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The Case for Prospecting

There are bad salespeople, mediocre salespeople, good salespeople, consistent salespeople, and then there are Superstars. The elusive talent that companies and sales organizations spend billions of dollars to identify, recruit, retain, and emulate—the coveted top 20 percent that produce 80 percent of sales.

Superstars outearn other salespeople—taking home almost all of the available commissions and bonuses. They win the trips, prizes, spiffs, and the recognition that the also-rans so badly crave.

They are not one-hit wonders. Superstars deliver year in and year out and tend to stay on top over the long haul.

Superstars are good at selling. They've got the talent and the skills. They're competitive and have the drive to perform. They understand how to manage the sales process, ask great questions, deliver winning presentations, and close the deal. They have exceptional people savvy, high emotional intelligence, and a winning mindset.

But, here's the thing: So do lots of salespeople. Lots of salespeople possess the drive and hunger to succeed. Lots of salespeople have the intelligence, talent, skills, and education to be top performers. Lots of salespeople are competitive, understand the sales process, and know how to ask for the business. Yet they consistently underperform the superstars.

That's what leaves so many salespeople and executives scratching their heads and wondering how the elite top 20 percent produce such massive results year in and year out. It's why:

- HR managers are frustrated that their complex and expensive hiring assessments aren't as predictive of sales success as promised.
- Legions of academic researchers spin their wheels searching for the holy grail of sales that they believe will magically turn all salespeople into top performers, and why corporate executives eagerly consume their flavor-of-the-day promises.
- CSOs and sales VPs chase one fad after another, desperately clinging to the latest expert who wins the annual "everything-in-sales-has-changed" beauty contest, in hopes of reviving their failing sales organization.
- So many salespeople and entrepreneurs yearn for the secret to gaining income stability through real, lasting success in sales, yet that secret always seems just out of reach.

The Real Secret to Sustained Sales Success

The path to superstar-level success in sales is brutally simple. Simple, mind you, not easy. It's a Paradox of Basics: A truth that is so blatantly obvious it has become impossibly invisible. A truth that remains frustratingly elusive for most salespeople, causing so many promising, intelligent, talented people to fail miserably in sales, and, likewise, businesses to close their doors and entrepreneurs to crash and burn.

What's the secret that separates superstars from everyone else, and why do they consistently outperform other salespeople? *Fanatical prospecting*.

Superstars are relentless, unstoppable prospectors. They are obsessive about keeping their pipeline full of qualified prospects. They prospect anywhere and anytime—constantly turning over rocks looking for their next opportunity. They prospect day and night—unstoppable and always on. Fanatical!

My favorite definition of the word fanatical is “motivated or characterized by an extreme, uncritical enthusiasm.”¹

Superstars view prospecting as a way of life. They prospect with single-minded focus, worrying little about what other people think of them. They enthusiastically dive into telephone prospecting, e-mail prospecting, cold calling, networking, asking for referrals, knocking on doors, following up on leads, attending trade shows, and striking up conversations with strangers.

- They don't make excuses: “Oh, this is not a good time to call because they might be at lunch.”
- They don't complain: “Nobody is calling me back.”
- They don't whine: “The leads are bad.”
- They don't live in fear: “What if she says no?” Or “What if this is a bad time?”
- They don't procrastinate: “I don't have time right now. I'll catch up tomorrow.”
- They prospect when times are good because they know that a rainy day is right around the corner.
- They prospect when times are bad because they know that fanatical prospecting is the key to survival.
- They prospect even when they don't feel like prospecting because they are driven to keep their pipeline full.

Fanatical prospectors carry around a pocket full of business cards. They talk up strangers in doctors' offices, at sporting events, in line to get coffee, in elevators, at conferences, on planes, trains, and anywhere else they can get face to face with potential customers.

They get up in the morning and bang the phone. During the day they knock on doors. In between meetings they prospect with e-mail and text. At night they connect with and engage prospects on social media. Before they quit for the day they make even more calls.

The enduring mantra of the fanatical prospector is: *One more call.*

Prospecting is the air they breathe. They don't whine like babies about not having enough leads or cry at the coffee machine with all of the losers about how they don't understand why no one is buying today. They don't blame the sales manager, company, products, services, or economy. They get moving, take responsibility, and own their territory. They generate their own leads and through hard work, determination, and perseverance, their own luck.

Superstars are aware that failure in sales is not caused by a deficit of talent, skills, or training. Not a poor territory or inferior product. Not subpar communication and presentation skills. Not a failure to ask for the business and close. Not terrible sales managers.

The brutal fact is the number one reason for failure in sales is an empty pipe, and, the root cause of an empty pipeline is the failure to prospect.

Yet countless salespeople and sales leaders who marvel at the consistent year-in-and-year-out performance of superstars are blind to the real reason for their success. Unwilling to accept that the foundational root of all success in sales is a fanatical focus on prospecting, they waste time tilting at windmills on their quixotic pursuit of fads, silver bullets, and secret formulas they believe will deliver them into the arms of success with little effort.

In Search of the Easy Button

“Lose weight effortlessly,” the announcer says over an image of models admiring their ripped abs. “With this revolutionary, breakthrough pill you'll never have to worry about your weight again. Eat

what you want. Forget about exercise. Just take this pill and you'll have the body of your dreams."

If these commercials didn't work, the companies that run them would quit. But they do work.

In his book, *Spartan Up: A Take No Prisoners Guide to Overcoming Obstacles and Achieving Peak Performance*, Joe De Sena explains that "easy is the greatest marketing hook of all time." So companies promise, again and again, that you can lose weight, flip houses, or get rich with no pain, no sacrifice, and no effort. Their phones ring off the hook, even though intuitively, most people know these promises are overhyped and not true. It is just human nature to seek the easy way out.

It is disappointing to observe how many salespeople today have this attitude—always looking for an easy way out. They have somehow deluded themselves into believing that they are owed something. They whine and complain endlessly about their company, prospects, leads, coworkers, CRM, product, prices, and on and on.

This is the brutal truth: In sales you are owed nothing! You've got to get your ass up and go out there and make things happen yourself. You have to pick up the phone, knock on doors, make presentations, and ask for business. Sales is not a nine-to-five job. There are no days off. No vacations. No lunch breaks. The great salespeople are skipping meals and doing deals—whatever it takes to win.

This mindset is the difference between driving a Mercedes or a Hyundai. Wearing a Rolex or a Timex. Savoring a juicy, bone-in, prime, cowboy rib eye in a five-star restaurant or surviving on ramen noodles. It's the difference between watching a 60-inch, flat-screen, ultra high-def TV or sock puppets on a 12-inch flea market hand-me-down.

In sales there will always be something to complain about. That is just how it is. There will be obstacles, roadblocks, bad managers, rude prospects, product and service challenges, and changes to the commission plan. There will always be rejection. There will always be hard work. You can sit around and complain and whine, but trust me, you are only hurting yourself.

It is critical that you awaken from the delusion that somehow you are going to be able to make prospecting easier and come to grips with the truth: If you had a choice between prospecting and swimming with sharks, you would choose the sharks.

The first step toward building an endless pipeline of new customers is acknowledging the truth and stepping back from your emotional need to find Easy Street. In sales, easy is the mother of mediocrity, and in your life, mediocrity is like a broke uncle. Once he moves into your house, it is nearly impossible to get him to leave.

The next step is keeping it real. In sales, business, and life, there are only three things you can control:

1. Your Actions
2. Your Reactions
3. Your Mindset

That's it. Nothing more. So instead of whining about the things that are out of your control, focus your energy on what you can control—your attitude, choices, emotions, goals, ambitions, dreams, desires, and discipline (choosing between what you want now and what you want most).

Stop Wishing That Things Were Easier and Start Working to Become Better

Developing a fanatical prospecting mindset starts with coming to grips with the fact that prospecting is hard, grueling, rejection-dense work.

There is no sugarcoating it. Prospecting sucks. This is why so many salespeople don't do it and instead spend their time and energy seeking silver bullets, secret formulas, and shortcuts, or ignore prospecting all together until it is too late.

However, if you dream of having a superstar income and living a superstar lifestyle, you must face the reality that prospecting sucks and get over it. To get what you want, you must prospect consistently.

Jim Rohn once said that you shouldn't wish that things were easier; you should wish that you were better. That's the promise I make to you. When you adopt the techniques in this book, you will get better.

Will the techniques I teach you in this book make you a more efficient prospector? Absolutely. I will teach you how to get more prospecting done in less time so that you can get back to the fun part of selling: meeting customers, discovery, presentations, proposals, negotiation, closing deals, and cashing commission checks.

Will the techniques I teach you in this book make you a more effective prospector? You can count on it. I will teach you how to get the highest return on the time you invest in prospecting. You will learn how to balance prospecting using multiple methodologies and gain insight on how to engage qualified prospects in sales conversations and get them into your pipeline. You'll get better results, open doors you thought would always be closed to you, and ultimately close more sales.

Will the techniques I teach you eliminate rejection, make prospecting more palatable (to use the words of one author who promises that prospecting can be "fun and easy"), make it painless, or remove the emotional and mental roadblocks that lead to prospecting procrastination?

Nope. Not a chance.

I will not lie to you about prospecting. I am not going to promise you that I will make prospecting easier, eliminate rejection, or turn it into something that you will learn to love. Only you can make the decision to do the hard work, pick up the phone, approach strangers, and get past your own mental hang-ups. The choice to act, the choice to adopt a new mindset, is yours and yours alone.

Here's the brutal truth: There is no easy button in sales. Prospecting is hard, emotionally draining work, and it is the price you have to pay to earn a high income.

How do I know this? I've been selling in the trenches my entire life. I've got trophy cases full of awards for my sales achievements. I started a successful multimillion-dollar business from the ground up and survived and thrived because my only option was to pick up the phone and start dialing. I am considered a leading expert on sales because of these accomplishments, and people pay me big bucks just to teach them the things I know. I've made millions of dollars in commissions. Bought big houses, boats, cars, and all of the toys a successful career in sales affords.

All of this was courtesy of fanatical prospecting. All of it! Yet, even though I know what brought me to the dance, even though I am fully aware that prospecting generates my income, the truth is prospecting is still the hardest, most mentally exhausting part of my sales day. There is always something more fun I would rather do, and although I know it will never get easier, the one thing that separates me from most other people is this: I get over it and do it anyway.