

# Women in Sales

8 EXPERTS SHARE SELLING ADVICE



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# Women in Sales



The number of women in sales is small, but it's a mighty group.

A look at some of the top women sellers in history gives you a glimpse of their power:



**Persis Foster Eames Albee** is considered the first Avon Lady. She got her start selling in the late 1800s, working for The California Perfume Company. She was one of the company's top sales agents and later developed a network of female sales agents. In 1939, the company changed its name to the one we all know now: Avon.



**Madam C.J. Walker** was an entrepreneur, activist, and philanthropist. She developed a hair care product company in the early 1900s that catered to Black women. She turned to direct sales when retail outlets wouldn't carry her products, creating the precursor to the multi-level sales model. Walker is recorded as "the first Black woman millionaire in America."



**Anna Bissell** played a key role in the success of the Bissell Corporation. While her husband invented the Bissell carpet sweeper, she co-patented the product with him and in 1876 became a traveling salesperson for the company. Anna also led the company's pivot to B2B sales, getting stores to sell the sweeper. She later became the CEO of the company—the first woman CEO in the United States.



**Mary Kay Ash** got her start selling for Stanley Home Products in 1939. She retired in 1963 when a man she had trained received a promotion over her. She set out to write a book to help women in business. That book became the business plan for Mary Kay Cosmetics. At the time of her death in 2001, the company had more than \$1.2 billion in sales and a sales force of more than 800,000 in at least three dozen countries.

# Women in Sales Today

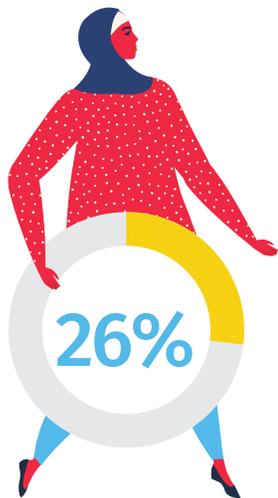


Percentage of women who are B2B sellers

Today, women represent just 29% of B2B sellers and only 26% of sales managers, according to a study conducted by Xactly. But these numbers hide a bigger truth. When it comes to sales success, women outperform men. The same study found 86% of women salespeople achieve quota, compared with 78% of men.

Women's success in sales is because they excel at different capabilities than men. Research by consulting firm ZS, which looked at the performance of more than 500 salespeople across several industries, found seven capabilities that set high-performing salespeople apart:

- Analyzing
- Connecting
- Collaborating
- Shaping solutions
- Influencing
- Driving
- Improving



Percentage of women who are sales managers

“Both high-performing women and high-performing men used all seven capabilities to some extent,” the research found. “But high-performing women were more likely to emphasize connecting, shaping solutions, and collaborating, while high-performing men relied more on improving and driving outcomes. For analyzing and influencing, there was no measurable difference between the genders.”

Considering today's digitally savvy and self-sufficient buyers, it isn't surprising that connecting, shaping solutions, and collaborating skills are highly effective. Buyers want sales reps to add value beyond what a company's website can provide. That means sellers must be able to collaborate with buyers, listen to their concerns, and shape solutions that are tailored to buyers' needs.

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# 8 Expert Tips from Women in Sales

Allego President and Co-founder Mark Magnacca spoke with several women sales experts about their experiences in the industry for The Adapter's Advantage podcast. The podcast features leaders from sales, training, and industry who share their personal journeys of transformation and how they are adapting to an ever-changing environment.

These guests are from a range of industries, such as financial services, training, and high-end retail, and sales roles. The interviews explored insights they have gained from the front lines of sales, including critical sales skills and how sales managers can lead their teams to success. Here's a look at eight things sellers must do to succeed today. While the advice comes from women, all sellers can benefit from it.



## Build Relationships with Buyers

A lot of people perceive salespeople as pushy—as trying to urge you to buy something prematurely. What sales reps need to remember is that selling is a process, and you must be patient, says Erica Feidner, sales expert and “Piano Matchmaker” who sold \$40 million of pianos for Steinway. In her case, she gets to know the buyer and builds a relationship with them before trying to sell them a piano.

“I’ve been known to say ‘sale’ is a four-letter word,” Feidner says. “Over the past few years, the idea of a salesperson or sale has pivoted to a very meaningful and important service.”



**LEARN MORE:** Listen to The Adapter's Advantage podcast episode with Erica Feidner, [Selling as a Service](#).

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—Erica Feidner, Sales Expert and Steinway piano “Matchmaker”





## Apply Data-Driven Decision Making

For decades, sales professionals have relied on their intuition to connect with buyers, win deals, and lead sales teams. Selling was more of an art than a science. Those days are gone now that companies have a plethora of data about trends, markets, prospects, and customers.

Sales professionals must “stop relying on gut-level decision making and rely on data-driven decision making,” says Mary Shea, Global Innovation Evangelist at Outreach.

Sales leaders will not help their teams get to quota by simply inspiring and engaging their sellers. “These folks need to start developing financial acumen. They need to improve their forecasting. They need to lean into the science more than the art,” Shea says.



LEARN MORE: Listen to The Adapter’s Advantage podcast episode with Mary Shea, [Facing the Future of B2B Sales](#).

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—Mary Shea, Global Evangelist at Outreach



## Be Emotionally Self-Aware and Willing to Change

Today’s sellers must have emotional awareness, says Colleen Stanley, president and founder of Sales Leadership Inc. and author of the book *Emotional Intelligence for Sales Success*. Sellers must be able to admit their strengths and weaknesses and think about what they need to change.

“I really believe in the phrase: ‘If you’re not aware of it, you can’t change it. If you’re not aware of it, you’re bound to repeat it,’” Stanley says. If you aren’t willing to learn, change, and grow, you won’t be able to adapt to different scenarios and situations, she says.

“Emotional self-awareness also requires some courage, and it requires another EQ: self-regard—the ability to admit, ‘I’ve got a blind spot.

I have a weakness. I need some help. I don't need to be the smartest guy or gal in the room," Stanley says.

Soft skills help with the execution of the hard skills, she says. And the combination of the two helps companies drive sustainable revenue.

 **LEARN MORE:** Listen to The Adapter's Advantage podcast episode with Colleen Stanley, [Integrating Emotional Intelligence into Sales](#).

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## Be Confident, Eliminate Imposter Syndrome

Confidence is the most important skill sellers must have today, says Kate Holmes, CFP, founder of Innovating Advice. Imposter syndrome, when people doubt their skills, talents, and accomplishments, is a big issue for some. Firms need sellers who are confident and willing to close the sale or have their first client meeting by themselves.

"The power of building confidence is incredible. I learned this lesson all over again when I got my pilot's license," Holmes says. "There's a learning curve and the rush you get the first time you land an airplane. It changed my entire thinking on the world. Once you can do that, you're like, 'All right, I can do anything.'"

 **LEARN MORE:** Listen to The Adapter's Advantage podcast episode with Kate Holmes, [Building a Business for Life](#).

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## Be Curious and Willing to Adapt

Sales success comes from combining creativity, curiosity, and adaptability and recognizing that you must put your customers' needs and the conversations they're having at the forefront, says Colleen Francis, president and owner of Engage Selling Solutions.

"I really, truly believe that salespeople still, from a skill perspective, are not good at monetizing value and communicating value to their customers. But to do that well, you have to be curious. You have to ask questions. You can't be afraid to ask questions around what it's costing them and what their goals are and what the biggest growth opportunities are and where they're struggling," she says.

"And if you're not curious from an operational standpoint or a business standpoint, it's impossible for you to build the right value messaging that's focused on your clients."



**LEARN MORE:** Listen to The Adapter's Advantage podcast episode with Colleen Francis, [Transforming Sales Strategy](#).

**"You can't be afraid** to ask questions around what it's costing them and what their goals are."

—Colleen Francis, president and owner of Engage Selling Solutions



## Dare to Do Something Different

Sales mentor and trainer Elyse Archer discovered the power of video when she started creating them to market herself as a sales coach. She soon learned video sped up the sales process. People felt like they knew her faster and that they could learn from her sooner. Plus, social media platforms put videos in front of users more often than article links, so more people see them.

Videos are also powerful when communicating one on one with buyers, Archer says. After a year of trying to get a meeting with a vice president of sales at a high-level financial organization, Archer grew frustrated and decided she had to do something different. So, she sent him a

video message. It worked. He replied, they arranged a meeting, and it led to a friendly and profitable relationship that continues to this day.

“All it took was just doing something a little bit different,” Archer says. “And that turned into a six-figure relationship. He referred me to a bunch of other people and became one of my dear friends. And I don’t think he ever would have responded if I didn’t do something different.”



Learn More: Listen to The Adapter’s Advantage podcast episode with Elyse Archer, [Believing in Yourself](#).

“All it took was just doing something a little bit different. And that turned into a six-figure relationship.”

—Elyse Archer, sales mentor and trainer



## Differentiate by Developing Client Relationships

In some industries, such as financial services, having deep relationships with clients is the only thing that differentiates you from competitors.

Products are all the same now, so you can’t use those to set yourself apart, says Ami Tully Lotka, a leading sales and management consultant who has worked in financial services for several years. Products don’t even have features or benefits that are differentiators because everyone copies from one another.

“These days, products are commodities, and the differentiator is the salesperson who represents them,” Lotka says. “And it’s the ultimate relationship sale.”

Salespeople really have to understand that they are professional tiebreakers, she says. They are out making the difference, and it’s the relationship that determines who gets the deal.

“All ties break to the person who the client thinks really understands them and will take care of them,” Lotka says.



Learn More: Listen to The Adapter’s Advantage podcast episode with Ami Tully Lotka, [Making Better Virtual Sales Connections](#).

“These days, products are commodities, and the differentiator is the salesperson who represents them.”

—Amy Tully Lotka, sales and management consultant



## Share Best Practices with Other Sellers

Courtney Ness, founder of Field Factor Training, says sharing best practices is one of her favorite things to do, especially during the first few weeks after a product launch. During that time, sellers don't know yet what will resonate with buyers.

Sharing best practices and keeping communication open between reps across the country are critical during this time, she says.

“You have to have high channels of communication with your team, no matter what geography they're in, because they're going into the unknown. There isn't enough market research out there. For example, does red work? Does green work? We don't know what color works, but what we do know is how our initial conversations are going with our customers,” Ness says.

“And that, to me, is the cornerstone of any launch: capturing that data real time during a conversation and sharing what's working and what's not working. It's about getting everybody on the team sharing and talking so we are moving forward as a company with our mission.”



Learn More: Listen to The Adapter's Advantage podcast episode with Courtney Ness, [Developing Advanced Selling Skills](#).

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—Courtney Ness, founder of Field Factor Training





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