



*Review: To Sell is Human  
By Daniel Pink  
April 2015*

*Reviewed by Jonathan Poisner, [www.poisner.com](http://www.poisner.com)*

I'm a big fan of Daniel Pink. I've repeatedly promoted on my blog [a white board video](#) he produced on how to motivate people.

As a result, I was excited to learn he was the author of [To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth about Moving Others](#), a book recommended to me by someone who attended one of my fundraising trainings. The "trainee," who was trying to transition out of a high tech sales job into the nonprofit world, told me that Pink's book on sales matched up nicely with what I was saying. She said Pink's book would be a great read for aspiring fundraisers.

I read the book to see if I should be recommending it.

Pink would definitely agree that fundraising is a type of sales. He defines sales as including "non-sales selling," which includes anyone "persuading or influencing others to give up something in exchange for what you've got." The book repeatedly cites studies on fundraising to support tactics he believes make for more effective sales.

Overall, I'm glad I read it. There were numerous "that's interesting" moments and a couple takeaways that will stick with me. But at the same time, I was underwhelmed.

The first part of the book makes the case that we're all in sales, with an interesting history about how changes in society have led more and more jobs to embody aspects of sales – defined as broadly as possible. He calls this "the rise of non-sales selling."

Yet, at the same time, many of these changes have altered the power dynamic between sellers and buyers so that buyers have far more power than in the past – more information available to them about products and services, as well as the ability to "talk back" on social media.

The second part of the book transitions to a discussion of three qualities that Pink believes are the most valuable in moving others.

"Atunement" is the ability to bring ones actions and outlook into harmony with other people and with the context in which they operate. In other words, are you able to put yourself in their shoes? Or, more to the point, can you get in their head and understand their heart?

“Buoyancy” is the ability to stay positive amidst repeated rejection – which is something all salespeople and fundraisers need to accept will be part of their life. If you see rejection as temporary, specific, and external, you are more likely to succeed. In contrast, if you feel rejection as permanent, general, and a personal statement about you, you’re more likely to flounder.

“Clarity” is the capacity to help others see their situation in fresh and more revealing ways, identifying problems they didn’t realize they had. In his words, Pink says the best salespeople are not just problem-solvers, but problem-finders for their potential customers.

The third part of the book focuses on some tactics to use in moving others.

These include a discussion of the ability to pitch ideas in today’s world of information overload, to improvise, and to be seen as in service to those to whom you’re “selling.”

After each chapter in the second and third parts of the book, Pink offers practical advice. These range from exercises you can do to additional reading. A few of the exercises seemed really valuable. But others felt impractical and gimmicky to me.

The book was chock full of interesting studies that supported Pink’s assertions. For example, he cited multiple studies showing the best salespeople are “ambiverts” – people who’re roughly in the middle of the continuum between extraverts and introverts. This is an interesting contradiction of the conventional wisdom that salesmen should be extraverts. My instinct based on experience is ambiverts would also be the best fundraisers.

Yet, despite lots of bits and pieces to the book that were valuable, I was not wowed. It felt at times as if Pink was throwing the kitchen sink of ideas at the reader, which ironically runs counter to his advice about simplifying pitches.

If you’re looking to become a well-rounded reader on sales as understood in the broadest sense, and how it relates to fundraising, Pink’s book seems a good addition to a library. But if you’re looking to read just one book on sales, this probably isn’t it.

*Jonathan Poisner is an independent management consultant who helps nonprofit organizations thrive. He helps organizations with strategic planning, coalition building, fundraising, communications, executive coaching, and other organizational development challenges. He can be reached at [jonathan@poisner.com](mailto:jonathan@poisner.com).*