,” Gottlieb said. “If we have an intelligently deployed agentic AI platform, that’s a new way to think about making a new rep successful. If we can deploy AI to scale knowledge, make execution repeatable and execute work faster, we can de-risk how high upside talent executes in the role. We can accelerate their ramp to confidence, competence and closing.”



## DAY 1 KEYNOTE

Instead of sales experience, he recommends looking for candidates with a growth mindset, proven flexibility when faced with challenges, and familiarity and comfort with AI tools.

### Prepare Your Organization to Become Agentic

The No. 1 thing holding companies back from achieving successful AI transformations is a lack of clarity on which AI use cases will drive ROI. This step is all about getting people focused on the most important activities that will result in a successful AI-centric transformation.

It entails breaking sales roles down into actions, hypothesizing the agentic AI accelerators that can take over or speed up those actions, and then adapting those roles to incorporate AI agents. Gartner has discovered companies that do this are 2½ times more likely to transform successfully and achieve commercial objectives (or as Gottlieb puts it, “hit their numbers”).

### The Time to Invest Is Now

Successful AI transformations won't occur without time commitment. Gottlieb said, “To quote my mother-in-law, you have to put your attention on your intention.”

Gartner clients that have taken the lead on AI transformation in sales have biweekly meetings to update sales leaders on progression. Teams that are executing the transformation programs are meeting two or three times per week. AI initiatives are on agendas at sales kickoffs, quarterly updates and annual planning sessions.

“Sales leaders driving results are not letting this significant opportunity slip through their fingers with hope and luck. They're wrestling with it and saying, ‘I'm going to make sure that we're doing the right thing, placing the right bets, and that we're going to win with AI,’” Gottlieb said.

A personal finance mantra is the time to start investing is now. It's no different for companies wanting to acquire agentic AI proficiency.

“This is your moment to get that swagger and set the tone to chase a new productivity frontier,” said Gottlieb. “Improvement doesn't come drastically or immediately. But if you start today, by 2027, you will realize exponential improvements of revenue, cost of sales and AI maturity. Can you imagine if you wait three years to start this?” **SMM**

## Don't Miss Future Focus Reports!

Sales & Marketing Management Focus Reports are published twice quarterly. Each report takes a deep dive into a topic that matters to B2B sales and marketing leaders — management best practices, technology updates and trends, creating cultures that foster high performance and more.

*Sales & Marketing Management* is the leading authority for executives in B2B sales and marketing across a wide array of industries.

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# Three Mid-Year Strategy Shifts for CSOs

BY ROBERT BLAISDELL,  
VP ANALYST, GARTNER SALES PRACTICE

Chief sales officers are under pressure. Less than 50% of CSOs report their organization surpassed its [2024 strategic goals](#), according to Gartner research. In today's rapidly evolving landscape, many CSOs are struggling to adjust their strategy to cope with the unexpected changes they face: 66% of CSOs say they struggle to adapt their strategic plans to sudden change. As CSOs look ahead to the second half of the year, there are three strategy shifts they should consider to meet their 2025 goals:

## Shift 1: Align Sales and Marketing

According to Gartner research, 49% of CSOs say their sales organization's definition of a qualified lead differs greatly from marketing's definition. Fostering alignment between sales and marketing is vital for driving revenue growth, and misalignment can create dysfunction that can slow down progress. Too often, sales and marketing have conflicting priorities and goals that are not fully aligned. In order to improve alignment between the two functions, CSOs should:

Share priorities and objectives with their marketing counterpart. Examples of shared priorities could include driving [current customer growth](#) versus new customer acquisition, updating the ideal customer profile, or revising the customer segmentation and tiering approach.

Create one or two shared KPIs beyond just revenue to demonstrate alignment, such as a specific percentage of growth from current vs. new customers, product portfolio penetration at a market, territory, or customer level, or set specific pipeline goals at certain stages of the sales funnel.

## Shift 2: Reskill Sellers to Meet Future Goals

Seventy-four percent of CSOs report a need for significant change in required seller skills to meet future revenue goals, according to Gartner research. Technology is driving this need: CSOs state that 58% of their sellers, on average, will need to be reskilled or upskilled by 2026 due to AI.

As buyers increasingly adopt generative and other forms of AI, sales teams need to develop the skills necessary to effectively interact with these tech-savvy customers. This requires incorporating AI into current sales processes to boost seller productivity. By aligning their teams' skill sets with the changing market demands, leaders can ensure their organizations stay competitive and responsive to buyer preferences.

CSOs should build a two-year roadmap to reskill or upskill their sellers in response to AI impact and changing buyer preferences.

## Shift 3: Leverage Technology

Almost half (44%) of CSOs report that incorporating an AI strategy for engaging buyers and sellers is key for creating future value. While AI is recognized as essential for boosting sales productivity, sales leaders frequently encounter obstacles due to their limited authority in choosing and implementing AI solutions within their organizations. Only 23% of CSOs are responsible for AI selection, whereas 68% only offer input or are kept informed about AI decisions.

In order to increase their influence over AI selection, CSOs must develop a strong point of view of AI's potential impact on sales productivity. Then, they should monitor the use and impact of GenAI in buyer purchase decision making.

To succeed in today's competitive sales landscape, CSOs must not only adopt AI but also strategically incorporate it into their workflows. This ensures that technology investments are deliberately aligned with organizational goals and adaptable to changing buyer behaviors. **SMM**

[Robert Blaisdell](#) is a vice president analyst in the [Gartner Sales Practice](#). He presented on this subject and others at the [Gartner CSO & Sales Leader Conference](#), May 20-21 in Las Vegas.



# Redefining the CSO Role for 2025

## A Strategic Vision Beyond Sales

BY ROBERT BLAISDELL,  
VP ANALYST, GARTNER SALES PRACTICE

In the rapidly evolving landscape of sales and marketing, the role of the chief sales officer (CSO) is undergoing a significant transformation. The expectations and responsibilities of CSOs are expanding beyond traditional sales metrics to encompass a [broader strategic vision](#). This shift is driven by the need for adaptive sales organizations that can thrive in a data-driven, collaborative environment.

### Bridging the Sales and Marketing Divide

A comprehensive framework for CSOs aiming to enhance their sales performance and strategy includes essential tools designed to diagnose and optimize various aspects of sales operations. These include assessments of sales effectiveness, budget efficiency and seller performance. By leveraging these diagnostics, CSOs can identify and prioritize areas for improvement to implement targeted productivity-boosting strategies.

One of the primary challenges facing CSOs today is the disconnect between [sales and marketing](#). This gap often leads to misaligned goals and inefficiencies that can hinder overall performance. To bridge this divide, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of a unified commercial strategy that aligns sales and marketing efforts. By fostering collaboration and communication between these two critical functions, organizations can create a cohesive approach that drives growth and adaptability. Gartner research shows that when sales and marketing collaborate on key commercial activities (as opposed to a siloed approach), organizations are 2.3x more likely to attain strong commercial growth.

### Harnessing Technology and AI for Success

Another significant challenge is the extensive skill set required for modern sellers. As the sales landscape becomes increasingly complex, sellers must possess a diverse range of skills to succeed. This includes not only traditional sales techniques but also the ability to leverage technology and data analytics. To address this, CSOs must focus on role simplification and provide ongoing training and development opportunities for their teams. By equipping sellers with the necessary skills and tools, organizations can enhance their overall effectiveness and drive better results.

Simultaneously [AI](#) is playing a pivotal role in shaping the future of sales. By harnessing the power of AI, CSOs can gain valuable insights into customer behavior and preferences to enable more personalized and targeted sales strategies. AI can



also streamline administrative tasks, freeing up sellers to focus on building relationships and closing deals. As AI continues to evolve, its integration into seller workflows will be crucial for organizations looking to stay competitive.

### Strategic Agility: Navigating Short-Term Goals and Long-Term Growth

Balancing immediate execution with long-term strategic planning is another critical aspect of the CSO's role. While achieving short-term sales targets is essential, CSOs must also keep an eye on the future and develop strategies that ensure sustained growth. This requires a thoughtful balance between tactical execution and strategic foresight, with an emphasis on adaptability and innovation.

The CSO 2025 leadership vision is about much more than just sales. It involves creating adaptive sales organizations that leverage data-driven decision-making, promote collaboration, and embrace technological advancements. By addressing the challenges of sales and marketing alignment, skill development and strategic planning, CSOs can position their organizations for success in an ever-changing business environment. As we look at the second half of 2025 and beyond, the role of the CSO will continue to evolve, requiring a [forward-thinking approach](#) that goes beyond traditional sales metrics to drive long-term growth and success. **smm**

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# Navigating the First Year as a Chief Sales Officer

BY BRENDAN CONDON,  
SENIOR DIRECTOR ANALYST,  
GARTNER SALES PRACTICE

Stepping into the role of a chief sales officer (CSO) presents a unique challenge: delivering immediate results while laying the groundwork for long-term success. To aid in this transition, Gartner has developed “The Executive FastStart,” a comprehensive toolkit designed to guide CSOs through their first year with confidence and effectiveness. Based on insights from thousands of CSO transitions across various industries, this framework focuses on four critical areas: establishing priorities quickly, understanding your environment and role, building relationships and your personal brand, and delivering on priorities in the first year and beyond.

## Establishing Priorities Quickly

The initial step for any new CSO is to swiftly establish [priorities](#). According to Gartner’s CSO Priorities survey, key areas of focus include new customer acquisition, account management and growth, and optimizing the go-to-market strategy. Aligning efforts with these priorities can lead to significant impact. However, understanding the expectations of the CEO and board, as well as assessing the sales function’s capacity to meet these expectations, is crucial.

## Understanding Your Environment and Role

Role clarity is paramount for a new CSO. It’s essential to grasp the reality of the role, its potential within the organization, and the steps necessary to realize that potential. Addressing any ambiguities, such as reporting lines, and understanding the enterprise culture and politics are vital. For those new to the role, structured plans to address experience gaps and leverage industry-specific benchmarking data can accelerate acclimatization and build credibility.

## Building Relationships and Personal Brand

Building relationships and a personal brand is a critical focus area, with over 50% of CSOs indicating a need for support in this domain. Establishing a strong personal brand involves defining your value and influence early on. Effective



communication tailored to your audience is key to building this brand. Regularly refreshing your understanding of stakeholders and refining your personal brand is essential, as is ensuring that your brand aligns with enterprise expectations.

## Delivering on First Year Priorities and Beyond

Achieving success as a transitioning [leader](#) typically takes over seven months, underscoring the importance of focusing on the entire first year rather than just the initial 90 or 100 days. To accelerate this process, it’s crucial to create a strategic plan that delivers impactful results in 30-day increments. Identifying both visible and invisible risks, securing early wins, and defining competencies that drive high performance are essential strategies. Additionally, understanding how your leadership style aligns with your team and peers, and establishing metrics to track and improve functional importance, are differentiators that can set top performers apart.

## Embracing the Journey

The journey of a new CSO is filled with opportunities to make a lasting impact. By leveraging the Executive FastStart framework and focusing on these four key areas, CSOs can navigate their first year with strategic insight and effectiveness, setting the stage for long-term success. **SMN**

[Brendan Condon](#) is a senior director analyst in the [Gartner Sales Practice](#). He presented on this subject and others at the [Gartner CSO & Sales Leader Conference](#), May 20-21 in Las Vegas.

# Unlocking Sales Success: The Mindset of Top Performers

BY SHAYNE JACKSON, VP ANALYST, GARTNER SALES PRACTICE

In the competitive world of B2B sales, the difference between average and exceptional performance often lies in the mindset of the sellers. Gartner insights reveal that fostering a growth mindset, resilience and a willingness to take risks are pivotal in driving sales success. These attributes not only help sellers meet their quotas but also enhance customer acquisition and growth.

## The Power of a Growth Mindset

A growth mindset, defined as the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work, is crucial for B2B sellers who face constant challenges and evolving market demands. Sellers with a growth mindset are more likely to embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, and see effort as a path to mastery. This attitude not only boosts their performance but also inspires confidence in their clients, leading to stronger relationships and increased sales.

Gartner data indicates that sellers who adopt a growth mindset are significantly more successful in achieving their sales targets. In fact, they are up to 3.7x more likely to achieve quota. The ability to adapt and learn continuously is a key differentiator in the fast-paced sales environment.

## Resilience and Risk-Taking: Keys to Overcoming Challenges

Resilience is another critical trait that top-performing sellers possess. The ability to bounce back from rejection and setbacks is essential in a field where the word “no” is heard more often than “yes.”



Resilient sellers maintain their motivation and focus, using each setback as a learning opportunity rather than a defeat. Sellers with resilience are 2.3x more likely to experience improved customer growth.

Moreover, a willingness to take calculated risks can set top performers apart from their peers. In sales, innovation and creativity often require stepping outside of comfort zones. Sellers who are open to experimenting with new approaches and strategies are more likely to discover effective solutions that resonate with their clients, and are 6x more likely to make their quota.

Creating an environment that encourages risk taking and resilience is essential. By promoting psychological safety, organizations can empower their sellers to explore new ideas without fear of failure, ultimately leading to greater innovation and success.

## Strategies for Nurturing Top Performers

For [sales leaders](#), the challenge lies in cultivating these mindsets within their teams. Several strategies can achieve this, including promoting psychological safety, encouraging customer empathy and facilitating career development.

Psychological safety, the belief that one can take risks without fear of negative consequences, is crucial for fostering risk taking and resilience. By creating a supportive environment, sales leaders can encourage their teams to share ideas and take bold steps toward achieving their goals.

Emphasize effort and learning by shifting evaluations beyond the hard numbers by recognizing and praising effort and growth, not just outcomes. This cements the connection between growth through skills application and success, with holistic performance evaluations.

Finally, investing in career development and mindset training can have a profound impact on sales performance. By providing opportunities for continuous learning and growth, organizations can ensure that their sellers remain motivated because they see the impact the right mindsets can have on their career.

The mindset of a seller plays a crucial role in determining their success. By embracing a growth mindset, resilience and a willingness to take risks, sellers can unlock their full potential and drive exceptional results. For sales leaders, fostering these mindsets within their teams is essential for achieving long-term success and staying ahead in the competitive B2B sales landscape. **SMM**

[Shayne Jackson](#) is a vice president analyst in the [Gartner Sales Practice](#). He presented on this subject and others at the [Gartner CSO & Sales Leader Conference](#), May 20-21 in Las Vegas.

# Selling to Reluctant Buyers

## Overhauling sales engagement strategies to satisfy modern buyer preferences

BY LUKE TIPPING, DIRECTOR ANALYST, GARTNER SALES PRACTICE

In today's rapidly evolving business environment, conventional sales engagement strategies are no longer enough to support [B2B buying groups](#) through their complex purchase journeys and deliver successful deals. Sales leaders must effectively integrate digital tools and seller interactions to provide a seamless, engaging buyer experience that drives confident decision making by enabling buyers to clarify their business goals, recognize value in their specific context, and establish buying group consensus.

### Empower Buyers to Explore and Refine Their Business Goals

B2B purchases are frequently initiated by an internal change or requirement unique to the buying organization. However, buyers often require assistance in defining their business problem and identifying precisely what they need. One of the primary strategies for engaging reluctant buyers is to empower them through self-service digital content and tools to learn more about their challenge (or opportunity), and explore their business goals independently. By providing platforms where buyers can access information, compare options and evaluate solutions at their own pace, companies can create a more personalized and satisfying buying experience.

### Optimize Touchpoints to Satisfy Buyers' Learning Needs

Buyers today are inundated with information, making it essential for sales organizations to deliver relevant and concise content that addresses specific buyer concerns. Consequently, optimizing touchpoints to align with buyers' learning needs is critical to successful engagement strategies.

Gartner data shows that buyers prefer self-service digital touchpoints to serve their general learning needs, but they lean on sellers and subject matter experts when their needs become more specific. By understanding the buyer's purchase journey, sales leaders can identify how to deliver the right information at the right time to aid buyer decision making and facilitate smoother deal closure.

### Embolden Buying Teams

Fostering confidence and consensus among buying teams is vital. In many organizations, purchase decisions are made collectively, requiring sellers to engage multiple stakeholders effectively. This necessitates a shift from traditional sales pitches to value-driven conversations that resonate with each stakeholder's unique priorities and concerns. Sellers must be equipped with the skills to navigate these complex interactions, ensuring that all parties feel heard and valued.

### Leverage Buyer Insights and Develop Seller Skills

The challenges faced by [sales leaders](#) today, such as prolonged sales cycles and difficulties in closing deals, underscore the need for an overhaul of sales engagement strategies. Mapping the buying journey is a critical step in this process. By identifying key decision points and potential obstacles, sellers can tailor their approach to address specific buyer needs and pain points. This proactive strategy not only enhances buyer engagement but also streamlines the sales process, reducing the time and effort required to close deals.

However, in isolation, buyer journey mapping is not enough. Sales organizations must combine this with advanced engagement analytics that provide valuable insights into buyer behavior, preferences and engagement levels. By leveraging these capabilities, sellers can make data-driven decisions, personalize interactions, and deliver targeted solutions that meet buyer expectations.

As the role of the seller evolves, so too must their capabilities. Training programs that focus on communication, empathy and problem-solving can equip sellers with the tools they need to succeed in today's competitive market. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and development, organizations can ensure that their sales teams remain agile and responsive to changing buyer dynamics.

### A Holistic Approach to Selling

Understanding buyer needs and providing relevant information are foundational to successful sales engagement strategies. Sellers must move beyond generic pitches and instead focus on delivering tailored solutions that address specific buyer challenges. This requires a deep understanding of the buyer's industry, market trends and competitive landscape. By positioning themselves as trusted advisors, sellers can build credibility and trust, paving the way for more fruitful and enduring relationships.

The key to selling to reluctant buyers lies in a holistic approach that combines digital innovation with human interaction. By enabling buyers to self-serve, optimizing touchpoints, fostering confidence and integrating technology, sellers can create a compelling and engaging buying experience. As the sales landscape continues to evolve, those who adapt and embrace these strategies will be well-positioned to thrive in the face of increasing buyer expectations and market complexities. **SMM**

[Luke Tipping](#) is a director analyst in the [Gartner Sales Practice](#).



# Ferrazzi: The Future of Leadership Is Teamship

21st century collaboration is trading top-down management for co-elevation

BY PAUL NOLAN, EDITOR, SALES & MARKETING MANAGEMENT

Both days of the Gartner CSO and Sales Leader Conference in May were loaded with messages about the importance of bold leadership and the competitive advantages it creates. In his Day 2 keynote address, Keith Ferrazzi, author, entrepreneur and thought leader, said the world's highest-performing organizations rely on teams more than leaders.

"I want you to say to your sales teams it's time for them to step up 30% and meet you in leadership," Ferrazzi said.

It's the message Ferrazzi presents in his 2024 book, "Never Lead Alone: 10 Shifts from Leadership to Teamship." The book, he said, is the culmination of 24 years of research involving more than 3,000 teams with a focus on one key question — what does it take to be a high-performing team?

It comes down to assembling a group of driven people who will commit to holding each other accountable, Ferrazzi said.

"We expect everything of the leader and give too little focus to the teammates and their responsibility to each other," he states in the book. "Work happens in networks of teams. Upgrading teams and what it means to be a great teammate is one of the least-curated and underleveraged opportunities for accelerating business outcomes today."

## Co-Elevation and Candor

An imperative first step to develop a high-performing team is to create a work environment in which individual team members embrace the challenge to excel, encourage each other to achieve, and feed off each other's successes.

Ferrazzi calls this co-elevation. It requires a shift away from the hub-and-spoke model of a leader who identifies goals and provides directives. It places an emphasis on collaboration and requires that every team member be willing to both provide and accept constructive criticism.

While Ferrazzi didn't call for a complete pivot to holacracy, he did say within a decade, an organization chart will be a sign of a company that is not embracing more effective paths to improved productivity.



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"Co-elevation is an unwavering belief in winning together and pushing each other higher in the process."

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Keith Ferrazzi

Co-elevation hinges on team members accepting a new social contract regarding how individuals work together. It requires agreement from everyone that there are old notions of behavior that do not serve the team well. Common tendencies such as reserving comment, avoiding conflict, resentment of a colleague, and allowing for less than a teammate's best will doom co-elevation.

Good leaders provide regular feedback, hold their team accountable, and lifts the team's energy, Ferrazzi aid. Great leaders assure that team members give each other feedback, hold each other accountable and work to raise each other's energy.

Teamship is characterized by transparency. There is no room for fragile egos or whispered comments in strong team environments.

Ferrazzi states in his book, "The old team social contract is to not speak up for fear of throwing a peer under the bus, but the new social contract is not holding back for fear of letting your peer struggle and fail without the value of your opinion."

## The New Look of Collaboration

Counterintuitive to his team-first emphasis, Ferrazzi suggested that large team meetings are one of the least effective forms of collaboration. Younger workers tend to recognize meetings as a cart-before-the-horse approach to true collaboration, he said.

Breaking into smaller groups — he suggests three members each — opens the door to sharing more openly. It magnifies coworkers listening to and learning from each other.

“In the average meeting of 12 people, four people feel like they’re heard — and they’re always the same damn people,” he told the Gartner Sales Leader Conference audience.

Breaking into groups of three provides psychological safety. Ferrazzi’s research shows that candor in small breakout rooms is 85% higher than when teams meet as a single cohort. When smaller groups reconvene as the entire team to share insights, team members are less likely water down their group’s consensus.

But bigger isn’t always a bad idea. Ferrazzi argues that a key component of teamship is to broaden the definition of what constitutes one’s team. “We work in broad global networks inside and outside even the walls of our own companies, so we need to redefine how we think of ‘teams’ and collaborate liberally outside the limited org chart,” he states in his book.

Ferrazzi held up e.l.f. Beauty, a company he has worked with, as a model of co-elevation through a commitment to candor and peer coaching. Mandy Fields, CFO at e.l.f. Beauty, told Ferrazzi their co-elevation culture begins with hiring and onboarding. The company pursues workers who will be open to candor and healthy challenges in a respectful manner from peers — and offer it in return.

Feedback at e.l.f. is not top-down from managers to subordinates in quarterly or annual reviews. It occurs daily, Ferrazzi said, it comes from all directions, and it is coached and reinforced by leaders and teammates who embrace it as a cultural norm.

### Practice Praise

Another key characteristic of companies that create co-elevation cultures is frequent recognition. “Our research shows that teams don’t celebrate enough,” Ferrazzi said. Here are some eye-opening statistics:

- 79% of the people who leave an organization cite a lack of recognition as the primary reason for deciding to exit.
- 40% of employees report never getting recognition on the job.
- 50% of managers admit they do not recognize outstanding performance as they should.

One sales team Ferrazzi worked with shared “exploits of the week” on a weekly team call. These were key wins, strategy decisions or teamwork that stood out.

Ferrazzi suggests making peer praise a formal part of meetings. Workers are asked to come prepared to share why they appreciate another team member. The expression should be specific and brief.

“Marathon runners need applause all the way,” Ferrazzi writes. “It’s especially important for young team members who need to know that they’re growing in the right direction, even though they’re learning.”

### A Singular Approach to Teamship

Ferrazzi told the Las Vegas audience that while teamship is all about cohesion and co-elevation, individuals don’t have to wait for it to be introduced as a companywide undertaking.

“I’m calling on you to be the shepherd of it in your organizations. Your company’s culture is irrelevant,” he said. “If a small group of people that are committed to working together adopt this social contract, that is their culture. It’s one of the best win-wins that you can possibly imagine, and you can be the culture change agent.” **SMM**

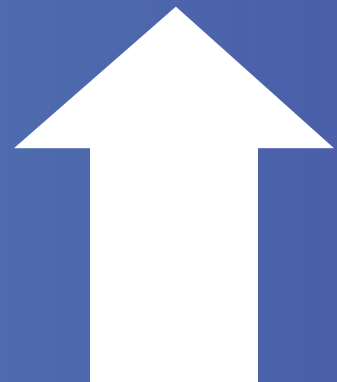
## Teamship Practices Accelerate Performance By Increasing Openness, Collaboration, and Speed

**Our research shows that our practices demonstrate a...**

- 79% increase in Openness / Candor
- 46% increase in Collaboration Speed
- 44% increase in Ownership / Accountability

**Along with these team outcomes:**

- Improved alignment to north star mission and goals
- Breaking down of silos
- Bolder ideas and innovations
- Morale boost & team resilience



# What AI Can't Replace

## The Human Sales Skills Still Winning Deals

BY TIM RIESTERER,  
CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER, CORPORATE VISIONS

Several years back, researchers analyzed 103 million hands of online poker and, to their surprise, discovered that the best hand wins only 12% of the time. Turns out, the best player wins 88% of the time, no matter what cards they're dealt.

Sales organizations have been in a frenzy to adopt AI. But just like those poker players, your success doesn't depend on having the best technology. Your sales organization needs the best players – sellers who are highly skilled at reading the situation and guiding buyers through complex decisions.

In other words, human sellers remain the decisive factor in winning complex deals despite AI's promise to automate everything from prospecting to pricing.

And there is science to back this up.

Let's dive into what the evidence says about winning in this environment.

### Do Buyers Really Benefit from AI?

Despite unprecedented access to AI-powered research and evaluation tools, today's B2B buyers are struggling more than ever to make confident decisions.

Research we conducted with Leff Bonney and Florida State University's Sales Institute reveals a fascinating paradox: The more information and automation your buyers have access to, the less confident they become in their decisions.

This is due to what behavioral scientists call [Escalation of Commitment](#). Buyers conduct a lot of self-directed research, they get locked into their assumptions, and they resist changing course – even when better options emerge.

Two underlying psychological forces make Escalation of Commitment particularly challenging for sales today:

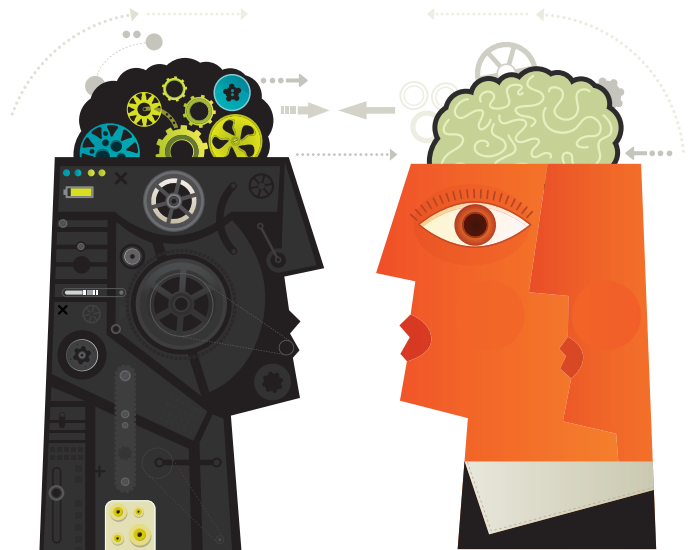
- **Sunk Cost Fallacy** – Having invested heavily in research before engaging sellers, buyers resist abandoning their initial conclusions.
- **Cognitive Dissonance** – They actively dismiss information that challenges their technology-guided assumptions.

While AI excels at facilitating transactions, it increases buyers' need for skilled human sellers who can challenge their assumptions and guide complex decisions. In fact, according to our data, better human selling experiences could have led to different outcomes in 53% of lost deals.

So what does that better human sales experience look like?

### Eight Predictive Buyer Experiences That Drive Wins

What exactly makes human sellers so effective? Through our analysis of 120,000+ won and lost deals, we identified eight distinct sales competencies that determine your success.



These aren't opinions or best practices – they're scientifically validated predictors of wins and losses, according to feedback from hundreds of thousands of real buyers.

- **Align solutions to needs** – Identify and understand the buyer's needs and develop the best solution fit.
- **Make a case for change** – Create a compelling vision of the future for the buyer and provide convincing reasons to change.
- **Demonstrate clear differentiation** – Showcase the unique advantages of your solution compared to both the buyer's status quo and your competition.
- **Articulate meaningful value** – Connect your solution's capabilities with the buyer's priorities to demonstrate value.
- **Help justify decisions** – Build a business case that convinces stakeholders and adds urgency to the decision.
- **Negotiate creatively** – Effectively manage pricing questions and negotiation conversations.
- **Deliver compelling communications** – Deliver engaging, memorable, and persuasive presentations with key stakeholders.
- **Resolve concerns responsively** – Understand and resolve any concerns or issues raised during evaluation.

These eight competencies are crucial. Executing them effectively requires a deep understanding of buyer psychology. Take align solutions to needs, for example.

### The Science Behind Modern Discovery

Our behavioral research study with Bonney shows that traditional discovery approaches (where sellers treat discovery as a brief checkpoint before launching into their solution pitch) achieve problem alignment only 45.5% of the time. Buyers and



sellers don't agree on the problem to be solved more than half the time.

In contrast, when sellers take what we call a "problem-minded" approach that effectively addresses Escalation of Commitment, solution alignment jumps to 68%. It's the most effective approach by far, but it's used only about 13% of the time.

The research shows three critical dimensions that determine your effectiveness when aligning your solution to buyers' needs:

- **Context** – Understanding the full scope of the buyer's situation
- **Clarity** – Helping buyers achieve true problem clarity
- **Correctness** – Ensuring accuracy in problem definition and solution alignment

Sellers who master all three dimensions while managing Escalation of Commitment see win rates increase dramatically.

Those who focus only on context, however, consistently lose deals they could have won.

Considering all the evidence and the current reality of sales, what does the seller of the future look like?

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**Corporate Visions research of more than 150,000 deals shows that 53% of lost deals were winnable if not for a misstep in the selling process.**

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### **The Seller of the Future: An Evidence-Backed Framework**

Here are the three essential elements that will separate high performers from everyone else:

#### **1. Science-Backed Skills Training**

Intuitive approaches to selling don't work anymore. Your sellers need training grounded in behavioral science, specifically cognitive psychology, behavioral economics and neuroscience.

Through microsimulations at key moments in your buyer's journey, you can now validate and develop critical selling skills with unprecedented precision.

#### **2. Psychometrically Validated Precision Skills Intelligence**

Sellers don't accurately identify the reasons for lost deals 50 to 70% of the time. Self-assessments and manager evaluations rarely match what buyers say about their experience during the sales process.

Through a combination of scientifically validated skills assessments and AI-powered sales simulations,

organizations can now objectively measure each seller's abilities and precisely identify which specific competencies they need to develop.

### **3. Buyer Evidence-Based Competency Framework**

When you align development efforts directly with what buyers tell you influences their decisions, your teams focus on capabilities that actually make an impact.

Organizations implementing this framework to collect buyer feedback and coach sellers see win rates increase by up to 40%.

### **Leading Teams Through Complex Sales Dynamics**

Complex, multi-stakeholder deals are where human skills become vital. The evidence shows that these opportunities never present simple, isolated problems. Instead, your teams must navigate interconnected challenges that span departments, geographies, and reporting lines.

This is precisely where AI falls short and skilled sellers shine. To win in these environments, sales leaders must develop four distinctly human capabilities in their teams:

- Active listening skills to uncover unstated needs and opportunities
- Strategic questioning abilities to reveal broader organizational implications
- Diplomatic negotiation techniques to align competing stakeholder interests
- Consensus-building tactics to bridge organizational levels

When your teams master these capabilities, they consistently outperform in both winning new business and expanding existing accounts. More importantly, they build the kind of deep relationships with buyers that technology alone can't replicate.

### **The Path Forward**

AI won't replace your team, but it will shine a bright light on just how crucial their human skills really are. Your competitive advantage lies not in having the best technology, but in mastering the art of human connection while using AI to handle routine tasks.

To capture this advantage, focus on three priorities:

- Get surgical about skill gaps with precision diagnostics.
- Focus on buyer-validated competencies for training.
- Build flexible frameworks that adapt to different buying scenarios.

Just like those poker players who win 88% of the time without the best hand, your success doesn't depend on having perfect cards. Instead, train and enable sellers who can read situations, build trust and guide complex decisions toward successful outcomes.

That's a game that humans are still winning — and will continue to win — in the AI era. **smm**

Tim Riesterer is chief strategy officer at [Corporate Visions](#), a provider of science-backed revenue growth services and solutions for B2B sales, marketing, and customer success.

# AI Is Here – But Is Your Data Ready?

BY ALEXANDRA NOLAND, MARKETING AND OPERATIONS LEADER, VOIANT

Attending the Gartner CSO & Sales Leader Conference as an exhibitor and having a user roundtable workshop session made one thing abundantly clear: AI isn't just coming, it's already here, and it's moving fast. There is a lot of buzz, a lot of excitement and definitely some pressure to embrace the latest tools and innovations.

But as I listened closely and dug deeper into conversations with leaders – going beyond which AI tool looked the flashiest among the booths – I kept returning to one critical question with people: “Is your data ready for AI?”

Again and again, the answer was some version of not really, or simply, no.

Whether I was talking with people at our booth, sitting in breakout sessions, or during our workshop on Optimizing Your RevOps Tech Stack for Growth, AI dominated the conversation. Sales leaders are curious; vendors are making big promises; and teams are already experimenting with tools like Copilot, ChatGPT, People.ai and a growing stack of others. But in nearly every conversation with sales and RevOps leaders, one clear pattern emerged:

Everyone wants to use AI and is feeling immense pressure to implement some kind of AI tool stack, but very few are confident that their data, systems or processes are ready for it.

## AI Built on Bad Data Still Delivers Bad Results

It's tempting to jump straight into AI. The possibilities feel endless. But what stood out more than anything else was how important it is to get the fundamentals right first.

One of the biggest takeaways people need to remember is that AI doesn't fix data problems, it amplifies them.

- If your forecasts are off now, AI will just make them wrong faster.
- If your systems aren't integrated, AI can't connect the dots.
- If your CRM and planning tools aren't aligned, AI won't know which version of the truth to believe.

Without clean, connected real-time data – and the processes to support it – AI becomes just another siloed tool spitting out half-truths, inconsistent insights or conflicting answers.

## The Real Opportunity: Strengthening RevOps Architecture First

What we shared in our workshop – and what I see play out every day with clients – is this: you can't layer AI on top of dysfunction and expect transformation.

The real foundation for using AI meaningfully in sales performance includes:

- A modern data architecture (think lakehouse, not Excel spreadsheets and batch uploads)
- Integrated systems that talk to each other in real time
- Clean, governed, harmonized data across teams
- Flexible planning tools that support what-if analysis and scenario modeling
- Clear, repeatable processes for forecasting, segmentation, and territory planning

Once this foundation is in place, AI can be incredibly powerful, not just for insights, but for decisions that actually drive value.

## Get the Data Right, Then Add AI

Ten years ago, we saw a rush to adopt software tools in the name of data and business intelligence. The idea was: collect more and more data, get smarter and make better decisions. Now, many organizations are buried under a pile of disconnected tools that aren't solving the right problems and massive amounts of data that isn't being utilized to drive decisions. We are all at risk of repeating that same cycle with AI.

Companies are racing to adopt AI tools without the underlying structure needed to use them effectively. That leads to big bills, confusing insights and, ultimately, missed opportunities to improve forecasting, decision-making and team efficiency. History, as we know, has a way of repeating itself. This time, we have a choice. Those who choose not to repeat history will have a big advantage over those who end up drowning in siloed AI tool confusion a few years from now.

I'm genuinely excited about what AI can do. If it's utilized correctly, it will allow organizations to operate in ways we haven't even dreamt of yet. But I've also seen how quickly AI can cause more harm than good if the core data structure isn't solid. If your leadership is asking about AI or you're beginning to explore it, here's my advice:

Start with your data. Build the right architecture. Align your systems. Then bring in AI where it actually makes sense – don't just implement and add to check a box.

If you're unsure whether your organization is ready for AI or what steps to take next, we offer a complimentary 90-minute discovery session to assess your RevOps strategy and data readiness. We'll help you identify quick wins, potential risks and a roadmap that aligns with your goals. [Sign up for more information about scheduling a session today!](#) **smm**

Alexandra Noland is the marketing and operations leader at [Voiant](#), a technology consultancy specializing in strategic sales planning and revenue operations.

# Maximizing Sales Results, Minimizing Expense

## The behavioral science behind sales incentives

BY NORM WILLIAMS, CO-PRESIDENT AND CHIEF REVENUE OFFICER, BI WORLDWIDE

Incentive programs are often seen as a tactical tool designed to boost short-term sales or reward top performers. However, when grounded in behavioral science and executed with a clear strategy, they become a powerful engine for sustained performance. That's the philosophy of BI WORLDWIDE (BIW), a global leader in sales incentive and performance solutions.

BIW's approach is rooted in behavioral economics, which reinforces that 77% of human behavior is driven by emotion versus reason. This insight is critical when designing programs to influence behavior change. Concepts like income targeting, loss aversion and idiosyncratic fit help explain why traditional compensation alone often fails to unlock full potential.

A notable example focuses on income targeting, as studied by four behavioral economists, including Richard Thaler, who won the Nobel Prize in 2017 in economic science. The researchers reviewed over 3,000 trip sheets and found that taxi drivers in New York City worked fewer hours on rainy days despite higher demand. Why? Because they hit their *income targets* faster and chose to stop working. It's a classic case of income targeting, a behavioral bias that defies traditional economic theory.

### Practical Application: A Case Study

Having the right approach, rules design and rewards set the stage for meaningful results. BIW, in partnership with a global media and technology conglomerate, reimagined how incentives, recognition and learning drive measurable business outcomes.

### From Fragmentation to Focus: A Sales Incentive Transformation

Before the transformation, this company's incentive landscape was fragmented and inconsistent. Departments ran their own programs with little coordination, ranging from cash bonuses to unused gift cards. There was no centralized system to track spending, measure effectiveness or align incentives with strategic goals.

Recognizing these inefficiencies, the company partnered with BIW to conduct a comprehensive audit. The findings revealed hundreds of disparate programs, minimal accountability and a lack of behavioral focus. It was clear that a unified, scalable solution was needed.





## Building a Performance Ecosystem

The solution came in the form of a centralized platform — a performance ecosystem that consolidated all incentive, recognition, gamification and learning initiatives into a single hub. This platform became the go-to destination for all employees, offering:

- Contests to drive short-term focus
- Incentives to drive goal achievement
- Recognition to reinforce culture and values
- Upskilling and reskilling gamified missions to build long-term capability

The result was immediate: improved process efficiency, greater visibility, and a clear return on investment.

## Contests That Spark Engagement

One of the first major initiatives was a head-to-head contest designed to increase mobile line sales. Prior to the contest, the average agent sold one line per week. The contest introduced a competitive, gamified element that energized the workforce.

The outcome:

- 123% increase in premium mobile product sales

The contest was easy to launch, track and reward — demonstrating the power of behavioral design and emotional engagement.

## Incentives That Drive Results

Another initiative focused on boosting mobile sales across multiple channels. Top performers were flown to Universal Studios where they experienced a warehouse run, grabbing merchandise in an exciting setting for themselves, their family and friends. The program delivered impressive results, including a 24% improvement in mobile lines sold via chat. Top performers achieved 200% more mobile units than the average frontline employee.

These results validated the strategy: when incentives are structured around thoughtful goals and emotional motivators, performance follows.

## Learning That Fuels Growth

To support continuous development, the company introduced missions — short, gamified learning modules that cover product knowledge, sales techniques and company values. These missions reward completion with badges and points, driving both engagement and capability.

The results:

- 120,000 missions completed monthly
- Over 40% of employees engaged monthly
- Average of 4.6 missions completed per user
- 85% program adoption

This learning strategy ensures that employees are not only motivated, but also equipped to succeed. Those who complete missions deliver stronger results.

## Recognition That Builds Culture

Beyond contests and incentives, the platform also supports a robust recognition program. Employees and managers recognize peers for behaviors aligned with company values and celebrate milestones like birthdays and work anniversaries.

The Impact:

- Nearly 50,000 recognitions are shared each month
- 25% of employees actively give recognition monthly

This culture of appreciation not only boosts morale but also contributes to higher retention, especially among new hires.

## Key Takeaways for Sales Leaders

This case study offers valuable lessons for any organization looking to elevate sales performance:

- **Move the middle.** Don't just reward top performers; Engage the broader salesforce to drive maximum results for the organization. There are more of them, and they have greater upside.
- **Make it personal.** Design rule structures that give everyone a chance to succeed. Just as an 11-minute miler can't compete with an eight-minute miler, you don't want to create a program that only gives your top performers the opportunity to achieve. Your middle performers may never run an eight-minute mile, but they might move from 11 minutes to 10 minutes. That scales performance and revenue growth.
- **Use points to maximize response and minimize expense.** Cash is not always king. More cash does not defeat income targeting.
- **Drive learning using gamification.** Bite-sized, gamified learning builds skill and keeps employees informed, motivated and ready to perform when it matters.

By combining the science of behavioral economics with a comprehensive performance solution focused on incentives, gamification, learning and recognition, BIW and this media and technology conglomerate created a scalable and measurable approach to sales performance. The result? A workforce that's not only more productive, but more connected, confident and committed. **smm**

Norm Williams is co-president and chief revenue officer at [BI WORLDWIDE](#), which works with companies around the globe that realize extraordinary results can only be achieved when their business is energized by the people who make it happen.

# What is the Seller's Role in an AI World?

BY JOHN ELSEY, CEO, RICHARDSON SALES PERFORMANCE

In less than a year, Generative AI has shifted from an interesting concept in the sales organization to full adoption.

However, adoption comes with challenges. While sales and enablement leaders acknowledge the technology's power, they remain unclear about how to integrate AI's capabilities with those of the sales team, especially when AI can now absorb some of the [work](#) that has traditionally sat with sellers. Leaders need a plan for adopting GenAI in a way that goes beyond productivity gains and complements the unique skills that only humans can deliver.

Gartner forecasts that within two years, 95% of sellers' research workflows will begin with AI, and that the median sales technology spending will exceed \$10,000 per seller per year. Importantly, these projections don't suggest that sellers are becoming obsolete. Instead, these figures indicate that the seller's role will change and that their greatest strengths will be those that AI cannot easily replicate.

To understand these strengths, sales organizations must do two things: learn how generative AI disrupts seller workflows and identify the new behaviors AI demands from sellers.

## Changing Seller Workflows

To fully benefit from AI's capabilities, sales organizations must understand the use cases that represent both high business value and high feasibility. For example, use cases such as lead scoring, cross-selling and territory optimization are all valuable to the selling organization and feasible for AI to accomplish. Other, more complex tasks, such as [needs discovery](#), shaping and [guiding conversations](#), and relationship intelligence, also have value, but are difficult for AI to manage, and are therefore not feasible.

In the last year, we have seen five distinct use cases emerge. All of them balance value to the selling organization with ease of implementation.

## Hyper-Personalization at Scale

GenAI enables sellers to create highly customized outreach content, including emails, LinkedIn messages and call scripts tailored to each individual's needs down to a specific buyer's role, industry, company goals and even recent news. Previously, sellers struggled to generate top-of-funnel opportunities because doing so required cutting through the noise and getting noticed. Sellers can now use AI to develop a hyper-personalized approach to outreach that piques the prospect's curiosity, reframes their thinking and drives action.

## AI-Assisted Account Intelligence

AI can synthesize massive datasets — such as CRM data, public filings, social media and more — to surface prospects that fit within a business' ideal customer profiles. This approach goes beyond simply reviewing static firmographic data, such as revenue and organizational structure, to analyze digital signals



indicating that a company is considering solutions similar to those the seller offers.

### Revenue Intelligence for Deal Coaching

Sellers can utilize GenAI to analyze buying signals and trigger relevant data in both live conversations and offline communication. With this approach, sellers can identify deal risks, such as single-threading, lack of buyer engagement and competitive risk. When AI presents these risks in data visualizations, sellers and managers can quickly identify important and actionable deal information.

### Behavioral Analytics to Diagnose Alignment to Methodology

AI not only reveals details about buyers, it also offers crucial [information](#) about sellers. Specifically, AI can assess how well a seller is demonstrating the specific, measurable and observable behaviors that drive wins. The technology can analyze how well sellers demonstrate critical skills in front of customers and prospects. Selling organizations can listen to sales conversations to assess how effectively sellers apply the skills and practices aligned with the organization's methodology. This real-time data clearly shows how well a sales transformation is progressing and provides insights into calibrating the enablement strategy.

Suggested ChatGPT Prompts:

- What are the main points of the following 10K filing?
- What are the key takeaways from the following call transcript?
- What are the main business plans cited in the following annual report?

### Redefining Seller Behaviors in the Age of AI

Given the emergence of AI in seller workflows, where can a seller deliver unique value?

Sellers can appeal to the customer's emotional state in a way that AI cannot. This ability is essential because buyers often rely on both logic and emotion when making purchasing decisions. AI is equipped to serve the customer's need for logic by creating a rational business case, preparing an agenda and talking points, and using research to demonstrate an understanding of the buyer's business. Sellers, in contrast, are uniquely suited to address the emotional aspects of making a purchase.

Doing so requires focus on four key areas:

- **Emotional Intelligence**

Sellers have just a few valuable opportunities to engage with buyers. Making the most of those moments requires [critical seller skills](#) that are the keys to regulating and demonstrating a high degree of emotional intelligence.

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**Buyers often rely on both logic and emotion when making a purchasing decision. AI serves the need for logic; Sellers can address the emotional aspects of making a purchase.**

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- **Situational Fluency**

Situational fluency balances different approaches based on a dynamic assessment of the situation. The seller's job is to guide the buyer, so they make the best decision for themselves and their company. This approach involves a series of gentle pushes, pulls and nudges that guide buyers toward action.

- **High-Stakes Conversations**

[High-stakes conversations](#) present elevated levels of risk, but also offer outsized rewards. These are moments when the best sellers have a chance to differentiate themselves and make an impact. Examples of high-stakes conversations include positioning a price increase or managing adversarial negotiations.

- **Judgment and Critical Thinking**

The customer's problems and concerns are often complex. Critical thinking involves creative, context-based problem-solving grounded in lived professional experiences. Judgment involves assessing stakeholders, the solution's fit, negotiation strategies and competitive positioning.

The combination of sound judgment and incisive critical thinking enables a seller to transition from being a reactive order-taker to a strategic consultant who can navigate large deals through organizational complexity to a successful close.

Suggested ChatGPT Prompts

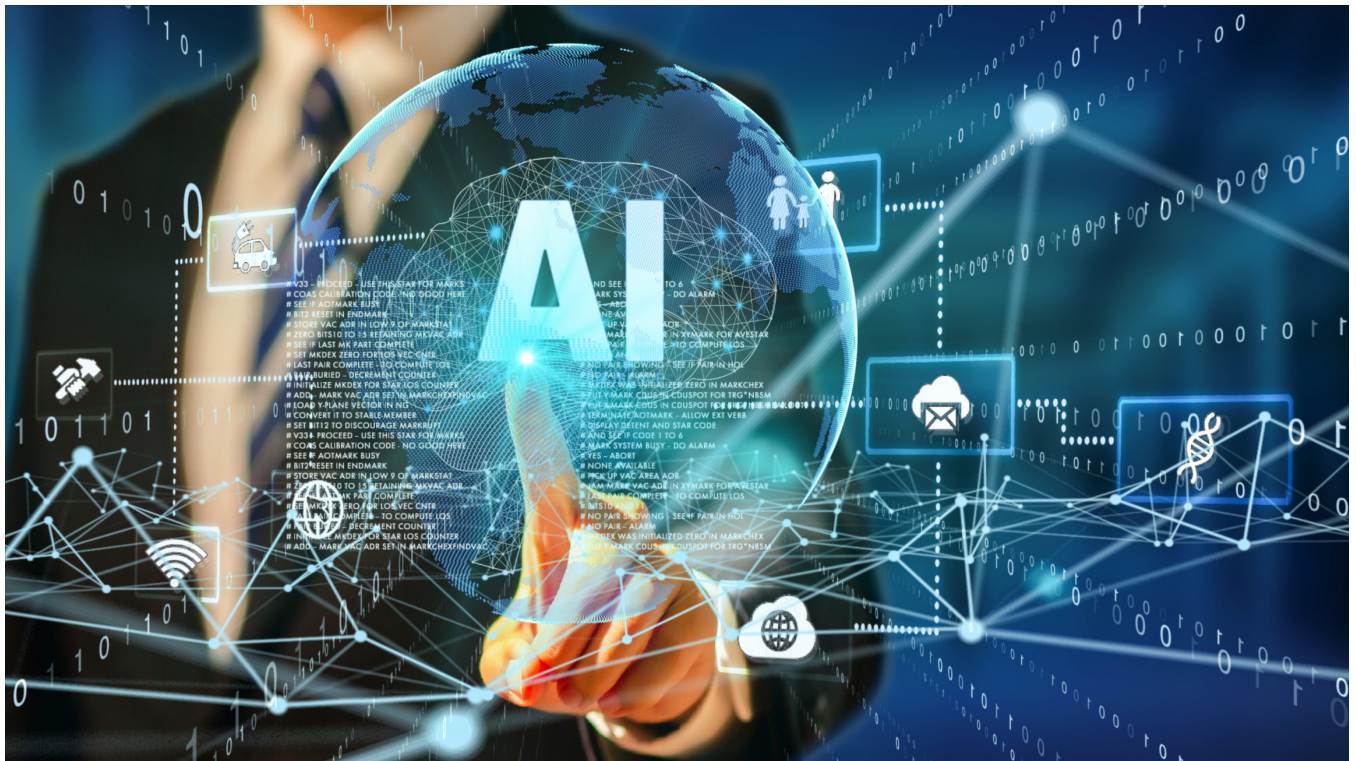
- What is the general tone of the following email text?
- How could this CTA be more conversational CTA than what is written here?
- What are some ways to convert the following text to plain speak? **SMM**

John Elsey is CEO of [Richardson Sales Performance](#). He presented on the future seller at the Gartner CSO Conference. Read more about the higher-order capabilities salespeople need today when selling in the era of AI in our latest white paper, ["Is Selling Human?"](#)



# Win Deals by Fielding the Most Prepared Sales Force

The real bottleneck in sales productivity isn't your people, it's their access to knowledge



BY MANISHA RAISINGHANI, FOUNDER AND CEO, SIFTHUB

At this year's Gartner CSO Conference, one theme echoed across leadership panels, tech showcases and hallway conversations: Sales teams are being asked to do more with less.

Quotas are rising, budgets are tightening, and if you're a sales leader, you've likely felt this pressure firsthand.

But here's the uncomfortable truth: The biggest drag on performance isn't your reps, it's the systems surrounding them. Specifically, the lack of fast, consistent access to the contextual knowledge they need to sell effectively.

## It's a Knowledge Problem

You don't just have a people problem. You have a knowledge problem.

Your AEs aren't underperforming because they're disengaged, and your SEs aren't slow because they're incapable. They're stuck because your GTM knowledge—competitive insights, proposal content, messaging, pricing logic, technical validation—is scattered across tools, buried in threads or sitting in someone's head.

What's slowing your team down isn't effort, it's friction. And that friction shows up everywhere:

- Reps spend 30-plus minutes prepping for a call by cobbling together messaging from old decks, documents and Slack messages.
- SEs type out the same RFP responses over and over because there's no easy way to access and reuse what's already been vetted.
- Enablement content gets created but not adopted—not because it's bad, but because it's hard to find when it's needed.

And with the [typical AE to SE ratio hovering around 4:1](#), that bandwidth gap only widens. Reps end up waiting. SEs end up stretched. And knowledge becomes the bottleneck no one talks about—until deals stall.

This is the knowledge-to-execution gap, and it's costing you deals.

## Your Tech Stack Isn't the Strategy

Most sales orgs respond to this challenge by layering more tools. But more tools that don't speak to each other to ensure smooth knowledge flow just add noise. What you end up with are beautiful dashboards, but missed opportunities.

The problem isn't visibility, it's ease of access and the lack of up-to-date information. Sales enablement content tends to go stale fast, especially when it's only updated once a month or once a quarter. What your team needs is an assistant—one that's context-aware, always-on, and built to remove friction in the moment of execution.

## How AI Tools Can Bridge the Knowledge Gap

Today's AI tools have the potential to fundamentally reshape how sales teams access and apply knowledge by working alongside teams to deliver the right context in the moments that matter.

Imagine an AI teammate that doesn't just store information, but brings forward the most relevant answers, content and insights—when your team is mid-call, building a proposal or preparing for a strategic deal review. The value lies in reducing the cognitive load, not increasing it.

Here's what that can look like:

- A rep preparing for a high-stakes meeting can instantly surface the latest competitor intel, use-case examples and tailored messaging without toggling between tabs.
- An SE responding to an RFP or security questionnaire can generate a first draft using pre-approved content matched to the customer's industry, product mix and deal stage.
- Sales leaders gain visibility into what content is driving results, where sellers are losing momentum, and what patterns are emerging across cycles without manual audits or chasing updates.

Top reps don't rely on guesswork. They work from tested playbooks, refined messaging and repeatable insights from

past wins. With the right AI tooling, that kind of enablement becomes available to every rep, not just the veterans.

The goal isn't to replace human judgment. It's to free up time and mental energy so your team can focus on the work that actually moves the needle—customer conversations, deep solutioning and closing with confidence.

## Smart Knowledge Flow Is the Real Competitive Advantage

The next generation of sales performance won't be defined by how many tools are in your stack. It will be defined by how seamlessly your knowledge flows to the frontlines.

When you eliminate friction, you don't just move faster, you make your team feel sharper, more confident and more in control. And that shows up in the metrics that matter—higher win rates, shorter sales cycles and stronger rep engagement.

At SiftHub, we're building for that future—one where your reps don't have to *find* answers. They're delivered in the flow of work. One where your team wins because they're the most prepared, not just the most persistent.

If you're wondering how to drive real productivity gains this year, start by asking one question: How easy is it for my team to get the knowledge they need to win without asking for it twice?

That's where the next unlock lies. **smm**

Manisha Raisinghani is the founder and CEO of [SiftHub](#), where she's building the AI sales engineer to make every rep as good as the top 10%. A second-time founder with deep technical roots, Manisha is focused on applying AI to one of the hardest problems in B2B SaaS: knowledge access in sales.

# AI Use at Work Has Doubled in Two Years

## Employers must provide formal plans and training to increase adoption

A Gallup survey shows the percentage of workers in the U.S. who have used AI in their role a few times a year or more has nearly doubled since 2023, from 21% to 40%. Frequent AI use (defined as a few times per week or more) has nearly doubled from 11% to 19% in that same time frame.

However, many employees are using AI at work without guidance or guard rails. According to the survey, 44% of employees say their organization has begun integrating AI, but only half that amount say their organization has communicated a clear strategy or plan for doing so.

The purpose and value of using AI in work settings appears to be muddled.

Employees responding to the Gallup survey stated the most common AI adoption challenge is "unclear use case or value proposition." Even among those who report using AI, only 16% strongly agree that the AI tools provided by their organization are useful for their work.

"If leaders want greater AI adoption, they will have to help employees find the value," the Gallup report states. When employees strongly agree that their leadership has communicated a clear plan for integrating AI, they are three times as likely to feel very prepared to work with AI and 2.6 times as likely to feel comfortable using AI in their role.

Leaders must also help their employees feel prepared to use AI. Only 6% of employees feel very comfortable using AI in their roles, while about 16% say they feel very or somewhat comfortable. Nearly one-third (32%) report feeling very uncomfortable using AI.

Leaders must implement a formal plan for integrating AI into job roles and provide training that is aligned with each employee's role. When employees participate in required training, they are 89% more likely than those who have not received any training—formal or informal—to say that AI will have an extremely positive impact on their individual productivity and efficiency at work.

# The Seller's Playbook: Planning Across Portfolios for Predictable Growth

BY DEVON MURRAY, DIRECTOR OF SALES, REVEGY

Nearly 73% of chief sales officers (CSOs) and senior sales leaders are prioritizing growth from existing customers for 2025, according to recent [Gartner research](#). This insight highlights a shift toward retention and account growth strategies. Yet, with only 57% of sales leaders identifying account retention and growth as a top-three priority, the question remains: how can sellers and sales leaders effectively plan across their portfolios to ensure sales forecasting accuracy and success?

Achieving predictable growth hinges on two critical factors: managing sales forecast performance and conducting effective analysis. A well-executed approach to these elements enables CSOs to make informed decisions, improve resource allocation, and maintain alignment across their teams.

## Managing Sales Forecast Performance

Sales forecasting is integral to strategic sales planning, as it reveals where organizations stand today and where they may land tomorrow when it comes to driving predictable revenue. However, many businesses struggle with forecast accuracy due to limited account visibility. Without clear insights, sales teams face challenges in quantifying value, navigating competitive dynamics and creating urgency for their solutions.

To that end, teams must cultivate strong relationships with key decision-makers, align solutions with customer goals, and articulate quantifiable ROI. Furthermore, choosing the appropriate forecasting methods, such as leveraging AI-driven predictive analytics or conducting historical data reviews, can significantly enhance forecast reliability.

Finally, completing regular performance reviews (whether weekly, monthly or quarterly) and making adjustments in response to key metrics are vital to managing sales forecast performance. Meanwhile, engaging marketing, sales and other stakeholders ensures alignment on key performance indicators (KPIs) and surfaces qualitative insights that enrich quantitative data.

Utilizing a data-driven approach to sales visibility brings together market data, account intelligence and sales activity to provide a complete picture of the sales landscape. In doing so, sales leaders can embed transparency and adaptability into the forecasting process, turning the guesswork into actionable business drivers.

## Conducting Effective Analysis

Data is the lifeblood of modern business, and analyzing performance data at the book-of-business level enables CSOs

and sales leaders to identify trends, risks and opportunities. Revenue intelligence platforms provide a robust foundation for extracting such insights, in addition to data related to customer behavior patterns, sales productivity gaps and product profitability.

For example, identifying trends like consistent customer churn or underperforming deals enables CSOs to make proactive adjustments. Similarly, understanding which strategies are driving revenue allows sales teams to replicate success across accounts. Leveraging these insights helps organizations make smarter decisions that drive consistent growth while mitigating risks.

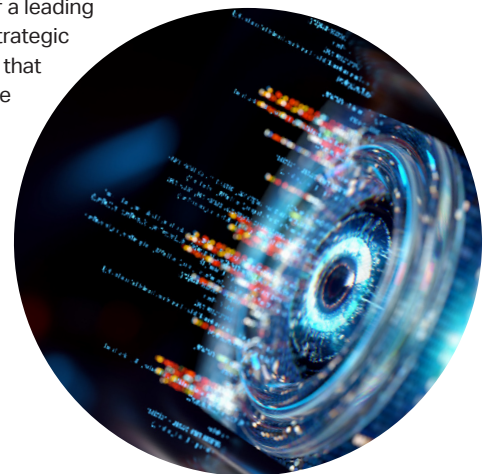
Ultimately, effective sales forecasting analysis provides the strategic narrative that turns data into meaningful action. It empowers leaders to pinpoint opportunities for improvement, optimize resource allocation, and create alignment across their revenue-generating functions.

## Key Outcomes

Accurate forecasting and thorough analysis are growth-enabling initiatives that can turn inconsistent sales pipelines into predictable revenue generators. As a result, CSOs can set realistic goals, allocate resources strategically, and foster alignment across teams. When implemented effectively, such practices create a solid foundation for achieving dependable growth in a competitive environment.

Sales forecasting across portfolios isn't just about managing performance today — it's about building resilience for tomorrow. By adopting these strategies, CSOs can ensure their organizations remain agile, informed and poised for sustained success. **smm**

Devon Murray is director of sales for [Revegy](#), supplier of a leading enterprise-class strategic accounts platform that provides actionable intelligence and value-based workflows.





# Sales Leaders of Tomorrow Are Managing AI, Not Just Adopting It

BY IBRAHIM HASANOV, FOUNDER, MYUSER

For the leaders of tomorrow, sales is no longer about managing people, but also managing AI. Monitoring AI-generated insights and analytics, integrating automation into sales workflows, and keeping a pulse on data security and ethical application are among some of the key parameters of successful AI use in sales.

With customers now expecting fast and efficient action, sales are rapidly transforming. As an analysis from [Harvard Business Review](#) puts it, decision-making in sales for a competitive edge now needs to be reflexive, not just reflective. That means taking immediate action based on informed decisions.

For sales teams to stay ahead, they need to ditch old habits and look to adopt AI-friendly skills to maximize how they're using these tools to drive revenue and personalization at scale.

## It's No Longer About the 'Hustle'

Priorities in the workplace are shifting as a result of the presence of AI, and sales processes are no exception. The leading VPs and CROs are ditching busywork, like manually cleaning up CRM data or attending unnecessary meetings. Instead, they're homing in on [emerging priorities](#) from accelerated change, which include personalization and adaptability.

Now, sales teams are moving away from old habits. Traditionally, sales were characterized by endless calls with current and potential clients, writing up individual emails by hand, and cross-referencing every action with every single lead in the database. Businesses can no longer cling to those old habits, especially given that traditional sales and marketing methods are causing an eye-watering [\\$2 trillion in wasted costs and lost revenue potential](#).

They're turning to AI to automate time-consuming, low-priority tasks for stronger business outcomes. CRM data entry and syncing, response handling for product or service queries, calendar management, and follow-ups are now being increasingly automated. In fact, according to [a survey from HubSpot](#), automation is helping sales teams win back two hours of their day that are otherwise eaten up by these tasks.

The new version of hustling means investing more time in the more meaningful, human aspects of sales: Handling nuanced negotiations, closing deals and building trust with new and existing customers.

## Automation Changes Sales Leaders' Responsibilities

Integrating AI requires careful oversight from the human side, and this shouldn't just be left to the IT department. Sales leaders who also learn how to manage automation as well as people are set to have a competitive edge and more agility. They're not only in the know about AI's weaknesses and vulnerabilities, but also where it can be best applied and how it can be managed in their operations for the highest business outcomes.

For a long time, skills like prompt design, model modification, and data literacy have been dismissed as "purely technical." However, they're now becoming increasingly relevant to business leaders. Those who reap the most revenue and benefits of AI are also well-versed with how it works and should be deployed. Let's take a look at those in greater detail for sales:

- **Designing strong prompts** so that AI models yield strong outputs. For instance, a sales team automating email follow-ups needs to ensure their AI tool knows the context, purpose, personal details and tone to produce consistently engaging and informative emails.
- **Fine-tuning models** to keep up with evolving strategies and business needs. A firm might introduce a new service to align with shifting markets, meaning that sales teams need to revamp AI outputs to include and possibly prioritize outreach accordingly.
- **Understanding data literacy** to manage data effectively and continuously optimize AI performance. A VP of sales who fails to spot gaps in data ends up leaning on biased AI insights, so their revenue forecast reports are inaccurate. A common example of data problems is duplicates, so a sales team could be forecasting more business opportunities because of duplicate leads.

AI isn't just a tool on the sidelines; it's now evolving into an integral part of streamlined and speedy sales. Successful automation needs careful oversight and close attention to detail of the variables that make or break how it performs. **smm**

Ibrahim Hasanov is the self-taught programmer and visionary founder behind [Myuser](#), a fully autonomous B2B sales platform that automates lead sourcing, hyper-personalized outreach and calendar management.



# From Software to Digital Labor

## Why big bets on AI will transform sales (and your career)

BY MILES NURSE, CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER, MEDIAFLY

There's a quiet shift unfolding across sales organizations. As agentic AI moves from experimentation to execution, we're seeing the start of a new operational model — one where we stop buying software and start investing in digital labor.

For decades, software in sales meant tools layered on top of manual workflows. Today, AI agents can write summaries, recommend next steps, score leads and even guide conversations in real time. Leaders increasingly recognize that seizing AI's potential means rethinking traditional sales roles and workflows at a foundational level.

### Why Sales Is Ground Zero for AI Transformation

Gartner forecasts that by 2027, [95% of seller research workflows will begin with AI](#), up from less than 20% in 2024. That shift is already underway: Salesforce reported in June 2025 that 78% of organizations are using AI agents to fully automate entire workstreams, and 72% believe their infrastructure is ready to scale AI adoption.

According to [Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index](#), “2025 will be remembered as the year the Frontier Firm was born — the moment companies moved beyond experimenting with AI and began rebuilding around it.” These “Frontier Firms” are restructuring their operations with “intelligence on tap,” designing systems in which AI plays an integral role across functions.

### A New Sales Org Model: From Reps to GTM Engineers

Truly harnessing AI's power often requires a structural shake-up in the sales organization. Rather than layering AI on top of siloed roles, some pioneers are redesigning roles altogether. For example, [one AI-native firm, Clay, reported in a blog post that](#) “the sales floor of tomorrow won't resemble today's reality of AEs, SDRs and RevOps manually crafting emails and cold calls. Instead, it will look more like an engineering organization.

In practice, this means treating sales workflows as scalable systems rather than individual efforts. In this vision, sales teams will build automated systems that can reach thousands of prospects without adding headcount.” Sellers become more like technical problem-solvers — designing automation workflows, orchestrating data pipelines and optimizing processes — much like engineers, if enabled with the right agentic and generative AI capabilities.

The payoff is a more efficient organization that can generate pipeline, engage customers and drive revenue with far fewer

handoffs. While every company may not adopt the exact “GTM engineer” model, the underlying principle holds: strategic AI bets go hand in hand with restructured teams and workflows. Firms that eliminate redundant steps and empower salespeople to act as builders of scalable outreach systems can achieve outsized results with leaner teams.

### Building the “Agent Boss” Culture

Microsoft describes this transition as the rise of the “Agent Boss” — employees who manage, train and collaborate with AI agents to achieve outcomes. The future sales org will likely consist of human and agent combination teams blending human judgment with AI speed. This means that staff must be upskilled to work alongside AI. Companies are investing in AI training so employees at all levels can become adept copilots.

Of course, this eliminates the common concern, “is AI replacing my job?” Rather than replacing salespeople, AI is elevating their role to focus on strategic activities like building relationships, crafting creative solutions, and guiding the AI on intent and tone.

As much as this shift requires sellers to learn new skills, revenue engine leaders (CSOs, CROs, and even CMOs) are the ones to lead the cultural and organizational change. That includes defining new success metrics, designing workflows agents can own, and ensuring internal trust in digital labor before extending it to customers.

### A Strategic Imperative

For revenue leaders, the challenge isn't whether to adopt AI, but how to redesign their processes around it. That means redefining value around outcomes, not features; investing in AI-first workflows; and enabling teams to scale insight and performance through collaboration with agents.

The winners in this new era won't be those who add the most features, but the change agents (pun intended) who design the smartest systems and empower the most adaptive teams while fully embracing agents as their team of digital workers.

The future of sales is about doing less and achieving more with AI agents by your side. **smm**

Miles Nurse is a 4x CPO and transformation leader guiding organizations from traditional SaaS to AI-powered, agentic platforms. At [Mediafly](#), he's pioneering dynamic digital labor to automate presales, value realization, and engagement.

