

# Inside

## BUSINESS

This is a publication of The Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce.  
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Volume Eleven, Number Ten  
October 2008

## The Canterbury Sales®

### Relationship Selling and the Parole Officer Scam

By Andy Gole

*"I'm a relationship salesperson!"*

You've probably heard this from many salespeople. This statement can be a well-earned badge of distinction or an evasion by a salesperson who won't challenge prospects.

Here's a clue to interpreting the statement: There is no relationship if the prospect isn't buying from us. Creating a relationship usually requires us to challenge the prospect.

One reason we need to challenge prospects is to avoid the *Parole Officer Scam*.

I first heard of the *Parole Officer Scam* more than 30 years ago when I helped manage a pizza parlor in Berkeley, California. My responsibilities included hiring drivers to deliver orders. One day I interviewed a walk-in applicant who wasn't a fit for the job. He had no hard feelings. Recently released from prison, he then told me the story of how to con a parole officer.

When he was released from prison, he was assigned a parole officer to monitor his behavior; they met periodically. The first time he met the parole officer, he slouched in the chair, wore a ripped shirt, had long unkempt hair and a disheveled beard, and talked somewhat incoherently.

He wanted the parole officer to note this in his records.

For the second visit, he sat straight in his chair and wore a new, clean shirt. The parole officer made notes again. By the third visit, he had cut his hair and beard, and looked like a solid citizen.

Yet again the parole officer took notes.

By the next visit, the ex-inmate had a job. The parole officer wrote something like: "Re-integrating into society. Discharged."

The ex-con looked me in the eye and said, "Now, I was ready to pull my next robbery."

We may be more familiar with this kind of behavior when our children – particularly teenagers – manifest it. Sometimes it can be amusing.

It is not amusing when prospects pull the "parole officer scam."

How does this happen?

Let's say a prospect wants me to quote a job, to beat the incumbent supplier into shape, get the incumbent to "improve the offer." All I am to this prospect is a "third price."

Suppose the prospect said, "Listen Andy, I will never give you a stick of business. But I want to beat the living heck out of my incumbent supplier, Joe. So would you mind taking eight to 10 hours to visit, find out my needs and prepare a proposal?"

I would say no, just as you would say no. The prospect knows this, so instead she says, "Andy, I realize I haven't given you any business in the years I have known you, because I relied on Joe, whose company always performed with excellence. Perhaps I relied excessively on this source. But something has changed in the last

six months and I am very disappointed in Joe. Service has deteriorated, there have been unexplained charges, and Joe has been slow in returning my calls. I am very disappointed. By contrast, I've been hearing good things about you, Andy, and I think this is your year. Could I invite to visit and prepare a proposal for me?"

That is exactly what I want to hear. So I visit and prepare a proposal – which the prospect will use to beat the living heck out of Joe, the incumbent supplier.

And I am victim of the parole officer scam. Again.

Maybe I fell victim because I'm a "relationship" salesperson. I reason she'll buy from me because we have a "good relationship."

There is no relationship if the prospect doesn't buy. And you will typically have to challenge the prospect to give him/her a reason to buy, to change their behavior, to form a "real relationship."

Of course, we want prospects to like us. And this typically will happen when we do business.

But don't confuse cause and effect when evaluating relationships. There is no relationship if you aren't doing business.



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Andy Gole has taught selling skills for 17 years. He started three businesses and has made approximately 4,000 sales calls, selling both B2B and B2C. He invented a selling process, *Urgency Based Selling®*, with which he can typically help companies double their closing or conversion ratio. Learn more about Andy's method at [www.bombadillc.com](http://www.bombadillc.com) or by calling him at 201.415.3447.