

Buyer First

A new era in selling



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A letter to the sales industry: It's time to put the buyer first

Dear sales colleagues,

We're now more than six months into the reality of living in and doing business in a virtual world. As each of us—sales professionals and our customers alike—has reevaluated and reinvented how we do our work, I've asked myself: how might our industry use this moment as an opportunity to invent systems that work better for our customers and therefore our sellers?

After all—virtual selling is here to stay. According to a LinkedIn survey of over 500 sales professionals, 80% said they have somewhat or completely shifted to virtual selling due to COVID-19. Of those respondents who said they shifted to virtual selling, 57% believe the new virtual selling model is better than their previous traditional selling approach, and 46% expect to continue selling virtually beyond 12 months.

Designing a sales model that embraces this reality isn't just a 'nice to have'—it's imperative. The companies that act now can realize a significant competitive advantage, those who don't face up to this reality run the very real risk of being left behind.

This moment calls for a new model of sales. One that treats buyers like the modern consumers they are, and equips sellers to be the trusted advisors they can be. An era where buyers and sellers are truly working together. At LinkedIn, we're calling this model **Buyer First selling**.

I'm excited to share over the following pages our vision for the future of selling, Buyer First. We believe it's how virtual selling can be most effective. And it's a call to action to every sales organization to transform our industry, and to become truly Buyer First. I hope you'll join us on the journey.



Jonathan Lister

Jonathan Lister, Vice President, LinkedIn Sales Solutions

A note on our methodology

With over 706 million members worldwide, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network. LinkedIn is also one of the only places where every day, buyers and sellers are interacting—they're sharing information, connecting, and building relationships that drive value for each other.

We can learn a lot from these interactions. For the past year, we've analyzed the millions of daily signals from buyers and sellers on our platform, and combined that with hundreds of interviews with sellers, buyers, analysts, and leading voices, and with our survey of over 10,000 sales professionals and decision makers through our State of Sales.

Today, we share our findings, as well as a playbook for a new way forward.



Our findings

We've reached a
breaking point in
the sales industry

Sellers believe they're putting buyers first, but that's not how buyers feel. They just want someone to listen to them, but sales managers aren't even hiring for this skill.

What traits buyers value in salespeople



What traits sales managers value in salespeople



90%

of C-suite executives don't respond to impersonal B2B sales, choosing instead to engage more selectively with those they trust



The distance between buyers and sellers is growing



34%

of salespeople's time actually spent on selling, making it more difficult to develop trusted relationships with buyers

The damaging behaviors that time-strapped sellers have come to rely on are no longer viable in a virtual selling world.

Impersonal automation that can feel spammy

Outdated techniques like information gating

Rigid processes that don't fit a buyer's needs

59%

Rise in sales emails compared to the pre-COVID benchmark

25-30%

Decline in buyer responses compared to the pre-COVID benchmark

“In the new normal of doing business remotely, new standards have emerged for more thoughtful communication. No one has the patience for generic, poorly informed outreach. For us in sales, there is no choice but to deliver value at every step of the buying process.”



Alyssa Merwin

Vice President, LinkedIn Sales Solutions Americas

The future of selling requires a shift to a new model

One that treats **buyers** like the modern consumers they are...

“Buyers are consumers first. They now expect a B2B buying experience that’s similar to the customized, seamless buying journey they enjoy when making individual consumer purchases.”

Gary Ambrosino
CEO TimeTrade

...and equips **sellers** to be the trusted advisors they can be

“It’s an opportunity and an imperative for the profession of sales to meet the rigorous intellectual requirements that buyers have, so that we can help them solve their problems.”

Craig Rosenberg
Cofounder TOPO

The way forward »

Welcome
to a new
era of sales

It's time to put buyers first.

Their access to information first.
Their individual business challenges first.
Their way of working first.
And, their success first.

Adopting an uncompromising Buyer First ethos is the only way to achieve meaningful and trusted relationships that last beyond the sale, and instead span a career.

It's time for a higher standard, and we're raising the bar.

Buyer First selling

Buyer First is our vision for the future of selling. It's a model that respects buyers' evolving needs and expectations, while also respecting sellers' time and expertise.

It's also a call to action to every modern sales organization to make a shift to become Buyer First.



81%

of top performers say they always
put the Buyer First

60%

vs all other sellers

Buyer First
isn't just a
philosophy;
it's a practice

In order to make this real, we have to make it actionable, with the **five principles of Buyer First selling**:

- 1 Learn, then define
- 2 Share, readily
- 3 Solve, don't sell
- 4 Deliver value
- 5 Earn trust

Buyer First principles

1

Learn, then define

Buyers are facing unprecedented challenges, and every situation will be unique.

At the same time, a seller's experience and expertise can add incredible value in helping buyers navigate the uncertain road ahead.

A Buyer First seller always listens first, then guides.



Buyer First principles

1

Learn, then define

Why it matters

“It’s really all about the customer and what’s going to make them bigger, faster, and stronger, not about your sales process or tool. So we have to focus on hearing them and integrating their feedback. You’ve gotta listen to what they want and then be actionable on it.”

Roderick Jefferson

CEO Roderick Jefferson & Associates

Sellers should

Understand who’s who in the buyer’s circle and learn their different needs and concerns

Practice open listening and be open to restructuring their offer, process, and success metrics to flex to a buyer’s situation

Lean on their expertise to guide a buyer toward the path that will help them best achieve their goals, even if it requires a pivot, more steps, or a different solution

79%

of decision makers are least likely to engage with sales professionals who lack knowledge about their company

56%

of decision makers are likely to consider a brand’s products or services if a sales professional has a clear understanding of their business needs

2

Share, readily

As consumers, access to information about products and services is table stakes. If they can find the price of their neighbor's home online, why does the sales industry still gate information about their products and solutions, and restrict access to reviews? Customers value transparency, and if you don't make it easy to do their due diligence, someone else will.

A Buyer First seller always empowers buyers with information.



Buyer First principles

2 Share, readily

Why it matters

“Buyers have already done their work; they’re already informed. They want you to give them insights that are going to change their perspective on and give them clarity about their true business challenge. They want sellers to co-create a solution with them, rather than telling them what to do.”

Jeff Davis

Author of “Create Togetherness” and Keynote Speaker

Sellers should

Speak credibly and transparently about the trade-offs with competitor solutions and anchors on customer challenges and objectives

Enable buyers to do their own research by sharing capabilities and pricing, and by ensuring information, reviews, and comparisons are objective and balanced

Share trends, insights, and learnings specific to the buyer’s industry to earn trust

44%

of buyers strongly agree that they’re more likely to consider a brand when the rep shares content applicable to their role in the decision-making process

28%

increase in win-rates associated with salespeople engaging with a decision maker’s content

Buyer First principles

3

Solve, don't sell

For buyers, trust is the #1 most desirable quality in a salesperson. They want, and need, someone looking out for them as a true partner—now more than ever.

A Buyer First seller always measures success in problems solved, not products sold.



Buyer First principles

3

Solve, don't sell

Why it matters

“Buyers want to feel like you have their best interest at heart, so you have to understand their challenges and say how can I solve that one way or another? Once a buyer finds a salesperson who can do this effectively, they stick with them for life.”

Samantha McKenna
Founder #samsales

Sellers should

Become a trusted advisor by listening to the buyer's specific challenges, and crafting solutions that help them achieve their goals

Surface new opportunities that go beyond just what their product can do for them

Recognize when solving the buyer's problem means recommending a different solution

Decision makers prefer working with sales professionals whom they perceive as:

66%

Essential partners

88%

Trusted advisors

91%

Well informed about their industry

4

Deliver value

The most customer-centric companies in the world don't see a sale as the end of a buying cycle—instead, it's the beginning of the next buying cycle. This level of care means seeing the process through long after a deal is signed, to ensure the buyer is seeing maximum value from your solution.

A Buyer First seller always realigns incentives so that the buyer's success is their success.



Deliver value

Why it matters

“It’s about consistency. When, over a consistent time period, you display your message, your value, that you care, that you’re listening—it resonates with people. It creates a sense of authenticity and connection.”

Jeff Davis

Author of “Create Togetherness” and Keynote Speaker

Sellers should

Offer tests, trials, and trainings before the sale to ensure maximum value extraction

Stay actively engaged after the sale, to ensure the buyer is happy with how the solution is working

Follow up with updates relevant to their business to ensure that the solution is always delivering maximum results

5

Earn trust

A Buyer First seller develops long-term trusted relationships by always acting in the buyer's best interest. By implementing these first four Buyer First principles, sellers will be certain they are prioritizing long-term relationships over short-term gains, and always investing in the customer's success.



Buyer First principles

5 Earn trust

Why it matters

“A partnership between a buyer and a seller means there’s trust, that we’re able to be open and transparent, have honest conversations about the buyer’s needs because they know when I make a recommendation for them, I have their best interest at heart.”

Jen Spencer
VP of Sales and Marketing, SmartBug Media

Sellers should

Continue to stay invested in the buyer’s business and in their success

Engage with their buyer’s thought leadership and share their own

Make introductions and broker new relationships

35%

of decision makers rank trust as the most important contributor in closing a deal—even above ROI of the product or service, or price

89%

of decision makers say that thought leadership is effective in enhancing their perceptions of an organization

Sellers
resoundingly
agree with
a Buyer First
approach to
selling

82%

can identify with Buyer First

Our commitment
to Buyer First

At LinkedIn, we're putting Buyer First to work

Holding the industry to a higher standard means holding ourselves to one, too.

LinkedIn is first and foremost a place to make connections and build relationships, so we're building from a strong foundation. In a Buyer First era, our goal is simple: to create an ecosystem where buyers can get access to the people, the information, and the expertise they need, and where sellers can demonstrate a Buyer First ethos in how they find, build, and nurture relationships with potential buyers, helping both sides achieve their goals.

As part of this, we'd like to share some ways our **platform, products,** and internal sales **processes** are already working to achieve this goal, and our plans for the future.

Our platform

The world's buyers and sellers are together on LinkedIn

As the world's largest professional network with 706 million members, LinkedIn is the only active community where buyers and sellers come together to drive value for one another.

It's the place where buyers share information about themselves in real time, including what they care about, what they need, and how they like to buy.

Which means we're also the place where sellers can listen, learn, and not just hope they're being relevant, but know they are.



Our platform

“Selling at LinkedIn has always started and ended with our customer and the value we drive for them, but we’re learning there is more to do. We’re thinking about how we put buyers first, what principles guide us in nurturing those relationships, and how our products support sellers to put buyers first, too.”



Jonathan Lister

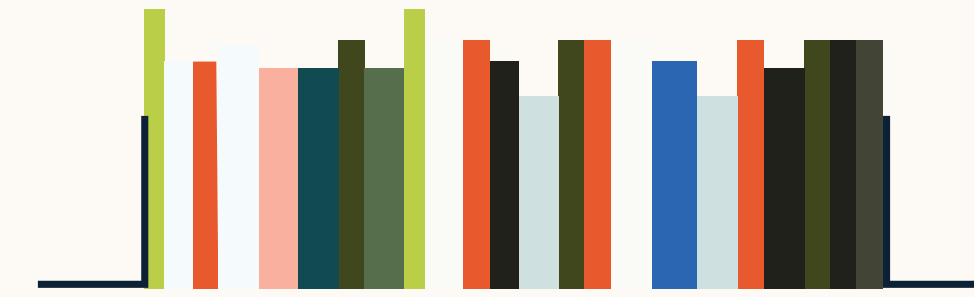
VP, LinkedIn Sales Solutions

Our sales process

Our commitment to Buyer First selling

At LinkedIn, we're fully embracing Buyer First. This means ensuring our own internal sales teams are adopting a Buyer First way of selling by embedding the Buyer First principles into our own sales processes.

We're also committed to continually evaluating our own systems, KPIs, and rewards to ensure we're constantly improving.



Our sales process

“Without buyers, there is no sale, regardless of how good your salespeople are. Investing deeply in customer relationships has become a much higher priority for all sales organizations, and particularly in a remote selling world.”

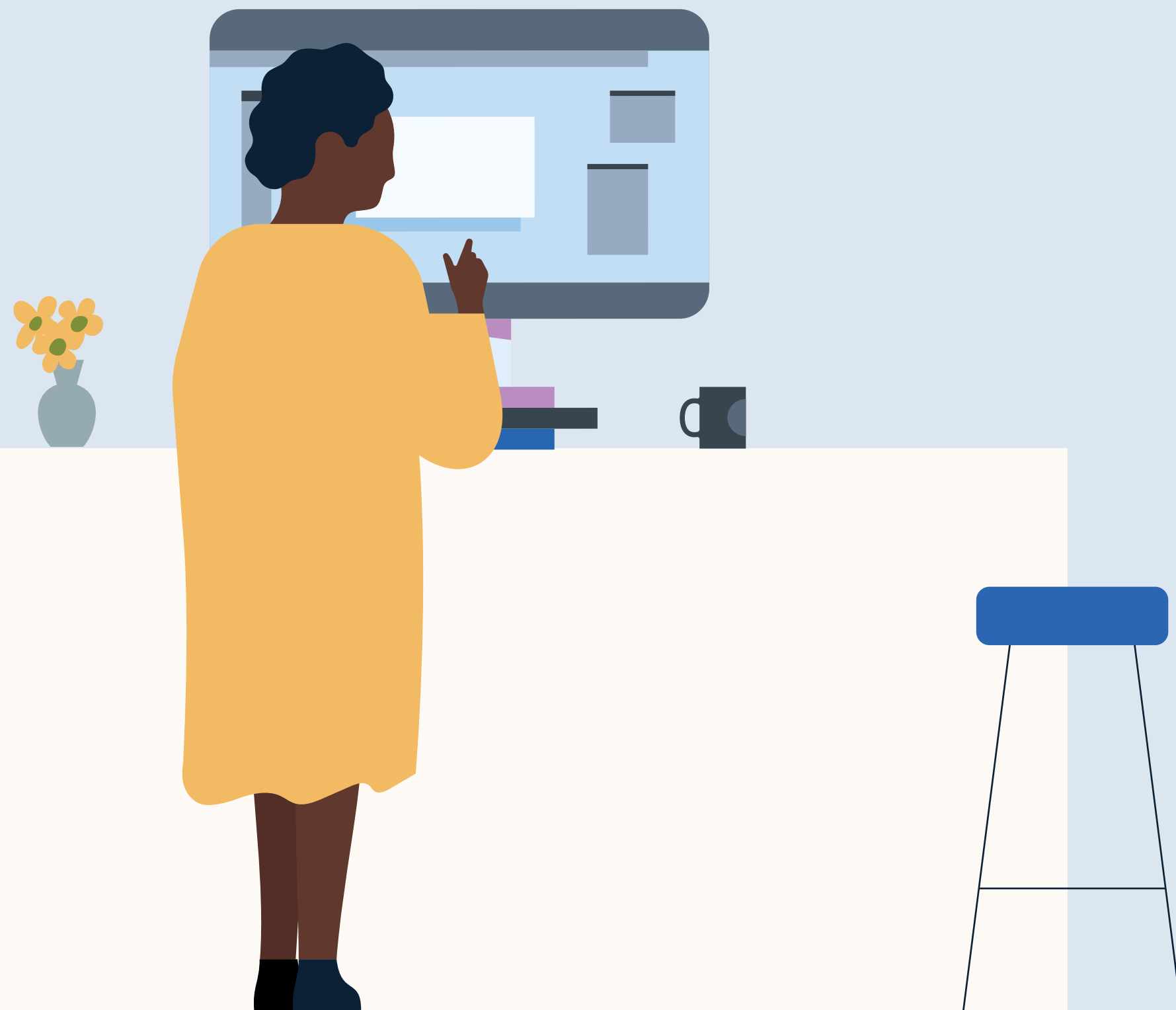


Liam Halpin

Vice President of Sales EMEA & LATAM, LinkedIn Sales Solutions

Our product

Our features are designed to promote Buyer First behavior



Today

Buyer interest signals help you understand if individuals are researching you and your company, or engaging with your content.

Alerts and spotlights show sellers recent job changes, promotions, etc., allowing them to listen and learn so they can tailor outreach accordingly.

Continuous learning through following hashtags, industry leaders, and competitors related to their buyer's industry.

In the future

Buyer interest alerts will help sellers avoid spam and reach out only to buyers who've already demonstrated interest. They will offer intelligent insights that aggregate multiple buyer signals to recommend the right time to engage with buyers who are more likely to be interested.

More trust through features that allow buyers to share their experiences with sellers and their products.

Greater transparency as sellers will be able to add more information about themselves to grow their reputation.

Our product

“Buyers and sellers alike are adjusting to a new normal. The hurdles might look different from buyer to buyer, but one thing is consistent—they need to feel confident that you understand their challenges and goals.”



Lindsey Edwards

Vice President, Product Management, LinkedIn Sales Solutions & Enterprise Platform

What you can do

Join the Buyer First movement

Buyer First behavior will help us all build strong relationships that drive value at every step of the buying process. To start, try taking these steps:

Follow #BuyerFirst

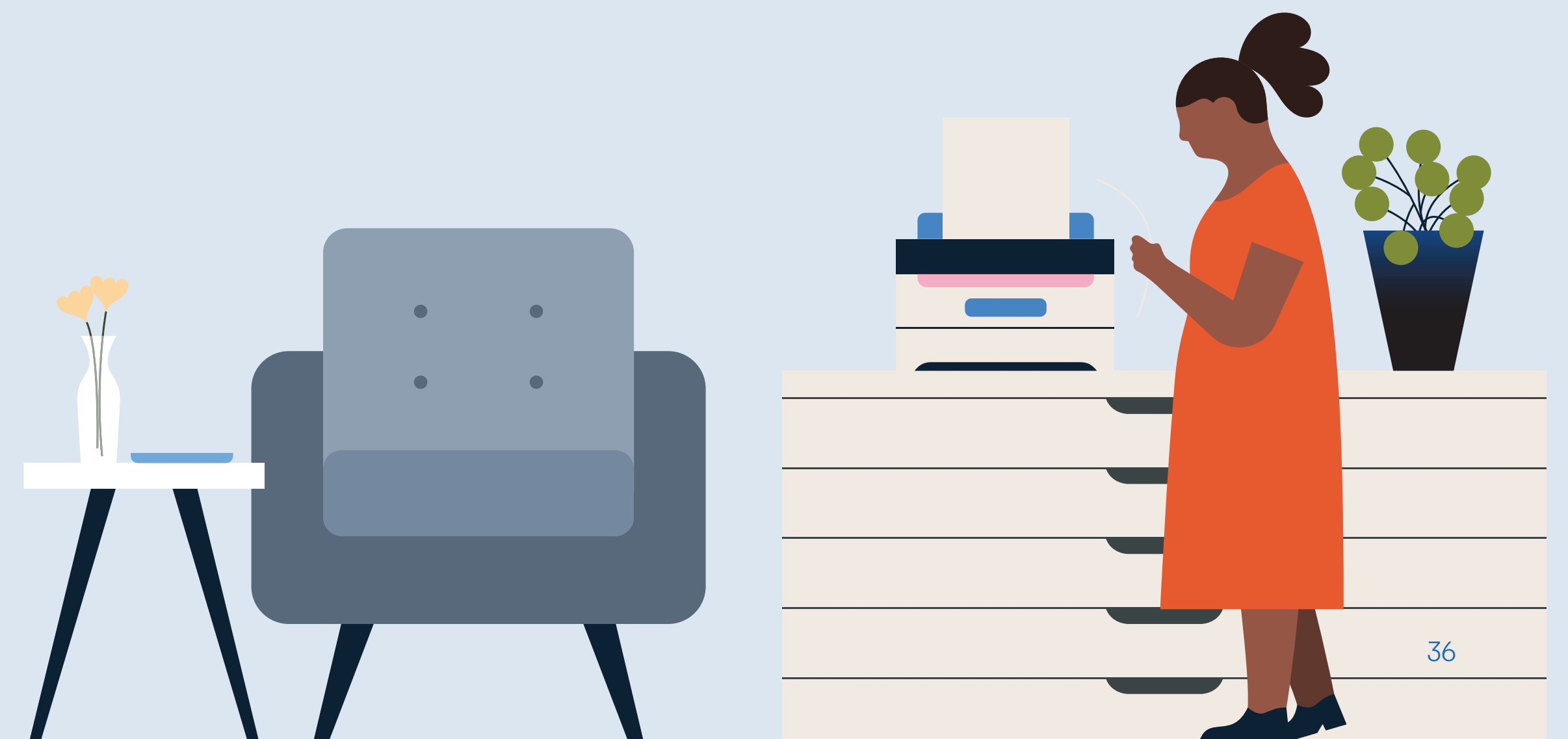
and join the conversation using the hashtag.

Visit

business.linkedin.com/sales-solutions/buyer-first for more content and resources on becoming Buyer First.

Subscribe to the LinkedIn Sales Solutions blog

for ongoing thought-leadership on how Buyer First can transform your sales process.



Thank you!