PRAISE FOR BUILDING A SALES GROWTH ENGINE

"*Creating a Sales Growth Engine* offers a ringing wake up call for staffing executives to take seriously the need for a highly integrated sales and marketing system to break through the clutter of undifferentiated staffing offerings that all sound alike. Trust the process and trust the authors!"

BARRY ASIN, INDUSTRY EXPERT AND FORMER PRESIDENT, STAFFING INDUSTRY ANALYSTS

“Growth does not happen by accident. *Creating a Sales Growth Engine* provides a detailed playbook that connects marketing, sales, buyer behavior and process discipline in a way every staffing leader should understand and act on.”

MIKE JACOUTOT, FOUNDER & MANAGING PARTNER, BUTLER STREET

“Too many staffing firms still depend on heroic sales efforts that are difficult to scale, sustain, and manage predictably. *Creating a Sales Growth Engine* is a critical guide for leaders ready to move beyond ‘make more calls’, and build the disciplined operating rhythm required for sustainable growth. David and Vicki don’t just preach these principles. They've built Haley Marketing around them with disciplined focus and genuine care for their customers.”

ART PAPAS, FOUNDER & CEO, BULLHORN

BUILDING A SALES GROWTH ENGINE

HOW STAFFING FIRMS STAND OUT, STAY TOP-OF-MIND, AND SELL MORE

DAVID SEARNS & VICTORIA KENWARD

ELEVATE PRESS

CHAPTER 1
SELLING IS NOT ENOUGH
THE CASE FOR A GROWTH ENGINE

"Get on the phone. More connects. More activity."
It's been the mantra of the staffing industry forever.
And it worked…until it stopped.

The Summer Job That Taught Me Sales Was Math

My career in staffing started as a summer job in 1981, working for Key Resource Group—my parents' employment company. My job was to help develop their first ATS (although they called it "staffing software" back then). For you old timers, I was developing in RPGII on an IBM AS/400. I built reports for the system.

Back in those seemingly ancient days, staffing was an educational sale. You called a prospect, explained what temp help was, why companies would want to use it, and how it worked. There was not much competition, and margins were very strong. When it came to selling, "make more calls" was the strategy of choice because back then, there were not a lot of other options.

In the early 1990s, my father brought me into his office to teach me a lesson about selling. He said, "As a staffing company, our goal is to

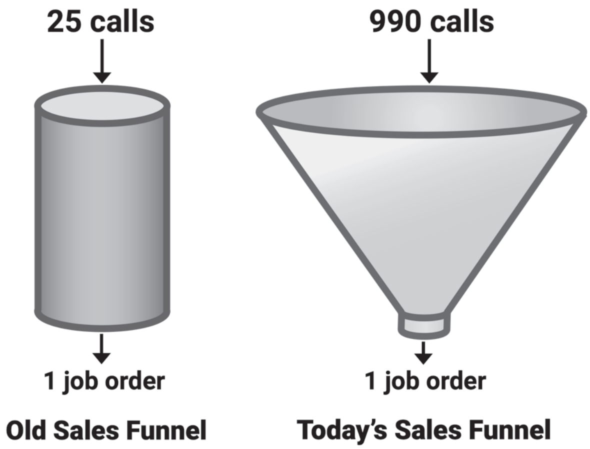
> make more placements, and the key to our success is quite simply math."
>
> He continued "If we want more placements, we need more sendouts. For every three candidates we send out to interview, we get one placement. If we want to send out more people, we need more job orders. And if we want more job orders, we need more appointments. To get more appointments, we need to make more calls."
>
> Calls → Appointments → Job Orders → Sendouts → Placements.
>
> That process worked just fine. Until it didn't.

THE PROBLEM WITH "MAKE MORE CALLS"

Visually, you can think of this as a cylinder. Put more calls in the top, and you get more placements out of the bottom. But over the years, that cylinder changed.

Today, buyers are significantly harder to reach (despite having more communication channels than ever). The decision maker is no longer simply HR or a hiring manager; staffing decisions now involve HR, purchasing, finance, operations, and sometimes senior leadership. And let's not even talk about how the time-to-hire has stretched. Once upon a time, employers trusted their staffing partners to deliver the right talent. Today, they want to interview every candidate…and that process seems to take forever!

Over the past three decades, that "make more calls" cylinder morphed into a funnel shape, and the mouth of that funnel seems to get wider and wider every year.



WE HAVE A PROBLEM...MATH!

The problem with "make more calls" isn't just a sales funnel issue; it's a math issue, a technology issue, and a consumer behavior issue.

Dad used to say, "It takes three candidate send outs to make one placement." He wanted three candidates sent out on every job order. That math worked just fine as long as our recruiters were able to keep up. The problem was on the job order side of the equation.

In the early days, it might take three to five calls to get an appointment, and that same three to five appointments to get a job order. If you follow the math, the worst case is five calls x five appointments or 25 total activities to get a job order. That's doable.

Today, the call-to-connect rate for B2B sales ranges from 3 to 8%,[1] so it takes up to 33 calls just to talk to someone (12 if you're lucky). When you're finally able to connect with a live human, your success rate will be far below 10% to get an appointment. And if you're an expert closer, you might close 40% of those appointments.

1. "25 Must-Know Cold Calling Stats to Level Up Your Sales Game in 2026," *Salesgenie* (blog), accessed June 9, 2016, https://www.salesgenie.com/blog/cold-calling-statistics-for-sales-representatives/.

33 calls to connect x 10 connects to get an appointment x 3 appointments to close a job order = 990 calls per job order.
That is not a strategy.
That is math telling you the old playbook no longer works.

Now look at the math: 33 x 10 x 3 = 990 calls to get a job order. That's insane. Even if you have the will and discipline to make those calls, who will you call? Closing 10 new clients this year would take roughly 9,900 calls. No staffing salesperson anywhere on planet Earth has the time to make that many cold calls!

To make today's sales funnel work, you need to transition from "make more calls" to "make more impactful calls." You need to put the math in your favor and turn that funnel back into a cylinder.

THE TECHNOLOGY ISSUE

In the early days of staffing, cold calling literally meant calling on the phone or, more often, in person. Thanks to technological advancement, we have more ways than ever to connect with staffing buyers: email, texting, social messaging, WhatsApp, online communities. Yet somehow, more communication channels have resulted in less communication.

The problem is overwhelm. People feel more overwhelmed than ever. And it's no surprise, considering these data points:

- **Email.** Average daily email has increased 40% since COVID. The average office worker receives 121 emails daily, and executives average 150–200+ daily.[2]
- **Instant Messaging (Slack/Teams**). The average employee receives 153 instant messages each day.[3]

2. "Workplace Email Statistics 2025: Usage, Productivity, Trends," *cloudHQ* (blog), April 22, 2025, https://blog.cloudhq.net/workplace-email-statistics/.
3. "Breaking Down the Infinite Workday," Microsoft WorkLab, June 17, 2025, https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/breaking-down-infinite-workday.

- **Always-On Culture.** 40% of people online at 6 a.m. are already reviewing email, and 29% of workers are back in their inbox by 10 p.m., highlighting the "infinite workday."[4]
- **The 24% Rule.** Only about 24% of received emails are considered important, meaning 76% is noise that has to be filtered.[5]
- **Interrupt-Driven Workday.** Employees are interrupted every two minutes with a new notification (email, chat, or meeting alert).[6]

Communication overload costs the average knowledge worker 28% of their workweek, and for top-level managers, this is often higher. 38% of office workers report that the volume of messages is a top stressor.[7]

In an always-connected, always-on world, "make more calls" and "send more emails" don't narrow the funnel. They just add to the noise. Effective selling in this environment is not simply about the volume of activity…it's about creating the right environment to sell.

THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR ISSUE

Over the past decade, B2B purchasing behavior has shifted dramatically, moving from seller-driven, linear processes to buyer-driven, nonlinear, digital-first experiences. Staffing buyers now behave similarly to consumers, expecting instant information, high personalization, and self-service options, with most of the buying journey completed before they ever engage a salesperson.

Here are a few critical ways purchasing has changed in the last decade:

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4. "Breaking Down the Infinite Workday."
5. SaneBox Team, "Unwrap Your Inbox 2025: What Your Email Habits Reveal About Your Year," *SaneBox* (blog), https://blog.sanebox.com/2025/12/26/unwrap-your-inbox-2025-what-your-email-habits-reveal-about-your-year/.
6. Gloria Mark, *Attention Span: A Groundbreaking Way to Restore Balance, Happiness, and Productivity* (Hanover Square Press, 2023).
7. Readless Team, "Email Overload Statistics 2026 (40+ Sourced Stats)," *Readless* (blog), January 5, 2026, https://www.readless.app/blog/email-overload-statistics.

1. THE "INVISIBLE" BUYING PROCESS (SELF-SERVICE)

- **Research-First:** B2B buyers now spend roughly 45% of their time conducting independent research—reading reviews, comparing products, and consulting peers—before contacting a vendor.[8]
- **Rep-Free Preference:** 67% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free experience, favoring self-service tools for procurement, tracking, and product configuration.[9]
- **The "Dark Funnel":** Critical decisions and vendor shortlisting occur in the "dark funnel" (on social media, community forums, or peer review sites) that is largely unmonitored by traditional CRM tracking.

2. DIGITAL-FIRST AND AI-DRIVEN

- **AI Integration:** Nearly 95% of buyers now use ChatGPT or other generative AI tools to research vendors, pressure-test sales claims, and summarize vendor comparisons.[10]
- **Omnichannel Demand:** Buyers expect a seamless, "consumer-grade" experience across digital channels, including LinkedIn, webinars, and online marketplaces, rather than relying on phone calls and email.[11]
- **Digital Content is Crucial:** 62% of B2B buyers consume three

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8. "B2B Buying: How Top CSOs and CMOs Optimize the Journey," Gartner, accessed June 9, 2026, https://www.gartner.com/en/sales/insights/b2b-buying-journey.
9. "Gartner Sales Survey Finds 67% of B2B Buyers Prefer a Rep-Free Experience," Gartner, March 9, 2026, https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2026-03-09-gartner-sales-survey-finds-67-percent-of-b2b-buyers-prefer-a-rep-free-experience.
10. "Forrester's 2026 Buyer Insights: GenAI Is Upending B2B Buying As Leaders Face Mounting Pressure To Justify Every Dollar Spent," Forrester, January 21, 2026, https://www.forrester.com/press-newsroom/forrester-2026-the-state-of-business-buying/.
11. Liz Harrison, Candace Lun Plotkin, Steve Reis, and Jennifer Stanley, "B2B Sales: Omnichannel Everywhere, Every Time," McKinsey & Company, December 15, 2021, https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/growth-marketing-and-sales/our-insights/b2b-sales-omnichannel-everywhere-every-time.

to seven pieces of content (whitepapers, case studies, blogs) before engaging with a vendor.[12]

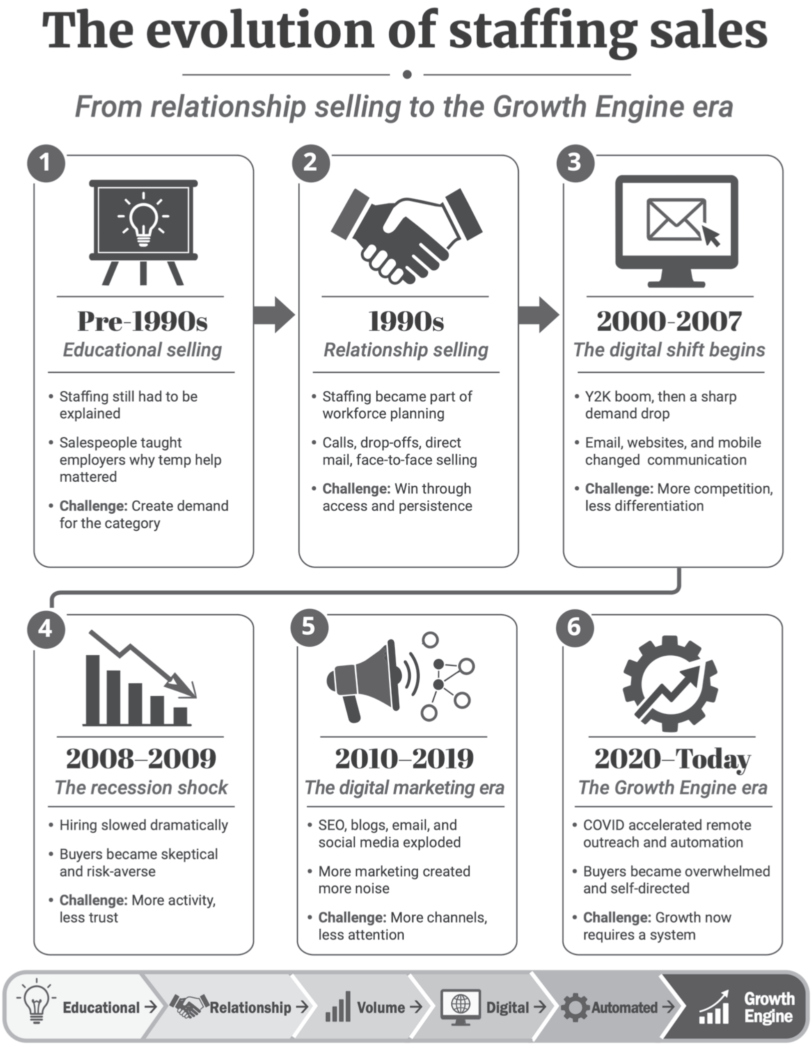
3. INCREASED RISK AVERSION AND COMPLEXITY

- **Stalled Deals:** 86% of B2B purchases stall during the process due to the complexity of gathering consensus among many stakeholders.[13]
- **Focus on Trust:** Because of years of overpromising by staffing vendors, trust has become a technical specification; peer reviews on platforms like G2 are more trusted than brand marketing.[14]

Feature	The Old Way	Today
Buyer Journey	Linear, rep-led	Non-linear, self-driven
Sales Interaction	Early engagement	Late, after most of the decision is formed
Decision-Maker	Single champion	Committee
Primary Source	Salesperson	Peers, reviews, AI, web
Outreach	Generic calls and email	Contextual, personalized, multi-touch

To win in this environment, companies must adopt a "buyer-enablement" approach, which we will cover in Chapter Eight.

12. "2022 Content Preferences Survey: B2B Buyers Crave Concise, Research-Based Content To Inform Purchasing Process," Demand Gen Report, accessed June 9, 2026, https://www.demandgenreport.com/resources/2022-content-preferences-survey-b2b-buyers-crave-concise-research-based-content-to-inform-purchasing-process/7283/.
13. "Forrester: To Master B2B Buying Mayhem, Providers Must Prioritize Buyers' Needs," Forrester, December 4, 2024, https://www.forrester.com/press-newsroom/forrester-the-state-of-business-buying-2024/.
14. "Securing Staffing's Future," StaffingHub, accessed June 9, 2026, https://marketing.staffinghub.com/staffing-trust-security-report; and "The Future of IT: Customer Trust," KPMG, archived October 8, 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20251008235340/https://kpmg.com/kpmg-us/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2022/future-it-trust.pdf.



THE DEATH OF "MAKE MORE CALLS"

The last few years have been among the toughest that the staffing industry has faced. While not as sharp a decline as The Great Recession, it's been a persistent, nearly three-year decline of 26% from the industry's 2022 peak.[15] This was compounded by internal turnover. Recruiter turnover reached roughly 46% in 2024, and earlier industry data put salesperson (account manager) turnover around 40% and recruiter turnover around 32%.[16]

However, the biggest change since COVID had little to do with the decline in revenue. No, the biggest change was people: more divisiveness, more distrust, and social isolation. These led to a severe decline in basic civility and loss of interest in human interaction and relationship building.

Blame it on the economy, remote work, politics, AI, or just the hangover that resulted from the pandemic. Blame it on whatever you want, but sales and marketing have changed. Not only is it harder to reach people, but it's harder (much harder) to gain their trust…if you can even figure out where to find them!

If you are in sales, in staffing, or any other B2B industry, what do you do? How do you get people to pay attention to your outreach? How do you get them to care about what you offer? How do you get them to trust what you say?

Selling alone is no longer enough.

Six facts follow from this. They are not arguments. They are the conditions every staffing firm is now operating in—the conditions the rest of this book is designed to work within, not around:

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15. Akash Taneja, "Staffing M&A: The Good & The Bad," Momentum Advisory Partners, March 2026, https://momentumadvisorypartners.com/where-staffing-ma-stands-early-2026.

16. Recruiter turnover reached 46% in 2024, as reported in "SIA's Executive Forum 2025 Is Upon Us," MeeDerby, March 7 2025, https://www.meederby.com/2025/03/07/sias-executive-forum-2025-is-upon-us/; earlier role-level data from 2022 showed account manager/AE turnover at ~40%, recruiter turnover at 31.9%, and internal employee turnover at 26.5% median and 29.4% average. See "2022 Staffing Employee Turnover Report," ClearlyRated, archived October 1, 2022, at https://web.archive.org/web/20221001082844/https://www.clearlyrated.com/solutions/2022-staffing-employee-turnover-report/. Additionally, the American Staffing Association, as cited by ClearlyRated in the same 2022 report, put the median annual turnover for account managers and recruiters at about 25%.

- Marketing has never been easier to produce and never harder to make meaningful.
- AI can create more content, but not more trust by default.
- Automation can increase speed but also increase commoditization.
- Systems create scale, but only if they are designed around human value.
- Marketing can be measured, but not everything valuable shows up immediately.
- Marketing does not replace sales. It accelerates sales, helping your firm stand out, stay top of mind, and sell more by building trust before, during, and after the sales conversation.

Quick Action: The Lead Source Audit

This week, look at your last 10 new clients. Where did each one come from? Not the official CRM source—the real story.

Did they come from a cold call? A referral? A search? A newsletter they had been receiving for months? A LinkedIn post someone shared? A conference connection?

Write down the honest answer for each one. What pattern do you see?

Most firms discover that their best clients came from a much narrower—and very different—set of sources than the sales team assumes. That pattern is where your marketing investment should follow. And it is the starting point for everything else in this book.

SALES DEPENDENCY AUDIT

Score each area 1-5 to assess how dependent your growth currently is on individual selling effort rather than a system.

Score	What It Means
1	Entirely dependent on individual rep effort—no system in place
2	Something informal exists, but it is not systematic or consistent
3	A basic process exists, but is not connected to a broader engine
4	Working and consistent, but could be stronger
5	Systematic, measured, and producing results independent of any one rep

Area	Current State (1-5)	Biggest Gap
Lead sources: Where do qualified conversations actually come from?		
Follow-up quality: What happens after a first conversation?		
Nurture process: What keeps prospects engaged between active sales conversations?		
Referral generation: Is there a process for generating referrals?		
Website support: Is your team able to use the website to support sales conversations?		
Buyer education: Does content help buyers understand the value before the first call?		

Your Priority Actions	
The area where we are most dependent on individual heroics:	
The one change that would most reduce that dependency:	

Selling alone is not enough. Next: See the system that makes selling work better. -> Chapter 2: The Sales Growth Engine, Visualized