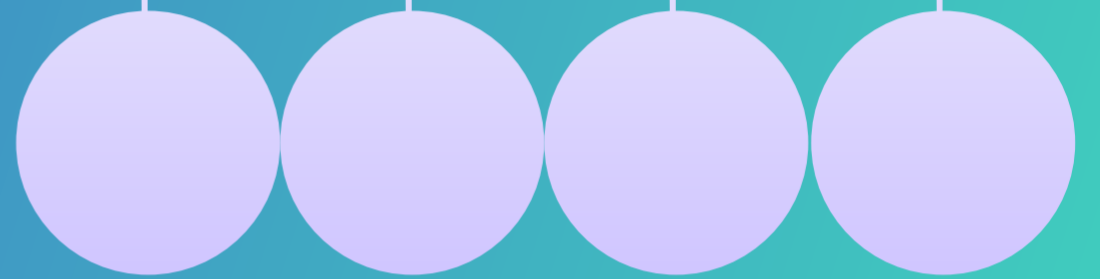




GROWERS EDGE



How Agricultural Sales Leaders Can Inspire Change



5 Proven Techniques You Can Start Using Today



Day to day, lead agronomists in agricultural retail face two main change management challenges: convincing farmers to embrace innovative products and getting your sales team on board with selling these products. (And, relatedly, getting your sales team to embrace a more proactive sales style in general.)

This guide addresses both, with five concrete strategies you can put in place right now to make change happen.

Throughout, we'll pull from established frameworks in the worlds of advertising and innovation, where experts have made careers out of [convincing people to try new things](#).

First, a quick crash course to get you acquainted with the concepts we'll be referencing.

Crash Course: 2 Essential Concepts for Getting People to Do New Things

Concept 1

Pathos, Ethos, Logos (aka Emotions, Authority, Logic)

The “three appeals” (pathos, ethos, and logos) are originally from philosophy and rhetoric, but have more day-to-day relevance to most people’s lives via the world of advertising. What are these appeals? And why are they so important when you’re trying to change someone’s behavior?

Pathos is an appeal to your audience’s emotions. It works by creating an emotional connection between you and your audience. One familiar example is Geico’s use of humor in its insurance commercials. Get your audience to laugh, and you’ll break down their barriers. But you can also tap other emotions: think pet rescue commercials with Sarah McLachlan in the background that evoke sadness, “limited-time offers” that evoke fear of missing out (or FOMO), and so on.

Ethos is an appeal to your own authority. “Trust me,” says the appeal to ethos, “I know what I’m talking about.” Ethos arguments might cite your track record, experience, knowledge, or similarities to your audience. Allstate commercials appeal to ethos when they bring in the sober spokesperson’s voice reassuring you that you’re in good hands.

Logos is the appeal to logic. Logos arguments evoke facts, statistics, and hard numbers. Geico policies can save you 15 percent or more. Allstate can save you however many dollars per year.

Different people respond to different appeals, and most of us respond to all three, to varying degrees. In most situations where you’re trying to effect change, you’ll have to use a combination of the three appeals, either over the course of several interactions or within a single interaction.

Don’t worry: we’ll provide some examples of what that might look like.

Before we do, let’s take a look at one more foundational concept.

Concept 2

The Innovation Adoption Lifecycle

Here's the reality about getting people to do new things: most people, even when presented with a rock-solid argument for trying something new, will not actually try it. At least not right away. This behavior is explained in Geoffrey A. Moore's book [Crossing the Chasm](#), which explores what it takes to market and sell high-tech products to mainstream customers.

It's also captured in the innovation adoption lifecycle visual, below.

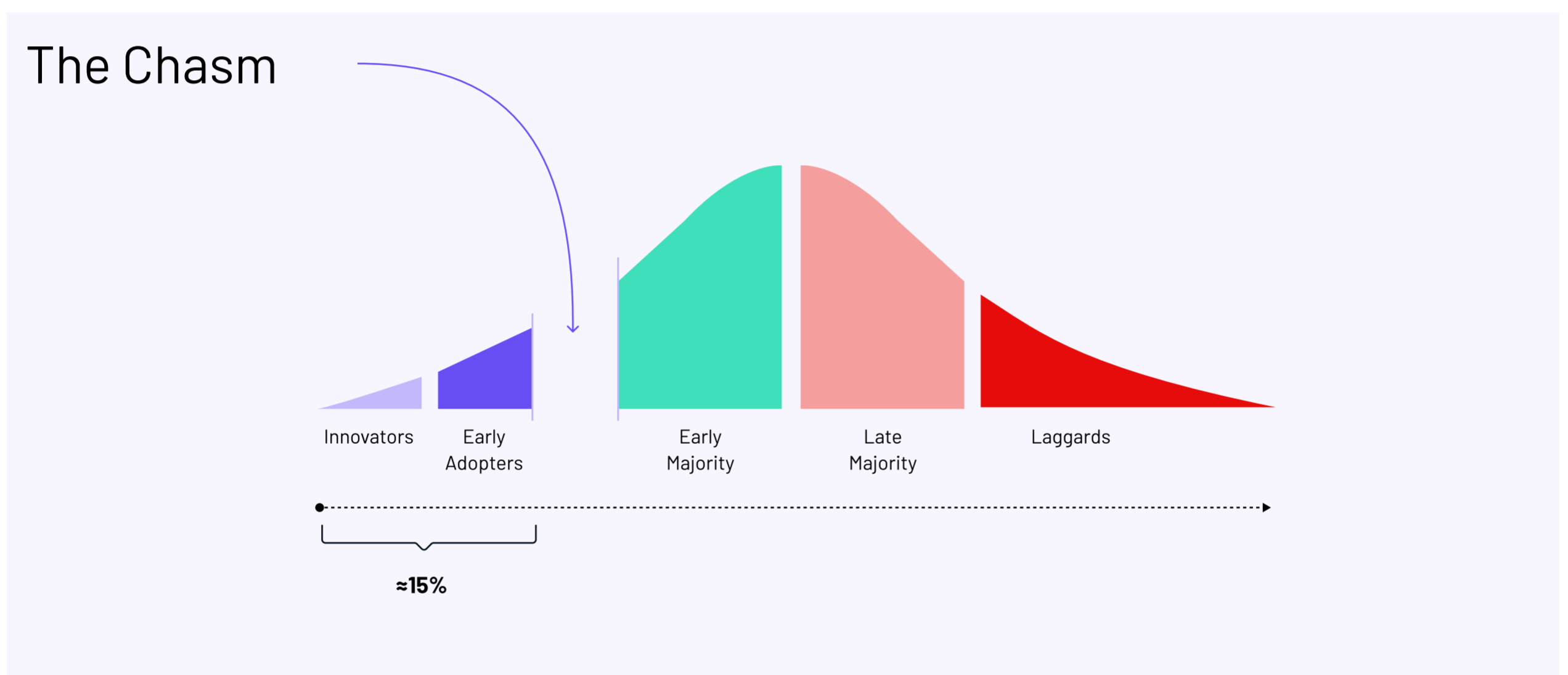


Figure 1: Innovation adoption Lifecycle

The important things to know:

- Only about **two percent** of people are considered “innovators,” meaning they’ll happily try new things.
- Another **13ish percent** are “early adopters,” meaning they’ll get on board with minimal convincing.
- The rest of us are much harder to convince.

The remainder of this guide is about how to convince those folks who aren’t naturally inclined to trying new things. And to be clear: that’s most of us.

Okay: crash course over. Let’s get into practical strategies you can use.

1

Start small

The next five sections will include tips and strategies you can put into use as soon as today to help spark the change you want to see at your organization. For each tip, we'll offer strategies to employ with your sales team and strategies to employ with customers.



Start small: Sales Team Edition

Let's imagine you, like many chief agronomists, want to inspire more of your sales team members to become true sellers rather than just order takers. In other words, you want them to be proactive and assertive, with an eye on growing the business.

As we know from the innovation adoption curve, you won't change their behavior overnight, even if you give a rousing inspirational talk during your next sales meeting.

What you can do, though, is **start small**. Ask your team to do one thing that's small enough that it hardly seems like something new at all. Something so small, in other words, it might not set off the "new thing" alarms that cause so many of us to go into resistance mode.

One way to start small is to push salespeople to ask more open-ended questions to customers who come into the store - especially if those customers are there to buy specific products. The key: suggest questions that are likely to lead to conversations about new products and offerings:

- Any new goals for next year?
- What have you heard about x new product?
- Any problems in the last few months?

This approach works for two reasons:

1. Your salespeople are likely already having conversations with their customers. Asking them to include a specific question doesn't dramatically change their behavior, but it can open new opportunities.
2. When you ask the right questions, you get information about how you can help your customers: goals and problems are entry points for products they might not have considered. When you point customers to those products, your credibility gets a boost (authority appeal). Implying there's buzz about a product taps into customers' FOMO (emotional appeal).

Obviously, this is only a start. Read on for where to go from here.



Start small: Farmer Edition

Maybe you want customers to embrace an innovative new product that promises both increased yields and an [improved environmental impact](#). Great! But the reality is that farmers are considering dozens of products in any given season that promise similar benefits.

They may be facing information overload, which can be stressful on top of all the other stress they face. One great way to start small: build up your authority.

When visiting farmers, focus on education. Answer questions and tell stories about the products you sell (more on that below). Establish yourself as a trusted resource they can turn to.

While you may not convince a farmer to try a new foliar treatment this season, you'll lay the foundation. Next season, you may be able to convince them to try the treatment on a few acres. Start small, take small steps.

This approach can work because it fits within the existing relationship farmers and sellers have (or hope to): sellers act as not only a vendor of products but also a source of valuable information. They're partners to their customers.

2

Try a Bunch of Things

Try a Bunch of Things: Sales Team Edition

Let's say you ask your sellers to use more open-ended questions... and they don't. Or they do, but it doesn't lead to any interesting conversations.

That's okay! Key to an innovation mindset is recognizing **that failure is part of the process**. The more you embody that reality, the more likely you'll help your team do so as well. And that's key to actually changing behavior.

As you try to get your team to embrace a seller mindset, don't be discouraged when something doesn't work. Consider this [oft-cited parable](#) from the book [Art & Fear](#) by David Bayles and Ted Orland:

A ceramics teacher says, on the first day of class, that one half the class will be graded on quantity and the other on quality. For the quantity half, the teacher sets weight standards: 50 pounds of pottery is an A, 40 pounds a B, and so on. For the quality half, students only need one pot, but it has to be perfect.

At the end of term, the quantity half had also created the highest-quality pieces.

 2

Why? In doing the work, over and over, they learned how to do it better, whereas the quality half spent more energy thinking about quality and less learning the practicality of what that meant.

The takeaway for chief agronomists: Every team is different and every individual seller is different. There's no one right place to start as you aim to change behavior. Try something, learn, and go from there. For example, you might...

- Define in writing the characteristics of a “seller” vs. an “order taker.”
- Identify which of those characteristics you’d like to nurture in your team – bringing in new customers? [Upselling and cross-selling existing customers](#)? Nurturing relationships outside of transactions? Etc.
- Brainstorm strategies to encourage each behavior (asking new questions, going on more farm visits, having internal competitions, etc.).
- Try them and see what happens. Try small things, learn fast, and go back or go forward as needed.
- Talk with team members about their experiences, learn, and try more things.

As you try new things, think about how you can use different appeals to connect with different members of your team:

Who will respond to FOMO, an emotional appeal? They might respond to a leaderboard approach where sales are tracked publicly.

Who will respond to an appeal to their own trustworthiness (aka their authority)? They might respond well to a professional development-type challenge: how can you make yourself more valuable to your customers?

Who are your stat heads who thrive on data? The leaderboard might work for them, too, because it offers a numbers-based account of performance (which appeals to logic).

2

Try a Bunch of Things: Farmer Edition

Obviously, farmers can't plant a hundred crops a season and see what works. Their cycle time is longer, so the "try many things" strategy looks different when getting them on board.

One framework that might be helpful is the reversible vs. consequential change framework. When thinking of trying lots of things, aim to get them to try things that are reversible and consequential: testing a new product on a limited number of acres, for example. Buying seed from a new vendor for a bundle discount.

Innovation happens here

Move time from inconsequential activities to here

Focus on getting more "at-bats"

Don't let perfect be the enemy of good

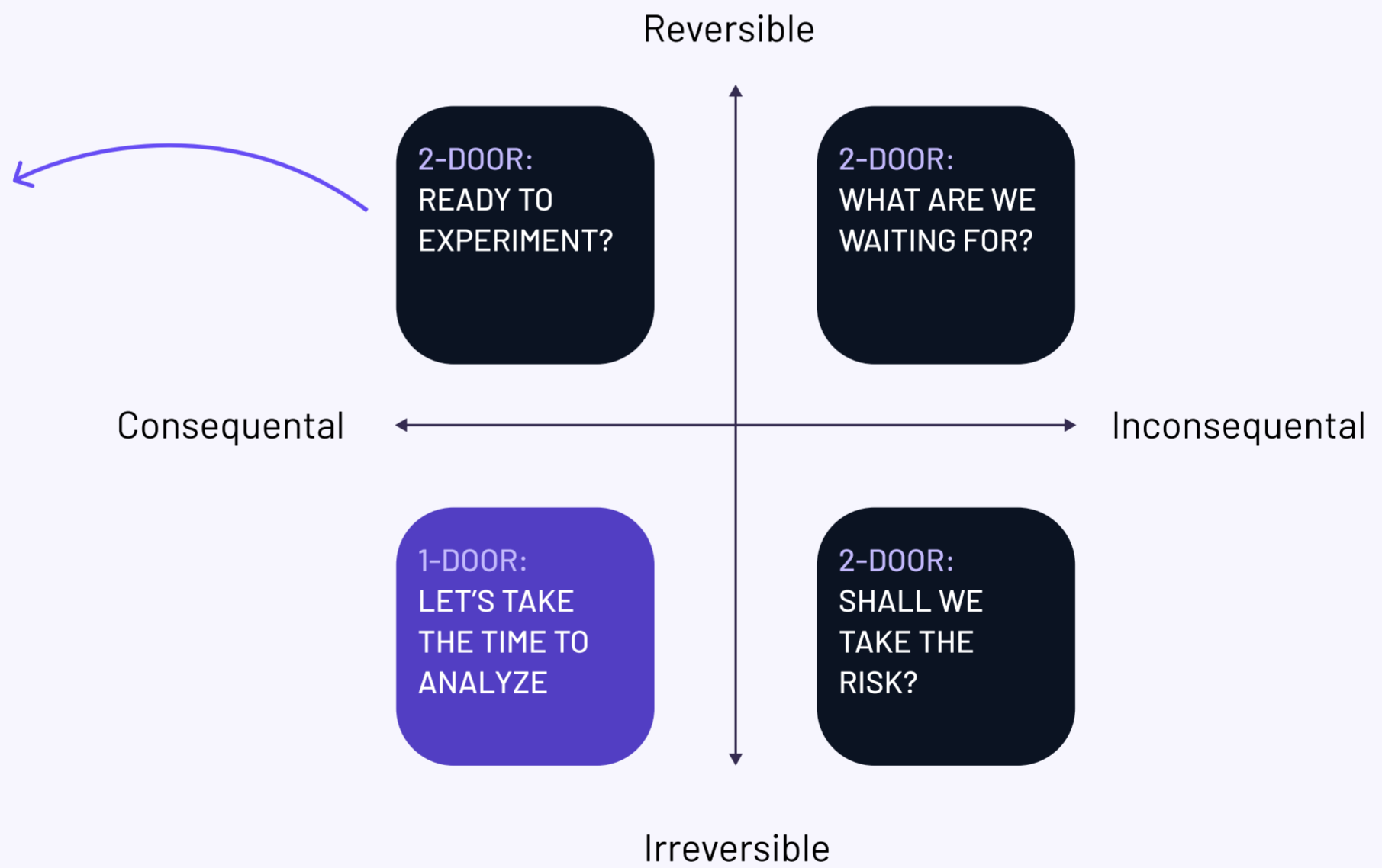


Figure 2: Reversibility & Consequentiality of Change

Even considering you as a vendor for a product they've never bought from you fits the bill here. The key is to keep the conversation going so you can keep gathering information to inform your next proposed experiment.

3

Tell Compelling Stories. Sprinkle in Facts

Before we get into strategies, we've got to level set on the power of stories. Because they are powerful.

Despite how logical many of us believe ourselves to be, research shows that humans as a species tend to [make decisions based on emotions, then use logic to justify](#) those decisions.

This is why Geico's famous "15 minutes could save you 15 percent or more" commercials worked so well: they told a funny story (emotional appeal) for 28 seconds, then used the last two to give us a good, logical reason to switch our insurance.

This formula works in other contexts, too: people are drawn in by the emotional resonance of the story (whether it makes us laugh, cry, or scream). We're hooked. When we get a nice data point at the end to justify our feelings, we feel very good about opening our wallets.

This is a hugely important concept to grasp for anyone trying to change behavior. Often, we believe that if we present enough facts and information, we'll be able to convince people to see things from our perspective.

And while facts have a role to play, stories are better at changing people's minds.

3

Tell Stories: Sales Team Edition

So how can you put this to use when trying to convince your sales team to be more proactive? The answer is simple: tell more stories.

Focus on stories that help your sales team better understand themselves and their role. Just as ancient stories of heroes slaying monsters prepared listeners for similar situations by letting them practice the emotional journey of such events, stories you tell in team meetings and conversations can prepare salespeople for interactions with customers.

You might tell a story of a salesperson who came on too strong and focused only on products without listening to the customer's needs – a great example of learning from failure (which we'll get into more below).

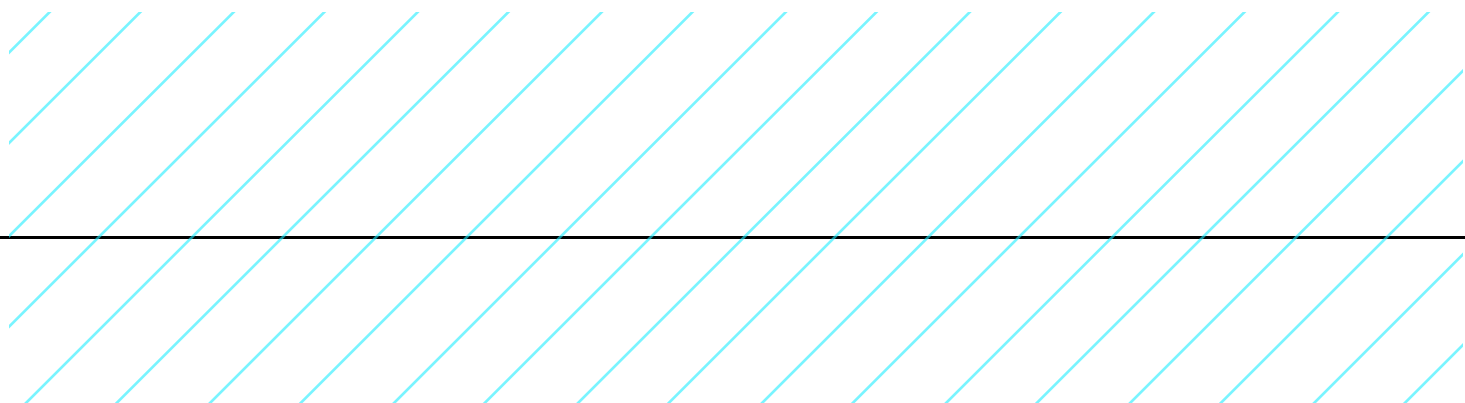
You might tell a story of a salesperson who followed up dozens of times before making a sale – but who was so helpful in those follow-ups that the customer became extremely loyal and brought in all their friends.

Instruction manuals are good for simple tasks like putting together furniture. But when we're asking people to do something that's complex and that will be impacted by complex emotions (like selling), stories have greater power.

Tell Stories: Farmer Edition

When framing stories for customers, it's helpful to understand the basic hero's journey.

The **hero** (your customer) faces a **challenge** (overcoming the comfort of the status quo and fear of the unknown future). A **mentor** (that's you) helps the hero respond to the challenge (with your product / solutions / practices / suggestions) so that your hero enjoys their **reward** (a successful outcome for their crops).



3

One ready-made story that many agronomists have in their back pockets: **case studies**. Case studies are stories of customers who have been successful. These can be stories you tell verbally, via video, or in writing.

Keep in mind, too, that one case study can be restructured multiple ways to mirror the challenges a given customer is facing.

For example: You may have a new fertilizer that [optimizes the use of phosphorus](#), cuts costs by 20 percent, and maintains yields.

Depending on who you're talking to, you might emphasize a story about cutting costs, a story about using less phosphorus for environmental reasons, or some combination.

As you're telling customer stories, think about emotions, authority, and logic:

- **What details will make your customer relate** (appealing to their emotions)? Maybe the farmer in the story had a kid going to college the next year and was looking for ways to cut costs so they could afford tuition.
- **What details or ways of telling will make you seem more credible** (appealing to your authority)? Offering specifics about the circumstances where a product works shows you know your stuff.
- **What facts and figures will let the farmer feel that they've made a logical, sound decision** (appealing to logic)? Citing yield numbers, comparing them to previous crops, and indicating whether the farmer plans to use the product next season can help.

4

Reduce the Risk of Trying Something New

Even the most compelling story may not be enough to get someone to make a change – even if it’s a small change, as discussed above. Think again about that innovation adoption curve: only two percent of people leap at the chance to try new things. A mere 15 percent are on board once the early adopters join the club.

The other 85 percent of us need nudges. We need things that [reduce the risk of trying something new](#). Think of these as carrots (rewards for trying something) and shields (protections from potential negative outcomes).

4

Reduce the Risk of the New: Sales Team Edition

As you introduce new strategies to your team – questions to ask customers, products to include in recommendations – provide additional motivation for them to do so. Again, what works will depend on your team and their personalities. A few classic techniques to try:

- Run an internal challenge where teammates enter into friendly competition to see who can reach a milestone first.
- Create a raffle system: every time an employee does the thing you want them to do, they get their name entered. Prizes can range from gift cards for local eateries to extra time off.
- Bring back that leaderboard and offer rewards to top performers at certain intervals.

Reduce the Risk of the New: Farmer Edition

Many retailer “carrots” are familiar: seasonal sales, manufacturer incentives, bundling discounts, and so on. These are classics for a reason: in the right circumstances, they can be enough of a reward to convince an otherwise reluctant customer to try something new.

Familiar “shields” include warranties, [input financing](#), money-back guarantees, free trial periods, and insurance.

For ag retailers, the warranty in particular holds promise, especially in the context of innovative new products. There are three main ways to make it work:

4

Reduce the Risk of the
New: Farmer Edition

1. The Whole-Acre Focus

Attach a performance warranty when farmers buy their whole-acre prescription from you. This can work when you're looking to nudge farmers to buy from a different provider (you) than they usually do. E.g., if they usually purchase seeds from a different provider, offering a warranty if they buy everything from you can help get them over the chasm of inertia.

- **New behavior:** buying more products from you
- **Benefit to farmer:** cash-back performance warranty
- **Benefit to retailer:** [increased revenue](#) and [wallet share](#)

2. The Specialty Focus

Attach a performance warranty when farmers buy a specific bundle of products, often including a new or innovative product. This can work when you're looking to nudge farmers to incorporate a new offering.

- **New behavior:** trying a new product
- **Benefit to farmer:** cash-back performance warranty
- **Benefit to retailer:** increased adoption of a new or specialty product

3. The Manufacturer Focus

Attach a performance warranty to a specific product from a specific manufacturer.

- **New behavior:** trying a new product
- **Benefit to farmer:** cash-back performance warranty
- **Benefit to retailer:** increased adoption of a new product, potential to co-fund the warranty with a manufacturer

Our [Crop Plan Warranty](#) is designed specifically for ag retailers looking to drive new behavior among their customers. If you're interested in seeing what it might look like at your organization, let's [set up a time to talk](#).

5

Celebrate Failures as Much as Successes

You've probably heard the now-infamous early Meta (Facebook) motto "[move fast and break things.](#)" The impetus behind it – and behind the innovation mindset that celebrates failure – is that you can't learn without trying new things, and you can't try new things without sometimes failing.

This is why the ceramics students learned how to throw pots better when they made as many as they could: they got their reps in. They learned from every pot they made. And (crucially) they learned as much about what doesn't work as about what does.

Anyone with experience in any field recognizes the validity here. And yet, in most organizations, we don't celebrate failure. We may even punish it! Make no mistake: shifting your culture to expecting, accepting, and celebrating failure as much as success is an essential part of enabling people to try new things.

Let's talk about what that might look like.

5

Celebrate Failure: Sales Team Edition

Starting small is your friend here: it's much easier to celebrate small failures. A salesperson didn't get any new information from asking customers different questions? Why not? What did they learn? Maybe they'd like to have some follow-up questions handy. Maybe they'd like to do some role-playing to get comfortable.

A team member didn't close a full-acre customer that would have been a big win for the team? Why not? What can they use to guide the next full-acre conversation? When can they check in with that farmer during the next growing season, and what might they ask at that point?

It might help your team to share the visual of "success" below (Figure 3). While success may seem like a straight line to someone on the outside, the process of getting to success is almost always indirect.



Figure 3: A visualization of success

As a team leader, your role is to make it safe to admit failure, talk about failure, and – importantly – ensure that every failure becomes a learning opportunity that moves the team forward.



Celebrate Failures: Farmer Edition

First, let's be clear: we're not suggesting you ask farmers to celebrate crop failure.

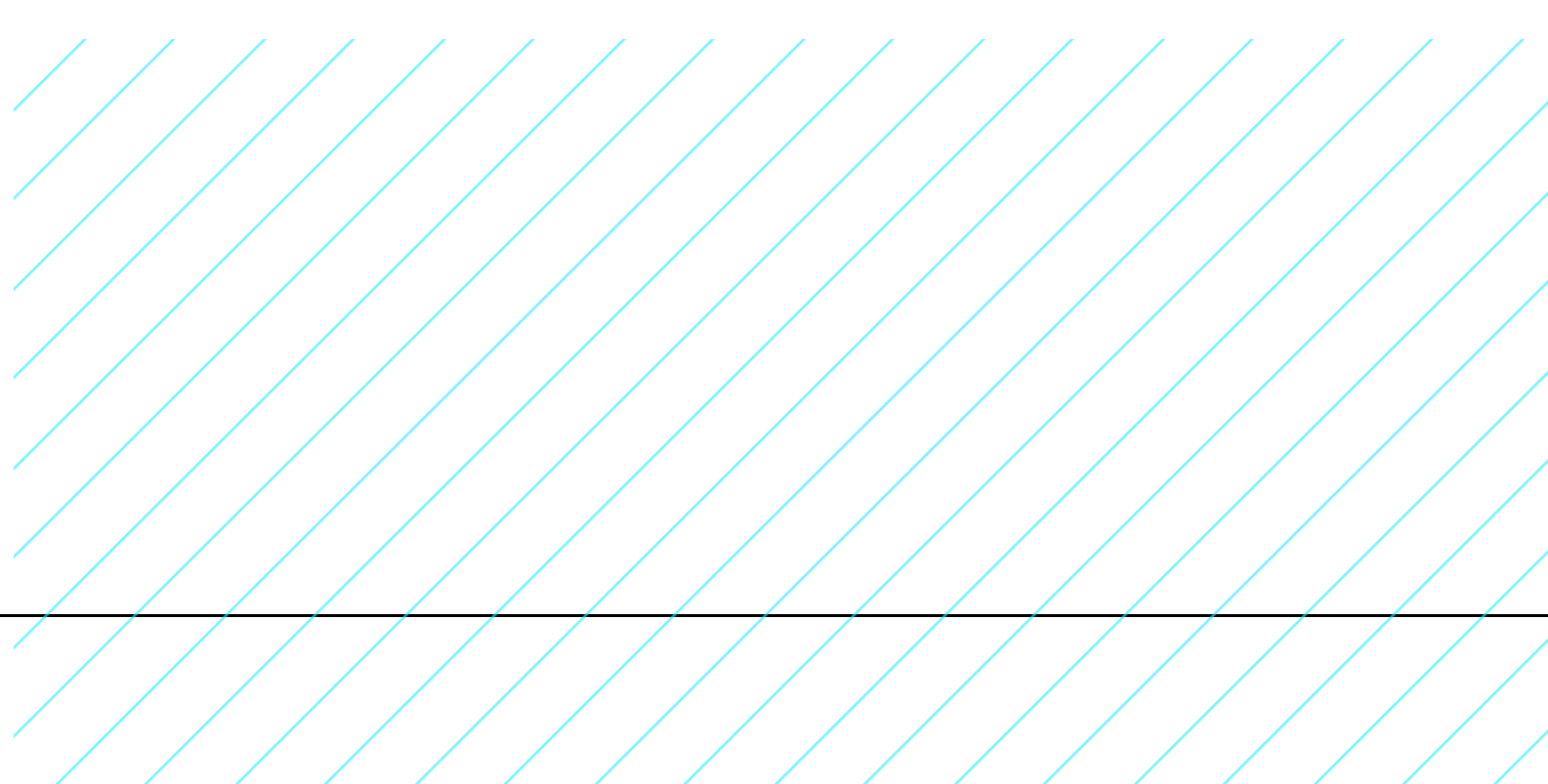
Instead, help your customers frame potential failures as learning opportunities. If you're trying to convince them to try a new product, for example, you might tell compelling success stories (emotional appeal), offer relevant performance metrics (logical appeal), and maybe even incentivize adoption with a warranty. It's during these conversations that you have an opportunity to reframe failure.

"Worst-case scenario," you might say, explaining the warranty, "you break even. And you'll know a lot more about your field." This offers both an appeal to your authority and to logic: you demonstrate yourself to be reasonable and trustworthy and you appeal to the farmer's logic.

Or you might highlight a failure from another customer: "So-and-so used this new foliar treatment, but he bought his seed from another retailer, and they didn't realize he was using the treatment. It didn't perform as well because it's actually not intended for that varietal."

This has an emotional appeal ("Poor So-and-so! I don't want to make that mistake!") and a subtle appeal to your authority (the implication is that you are the kind of retail partner who would not let a farmer make such a mistake).

Another option here: when pitching a new product, talk about the testing the manufacturer did, what they learned, and how they modified the product to address the failures they encountered.





Change Is Hard, But These Strategies Work

Change isn't easy for anyone – even when we want it. Getting other people to change can be even harder. But it's not impossible! And the strategies outlined in this guide are proven to make change happen.

Whether you're hoping to bring a new mindset to your sellers or introduce new products to your customers, be prepared for a long-term commitment to bringing about change. Once you're able to shift mindsets, the payoff will be huge: the people around you will be open to trying, failing, and learning – which will move everyone forward.

If you found this guide helpful, we'd love to hear what worked. If you didn't, we'd love to hear that too – we're also looking to learn. Either way, feel free to [drop a line](#).

About Growers Edge

Growers Edge provides modern financial products and data-driven tools that help forward-thinking agriculture retailers, manufacturers, and lenders reduce their growers' risks and costs when adopting newer innovative solutions and practices. The company's **Crop Plan Warranty** and **input financing** solutions are trusted by dozens of retailers and manufacturers to assist hundreds of growers affordably purchase their products and guarantee yields on more than one million acres of cropland.



Headquarters

5435 NW 100th St. Suite 200
Johnston, IA 50131

P: (515) 726-3343

E: info@growersedge.com

W: growersedge.com