

A blurred background image of a woman's face and hand. A large, white, semi-transparent question mark is overlaid on the left side of the image, partially obscuring the woman's face. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# The Most Important Sales Conversations You'll Ever Have

Mike Schultz & John E. Doerr

# “If you don’t change your beliefs, your life will be like this forever. Is that good news?”

—SOMERSET MAUGHAM

This manifesto is for every sales person who is committed to becoming a rainmaker—no matter what the product or service is you’re selling. Rainmakers are the sales elite, typically outperforming average sales people by 300 to 500%, and often by a lot more. Success as a rainmaker depends on your ability to lead masterful sales conversations from “hello” to “let’s go,” but the first sales conversation, the most important sales conversation, happens before you talk to actual prospects. The most important sales conversation you have... is the one you have with yourself.

To determine if you have what it takes to become a rainmaker, you must ask yourself these six questions.

**1. How strong is my desire to achieve in sales?** The most important factor influencing whether or not you become a rainmaker is your personal desire for success in sales. Note the emphasis on in sales. You might think for full-time salespeople this goes without saying. It doesn’t. Some salespeople can’t wait to sell; others are just biding their time until something better comes along. The same is true of professional service providers. Many professionals have a tremendous desire to achieve in general, but not so much in sales (or, as it’s more commonly referred to, business development.) What’s important to rainmaking success is to embrace your role in sales.

**2. How committed am I to doing what I need to do to succeed?** Salespeople often know what they need to do—make more phone calls, lead more rainmaking conversations, deepen relationships, become experts in their fields, learn new skills, go the extra mile for customers.

Rainmakers have an unassailable commitment to success in sales. The going gets tough all the time in sales. It's not easy to create new conversations every day, go the extra mile to win a deal, and beat the competition, but rainmakers never take a break in their quest for success. Desire to sell is the first step. Committing to action and taking it—that's the game-changing leap.

**3. How energetically will I pursue success?** Success with rainmaking conversations is a function of how many you have and how well you conduct them. You'll hear a lot of advice about how to work smarter. And being able to facilitate great conversation takes smarts and practice. While you can always work smarter, working harder makes a big difference, too. Rainmaking conversations require a lot of work—you have to arrange the conversations, prepare rigorously, facilitate the discussion, and typically make multiple follow-up calls to close the deal.

**4. How's my attitude?** If you want to succeed at selling, and have the desire and commitment to do so, you must not derail yourself with thoughts of doom and gloom about the economy, lack of faith in your company product's or services or worries about your ability to lead successful sales conversations. Rainmakers do not go into sales conversations with negative thoughts or doubts. If you think the opportunity can't, won't or shouldn't happen for you, it won't. If you think it can, will, and should happen for you, when opportunity knocks you'll be ready to embrace it.

**5. Do I accept responsibility for my outcomes or do I make excuses?** There's always a good reason for why we don't do something we mean to do, don't reach the goal we set for ourselves, or don't reach our potential. When this happens, do you blame circumstances or other people, or do you as a rainmaker take responsibility?

Rainmakers succeed despite adversity. They beat a bad economy, they create conversations with difficult-to-reach decision makers, they sell something complex and intangible to someone who never even had an inkling they wanted to buy it until the salesperson came knocking.

Rainmakers never fall back on excuses for why they didn't prospect, didn't prepare well for a meeting, and didn't make those last few follow-up calls before they left the office for the day.

Rainmakers know there is no one keeping them from getting it done but themselves.

**6. Am I willing to face my sales demons?** If you've been honest with yourself after asking the first five questions, you might be thinking, "I know some areas I can improve." But rainmakers look at one more area beyond the first five questions: their weaknesses.

Weaknesses aren't as obvious as desire, commitment, attitude and the rest. They can sneak in and derail conversations from any number of angles.

Regardless of what your weaknesses are, if you are willing to examine them closely, you'll be well on your way to mastering rainmaking conversations.

*Desire to sell is the first step. Committing to action and taking it—that's the game-changing leap.*

Once you're committed to your own selling success, the right attitude will take you far. But the right attitude paired with the right skills will make you a rainmaking star.

We've found that the top rainmakers share 10 common beliefs, actions, attitudes, and rituals that define their sales success and set them apart from the pack. We call them the 10 Rainmaker Principles.

# The 10 Rainmaker Principles That Lead to Long-Term Rainmaking Success

After years of research in the fields of selling and sales training, observing the best sales professionals in action and working with sales people to dramatically increase their results, we found the salespeople that exhibit the following 10 Rainmaker Principles achieve the most success.

- 1. Play to win-win.** Rainmakers respect, and always try to satisfy, the best interests of prospects and clients (the “win-win” part) as well as win sales. They are also extremely dedicated to becoming top performers (the “play to win” part).
- 2. Live by goals.** Rainmakers are goal-setting and goal-following fanatics. Goals are a part of their daily rituals.
- 3. Take action.** Rainmakers realize that goals without actions don’t get you very far. While other people *intend* to take action and do more, rainmakers *do* it.
- 4. Think buying first, selling second.** Rainmakers map their selling processes to the processes and the psychology of buying.
- 5. Be a fluent expert.** Rainmakers are masters of market knowledge, customer needs, their products and services, their value, their competition, and everything else they need to know to succeed at selling.
- 6. Create new conversations every day.** Rainmakers always feed the front of their pipelines and improve their pipeline quality. Rarely a day goes by when they don’t speak to customers, prospects and referral sources with the intent to source new business.

**7. Lead masterful rainmaking conversations.** Rainmakers lead masterful sales conversations, from prospecting to needs discovery to closing to account management (see RAIN Selling on the pages that follow).

**8. Set the agenda; be a change agent.** Rainmakers recommend, advise and assist. They are change agents who are not afraid to push when it's in the best interest of the customer.

**9. Be brave.** It takes courage to rise to the occasion in sales. Rainmakers not only conquer their fears, they seek actively to win the most fruitful sales opportunities no matter how difficult the challenges may be.

**10. Assess yourself, get feedback and improve continuously.** Rainmakers are never afraid to learn the cold, hard truth about themselves. They take what they discover—the good and the bad—to learn, grow and change for the better. (See the six questions at the beginning of this manifesto.)

*The right attitude paired with the right skills  
will make you a rainmaking star.*

Much sales success is based around the conversations you have—the conversations you have with your prospects, your clients, and yourself. To help you lead masterful rainmaking conversations (Rainmaker Principle #7), we've developed the concept of RAIN Selling.

# RAIN Selling: The Foundation of Successful Sales Conversations

RAIN is an acronym for Rapport, Aspirations and Afflictions, Impact and New Reality. In addition, the “A” and the “I” perform double duty; standing for Advocacy and Inquiry and the “IN” will help you to remember to maximize your Influence.

**Rapport:** The ability to build rapport in sales conversations is an old concept that is more relevant and more important than ever. At the same time, rapport is talked about less and less in the sales-training community, and all too often dismissed as a ploy to make a superficial connection with a potential customer.

We agree. You shouldn't make superficial connections, you should make genuine connections. Genuine rapport sets the foundation for the rest of the conversation and creates the opportunity for trust and a strong relationship.

**Aspirations and Afflictions:** Once you've established rapport with a client, you have the opportunity to begin the process of learning what issues the prospect has and how you can help. A salesperson must uncover his prospective client's afflictions. But uncovering afflictions is only half of the story. Afflictions only focus on half—the negative half—of the customer needs and if you only focus on the negative you leave opportunities on the table to expand your existing relationships and generate new opportunities.

You must also uncover your client's aspirations. What are their hopes, dreams, and desires? When you're able to uncover your client's aspirations, it opens up new possibilities for how you can help.

Once the prospect's aspirations and afflictions are uncovered, this will enable you to move the rainmaking conversation to the next level—a level that many salespeople fail to achieve. This is what will separate you immediately in the minds of buyers.

**Impact:** After you uncover the full set of client needs and desires, it's your job to demonstrate the rational and emotional impact that buying from you will have on your prospects.

The rational impact is the business case—where a prospect understands the return on investment (ROI) of solving particular afflictions or achieving aspirations.

The emotional impact is the prospect's desire for success, financial freedom, peer recognition, pride, happiness, stress reduction, and so on. These are powerful forces in buying, and they're often underestimated by salespeople, especially those in business markets where ROI is king.

Show someone a way to succeed more, solve problems and make more money, and all of a sudden that person feels stress going away. They feel the excitement of making a difference, the anticipation of greater success, and experience the worry-free weekends they haven't had in years.

If you make the impact as tangible and measurable as possible you will be presenting your value in the best possible light for your prospect.

*Genuine rapport sets the foundation for the rest of the conversation and creates the opportunity for trust and a strong relationship.*



**New Reality:** The final piece of RAIN Selling is to establish the New Reality benchmark. At the end of a well-managed sales process, your job is to paint a picture of the new reality your customer will achieve as a result of working with you.

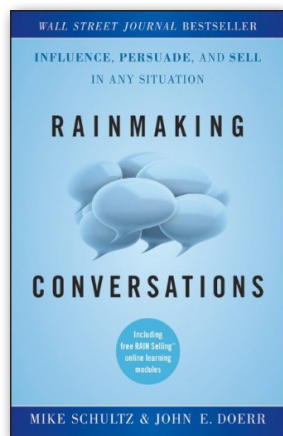
You as the seller must translate the new reality into dollars and cents, help buyers understand how their lives will be better if they purchase and then, as compellingly as you can, paint the picture in which they see the difference between their undesirable current state and much improved new reality.

**A/I – Advocacy and Inquiry:** The A and the I play double duty to remind us to balance advocacy and inquiry in sales conversations. The key to making a true connection with buyers is to always balance asking questions (inquiry) with talking about your offerings or giving advice (advocacy). Talk too much and the prospect will tune out. Ask too many questions and prospects will feel they are getting the third degree. The rapport-building sweet spot is usually somewhere in the middle, leaning a bit toward giving the prospect more airtime than you.

**IN – Influence:** Lastly, the IN in RAIN reminds us to employ influence strategies across all stages of the buying process.

If you follow RAIN Selling and build strong relationships, uncover the full set of needs, demonstrate the impact of working with you, and create a strong desire for the new reality, your prospects will want the solution, know the best provider is you, and believe that you can get the job done.

They say the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Indeed, the path to mastering rainmaking conversations begins with the first one, and it's the most important rainmaking conversations you'll ever have. Succeed with the conversation you have with yourself, employ the 10 Rainmaker Principles, and master RAIN Selling to lead masterful conversations with your prospects and **become the rainmaker you know you can be.** 📌



## BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of Schultz and Doerr's [\*Rainmaking Conversations\*](#).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

President of RAIN Group, **Mike Schultz** is world-renowned as a consultant and expert in sales performance improvement and co-author of the books *Professional Services Marketing* (Wiley, 2009) and *Rainmaking Conversations: How to Influence, Persuade, and Sell in Any Situation* (Wiley, 2011). As Co-President of RAIN Group, **John Doerr** draws upon an extensive career in business leadership which has included senior executive management, business development and marketing, and product and service development. Also co-author of the books *Professional Services Marketing* and *Rainmaking Conversations: Influence, Persuade, and Sell in Any Situation*, John provides executive and business development coaching for sales professionals, sales leaders, and business executives.

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