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## A SHIFT IN MIND-SET

**I**t is rare that you meet a child who has aspirations of growing up to be a salesperson. You do hear alternatives such as politician, lawyer, doctor, sports professional, or artist—and in all these examples, the commonality is that without the ability to influence, persuade, and negotiate, the chances of success are highly reduced.

Having a talent or ability to perform is not enough by itself to secure success. Through the years there have been countless examples of highly capable businesspeople failing because of one simple reason: they did not know how to sell.

### **SALESPEOPLE OR SALES PROFESSIONALS**

Finding yourself in a sales role quite often happens by accident. Perhaps you have just started in business or had an urgent business need, or maybe somebody else has put you into the role. The truth is we are all salespeople, and in every part of life, sales skills are useful tools in helping us to climb the ladder and realize

more of our potential. When you reflect on almost everyone who has achieved a significant level of success, you will typically find that their achievement has been enabled, amplified, or accelerated through their ability to sell.

“Sales” is certainly not a dirty word. To illustrate my point, here are some high achievers I would class as being some of the most successful sales professionals on the planet:

- Steve Jobs
- Martha Stewart
- Leonardo DiCaprio
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Nelson Mandela
- Sir Alex Ferguson
- LeBron James
- Richard Branson
- Oprah Winfrey
- J. K. Rowling

There is probably a huge difference between your initial image of a salesperson and these decorated professionals.

During my seminars I often ask audience members to reach for adjectives that would describe a stereotypical salesperson. Common responses almost always include these words:

- Pushy
- Greedy
- A con man
- Obnoxious
- Overly friendly
- A liar
- Annoying

How would you feel if someone used those words to describe you? I would imagine less than happy. I also imagine that one of the reasons you picked up this book is your fear of being perceived that way.

In seminars, I then ask the same audience to reach for adjectives that do not describe a “stereotypical” salesperson, but a “professional” salesperson. The list of adjectives is quite a contrast:

- A good listener
- Problem-solving
- Empathetic
- Genuine
- Knowledgeable
- Helpful
- Responsible

I always find this experiment incredibly interesting. It becomes obvious to me that the fear of being a salesperson is the fear of being perceived as carrying that first set of attributes. Today’s world is a very different one, and given our reality—the huge transparency now created through reviews, the Internet, and the power of a consumer’s voice on social media—then it really only leaves room for the sales professional to prosper.

Choosing to be professional means you are faced with two options for acquiring new customers. One option is to be reactive, await your inquiries, and respond promptly on receipt of some interest, and the second is to be proactive and take steps to make things happen.

Although there are plenty of strategies that can result in you creating more inbound inquiries, it is paramount that you take control of your circumstances and build a robust plan to proactively reach more potential customers. Success in sales is all about

maintaining control. By building a process that allows you to direct and steer your future customer numbers, you can build your business with far more control and composure. Relying purely on a reactive approach will bring huge variance, with external factors largely responsible for your success or failure.

## CHOOSING YOUR FOCUS

A significant difference between marketing and sales is that marketers look to attract new customers, while sales professionals take the time to choose their customers. If you can look back over your experience and think of a customer you wish you hadn't had, then I imagine that was not somebody you strategically chose as a perfect customer.

Choosing your customers ahead of time is a process known as "prospecting." Outside of the world of sales, the word is defined on Wikipedia as "the first stage of the geological analysis . . . of a territory. It is the physical search for minerals, fossils, precious metals or mineral specimens . . . . Prospecting is a small-scale form of mineral exploration which is an organized, large-scale effort undertaken by commercial mineral companies to find commercially viable ore deposits." This can be simply translated as the hunt for buried treasure. It's about extracting the maximum value from the relationships that we hold, the circumstances we find ourselves in, and the opportunities we create.

Your responsibility as a sales professional is to constantly be on the hunt for buried treasure. As a treasure hunter, you would have predetermined goals identifying the high-value items you are looking for. As a sales professional, your job is to do exactly the same thing: decide in advance the precise, perfect people you would love to do business with.

Striving for more and having ambition are qualities that have fueled the sales profession since the start of time. This enthusiasm can also be a huge barrier to you taking advantage of the opportunities that are already available. You have the right to choose your customers, decide what success looks like, and identify the quality and quantity of people that you would like to work with. A common mistake is that people fail to execute that choice and find themselves trying to work with anybody and everybody.

I choose to take the perspective that every future customer is no more than a “missing person.” Instead of looking for anybody and everybody, get laser focused on exactly what your ideal customer looks like—to the point that you could describe them to a stranger, as you would with a missing person. Once you have that focused description in your mind, you will see opportunity more often, get more of the right kind of customers, and be more targeted in all of your activities. The additional benefit you gain once you can explain each of your target markets is that other people can help you to hit the target. You can describe them to everyone you meet and let those people introduce you to your missing people or opt in to be potential customers themselves.

There is a part of the brain called the reticular activating sensor (RAS) that is a component our conscious system. It makes decisions throughout the day as to what information is important and what we should ignore. Setting your RAS on the precise customer you would love to meet next means that you start to see and create opportunity everywhere you go. I am not saying that you will only deal with people who fit your perfect description, but simply being more targeted in your activity means you get lucky more often. I view it just like the game of darts. Every time you throw a dart, you are aiming for something specific. You don't always hit it, yet each time you miss, you still contribute to your score.

To identify your missing people, you can work through three simple steps:

1. Imagine your dream customer, the perfect person you would love to work with repeatedly. Once you are clear on this picture, take pen to paper and write a list of the exact qualities of this person and the reasons they are perfect for you.
2. In addition to the list of attributes, you may then need to apply some constraints and boundaries that narrow your gaze and place you in a stronger position to start identifying precise candidates:
  - Where are they located geographically?
  - What industry or sector are they in?
  - How big are they?
  - How long have they been doing what they do?
  - Who specifically within the company are you looking to help?
  - Why specifically would they need you?Combining the answers to these questions with the qualities from your list will put you in a very strong position to identify potential customers.
3. Create a detailed written profile of the precise people you are looking to do business with and make it as visually appealing as possible. This is your chance to create your “missing person” poster and share the details with all the stakeholders involved in your business.

If you have a range of products and services and have different target markets for each, then simply repeat the process for each specific audience.

## BUILDING YOUR PROSPECT LIST

If you are to proactively drive your success as a sales professional, then you must take control by creating a definitive list of potential customers who meet the predetermined criteria you have just set. It is unlikely that you will gain more new customers than you have prospects, and the finest sales professionals always have an abundance of new opportunities ahead of them. Therefore, an essential part of every sales process is to identify a list of potential customers and add to that list as often as possible.

My general rule is to build a list with at least 10 times more than the number of new customers you desire. Start by building the list before approaching the people, because without a quantity of quality, you can quickly hit a dead end. This can dramatically affect your momentum and confidence when you are building your pipeline.

To help you build a massive list, I have developed a simple system for creating a sequential process to maximize your existing network and reach, delivering you a never-ending supply of names. Build your list of potential customers by following the FRIENDS system:

**Friends**—Start your list by considering all your friends in life and business. Go through your phone contacts, e-mail contacts, social network connections, and address books, considering all people who fit your target market or could help you get closer to it, and add them to your list.

**Records**—As we go through our professional lives, we collect reams of information that is full of potential future value. Go through existing and previous customer and supplier records, contacts from previous employment, and libraries of business cards.

**Industry**—Consider every industry that you would like to work with or have worked with in the past, and then add relevant individuals and companies from the same or similar industries.

**E-marketing**—The web is a fantastic tool for building your list. Put a contact form on your website to collect phone numbers and e-mail addresses in exchange for something of value, and use search engines to identify existing buyers of your product or service.

**Networking**—Attend events, both formal and informal, to identify future customers for you and your business.

**Directory**—Use directories of groups and organizations within your sector to gain the names and contact details of prospects. Start with the directories of groups you are associated with so that you have a common interest to make contact over.

**Same Name**—Finally, review your entire list and consider anyone you can think of who shares the same first or last name as any of your existing prospects. You will be amazed at how many names you add by following this simple memory technique. *Please remember that people buy people—your list must be of names of people, not organizations!*

## BECOMING DEVILISHLY PRODUCTIVE

So now you have this giant list of people. As much as this is helpful, it can also be remarkably overwhelming. To professionally prospect a massive list is close to impossible, but your productivity can be enhanced by defining your focus and narrowing your gaze toward specific groups of people.



If you are to find the treasure, have long-term success, and be in a position in which you have a continuous supply of new business opportunities, you will likely need to look for prospects who fit into different groups. Invest the time to identify three different types of prospects before choosing your focus. You can choose to label these categories in a way appropriate to your circumstances, but to help with the clarity of the example, let's stick to the analogy of hunting for treasure.

**LEVEL 1—SILVER PROSPECTS** These are the opportunities that should be your easy wins and should provide you with the short-term success you need to keep doing business. They possibly came to you through a direct inquiry, have an immediate need, and are transactional in their nature. It is unlikely that these people are going to be big spenders; however, they make decisions quickly, are not very price sensitive, and are an essential part of your sales success.

**LEVEL 2—GOLD PROSPECTS** These are people you have proactively selected as potential valuable core customers of your product or service. Perhaps they are already buying from somebody else and may be a little slow to make their decision, but they have the ability to deliver an ongoing, repeat spend to you.

**LEVEL 3—PLATINUM PROSPECTS** These premium prospects are your high-reaching dream opportunities—perhaps the perfect sale, the ideal account, or the elusive “big fish.” This is an opportunity that, if you were to secure it, could make your year or even be life altering for you personally. They are unlikely to have you on their radar, already have an abundance of others trying to win the same opportunities, and are notoriously challenging to get in front of.

Having these three categories means that you can split your big list into smaller areas and, before taking action, choose what type of customers you are currently looking for more of. All this preparation can still leave you paralyzed and lacking the focus to determine where to point yourself. You may have hundreds of potential customers in each area, so that this abundance of opportunity stops you from moving forward.

Instead of working with everybody, your next smart step is to become what I call “devilishly productive.” The reason I call it this is because it involves taking each of your three categories and selecting just six specific contacts to work on in each area. Six silver, six gold, and six platinum prospects (666) gives you a workable total of just 18 people.

The first six “good” prospects become your bread-and-butter sales—they decide quickly and drive instant profit and opportunity into your business. They’re unlikely to make you whoop and holler with excitement, but these are the people you need to keep moving forward and help feed you on the journey to find the people who are going to close in your next six.

This next six people you focus on are your “better” prospects. These are the ones who, when you do secure them, make for a good day. This is when you get super excited, so this is your gold—what you’re really looking for.

The last six people to work on are your absolute ideal prospects, those big fish, the ones who, if you land one, will make your life easier. Now, this might be an individual you want to join your business. It might be that dream transaction, where somebody buys everything you have to offer. Or it might be that perfect partner, the relationship that you know will manage to join those dots up and cause your business to skyrocket overnight.

Think about the differences between these three different groups of people. Those good prospects down at the first six should be easy to find and easy to close, and you should be able to work through them fairly quickly.

The second group of people might take a bit more time—time to find, time to get in front of and time to work through multiple meetings. It might take you a few weeks or months to get to a point where they make the decision you want them to make. But when they make it, you know it's worth it.

The final group are the slow burns. These are going to take the most time, effort, and energy. They're probably already working with somebody else. This isn't about getting them to choose you. The first decision you need to get these people to make is to choose to stop doing the thing you want to replace, so this will take time.

Choosing to become devilishly productive and working prospects in these three different areas means you're taking care of the day-to-day, you're looking at how you can be super successful, and you're also taking care of the dream ticket that we know is possible for you.

Staying focused on just 18 people means that as decisions are made, your list is always changing. As you close one successfully, enjoy the celebration, be proud of yourself and your achievement, but then immediately start thinking about who steps into their place the very next day.

The same goes when somebody decides they're not for you at this stage. When somebody says "No, not right now" to you, move them off your devilishly productive list, return them to your larger list, and bring somebody else into their place.

Being prepared to ask yourself every day "Who are the 18 prospects I'm working with at this moment?" is a very simple way

to keep part of your activity focused on the continuous growth of your customer base.

## SALES IS A PHILOSOPHY

In every business I have been a part of, there has typically been a clear divide between the sales and operational sides of the organization. Most people believe that the responsibility of winning and maintaining business is simply that of the sales team. I do not just disagree with this approach but believe it to be the failing of many businesses year after year.

If you are building a business that looks to connect with its customers, offer fantastic levels of service, and gain referrals and stacks of repeat business, then understanding that sales is a philosophy can help you get there.

When working with clients, it is essential for us to oversee the entire customer experience—from first contact, through the sales process, to delivery of the promise and beyond. The whole team has a significant impact on the commercial success of the company, and at every point of contact we have the chance to either enhance or reduce the quality of the customer experience. Getting this right brings such significant results, it's astounding. Bringing a commercially focused sales mind-set to every customer interaction can amplify your sales success in abundance. Having everybody pulling together in one direction creates benefits that are slight when looked at in isolation, yet the collective benefit is compounded to a result that will astound you. Shift your mind-set to your own process and ask yourself the following questions:

- How does the first point of contact with a customer support your sales outcome?

- How well does your operational team deliver on the promises made by the sales team?
- What specifically do you say in the sales process to set fair expectations for the process that follows?
- Are the sales opportunities being maximized at the point of delivery?
- What further information could be collected at each contact point that would support future sales success?
- Is the language and terminology used to describe your products and services consistent across all areas?
- Is your finance department aware of the potential value of each of your existing customers?
- Are relationships being layered within existing customers to protect loyalty, strengthen relationships, and increase the efficiency of transactions?

Connecting the dots in the process has several very tangible benefits, including

- Increases in profits
- No late payments
- No bad debts
- Preferential treatment from suppliers
- Increased operational efficiency
- Improved staff productivity
- More free time
- Reduced customer complaints
- Improved communication

Just imagine the positive impact on your sales success if you first choose to map your customer journey, identify the key checkpoints within it, and equip yourself and all key stakeholders with the correct skills and information to maximize each opportunity.

## PERCEPTION IS REALITY

Unfortunately, in life and business, first impressions count. Humans are notoriously shallow and make judgments on others in the shortest periods of time and with very limited information. When you're asking others to part with money, these judgments can be even sharper, and the difference between someone choosing you and someone like you can be the slightest of factors.

Knowing that you are going to be facing huge judgment from potential customers, consider how you wish to be judged and take control over what others go on to think. However harsh a judgment may be, take confidence from the fact that creating this first impression is within your full control. The position you hold in your business, your personal experience, and the size and credibility of your organization are all unknown factors when you present yourself for the first time. This impression is your opportunity to set the bar at a place that you decide.

Your personal presentation is paramount. Your choice of outfit, fragrance, personal grooming, and accessories all say something about you. Are you happy with the message you are giving?

I am sure you can think of countless scenarios in which you have been prejudged or you have prejudged others. It is important to accept that this happens, but equally important to never prejudge others.

Some of the key factors that affect the immediate judgment others make of you are as follows:

**Mode of transport**—People's social standing is often judged by the car that they drive. Knowing this, please do all you can to use it as a tool. If your business requires you to be perceived as highly successful and your car echoes this, then make sure you get seen driving it. If your vehicle hasn't yet reached

your business aspirations, then choose an alternative means of transport or ensure that it does not hinder your chances of success. This can also work the other way. If your business has a high-value offering and your car seems too expensive, then you too will be perceived as expensive and you may lose the work. What is imperative is that, whatever your means of transport, it is always presented at its best and is working for you, not against you.

**Your uniform**—Clothing is a tough one to get right. Many of us undertake a variety of roles in business and have a varied work life. My general rule is to dress as your customer would expect to see you, and if in doubt, you are better to be dressed more formally than too casual.

**Your accessories**—Accessories are often the most telling guide to someone's true personality. You can tell far more about people from their choice of shoes, jewelry, body art, business stationery, electronic devices, and luggage than from many other factors. Please take a moment to consider what yours say about you and whether they give the impression you are planning for.

**Your grooming**—Be prepared for people to judge you by what you look like, what you smell like, and how you behave. Ask a stranger to profile you based on your look and listen to the response. I learned an important lesson on an extended business trip when I looked down at my hands to see overgrown fingernails not representing me the way that I would choose. I mean, how can I take care of someone's business success if I cannot care for my own personal grooming? The entire meeting I kept my hands out of sight, lacked my usual confidence, and felt paranoid about my personal appearance. From that day onward, the manicure routine has taken high

priority in my personal planning, and travel-sized nail clippers are a permanent fixture in my work bag! Please also consider your handshake: too firm and people will think you're arrogant; too weak and they will think you're incompetent.

**Your marketing materials**—Your business gives an impression, too. Whether it is your business card, your e-mail signature, your telephone voicemail, or your website that your prospects first bump into, be certain it is giving the right message. I work on the principle of presenting your business as the one you plan to grow into, not the one you are today. The quality of printing on your media gives an impression of the care and attention you take with your business. Giving a consistent message through all e-mail communication demonstrates structure and control. I recommend that all e-mail communication follows the same format, with fonts, spacing, and auto-signatures all being consistent. Your voicemail sets the tone and culture of your business. Your website should clearly explain how you help people and should reinforce your vision.

Understanding each component that contributes to the equation of your suitability for the job is one further area that you can control ahead of a sales opportunity. It also helps you think like a sales professional.

## IS IT WORTH IT?

I learned early on that there is a big difference between doing the job right and doing the right job. I have always been hardworking and dedicated and put effort into every activity, striving toward the best results. The changing point came when I realized that just working hard and being good at what I did resulted in only limited



success. The big lesson was that I needed to understand what my high-payoff activities really were.

We all have “stuff” that we need to do in our daily routines, but how much of that “stuff” really helps toward achieving the end result we are looking for? Run this simple equation for yourself and you will start to be able to make more informed decisions about where you choose to spend your time.

You will need to know the answers to the following questions:

A: How much money do you wish to earn in the next 12 months?

B: How many hours a week do you personally plan to work?

C: How many weeks of the year do you see yourself working?

Then calculate the following mathematical equation:

$$A \div B \div C = \text{Your hourly rate}$$

Only by knowing this number can you really start to look at your productivity and identify which of your activities are building your business and which are detracting from it. Anything you find yourself acting on that you would not pay yourself your desired hourly rate to do needs to be considered and questioned. Many of the activities you may have to learn to delegate, and some you may just stop doing completely.

The exercise typically results in people realizing that the following are the two most profitable activities:

1. Direct conversations with potential customers
2. Delivering goods or services for actual customers

The reason they discover this is because of their knowledge of one more high-payoff activity:

3. Planning and review

The more of your time you invest in these areas, the more chances you create to grow your business.

## THE VALUE OF A CUSTOMER

A common mistake that many people make is that they fail to see past the first transaction with a customer, and they measure their success or value based on the size of the initial piece of business.

Consider, for example, that you are in the business of cutting hair. Looking at the value of customers, you learn the average one spends \$75. It would be easy to plan your business accordingly. If, however, you look at the bigger picture, you can soon start to identify the true value of this exact same customer.

### EXAMPLE 1

Customer spends \$75 a visit

Visits every 8 to 12 weeks

Remains a customer for 5 years

Taking into account the extremities of this example, the value of this customer is calculated as follows:

$\$75 \times 4 \text{ visits per year} \times 5 \text{ years} = \$1,500 \text{ in lifetime value}$

### EXAMPLE 2

Customer spends \$95 a visit

Visits every 6 to 8 weeks

Remains a customer for 7 years

Introduces two new similar clients annually

Taking this more optimistic view helps us see a different potential value in a customer, calculated as follows:

$$\$95 \times 8 \text{ visits per year} \times 7 \text{ years} = \$5,320$$

plus a further 14 new customers who, if they do the exact same thing, result in a further \$74,480 in revenue from a single relationship.

What I do know is that it is very rare you will get more money than you ask for or achieve greater success than you prepare for. If you see your customers as being worth \$75, that is likely where you will set the bar. If you see your customers as being worth \$5,320, then you will build an experience that is fitting for that. If you see their value as over \$80,000, then you will do what it takes to prepare for that greater opportunity. Long-term success starts with taking a long-term view and preparing yourself by understanding the accurate potential lifetime value of your customers.

## MAKE IT WORK ON PAPER

“If at first it does not work on paper, then how can we expect it to work in reality?”

This was a piece of advice I received early on in my career, and since then I have continually taken an analytical approach to growing businesses.

Every successful sale is the result of a combination of variables that lead up to that success. Imagine your sales process as a machine and every stage as a component in that machine. Typically, if a

machine is not working as it should, it is rarely the whole machine that is at fault. It is simply that one or more of the components is not running efficiently. By monitoring and measuring, we can find the individual areas that require improvement and continually work to improve the end result. In big business, we call these data points key performance indicators (KPIs), and we use them to create a dashboard to monitor the factors that contribute to sales success.

To provide yourself with a valuable tool to keep track of the factors that influence your overall success, it is advisable to have at least five KPIs and no more than twelve.

Examples of areas to consider monitoring are as follows:

- Total number of sales opportunities per week, month, or year
- Outbound calls made
- Percent of sales versus target, budget, or previous year
- Minutes spent in sales conversations
- Time between inquiry and decision
- Marketing activity/lead creation
- Lead/appointment
- Appointment/sales conversion
- Average transaction value
- Number of transactions per annum
- Percent of additional sales items
- Pipeline value

As you repeat activities, you soon have the ability to create ratios. Once those ratios appear, you have the ability to measure the effectiveness of your actions. Only once you start measuring something can you really start to improve it.

## THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Before you rush into action communicating with potential future customers, there are two very simple and hugely profound questions that it's essential you know the answers to:

1. Who do you serve?
2. What problems do you solve for them?

Without detailed answers to these two questions, you will find yourself flailing in the sales process, lacking direction in your activity, and lacking conviction in your conversation. The clearer you are on your answers, the more prolific you will be in finding and converting customers. Successful selling starts with understanding your role in finding the right solution for the right person at the right time. Gone are the days of embellishing the attributes of a product or service and hoping the masses come running—start by aligning yourself with the right groups of people, finding clarity regarding the service you provide and the value it brings to the customer, and having confidence in delivering that value.

