



## Mastering Technical Sales

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*John Care, Managing Director*

## 2026 New Year's Resolutions

### Self-Improvement for the Sales Engineer

Every year, I compile a set of personal and professional resolutions for the Sales Engineer to make in the New Year to improve their 3Ps: Performance, Promotability, and Income *Potential*. So your call to action, whichever New Year you celebrate, is to pick a few of these ideas and make them happen!

4,000 years ago, the Babylonians began the tradition of making New Year's resolutions to appease their gods. They typically paid off debts, returned borrowed equipment, and made peace with estranged friends and relatives. Millions of people worldwide will make a personal resolution this New Year's Eve (or their equivalent). Here in the US, 45 million people vow to diet and spend \$33 billion doing it – with a single-digit success rate. Worldwide, almost 40% of adult smokers attempt to quit, but only 4% succeed. ***Is your success rate as a sales engineering professional better than that?***

### Before You Start.

Here are a few guidelines from New York University psychology professor Peter Gollwitzer:

- A. Don't start your resolutions with "don't/won't." Simply telling yourself NOT to do something doesn't work that well.
- B. Prepare an if/then plan. What will you do if a challenge occurs and you have to adapt rather than accept failure?
- C. Be ready to ignore distractions. Prepare and think through potential obstacles that may arise. Ignoring distraction, noise, and negativity is vital to success.
- D. Replace a habit you want to change (like interrupting customers when they are speaking) with an action (such as clasping your hands together to signal silence)

### This Year I Will...

Here are some of the positive actions you can take during 2026, which can impact the **3Ps** and also contribute to your employment stability:

1. **Start With A Quick Win.** In Caroline Arnold's book, [Small Move Big Change](#), she discusses the power of micro-resolutions versus the difficulty of completing a larger, grander resolution. As a (successful) example – instead of me saying, "*this year I will be neater*," I said, "*every time I enter the house, I will hang up my coat and put away my car keys.*" It worked!

2. [Read More Books](#). There is a lot to be learnt from the wisdom and insights of others. I read a business-oriented book a month, plus various other books and magazines when I travel. Pick three books you feel would be helpful to read and get them completed by June 30<sup>th</sup>. [You can find suggestions here](#).
3. [Learn More About The Art Of Sales](#). Spend some time with one of the salespeople you work with and understand more about what they go through in their job. It's not as easy as you think. You'll learn about the issues of lead generation, contracts, legal and third parties, and the emotional pain of forecasting.
4. [Write Down Your Career Expectations](#). If you want a promotion or to get that management position you have been dreaming about, write down the how and the why. If you wish to transfer in/out of a division, write it down! That simple act makes your abstract wish more concrete and achievable. In addition, you have already taken the first step.
5. [Discuss Those Expectations With The Boss In The Next 30 Days](#). Sit down with your manager within the next 30 days and discuss specific expectations for the year. Don't make it a formal review session; instead, leverage any feedback you received from your last official performance appraisal. This sets the tone for the rest of the year. Nothing frustrated me more than having to guess my employee's expectations. Mind-reading is not in the job description. If your boss does not know what you want, they cannot help you.
6. [Embrace The Cloud, Big Data, AI, Cybersecurity, and Other "Hot" Areas...](#) They are here. Even if you work for a fully virtualized and mobile social-media, big-data-oriented AI-driven company, there is still more to come. Become an AI expert (as in how to utilize it, rather than its features/functions), as it has the same impact on businesses today as client-server did in 1990 or the internet did in 2000. Take it from someone who profited from both of them. Think about Time To Value!
7. [Solicit Feedback and Act On Feedback](#). Ask for specific feedback after every sales call or customer-facing interaction. A good method is to request that the salesperson/peer/manager use the top-down-next three model. That means, "*Which three things I did or said should I repeat, which three things should I omit, and which three new things should I try next time?*" Asking for feedback is only the first step – if you do not act upon it, you will never improve your performance and will stop receiving feedback even when you next ask for it. So check back with the person who gave you the original feedback and close the loop. Remember that feedback is a precious gift.
8. [Understand Not Everyone Is Like You](#). Take the time to understand the motivations and personalities of the people you work with - especially when it comes to giving and receiving feedback. See if you can persuade your team to take a DISC/Colorful Insights or Myers-Briggs test and share the results. (Great 2026 resolution for new managers!). Then, apply it to the salesperson you spend time with in Point #1!

9. **Predict The Future.** Well, if you could do that well, you are wasted as an SE. So, next time you and a few of your SE colleagues get together, discuss how the job is evolving and what it will look like in 2, 4, and 6 years. Then prepare for that future.
10. **Share My Toys.** Your kindergarten teacher was brilliant! How many times have you worked on a demo or presentation and discovered that someone else (or AI) had already built most of the material you needed? Whenever you or your team create something reusable, publicize it, post it, and the favour will be returned.
11. **Reach Out Across The Seas.** Establish a relationship with a peer located in another country or continent. Stretch yourself and make it a different language, too. If you are based outside of the corporate headquarters, look for a "buddy" inside HQ. Expand the #10 - Share My Toys and match up with your international "twin." Non-English-speaking presales teams sparked many of the best ideas and processes I have ever seen.
12. **Smile More Often.** Smiling<sup>i</sup> during a presentation will put your audience at ease. Even during a webcast, it will relax your voice and remove some of the stress you may be feeling. Of course, this resolution will work wonders for your home life unless you turn into a smiling fool.
13. **Replace Slides With A White Board.** Pick a customer-facing pitch you usually use with PowerPoint/Slides or words alone (like a Q&A). Then build and devise a visual presentation that you draw by hand, rather than using the laptop. You'll be that much closer to gaining credibility and that "trusted advisor" status.
14. **Cast A Longer Shadow.** Being a great SE is not just about fulfilling your job description and giving great demos/presentations/proposals/proofs. It is about what else you contribute to your SE community – who you mentor, who you help in other parts of the organization, and the other non-written parts of the job.

## This Year I Will Not ...

There are some things we do and say that we should not. Here are a few habits to either remove from your repertoire or turn into a positive.

1. **Fall Victim To The Curse Of Knowledge.** You know your "stuff." The customer does not. You have presented it or demoed it (or both) multiple times this year. This is the first time the customer has seen it. Do not make assumptions. Make it easy for the customer to understand and follow you:

*If they cannot remember it, they cannot repeat it".*

*If they cannot repeat it, they do not get it.*

*If they do not get it, they will not buy it.*

2. **Accept customer procrastination.** Instead of responding to "I'll have to think about it" with a "but" statement, keep the dialogue open. Try "why do you feel that way," or "what can we

*change about this solution to make you more comfortable?" Asking just one more question often yields positive results.*

3. **Be a slave to email.** Could you give it a rest? Set your email to sync only once an hour, organize your inbox, and don't feel you have to respond to any message instantly. Remove yourself from newsgroups and lists that you never read. I cut my email by 20% a few years ago and by another 5-10% each subsequent year, simply by using unsubscribe and email folder rules.
4. **Allow anyone in the company to give a 20-slide corporate overview.** Enough said.
5. **Start a sentence with: "No, But or However."** Whatever praise or agreement comes before those words will automatically be forgotten by the person listening to you.
6. **Let the negatives outweigh the positives.** Always look for the positive. Turn "*no one has ever heard of my company*" into "*they can't have a negative image of us*" and switch "*our product is new and untested*" into "*today, innovation and the competitive edge are priceless.*" Then convert "*an angry bear is chasing me*" into "*I really needed the exercise.*" Try it at home with friends and family, too.

## Summary

The first step towards making something happen is to write it down and then personally commit to action. Pick as many positives as you can handle and just a few negatives – write them down, display them with pride, and then put together a plan to make it happen. Perhaps you should call your boss and invite them for lunch, and then tell a few other important people in your life...

**Mastering Technical Sales wishes you a happy, healthy, and profitable 2026 / Year Of The Fire Horse**

**"A New Year's Resolution is something that goes in one Year and out the other."**

***Anonymous***

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<sup>i</sup> There are cultural implications to this. Smiling excessively in say, eastern Europe, can be viewed as unprofessional