

*“Experience is the teacher of all things.”*

**Julius Caesar**

# The B2B Leaders Guidebook

Powerful tips, techniques and tools – all based on experience - to help you succeed in running a small B2B business, a start-up or a sales team in any size of business – all based on over 40 years of real-world business experience, including over 20 years in complex leadership roles.

**Jim Irving**

*“I wear a suit of armour, made of my mistakes...”*

**Old French Proverb**

## **The B2B Leaders Guidebook**

First edition - 2020 by Jim Irving, distributed  
in partnership with ebookpartnership.com  
Copyright © Jim Irving 2020.

## **ISBN**

The right of Jim Irving to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems without the specific written permission of the author. Short excerpts may be quoted, but only for the purposes of press coverage, reviews or interviews and must be credited to the author.

The stories told in "The B2B Leaders Guidebook" are for illustrative purposes only. Specific stories, individual names, locations and products or services have been modified or amended as necessary to maintain confidentiality. No identification of actual individuals (living or dead), organisations, locations, products and services is intended, made or should be inferred.

This book is available in e-book, paperback and audiobook formats.

Design by [weareseventhree.com](http://weareseventhree.com)

# Two short sample chapters for you to Review at Your Leisure...



## About the Author

Jim was born in Edinburgh, Scotland and now lives in rural Northern Ireland with his wife, Yvonne. He has spent over 30 years in Business to Business (B2B) selling and business leadership in a number of tier one technology organisations including Amdahl, Sequent, Silicon Graphics (SGI) and Information Builders ([www.ibi.com](http://www.ibi.com)).

Over the last 14 years, since leaving the corporate world and starting his own consultancy, he has improved the sales processes and results and also mentored the business leaders in a large number of early stage and SME (Small to Medium Enterprise) organisations.

His career started with the hardest possible assignment – selling office equipment door to door in Scotland, in the depths of winter! His career rapidly developed into senior selling and sales leadership roles then ultimately to senior executive positions at major multinationals – including becoming the UK MD of Information Builders – a leading US based enterprise software company. At Silicon Graphics he was awarded the Corporation's 'Exemplary Leader' award. Jim has also held several executive marketing leadership posts. In recent years Jim has been both the Managing Director of an SME tech company and VP of sales and marketing for another. Of his 43 years' total business experience, he has spent over 20 years in direct management and leadership roles.

Jim has travelled extensively and worked in over 25 countries worldwide. He gained an MBA from Edinburgh Napier University in 1988. He is a Fellow of both the Chartered Institute of Marketing and The Institute of Sales Management. He has spoken at a number of seminars and conferences and has in the past been an occasional visiting lecturer to both the Postgraduate Business school at Edinburgh Napier University and also to the Postgraduate Business School at Queens University, Belfast.

His first book, *The B2B Selling Guidebook*, has been highly successful. Positive comments from leading sales authors, positive reviews from The Institute of Sales Management and The Chartered Institute of Marketing, plus the specialist book reviews site 'Discovery' and consistent 5\* Amazon reviews have quickly cemented his reputation as a writer.

When not working, Jim enjoys dining out, family time, running, travel, reading fiction and following current affairs.

# Contents

<b>Section 1.</b>	<b>Starting...</b>	<b>15</b>
Chapter 1	Introduction	16
Chapter 2	It's the Hardest Job - Really!	21
Chapter 3	You Only Get One Chance to Make a First Impression	26
Chapter 4	Your First Actions	36
Chapter 5	Management -v- Leadership	43
Chapter 6	Turn Their World Upside Down!	48
Chapter 7	Creating Team Identity	53
Chapter 8	It's YOUR Business	59
<b>Section 2.</b>	<b>Building...</b>	<b>63</b>
Chapter 9	The Best Approach?	64
Chapter 10	Ask Questions	69
Chapter 11	Are You a Soft Leader?	78
Chapter 12	People Are Still People	84
Chapter 13	How to Coach	89
Chapter 14	Recruit the Best	97
Chapter 15	Performance Measurement	104
Chapter 16	Time Management (Yours and Theirs)	113
Chapter 17	Priorities	120
Chapter 18	Meetings, Meetings, Meetings...	126
Chapter 19	Discipline - and The Problem Child	132
Chapter 20	That Big Deal!	140
Chapter 21	Qualification	145
Chapter 22	Customer Service	151
Chapter 23	Sales and Marketing. Best Friends or Cat -v- Dog?	159

<b>Section 3.</b>	<b>Improving...</b>	<b>165</b>
Chapter 24	Are you Really a Leader?	166
Chapter 25	Find Your Own Path	170
Chapter 26	REAL Social Selling/Marketing/Business	175
Chapter 27	Improving Team Performance	180
Chapter 28	Lead from the Front	185
Chapter 29	Simplify	192
Chapter 30	Unfair Mindshare	196
Chapter 31	Why Worry?	204
Chapter 32	Attitude and Ethics in Leadership	209
Chapter 33	Summary	215
Appendix 1	Suggested Reading	220
Appendix 2	A Fuller List of Recent Reviews of The B2B Selling Guidebook	222
Appendix 3	Comments on Jim Irving's Leadership Credentials	227
Appendix 4	Some Thoughts on Selling, Managing and Leading in the Covid-19 World, and After	230

Chapter

# 20

## That Big Deal!

*“What turns ordinary people into overachievers is the way they use their minds when they are called upon to perform.”*

**John Eliot**



From time to time, the 'deal of the year', the 'one we must win at all costs' comes into view. This principle also happens, in different ways, for any team - there is now and again, that giant, special challenge to be faced. The real leader needs to stand out and up front to literally lead when this happens...

Let me stick to the example of sales in its purest form. I have now lost count of these one-off deal situations but one or two will live with me forever. There are typically some common challenges. First, it's humungous. Second, it's complex. Third, it's a stretch but winnable. Fourth, we probably don't have enough time and/or resources and/or capability to do it justice. Do we walk away? You can, and sometimes that is exactly the right thing to do, but other times you just get that feeling... *"This could be the one"*.

Running a sudden, timebound, incredibly challenging 'project' like this calls on your real leadership – and management – skills. You have to be engaged, setting the directions sometimes micro-managing, communicating very clearly and being positive but honest too. That is the theory, but what about the reality?

You have decided to go for it. Now you have a test for your leadership. This is a big one. Let's say you are running a sales branch or small business. You have to consider how to manage this priority. Take a deep breath and then jump in and lead! Let's assume it is big and complex and too tight for time; here is what I would do...

1. Who do we need in the team to fulfil and have the best chance of succeeding (say, for the proposal, solution development, emergency project or Tender reply)?
2. What are they doing at the moment? Who can cover for them?

3. What else can we delay or ignore to help give us the space to deal with this one?
4. Is there any other company resource we can call on to cover for us/help us? Now you have the team assembled and ready to go...
5. Create a working space, room, meeting room or whatever. Get a flip chart or whiteboard set up. Set overall project goals and daily/weekly ones. Get them up at the top of the board.
6. Assign tasks and be 'the enabler' as people work to achieve against them.
7. Delegate wherever you can to clear your time for leading and to develop your team members
8. Measure progress frequently and ruthlessly.
9. Make sure, from the outset, that you actually have a full team assembled or on call – sales, pre-sales, administration, finance etc. Treat them as equals in this one-off project team.
10. Remember chapter 6, the upside-down organisation chart? This is where you need to believe in and live it. I have led quite large teams working late into the night – and on to the next morning - to get the job done before a hard deadline. It was me, not the most junior member, who was out on the streets at 1am trying to find pizzas to refresh everyone. The others were too important to the task. And the smiles when I arrived back carrying five or six of them!
11. Once it is all done and the proposal or whatever is delivered, make sure you thank every individual and then organise some unofficial time off for them if you can, if it has been way over normal hours required,

especially for those who are not direct sales team members. I have, when the company refused to help, taken this ad-hoc team all out for drinks and food myself a couple of days later when everyone had recovered. After all, if you don't, what will the reply be the next time you ask for such a big favour!

12. Finally, if the deal is won, hold a big celebration and acknowledge everyone. In a larger company I have also written up a description of all that happened then said nothing until they each opened up the corporate newsletter a month or two later and saw their names up in lights there. Fantastic motivation for everyone.

### **The Lesson**

Big projects or bids have the power to destroy or build a team. They can also create legends and team history! IF it's the right thing to do, never be half hearted about it. Go big or go home...

*“You alone are responsible for what you do, don't do, or how you respond to what's done to you.”*

**Darren Hardy**

Chapter

# 29

## Simplify

*“For the overachievers out there. Your mantra is likely ‘what else can I do today?’ Consider replacing that for a week with, ‘what can I do less of today?’ and see what happens...”*

**Ted Hargrave**



How is life for you these days? I would make a guess that in business, possibly in family, definitely in your country and society, things are getting more and more complex, pretty well every day.

I have watched this trend closely for around 30 years now. Many years ago, I bought a cassette tape (yes, that many years ago!) on the subject of improving my sales. I could put it into my tape drive as I drove my gold Ford Cortina around the UK. A wondrous car at that time. The sales guru from the US (name long forgotten) talked about the increasing complexity of life. He talked about complexity and connections. In other words, every year, you make more connections, your life becomes more complicated and the outside world is also becoming more and more complex at the same time, sometimes even faster. He said *“If your life is getting simpler, I want to meet you”*.



He was right at that time. And for every year since. Life has continued relentlessly to become ever more complex. In fact, there is a current hit TV show in the UK (on BBC, worth a watch if you can find it online) called ‘Going Back for the Weekend’. A modern family who live in London, in a terraced, older house, are the guinea pigs. They are removed from their own home, it is remodelled and redecorated – 100% to a specific decade - and then they are dropped back in along with an instruction book and they have to live there exactly as they would have done in that decade. It is fascinating. But it really brought this whole concept back to me. The series starts in the 1950’s with them having to live for real at a rate of a day per year, so 10 days to cover the decade. But, just wow! The 1950’s home... Main living room; coal fire, three seats, one table

and a radio. That was it. It brings our lives today into focus with a vengeance. And as each decade progresses in the show you can see the wealth, relative luxury, complexity and material goods continue to grow and grow.

What about the business world? Gertrude Stein said this *“Everybody gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense.”* We are working under a deluge of choices, information, access to more information and suggestions in every aspect of business life. We need to simplify. I have already discussed your priorities and time management. But how about consciously simplifying your working life? Start with your core priorities. Then ask yourself what else can be removed? Or delegated? Or delayed? Or reduced and simplified in itself. With simplicity comes time to focus and time to improve your performance. Teach the idea to your team members too. Here’s a great question for them (which can be easily adapted to any other area of work). *“Last week, how much time out of your total working time, was spent on your core sales activities – speaking to prospects, cold calling, moving prospects along your pipeline, delivering presentations and proposals?”* I bet the best answer – if truthful – is less than 50%, and often a lot, lot less.

### **The Lesson**

Simplicity is better. It is also easier and delivers greater focus. It gives you that time to react and to consider. In the UK we say *“you can’t see the woods for the trees”*. Is that you today?

*“It is not a daily increase, but a daily decrease. Hack away at the inessentials.”*

**Bruce Lee**



## Amazon Reviews

*“Compelling, insightful reading... this book is a great example of the wealth of experience that he has amassed throughout his career. Poignant in parts, it provides a real-life view of Jim’s 40+ year sales career and he touches on the highs and lows of selling, using very clear examples to make each point... I can’t recommend this book highly enough if you’re in any way involved in sales, or if you’re interested in learning more about the everyday challenges that those of us in this noble profession face.”*

**Colin**

*“Absolutely the most practical and useful book ever written on B2B selling.” “From beginning to end, Jim Irving’s masterpiece is simplistically instructive but also captivating. This book is powered by Jim’s 40+ years of selling experience. It’s a shortcut through the hard knocks route of mastering the crazy nuances of the B2B selling profession. Highly recommend this book and this author.”*

**Tkadams30 (USA)**

*“A book that should be read by anyone in any business discipline”. “.. Jim brings years of business experience to the table in what should become the bible for anyone in any business discipline where there is a focus on B2B markets.” “...Jim cuts to the chase with real anecdotal evidence from his vast experience which saw him rise to the very top of the tough global industry sector within which he worked. And it works when put into practice! I am seeing the actual results right now in my business life. Jim is a hero and his book is a must-read.”*

**Amazon Customer**

*“The sales book you have always been looking for.” “.. Unlike many other b2b books, Jim breaks down sales strategies and turns them into understandable stories rather than dry theory. Think of this book as the university of life version of a four-year degree on selling. I challenge anyone, whether new to sales or a 20-year veteran, to read this book and not come away with practical ways to be a better sales person. It’ll be the best thing you’ve ever bought under a tenner.”*

**John G Ferris**

*“Real stories and advice to accelerate your sales, no matter your experience or skillset.” “I have had the pleasure of working with Jim and it had a huge impact on my career and success. This book pulls together everything you need to know about sales and making your customers happy. It covers all aspects to help accelerate your revenues. If you want to sell better, faster and generate more revenue for your business and career...get this book today.”*

**Grainne**

*“Regardless of your experience, you need this book.” “As a seasoned, long in the tooth sales professional and sales trainer, I have read a lot of stuff, mostly rubbish and one or two real gems. This book is in the latter category. Experienced sales professionals look to learn from other seasoned professionals for our development. We don’t want theory we want relatable experience that can be applied first hand. That’s what you get in this book. In 2020 B2B sales needs to be effective, especially with Covid-19. This book felt like a safe pair of hands and I truly recommend you read it.”*

**Simon Hares, SerialTrainer7 Ltd**

*“Different, insightful, compelling read based on real world experience.” “Unlike any other corporate sales book, you will ever read. I had the privilege of working for “Gentlemen Jim” in the early 2000’s and this book explains his grounded approach to Sales... Any salesperson adopting just one of Jim’s learnings here will find a genuine shortcut to success. The only comment I might make is about the title. It’s not a guide at all but an insight into the mind, experience and thinking behind one of the most respected executives from the UK IT industry in the last 40 years. An outstanding read and an even better listen from the author’s own voice in the audio recording.”*

**Paul**

*“Must read! Up there with the best.” “I’ve read 20+ books about sales over the last year, this is one of the best. Jim takes a different approach from most sales books in the way he formats each short chapter. Each one starts with an introduction of a principle, an example of how Jim has applied this in a high-level sales situation, followed by a summary of the lesson learned. The anecdotes are interesting and funny at times which really helps visualise how to handle various sales situations. Unlike a lot of sales books, the principles learned from The B2B Guidebook apply very well to C-level selling. When you read Jim’s career history and references from C-level and Director level people, you know that the man is worth paying attention to.”*

**Martin Tonothy**

## Other Reviews

*“Pick up a copy of this amazing enterprise selling book and break out the highlighters!!” “I have just finished reading ‘The B2B Selling Guidebook’ by author Jim Irving. It is clear Jim is a big-time money-ball seller. His enterprise selling stories and business cases are moving and motivating. It is clear author Irving wants to leave something personal for the business community. His ideas are crystal clear and worth repeating. Pick up a copy and break out the high lighters!”*

**Patrick Tinney**, World famous author of ‘Perpetual Hunger’ and other sales classics.

*“The selling process offers a peep-hole into the human condition. In this book, Jim helps the sales person see reality, develop insights and then, most of all, add long-term value to the client-supplier relationship.”*

**Bob Bishop**, Former Chairman & CEO, Silicon Graphics Inc

## Institute of Sales Management

*“Irving writes in a clear, down to earth style. He is not so much teaching you but sharing ideas in the same way a sales manager might mentor a salesperson. Overall, it’s a good read for any salesperson. Entrepreneurs looking to increase their sales will also find the book of value. The book is recommended for anyone looking for ideas on how to increase their knowledge about sales practice without a substantial time commitment.”*

**ISM Winning Edge Magazine**, July 2020. Reviewer – Roger Bradburn, COO and Director

## Chartered Institute of Marketing

*“In ‘The B2B Selling Guidebook’, Jim Irving sets out many of the fundamentals of professional and ethical selling. Jim is a CIM Fellow and a Fellow of the Institute of Sales Management. His 43-year career encompasses leadership roles in both disciplines. The book covers the most important sales lessons of his career. Each short, enjoyable chapter takes a sales attribute or discipline, explains it through real-life stories and then delivers insight to the reader.” ... with powerful lessons for all.” [www.cim.co.uk](http://www.cim.co.uk)*

**CIM Catalyst Magazine**, July 2020 edition. Reviewer – John Knapton

*“Jim Irving beats me. His 40+ years vs my 34 in B2B sales... Read it... regardless of your time served you will learn and you will be challenged... The B2B Selling Guide Book is so well thought through as Jim provides you with one insight and example after another. I really enjoyed the quotes, the lessons and the notes pages that turn this into a workbook to take around with you... This book takes its place in the PLAN. GROW. DO. Ltd recommendations that support our sales training.”*

**Steve Knapp**, The Sales Mindset Coach, author of “Funnel Vision”

*“Complete with an exclamation mark, ‘keep learning’ are the final two words of this excellent book by Jim Irving. Like a stick of Margate or Blackpool rock, those two words are weaved through all twenty-one chapters. Aimed at seasoned salespeople as well as novices, this little black book is a cornucopia of sales content and personal anecdotes from Jim’s forty plus years in sales. The entire book is written in Plain English (a pleasant change) and there are some excellent appendices at the back. I’m reading this book again I liked it so much.”*

**Jeremy Jacobs**, The Sales Rainmaker

## Discovery Books Website

*“I found the format of this book unique and interesting...” “The author writes in simple language that makes it easy for people with no experience in sales to understand the subject.” “I think this makes the book a well-rounded work for anyone who wants to learn about B2B selling.” “I found this book informative, interesting and easy to understand.”*

**Discovery Books**, (see [www.reedsy.com/discovery](http://www.reedsy.com/discovery)). Professional Reviewer – Satabdi Mukherjee

# Appendix 3

## Comments on Jim Irving's Leadership Credentials

*“True intuitive expertise is learned from prolonged experience with good feedback on mistakes.”*

**Daniel Kahneman**

*“Jim is a seasoned sales leader with a proven track record of success in multiple channels and business models. His leadership and motivation skills elevate the productivity of his teams resulting in consistently exceeded goals. He is respected by his customers, team, peers, and senior management.”*

**Greg Goelz**, President & CEO, Smart Locus Inc, Californian

*“I first met Jim when I asked him to be the MD of a technology company I chaired. He brought clarity and strong execution to the business and massively increased market visibility while improving business results and motivating staff. He delivers very strong sales and communication skills to every endeavour”*

**Michael Black MBE**, Successful technology entrepreneur. Non-Executive Director at Danske Bank, Non-Executive Director at Titan IC Systems and Chairman – Displaynote Technologies

*“Jim is an excellent leader who manages to combine the strength of character, determination and toughness that’s required to fulfil senior roles with his great kindness, warmth and humility. He also brings his huge experience and wealth of skills to bear in a hands-on manner and was an excellent manager to work for. I would gladly recommend him to anyone.”*

**Gary Baverstock**, Sales Director Northern Europe, Denodo Technologies

*“I worked with Jim whilst heading up pre-sales in a regional branch of a major US multinational. The branch had underperformed for several years and Jim was promoted to lead it. The change in style that Jim brought was questioned by some to start but over 2 years the region went from bottom in the UK to top and #2 in Europe. Jim’s ‘serving to lead’ approach turned a group of individuals into a high performing team. It was incredibly effective.”*

**Mike Robb**, founder of independent IT consultancy, Avendris

*“Turning around a broken sales organization, one with a culture of underperformance and lethargy is a monumental challenge. In short order, Jim took a bottom-dwelling country operation and grew it to one of the best performing teams in the world. His no-frills, straightforward and ethical approach to building a world-class sales organization is something to this day that I not only admire, but also strive to emulate.”*

**David Rode**, Former Senior Vice President, International Operations, Information Builders (IBI)

*“Jim’s reputation is very well established. He has gone in to lead sales/the business in difficult circumstances and markets and has delivered clarity in strategy and also in sales execution and improved results. He understands the dynamics of selling.”*

**Professor Paul Atkinson**, Founding Partner - Par Equity (a multi award winning VC firm), Executive Chairman Taranata Group and serial investor

*“Jim is a natural sales leader, able to instantly command attention and respect from both his sales team and prospective clients. He has a relaxed and friendly approach which puts customers at ease and gains their trust. This, coupled with a keen commercial drive, enables him to identify opportunity, develop winning sales arguments and effectively manage the sales process to ensure his team make their numbers.”*

**Ian Baxter**, Vice President - NetDimensions

**[www.b2bsellingguidebook.com](http://www.b2bsellingguidebook.com)**

**[www.b2bleadersguidebook.com](http://www.b2bleadersguidebook.com)** 