LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT FOR TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS

A practical course guide for field sales leaders, engineering managers, and technical directors.

Andrew Sykes | MCGI Level 7
Founder, Acumen Seals and Pumps Limited

36 years of real-world experience in technical sales, sealing engineering, and commercial leadership.

About This Guide

This is not a management theory textbook. There are no academic models borrowed from a business school or generic frameworks invented in a conference room. Every concept in this guide has been tested in real field conditions — on live accounts, with real teams, in industries where getting it wrong has a measurable cost.

It is written for people who are good at their technical job and are now expected to lead others who are good at it too. That transition — from expert to leader — is one of the most demanding shifts in any career. Most people are given the title without the tools.

This guide gives you the tools.

Who Is This For?

— Field sales managers stepping into leadership for the first time

— Technical directors who are still doing too much of the hands-on work

— Engineering professionals moving into commercial or team management roles

— Sales managers in industrial, manufacturing, or engineering environments

How to Use This Guide

Work through each module in order, or jump to the one that addresses your most urgent challenge right now. Every module ends with an application exercise. Do not skip it. The exercise is the module.

> **A note on experience:** Everything in this guide is grounded in 36 years of selling, managing, and leading in the sealing and engineering sector. The examples are real. The mistakes are real. The results are real.

Contents

Frameworks used in this guide: GAP Selling · ORDER · SCREAM · Delegation Levels · 90-Day Focus · Pipeline Review Framework

MODULE 1

The Hardest Step

Moving from Technical Expert to Leader

Learning Outcome: After this module, you will be able to identify the specific behaviours that are keeping you in the doer role — and make a deliberate plan to step into the leader role.

The Problem

Most technical professionals get promoted because they are the best at what they do. They fix problems, they know the product, they're the person everyone calls. Then they get promoted. And suddenly, the skills that got them there become the biggest obstacle to doing the new job well.

The result? You're still the one answering every technical query. Your team isn't developing because you're always stepping in. And you're working twice as hard as before — but producing half the impact.

The Concept

There are three versions of every technical professional's career:

• **The Expert** — you are the answer. People come to you. • **The Manager** — you organise the experts. You make the system work. • **The Leader** — you create more leaders. You make yourself unnecessary.

Most people get stuck between Expert and Manager. They manage the diary but never lead the direction. The shift to genuine leadership requires one thing above all: the willingness to let someone else be wrong in the short term, so they can be right independently in the long term.

Real Example

> When I was building the Acumen field team, I had a salesperson who kept asking me which seal to recommend for a chemical application. I knew the answer in thirty seconds. Every time I gave it, he got the sale — and learned nothing.
>
> I stopped answering. I asked: *"What do you know about the chemical compatibility of FFKM vs FKM at that temperature?"* He didn't know. So I sent him to find out. He came back with the answer, got the sale himself, and the next time he faced a similar problem, he didn't need me. That's the job.

Application Exercise

Write down the three things your team asks you most often this week. For each one, ask: *Could I create a process, a resource, or a question that gets them to the answer without me?* Do that — for one of the three — before your next team touchpoint.

KEY TAKEAWAY — Your job as a leader is not to be the smartest person in the room. It's to build a room full of smart people who don't need you there.

MODULE 2

Stop Doing, Start Delegating

Handing Over Work Without Losing Control

Learning Outcome: After this module, you will be able to delegate a task using a structured handover framework — and follow it up without micromanaging.

The Problem

Technical leaders are often terrible at delegation — not because they don't want to give work away, but because they don't trust the outcome. They've seen what happens when someone without their depth handles a complex customer query. They know how long it takes to fix a botched recommendation.

So they hold on. They review everything. They rewrite the quote. They join the call "just in case". And their team stops growing, because there's no room to.

The Concept

Effective delegation has four levels — and most leaders only use two:

• **Level 1 — Do it and tell me you've done it.** For low-risk, routine tasks. • **Level 2 — Do it and show me before you send it.** For customer-facing work in development. • **Level 3 — Make a decision and tell me what you decided.** For capable team members building confidence. • **Level 4 — Own it completely.** For trusted, experienced team members on defined territory.

The mistake is applying Level 1 or 2 to people who are ready for Level 3 or 4. Match the level to the person and the task — not to your anxiety.

Real Example

> I had a territory manager handling a major account — a pump manufacturer running six different seal types across their production line. I kept reviewing every quote she sent. She was three years in and she knew that account as well as I did.
>
> I moved her to Level 4. She managed the account completely for a quarter. Revenue held. Customer satisfaction held. She came back with two upsell opportunities I hadn't spotted. Micromanagement wasn't protecting the account — it was stunting it.

Application Exercise

List three tasks you are currently doing that someone on your team could own. Assign each a delegation level (1–4). Plan a ten-minute handover conversation for the highest-level task this week. Use the format: *Here's the task, here's the outcome I need, here's the level of oversight, here's how we'll review it.*

KEY TAKEAWAY — Delegation is not abdication. It's a structured transfer of ownership — with the right level of oversight for the right person at the right stage.

MODULE 3

Developing Technical People Who Can Sell

Closing the Gap Between Knowledge and Commercial Output

Learning Outcome: After this module, you will be able to identify the development gap in a technically strong but commercially weak team member — and design a specific intervention to close it.

The Problem

In technical sales, the gap is rarely knowledge. Your engineers and field reps usually know the product. They understand the application. They can diagnose the problem on site.

But they can't close. They give away information without creating urgency. They answer every objection with facts when the customer needed confidence. They leave sites without a next step because they didn't want to seem pushy.

That's not a product problem. That's a commercial behaviour problem — and it's your job to fix it.

The Concept

The GAP Selling framework is built around one idea: before you talk about your product, understand the gap between where the customer is now and where they need to be.

Teach your team to ask three questions before they present anything:

• **Where are you now?** — What's the current state? What's it costing you? • **Where do you need to be?** — What does success look like? • **What's stopping you?** — What have you tried? What didn't work and why?

When you train your technical people to lead with these questions, two things happen: they stop pitching too early, and the customer starts selling themselves.

Real Example

> A field engineer I coached was visiting a plastics manufacturer with repeated seal failures on a solvent-based application. He went in ready to recommend a FFKM solution — £4,000 a seal.
>
> I told him to start with three questions before mentioning a single product. He came back with this: the customer had already tried two other suppliers. The downtime per failure was costing them £12,000 a day. They'd had four failures in a quarter.
>
> He presented the FFKM solution in the context of £48,000 in downtime costs. The customer bought twelve seals on the spot and asked about a supply agreement.

Application Exercise

> Take a live opportunity from your team's pipeline. Role-play the customer visit using only the three GAP questions for the first ten minutes — no product information allowed. Then debrief: what did you learn that you wouldn't have led with? What changed about the pitch?

KEY TAKEAWAY — Technical people don't need to become salespeople. They need to ask commercial questions — and listen to what the answers are really telling them.

MODULE 4

Reviews That Actually Drive Performance

Running One-to-Ones and Pipeline Reviews That Change Behaviour

Learning Outcome: After this module, you will be able to run a structured pipeline review that identifies the right interventions — and stops the conversation turning into a status update.

The Problem

Most pipeline reviews are a waste of time. The manager asks what's happening with each account. The rep gives an update. The manager says "keep going" or "let me know how it goes". Nothing changes. The rep leaves feeling inspected rather than supported. The manager leaves thinking they've managed the pipeline.

They haven't. They've described it. Describing a pipeline isn't managing it.

The Concept

A good pipeline review answers four questions — in order:

• **Is this opportunity real?** — Has a budget holder confirmed there's a problem worth solving? • **Is it progressing?** — What happened since last time, and what changed? • **What's the blocker?** — If it hasn't moved, why not? What does the rep think is stopping it? • **What's the next committed action?** — Not "I'll follow up". A specific action, a specific date, a specific person.

The manager's job in a review is not to be updated. It's to apply pressure where it's needed, remove obstacles where it isn't, and build the rep's commercial judgement through the questions you ask.

Real Example

I was reviewing a territory pipeline and the rep had an opportunity listed as "negotiation" for eleven weeks. I asked: *What are we negotiating?* He said the customer was waiting for a decision from their procurement team. I asked: *Who in procurement? When did we last speak to them directly?* He hadn't. He was waiting.

The opportunity wasn't in negotiation. It was stalled, and he'd filed it under a stage that made it feel like progress. We called the procurement contact that afternoon. The deal closed the following week.

Application Exercise

Pull up your team's pipeline right now. For every opportunity in the top two stages by value, apply the four questions. Any opportunity that can't answer all four — is not in the stage it's listed in. Move it back. Then schedule a fifteen-minute conversation with the rep to explain why.

KEY TAKEAWAY — A pipeline review is a coaching conversation disguised as a numbers meeting. Your job is to find where reality and optimism have drifted apart.

MODULE 5

Strategic Thinking Without Leaving the Field

Building a Commercial Direction When You're Still Running Territory

Learning Outcome: After this module, you will be able to write a 90-day commercial focus — specific accounts, specific targets, specific actions — that gives your team direction without removing your ability to operate day-to-day.

The Problem

Most technical sales leaders are player-managers. They're carrying quota and leading a team. They have six customer visits this week and a team review on Friday. Strategic thinking feels like something that happens in a boardroom, not a service van on the M62.

The result is a team that knows what to do today, but not why. No shared commercial direction. No prioritisation. Every account feels equally urgent, which means none of them are managed strategically.

The Concept

Strategy for a technical sales leader doesn't need to be complex. It needs to answer three questions:

• **Where is the growth?** — Which accounts, sectors, or applications have the most untapped potential right now? • **Where are we at risk?** — Which accounts are fragile? Who could we lose in the next 90 days? • **What do we stop doing?** — What activity is consuming time without producing results?

Write a 90-day focus document. No more than one page. Three growth targets. Three at-risk accounts with mitigation actions. One thing you're going to stop doing. That's strategy. Done.

Real Example

At Acumen, I introduced a quarterly focus document — one page, not a spreadsheet, not a presentation. Three accounts we were going to grow. Three we were protecting. One process we were killing.

It changed how the team thought about their week. Instead of reacting to whoever called last, they had a filter. Does this activity move one of our six accounts forward? If not, it waits. Simple — but only if you've actually written it down.

Application Exercise

Write your 90-day commercial focus document right now. One page only. Three accounts you are actively growing and why. Three accounts you are protecting and what the specific risk is. One activity you are stopping or reducing. Share it with your team at your next review. Ask them to hold you to it.

KEY TAKEAWAY — Strategy without a deadline is a wish. Write down the three accounts you're growing, the three you're protecting, and the one thing you're stopping — then tell someone.

MODULE 6

Leading Through Change

AI, Automation and What Your Team Needs From You Now

Learning Outcome: After this module, you will be able to introduce one AI-assisted workflow to your team — and explain it as a commercial advantage, not a technology initiative.

The Problem

Technical sales teams are seeing more tools, more data, more automation — and most of them are suspicious of all of it. They're worried about being replaced, about learning new systems, about their manager using AI to micromanage their activity.

If you introduce AI badly, you create resistance. You create a two-tier team: those who adopt and those who quietly don't. And you lose the very people you need most — the experienced ones who know that technology is only as good as the judgement behind it.

The Concept

Introduce any new workflow or tool by answering three questions for your team — before they ask them:

• **What does it do for you?** — Not the company. You, specifically. Saves time, removes admin, gets you in front of customers faster. • **What does it not do?** — Be specific. It doesn't replace your knowledge. It doesn't replace the relationship. It doesn't make the call. • **What does success look like?** — One specific outcome in the first thirty days. Not "improved efficiency". One less hour of admin per week. Twenty more call reports filed per month.

Your job as a leader is to take the anxiety out of new tools by being specific about what they solve.

Real Example

> When I introduced AI-assisted call reporting at Acumen — using voice-to-text and automated CRM updates — the first question was: *Is this going to monitor us?*
>
> I answered directly: *"It will write the call report from your notes. You'll save twenty minutes per visit. The content stays exactly what you give it. This is not a surveillance tool — it's a time machine."*
>
> Adoption was immediate. One person did it, saved the time, told the others. The tool sold itself — but only after I'd removed the fear first.

Application Exercise

> Pick one repetitive task your team does after every customer visit — call report, follow-up email, CRM update, quote request. Write a one-paragraph description of how AI could do that task in under two minutes. Then answer the three questions above for your team. Pilot it with one team member this week.

KEY TAKEAWAY — Your team doesn't need to love new technology. They need to trust that you understand what it's for — and what it isn't. Be specific. Remove the fear. Show the time saving.

What Comes Next

You've now worked through six modules covering the core challenges of leading in a technical sales environment. If you've done the exercises, you haven't just read a guide — you've already started to change how you operate.

The next step is accountability. Share your 90-day focus document with your team. Run one pipeline review using the four-question framework. Delegate one task at the right level. These are not big changes — but compounded over a quarter, they are transformative.

Continue the Development

— Technical Sales Skills — GAP Selling, prospecting, and handling objections in engineering markets

— Sealing & Engineering Knowledge — O-rings, FFKM, gaskets, and application troubleshooting

— AI & Workflow Automation for Sales — automating call reports, CRM, and follow-up processes

Get in touch: Andrew Sykes | Acumen Seals and Pumps Limited | www.acumenseals.co.uk | Specialist sealing & technical sales expertise — MCGI Level 7 | Frameworks: GAP Selling · ORDER · SCREAM