

Driving sales in challenging times

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EDA



01752 220979 | plymouth@wilsonpartners.co.uk | wilson-partners.co.uk

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partners.**



Peter Hill

Director at Wilson Partners with a portfolio of clients ranging across all different industries

Over 40 years experience helping drive business performance, and in a direct selling role within the business.

Regular Speaker on a range of topics

Author of 'Pricing for Profit'



Mark Whittaker

Director at Wilson Partners In 1989 (!) joined as Office Junior (Then Mark Holt & CO) and have progressed to Accounting and Business Services Director.

In that time, have enjoyed working with an extensive portfolio of clients ranging from individuals to large corporate clients covering a broad range of business sectors.

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Today's agenda

- 1 Context - The world we are in and how it is changing.
- 2 Order taker Vs Salesperson
- 3 The importance of language
- 4 Customer classification
- 5 The confidence Gap



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These are challenging times

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Many of the economic indicators are flashing red...


- The war in Ukraine continues. The war in Iran remains unresolved. Trump seems in no hurry
- Interest rate falling slower than expected. (Held at 3.75%, but BOE suggests they could go back above 5% by end of year)
- Inflation is stubborn, and will rise due to energy cost increases and supply chain issues
- Unemployment rates increasing (particularly in younger age groups).
- Economic and political uncertainty (Nationally and internationally)
- A shift in technology that will change all businesses. AI being adopted but not yet the perfect solution, will get better, fast!!

All business should always be adapting to the world around them.

But things are changing faster than ever!

W. The speed of change is accelerating

Number of years it took
each product to gain
50 million users



Any business that does not embrace technology, and manage key data effectively, will be left behind.

The technology of customer management is a business-critical issue. CRM/Lead management etc.

The style / type of communication, and the personalisation of contact points with targets and customers is critical.

The value of data on your customers' spending habits is huge.

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In your business sector there are some mixed messages

- The construction sector as a whole is down on the previous year.
- The PMI is the lowest since 2020.
- Housebuilding, commercial construction and civil engineering hit hardest.
- The building of Data centers is seeing huge growth as AI usage increases. (But affected by energy costs!)
- There is an energy supply concern, and green energy will zoom up the agenda for individuals and businesses.

Everything is changing at a rapid rate, both positively and negatively.

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In other ways things haven't changed at all

- Cash is king.
- Not all customers are good customers. (Bad debts will increase)
- The price of copper goes up!
- Banks want to lend you money when you don't need it, and not when you do! (borrow when you don't need to!)
- Most businesses are focused on turnover and not profit.
- Even in a struggling economy, well run businesses thrive. If the market falls 5%, some businesses may still grow a lot!
- The fundamentals of good business have not changed (they never do!).
 - **The right team**
 - **The right products**
 - **The right customers**
 - **Strong financial control**

The order taker

- Chats and build rapport
- Discusses needs
- Places order - £x
- Leaves

The sales person

- Chats and build rapport
- Discusses needs
- Places Order - £x
- Keeps talking...

- Explores extras and add ons - £+10%/20%
- Discusses
 - Future Projects
 - Referrals
 - Market Intelligence
 - Personal info - family, holidays etc.
- Leaves
- Records information on CRM system
- Follows up on any specific points i.e. a month before a new project
- Maintains regular contact

Identifies additional opportunity now

Build relationships and identifies future opportunity

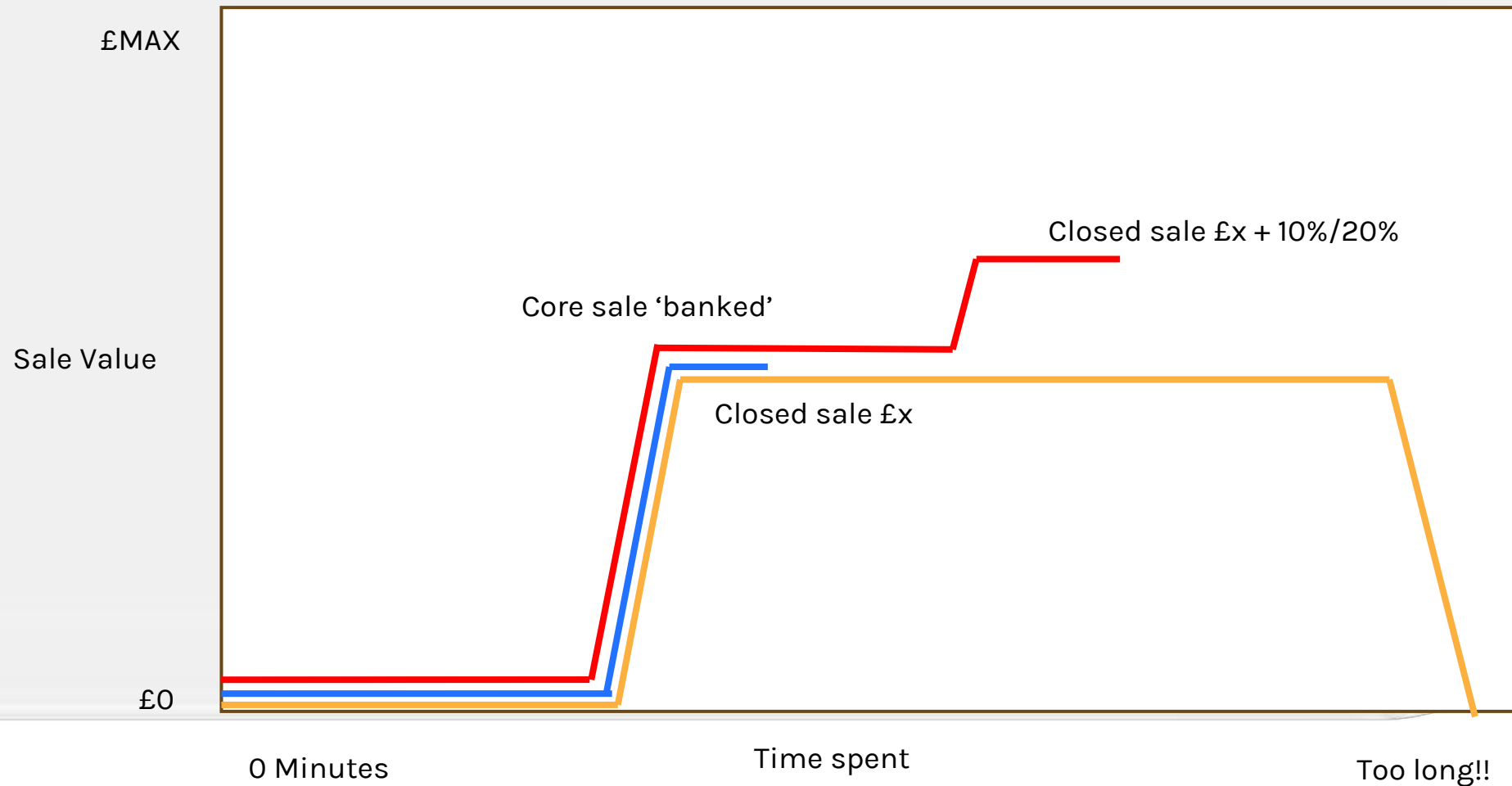
Ensures future opportunities are not missed

Builds recurring relationships

The effort to get into the sales dialogue is the same in each situation.
The extra time invested may be only 10 minutes but adds the greatest value.

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Close the sale then keep talking...



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The failed sales call – Common mistakes

1. **Arriving late** - Puts the salesperson on the back foot immediately and sets the wrong tone from the offset.
2. **Lack of Preparation and Poor Research** – Not prepared properly for meeting. In a recent survey 42% admitted attending a sales call without doing any research or preparation and 40% of salespeople spent more time chasing leads than actually selling.
3. **Meeting took too long and was unstructured** – The sales call fails because there is no clear objective, conversation lacks structure and drifts. It takes too long to get to the crunch of the meeting, and it is not concluded satisfactorily.
4. **Failing to meet the customers needs** – the customer has a need for product A and the salesperson spends most of the meeting trying to sell product B. Asking open questions can ensure the meeting is properly directed.
5. **Too Pushy and Only Interested in the order** – studies clearly show pressure tactics significantly erode trust and satisfaction, while much milder “directive” nudges retain more positive outcomes.
6. **Added Nothing for the customer** – often sales calls or visits are unsuccessful because the salesperson offers nothing other than a brochure of products. It is key that they demonstrate the value you can provide by adding more than a list of products and prices. This can include industry intelligence, new ideas or product knowledge.

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The importance of language

The use of the correct language can be critical for a successful sales meeting and building relationships with customers, some key examples would be:

- *'You' vs 'We'* – the focus should always be the customers needs. (*We care Vs You want a partner that cares*)
- *'Value' and 'Investment' vs 'Price' and 'Cost'* – Price is negative and negotiable. Investment suggest an ongoing relationship
- *'Products' vs 'Solutions'* – Products suggests simple and generic (anyone can provide), solutions suggests tailored and value added.
- *'Prospects or targets' vs 'Future Customers'* – Your behaviours change if you see them as customers who just haven't spent money yet.

We would also recommend having some key phrases you often use with customers, these can include:

- *"The majority of our customers prefer....."*
- *"The reason our customers switch to us is....."*
- *"Most of our customers value service above price....."*

The key is that it is not just what is said, but the impact of specific phrases and how it can change customers perception.

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It's not just a chocolate pudding...

We have run many events where we asked participants to suggest a price of three things...

Your car valeted

Your car valeted using state of the art chemicals to bring your car back to its original shown room condition!

Steak and Chips

A locally sourced steak, cooked to order, with a tower of triple cooked skin on fries, and a selection of fresh seasonable vegetables

Your tax return completed

Your tax return completed and filed within HMRC deadline, making sure all tax allowances have been claimed, and that you are compliant with all the tax reporting requirements.

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It's not just a chocolate pudding...

In every case, the expectation of price using the more descriptive information, was around double that of the simpler description.

That doesn't mean customers will pay twice as much, but their focus is switched to VALUE, and not PRICE.

How we say things matters.

Salespeople need to choose their words carefully, and prepare in advance to focus on the non-price elements.

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Brief Pause...

A moment to reflect

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Customer classification

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Customer classification

Let's just explore this with a real example.

We have run projects for a wide range of businesses. Strangely, for those that shift boxes (Electrical wholesalers, Builder's merchants, Plumbers merchants etc) the results are staggeringly similar, regardless of the size of the business.

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Growth must be controlled – Customer classification

Premium customers (A)

- Quality more important than price.
- Expect great service.
- Want ideas and proactivity.

£ = 66% of turnover
No = 5% of all customers

Profit £ = 80%

Normal customers (B)

- Make VFM judgements
- Judge you on 'how' you deliver.
- Generally loyal.

£ = 32% of turnover
No = 45% of all customers

Profit £ = 35%

Poor customers (C)

- Want cheaper, or have no money.
- Slow payers.
- Complain.

£ = 2% of turnover
No = 50% of all customers

Loss £ = 15%

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Customer classification – Part 1

The amount a customer spends is only one of the criteria that decides if they are A's B's or C's

We will need to identify the other criteria that we can use to place customers into these categories.

We need to consider all the possible methods to identify three core categories of customers, beyond simply the amount the spend.

In other businesses this might include...

- Financial strength.
- Growth potential.
- Account management.

It is important to be as specific as you can on any criteria that you decide is valuable data to slice and dice the customer lists. Whilst there can be some subjectivity (are they nice to deal with? Do they refer other customers?) if it is too subjective the analysis will be biased.

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Customer classification – Part 2

The critical issue is not the identification of these categories, but what changes in the way you deal with those in these categories.

What does an 'A' customer get that a 'C' customer does not?

- How we communicate with them (Face to face, teams, e-mails) and how often.
- Pricing and discounting policies. Are C's cash only and full price?
- Credit limits.
- Who they can speak to (can a £100 a year customer get the same attention as a £10k one?)

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Customer classification – Objectives

The key issue is that in challenging times we need to maximise our return on effort and protect key customers. We can't waste time on the wrong customers or the wrong actions.

Many businesses we work with make no distinction between A, B or C grade customers. What an analysis will show in almost every business, is that a small number of customers are critical to future success, and a large number actually cost you money to serve.

Being clear on who are the A's B's and C's, and differentiating how we look after them, we avoid wasting time and resources on the wrong customers.

- A grade accounts need extra TLC as you cannot afford to lose them.
- B Grade customers have potential to spend even more if you cultivate them properly.
- Many C grade customers actually lose you money, and you may be better off without them.

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So, do we bin the 'C' grade customers?

Once you identify those C grade customers, you have already decided that they are the wrong ones to work with, *on the current terms*.

The right action is to change the terms, and try and make them B grades...

- Increase prices (or limit discounts) to make them more profitable.
- Set minimum order quantities to increase sale value and make the sale more efficient.
- Cash only, no credit. (cheaper and no bad debt risk)
- Online sales only. (no expensive people time invested)

If they accept these changes, then they may be worth having. If they don't, they will leave of their own volition and start draining the resources and energy of a competitor!

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Brief Pause

A moment to reflect

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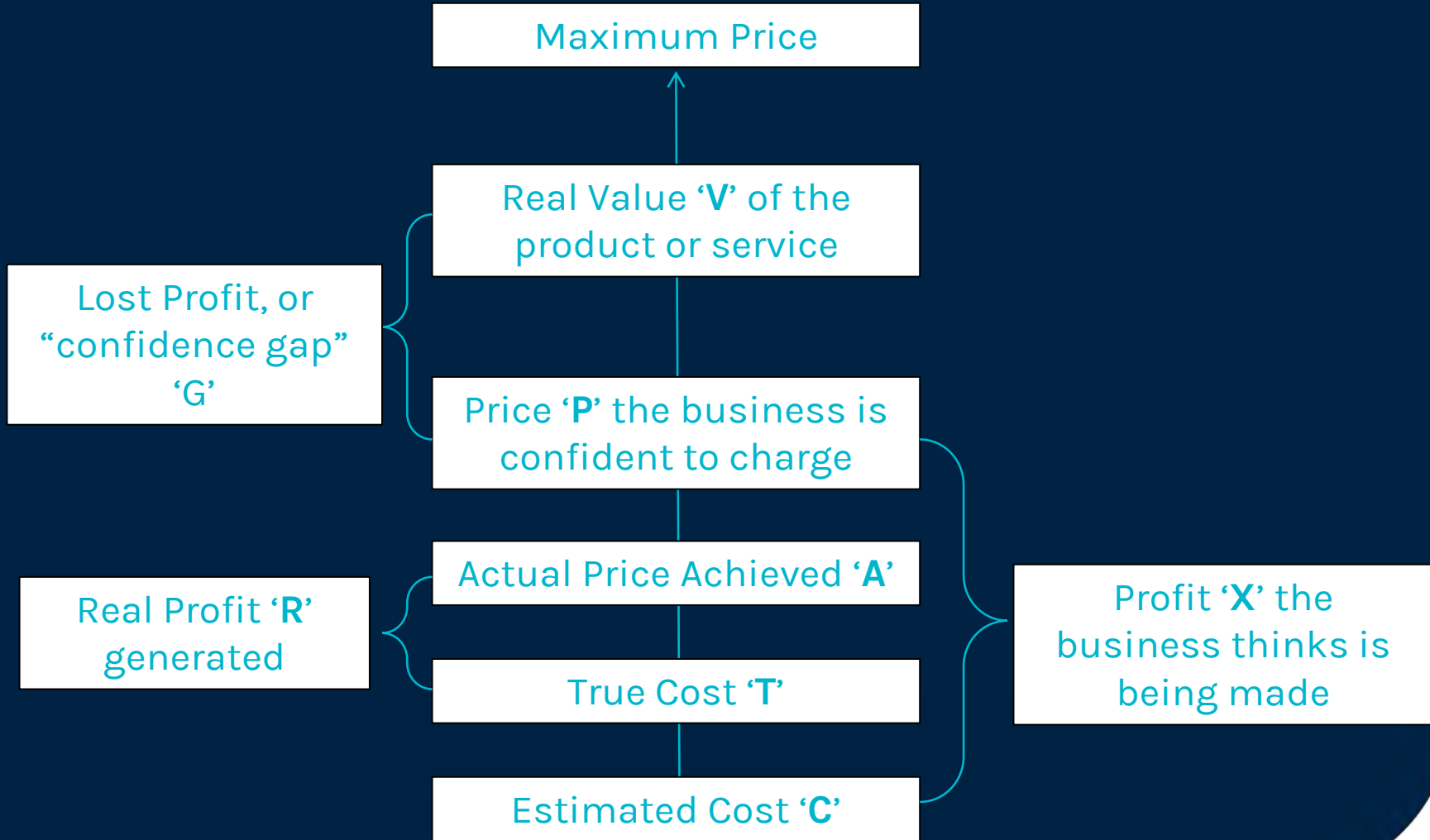
The confidence gap

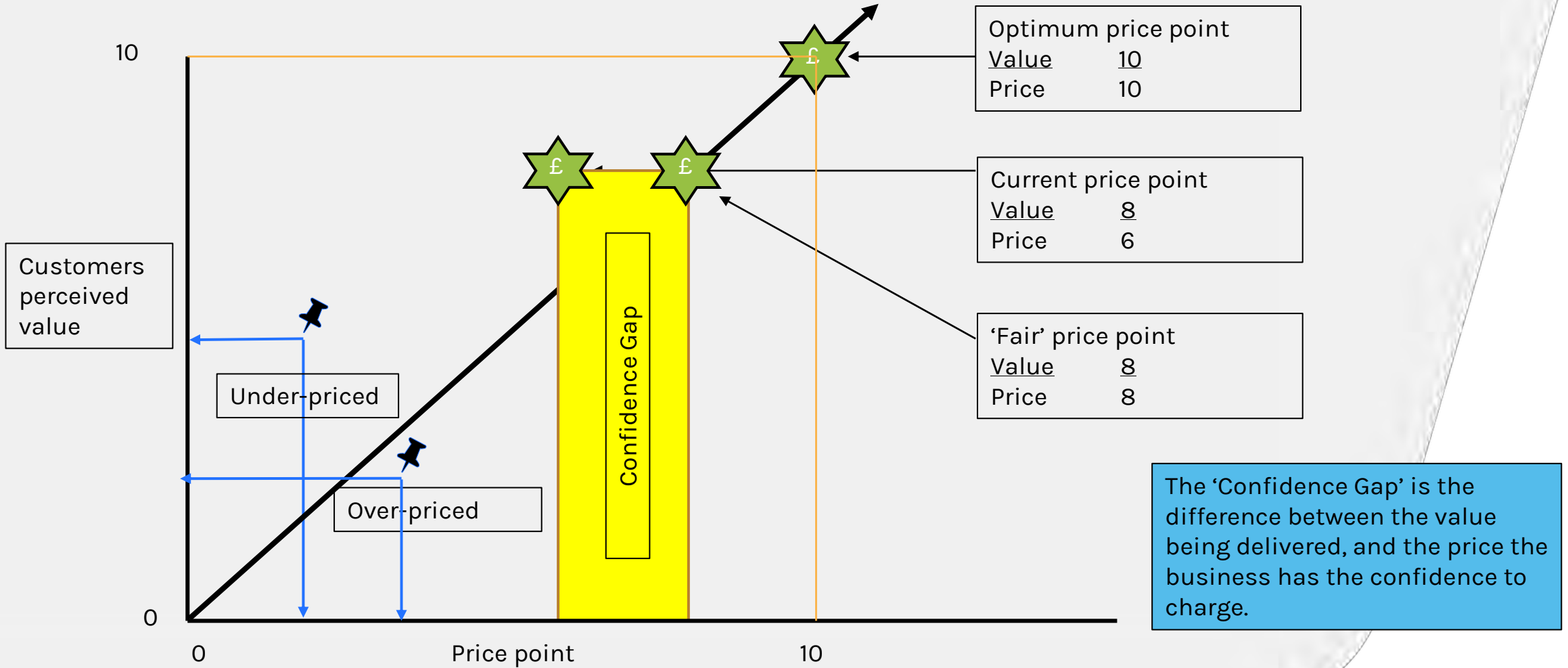
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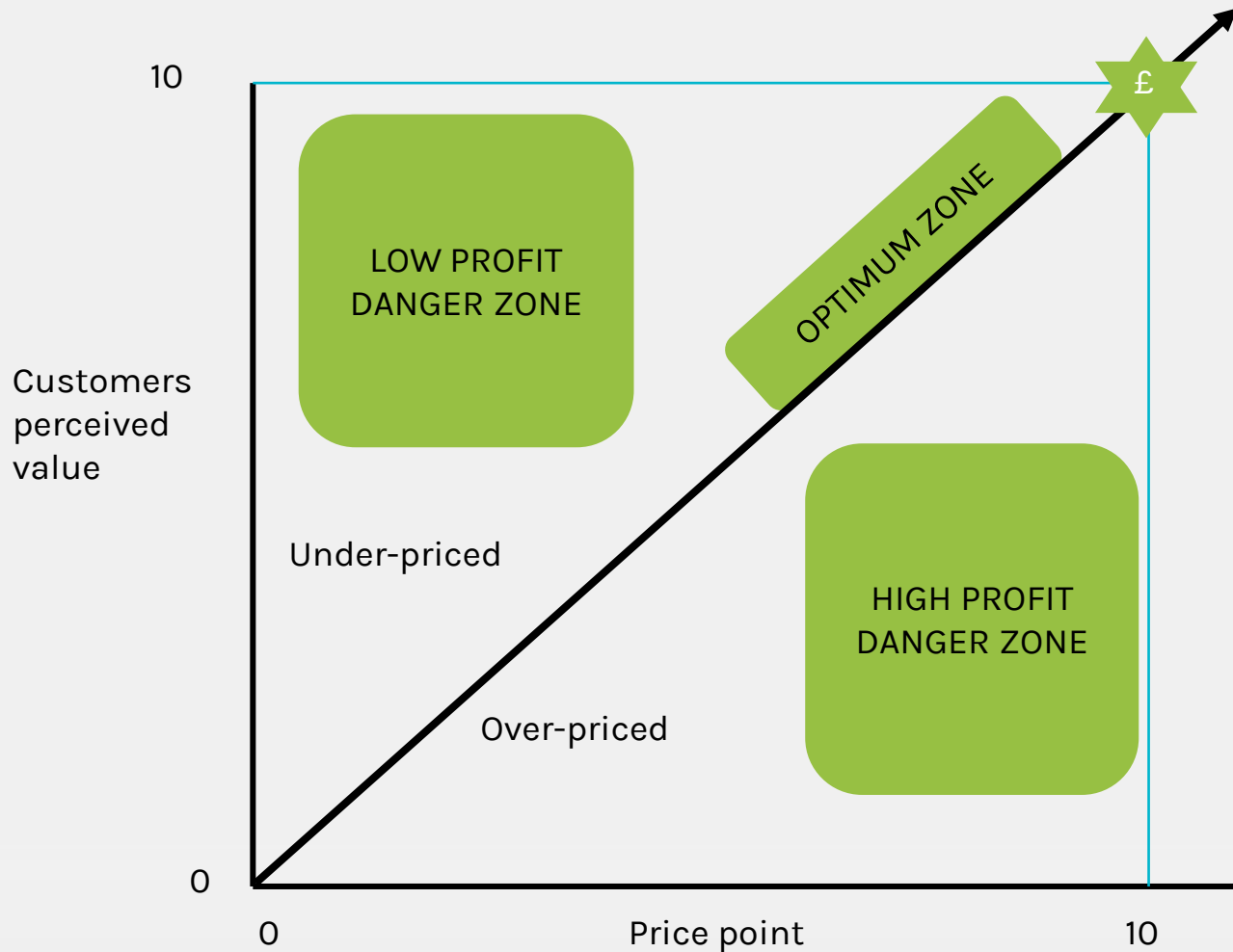
Why do we under price and under sell?

The reality for many businesses is that they are simply leaving money on the table in a lot of sales situations.

Why?







As you move away from the optimum line, you enter a danger zone.

Above the line risks low margins and growth without profit.

Below the line risks customer dissatisfaction in the medium term, and future lost sales.

The target price is just above the top of the optimum line.

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So how do you get into the *optimum zone*?

The objective in any sales negotiation is to achieve a balance for both sides.

- Buyer believes what they are paying reflects the value they are getting.
- Seller believes the amount they receive reflects the value they are delivering.

If there is an imbalance (i.e. the customer expresses a concern that the price you are asking is higher than the value they are getting).

Then this will lead to further discussion, and potentially “no-sale”.

There are two fixes to this situation...

1. Reduce the price (the most common solution is to discount to satisfy the customer)
2. Improve the customers perception of value.

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There are two ways to add to the ‘perceived value’

1. Ensure that the customer knows all the elements of the sale. Don't just assume they do.
 - What parts of the sale are implied rather than explicit?
 - What must we say better?
 - How are we quantifying the value of features and benefits?
2. Add *real* value by including extra elements in the sale not currently included.
 - What else could you offer that adds to the value the customer gets?
 - Technical support
 - Enhanced Product training
 - Extra warranties/indemnities
 - Personalised service (delivery schedules, invoicing by site, etc)
 - ??????

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How do you deal with underperforming sales people?

Firstly, know who is who. Measure performance. Sales values, margins achieved, new accounts opened, average value of each order, complaints, phone calls made, CRM updates done etc. etc .

There is lots of data that can tell you who is performing well and who isn't making the cut. Not enough businesses are diligent enough at recording and using this data. Every poor salesperson has a load of good excuses, but FACTS don't lie.

Put all your sales team (or do it for every employee) into three categories so you can have one of these conversations....

- You are doing a great job. We noticed. Thank you. It is appreciated.
- You are doing well, but the world is tough right now. We need you to step up a notch.
- You are at risk. Times are tough and we need you to step up, and fast.

The way they step up is to do all the things I've covered in this session (and more).

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Summary /Your action

The actions require to sell well in challenging times are the same at all times...

- Focus energy and resources on customers most important to your business (A's)
- To do that you need to identify who are the A's, B's and C's.
- Use the right language (*Value* not *Price*. *You*, not *We*)
- Try not to oversimplify and 'jump to the sale'.
- Explore what elements of your service are most valuable to that customer.
- Prepare. Your objectives? Likely objections? Your approach the sale discussion?
- Make the sale, then keep on talking.
- Praise your best people and challenge the worst. You cannot carry dead weight.

In summary...

Sell professionally with structure, discipline and a clear focus on the right customers.

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01752 229079

Peter.hill@wilson-partners.co.uk

Mark.whittaker@wilson-partners.co.uk

Lee.warner@wilson-partners.co.uk

 WilsonPartners

 wilson-partners-limited

 @wilsonpartners

 wilsonpartners

