

## CHAPTER ONE

# TAKING THE SEVEN STEPS TO SALES SUCCESS

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I am not one of those sales coaches who believe that everyone has the potential to be a great salesperson, any more than I believe that everyone has the potential to be a great actor, a top-notch surgeon, or an ace fighter pilot. I have worked with some of the truly great salespeople, and I have noticed something about them that makes them quite different from other people.

Great salespeople are usually people persons. They are curious. They engage others in conversation. They get fully involved in other people's lives, even if it's only for that moment when they're making the sale. They have a genuine interest in other people, in the situations those people are in. They nurture relationships, and through those relationships whatever products and services they are selling tend to sell themselves.

Just because you have "the gift," however, does not mean that you are destined to be a great salesperson. I have seen many talented candidates fail miserably, simply because they didn't have

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the right mindset, the right mentor, or the *sticktoitism* required to succeed.

In this chapter, I reveal the seven steps you need to take to get from point A (where you are now) to point B (the success you dream of). These steps will work not only in your professional life but also in your personal life, and true success requires attention to both. Maybe you have what it takes to be a great salesperson and maybe you don't. This is something you need to discover on your own. However, if you have what it takes, and you follow the steps I describe in this chapter, you will be well on your way to achieving your goals.

### Step One: Be a Salesperson, Not an Order Taker

I use the term *salesperson* to describe individuals who take responsibility for their own success. A salesperson is an entrepreneur constantly in the process of expanding his or her circle of influence to encompass more clients, partners, and opportunities. Those who rely on their company to present them with a list of prospective buyers are merely *order takers*. Instead of taking control of their own destiny, they whine about market conditions, their boss, their lack of resources, and whatever else they believe is getting in the way of their success.

The global economy, along with the Internet, has compelled more and more individuals to become salespeople. Now, more than ever before, just about everyone sells some kind of product or service. Whether you have your own small business selling products on eBay, or are a traditional salesperson selling products or services on behalf of someone else's company, or are a job candidate presenting your qualifications to a prospective employer, you take on the role of salesperson and are ultimately responsible for your own success. Even the president of the United States has something to sell to the voters.

Order takers burden themselves with the mentality of employees. They go to work at a certain time, watch the clock, and leave at a

certain time. They let the boss supply the phones and the computers and the marketing materials. They may even work for a fixed salary. That's totally contrary to the essence of a sales career. In sales, the more you sell, the more you make. That's the great thing about sales. It lets us—the salespeople—determine just how successful we want to be.

Many of these passive salespeople believe that they can sell anything. They may say, "You just get the customers in the door and I'll do the rest." You hear salespeople voice this attitude in car dealerships, clothing stores, stock brokerages, and insurance offices. It is so misguided. It is guaranteed to keep a salesperson stuck in the lower ranks of the profession.

The first step in turning yourself into a top-producing sales professional is to think like an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is one who sets his or her own goals and then finds the means to achieve them. An entrepreneur is an independent contractor, even if he or she works for a large organization like a department store or car dealership.

Being an entrepreneur means that you make the majority of the decisions that shape your working day. You create and maintain your own database of clients. You invest in your own technology—a computer, a handheld wireless device (such as a BlackBerry), your own web site and blog, and so on. You create your own marketing materials, even if they're as simple as thank-you cards that you send to customers.

Being an entrepreneur means you set your own financial goals. These goals are independent of whatever quota your boss sets. These goals represent where you want to be in a year's time, in 5 years, in 10 years. They can involve specific purchases you want to make, like a new house or car, or include a target date for your retirement. Your job becomes a way to fund these dreams.

This basic attitude may be the most important thing I talk about in this book. If you get nothing else right, get this right: *Think like an entrepreneur, not an employee, like a salesperson, not an order taker.* What you need to realize is that you are a business unto yourself. You're a

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little corporation. It's You, Inc. You can make it whatever you want it to be. It can be as small or as large as you want. This remains true even if you work for somebody else. The true salesperson operates as an independent contractor. This gives you the right to take your success to whatever level you want.

#### **Step Two: Get All the Education You Can**

When I was just starting my career in real estate, I knew another guy who was just getting started. Each of us took an entirely different approach. While I dove right in and started selling houses, he was taking every real estate course he could fit into his schedule.

He was a GRI (Graduate Realtor Institute) before he had ever listed his first house. He was a CRS (Certified Residential Specialist) before he showed a house. He took every class, went to every seminar, and signed up for every workshop available. I used to say, "How crazy is that? The guy doesn't make any money. He's getting all this education—for what?"

Although this agent was not making money right out of the gate, he quickly achieved success and became the fifth or sixth top agent in the metropolitan Detroit area. He was probably pulling in a quarter of a million dollars a year. What he did was to take the doctor or lawyer approach to real estate. He went out and got his education first.

#### **Doing It My Way**

My approach was to start making money immediately. I figured I didn't need all that education. All I had to do was work my butt off and the money would start rolling in. I enrolled in the college of hard knocks, earning my street smarts, and working like a dog to make things happen. I had to overcome my lack of education with the sheer number of hours worked and energy spent.

In the long run, we both became very successful agents, but I had to work much harder to achieve the same level of success. At the time, I was too stubborn and closed-minded to see the value of

education. You really need *both* to be successful:  $e^2$ , or education and experience. Learn from my mistake and seize as many educational opportunities you can.

### **Easy In, Easy Out**

We all know that sales is an easy profession to get into. That's why there's such a high turnover. Something like two or three out of every four automobile salespeople leave their dealerships each year. What an unbelievable waste! In my field, about half of the people who go into real estate sales fold within their first year in business.

I could have been one of them. In my youthful exuberance and naïve enthusiasm, I thought I knew it all. I had closed my mind to new ideas. I wasn't smart enough to realize you could never be smart enough. Looking back, I'm amazed that I was able to succeed with such an attitude.

Over the years, I started realizing how important education was to my career, to the point that I became an information and resource sponge. I couldn't get enough. In fact, when I started taking my CRS courses and my GRI classes, I saw how knowledge I picked up could indeed make me richer as I applied it to my career. I was in the classroom devising ways to use what I was learning to make more money. (I also took an investment course, and I used what I learned to buy my first office.) I even took my GRI course over again, because another instructor was teaching it, giving me a fresh perspective.

I am a big fan of education now, because I know it helps build you into a better salesperson. I found that getting my education and increasing my knowledge gave me something very important: It allowed me to work smarter instead of harder. That should be the goal of every salesperson.

### **Read, Read, Read!**

Your education as a salesperson is not limited to the classroom. You should read all the books you can get your hands on. There are

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books on service, books on time management, books on a variety of topics and subjects. You can even get audio books on CD and iPod if you're too busy to take the time to read. There are motivational CDs that will help you develop a better attitude and more productive mindset. The key is to never adopt the attitude that you know it all. Then you're dead in the water and you'll lose any leadership advantage you may have.

When I first decided to go to the National Association of Realtors convention, I went only because my wife really wanted to visit San Francisco and I knew I could write off the cost of the trip. I really had no intention of attending the actual convention. However, when I got there, I decided to have a quick look to see what was going on inside the convention hall.

The strangest thing happened. I absolutely fell in love with the speakers and what was happening on the convention floor. What an amazing place to get ideas! (No matter what profession you are in, you should go to your convention and soak it all in.) At the time, I had to wonder why, from about 800,000 real estate agents in the nation, only 25,000 bothered to show up. I thought, "Wow, all these great speakers, all these great ideas. Where's everybody else?"

Go to seminars, take classes, attend your convention, read books, talk to other, more experienced salespeople—do whatever you can to improve yourself and your skills. My big mistake early in my career was thinking I knew it all, that I didn't need to take the time and effort to learn. How much sooner could I have improved my skills and become a top agent if I hadn't made this terrible mistake?

I also feel that this mistake is not limited to beginning salespeople. To this day, I still bump into seasoned, veteran salespeople who think they can't learn anything else, that they've seen it all. It breaks my heart to see this. It could mean that these salespeople won't grow anymore. That, to me, is stagnation. That's not a good place to be, especially in an industry—a world—that is changing daily with new technology that can empower us to do more things faster and better.

I guess the lesson I am trying to impart here is this: Never stop learning. Never stop growing as a salesperson. Soak it all in like a

giant sponge. You'll be better off for it, your career will be better off for it, and your clients will be better off for it.

### **Step Three: Spend Money to Make Money**

My grandmother was one of my best mentors. She would do anything for me. All through the eighties, we would have lunch nearly once a week. She'd come to the office (my wife worked at the office at the time) and she'd take us out to lunch. I don't remember exactly what year it was, 1985 or 1986, when I said to her, "You know, if I had thirty thousand dollars, there's this house I could buy, and I could probably make five or ten thousand dollars profit on it." It was priced way below market, because the owners needed to sell in a hurry. They were facing foreclosure. We went on and talked about other things, but before we left lunch, she gave me a check. She said, "Pay me back when you can."

I was just 25 or so. I probably borrowed money off my grandmother 30 or more times for different projects I was involved in. Now that she's no longer with us, I'm grateful that I was always able to pay her back. She was someone who believed in me and in what I did. She was someone who helped me find the money I needed to set myself up in business.

### **Invest in Yourself**

All salespeople, especially those who are first starting out, need a source of startup capital. Perhaps you won't be as lucky as I was. But then, you may not need \$30,000 so early in your career. You may need just a couple thousand dollars to buy business suits to wear to your new job as a stockbroker. You may need money to buy a new laptop computer to keep track of your transactions. You may need a few hundred dollars to buy a handheld wireless device.

My friend, Phyllis Wolborsky, became the top real estate agent in Raleigh, North Carolina, selling over 200 homes a year and working just nine months of the year. She once told me that when she got

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into the industry, all she needed was an air-conditioned car in which to drive clients around. Today, she needs much more: a cell phone, computer, assistants, and many other things that I cover later in this book. But even at the beginning of her career, she still needed that car. She had to invest in a car to put herself on the road to success.

### **Borrow If You Must**

I realize that if you are first starting out you may have to run to family and friends for help. That's okay; it is entirely appropriate to borrow a few thousand dollars from your parents to set yourself up in business. The amount will seem paltry once you become a success.

Don't shrink from capitalizing your career. You have to spend money to make money.

### **Step Four: Follow in the Footsteps of Success**

Years ago, a motivational speaker gave me some advice that's stuck with me. He said, "If you want to be happily married, hang around with happily married people. If you want to be a good father, hang around with good fathers."

And so it follows: If you want to be a good salesperson, hang around with good salespeople. Have you ever worked in an office or with a group of people with one person who complained all the time or a whiner who found fault with everything? Did you notice how one such person could bring down the whole office? Negative people negatively affect everyone around them.

The same is true of positive people: They give a boost to everyone around them.

### **Success Stands Out**

Did you ever notice that successful people don't complain much? You might say, "They're successful. What do they have to complain



about?" This is a case of the chicken and the egg. Which came first? Did success generate the winning attitude, or did the person's winning attitude breed success?

There's no question in my mind as to which came first. You have to want to win before you can even start to win. Success can be contagious. Most of us know what it feels like to be on a winning team. Everyone feeds off each other. They motivate one another. They share secrets, tips, and ideas. They listen to each other. They get things done together.

But remember, being a true winner is not looking down to see how many opponents you've beaten. A true winner always looks ahead to see whom he or she can catch up with or pass.

That's how it should be with your sales career. Watch and learn from the salespeople ahead of you. Use that knowledge to catch up with them. *Pass* them using the knowledge you got from even better salespeople. It's *momentum*—the momentum you gain from the combination of accumulated knowledge and a winning attitude.

### **Mentors: The Essential Ingredient**

If you want to be a better salesperson, hang around with salespeople who are better than you are. If you're happy selling 100 cars or 100 insurance policies a year, hang with salespeople at that same level; but if you want to learn more and bust through to the next level, then hang around people who are selling at a higher level. If you have a good attitude, your natural tendency is to want to rise up to their level. What a perfect motivating goal.

One of my early mistakes was not so much lacking a winning attitude. I've always had that. My mistake was not hanging around with salespeople who were better than I was. Looking back, I would have done this from day one. Of course, I started my sales career as a teenager. So I had the double whammy of being a wet-behind-the-ears, cocky 18-year-old who was going to set the world on fire. I lacked the vision to learn from salespeople who were more

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successful than I was, and more importantly, from salespeople who were working smarter than I was.

### Following in the Footsteps of Zig Ziglar

Throughout my high school years, I listened to the top motivational speakers and sales gurus—Zig Ziglar, Tommy Hopkins, Charlie “Tremendous” Jones, and others—who would come to Detroit and speak. I read their books. I listened to their tapes. I even skipped school to attend their events and rallies. I didn’t have enough money to get in, so I would have to go to the hall at 5:30 A.M. to sneak in.

I wouldn’t hesitate to approach these incredible speakers. I was awestruck, but I would approach them after the event and ask questions or tell them how much I admired them. Zig Ziglar once asked a young Ralph Roberts, “What are you doing here, son?” I gushed out, “I got special permission to be here, sir.” I lied. “Someday I’m going to be successful like you and do what you do.” “I’m sure you will,” he said.

His words were inspirational. What an incredible moment for me. Luckily, I wasn’t afraid to approach and talk to these people. Today, I invite many speakers to come to the Detroit area for lunch. Those I’m friends with, I invite to visit with my family. I get to network with these inspirational and intelligent people. You won’t believe how much you can learn.

### Success Leaves Big Footprints

I saw early on the value of listening and learning from my motivational heroes. But, at first, I failed to look to my own industry for inspiration, advice, and knowledge. That was a mistake. Now, in hindsight, it seems too painfully obvious. Those people who sell more than you do may know more than you do. Talk to them and find out what it is!

It won’t be as hard as you might think to find such people. Success leaves big footprints. Attend your industry conventions and listen

to the speakers. When you hear speakers you like, go up and talk to them afterward. Give them your business card. Write thank-you letters telling them what you thought about their topics and ideas. If you meet someone who is selling a ton of products, you have an incredible opportunity to ask them questions about the business. It's like stumbling on a goldmine of information!

### **Don't Be Too Proud to Ask for Help**

Many obstacles stop most of us from seeking out mentors. Some of us are too proud. "I'd never stoop to having to ask another salesperson for advice." That's wrong. You're not stooping down; you're working your way up. Some of us may be jealous, as in, "I'm better than that salesperson. He just got lucky." But sour grapes never benefited anybody. Even worse, some of us are too afraid to ask for advice, ideas, or help. Don't be afraid to approach people for advice and answers. Sure, someone could snub you, but most are willing to teach someone who is eager to learn. Just move on to the next person.

If you are a beginning salesperson, you can learn from most veterans. No matter at what level you are, you can probably find people who are producing at significantly higher levels than you are. Seek them out. Ask them if you could spend a day with them to try to pick up some pointers. You'll be amazed at how many salespeople will say "yes." It's a big boost to anyone's ego to be admired. People love to share their knowledge with others. It makes them feel good. I can tell you from personal experience how good it feels to share ideas and knowledge with salespeople who come up to me at my speaking events.

As I said, my mistake was not hooking up with mentors in my early years. Let me tell you, though, I quickly made up for that mistake, soaking up as much knowledge as I could from anyone who would share it with me. I've put together systems that have allowed me to sell over 500 houses a year. Do you think I made up every one of those systems in my head? My systems are the result

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of 20 years of keeping my eyes open, reading, taking classes, and, just as important, watching other salespeople work.

### My Shadow Program

I've had many superstars around the country *shadow* me and spend a day watching me work. And I've been very fortunate that they have all paid a fee to shadow me. The funny thing is, while they're learning from me, I think I learn more from them. I'm like a sponge; I soak in everything I possibly can. But to take, you have to give. You can't be afraid to share your secrets. The more you give, the more you'll get. You can only improve your industry with this mindset. If you are approached by salespeople who want to learn from you, share with them! You'll be amazed at how much you learn in the process. Even today, I ask other superstar salespeople if I can shadow them for a day, just to see what helpful hints I can pick up.

### A Million Questions a Year

I try to give as much back to agents as I can. I speak around the country, and I answer a million real estate questions a year. Right now, besides writing this book, I'm creating CDs, podcasts, and other products. Running my real estate practice, writing books, speaking, and pursuing other opportunities keeps me plenty busy. But I still have my staff block out a certain number of days a year so that salespeople can come in and shadow me. I hope you may be motivated to call my office and inquire about shadowing me. That would be great. Then I would know that this book is doing what I hoped it would do: helping people avoid the mistakes I made years ago. I would love to have you come down and meet the staff, and learn a ton of stuff!

Ira Hayes, a great motivational speaker and the number-one cash register salesperson in the world, would go around and speak to other cash register companies. They'd ask, "Ira, why are you here

telling us your secrets? We're your competition!" and he would say, "My company can't even get the people back at the office to do what I do, so they're not worried about anybody here doing it." Unfortunately, that's incredibly true in the sales profession as a whole; what's required to succeed is readily available, but too many salespeople fail to take advantage of it.

### **Step Five: Nurture Relationships**

A great salesperson can sell anything: cars, homes, pharmaceuticals, technology, you name it. This is because selling is all about creating productive, mutually beneficial relationships. Selling is about building trust and establishing yourself in a community as the most trustworthy and knowledgeable person from which to buy particular products and services. Whether you are selling beauty-care products on the Internet or networking solutions to corporate executives, your relationships drive sales.

### **Know Your Product or Service**

To be a successful real estate agent, you really need to appreciate the benefits of owning your own home—the pride of maintaining and decorating it, the tax savings, the privacy, the security, and the memories you create in that home with family and friends. Not all salespeople have the opportunity to use all the products and services they sell, but as much as possible, take on the role of the consumer—your customer or client. If you can't use what you sell, at least talk with the consumers to obtain an intimate knowledge of their needs and what they feel makes one product or service superior to another.

Loving what you sell is an added bonus. I love real estate. I love the whole concept of owning land, designing and building my dream home, decorating and furnishing my home and its surroundings, having neighbors, building future wealth, benefiting from the tax savings, and so on. Homes get me pumped up, and I find

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nothing more rewarding than helping a young couple find and purchase their first home. I believe that if I didn't love what I was selling, I would not be half as good at selling it.

### **Sell the Benefits**

Far too many salespeople get so caught up in *what* they are selling that they forget about the needs of the consumer *to whom* they are selling. As a result, their sales presentations are packed with an overwhelming number of details promoting the product's bells and whistles. After examining all the features of the product, the customer is left wondering, "Who cares? What do all those features have to do with me?"

Whenever you present a product, sell the benefits first. Show your prospective clients exactly how your product or service solves a problem they are currently experiencing or meets their specific needs.

In most cases, before you are able to sell the benefits, you first need to assess your prospective customer's needs, and that means asking questions. Until you know what your customer needs, you have no idea what that person is willing and able to buy. By asking the right questions, you help your clients discover what they need. Only then will they be prepared to purchase what you are selling.

### **Your Client's Success Is Your Success**

As a salesperson, your motto should be "Your success is my success." If you assist in making your customers more successful, you benefit in at least three ways:

1. Your customers will be more willing to purchase from you again.
2. Your customers will have more money to purchase more products or services from you in the future.
3. Your customers will send more referral business your way.

When you are on a mission to build your customers' success, this may mean that you don't make a particular sale. You may even send the customer to one of your competitors, if your competitor is better equipped to meet the customer's needs. Remember, you are building a reputation and relationships that will drive business your way throughout your career. Losing one sale is a small price to pay to establish a positive relationship that will pay dividends for many years to come.

### **Step Six: Master the Tools of Your Trade**

When I was first starting out as a real estate agent, I needed only a few tools: a car, a phone, and a calculator. To remain competitive in today's marketplace, I still need those three basic tools, but additional, more powerful tools have become necessities, including my BlackBerry, a laptop computer with Internet access, web sites, blogs, e-mail, an Internet lead-generation service, software for managing drip e-mail campaigns, a fax machine, a contact-management program, a computer network, and a host of other computer hardware and software.

Although all of these technological tools require an investment of both money and the time required to master them, they allow you to become more productive and improve customer service.

### **Identify the Best Tools and Technologies**

Before you decide to adopt a particular tool or technology, consult with other salespeople in your industry to identify the tools and technologies that they have found most useful. Nothing is more discouraging than investing in a particular device and then finding out that a superior product is available.

If your industry has magazines or journals, subscribe to them and read them regularly. These publications often have articles and advertisements for the most useful tools and technologies that offer tips and techniques on how to make the most of them.

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### **Adopt New Technologies Gradually**

Attempting to master all the tools of your trade immediately can become overwhelming, so avoid tackling too many technologies all at once. If you adopt one new technology per month, by the end of the year, you will have mastered a dozen new tools. Instead of trying to learn all of the features of a particular tool, learn one feature per day; by the end of the month, you will have mastered 30 features!

All too often, people try to take on too much. They quickly become discouraged and give up altogether. Pace yourself. Make a commitment to learn so many things over the course of so many days or weeks or months, and then stick to your schedule. Looking back, you will be surprised at just how much you have learned.

### **Seize Change**

The victims of change are the people who resist it. The real estate industry is undergoing a revolutionary change. More and more people are using the Internet as a tool to find a home to purchase or market a home they are selling. Some agents view this as a threat to their business and refuse to become a part of it. These agents will ultimately be the biggest losers.

Other agents view the latest trend as a huge opportunity. Instead of resisting the change, they have built their own web sites and blogs. They have set up sites to gather the e-mail addresses of prospective clients. They have signed up for online lead-generation services that put them in contact with potential clients, both locally and out of state. They have fully exploited the latest technologies to expand their businesses.

By seizing technology rather than resisting it, you remain on the cutting edge and have the potential to serve more customers better than before.

### **Step Seven: Stick to It**

The seventh step is perhaps the most important: Stick to it. Like most successful people, I have had my share of setbacks and outright



failures. In fact, early in my career as a real estate investor, I lost a home in foreclosure. I could easily have given up at that point, admitted defeat, and declared that I was ill suited to invest in real estate. Instead, I learned an important lesson from my mistakes and kept trying until I became successful.

Everything I recommend in this book is proven to work, but this does not mean that the first time you try something I recommend it will work for you. It may not work the first time; or it may work well, but you won't see the positive results immediately. What is important is that you put what I recommend into practice and keep at it until you achieve the desired level of success.

I believe so much in the importance of sticking to it that I have coined my own word: *sticktoitism*. The official, dictionary version of the word is *stick-to-itiveness*, but I prefer my version—sticktoitism, the dogged determination to succeed in the face of an overwhelming challenge.

### YOUR CHAPTER 1 CHECKLIST

- ☐ Think like an entrepreneur, not an employee, like a salesperson, not an order taker. Set your own goals. Prepare your own marketing materials. Set your own schedule. Take a proactive approach to pursuing customers rather than just waiting for them to walk in the door.
- ☐ Get all the training and education you can as early as you can.
- ☐ Commit yourself to lifelong learning and improvement.
- ☐ Invest in yourself to be a success. Startup costs are simply a part of business.
- ☐ Learn from salespeople who are more successful than you are. Shadow top-producing salespeople in your industry and find a mentor. Never be afraid to ask for advice.

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**YOUR CHAPTER 1 CHECKLIST** *(Continued)*

- ☐ Focus less on selling and more on building relationships.  
Relationships drive sales, so always act in the best interest of your clients.
- ☐ Master the tools and technologies that have the potential to make you more productive and enable you to better serve your clients.
- ☐ Stick to it. Quitters never win.