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From Information to Empathy

What is most important to your success as a sales or business professional? Is it education, experience, product knowledge, job title, territory, or business dress? Is it your company's reputation, product, price, marketing collateral, delivery lead times, in stock ratios, service guarantees, management strength, or warehouse location? Is it testimonials, the latest *Forbes* write up, or brand awareness? Is it the investment in the latest CRM software, business 2.0 tools, or social media strategy? Is it your education, experience, work ethic, geography, business-card color, or connections?

You could hire a fancy consulting firm, make the list longer, add some bullet points, put it into a PowerPoint presentation, and go through the whole dog and pony show. But at the end of the day there will be only

one conclusion . . . **None of the above!** You see, the most important competitive edge for today's business professionals cannot be found on this list, your resume, or in any of your company's marketing brochures.

If you want to know what your single most powerful competitive edge is, just look in the mirror. That's right, it's you. Do these other things matter? Of course they do, but these are just tickets that give you access to the game. When all things are equal—and in the competitive world we live in today they almost always are—*people buy you*. Your ability to build lasting business relationships that allow you to close more deals, retain clients, increase your income, and advance your career to rise to the top of your company or industry, depends on your skills for getting other people to like you, trust you, and BUY YOU.

When you fully accept and adopt the *People Buy You* philosophy, your confidence will go up and you will perform at a higher level. You realize how very powerful you can be as a business and sales professional because, for the first time, you will understand just how much you are in control of your destiny. You are no longer tied to old paradigms. Things that you once believed important are pushed to the wayside. Now you know what really matters most in business is how well you do in getting others to like you, trust you, and believe in you. Once you wake up to the reality that people buy *you*, real success and achievement are within your grasp.

The Light Bulb Goes Off

I first sketched the outline for this book on a napkin while having lunch with a friend in San Francisco. We'd been discussing how utterly complicated most sales books and training had become over the past decade. As students of the sales profession, my friend and I had read hundreds of books on sales and business. As the publisher of the most visited sales web site on the planet, SalesGravy.com, I receive several new business books to review each week. It seems to me that each author tries to one-up the last with a new approach for sales and business success. I am continually amazed at the plethora of sales books, systems, and programs that claim to be the newest and greatest at helping sales professionals close more business, small business people reach nirvana by becoming big business people, leaders develop winning teams, and individuals build better careers. It is astonishing how confusing some of these books have made the process of doing business. The myriad new schemes more often than not ignore the basic principles of human interaction that drive everything in our lives.

My first sales manager taught me that selling is governed by basic rules and principles. While we worked together on complex, multi-million dollar deals, he coached me to focus intently on these basics at all times. Our closing percentage was among the highest in our industry, because we stuck to the basics. Over

my 20 years as a sales professional, I have rarely strayed from these basics. Whenever I did, I was quickly reminded, by the gravitational force of failure, not to do it again. I know from experience as a sales professional, sales manager, and senior executive that it is enticing to think there is a magic pill solution to success. However, in business, it takes a keen and unwavering focus on the basics to sustain success year in and year out.

Twenty-First Century Trends

Some of the complexity and one-upmanship is being driven by three major trends: *technology, communication, and specialization*. Technology and communication have transformed and streamlined organizations, especially in larger companies. The art of business known to yesterday's generations is rapidly being replaced by a sleek process and system-driven science. Technology, communication, and specialization have forever altered the speed of business.

However, the major problem facing businesses today is that the pendulum of focus has swung too far toward technology, process, and systems, and too far away from the interpersonal skills. Many organizations have jettisoned the basics in favor of fads or focused so much on process and systems they have forgotten that, at the core, business is just one person helping to solve another person's problem. The irony is that huge

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investments have been made in technology, communication, and systems for the express purpose of giving their sales professionals and frontline employees more time with customers, their support staff more time to spend collaborating with each other, and their leaders more time to spend with employees. It seems counterintuitive to me that companies would invest to give their people more time to spend with other people while turning their backs on teaching the basics of interpersonal relationships.

The trend toward specialization also got my attention. Today more than ever, business professionals have become specialists in their fields and industries. Although there is still crossover, there is much less than in the past. For example, it is very difficult for someone in software sales to move into medical-device sales on a whim. With the trend toward specialization, business professionals have to rely more on their personal brands and relationships than at any other time in recent history. Their ability to rise, and stay at the top of their industry and specialization will depend on their flexibility to grow and adjust with industry changes, to embrace technology and process, and, most importantly, to build lasting relationships. Building, fostering, and tapping into your network, or *who*, to achieve your career goal is one of the foundational themes in Bob Beaudine's ground-breaking book, *The Power of Who*. With training organizations focused so completely on systems and process, who will teach the next

generation of business people how to connect relationship skills to business process?

Meet Tim Sanders

Then I met Tim Sanders, the author of *The Likeability Factor*. I had the unique opportunity to listen to his dynamic and engaging speech about likeability. It moved me to action. Tim had it right! The more likable you are, the greater the probability that you will be happier, healthier, and have more friends and success. As a sales professional, I instantly began considering how his *L-Factor* could be applied to the business of getting and keeping customers. What was the implication to twenty-first century sales professionals? And, for that matter, what was the implication for all business professionals?

I believe at the granular day-to-day level, business is just one person solving another person's problems. Those one-on-one interactions repeated millions of times, at all levels, each day are the gears that drive business and the economy. Nowhere is this concept more important than in sales. Sales is pretty simple: solve your customer's problem and they will buy your solution.

Thinking about business in this light was the tipping point for the *People Buy You* project. I realized that in the twenty-first century, interpersonal

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relationships are more important than at any other time in our history. The paradox of technology is that it has removed barriers that for so long made communication slow, cumbersome, and expensive, while it has erected barriers that inhibit interpersonal interaction. In many ways we have moved into an era of instant communication and delayed response. Technology has removed the need to actually speak to other people or even meet with others face to face. These changes in the way we communicate have made it necessary for business professionals to learn and adopt new skills for building relationships, and they have placed more value on traditional relationship-building strategies.

A New Paradigm—from Information to Empathy

From the moment we entered the Information Age in the 1980s, process has been valued over people. The Internet and its accompanying technology wrung productivity out of every business process and system. As productivity per worker increased, so did our prosperity. As barriers to communication improved, we were then able to move the repetitive tasks that could be systematized overseas, where low wages helped boost profits even more. In less than two decades we removed human interaction from many of our day-to-day activities! Just consider how online banking and stock

trading have changed the way we interact with our financial institutions. Along the way, customer service deteriorated at many companies as the service functions were moved online or overseas. You only need to reach a customer-service representative in another country who reads preapproved copy, like a robot, from her computer screen instead of actually helping you, to know how far the pendulum has swung.

Daniel Pink points out this phenomenon in his bestselling book, *A Brand New Mind*. He makes the case that workers who have the ability to be empathetic and interact with others will have the competitive and economic edge in the coming decades. Like Sanders and Beaudine, Pink makes us aware of the value of human interaction to our own success in both business and life.

We know intuitively that pendulums swing. Once the pendulum reaches its apex on one side, it stalls and rapidly gains momentum toward the other side. Now that the pendulum has reached its apex on the process side, human interaction, empathy, and interpersonal skills (previously devalued) are the new competitive edge for business and sales professionals. Jobs that can be boiled down to process have been shipped to other countries where cheap labor and technology do the work at a lower cost. The jobs that are left require human interaction and empathy. This is one of the reasons I continue to believe that sales is the most recession-proof and lucrative profession on earth.

What's the Point?

The objective of this book is simple. I want you to understand how important your ability to get others to like you, trust you, and buy you is to your future. Understand, though, that *People Buy You* is not about selling yourself. That is an old cliché, which, unless you are in the sex trade, is virtually meaningless. *People Buy You* is about interacting with others in a way that helps them get what they want so that you get what you want. It is about connecting with others for the express purpose of uncovering and solving their problems.

In this book you will not find long diatribes about human psychology and behavior. There won't be lessons on neuro-linguistic programming or understanding the intricacies of body language and facial expressions. I won't be quoting from textbooks about the studies of famous scientists. I will not provide tricks for manipulating others. This book is about action. It is about reality and the real world. *People Buy You* is a practical guide that will teach you easy, no nonsense steps that will instantly change how you are perceived by others, help you to develop lasting relationships, become more influential and persuasive, and ultimately allow you to gain the business success you deserve.

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