

A circular splash of water, with the word SHIFABILITY in the center. The splash is composed of many small droplets and a larger ring of water, all in shades of blue and white. The background is a light blue gradient with some faint, larger water splashes.

SHIFABILITY

CREATING A
SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE IN SELLING

"Do you agree that sales is undergoing a crisis of confidence in these rapidly changing times? Then *Shiftability* is the book you need now. It will show you how to transform your thinking, sharpen your skills, and master the changing environment of sales."

— Daniel H. Pink, Author of *To Sell Is Human*

"A brilliant treatise combining a shift -- perhaps even a transformation -- of both mindset and skillset that is absolutely imperative for a sales professional to acquire in our ever-changing world of sales. Really, this book is a masterpiece!"

— Bob Burg, Co-author of *The Go-Giver*

"*Shiftability* dives deep into the heart of intelligent, collaborative selling. The powerful, inspired takeaways herein can lift any salesperson's performance to surprising new levels...this book is paradoxically ahead of its time and immediately useful."

— Steve Chandler, Author of *Time Warrior*

"From mindset to skillset *Shiftability* gives you actionable, practical, doable steps that give the ultimate competitive advantage in sales and in life. Don't just read this book – use this book!"

— Anthony Parinello, Author of *Selling to VITO: The Very Important Top Officer*

"Everything about buying and selling has changed---except the sales person. Mitch and Hendre focus on the mindset shifts that are critical to success in today's new world of sales."

— David A. Brock, Author of *Sales Manager Survival Guide*

"With Mitch and Hendre at your side—given their incredible experience and expertise in both selling solutions and coaching behavior change—you have in *Shiftability* the personal guide necessary to make truly transformational change in both mindset and skillset."

— Brent Adamson, Author of *The Challenger Sale* and *The Challenger Customer*

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INTRODUCTION

As We Begin ...

Anyone in sales today faces an uncertain future. We could almost say anyone in any business role today faces an uncertain future. We live in an age of disruption and disintermediation. The business landscape is rapidly and radically changing and it keeps getting harder to predict what lies ahead.

Sales methodologies are changing as well, partly in response to the flux in the business environment. Through the valuable work and research of many in the field we understand the nature of the buying and selling relationship differently.

All of this uncertainty around us raises an important question:

The sales context has changed.

Selling methodologies are changing.

Have you changed?

What we see today is sales professionals responding to all of the movement around them by switching companies, or changing roles, and of course attempting to change the way they do things. Because this is how human beings respond when faced with a problem: *Okay, what do I have to do to fix this?* We get asked this all the time in our coaching and managing of sales teams: **Yes, everything is changing. What should we do?**

The assumption is if we just do the right things, we will have the right results and then we will be successful. Perhaps you have thought this way too and tried to change things around you and the way you do things. Likely you have found yourself in the same place, getting the same results, running up

against the same frustrations. And we have to ask—what is the common denominator? The answer is you.

You can change your job, change your boss, change your city, and try a new method, but unless you undergo a personal transformation yourself, all of these external changes in context and methodology are not going to get you where you need to go or help you become who you need to be in order to have success in a complex new world

Deepak Chopra said, “I am not a human thinking, I am not a human doing, I’m a human *being*.” When we try to do the right things in order to get the right results, expecting to then be successful, we are saying that we are “human doings.”

Instead, we need to start with who we are and what we believe. Human beings act out of their beliefs and sense of purpose; what we do is a result of what we believe. If I believe that I can make a sale, I will do all the work that is necessary to make that sale. If I believe that things are going to get difficult, then things are most likely going to get difficult. We become our own self-fulfilling prophecy.

So one of the invitations we’d like to make in this book is for you to recognize that what you believe - about your context, about the future, about selling - determines how you engage. If you are afraid, then you are going to act and do things a fearful person does.

So before you change what you do, first we need to explore what you believe and how much of what you are doing is determined by fear, concern or limited ways of thinking. This is where personal transformation starts.

This personal transformation is necessary to solve the challenge facing every sales professional today: how do I stay relevant in this new world, navigate the shifting environment around me, and deliver value to both my client and my company?

Through our work guiding and coaching sales organizations we have been applying the leading research in selling and teaching some important new methods. In particular, we acknowledge the groundbreaking work of *The Challenger Sale* and the imperative to Teach, Tailor and Take Control.

Challenger has provoked an important debate about the real value a salesperson delivers to the customer today, and the principles of *Challenger* are at the core of what we teach. Daniel Pink's book *Drive* and the premise that autonomy, mastery and purpose are central to success today has also been highly influential, along with several other works.

But we have learned that before we can equip sales teams with new methods and train them to do things like Teach, Tailor and Take Control, we first need to help them develop a different mindset and address this question of personal transformation. To maximize sales effectiveness today and truly impact your client you must have a difference-making methodology **and** a transformation in mindset and beliefs. It is the aggregate combination of both that will supercharge your outcomes. The right shift in mindset makes it possible to truly understand, internalize and act upon groundbreaking methodologies.

Through this book, we invite you to start a journey of personal transformation that will equip you with this mindset that you need to thrive in the current shifting context and survive whatever future changes lie ahead.

First, we will explore what you believe. We will help you identify and overcome the limiting beliefs that are keeping you back. We will take a look at your purpose and motivation and show you how staying focused on your true north produces better results than focusing simply on results. When you shift your beliefs and get excited and are willing to engage, then you will be ready to **do** new things and achieve new and improved better results!

In the second part of the book, we will discuss the core skillset sales professionals need to excel in selling today. These six core skills are anchored in the mindset shift of part one. Some of these skillset shifts may seem a bit counterintuitive. For example, we believe it is vital to welcome and embrace complexity rather than constantly drive to simplification. Similarly, we don't want you to remove tension, but learn to manage it and leverage it toward action.

Making shifts like these will only be possible because first you will have understood the beliefs that hold you back from making them and adopted a mindset that will help you be nimble with new methods.

We believe all of this is wrapped up in a quality we have termed **shiftability**. Shiftability encompasses both awareness and action. It is having the combined mindset and skillset to understand the circumstances around you and then to act appropriately in pursuit of your desired results. Shiftability is about adapting and changing in response to circumstances around you – but it’s not about compromise.

Bruce Lee said, “Notice that the stiffest tree is most easily cracked, while the bamboo or the willow survives by bending with the wind.” The tree that bends with the wind is rooted in the ground. It bends but it does not blow away.

Compromise, or merely being shifty, means that you simply succumb to pressures around you. Rather, shiftability is about awareness and action, giving and taking, while staying true to who you are, rooted in principles of integrity and purpose. Shiftability responds to outward demands from inward strength, purpose and skill.

The mindset of shiftability acknowledges the need for change and transformation and embraces it, keeping an open mind about new ideas while wisely retaining things that still apply, always learning, always building, always growing.

The skillset of shiftability will vary depending on your context. The shiftability skillset for sales professionals includes:

- mastering situational client engagement,
- embracing conflict,
- creating and delivering personalized insight,
- managing and leveraging tension,
- asking for the business and sustaining client engagement,
- and not being afraid of NO.

We believe shiftability is a quality that you can cultivate and develop. In fact, we will be so bold as to say that it is a quality that you must cultivate and

develop to stay relevant and succeed in selling today. That's why we wrote this book.

By the end of this book, you will not just have another sales process or methodology. Instead you will be equipped to set out on the road to relevance along with your entire client engagement team—inside sales, outside sales, technical support, management, marketing, product development, and customer service.

Today's sales leaders must make a major transformation. Sales leaders must transform from being product and solution experts with technical skills to being client engagement project managers with strong interpersonal skills who can deliver the appropriate resources at the right time to help the client in the best way.

Are you ready? Let's begin with how we got here in the first place ...

CHAPTER 1

The Elephants Aren't Just In The Room – They Are Everywhere

HOW DID WE GET HERE? WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

If you do not change direction,
you may end up where you are heading.
Lao Tzu

To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.
Winston Churchill

It seems impossible that three tons of mammoth power can creep up on you without a sound. But any who have encountered elephants in the wild will know this to be true. Elephants can be incongruously stealthy, scary quiet, and seemingly appear from nowhere, suddenly emerging in full view with intimidating presence and power.

In 1993 Hendre was with a group of students on a road trip up through Africa. The group had traveled through Lusaka in Zambia and stopped along the Zambezi River to visit the Victoria Falls. That afternoon they took a sunset cruise on the Zambezi River about a mile upstream from the Falls. There are very few things as amazing as an African sunset and seeing huge crocodiles just a few feet from the boat. The river at this point is about a half-mile wide and has a number of tiny islands where lazy crocodiles soak up the afternoon sun with their jaws wide open. The boat captain would get precariously close for a better view of the crocodiles – so close in fact that the boat would enter a number of areas that were overgrown with bamboo reeds and leaves.

As Hendre leaned over to get a better look at a sunbathing crocodile, suddenly an elephant trunk raised up inches in front of him. An elephant was the last thing he expected to see in the middle of the Zambezi River just above Victoria Falls. How did it get there?

When we refer to “the elephant in the room” we are usually talking about the fact that we are avoiding the obvious because we are too afraid of addressing the issue. The funny thing is that we never notice how the elephant enters the room. In selling, several elephants have crept up on us in recent times. Suddenly we find ourselves confronted with challenges and changes that can make us question the very role we are in. Is there still a place for the sales professional in business?

In business, as on a safari, we miss seeing the elephant most often because we are looking elsewhere. Sales people are busy doing what we have always done and what worked the last time that we simply haven’t noticed the shifting environment and the elephants around us until they are right in front of us. The current reality of our world is that there are so many changes

happening all at once that people often have change fatigue and choose to only focus on what they already know and ignore the elephants in the room. It requires a huge commitment to embrace the ambiguity and engage in this context of uncertainty. There are elephants everywhere. How did they get here?



In the beginning there were people who made stuff and people who needed stuff. Then there were the peddlers of stuff who helped the makers and the buyers find each other.

The peddlers of stuff were very successful for hundreds of years, because the makers and buyers needed them. Stuff was bought and sold and everyone was okay.

Then things changed.

THAT WAS THEN ...

It was a typically warm and sunny Arizona day. The cloudless blue skies seemed to go on forever as Mitch drove across the desert out of Phoenix on one of his monthly sales trips to Las Vegas. This time was a bit different. Mitch's usual mode of transportation was his bright silver Audi 5000T. This day he was behind the wheel of a bright orange and white rental truck from U-Haul.

The two-ton box on wheels was loaded front to back and fully to the ceiling with high tech data. But this was not data as we think of it today. This was technical product information contained in hundreds of copies of technical documents, printed and bound in books from various manufacturers. These were called data books. In the technical sales trade they were almost as good as gold. Electrical engineers would go to almost any means needed to get their hands on their favorite manufacturers' data books.

And Mitch had an entire truckload of them.

He was on his way to a government contractor in Nevada. This was a tough account to get into to talk with even just a few of their thousands of engineers. But Mitch had found that if he set up shop in the parking lot with a truckload of data books, over a couple of days nearly every engineer in the company would come out to visit him. They could pick and choose from any of the dozens of manufacturers that he represented and take any data books they needed. All he asked was that they grant him access at a later date. Through Mitch's semi-annual book drive he built one heck of a contact Rolodex.

This was 1977 and the electronics industry was in its infancy. Apple Computer had just incorporated, Star Wars had just opened and set new records, and Elvis had just left the building. At the time Mitch was a Field Sales Engineer working for Wyle Electronics, one of the largest distributors of electronic components in the industry. They represented and sold semiconductors for Motorola, Intel, Fairchild and many others. They also sold a variety of electromechanical products like connectors and switches and passive products such as capacitors. Wyle represented the best of the best.

In these early days of the electronics industry a sales person working in the distribution world was viewed as a great source of information. Customers eagerly welcomed sales reps whether they were bringing in data books or doughnuts. At that time the only real source of technical product information was the printed material that the various manufacturers created. There was no Internet. This was a time known as BCP (Before Cell Phones). Electronic messages between companies were sent through a system called a TWX or a Telex. Fax machines were just becoming real. The human was the primary means of conveying the realities of the fast moving electronics industry.

Every Monday night after work Mitch's sales team would meet with various manufacturers over pizza and beer and hear all about what wonderful new technologies and products they were about to bring to market. They would check out the new technical literature and sometimes they would even score the ever-elusive "sample" that they could deliver to a really important client.

Life was grand and the role of sales professionals had maximum meaning and purpose. They were the kings and queens of data. Not just data, but data everything. They had data sheets, data books, data libraries, and data brochures. They had copies of advertising, which was just more data. They had product data, solution data, reliability data, and eventually, data CDs.

Not only did sales reps have all of the data known to the technical world, but they also had free products they called samples. They had samples to hand out for specific client projects, they had sample kits, they had product sample packs and solution sample packs. They even had product demo boards, product evaluation kits, and full demo system solutions. They had development systems and emulation tools. And even more importantly the sales rep had CONTROL of it. It was theirs to gift to their favorite clients, theirs to spread out, move around and use to build relationships.

Sales reps also had control of the feedback on the use of the products and samples. They controlled the communication to the client and the communication back to the manufacturer of the products. The sales rep had it all – all the data, all the products, and all of the control.

That was then ...

THIS IS NOW ...

Flash forward to today.

The electronics industry is thriving, the Star Wars franchise is still going strong, Apple is one of the premier companies in the world, and today the sales professional is on the verge of leaving the building.

We are no longer the kings and queens of data. Our customers do not need us to bring them information. They have the Internet for that. A revolution of massive disruption and disintermediation is underway.

And this changes everything.

A CEB study of more than 1,400 B2B customers across different industries revealed that 57% of a typical purchase decision today is made before a customer even talks to a supplier.

This means that in a decision-making process that starts with an idea and ends with the purchasing of product, today's buyer typically does not engage with a sales person until they are 57% of the way through the entire cycle. They have independently researched and gathered their own information. Buyers have already assessed nearly all of the needs, prioritized the capabilities, compared and benchmarked the suppliers, and have researched pricing.

This is a really ugly spot for a salesperson to come into the picture for the first time. About the only things left to discuss are price and delivery—not an easy place to differentiate or add value!

More recent surveys of the same subject suggest that 57% is actually an optimistic number. It is more likely that your customers are only reaching out to their suppliers when they are about 75% of the way through the entire process. Now we are talking about coming in even later in the process with even less opportunity to differentiate.

The modern sales professional is fighting to stay relevant to both their customers and to their organizations. Nobody is running to greet us in the lobby, hoping to get one of our precious databooks. We are no longer the gatekeepers of information.

Obsolescence and irrelevance are looming on the horizon. In fact, some are already proclaiming the death of the salesman. And there's more bad news.

Along with the paradigm shifts in the control and flow of information there has been a seismic shift in the nature of the procurement process itself. The commoditization of information through the Internet has contributed to the recent resurgence of a particular style of aggressive supply chain management, popular in the eighties under the benign-sounding moniker, PICOS.

A MAN NAMED JOSÉ

In March 1989 Tim Berners-Lee wrote a proposal for what would become the Worldwide Web. Nine months later the first commercial Internet service

provider in the United States served its first customer. At the same time as the modern Internet was emerging, a man named José Ignacio López de Arriortúa was revolutionizing procurement at General Motors.

During his tenure, Lopez was nicknamed “Super Lopez” for his wizardry in cost reduction and streamlining production. His system was called PICOS (Program for the Implementation and Cost Optimization of Suppliers, sometimes noted as Purchased Input Cost Optimization). In theory, the PICOS system was designed to “help” a supplier reduce its costs so it could “share” those cost reductions with GM. In reality, it was a system designed to defeat weak supplier negotiation and their entire management team.

PICOS is a process by which the buyer personally and emotionally bludgeons the seller into a corner whereby all of the seller’s products and services are devalued and dedifferentiated to a point where they are nothing more than simple commodities, and the only thing that will make them stand out from all of the competition is their lower price.

While the PICOS history is colored by Lopez’s defection from GM to Volkswagen in 1992 amidst charges that he stole GM secrets, and his subsequent indictment for industrial espionage, the practice remains alive and well today across most industries. Over the past three years we have seen an epidemic spread of the practice, sometimes under names like “cost optimization” or “supply systems management.”

The win-win collaborative rhetoric of PICOS sounds good in theory, but in reality it is a devastating business practice. The objective is to beat the supplier into submission and to secure long-term major price reductions, and to get those commitments made for several years at a continually decreasing price. Today’s PICOS teams are averaging a 10% annual price reduction target, with the aggressive teams pushing for 25% reduction.

The supply chain professionals who deploy PICOS understand how to play the “win-win relationship” card and back the supplier into a seemingly uncaring corner. They keep the individual pressure up, implying a lack of commitment to partnership for those suppliers who will not cooperate and agree to their targets. They use heavy-handed threats of escalation and

manipulate the supply side of the table with every known trick in the book. It is a game with old, well-documented rules. Here is a direct excerpt from Lopez:

Section 6

...

- f) Be prepared indirectly and under pressure to *bluff and lie*.
- g) *Destabilize* each supplier's people with many urgent meetings and many demands for information.
- h) Set new deadlines for suppliers to meet but defer decisions to *increase their anxiety*.¹

In a PICOS negotiation, the sales professional is personally, professionally, and emotionally challenged at every turn.

So, not only is today's sales professional struggling to stay relevant in the age of commoditized information, they are often being bloodied and beaten at the table by aggressive tactics of manipulation and intimidation masquerading as collaboration for the win-win deal.

IT SEEMS A LITTLE FLAT

In many respects the rise of aggressive supply management is also due to the fact that many of today's sales and purchasing practices are rooted in business economics of the past. Forty years ago 10% to 20% growth per year in revenue was pretty much the norm for most industries. And this growth was sustained for a long time. Year after year, revenue and profits continued to rise and most of us assumed this would be the norm forever. We created compensation plans, sales practices, purchasing styles, and operational standards in almost every category based on endless growth. This became the baseline for all things.

Well, those times have come and gone, and today the world is flat in terms of growth globally. It may shift and ebb regionally, but the fundamental

¹ Mack Hanan, *Sales Shock! The End of Selling Products - The Rise of CoManaging Customers*, American Management Association, 1998, pp. 24-26. Emphasis added

growth of the world's economy is simply not what it was when the rules that most of us follow today for selling in the B2B environment were set in place.

This lack of growth has many implications. The environment of the public company is driven by growth, and mostly by growth in terms of profitability. Companies, public or private, only have two knobs to control for generating profits: revenue and cost. Not too complex.

However, the notion of control is perhaps questionable. In reality, the fundamental of revenue growth is not totally in a company's control, since their customer base has a strong influence over revenue, which is a huge uncontrolled variable. So, the hard truth is that the only knob that a company can actually control is cost. This cost control element has landed primarily right in the lap of the procurement organizations in every company.

Procurement, purchasing, supply chain management, buyers, sourcing, vendor management—teams by many names are all focused on reducing product costs.

Cost reduction has just as many names: piece price variance or PPV, annual cost downs, enhanced supplier relationships, preferred supplier programs, supplier score carding, vendor ratings, gold/silver/bronze partnership programs, win-win negotiations, and a host of others. All of these teams, programs and practices are aimed at one thing—lower prices.

This trifecta of commoditized information and disintermediation, widespread aggressive cost-reduction and use of PICOS-style negotiation, and a flat-growth economic environment, makes things difficult for sales professionals today. There is a new urgency to figuring out how to stay relevant, how to stand up and push back to return the sales conversation to value with the right people, and to discovering how to operate in today's economy.

The landscape of selling has changed dramatically and it continues to change rapidly. How do you navigate this uncharted territory? How do you chart a course through this changing landscape? You have to learn how to shift ...

Shift into different abilities.

Shift onto a new plane of performance.

Shift into a deeper understanding of value and your role in creating it.

Shift into a new mindset.

Shift into a new skillset.

Most of all, you have to be willing to shift and choose to move forward, even though the way is not clear. You have to cultivate shiftability.

SO I HAVE TO CHANGE—AGAIN?

Juggling her coffee and her laptop, Kristine pushed open the door to the conference room with her elbow, a few minutes late for the weekly division sales meeting. As she made her way to her seat she caught Dave's eye. He made a small nod to the right. She followed his gaze. Three stacks of bright colored hardcover books occupied center stage. Kristine's stomach knotted and she looked back to Dave. He smirked and rolled his eyes.

Whatever it was, Kristine knew a couple of things for sure. There would be a few good ideas to get excited about but she would probably be told to abandon a few old ideas that had worked for her in order to get with the new program. And Dave would make some good beer money again, selling everyone's new books on eBay.

Sound familiar? Perhaps your sales manager handed you this book to read over the weekend and told you to come back Monday ready to discuss it in your sales meeting. Please don't sell it on eBay just yet.

Kristine's sales manager, like so many others, is frantically trying to solve this problem: **How does a sale professional stay relevant today?** How do we equip ourselves to be successful in aggressive PICOS-style negotiations? How do we make sure we deliver value to our organization? To our clients? And ultimately, to ourselves?

So we are eagerly searching for the next best technique in selling, adopting and mandating new methods, changing focus, trying different incentives, and designing new programs. We get very busy doing new things, something, anything. But too often, even though we have changed everything, we get the same old results. We knock our heads up against the same

problems and find ourselves right back where we started, still on the edge of irrelevance.

The whole effort becomes change for change's sake, without any real progress or improvement made. Several key misconceptions underpin this cycle of change that doesn't change anything.

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

The first misconception is that a shift or change is always an either/or proposition. We will either adopt this new program wholeheartedly and abandon our previous methods OR we will reject this new idea and stubbornly stick to the old plan.

Neil Rackham, author of *SPIN Selling*, calls this the “Armageddon selling formula” and describes it like this:

“Everything you’ve ever learned about sales is wrong and, unless you stop doing it instantly, your sales efforts will shortly die in agony. There is, however, one simple cure that I have discovered. It is...” and here the author puts in a pitch for the appropriate magic bullet, such as “my prospecting method,” “my selection system,” “our funnel management process,” or “our trademarked social media analytics”—take your pick ...²

This is probably the biggest failing of many sales formulas and usually what inspires controversy. The champions enthusiastically adopt the new program and throw out everything they have been doing up to this point. The detractors disdainfully reject the new ideas completely because they are unwilling to part with their old ways. In both cases change is understood to be a net-zero exchange, instead of a process of building, growth and evolution.

In this book we would like to suggest that shifting is not binary, but instead mostly a both/and proposition. You will need to learn new skills, apply new ideas in selling, AND still maintain the old ideas that work well but perhaps understand and apply them in new ways. We don't want you to abandon methods and skills that are successful for you. We also don't want

² From the Foreword to *Insight Selling* by Mike Schultz and John Doerr.

you reject new ideas just because they are new and perhaps not yet proven in your own experience.

The challenge becomes choosing which changes to adopt, and which shifts to make.

We aim to show you a framework for putting the best of today's thinking in selling into practice. We are going to help you navigate your way through the noise to six essentials shifts we believe you need to make to stay relevant and be effective. But first we need to help you answer this pressing question: *How do I make changes that stick?*

TO DO, OR NOT TO DO?

The second misconception about change is that it is all about doing. When we are faced with a problem, usually our first thought is, what should I do to solve this problem? Then we get very busy doing things to solve our problem. We think that if we could just change our behavior, develop a new skill, apply a new technique, or start a new program, then surely we will be more successful. Hence the flood of books on selling that promise new ways to **do** sales.

We are going to show you why doing isn't the right place to start for sustainable change. Rather, we need to start with changing who we are at the core in our beliefs, not just changing our techniques.

Before we get to showing you the things you can do that will help put you on the road to success as a sales professional today, we need to talk to you about your being. In order to **do** something different, you have to **believe** something different.

This is the heart of transformation. And, transformation is exactly what is required.

A Note from Mitch & Hendre

Thank you for reading this preview of our book. We are sure you have experienced many of the same pressures in selling that we have described in these opening sections.

We believe that there is a future for the B2B sales professional and that your role is more vital than ever. We hope you have been encouraged to learn more about how you can adopt the mindset you need to build the skill set required for sustainable success in selling today.

Shiftability will be available on Amazon in both paperback and Kindle formats. All proceeds from the sale are being donated to support www.charitywater.org, so you will not only be learning and growing yourself – you will also be supporting communities in need of safe, clean water.

And please share *Shiftability* with your colleagues and friends. The principles contained in this book are beneficial to anyone in any role in the business world today.

We wish you great success!

Mitch & Hendre

P.S. Visit www.mitchlittle.com and www.hendrecoetzee.com for further news and resources related to Shiftability.