

SALES STAR



## Buying Facilitation: Sharon Drew Morgen's New Paradigm

[By Amanda Richter]

Like many successful people, Sharon Drew Morgen entered the world of sales somewhat arbitrarily. "I was fired from every job I ever had. True story," she explained in a phone interview.

And this was with a master's degree. But it wasn't incompetence that cost her previous jobs in public relations and social work; it was, primarily, her business acumen. "I was always telling everybody what they were supposed to be doing and what they were doing wrong," she said. Rather than being simply brushed off as cheeky, she made people uncomfortable because she was *right*.

Seven books and more than 600 articles later, Morgen is a respected name in sales, though it is, perhaps, a distinction she'd rather not have. Morgen doesn't sell. She facilitates. That is, rather than trying to bind buyers to products, she presents a distanced, holistic approach to their decision-making processes.

"Selling, historically, has been about needs assessment and product placement," Morgen explained. "The problem is that sellers see only the tip of the iceberg." The hulking frozen mass underneath—all of buyers' systemic issues—remains hidden.

Morgen's more than 20 years of experience have enabled her to articulate a system for what she has been doing intuitively all along. It turns out her instincts have been correct. The systems thinking and psychological undertones of buying facilitation have reconfigured the selling paradigm.

Buying facilitation harbors the dualistic qualities of many theories. It is both simple and complex. It is both commonsense and completely unexpected. It stems from several misconceptions, one of which is that the "problem" of buying is an isolated event. The other misconception is that this problem must be corrected immediately.

"Buyers don't want to buy; they want to resolve business problems," Morgen said. But traditional sales approaches backfire when sellers attempt to introduce foreign elements—their products—into systems (buyers' physical, emotional, and intellectual

sums) that are not prepared to support new elements. "Sales does everything wrong," Morgen proclaimed.

Instead of forcing contrived, outside solutions upon buyers, Morgen seeks to help buyers manage the issues that arise when their systems are disrupted. She has identified the sequence of questions to which buyers demand answers when making buying decisions: What rules have to be maintained, reconfigured, etc.? What partners/departments need to be brought in or changed? Stressing that "unique buying decisions must be managed," she reminds devotees to the old-school methods of selling that "outsiders cannot understand" the totality of any buying decision.

Yet by helping buyers work through their processes (remembering that when any component of a system changes, it affects the whole) and understanding all of the issues that arise, sellers can facilitate solutions to buyers' problems that will embrace their own solutions: their products. That way, rather than penetrating the buyer's system as an external stimulus, the seller forms a symbiotic relationship with the buyer.

Morgen is, herself, no stranger to disrupted systems, having run away from home

**Q. What do you do for fun?**

A. Dance, play the harmonica, see movies, and read.

**Q. What CD is in your CD player?**

A. Norah Jones, Eric Clapton, Bad Religion, Bob Dylan, and The Derek Trucks Band.

**Q. What is the last magazine you read?**

A. *The New Yorker*.

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

A. *Extras*, *The Sopranos*, and *Ugly Betty*.

**Q. Who is your role model?**

A. The Dalai Lama.

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and worked her way through school. Her success has been earned largely through similar risk-taking initiatives. That's how she landed her first job after losing so many. She walked right into Merrill Lynch and demanded to speak with Charlie Ross (then second-in-command).

"He said, 'How can I help you?' I said, 'You can hire me.' I had no idea what I did," she recalled.

He agreed and, recognizing her spark, gave her a job-as a stockbroker. In the midst of a severe, five-year bear market.

When making the required cold calls ("smiling and dialing," which she still does at least two hours a day and as often as 700 times a month), she'd preface her spiels with a bit of truth.

"I first have to tell you that I'm probably going to lose all of your money," she told prospective clients. This was not an attempt to be charming; this was an attempt to be ethical.

It worked. She was named "Rookie of the

Year" her first year at Merrill Lynch. And after five or six years as a broker, when she was poised to discover the reason for the gap between buying and selling, when her original selling model was just finding a voice, when she was about to move to London and start her own company...they didn't want to let her go.

Today, her books, including *Sales on the Line* (a *New York Times* bestseller that was recently named one of the top nine books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), *Selling with Integrity*, and *Buying Facilitation: The New Way to Sell That Influences & Expands Decisions*, are renowned examples of Morgen's expertise.

In the preface to *Buying Facilitation*, she writes:

My purpose is to create the means to support sellers in making the world of business a more meaningful and lucrative collaboration between people and systems, integrity and profit. My vision is that by integrating sales and buying facilitation, we'll be able to serve our customers with skill, heart, and integrity; we'll be able to make money

serving our values; and we'll be able to serve our companies by being brand ambassadors in every client exchange.

And with more than 12,000 clients, including such corporations as Wachovia, IBM, Morgan Stanley, Unisys, FedEx, Clinique, and KPMG, it seems her vision is becoming a reality.

"Salespeople should recognize that they are actually creating every response that they are receiving," Morgen, typically forthright, said. She doesn't fear candor. And though her honesty may be frightening, it is indispensable to her continued success. What's next for a woman like that? Simple. And incredibly ambitious. She wants to change the world.

### On the Net

Sharon Drew Morgen  
[www.sharondrewmorgen.com](http://www.sharondrewmorgen.com)

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