

Chill with Bill: Advice for the New-to-Sales Rep

I asked dozens of Sales Vault members, "What advice would you give someone just starting out in print/sign/promo/packaging/label sales?" and, wow, did the comments come flying in!

In my January 9 LinkedIn episode of Chill with Bill, I paraphrased the first ten replies. This complimentary download expands on those member responses to show their full responses.

If you are new to sales and want help getting started, check out the [90 Day New-to-Sales Program](#) available at SalesVault.pro or give me a call: 781-934-7036.

Bill Farquharson

"Spend a day in each department of your shop. Get to know your people and some of the things they face every day."

—Christine Alexander

"Look for the most successful sales person at the company and ask if you can spend the day with them observing and asking questions and also Christine's advice."

—Tamera Rice Ehrman

"Dive into your customer's business and learn how they actually operate. What is going on behind the scenes? What are their stressors? What slows them down? Once you learn these things, you become a partner rather than a vendor. Partners always win."

—David Barber, Sales Vault Member

"YES! You stole my thunder. Become a "team member" with your customer - educate yourself in their business/industry - be able to see things from their point of view and don't try to sell them a product/solution YOU would not buy!"

—Gary Littleton

"It's a very competitive industry so keep grinding. Don't take 'No' personally. 'No' right now, does not mean 'no' forever. It only takes a couple of yeses to start building your pipeline and book of business."

—Jayson Wold

"One of the biggest things I wish I had understood earlier is how much long-term ownership costs matter, especially as a business scales. Early on, it's easy to focus on the excitement of new equipment, higher speeds, or expanded capabilities. What often gets overlooked are the ongoing realities: maintenance, service contracts, parts availability, downtime, operator training, power requirements, and the physical footprint of large machines. As companies grow, those costs compound quickly.

A piece of equipment that looks profitable on paper can become a bottleneck or a financial burden if it's expensive to maintain, difficult to service, or overly complex for the volume it's supporting. I've learned that asking deeper questions up front about total cost of ownership, reliability over time, and how equipment fits into a scalable workflow can make a huge difference in long-term success. If I were advising someone new to the industry, I'd say this: don't just sell (or buy) for today's needs. Think two, five, even ten years down the road. The smartest growth usually comes from solutions that are sustainable, serviceable, and adaptable not just impressive on day one."

—Adam Koppelman, Sales Vault Member

"I believe everything comes from experience. I don't think there's anything I could've known when I first started that would've given me some insane advantage. The trial and error of experience leads to a lot more learning and knowledge on your field of sales, something you can't really get with a quick tip or cheat sheet. This process has made things much more natural for me, leading to more comfortable and efficient sales. I suppose my advice would be to do instead of think. Applying this mindset leads to more opportunity and growth."

—Luis Bernard, Sales Vault Member

"Learn as much as you can. Dive into technology and figure out how to use the available tools to bring value. Engage with as many people as possible, share ideas and learn. If they don't value what you bring to the table or discount you as too young to know anything valuable, move on quickly."

—Brian Amos

"One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that whether you're starting a new business or scaling an existing one, growth takes time. Building strong relationships is absolutely critical—and that can't be overstated.

Another major learning curve has been truly understanding your vendors: how they operate, what their processes look like, and how product quality aligns with cost. It's important to know your top vendors in each category—apparel,

technology, promotional items, and print (flyers, business cards, etc.)—so you can confidently guide your customers.

If you're not running your own production facility, building a reliable team of embroiderers and screen printers is essential. Finding the right partners can be challenging, because it often takes hands-on experience to evaluate quality, consistency, and how they handle mistakes when things don't go as planned.

Finally, understanding vendor fees and additional charges has been a big one for me. Knowing those details ensures we're accurately accounting for costs and pricing our work appropriately.

Those are my top three learning curves—ones I'm still refining and growing through every day."

—Chandra Powell, Sales Vault Member

"Speed and quality are everything. They're two legs of a three-legged stool, with price being the third. You don't have to sell on price—speed and quality allow you to position yourself as a premium solution.

Eliminate or neutralize as much risk as you can, and show customers you understand how that protects their bottom line. When I got into the business, I saw these risk areas: (1) print risk (color profiling and print quality), (2) lamination risk, (3) mounting risk, (4) cutting risk, and (5) install risk.

We addressed those risk points by adopting G7 color profiling across all our printers, acquiring UV direct printers, investing in high-speed precision cutters (nothing cut by hand), and consistently implementing well-thought-out processes. I always say: "Making mistakes is human. Making the same mistake again is the fault of (1) management not focused on putting processes in place to help the employee be successful, or (2) the employee not following prescribed processes and procedures." Basically: identify the risk and handle it.

When I was starting out, Bruce Benson told me you'll learn 80% in the first six months, 15% over the next six months, and the remaining 5% as you go. So when I met with a customer about a project, I'd try to gather as much information as possible, then ask permission to think through the best solution: "I have some ideas, but I want to check with a couple of our manufacturers. Can I follow up in 24 hours?" Then I'd contact other owners to get their ideas and get right back to the customer.

I also live by the “sunset rule”: never let the sun set on a task you promised. Respond even if you don’t have everything—just check in and let them know you’re still on it. Our first account manager would get a request and email back “Got it.” She’d ask a one-sentence question; the customer would respond; then she’d ask another quick question—back and forth. The final exchange was often, “You’re amazing, Antoinette!” I realized people were changing how they communicate, and you don’t need to write a three-paragraph Q&A. We started using email like text, and customers loved it. That was one of my most important learnings—from our 26-year-old superstar.

Establish performance objectives and live by them. When I entered the business, I said we would: (1) quote in 45 minutes, (2) deliver in 24 hours, and (3) be 20% less than the high-priced big competitor in Orlando. Later, a customer told me, “You produce faster than most people quote.” We didn’t always have a quote ready that fast, but the “text-like” email exchange was already underway.

After thinking about this a little, I don’t have anything earth-shattering—just a couple of things that would have made it easier in my own head. First: your prospects aren’t necessarily ignoring you. They may just be too busy to talk, email, or text right now. They’re probably wearing a lot of hats, and you just caught them at a bad time. Keep at it and they’ll come around.

Next: if someone says “yes” to you right away with very little work to get to that “yes,” they’re probably telling your competition the same thing. You won for now, but likely not long-term—nurture them carefully and give them a reason to say “no” to the person who comes in behind you.

Lastly: be a connector of people. I learned this later than I wish I had. The more you connect people who can help each other, the more value you have to each of them individually. It takes time, but it’ll help you in the long run more than you can possibly know right now.”

—Aaron Nudelman, Sales Vault Member