



## Selling Around the Holes

From "Sales Wise – a journey through Sales and Selling"  
by Martyn Lewis

I will never forget my first national corporate sales meeting. We were a large company so I was there along with several thousand other sales folk – and I was pumped. Freshly pressed suit, shiny new briefcase, and my imagination bubbling over with that unbridled, fearless optimism that you cannot believe anybody else in the room can come close to. Of course I have since learned that many felt exactly the same way and indeed still do, and thank goodness they do. Sadly, these large gatherings are fast becoming a thing of the past, and it's too bad in a way because there is something very special about the buzz of a large national sales convention. Surrounded by your peers, revved up with competitive anticipation, and all like-minded in enthusiasm – and especially if it's out of town.

So there I was, and as is typical the first day ended with a dinner for the multitudes followed by the keynote address from our corporate vice president of sales. In more recent years, I too have been that after-dinner speaker and I've discovered it can be a tough role to fill. What does make it easier is when you realize that in being the VP of sales, just about everybody in the room eventually reports up to you. Then, as now, the audience was clearly attentive.

To add to the excitement, the leader of our sales force was an almost legendary character with a booming voice that hardly needed the help of a microphone. As is typical on these occasions, he shared with us his rationale for his unshakeable belief in our future success. After presenting us with all the reasons why he believed we would continue to be market leaders, imagine my surprise when he changed gears and said,

"We know that in some cases our products have a few holes."

"We know that our competitors' offerings are not that far behind us."

"We know that at times our customers see certain weaknesses in our overall offerings."

"We know that at times our competitors sometimes leap-frog us in some areas."



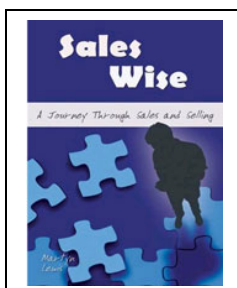
Wow! I couldn't believe that a senior executive of the company would actually admit that we didn't always have the best mousetrap. And it was what he said next that has stayed with me all these years:

“And we don't need *you* to tell us – we pay other people to tell us this. *Your job is to sell around the holes.* If we always had the best products and our prospects and clients always viewed us as the best solution provider, we wouldn't need a sales force. The only reason that we have you is to sell around the holes”.

Interesting words indeed, and a point well worth making, because since then I have unfortunately met too many salespeople that spend too much of their time dwelling on why they can't sell. They make it a significant part of their day to share with anyone who'll listen what the competition is doing better than *us* and why *we* could be in trouble. I've seen too many sales meetings turn into major whine sessions as soon as the manager leaves or when the floor is thrown open for discussion. So in my mind, there is a real lesson to be learned from the words in that after-dinner speech.

Now, not for one moment would I suggest, nor do I believe that our VP of sales was suggesting that we lie, cheat, or steal our way to fame and fortune – but we have to realize that our competitors are no slouches. And hopefully we have ample confidence in our own company, our own offerings, and our own ability to provide a successful solution to our customers. Perhaps in a perfect world we could pick our spots where our offerings, and only our offerings, were the ideal solution for the customer but reality suggests that you're not going to get to quota-heaven with that plan. So it becomes abundantly clear that a very important part of our job is to guide the sales situation around the holes that may exist in our offerings and play to the strengths of what we can provide to our customers. Because that VP was probably right; if we always had the perfect product, why indeed would we need salespeople?

**Don't waste your time complaining about the competition and other factors you can't control; focus on the strengths of your own offering and what you can control.**



**“Sales Wise – a Journey through Sales and Selling”  
by Martyn Lewis**

**is now available from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).**

**With entertaining true stories, Sales Wise introduces its readers to new ways of thinking about sales – and shows you how to sell your products, services, and ideas more effectively.**