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## The Mysterious Brown Bag

*It is the dim haze of mystery that adds enchantment to pursuit.*

—Antoine Rivarol

At the young age of 23, Art had just landed a huge promotion or, in his words, “Somebody left the company, and I got lucky.”

As a lease sales representative, he worked with complex, long-cycle deals, not the typical sales role handed to wet-behind-the-ears 23-year-olds. Fortunately, Art had two things in his favor: an unequaled drive to succeed *and* a great mentor.

His mentor and sales manager was a company legend. Joe had his name etched on pretty much every award the company bestowed and on many of the largest customers in the organization’s account base. Joe appreciated Art’s willingness to learn and took him under his wing.

“To me, at that young age, Joe looked ancient,” Art jokes. “He’d been around forever. But he knew the answers to every question and

where to find any tidbit of information; and, boy, did he know how to talk to customers.”

It was Joe who taught Art one of the most valuable lessons of his young career: *You must learn to speak your prospect’s language, because people buy for their reasons, not yours.*

## **The Lesson of a Lifetime**

Art had been working on a deal with a local bakery. Everything was going along without a hitch until Art presented his pricing.

“Mr. Colaizzi, the owner, was adamant that my rates were too high, and he wouldn’t budge from his position. I’d been going back and forth trying to convince him that, even though my rates were a little higher than my competitors’, the added value from the quality of our service was more than worth it. But I was getting nowhere.

“He kept throwing the competitors’ low prices in my face, but I was in a tight spot. If I went any lower, I wouldn’t make a dime of commission. Worse, I’d have to get approval from my district manager—not a pleasant experience.

“During a pipeline review with Joe, I explained that the Colaizzi deal was stalled, and expressed my frustration with our high rates. If we didn’t get our prices in line with our competitors’, I was never going to be able to sell anything!”

Art smiles as he explains that he might have been “just a little bit hotheaded back then,” and tells the story of how Joe taught him an indelible lesson:

Joe didn’t flinch. He just stood up and said, “Come on.” We walked out to his car, and he motioned for me to get in.

Then Joe drives us to a local grocery store, parks the car, and says, “Wait here.” Ten minutes later he comes out carrying a brown paper bag. He stuffs it in the backseat, puts the car in drive, and off we go.

A half hour later we’re sitting in the lobby of the Colaizzi Baking Company waiting for Mr. Colaizzi to arrive, the mysterious brown bag perched on Joe’s lap.

After a 20-minute or so wait, an assistant ushers us into Mr. Colaizzi's office—the brown bag clutched in Joe's hand.

I didn't know what to expect. Joe had barely spoken to me since we'd gotten into his car, and I was nervous about his intentions.

We sat down across from Mr. Colaizzi's desk, and Joe started the conversation in a relaxed, almost nonchalant tone: "Mr. Colaizzi, Art tells me he's been working with you on a truck leasing program for your delivery fleet. He says you feel that our rates are a bit too high, and I came down here to learn more."

Then, he shut up.

Mr. Colaizzi leaned back in his chair, crossed his arms, and said, "I appreciate that you took the time to come all the way down here, but the fact is your rates aren't a 'bit' higher; they're way higher than your competitors'. You aren't even close. I know you're going to say that your service and quality are better. You can save your breath because I've heard it all before. All of you truck companies are the same. If you can't get your prices in line with your competitors', we don't have anything to talk about."

Joe wasn't the least bit ruffled. He placed the brown bag on Mr. Colaizzi's desk, slowly unfolded the top, and pulled two loaves of bread out of the bag. Joe set the bag on the floor and placed the loaves directly in front of Mr. Colaizzi.

Joe allowed the silence to hang in the air for just a moment before speaking. "Mr. Colaizzi, I'm just curious. What's the difference between this loaf of supermarket brand white bread that costs sixty-three cents and this loaf of Colaizzi Italian bread that costs a dollar eighty-seven cents? What makes it worth three times as much?"

Mr. Colaizzi jumped up, pushed his chair back, leaned over his desk, and spent the next 10 minutes lecturing us on why his bread was better—his passion for his bread and reputation on full display.

He explained that his bread was fresher, that it was made from higher-quality ingredients, the care that went into making it, the unique baking process, his family's recipe, the history of Colaizzi bread, and the taste. The taste was "so much better than mass-produced bread"—his face twisted in disgust as he said the words—"with all of those artificial ingredients. That stuff's more like cardboard than bread."

When he felt that we'd been sufficiently educated on the superiority of Colaizzi Italian bread, he sat back down.

Joe leaned across the desk, picked up the loaf of Colaizzi bread, and said, "Mr. Colaizzi, that's exactly what we've been trying to tell you about us. We are the Colaizzi bread of truck leasing!"

For an interminable moment, Joe and Mr. Colaizzi just sat there staring at each other.

I didn't breathe.

Then a grin spread across Mr. Colaizzi's face, and he let go of a big laugh. He reached out and shook Joe's hand. There were still a few concessions to make, but we walked out with a signed contract and a new customer. We no longer looked the same as our competitors.

Today Art Vallely is COO of Penske Truck Leasing. He's one of the most gifted and dynamic leaders I know—an executive who gets it. He puts a high priority on sales and sales training. He's the only C-level executive I work with who spends time with every sales training class from entry-level sales reps in basic sales training to veteran sales professionals who are attending advanced training.

Art passes on lessons, like the one Joe taught him, to his sales professionals to help them understand that the key to being an ultra-high performer (UHP) in sales is mastering emotions, interpersonal skills, and human relationships.

## **A Front-Row Seat into the Mind of a UHP**

In Mr. Colaizzi's mind, all truck companies were the same. Why wouldn't he believe this? He had endured multiple truck leasing sales pitches that all sounded the same, marketing brochures and collateral that looked the same, and proposals that offered the same promises.

To Mr. Colaizzi, a truck was a truck was a truck. Inside this pattern of sameness, Mr. Colaizzi shifted into his reflex buyer script—"Your price is too high." From a purely cognitive standpoint, his response was an easy mental shortcut for dealing with the complexity of sorting out the real differences between the vendors.

Average salespeople play into and conform to buyer scripts by responding in kind. They become defensive, they argue, or they fold. In the process, they lose control and lower deal win probabilities.

But Joe didn't play by the same rules as average salespeople. He reached into his mysterious brown paper bag and changed the game—leveraging simple, but powerful, influence frameworks.

- In response to Mr. Colaizzi's buyer script, Joe leveraged a non-complementary response.
- This disrupted Mr. Colaizzi's expectations for how a salesperson would behave, pulling Mr. Colaizzi's attention toward Joe.
- Mr. Colaizzi took the stage to defend his position and lecture Art and Joe on why Colaizzi bread was better than supermarket bread.
- As Mr. Colaizzi began talking about his bread, it kicked off a self-disclosure dopamine loop in his brain that rewarded him for talking. He felt good, even though his conscious self didn't know why.
- As Joe and Art listened intently to the lecture and gave their complete attention, it made Mr. Colaizzi feel important (the most powerful gift you can give another person). This created a feeling of obligation in Mr. Colaizzi.
- In the process of lecturing Art and Joe, Mr. Colaizzi became more committed to his position that his bread was better than the competition.
- Joe touched both wires to the emotional trigger by speaking in Mr. Colaizzi's language: *That's exactly what we've been trying to tell you about us. We are the Colaizzi bread of truck leasing.*
- Using Mr. Colaizzi's language caused him to feel that Joe understood him, creating a powerful emotional connection and trust.
- Mr. Colaizzi had committed to the position that his bread was different. To then refute Joe's claim that his truck leasing service was also different would be inconsistent. This incongruence would cause painful mental stress called cognitive dissonance.
- All Mr. Colaizzi could do was smile and agree when Joe made his case.
- The feeling of obligation Mr. Colaizzi felt when Joe and Art made him feel important caused him to want to reciprocate, which opened the door to negotiation. A deal was then struck that was fair to both parties.

Average salespeople delude themselves into believing that buyers make rational, logical decisions based on empirical data and information. But that's not how the human mind works. Emotions come first, then logic.

Rather than fold like a cheap lawn chair and lower the price, Joe managed his own disruptive emotions and flipped the buyer script, "Your price is too high." He then shaped the decision process until it became virtually impossible for Mr. Colaizzi to make any decision other than yes.