

# Women in Sales



Learning from the women who  
smashed the glass ceiling



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**Women bring excellent skills to sales roles, particularly when it comes to modern social selling**

# Introduction

It's hard to make any generalisations when it comes to the differences between the sexes – everyone's experience is unique and should be valued. That being said, we believe that women bring excellent skills to sales roles, particularly when it comes to modern social selling – using news, blogs, social media, company information and the people you know to find customers, listen to their evolving needs, relate to their challenges and engage them in conversations that lead to successful commercial outcomes.

Social sellers need to take a softer approach to sales, shifting from competition to collaboration, and using all the information available to tailor their approach to the individual. What's more, buyers are *expecting* this personalised approach. Sellers must speak directly to the buyer's needs and challenges to form a consensus, and this is an area where women tend to excel.

However, breaking into sales isn't always as easy as a woman. We spoke to a number of sales women who have smashed the glass ceiling to become respected thought leaders in their field to get their insight into what is still a very male-dominated industry.



# Meet the Leaders

We asked the following industry leaders their thoughts on the big opportunities and challenges around being a women working in sales.



**Anneke Seley – @annekeseley** – Anneke was the first woman sales manager at Oracle in 1985, founding their inside sales organisation, OracleDirect (now a multi-million dollar global organisation).



**Jill Rowley – @jill\_rowley** – Hashtag-obsessed Jill switched careers from management consulting to become a keen social selling evangelist.



**Barbara Giamanco – @barbaragiamanco** – With over 25 years in sales, Barbara has a very successful C-level background in Sales, Technology and Leadership Development.



**Lori Richardson – @scoremoresales** – Lori began in technology sales as a young single mom in her early 20s and has been connected to B2B sales, sales leadership, sales consulting, training, blogging, writing and speaking ever since.



**Brynne Tillman – @SocialSalesLink** – Brynne began her career at Dun & Bradstreet, first taking inbound calls before moving into outbound sales calls. It was in sales that Brynne found her passion and has been excelling in the field ever since



**Afi Ofori – @WISawards** – Afi is the Managing Director of Zars Media, the organiser of the annual Women in Sales Awards that take place in Europe, India and North America. Before joining Zars, Afi held positions in the FT and Incisive Media with experience in client management and business development.



## Overview of Women in Sales

One of the key issues is the lack of women in major senior management roles with the number of female CEOs in Fortune 500 companies seemingly stuck at around 3%. Afi suggests one reason for this is the lack of women in revenue generating roles.

She told us:

**“Research involving the largest US corporations revealed that 62% of women are in job positions that provide service and assistance but which don’t directly generate revenue. These roles very rarely lead to major jobs in senior management. In contrast, 65% of men on executive committees previously held line jobs associated with revenue creation.”**

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Afi highlights the importance of encouraging diversity in the workplace and on boards as a way of making companies stronger in the modern business environment and one key way to do this is to encourage women to enter traditionally male-dominated fields such as Sales.

However overall the feedback from our thought leaders was pretty positive. They all thought that sales was, to use Anneke’s brilliant phrase, a

**“colour and gender blind profession”.**



As Lori told us:

**“Sales is an admirable profession and I was almost always judged by my numbers - as long as I sold things, I had my company’s support.” A feeling echoed by Barbara: “I didn’t care what the guys thought, because quota attainment is a great equalizer” and Brynne: “The bottom line is truly the bottom line, if you produced you were respected.”**

However, all of our thought leaders thought that there are issues around perceptions of and by women in sales that need addressing.

It was also extremely interesting to hear their thoughts around the skills and qualities that they believed women brought to sales. All agreed that generalisations should be limited, but when compared to a traditional, more aggressive ‘male’ approach, they thought women brought a different, more collaborative approach.

Afi emphasised it was key to recognise that women working in sales roles often excel at what they do giving the example of IBM’s Ginni Rometty who was IBM’s global sales leader before landing the Chief Executive role.

**“I didn’t care what the guys thought, because quota attainment is a great equalizer”**





## Perception versus Reality – How do Women view Sales Roles?

The majority of the women we spoke with thought that there was a problem in the perception most women have of sales as a career choice.

**“In my opinion, many women, especially after they have some work experience, lack the confidence to go into sales because of the perceived risk of a commission plan based comp package,”**

Anneke told us.

But she also thought women shouldn't be concerned with commission plans or view them as risky because, in reality, they were likely to exceed targets.

Barbara suggests that

**“women often view sales as a sleazy profession and thus don't enter into selling as a career.”**

However, she continues on to say:

**“I think that is a mistake. My sales career has presented me with many great opportunities. I also love that no two days are the same. Flexibility, a variety of people to work with, something new to learn every day, great money what's not to love?”**

There also seemed to be a slight male bias in technology sales.

Lori told us that:

**“In technology sales, it was quite an old boys' network. Fortunately my skills and deals closed proved my abilities and once you're proven, most people happily support you.”**

This perception was shared by Barbara who said that

**“some of the guys thought their technology knowledge was superior to mine. It wasn't.”**



# The Language of Sales – Does ‘He’ Dominate?

Another area where our thought leaders saw challenges for women was in the language that had been adopted by the industry.

Lori said it best when she commented:

**“One big issue is that women don’t tend to use “war” words - kill ‘em, killer, blow ‘em up – so early in a recruiting effort, a top woman seller might be turned off by a company’s environment. I heard a sales speaker talk last week on stage about how you don’t need a shotgun in prospecting, you need a cannon. It is something I will never relate to, but I can grasp what he’s talking about using other analogies.”**

Barbara also mentions this issue of recruitment of women into sales roles:

**“The language used to describe sales roles can be off-putting. For example, you see things like Wanted, aggressive rock star who will get out there and hunt business. You’ll see terms like warrior, killer, quota crusher, take no prisoners attitude all these terms lead women to think that a career in sales is not for them. And, frankly, buyers don’t want to work with hunters, warriors or quota crushers.”**





# The Value of Softer Skills

**I think we all sell differently as individuals. However, in general, women often bring stronger soft skills to the table. In my experience women will nurture a sale.** Afi Ofori, MD of Zars Media

Instead of an aggressive “quota crushing” attitude, many of our thought leaders said that softer, more collaborative skills and approaches were more effective at making sales.

Jill summed it up best when she explained the traits of a great sales professional included:

**“coachability, curiosity, intelligence, adaptability, team player, and empathy. Buyers respond to salespeople who are helpful, smart, and respectful of their needs, not pushy-pushy selly-selly strong-armed sales tactics.”**

Barbara added:

**“I do think that women tend to be more collaborative and consultative. The aim is to work with the customer to solve their business problems. That means not only doing research in advance of sales conversations, it means asking the right questions and listening to the answers. Not listening so that you can swoop in and pitch, but listening to truly understand what problems the buyer is trying to solve.”**

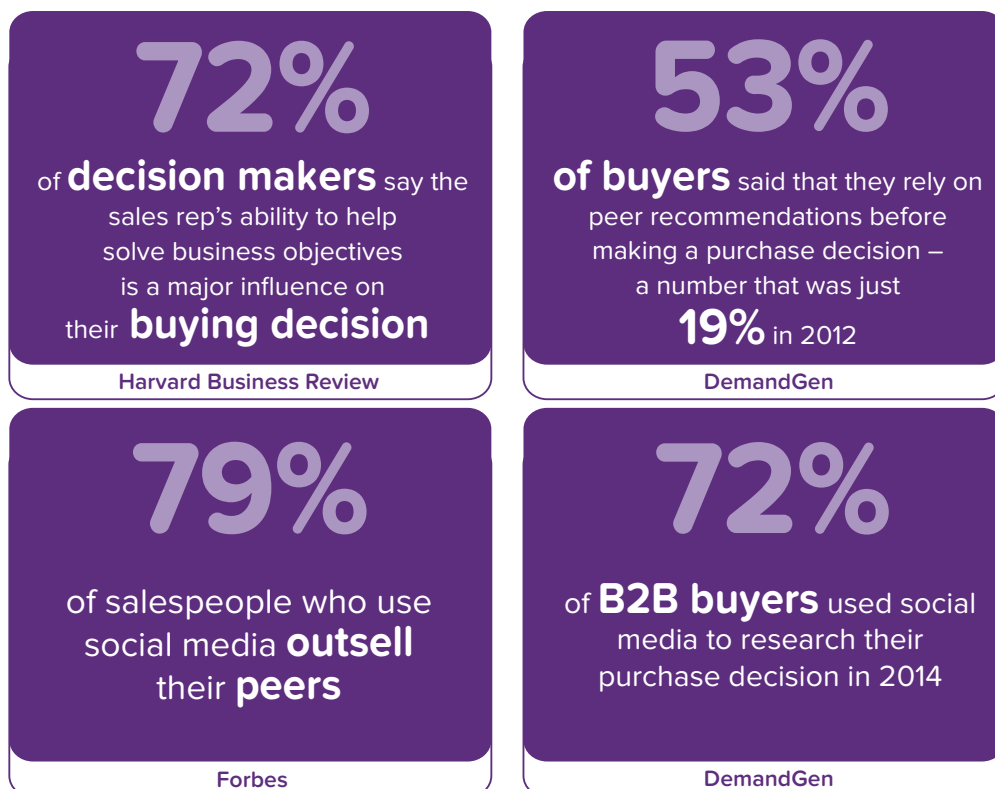
While Lori eloquently concluded:

**“Women tend also to be better collaborators with their buyers - working together instead of an ‘us against them’ sort of seller vs. buyer atmosphere I’ve seen.”**



## The Effect of Social Selling

When it came to the topic of social selling, our thought leaders all agreed that it was the most effective approach for the modern market. Jill cited a number of useful stats to back up this point:



Many of the women we spoke to commented that social selling also served as a great equaliser between the sexes.

**“I think social selling in general has levelled the playing field. No matter who you are, what company you represent, where you live or what you do, you have the opportunity to have an equal voice on equal platforms,”** explained Brynne.

Lori mentioned the 2014 Harvard Business Review whitepaper, *Winning at Sales in a Buyer Empowered World*, which revealed that,

**“buyers are looking to work with salespeople who get to know their business and truly care about helping them solve their business challenges.”**



Jill agrees:

**“In sales, our job is to serve our customers. Happy customers willing to be strong advocates of our company, our product, and of us are our best salespeople. The happier I made my customers, the easier I made it for my sales colleagues to grow their business.”**

**“As a result of [our] questions, we were essentially crafting the makeup of a social selling program they want to put in place. I didn’t have to ‘sell’ them,”**

Barbara explains.



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# The Challenges Still to Overcome

## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

“The corporate world in general does not do a good job of retaining women who are interested in ‘having a life’ outside their work. Companies that want to retain women (and men) are now offering programs such as paternity leave, flex time, telecommuting, unlimited vacation time and other options.”



There are so many women in sales who are also engaging and dynamic speakers, so why don't we see more of them on the main stage?

That's the view of Anneke Seley, who advocates integrating these in recruitment, retention and promotion programmes. This would help to ensure that the right language is being used to advertise the position, that both women and men have the opportunity for a successful career in sales while managing a life outside of work, and to ensure women are being paid and promoted in-line with their male counterparts.

This frustration was echoed by Brynne, who summed up by saying:

“I would like to see all opportunities equalized for minorities and women. It would be ideal if people were simply paid for what they are worth.”

## CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Jill pointed to Sheryl Sandberg's TED Talk for evidence that

“the data shows companies perform better when they have more women in C-Suite positions and in board roles,”





suggesting that

**“we can’t continue to ignore the issues that are preventing women from rising to the top. We must find ways to overcome the hurdles preventing women from advancing their careers.”**

Lori Richardson highlights the fact that sales teams don’t represent the customer base it sells to. Many buyers are women, yet very few sales people are women.

**“We need more diversity in professional selling. More successful women and women sales leaders,”**

she concludes.

## **VISIBILITY OF WOMEN IN SALES**

Several of our thought leaders also mentioned the lack of representation of women in sales – at conferences, training days, corporate events – leading to an overall lack of visibility of successful sales women.

**“There are so many women in sales who are also engaging and dynamic speakers, so why don’t we see more of them on the main stage?”**

ask Barbara.

**“Sales continues to be dominated by men. At least that’s the impression you get when you look at the speaker make-up of most sales conferences. Out of 25 speakers, you might see two women on the roster. That’s a problem.”**

She does however praise Lori Richardson’s *Women Sales Pros*, which she describes as

**“a great resource for salespeople looking to improve their skills and when conference organizers are looking for great speakers.”**

Lori herself comments that she’d

**“like to see a business conference have speakers who look like the members of the audience.”**

A sensible suggestion.



# The Future of Women in Sales

Yes there are great women already taking on important roles in Sales but there's still a lot to do. To continue growing the success of women in Sales, we need to:

- Encourage women into sales roles
- Support their career progression
- Enhance the visibility of women in sales
- Equalise pay and opportunities for development
- Overcome hurdles to development that see women shut out of the board room

When Afi was asked

**'What advice do you have for a young woman thinking about sales as a career?', she told us: For young women thinking about a career in sales I would ask them this: "what career paths do they know of that enable you to learn about so many different industries and companies? And what career paths, at the same time, offer you the opportunity to hone your entrepreneurial skills?"**

The only answer I know of is Sales! The skills you learn in sales will not only benefit your business life but your personal life as well. Now how many careers can offer that!

And as we look to the future, it's important to celebrate some of the amazing achievements our sales leaders have achieved in their careers so far.



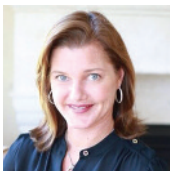
## WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?



Anneke Seley

“Being part of the success of Oracle through rapid growth from a company with just 12 employees to a massive global enterprise with over 60,000 employees.

OracleDirect, the sales organisation we created, was cutting-edge for its time and generated huge high-profit incremental revenue for the company. And many of the people we recruited into the team are now tech industry leaders; I’m incredibly proud that they’ve done so well.”



Jill Rowley

“I am probably most proud of winning the 2011 Eloqua Employee of the Year Award. In the history of the company, no one in sales had ever won any of the all employee awards, much less the Employee of the Year Award.”



Lori Richardson

“Every deal I closed – hundreds of dollars to multi-million dollar deals. I love to win.”



Barbara Giamanco

“While I was with Ingram Micro early in my sales career, I remember how proud I was to be named Salesperson of the Year. I was 4 years into my professional sales career, so winning that award was a pretty big deal. In a way, it put me on the map. The more experienced salespeople in the company definitely took notice of who I was.”



Brynne Tillman

“I realized that I figured [social selling on LinkedIn] out, I knew exactly how to use the tool, teach the tool and get sales professionals to get fast results. The program was incredible, it was ready to launch as a stand-alone – so I launched my company just 2 years ago and now am impacting tens of thousands of business development professionals.”

## Recognising Success – The Women in Sales Awards

Afi Ofori MD of Zars Media created the Women in Sales Awards to bring a greater awareness of the need for gender diversity in sales and in executive leadership teams, as well as help grow the pipeline of female sales talent and to eventually pave the way for more women to gain board positions.

She told us

**“The other reason I created the awards is that sales sometimes gets a bad reputation and my dream is that, through these awards, people will come to recognise how important a career in sales is and respect the skills required to be a great sales person. Sales is an art. The ability to understand a client’s needs and deliver what they require is one that only the talented few ever truly master.”**

**Learn more about  
the Women in Sales  
Awards here.**





## HOW ARTESIAN CAN HELP

Artesian works to make salespeople even more awesome. In fact - we are the world's most powerful sales intelligence solution for B2B sellers.

**So how do we do it?** Our app supports you from pipeline generation and securing your first meeting to building customer relationships, retention and growth. First we gather and track intelligence on customers, prospects and competitors from millions of online resources including blogs, news and social platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn. Then by using clever science to filter and transform all this information into commercial insights, we enable you to target, connect and share with customers and prospects on any device, at any time.

**We're with you every step of the way** with our full training suite as part of Artesian Academy, so whether you prefer to learn face-to-face, through webinars or with ebooks, case studies and how-to guides, we're showing you not only how to make the most of Artesian but also how to become an awesome social seller.

**When it comes to onboarding new members of the team, all the industry information they need is already at their fingertips.** We measure your success with a Social Seller score so you can always see where you're rocking it and where you can make some positive changes. Most importantly, Artesian is quick and easy to use so the time we save you doing research or pitching inappropriately – you can use to sell more and in a way that creates value for you and your customers. Pretty awesome, right?

**We're changing the way B2B sellers communicate with their audience for the better, forever.** Right now Artesian delivers over 37 million actionable insights per month on almost 700,000 companies to our 25,000+ social savvy users. Our amazing customers range finance, tech, telcos, media and insurance and include great companies like American Express, Adobe, Barclays, HSBC, Royal Bank of Scotland, Towergate, Willis and Verizon.

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