A FREE GUIDE FROM NICK BURNS

Nick's 5 Insights for Selling More Tech

Simple fundamentals that turned a technical founder into someone who closed multimillion dollar deals.

The beautiful thing about tech businesses is how passionate technical founders are. I've never met a founder, or a person involved in an early-stage business, that doesn't have a fire in their belly for the journey they are on and what they are creating.

What many don't realise is that the passion and belief they have translates into 50% of the sale. In other words, you are halfway there to closing a sale with such belief in your product or service. And you probably don't even realise it.

Why do I say this? Well, selling is primarily an emotional process, with a small amount of rational justification to support the emotion the buyer is feeling. So passion and belief are obvious to the buyer, and something they align to and remember before they think about the technical solution you have presented.

Where technical people generally go wrong is how they communicate their expertise and their product.

One of the biggest shortcomings is where technical people over-focus on what they know and fail to connect with the buyer on what they want and need. This leads to a bizarre scenario where the seller thinks they have knocked it out of the park with an awesome technical presentation, while the buyer is underwhelmed, because they haven't connected what was presented to their own problems, wants and needs.

And the reality is, there are simple solutions to this problem. I am a technical founder who by default ended up selling as if my life depended on it. It took a while, learning by doing, but I adopted simple fundamentals that ultimately turned me into a successful salesperson who sold multimillion dollar deals. It's a pleasure to share these shortcuts with you.

Insight 1: "Interesting" does not mean "interested"

"Wow, that's interesting!" We often hear words like interesting and take them literally, assuming the audience loves what we presented. So we carry on giving more and more information, and may even hear those words again and again.

But if we don't clarify why the audience finds it interesting, we can spend time heading down a path that leads away from making a sale.

So while you are comfortable talking about your solution, take the time to clarify what it is about your solution that the audience actually likes.

Simply put, regularly pause and ask for feedback. Then discuss that feedback with the audience. Most of the time you'll need to pivot or change direction to maximise the interest shown, and that can feel scary at first. But you know your stuff, so you can always return to where you were once the conversation settles.

Insight 2: How your product solves THEIR problems

You know your stuff. But how well do you know your audience's stuff? Until you can connect what the audience wants to do with what you offer, no sale is going to happen.

Whenever you present, discuss your product in terms of what it will do for the audience in front of you. If you're unsure, ask questions early: Tell me about your organisation. What are the biggest challenges you face? What are the major areas or projects you're focused on?

Then express your value in their terms: Imagine if you could do A, which results in B. You mentioned you had this problem, we can help with that by doing this. By doing X with our product, you solve the Y problem you mentioned.

You'll be amazed how many more questions the audience asks. That's a sure sign you're on the path to selling.

Insight 3: Clean Sheet Selling

I remember arriving at a first sales meeting with a major healthcare facility without my prepared presentation. Panic set in. But it took long enough to get the meeting, so there was no turning back.

I had two choices: wing the presentation from memory, or treat the meeting as a clean sheet and learn as much as I could about the audience while sharing what we offer as the conversation unfolded. I chose the latter, and that meeting started a far more effective way of selling.

Clean Sheet Selling means going into early sales meetings without a prescribed presentation, open to learning about the audience, while backing yourself that you know your stuff.

It forces a technical person to ask questions and learn before telling. On most occasions you shouldn't be demoing on the first meeting anyway, because you don't yet know how it helps them. In that healthcare case, we closed the sale, and they became one of our closest customers. They felt we took the time to understand them, rather than it being about us.

Insight 4: Use an online sales tool, for free

Sales is a numbers game. You need a steady flow of interested buyers to convert some into paying customers. Sales is what brings the money in. No sales, no business.

The more you spread your wings, the more you need to manage your focus in terms of time and money, because you don't have bottomless pockets. A simple way to keep that focus is a free or low-cost CRM. To this day I use one.

A CRM lets you record, measure and access all sales activity, so you can answer the questions that actually manage sales:

How many prospects do we have in play? What stage is each at? What's the potential value of the deals? What are the most pressing priorities? How effective is our selling? Just like you manage development sprints, a CRM gives you a framework to manage sales. And you don't need to be fancy.

Insight 5: Because EVERY interaction is a sale

At its simplest, one person needs to sell something and another needs to buy it, whether it's an idea, a service or a product.

Every time you engage with a person, a sale is taking place. You want someone to do something, or you're being asked to do something. Someone needs to agree to move forward.

So why not practise selling every time you communicate? Try a clean sheet: find out what motivates your team, then tailor what you ask based on what you learn. Ask questions to understand and listen, before asking for something or telling people what you want.

It's time for techs to sell more tech

Take the passion you have for building great technology and apply it to building great relationships. Next time you're chatting at the water cooler or around the dinner table, ask questions, listen, and learn how you can help. Then take what you know and apply it to what you've just learned. You might be surprised by the results. And don't be surprised when you sell more.

Ready to grow your sales with confidence?

Get your free Growth Scorecard at nickburns.nz. In about six minutes you'll see where your sales engine is leaking - then book a call and we'll agree the one thing to fix first. It's yours to keep, whether or not we work together.

About Nick Burns

Nick co-founded healthcare analytics company Emendo in 2002, improving patient flow and operational costs in hospitals around the world. A technical person by training, he became the company's sales evangelist, from its first sale through to multimillion dollar international deals, and a successful exit to McKesson, a Fortune 10 company, in late 2012.

Since then, Nick has helped 60+ technology companies grow sales with confidence, in New Zealand and internationally, through personal leadership and sales expertise built on honesty and high-trust relationships. He is a former chair of The Clown Doctors NZ Charitable Trust, sits on the board of Pillars (Ka Pou Whakahou), and mentors founders through Business Mentors New Zealand.