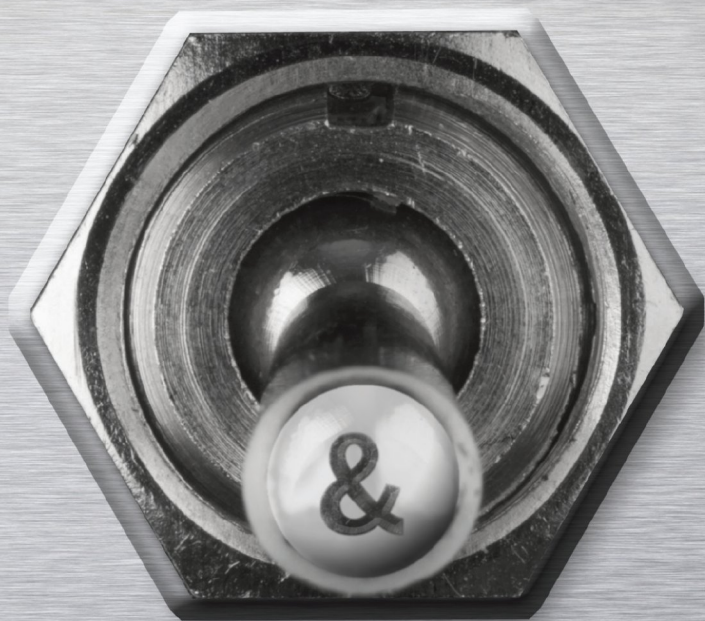


STOP SELLING



START CARING

BE BOLD. BE DIFFERENT.

MICHAEL S. MILLER

*Stop Selling
and
Start Caring*

Stop Selling and Start Caring

**By
Michael S. Miller**



E-BookTime, LLC
Montgomery, Alabama

Stop Selling and Start Caring

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Preface

What Does it Mean to Sell at Combat Speed?

The word *combat* in any context sounds harsh, right? When I speak at conferences, I am frequently asked to change the title of my presentation, *Selling at Combat Speed*, because *combat* seems too harsh. But allow me to explain.

I have never known an organization that trains and prepares individuals the way the U.S. military does. A soldier is trained to act without thinking. Wow, did I really just say that? You see, in a life or death situation, if a soldier has to stop and think about the training he received, he may lose his life or cause the loss of other lives. But we are talking about salespeople in Corporate America, not soldiers . . . right? Correct! But whether you are in combat, Corporate America, or professional sports, the same methodology applies. If a wide receiver has to stop and think about all the tasks involved in making a catch, he will more than likely miss the ball. He may not even see the ball coming at him. If a golfer has to think about the mechanics that go into a perfect swing, his golf shot will be as inconsistent as mine is. If a salesperson has to stop and think about the steps of the sales process or the questions he needs to ask, he will not be focused on the prospect, but on what he is going to say next. In any profession, to perform effectively, we have to

commit these processes to muscle memory. They must become habits. We should not have to think about them. They should just happen. That's what it means to sell at combat speed.

As salespeople, we need to take ownership of our sales process. We will follow the guidelines of the P-Effect, the system being taught in this book, but each of us will make it unique, to suit his or her personal style. How does this happen? First, trainers need to lose the scripts. Salespeople need to be taught a process, and coaching should be implemented to assist each salesperson to develop a unique sales process based on that person's style. The questions that I feel comfortable asking could make you very uncomfortable. But we can change the *way* we ask the question to gather the same information. Ninety-nine percent of the time, a salesperson will not ask a question that makes him or her uncomfortable. Asking the right question at the right time requires skill, even more so if the question that needs to be asked takes the salesperson out of the comfort zone.

So, what does it mean to be a sales warrior and to sell at combat speed? It starts with a major shift in mentality. If we take the same approach to our sales process as a soldier does to his rifle, what will the impact be? First of all, we have to understand what that rifle means to the soldier. Here is *The Rifleman's Creed*:

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life. My rifle, without me, is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than my enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will . . .

My rifle and myself know that what counts in this war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, nor the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count. We will hit. . .

My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strength, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will ever guard it against the ravages of weather and damage as I will ever guard my legs, my arms, my eyes and my heart against damage. I will keep my rifle clean and ready. We will become part of each other. We will . . .

Before God, I swear this creed. My rifle and myself are the defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life. So be it, until victory is America's, and there is no enemy, but peace!

If you are thinking that I have seen too much combat and have completely lost my mind, I ask for just a few more minutes of your time before you close this book. Imagine for a minute if you developed a creed for your sales process. Maybe it would look very similar to mine, where I have changed a few words of *The Rifleman's Creed* to make it my own.

This is my sales process. There are many like it, but this one is mine. My sales process is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life. My sales process, without me, is useless. Without my sales process, I am useless. I must show

I care for my prospect more than my competitor who does not care at all. I must and I will care.

I know that what counts the most is not the number of deals I close, the amount of money I make, nor the competitions I win. I know that it is my integrity and the number of people I help. I must and I will help.

My sales process is alive, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strength, its capabilities, and its failures. I will ever guard it against the ravages of those who have no integrity, as I will ever guard my legs, my arms, my eyes, and my heart against damage. I will refine, maintain, and continue to master my sales process. We will become part of each other. We will become one.

If you truly believe and live by this creed, how will it change your life? I know it will impact the way you sell and the activities you perform every day. I know you will move toward a more customer-focused selling process. I know that you will increase your closing ratio immensely. However, most will not even attempt to make this commitment. Most will remain content to be average salespeople; after all, average means being among the majority. The minority will step up to the plate and commit to a new and more dynamic way to do the job. They will do what others will not, and that is why they will succeed. These few will learn to sell at combat speed and become sales warriors.

So, I ask you right now, are you ready to make a commitment? Are you ready to be the change that needs to

happen? Are you ready to do the things that others will not do?

STOP RIGHT NOW! Make your choice.

Whether you choose to make the commitment or not, you are going to benefit from this book. Some of you will learn enough to make minor changes. A small handful of you will make the full commitment. Regardless of your choice, keep one thing in mind: You cannot change everything at once. If you try to do this, you will fail . . . time and time again. Take your time. Determine what changes need to happen, and make small improvements, one at a time, until you have it mastered. Mastering a few tasks will be far more rewarding than simply knowing a little about everything.

As a salesperson, you work hard. You spend your days looking at numbers and trying to determine where your next prospective customer is coming from. You spend your time struggling to make those last few appointments count. If this sounds like the type of experience you are having, you may need to set down the pen, put down the phone, and walk away for a moment. You may be going about the process of selling, but you are selling the wrong thing.

Consider the person who walks into your office as a potential resident of your community. This person, or his or her loved one, is thinking, “Is this where I will be living?” or, “Is this place going to be a good place for my mom (dad, grandparent, etc.)?” Your job is to ease the person’s fears and to show that living in your community is a good thing.

If you are like so many other people in today’s senior housing market, you are struggling for the sale. You may

have a number of prospective residents coming in, but you are not getting them to commit, and you are not closing the sale. This could be for a number of reasons, ranging from not having what the senior needs to being unable to match the prospect's demands in the community. Chances are, though, that the problem lies in the way you are approaching the senior and his or her family.

Look to the Future

Take a few minutes to look toward your future. What will you be doing in a year? Do you imagine yourself sitting behind that desk as you are today, talking to potential residents? What about your senior living community? What does its future look like from your vantage point? Will your occupancy be high? Will your finances be strong? Will you be pushing forward, or hanging back?

As you look into your future, let go of the concern. Of course you're worried – it's human nature to worry. You are unsure of what the future holds financially for your business and career, especially if you cannot improve the numbers.

It seems as if in every community I visit, I get asked the same question: "Mike, how can I shorten the sales cycle?" Well, I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that you cannot shorten the sales cycle. When you think about shortening the sales cycle, you are making it about you. You are focusing on *your* agenda. The good news is that once you implement the sales strategies and the not-so-sales-like mentality that you will learn in this book, your life will change, and your senior living community will flourish. If you are truly on the prospects' agenda and the questions you ask bring them to the resolution that they need to move in sooner rather than later, that will be because you

truly care. The money signs in your eyes will have been replaced with eyes of compassion.

Things Have Changed

One of the things to take into consideration as you look toward the future is the ways in which this market has changed. Just ten years ago, selling in the senior housing market might have been easy. All it took was developing a community, and there were plenty of people willing to fill the rooms. That is because there were just a handful of communities at the time. It was easy to be a selective community; you could choose the people who would best fit into your community. The economy was booming and with it, the housing market. Today, this is no longer the case.

Now, within the space of a few miles, you will find several senior housing and medical communities. I was recently training for a client in Florida, and there must have been ten senior living communities within five miles of this client's community. The competition is fierce, and it is up to you to confront it head-on.

In addition, there is now less traffic coming into most communities. For a variety of reasons, people are staying home, at least until they can no longer manage it, or living with their kids, rather than moving into senior living communities.

What is one of the most common objections we hear? "We have to sell our home before we can make the move." In some cases, that is true. However, we conducted a study and found that although this objection is commonly used, it is

rarely the truth. Hold onto that thought, though. We will talk about it later.

There are fewer people moving in, and fewer people coming in for appointments. Each one of these people, then, must count. Further, you are splitting the limited traffic that is coming in with all of the other competitors in your area.

Another concern is attrition. Across the board, senior living communities are seeing higher numbers in this area, too. If you do manage to move five people in, you lose seven. This makes for a complicated scenario when it comes to managing your numbers.

There is some good news, though. Most experts believe that as soon as the economy begins to improve, seniors will once again be looking for senior living communities to call home. The problem right now is, to some degree, the lack of funds. Nevertheless, your business, if it is like most others, can't wait until the economy gets better to turn a profit. You need people moving in . . . now.

The Baby Boomer Generation

Before moving on, it is important to talk a bit about your newest residents, the baby boomer generation. The buying habits of this generation are very different from those of previous generations. As you take into consideration your marketing strategy for Baby Boomers, it is necessary to understand this.

Who are they? These are the people who were born in 1946 through 1964 . . . and they are 77 million people strong. The first wave of this generation will begin moving into the senior housing industry in the coming years. With that

comes a whole new set of values and concerns. This first wave of Baby Boomers accounts for some 37 million people, born between 1946 and 1955. This generation, now approaching senior status, are among the people your community will want to target.

The Baby Boomer generation is different from any generation before them. They have very different world views. They also control most of the wealth in the United States right now. Their needs are different from those of earlier generations, and the way they buy is also different. Growing up in the 1960s changed the way many people looked at the world. The values of this generation came to be more focused on individuality and a sense of self. Here is a short list of values that this generation regards more highly than others:

- Relevance
- Questioning
- Enthusiasm for new causes
- Instant remedies
- Acceptance
- Flexibility
- Lack of Commitment
- Participation

Most Baby Boomers have a high level of expectation. They value being non-traditional. They are driven. They value autonomy. When considering the right sales message for this group, it is critical to look at their core values and to make changes to accommodate them.

The Baby Boomer generation is one that lacks commitment and needs to question everything. Because of this, in your

sales pitch, you need to ensure that they conclude that your community is clearly the best one for them.

Baby Boomers have high expectations. Is your current sales pitch showing potential residents the value to meet those expectations? This generation is very focused on self, and finding instant remedies. Does your sales approach emphasize specific ways in which the potential resident will benefit from choosing your senior living community? What instant remedies does your sales pitch offer them? How does it solve the resident's immediate problem?

These are just a few of the factors you must take into consideration when selling to the new generation of seniors. Your sales approach needs to focus specifically on meeting the needs of a new generation. This is not an easy task.

A Word to the Leaders

I am going to repeat the sentence above. Most experts believe that as soon as the economy begins to improve, seniors will once again be looking for senior living communities to call home. We have taken this projection and used it as a crutch. Managers, you are letting your salespeople off the hook every time they play the economy card. I get so tired of hearing this excuse. I have not walked into a single community or conducted a single training session where I have not heard something about the economy affecting the demographic. I finally conducted an in-depth research project to find out the truth. In Chapter 1, we will talk about some of those results. The bottom line is that the experts are probably correct. However, if you continue to use the economy as an excuse and depend on the future to bring prosperity, it will not matter who you have on your sales team. You will continue to struggle.

I have some clients whose occupancy is at one hundred percent with a waiting list. I have some clients who think the world is coming to an end if they drop below ninety-three percent occupancy. When that happens, I get a call that sounds something like this: “Mike, we are at ninety-two percent. We had the momentum and things were going so well. I am not sure what happened, but I need you to come and fix it.”

Some of you are probably thinking to yourselves, “What I would not do to have ninety-two percent occupancy. I would be the master of my domain. My boss would think I walk on water.” Well, here is the bitter truth: If you wanted to be at ninety-two percent occupancy, you would be there. If you wanted to be at one hundred percent occupancy, you would be there. I will tell you what one of my friends told me a couple of years ago: you are exactly where you want to be in your life and business.

The majority of you are not buying this. That’s okay. Over the years, I have learned to not take it personally. I have lowered my expectations, but I will not take on a new client who has salespeople who are not willing to be coached and trained. I refuse to waste my time and a client’s money on salespeople who are merely going through the motions.

Leaders, start holding your people responsible. From top to bottom, the entire staff needs to be held accountable. Provide your staff with the resources they need to succeed. Invest in your team, but make sure you have the right players. Ensure that you have the coach who is going to take you to the big game. If you are not getting results, find out why and fix it. The longer you wait to fix a problem, the more money you will lose.

The bottom line is that we have a real leadership issue in this industry. When I say leadership, I am not referring to just those individuals at the CEO, CFO, CMO, SVP, VP, etc. level. A title does not make a leader. It describes a person's official function and role in the organization. Most people confuse managers with leaders. We have a ton of managers in the industry, but few leaders. The great news is that anyone can be a leader. When you have a person on your team who is both a manager and leader, you are fortunate, and you will see results.

Last year, I sat down with the owner and CEO of a very successful company. As with many of you, his numbers had begun to turn south. We finally got our calendars aligned and met for lunch. He did not know it, but I came to the meeting feeling generally frustrated. I was sick and tired of talking to people who want to complain about their situation, yet do not want to invest in resources that would resolve their issues. But this meeting rejuvenated me. This is what he said to me: "Mike, I would not say we are struggling, but we are certainly not where we were a few years ago. We were going through our annual budget and trying to make cuts, just like everyone else. Then I had an epiphany. Everyone else is cutting training and staff development out of their budgets. That is always the first thing to go. Why not invest where others are not?"

Finally, someone gets it, I thought. I know there are others out there who get it too. Some are my current clients. Some work with other companies that provide the same type of services I do. To those who are doing nothing, I have three words for you: *Stop . . . Doing . . . Nothing!* Do something . . . anything. Then make sure the something you are doing is the right something, and if it is not, try something else. Find

a solution that works for you. And don't go with the least expensive product and services. Yes, sometimes you will find a good deal, but most of the time, you get what you pay for.

Leaders, it is time to step up. I will tell you what I tell salespeople during training and coaching sessions: to be successful, you have to do what others are not willing to do. There is no need to recreate the wheel. Take a look around you at the successful companies. If they are doing it, maybe you should too. If they are not doing it, maybe you should still do it. The bottom line is what Nike has been telling us for years – “Just Do It.”

You Know All That

The information provided thus far in this book is nothing you do not already know. Some of the information in the remainder of the book will be familiar as well. Last year, I was training some regional managers at a very successful organization. The senior vice-president of sales and marketing is one of the most talented professionals I have ever worked with. She was one of those leaders (yes, not just a manager, but a leader) who sent up the flag and started sounding the alarms when the occupancy in any of her communities dropped below ninety-three percent. At the completion of the one-day training, one of her regional managers gave me this feedback: “This was good training. We learned some new ideas. However, most of it we already know.” I was so proud I could have hugged the SVP when she gave this response: “True. But how many of your salespeople are actually doing it?”

You are likely finding it challenging to turn sales fast enough to keep the business in the black and your commissions high. But how can you do precisely that?

Rather than selling the product, focus on communicating with the potential resident on an emotional level. Here are the things you need to keep in mind when making a presentation:

- You are selling peace of mind, giving a person the confidence to feel that all is going to be okay.
- You are selling social interaction. We are all social creatures, and you are offering the prospective resident the means to interact with other people with whom they will have much in common.
- You are selling security, the ability to feel safe.
- You are giving the potential resident and his or her family the validation that moving in is the right decision.

Instead of selling as you normally do, consider the emotional elements that pull at the triggers that compel people to act. Your prospects are looking for answers and help in making an important decision. While other factors such as pricing and location contribute to the decision-making process, it is the elements above that carry the most weight.

When you learn to sell in this manner, you are able to turn potential residents into long-term residents who are happy to stay in the community. That is what is going to improve your bottom line. Take every opportunity to create **Heartfelt Unexpected Gestures**. I refer to this as giving your customer a HUG.

The goal of this book is to provide you with the means to take your old selling methods and toss them out the window (along with those concerns about where you will be in the coming year.) You will learn how to make every single person who walks through your door matter to your business. Your senior living community will prosper when you incorporate these new sales methods, and you will prosper as an individual. You will have cared enough to help someone. This is the greatest payment we can ever receive. The rest is just a bonus.

What You Will Learn

In this book, you will learn how to change the way you are currently selling. You will learn to focus on your clients, and to improve your approach to selling to make it more successful. You will learn to address the needs of potential residents. If you are like most of the salespeople I run across, you believe you already understand the concepts that will be explained in this book. Oh, how I wish we could all have an out-of-body experience and really see how we perform on the telephone and in-person. Well, here's the good news: although we cannot have an actual out-of-body experience, we can have the next best thing by implementing a mystery shopping program that will allow each salesperson on the team to see the presentation through the eyes of the customer. Later, we will discuss some mind-boggling information that has been discovered through mystery shopping and other research.

To achieve the desired results, you need to have a strong team, thriving residents, and a solid brand. You need to be at the top of your game and to use every lead to full advantage, so that even with fewer leads, your sales remain strong. The system we present will help you to accomplish

this and much more. Rather than focusing on getting more traffic, you will learn to take better care of the traffic you have.

You will learn how to increase your revenues. You will learn how to improve the service you offer. You will add more to the community you care about. You will help people to understand what they want and how you will provide it for them.

Realize that people are calling on you in their time of need. Use your experience and know-how, the brand you stand behind, and the services you offer that will benefit them, and present the package in a way that shows this generation that they can have it all.

No matter which position you play on the senior living community team, whether executive director or sales counselor or regional VIP, you must understand this sales approach and provide the necessary leadership if you hope to improve the bottom line. This book and our coaching will help you through this process. You will have to be open to change, and yes, it will require you to step outside your comfort zone. You will not always succeed the first time you try something new. But you will learn to embrace your failures, because you cannot be successful until you learn how to fail.

You will learn the techniques to help you sell differently from your competitors. This is a must! If you sell the same way as everyone else, you are expecting the prospect to make a buying decision based primarily on logic – who has the most amenities for the best price. But you will come to realize that nearly everyone buys from emotion, and most of the time, that emotion comes from a subconscious place. We want the prospect's emotions to come to the surface and to

influence the decision to buy. The primary motivation for the decision will be emotional, with factual and logical support. To accomplish this, we must sell first to the emotions. It is not as difficult as it sounds. We make it difficult because it requires a change.

Are you ready to stop selling and start caring?

“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

If I had to choose a word that describes this book, it would be CHANGE. About 80% of deals are lost over the phone. Of those prospects who do walk through our doors, we are losing 70-75% of them. The industry needs a transformation, and we need it now. People buy on emotions, yet the majority of us sell to the logic. The solution is to stop worrying about the “money” side of the sell and focus on the prospect. If you genuinely care about helping the prospect, the “sell” will take care of itself.

As a sequel to “*Selling at Combat Speed*,” Mike takes the same concepts and applies them specifically to the senior living industry. In “*Stop Selling and Start Caring*,” you will be introduced to new concepts and skills that will require you to change your current habits and ways of thinking. The stories and statistics are real. The results are real. The challenging yet rewarding journey is real. The transformation of the industry starts with a personal commitment to change. It will not be easy. You will fail along the way. Few will reach their full potential. Those who learn how to fail and accept failure as a natural stepping stone to success will be victorious. The choice is yours and yours alone. Today is the day. Right now is the time. Be bold. Be different. Choose to stop selling and start caring.



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