



# The Future of Selling

## Can artificial intelligence replace salespeople?

by: Troy Harrison, Troy Harrison & Associates

The sales profession is facing an entirely new type of competition. Whether it will be a game-changer is yet to be seen. The topic of a recent LinkedIn poll was: “Can salespeople be replaced by artificial intelligence (AI) in five years?” My instinctive reaction was probably the same as yours: “Of course not.” Then I did a little thinking before I answered and I realized that, yes, a lot of salespeople could be replaced by AI — not in five years, but *right now*. That is because their skills are not really any better than your basic chatbot — and therein lies a problem for those of us who care deeply about the role of the professional salesperson.

Let’s be clear. I believe there are things that skilled, engaged salespeople can do that AI cannot do — and probably will not ever be able to do. But for this article, I wanted a more expert opinion, so I decided to interview the most prominent current expert on AI about this very topic: ChatGPT. That is right — I interviewed AI about AI. Here is a highlight from that interview:

**Me:** “Will AI be able to replace most salespeople in the future?”

**ChatGPT:** “While AI technologies like ChatGPT have shown tremendous advancements in recent years and can perform many tasks with impressive accuracy, it cannot completely replace the role of a salesperson. There are several reasons why ChatGPT cannot replace salespeople:

**(1) Personalization:** Salespeople build relationships with their customers through personalized interactions that require a high level of emotional intelligence and human connection. AI technologies lack the empathy, intuition and emotional intelligence needed for human interactions.

**(2) Complex sales processes:** Some sales processes require a high degree of complexity and nuance that ChatGPT cannot handle. Salespeople can provide specialized knowledge, solve complex problems and negotiate terms with customers.

**(3) Trust and rapport building:** Salespeople establish trust with customers over time through their interactions and relationship-building skills, which are essential to closing sales. Building trust takes time and a deeper understanding of the customer’s needs, which ChatGPT may not be able to provide.

In summary, ChatGPT can be used as a support tool for salespeople by providing relevant information, data and customer insights. However, AI cannot replace the human-to-human connection that is necessary in sales interactions.”

Whew. Well, even ChatGPT thinks it cannot replace salespeople. So, all is well, right? Wrong.



Look at all of the things ChatGPT says salespeople do:

- Build relationships with their customers through personalized interactions that require a high level of emotional intelligence and human connection
- Provide specialized knowledge
- Solve complex problems
- Establish trust with customers over time

Here is the problem. An awful lot of today’s salespeople do not do this. They go through the motions, make some sales calls and put in some numbers. The level of engagement described by my ChatGPT “expert” is the level of skill that top salespeople show. This is 20% or less of this profession.

The implication is that a large number of salespeople can be replaced by AI. Imagine an AI bot that dials a prospect, engages in a voice-to-voice conversation using prospecting and sales best practices, and even sets appointments.

Take it a step further and imagine it doing so in the same voice as the real salesperson who would handle the live appointment. Or, how about an AI bot that sets Zoom sales appointments and then carries them out in a hologram? This kind of thing would have been science fiction five years ago. Now it is a coming reality. The technology to do the phone prospecting is almost here now — AI can have conversations through chatbots. Text-to-voice technology is here. And you can even train that tech to use your voice — or a voice similar enough that few people could detect it is not you.

So what does all this mean for you? It means that it is time to up your game in every respect. If you are a principal or a manager, ask yourself if your salespeople are exhibiting personalization, emotional intelligence, problem-solving and trust-

building on a day-to-day basis. If not, find ways to train them to do so.

It means that if you are a salesperson, you have some work to do. Here is a quick list of what salespeople should be doing in order to move into the future of selling:

■ **Personalize your encounters.** One-size-fits-all sales calls do not work anymore, if they ever did. Neither do canned presentations. Personalization means knowing your customer better by asking thorough and more questions, and then using the information you have discovered to solve problems — not just pushing whatever you can.

■ **Tune in to your customers.** After asking a great question, it is time to listen. Really listen and tune in to the words coming from the customer — they are important. Watch their LinkedIn profiles for clues as to their viewpoints and priorities.

■ **Live with empathy.** Notice I did not say “show” empathy — that is inauthentic. I mean live with empathy. Work on your ability to put yourself on the other side of the desk and see things from the customer’s point of view. Facing the same situations, what would you do? How would you react or feel? That is empathy.

■ **Focus on the buyer’s journey.** In sales, we are trained to think about the “sales process” — projecting what we want onto the customer. It is time to flip that script. Instead, think

A great salesperson will always be better than AI ... I am a 100%-passionate advocate for personal selling by human salespeople to human customers.

about the journey the buyer takes to reach a purchase and what that buyer wants at each stage (this is part of living with empathy).

■ **Use technology to its max.** Competing with tech means using tech. The battle over CRM is over. It is a good thing. Embrace it and use it. Use reviews of your customers’ businesses to learn more about them and find opportunity. Even using ChatGPT as a research tool is completely fair. It is a tool — use it to be the best salesperson you can be.

Make no mistake about my outlook. A great salesperson will always be better than AI. A good salesperson will always be at least as good as great AI. I am a 100%-passionate advocate for personal selling by human salespeople to human customers. And just as I am challenging you to up your game, I am challenging myself to up mine. This space, in future issues, will help us do just that. ■

*Troy Harrison is the author of “Sell Like You Mean It!” and “The Pocket Sales Manager,” and is a speaker, consultant and sales navigator. He helps companies build more profitable and productive sales forces. To schedule a free 45-minute Sales Strategy Review, call (913) 645-3603 or email [troy@troyharrison.com](mailto:troy@troyharrison.com). Visit [www.troyharrison.com](http://www.troyharrison.com).*

