

Heart

10
UNIVERSAL
TRUTHS
EVERY
SALESPERSON
NEEDS TO
KNOW

AND

SELL

“In this game-changing book, Shari Levitin shows you how to excel in sales without losing your soul.”

—Jill Konrath, author of *More Sales—Less Time*,
SNAP Selling and *Selling to Big Companies*

Shari
Levitin

Praise for *Heart and Sell*

“*Heart and Sell* bridges the gap between the new science of selling and the realities of today’s highly informed and equally overwhelmed customer who demands and deserves a more personal sales approach. Levitin’s expertise is readily apparent in this read and expertly blends neuroscience, heart and humor to create a powerful resource for anyone who wishes for success in sales.”

—Michael Brown, CEO, Hilton Grand Vacations

“If you practice just one of Levitin’s ‘universal truths’, you’ll have immediate success. So, why not put all ten into action...and watch out! A tour de force for anyone interested in selling, serving or living a more authentic life.”

—Shep Hyken, *New York Times* best-selling author of
The Amazement Revolution

“Shari is an amazing speaker and author. *Heart and Sell* is filled with wit, wisdom and humor. A MUST for anyone selling anything.”

—Patricia Fripp, past president of National Speakers Association, CSP, CPAE sales presentation trainer, keynote speaker, executive speech coach

“It's been said that nothing happens in this world until a sale is made. It's also been said that there's nothing more important in life than relationships. Shari blends these two concepts beautifully. Going beyond the ‘how-to,’ this book gets to the ‘why’ that only the top salespeople understand.”

—Dan Baker PhD, Dan Baker Consulting, author of
What Happy People Know, lecturer, executive coach, and consultant

“Shari Levitin talks about eliminating excuses and taking responsibility in this book. So no excuses—buy this book and take responsibility for your sales success. *Heart and Sell* is a winner.”

—Colleen Stanley, president of Sales Leadership,
author of *Emotional Intelligence for Sales Success*

“Full of Levitin’s usual wit, compassion and humor. Her fans will be delighted and sales leaders can gain new actionable and useable tools to increase profits and create more satisfied customers. It’s refreshing to see science-backed research combined with heart and authenticity. Timely and necessary!”

—Fiona Downing, senior vice president,
Development & Operations, RCI

“*Heart and Sell* is an essential must-read—but don’t for a moment think this is a book only for sales professionals. Anyone in the business of persuading others will walk away richer for having read it.”

—Maria Margenot, senior vice president, sales development,
recruiting & training, Wyndham Vacation Ownership

“Establishing trust through relationship building is critical, yet it’s something sales professionals sometimes forget. Shari highlights the importance of establishing, maintaining, and growing trust between buyers and sellers through reliability, honesty, and integrity. Shari drives home her wisdom with passion and emotion, helping readers remember her message through storytelling, anecdotes, and vignettes. Shari’s wisdom is transformative. I can’t recommend *Heart and Sell* strongly enough.”

—Ken Allred, founder and CEO of Primary Intelligence

“*Heart and Sell* is brilliant. Shari’s approach is fresh, funny and practical. It’s loaded with useable ideas and will quickly become the new method of selling for the entire resort industry.”

—Eric White, director of Pacific Sun Marketing

“*Heart and Sell* is incredibly powerful and insightful. Every sales professional should have these skills in their tool chest. This book will not only help you close more deals but will renew your spirit and your life purpose.”

—Lt. Col. Rob "Waldo" Waldman, MBA, CSP, CPAE, Your
Wingman, Member of the Speaker Hall of Fame,
New York Times best-selling author of *Never Fly Solo*

“This is a fantastic read and a breath of fresh air from the ‘pitch’ style sales training. It is the connection of heart, caring and incorporating that into the process which creates happy new clients for years to come...this is the next level of training we are striving for here and is 100 percent effective.”

—Doug Saunders, project director, Vida Vacations, Mexico

“Shari is a star! I rarely make it all the way through business books. But hers, I read cover to cover!”

—Kathryn (Katie) Hoffman Abby, Assistant Dean, Corporate Outreach, David Eccles School of Business at the University of Utah

“When it comes to selling the heart always comes before the head. In this day and age developing trust as an emotional sales bond is a critical success factor. In this book Shari teaches us how to do just that. Bravo!”

—Trish Bertuzzi, author of *The Sales Development Playbook*

Heart

AND

Sell

10 UNIVERSAL TRUTHS
EVERY SALESPERSON
NEEDS TO KNOW

Shari Levitin

 CAREER
PRESS
Wayne, NJ

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HEART AND SELL
EDITED BY ROGER SHEETY
TYPESET BY PERFECTYPE, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE
Printed in the U.S.A.

To order this title, please call toll-free 1-800-CAREER-1 (NJ and Canada: 201-848-0310) to order using VISA or MasterCard, or for further information on books from Career Press.



The Career Press, Inc.
12 Parish Drive
Wayne, NJ 07470
www.careerpress.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

CIP Data Available Upon Request.

DEDICATION

To my mother who I respect love and admire with all of my heart. There are no words to describe her joy, drive and compassion. But if I did have words, she'd encourage me to re-write them, to edit them just one more time, and make them better.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

They say writing a book is like giving birth. Having missed that experience, I can say that writing *Heart and Sell* has been the most wonderful, painful, frustrating, agonizing, joyful, and rewarding experience of my life. Similarly, the creation of this book is not something I could have done alone.

I want to start and thank my beautiful, loving family. My life shifted from black and white to color when my husband, Lee, and his son (now my adopted son), Tyler, entered my life. Thank you both for your love and understanding during the past year of 16-hour days, for always being available for discussions and editing, and for continually cheering me on.

Thank you to my father, who has always told me I could do anything I put my mind to, and to my very successful brother, Daniel, who is a role model of humility.

I am indebted to my friend and mentor, Jill Konrath. Thank you for kicking my butt and making me write a real book, rather than “a give away at the end of a poorly attended conference.” Your expert guidance and generosity of spirit provides new meaning to the phrase, “There’s enough to go around.”

Thank you to Stanford lecturers and confidants, Lee Eisler and Marisa Handler, for helping me find my authentic voice and to learn to speak from my heart.

I am also grateful to the many friends and colleagues in the trenches in sales, mentoring, and leadership, who graciously read early chapters. They offered wisdom and advice to ensure that *Heart and Sell* is relevant to today’s ever-changing consumer and the needs of the modern sales professional.

Specifically:

Katie Hoffman-Abby

Ken Allred

Dr. Dan Baker

Trish Bertuzzi

Julie Benson

Terri Cotter

Lee Eisler

Patricia Fripp

Carolyn Galvin

Erika Garcia

Michael Gehrig

Melissa Gordon

Daniel Greene

Sean Harrison

Ron Hensel

Jim Madrid

Maria Margenot

Alyson Robbins

Katie Roberts

Adam Robertson

Doug Saunders
Glenn Seninger
Will Spendlove
Colleen Stanley
Waldo Waldman
Jack Waller
Andrea Waltz

I feel an enormous amount of gratitude to those employees, strategic partners, and major clients, past and present, who were most instrumental in the success of Levitin Group during the last 20 years. Especially Kent Kozimor for his loyalty and flexibility, Terry Ferrara for being my moral compass and partner, Dave Stroeve, Eric White, Geoff Balotti, Kari Bodily, Jenny Ochtera Davlin, Fiona Downing, Howard Nussbaum, Linda Clemons, Joe McGriff, Bruce Polansky, Ken May, Franz Hanning, Gordon Gurnik, Valerie Ickes, and Angela Andrews.

To my best friends, Colleen Sugerman and Susan Fredston-Hermann for your emotional support.

I could certainly not have done it if it wasn't for the tireless work of my editors: Michael Levin, who helped me uncover the heart of my message and who brought wit and humor. To Sarah Rainone for her tireless commitment to help craft the right structure and message. Also, thank you to Kelsey Fredston-Hermann for her intelligence and inquisitiveness.

Much gratitude to Lori Richardson, and the amazing women in SalesPros. Thank you for accepting me into this high-power group of women who support each other in their work, and whose mission it is to create an even better future for women sales professionals.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the thousands of hard-working sales professionals and sales leaders who find value in our training. You put your all into every client interaction, and you do make a difference. You take rejection, pull yourself up, and give everyone your heart and soul. Above all, thanks to you.

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INTRODUCTION

Balancing Heart and Sales

I don't remember the exact date it happened, but I'll never forget the feeling.

Five hours into teaching a sales seminar for a client in Mexico, I was convinced I had everyone hooked. I'd spent 15 years as a salesperson developing a system, and though I was new to the training business, my audience had taken to it pretty well. They laughed at my stories. They nodded along with my ideas. I was feeling good.

I'd just finished talking about the importance of what I call "Third-Level questions"—questions that lead you to the deeper, emotional "why" behind people's purchasing decisions—when a salesperson at the back of the room raised his hand.

"I like all of this stuff you're teaching," he said, "but won't the customer feel sort of, well, *manipulated* by all of these sales techniques?"

The room fell silent.

I had never been asked that question before

and it threw me. My whole mission was to teach ethical behaviors to salespeople. That was the point of my system: building an authentic connection.

I did my best to look confident, however I was anything but. Was this my inexperience teaching me something new, or—and this was the scarier

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option—*was I teaching techniques that were shallow and even manipulative?* That wasn't who I was or what I wanted to be.

I stalled for time.

“Let me think about that tonight,” I said. “And we'll discuss it in the morning.”

Fortunately, that evening I was invited to dinner with the top salespeople at the seminar. An older gentleman introduced himself as Apapacho.

“Apapacho?” I asked. I hadn't heard that name before.

“It's a nickname,” he explained. “It means ‘hugger,’ or ‘affectionate one.’”

Apapacho told me a little bit about his background; he'd been with the company for 25 years, was one of its top salespeople, and yet . . .

“I have a confession to make,” he said. “I've never received formal sales training. I simply love my customers. I am a student of people.” Apapacho had met many of his first customers when their kids were in elementary school. Now, those same children were graduating from college and raising kids of their own. He had been a fixture in their lives, sending holiday cards just after Thanksgiving with pictures of his three dogs.

“To them, I guess I'm just Apapacho!” he said.

At that moment, I knew I had my answer for the man in the back of the room, and so, the next morning, I jumped right into it.

“I want to talk to you about yesterday's question,” I said. “I think you're right. If you simply use sales techniques and don't genuinely *care for* and *connect with* your customers, you'll falter. You'll sound staged, even manipulative. In fact, if that's the only way you know how to sell, you should find another profession.”

The man who'd asked the question nodded. It was hitting home.

“But be careful about going too far in the other direction. If all you have is *apapacho*—that affection for your customers—and you never use any solid techniques, you'll probably do well in sales, but not as well as you could,” I continued, before sharing my big realization from the night before.

“When you combine proven techniques with *apapacho*,” I said. “That's when you will find true success.”

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At its core, this is a book about human connection. It's about how to come from a place of *apapacho* with your customers—and with everyone you meet. It's about how to use proven sales skills without losing your authenticity.

Plenty of books will help you maximize your profits and get the most out of your employees. Those books are rife with techniques to ignite and incentivize your sales force, and they have their place in the world.

This *is not* one of those books.

Instead, this book will change the way you think about what it means to *put your heart into what you're selling*. The philosophy in this book is the real game-changer: It's a shift in perspective, a leap of faith that many of the world's most successful leaders—in sales, in politics, in any business—have made. Now you can too.

What does it mean to have your heart in selling? It means living in an ethical and principled manner, of course. But more than that, it means genuinely caring about improving the lives and businesses of your customers. It means understanding human needs and behavior, and using that understanding to form an authentic connection, rather than trying to finesse a quick sale. It means leaving space to truly listen rather than bulldozing your way through a meeting. It means listening for the emotion behind the words—and caring about what you hear! Above all, it means *living* these principles in every aspect of your life.

If you are in a leadership position, selling with heart will increase job satisfaction among your management teams and sales forces. Teams that sell with heart are more open, more receptive, more engaged, and better able to let their passions and talents shine through.

The 10 Universal Truths: An Introduction

During the past 20 years, my colleagues and I have had the chance to work inside many Fortune 500 companies with enviable cultures and superior products. At the height of the market collapse, we helped fledgling real estate companies keep their doors open and regain their competitive edge. We have

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boosted call center revenue by teaching sales reps the psychology behind their scripts. Our training materials have improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of salespeople and young entrepreneurs—from new recruits to veterans wishing to master their game.

I've spent a lot of that time wondering why salespeople selling the same things and following the same processes can have such vastly different results. How can salespeople in the same auto dealership, real estate agents in the same marketplace, and sellers of similar software products produce such different outcomes? Why does one salesperson earn \$50,000 per year, whereas another in the same industry earns \$400,000?

Seeking answers to these questions, I made it my mission to study top sales leaders and salespeople in various industries.

For each person I studied, I asked myself: What did they say—and what *didn't* they say? How did they do it? Did they have secret tricks or best practices they could share?

It turns out that top salespeople have a lot of differences beyond the products they sell and the industries in which they work. Some are educated and some are streetwise; some are effusive, whereas others are shy. Some come from wealth, whereas others have struggled. But they are all the same in one important way.

Beyond knowing what to say and why to say it, the best salespeople know something else; something deeper, more penetrating, and more sustaining.

Talk to successful salespeople and you'll find that they have one thing in common. They not only lead with their hearts when connecting with others, they also connect deeply to themselves and their own goals and dreams. In other words, they know who they are and what they want out of life. Regardless of what they sell, where they live, or who their customers are, the best salespeople are authentic and filled with a sense of purpose.

This authenticity is more important than ever. If we as salespeople aren't coming from a place of integrity, customers know it instantly. Today's buyers, as I'm sure you'll agree, are savvier than ever, and they're wary of staged presentations and canned pitches. A recent Gallup poll found that customers

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consider salespeople such as real estate agents, auto dealers, and phone reps among the *least* ethical of all professions—only lobbyists and members of Congress ranked lower!

I've spent the majority of my career developing systems, models, and templates, but I'd never tell you that there's a one-size-fits-all method for sales. People are different and complex. Products are diverse. And markets are ever-changing. But though I don't believe in one-size-fits-all solutions, what I do know is this:

There are a few powerful principles about human behavior that apply to everyone, everywhere, every time. There are truths that help you not only connect with others, but also with yourself and your deeper purpose. They will not only help you do your job more effectively and authentically, they will also help you live a richer and more fulfilling life.

Top salespeople know how to balance heart and sales. They also understand that unless they really know themselves, they'll never truly connect with their customers—or anyone else, for that matter. They know that what you do matters, but *who you are* matters more.

These universal truths are all about achieving that balance, and more deeply connecting with your authentic self.

Please don't imagine that I've written this book because my life has been a parade of awards and victories or, conversely, struggle, failure, and pain. It's been an incredible and necessary combination of both. I've always lived my passion. I've always put my heart and soul into everything I've done. It hasn't always worked in my favor, but I don't have many regrets. My sincere hope is to help you find your purpose in life or, perhaps, reignite the passions that once propelled the choices you've already made.

Sales can be a tough game. It's full of rejection, stress, and self-doubt. But once your dreams are more potent than your fears, you will find that your rewards are far greater than your struggles.

This book and the 10 universal truths I'll share with you constitute a definitive guide to selling more and living with greater pride and purpose. I

hope you find it provocative, funny, inspirational, authentic, and, above all, filled with heart.

The 10 Universal Truths

1. **Success starts with the growth equation.** Top salespeople share a willingness to take *responsibility* for their weaknesses, a deep *curiosity* about their customers and the world, and a desire for *mastery*. They commit to using what they've learned about their processes to continue improving. When you master this “growth equation” you will not only improve your sales record, you will transform your life.
2. **Emotions drive decision-making.** The desire to be loved, to create closeness, look good, feel good, be remembered—even to belong—drives all of our decision-making. Our ability to uncover our customer's emotional dominant motivators will dictate our success.
3. **Freedom lives in structure.** Pilots run through preflight checklists. Free-throw shooters develop rituals to help them hit the same shot time and again. Bakers adhere to time-tested recipes. So why should it be different in sales? Highly successful salespeople have a process they follow and they follow that process every time. It may sound counterintuitive, but structure creates the freedom to act authentically and to create true connection.
4. **In sales, no never means no.** Are you paralyzed by fear? Good. Top salespeople know that the more fear they feel, the more important it is to tackle the fear. What you're afraid to do, you must do. The question you're afraid to ask, you must ask. In this chapter, we'll look at “getting out on the skinny branches.” Failure is inevitable. Resilience is a life skill, one that will fill your soul and your pocket.
5. **Trust begins with empathy.** Trust is born of empathy, integrity, reliability, and competency. You need all four traits, but without connecting on an empathetic level, you won't have a chance

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to demonstrate the other three. Empathy is the first building block of trust. We can't pretend to have empathy. Empathy is not about shifting the conversation to what you want to say or judging your customer. It's about being fully engaged and present to someone else's emotions.

6. **Integrity matters.** Once we cultivate true empathy, we find it impossible to lie to or cheat our customers—or anyone, for that matter, including ourselves. The word “sales” comes from the old English word for “give.” When we sell, we must give. We can only maintain trust and enjoy enduring success when we cultivate honorable traits like reliability, competency, and integrity. Eventually, they become part of our character.
7. **Anything that can be told can be asked.** When we ask the right questions, we uncover what matters most. “Discovery questions” uncover customers' needs, direct their thinking down a path we choose, generate curiosity, and ultimately move them to action. These questions build rapport, gain commitment, and help your prospects sell themselves. Well-crafted questions help us make a point loudly, without having to raise our voice. Good questions create change. Great questions can change the world.
8. **Emotional commitment precedes economic commitment.** Most salespeople incorrectly assume that they can create a sense of urgency by threatening scarcity or appealing to greed. But if people don't want what you're selling, they won't care if there are only two left or whether you're throwing something else in. (Anyone want a stagecoach? It's on sale today only! And I'll throw in some horseshoes for free!) In this chapter, I'll discuss ways to engage customers with stories and build urgency by demonstrating how your product connects to precisely what motivates them.
9. **Removing resistance takes persistence.** As soon as a prospect displays resistance, most salespeople drop the price, modify the terms, or otherwise change the offer. But the truth is: only when someone is in a receptive emotional state can you close.

This section will include strategies for keeping customers receptive, isolating the toughest customer objections, and uncovering the real and final objection so you can close more deals more quickly.

10. **Looking for wrongs never makes you right.** Every day, in every encounter, you have a choice. You can look for what's right about that person or experience—what's valuable or productive—or you can look for what's wrong. When you're interacting with your associates or your customers, don't look for reasons why they won't buy. Look instead for reasons why they will buy. Whatever you look for, be certain you'll find it!

The Truth About Truths

After a large training event I presented a few years ago, an older man from the front row approached me and told me he'd been coming to my seminars for years.

"I've listened to all of your CDs," he said. "I watch your DVDs every week . . ."

I smiled, wondering what he was going to tell me. If a guy is watching and listening constantly to my work, I figured I was due for a big compliment, right?

Wrong.

"But I gotta tell you," he continued, "your training doesn't work."

I was shocked. I didn't know why he was telling me this or why he kept listening to my stuff if it wasn't working for him!

But I was curious. I asked him to tell me a bit about his process, and he described how he sold. I had to admit: He was a serious student of my work. (Heck, he knew my material better than I did.) It sounded as though he really grasped my approach to sales. He was saying all the right words and asking all the right questions.

Then I asked him to actually *show me* his presentation—and suddenly the problem was obvious.

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Right from the start, it was clear that something was missing. He knew exactly what to say and do, yes, but something was interfering with his ability to execute everything properly. After we talked a little more, I got to the heart of the issue. It turned out that he didn't actually believe in his product and—even more importantly—he lacked compassion for his customers. It didn't matter what he was saying; he came across as inauthentic.

I encounter a lot of salespeople who are full of knowledge, but light on results, and I tell them what I told this man:

You can know something intellectually, but that doesn't mean you can execute it effectively.

I've been rock climbing for years. Before any climb, I study the route and learn all about the type of rock. But, believe me, once you're hanging from a rope at several hundred feet, knowing how to do something and actually doing it are two very different things. Yikes!

The only way any of us can improve our performance is by closing the gap between what we know and what we're actually doing.

You may have read the summary of the 10 Universal Truths and thought, "But I know all this. Of course I know I'm supposed to build trust, ask questions, and take responsibility."

But here's the tough question: Are you actually doing it? And are you doing it every time or maybe even most of the time?

If not, why not?

It turns out there's a very good reason.

Tackle Your Tendencies

Like other animals, humans fall into "default modes" when performing difficult or even life-preserving tasks. Think of these default modes as the path of least resistance: doing whatever takes the least amount of work or mental energy. The moose who visits our backyard doesn't veer far from the lush grassy patch. Why? It takes more effort to get food from elsewhere. The food is plentiful just where she is.

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I first heard the term “default mode” in my Anusara yoga class. My instructor told the students that everyone has certain “tendencies.” We default to these tendencies when we aren’t hyper-focused. Why? Because they’re easier. Our bodies naturally default to the easiest positions. We slouch our shoulders, or hang our head, or forget to breathe properly. When we’re not really paying attention, we tend to slide into default mode. With time, in the workplace, these tendencies can lead to dramatic underperformance.

There’s a hard science to explain why. Neuroscientists have discovered a part of the brain they call the “default mode network.” It becomes hyperactive when we’re in what’s known as a “resting state.”¹ (This is actually a good thing after work, during a break, or on weekends because this downtime refreshes the brain.)

Using this part of the brain can limit your abilities when interacting with a prospective customer, however. To truly connect, you must “wake up” out of this state. You must be fully present to sell with integrity and authenticity. Yet, somehow, this state of wakeful rest is where we all retreat to when we’re distracted.

We all have default tendencies to overcome. These are the repetitive or destructive—and usually unconscious—behaviors that prohibit you from making a sale. Sometimes, when you’re tired or distracted, they’re more pronounced, but default mode takes over for several other reasons. I use the acronym “HELL” to sum them up.

Have You Fallen Into Sales HELL?

H = Habits

E = Ego

L = Lack of knowledge

L = Laziness

HABITS

We default out of sheer habit. Many sales veterans are guilty of this. You’ve been doing something wrong for so long, you can’t see how it wreaks havoc

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on your performance. Or the action is so subtle that you can't distinguish the behavior as a hindrance.

Charles Duhigg writes in *The Power of Habit* that when we repeatedly perform even mundane activities (such as brushing our teeth, brewing our morning coffee, or parallel parking) we form neurological patterns.² The more you repeat a behavior, the more you ingrain the habit. If you are unkind every day, you become an unkind person; if you don't listen to people, you become self-centered; when you empathize every day, you become empathetic. As the saying goes, we are what we repeatedly do. Good habits as well as bad ones get easier with time.

Habits are a natural part of being human. The problem, of course, is when we get stuck in bad habits that don't serve us. The good news is that bad habits can be changed—if we're aware of them. If we're disciplined about replacing old behaviors with new ones, we can change what we do and, ultimately, who we become.

Ego

According to research conducted by David Mayer and Herbert M. Greenberg, good salespeople have a need to conquer.³ This particular type of ego drive gives us the ability to claim greatness, to say, "I'm going to be number one and earn a huge promotion."

But the other aspect of ego urges us to play the blame game and abdicate responsibility for a lost sale. An overblown ego keeps us from learning and growing as new technologies emerge or the client demands a different kind or level of interaction.

I've heard many salespeople excuse their poor performance by citing a recent study that shows the average attention span of people today has plummeted from 12 to 8 seconds.⁴ They say goldfish have a longer attention span than people! If you don't believe me, go to the nearest pet store and have a staring contest with a goldfish. If you're like most people, my money's on the fish.

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Here's the problem: Rather than owning up to their failure to hold a customer's attention, many salespeople make excuses for underperformance instead of finding ways to improve.

To paraphrase creative writing guru Robert McKee: You don't have a problem with attention span; you have a problem with "interest span."⁵ It's not that our customers aren't paying attention. They just aren't paying attention to *us*. In other words, we aren't *holding* their attention. If you've ever binge-watched a TV series like *Mad Men*, *House of Cards*, or *Game of Thrones*, I'm sure you'll agree that you pay closer attention to the episodes than you would to, say, your sock drawer. When you sell, are you Kevin Spacey in *House of Cards* or are you about as intriguing as a mismatched set of socks? Don't let your ego rob you of your ability to take responsibility for your performance!

As long as I'm going all Dr. Phil on you, here's another question: When you lose a sale, do you look for ways you could have done your job better? Or are you quick to blame external circumstances? How willing are you to look at the habits that are holding you back?

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

This might be the most common reason newer salespeople succumb to their negative tendencies: *They simply don't know any better*. Perhaps they haven't learned the steps of their sales process, haven't mastered their product knowledge, or don't have enough experience overcoming and isolating common objections.

Is a lack of product or market knowledge the fault of the manager or the salesperson? Sometimes it's hard to determine where one person's responsibility ends and another's begins, but top performers know that if they lack knowledge, they had better seek that knowledge. If you're not getting enough information from your manager, ask questions. Seek out information from other sources. Refuse to become complacent. You were not born to be average.

Don't think for a moment that you can blame your lack of success on the fact that you aren't a "born salesperson." As the late, great sales trainer and

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motivator Zig Ziglar said, “I looked in the paper this morning and a bunch of salespeople died, but I didn’t see a single salesperson born.”⁶

Are great salespeople born or made? Neither. Great salespeople are salespeople who commit to overcome their negative tendencies to make themselves great.

LAZINESS

When I speak of laziness, I don’t mean we’d rather be lying on a deck chair drinking a margarita (although we might) or watching reruns of *Leave it to Beaver* and *My Three Sons*. Rather, I’m referring to the lazy moments when we aren’t purposefully engaged, when we aren’t bringing our “A-game.”

None of us are immune to the lure of laziness. How many times have you made promises like, “I’m going to work out in the morning,” “I’m not drinking tonight,” or, “I’m calling five referrals today”—only to default into a justification for why you’ll start tomorrow?

But chronic laziness can really take its toll. A colleague of mine—let’s call her Karen—sleeps until nine every morning and leaves the office at five, and for the last 20 years has been telling me: “Levitin, you live to work. I, on the other hand, work to live.”

Karen has rules—lots of them. She refuses to take extra shifts, or respond to customers who need servicing, or seek advice from a mentor. As a result, Karen lives paycheck to paycheck. Whenever we meet she tells me, “If I had your money, I’d burn mine. You’re so lucky.”

I don’t tell her that luck had little to do with it. I also don’t tell her that I had to train myself to avoid procrastination and commit to staying focused even when I wanted to check out. Why don’t I tell her any of those things? Because she is too deeply committed to her own mediocrity to hear what I have to say.

Salespeople that default out of laziness fail to prepare for client meetings, take shortcuts in their sales processes, and often go on the defensive when a customer voices an objection. The customer isn’t attacking the salesperson, but laziness can cause us to take innocent statements as personal affronts. The customer is just trying to learn something. If he learns that you’re too

impatient to answer his questions, you're also teaching him to go buy from someone else.

Mediocre salespeople have another vice: They're addicted to what they call multitasking. They constantly check their e-mail, Facebook, and Twitter accounts under the guise of multitasking, even though science has shown us there's really no such thing. According to best-selling author and neuroscientist Dan Levitin (I'm his proud sister), "Multitasking is a diabolical illusion. When people think they're multitasking, they're actually just switching from one task to another rapidly. Even though we're getting a lot done, ironically, multitasking makes us demonstrably less efficient."⁷

Why? Because we're diverting our precious and limited attention away from what matters most (the customers!) to what matters less (what your sister posted about her breakfast on her Cabo vacation yesterday).

If you're not performing at the level you'd like to be, ask yourself whether you're really *paying attention* to your customers and your work—or whether you're slipping off into a fantasy world and filling your downtime with activities that sap your energy.

We blame our customers for not paying attention, but who just lost the staring contest with the goldfish?

If you've ever found yourself in sales HELL, congratulations! You're human. Falling into default-mode behaviors is a natural part of being alive, and it's probably impossible to ever completely eliminate these tendencies.

However, our goal is to bring our heart into the sales process, to go beyond mere interaction, and really connect with customers. Remember: Not only does this make us more effective salespeople, it also increases our satisfaction in every area of our lives. Default-mode behaviors rip us out of the present moment—and it's only in the present moment that we can have the most impact and experience the most joy.

What Are Your Default Tendencies?

Now, be brutally honest with yourself. What are *your* default-mode behaviors? Here's a short list to get your brain going (for a full list of default behaviors that correspond to each universal truth, go to ShariLevitin.com):

Introduction

- ✱ Hearing a customer problem, and immediately trying to solve it rather than uncovering *why* it's a problem.
- ✱ Giving the customer way too much information.
- ✱ Selling features that aren't important to the customer.
- ✱ Talking too much during the discovery or closing process.
- ✱ Not involving all of the decision-makers.
- ✱ Making your offer sound too good to be true.
- ✱ Exaggerating product benefits . . . just this once.
- ✱ Telling the customer how your product works, instead of sharing with them how they'll *feel* when they use, own, or engage with your product.
- ✱ Not preparing ahead of time and just sort of winging it.
- ✱ Telling the customer that their existing choices, partners, or way of doing something are all wrong, just so your solution sounds superior.

And then there's the biggest default of them all:

- ✱ *Not listening or working to uncover the customer's emotional motivators in the first place!*

Now, ask yourself: Which tendencies am I most prone to? And when I do fall into default mode, what part of sales HELL am I usually stuck in: habit, ego, lack of knowledge, or laziness?

Having a basic understanding of your tendencies is going to help you get the most out of this book and so, right now, set aside time to think about what default mode looks like to you. After all, until we're willing to admit we have a problem, we certainly can't solve it.

Your turn—make a list of the destructive tendencies you'd like to abandon.

Now that you know the true source of your sales struggles, it's time to see what you can start doing about it. You'll find those surprising answers in the next chapter.

*Names and identifying details of many of the people and companies that appear in the book have been changed to protect their privacy.

CHAPTER 1

Success Starts With the Growth Equation

Universal Truth #1: Top salespeople share a willingness to take *responsibility* for their weaknesses, a deep *curiosity* about their customers and the world, and a desire for *mastery*. They commit to using what they've learned about their processes to continue improving. When you master this “growth equation” you will not only improve your sales record, you will transform your life.

When I was about 30, I heard about a sales opportunity at Marriott. Fortunately, I was hired, because it was there that I met my first sales mentor.

Motivational speaker and author Marcus Buckingham, formerly with the Gallup Organization, once said, “People don’t leave jobs, they leave managers.”¹ As for me, I stayed and thrived with Marriott because of one man: Greg Willingham.

Greg grew up in the land business and was what Bostonians call “wicked smaht.” It was because of Greg that I was able to rise through the ranks at Marriott, eventually becoming the top salesperson and going on to help lead the top sales team in the company.

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That didn't mean working for Greg was easy—far from it. There was no messing around in his salesroom. Sales meetings started every morning at 8:00 a.m. sharp. If you weren't in your seat, you got no customers that day. That's right, not one lead. The reason for your tardiness didn't matter. One day, a company bulldozer rammed into my colleague's Subaru while he was pulling into the parking lot.

No leads.

Greg wasn't interested in reasons. "I hire the best salespeople I can find," he said. "I don't want to spend my time listening to excuses."

Greg taught me the most valuable lesson of my career—the three goals of any sales encounter:

1. Make the customer feel better about you and your company than they did before you met.
2. Make a sale.
3. If the customer doesn't buy, find out the real reason. Learn from it, accept responsibility, and don't make the same mistake again.

It's the third rule that I've found to be the most important and, often, the most painful. The moment you really start to take *responsibility* for your actions, you will feel the pain of failures more acutely than before. But you will also learn from each experience so you'll never make the same mistakes again.

This willingness to look at your mistakes requires *curiosity*. The most successful people I've encountered aren't afraid to say, "Yes, I messed up, but what did I do wrong? What's the lesson? How can I get better?" They know they might not win back a lost sale or fix a mistake, but they do commit to changing their behavior next time.

How? By taking a good look at their habits and by being vulnerable enough to admit what's working and what isn't. The willingness to learn and grow is what leads to true *mastery*.

The Growth Equation

Responsibility, curiosity, and mastery make up what I refer to as the growth equation—and top performers understand and practice this universal truth.

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Why is a commitment to growth such a necessary component of selling with heart? Because when we take responsibility, we draw people in rather than pushing them away. Increased curiosity creates more authentic relationships. By mastering sales techniques, you will live in the moment with your customers and be present to their needs and emotions.

Work on all three of these things and your connections will be deeper and your paycheck will be bigger. Of course, you have to first believe that this kind of growth is even possible.

Make a commitment to growth—and surround yourself with others who've done the same.

For years I thought that sales skills were either something you were born with or not. I figured that my talents, much like my frizzy black hair, were facts of life.

In her bestselling book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Stanford Business School professor Carol Dweck presents a powerful way of looking at success. High achievers possess more than intelligence and talent. In addition, they all have a commitment to growth and continual learning.

Dweck says that people have either one of two types of “mindsets” that have a powerful impact on how they conduct their lives.² The first group of people—those with a *fixed* mindset—believe that their qualities and abilities are static. They think there's a limit to their basic talents and nothing can change that. As a result, they feel a deep urgency to prove themselves to others.

We all know people stuck in a fixed mindset. They say things like:

- ✿ I'm not good at math.
- ✿ I don't remember people's names.
- ✿ I'm not a natural salesperson.
- ✿ I don't do technology.
- ✿ I'm not interested in politics!
- ✿ No one finds me attractive.
- ✿ I'm not the athletic type.

Because those with fixed mindsets aren't curious to learn more and often don't put in the effort to become masters in their fields; they hide behind

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false bravado. They try to mask their deficiencies, instead of trying to overcome them.

People with *growth* mindsets, on the other hand, believe that their basic qualities “are things you can cultivate through toil and persistence.”³ These people are energized by learning and invigorated by overcoming failure. To them, life is a journey of gathering new information, making new connections, asking for constructive feedback, and learning from painful lessons.

A passion for stretching themselves is the hallmark of those with a growth mindset.

A perfect example of someone with a growth mindset was Benjamin Franklin. The consistent theme in Franklin’s life was self-improvement. As the brother of seven, and the child of a poor candle maker, he had less than two years of formal education and yet he became one of the wealthiest, most respected intellectuals of the 18th century.⁴

From an early age, Franklin read everything he could. He loved the knowledge he found in books and in 1727 formed a club called the Junto, a structured forum to discuss and debate intellectual and worldly topics with fellow club members.

Learning about the world was obviously important to Franklin—but so was spending time with other thinkers and community leaders who were as curious and committed to learning as he was.

Think for a moment about the people you surround yourself with: Are they people who inspire you and fuel your energy, or do they just suck the life out of you?

My (former) friend Cindy always had a health issue, a problem with her ex-husband, or a gripe about her mother. I somehow became her sounding board and her bartender, listening to her sob stories over too many bottles of wine. Alas, Cindy would never do anything about her situation. She preferred complaining to therapy, and victimization to optimization. When I finally realized there was nothing I could do to help her until she started to help herself, we parted ways.

The next time you find yourself feeling stuck in a fixed mindset, think about what you might do to step outside yourself and learn from your

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mistakes. Think about those colleagues and friends who strive for improvement, and ask yourself if you're spending enough time helping each other grow.

This commitment to growth and the bonds you form with other growth-minded colleagues will pave the way for you to master the growth equation.

Responsibility

At one of my consulting workshops, I kicked off the first morning by greeting each salesperson by name. They all replied with the same good cheer.

All but one.

Instead of saying hello, Linda was quick to make excuses as to why she wasn't having any luck with the previous day's assignments.

"The prospects are terrible," she said. "They don't buy."

The second morning, it was the same thing.

"Good morning," I called out. "What a grand day!"

But it was never a grand day for Linda.

"These leads are NQs!" she hissed. (NQ is short for "not qualified.")

Who does that, I wondered. Who blames everyone and everything but themselves for their lack of sales?

Actually, a lot of people do. Many salespeople blame external circumstances for their lack of success. But when we do this, we erode our own power.

We've all met chronic blamers—reactive people who limit their ability to take control of their lives. Reactive salespeople are easy to spot. They use phrases such as:

- ✱ I can't help it.
- ✱ They didn't have the money.
- ✱ It's marketing's fault.
- ✱ I don't have the time.
- ✱ I never get any support.

Often, chronic blamers are fearful about their job security—and for good reason. Take Linda, for example. Her organization had more than 500

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salespeople who all worked together at the same office. Every month they had awards for the top three salespeople. Linda had never been close to the top; in fact, she was always in the bottom 10.

But an interesting thing happened during the course of the seminar. The techniques I was sharing resonated with Linda and, just two weeks later, she went from number 125 on her team to number two. Around the time the awards were announced, I noticed Linda in the back of the room on a little brown chair, writing feverishly on a yellow pad.

I asked her what she was doing.

“Writing my speech,” she said. “I’m going to share with everyone what I did to win the number two slot.”

I congratulated Linda for improving her sales record, but I also told her what I tell salespeople all over the world:

We can’t take the glory for being great if we won’t take the responsibility when we’re not.

Remember: Linda wasn’t blaming herself for being number 125—she was blaming the customers. So although I was thrilled to congratulate her for her victory, I warned her that she needed to be equally willing to take responsibility the next time customers weren’t buying.

Top salespeople never blame external factors for their lack of success. They know that, even as a veteran, you can go from having a great month where everyone’s buying to one where you can’t sell anyone anything. You try everything, but you can’t even talk your dog into going for a walk. As Eric Greitens writes in his book *Resilience*, “While fear can be your friend, excuses are almost always your enemy. Faced with a choice between hard action and easy excuses people often choose the excuse. . . . Excellence is difficult. An excuse is seductive.”⁵

People who sell from the heart never blame external factors for their lack of success. They hold themselves accountable and, as a result, they consistently improve.

You can have the greatest sales system in the world, but if you won’t take responsibility for your own success, in the end, it won’t matter.

When Organizations Play the Blame Game

If the failure to take responsibility can prevent an otherwise talented salesperson from growing, it can mean the death of an organization. Yet, in too many companies, the blame game runs rampant. A single chronic blamer can turn an entire culture into a game of finger pointing and “It’s your fault, not mine” thinking.

A few years ago, I sat with a group of senior leaders who weren’t meeting their quotas. They were struggling to get salespeople to prospect correctly and to isolate objections.

I met with the leadership team separately and asked them to identify what they saw as the major issue.

“The salespeople just don’t listen,” they complained. “We tell them over and over again what to do and it goes in one ear and out the other.”

“Really?” I said. I was shocked. “Who’s in charge of training here?”

There was an awkward silence.

“We are,” one of them responded.

“They’re looking to you for leadership and direction,” I said. “They rely on *you* to provide mentorship and accountability! And *you’re* blaming *them*?”

Next, I met with the sales team. Their biggest beef with management was that they weren’t providing enough support or guidance about how to close.

“It’s their fault,” they complained.

Really? Doesn’t anybody in this company want to accept some responsibility? Apparently not.

No matter where you sit in an organization, blaming others is always a bad idea, not simply because it alienates people, because it’s lazy, or because it robs you of respect. There’s a deeper reason—one that won’t just cause short-term problems, but will destroy your organization’s chance at long-term growth:

Blaming other people and external circumstances prevents you from learning, and it prevents your company from growing.

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You can start to take more responsibility immediately by changing your self-talk and the questions you ask yourself. Consider the following alternatives to some old standby excuses:

- ✱ **“They didn’t have the money.”** Instead, think about where you could have improved. For example, “I didn’t show them the value. Did I find a problem? Was it big enough?”
- ✱ **“They’re indecisive.”** Maybe, but what could *you* have done differently? “I didn’t make enough of a connection. What else could I have done to build trust?”
- ✱ **“Someone gave them a better deal.”** Instead of blaming your competitors, keep your focus on you. “I didn’t differentiate our offering. What are the power statements I could have used to better differentiate my offer?”

Despite years of training myself to take responsibility, I still find myself asking accusatory questions like “Who took my car keys?” or “Who left the milk out?” My default mechanism is often to blame. I sometimes think that’s why I seek advice from so many people when I’m going through rough times. That way if the advice doesn’t pan out, I can abdicate responsibility. I’m not proud of this, but I am certainly aware of it.

The truth is that it’s easier to blame than it is to accept criticism. Here’s how to catch yourself in the act. If someone asks you why something went wrong, do you start a sentence with the words “He,” “She,” or “They”? The very use of those words suggests that someone else, somewhere else, is in control. The sales gods must be against you!

As soon as you say “I,” you’ve taken back control for your failures—and your successes.

Curiosity

Years ago, the manager of a European conglomerate asked me to help out a struggling new salesperson. Buzzcut Bruce, we called him. Now, Bruce was

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new to sales. It turns out he excelled as a private investigator in Louisiana, but after having just moved to Colorado he thought he'd take a whack at a career in fractional real estate sales.

Whenever I coach a new salesperson, I focus on the discovery questions they ask their clients. Bruce asked the right questions all right, but his questioning quickly deteriorated into interrogations. Not a good idea. Here's an example:

"So Charlotte, you just mentioned your last holiday in Montana," Bruce would ask. "Do you and Brad always vacation in the summer?"

"Yes," the prospect would reply. "That's when the kids are out of school."

"And what month do you travel?" he'd ask.

"Usually August. It gets pretty hot in Texas, so we like to head north."

Painful pause . . .

"Hmmm . . . but you said that Christmas is when you take the most frequent breaks. So which is it, ma'am?"

Yikes.

I couldn't tell if he was trying to get a signature on a contract or a confession.

Now, this is an extreme example of what not to do. Not every novice salesperson is going to grill their prospects as hard as a former private eye. But my point is this: Unless salespeople are truly curious, the discovery process may *feel* like an interrogation to customers.

I've watched thousands of salespeople go through the motions of asking the right questions, only to completely annoy their customers along the way. Why? Because they display a lack of genuine curiosity. When objections arise, instead of asking questions that will put the customer at ease and create a connection, they go on the defensive. It's not enough to ask questions; you actually have to listen for the answers!

As an alternative approach, I love the quote from the book *Just Listen* by Mark Goulston and repeat it to my son frequently: "Be more interested than interesting."⁶ The more you listen, the smarter people think you are. Why start talking and louse up their positive impression of you?

The Five Attributes of Curious People

Consider some of the habits of truly curious salespeople:

- ✿ They ask questions that help them better understand their customers—not simply those that allow them to elbow in their point of view.
- ✿ They do their homework before they meet a prospect. Who is this person? How long has he or she been with the company? (What they don't do is prejudge.)
- ✿ They dig deep in order to find out what really matters to their customers at the heart level.
- ✿ They want to get to know their customers' inner worlds and discover how it affects their outer worlds.
- ✿ Instead of reacting negatively, they seek to understand why a prospect might be putting off a decision.

Curious neuroscientists are studying the brain to uncover the neurological impact of, you guessed it, curiosity. Some of the most recent findings support a theory developed by Carnegie-Mellon's George Loewenstein known as the "information gap."

"According to Loewenstein, curiosity is rather simple," writes Jonah Lehrer in *Wired*. "It comes when we feel a gap 'between what we know and what we want to know.' This gap has emotional consequences: it feels like a mental itch, a mosquito bite on the brain. We seek out new knowledge because that's how we scratch the itch."⁷

So what does all of this have to do with increasing your paycheck?

As it turns out, lots.

A Ferrari on Crap Gas

The first real fight between my husband and me took place in a coffee shop. I don't remember exactly what we were eating or what time of day it was—just that the place was far from chic, and two groups of college students sat

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uncomfortably close to us. I also recall my husband telling me, “You’re a Ferrari on crap gas.”

What the hell did that mean? I wasn’t sure, but I could tell it wasn’t a compliment.

“You’re very smart,” he said, “but you know nothing about the world. You don’t read. You don’t even know who Nelson Mandela was, for god’s sake!”

Yankees center fielder. Everyone knows that.

Okay, nobody’s *that* dumb. I told him I did know, but I had forgotten—a typical response from me. Of course, that didn’t work this time.

“I’m running a company,” I said. “I’m learning social media marketing and studying leadership.” I justified my lack of breadth by hiding behind the “Hotel Theory of Learning”—an idea I’d heard that boils down to “Before something can check in, something else has to check out.” I was quite pleased with myself when I explained to him that I have *so* much new knowledge that there just wasn’t enough room for the old knowledge.

He didn’t buy it.

“I want to talk to my wife about something other than sales.”

The truth is he was right. And instead of arguing with him, I decided to listen for once. I began reading the newspaper, the *New Yorker*, fiction, and nonfiction. I started paying attention to politics. I read about economic developments in the United States and abroad. I paid attention to conflicts going on in other countries. This allowed me to build rapport with a greater number of people as well as to interact with higher-end clients.

I also found out that Nelson Mandela didn’t play center field.

He was a shortstop.

As my world grew, so did my relationships, my self-esteem, and my business. Today, I can’t imagine life without op-ed columns, classic fiction, TED Talks, and the whole world of current information that is mine for the taking.

To be curious about the complexities of the world we live in is an essential part of being an engaged citizen and an interesting person. It’s also become more important than ever for salespeople to be tuned in to what’s going on in the wider world.

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When I began my career in the early 1980s, the salesperson was the only channel the customer had when it came to getting information about a product. The customer either believed me or not. Oh, sure, a couple of decades ago people could ask their Uncle Archie if he had ever used our product, but it was up to me to build or destroy the trust between me and the customer.

By contrast, today's customers have countless ways to receive information about the product they're considering. No longer must they rely on the salesperson's explanations or printed materials. They can conduct their own research, watch video demos, scour through hundreds of Yelp reviews—you name it.

As a result, today's salespeople need to be so much more than just our sales pitches.

Today, you must be at least as educated as your customer. Knowledge is necessary for credibility—and I'm not just talking about knowing about your product and those of your competitors. You need to know the news of the day and how it might be shaping the moods and emotions of your customers. You must understand economic trends and how they might be affecting people's confidence about making major purchases.

My good friend Eric White employs 400 salespeople in his business in Mexico. He suggests to each of them to read news like the *Wall Street Journal* or the *New York Times* daily. "How can we possibly ask our American customers to pay \$25,000 to \$750,000 for our product," he says, "if we don't understand their politics, their business, and their economy?"⁸

I can't argue with that.

PUT IT INTO ACTION

Amp Up Your Curiosity

If you're looking to amp up your own curiosity, ask yourself the following questions:

- ✿ Do I read the news and engage with challenging material or relevant nonfiction daily? (Simply watching TV doesn't count!)

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- ✿ Do I know as much about my product or service as my most educated customer?
- ✿ Do I take courses online, participate in discussion groups, and share valuable content with others?
- ✿ Do I learn new technologies? When I can't figure something out, do I shut down, or do I ask for help?
- ✿ Do I surround myself with those that have different opinions than my own?

If the answer to any of those questions is “no,” the work you have to do is clear. But I hesitate to call it “work.” So many of us associate learning about the world with passing (or failing) tests. The great thing about continuing our education as adults is that we get to choose what to study.

You don't have to know everything, but knowing what interests you, what fascinates you, what keeps you engaged—and what interests, fascinates, and engages your customers—is a great place to start.

Mastery

A few years ago, the Portuguese pianist Maria João Pires arrived at Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw ready to play a Mozart concerto.

But the second the music began, a look of horror appeared on the acclaimed musician's face.

“She was shocked because she was expecting us to play another concerto,” said conductor Riccardo Chailly in a video that went viral a few years ago. “She kind of jumped and panicked like an electric shock.”⁹

Can you imagine how she must have felt? There she was on stage in front of a huge audience, and she had prepared to play the wrong piece.

But after realizing her mistake, an amazing thing happened. Pires was able to play the piece she had not prepared to play, completely from memory. The audience never knew the difference. Neither did the orchestra.

Unconscious Mastery

Mastery is taking a step beyond just being great. Mastery means you're so accomplished, like Maria João Pires, that you can perform your craft without thinking about the details while doing it, even under awkward or adverse conditions.

What does this level of mastery allow you to do? Everything that's critical for a top salesperson. Because you're not hung up on thinking about what to say next, or how to answer a concern accurately, you are freed up to:

- ✱ Listen with your heart.
- ✱ Listen for the emotion behind the words.
- ✱ Pivot when the customer throws you a curve ball.
- ✱ Change your strategy when an unexpected event occurs (you prepare the wrong slide show, only one decision-maker shows up, the global economy collapses, you break a heel).
- ✱ Teach it to others.

Although time and practice are obviously key to become a master, I've found there are some ways to jumpstart your pursuit of greatness:

- ✱ Seek feedback.
- ✱ Give up your ego.
- ✱ Repeat.

These steps are not something you do once and then forget about. Mastery is an ongoing process of taking on new challenges, being humble enough to learn from your mistakes, and persisting.

Feedback Will Help Power Your Performance

I used to work with a guy I'll call Barry. (That's not his real name. His real name was Sam.) Barry showed up to an interview with the boss, carrying his trophies and plaques in his suitcase. He placed them on his desk before the meeting started. Barry was a skilled presenter, but he wasn't interested in improvement.

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Barry was his own worst enemy. When his sales went down, his excuses went up. He spent more time defending his lack of sales than it would have taken to learn more about his product and market. When offered coaching, Barry pointed to his awards and said he didn't need any. Soon, Barry's trophies were a relic of a decade that had long past. As the expression goes, nothing recedes like success.

When someone doesn't accept valuable feedback, that person cannot grow. Eventually, Barry's complaints about everything from the lamb chops he ate the night before to the company's lack of training destroyed his relationships and his chance at growth. (Have you ever noticed that it's the top 25 percent of the salespeople who buy sales aids such as books and online learning programs? You may say, "Well, it's because they can afford it." I can tell you firsthand it's the other way around: They can afford to finance their ongoing education because they've been putting in the investment since day one.)

Learning isn't just something you do with books, CDs, or online programs. Working with mentors is also key to achieving higher levels of performance. Your brain needs to know what's working and what isn't so it can improve. Online training is great—I offer a ton of it—but it's not sufficient. You need feedback from a living human being so you know specifically where you need to improve. Feedback is just as hard to give as it is to receive, but it's an essential part of learning. I recommend finding a mentor, as I did, who is competent, dependable, and driven to help facilitate your growth and provide real-time feedback.

Whether you're a skier, author, or parent, research shows that positive, immediate, and constructive feedback will help you understand what you're doing well and what you're doing poorly so you can practice, repeat, and master your best behavior. Otherwise, you're just grooving bad habits deeper into your brain until you can do a terrible job without even having to think about it!

PUT IT INTO ACTION

Become a Master at Receiving Feedback

- ✿ **Make certain that the person who's giving you the feedback understands what you're trying to accomplish.** Think about the iconic quote from Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it."¹⁰ Don't assume that the person giving you feedback will automatically know what you want to achieve. Letting him or her know a bit about your goals will help ensure you get the *right* feedback.
- ✿ **Seek out someone who can give you constructive feedback.** This is hard. No one likes being told what they did wrong. The person who offers feedback is wise to first tell you what you did right. By hearing the good stuff first, our brains will be more receptive to the areas where we need to improve. In fact, a *Harvard Business Review* study confirms that individuals who receive at least a 6–1 ratio of positive-to-negative advice significantly outperform those who are more often criticized.¹¹ In short, find a mentor who gently tells you how to improve and who recognizes your strengths.
- ✿ **Only focus on a maximum of three things at a time.** The brain can't possibly remember 36 new things to incorporate into a sales presentation. In golf, there's an expression called the "swing thought." The idea is that when you're about to make an important shot, you don't have time to remember 12 different things. So a good swing coach will offer just one thing to recall, and that one key piece of guidance triggers all the other things you know to do. It's the same thing in sales.

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- ✱ **Feedback must be specific.** In seminars I've taught around the world, I've heard countless salespeople proclaim that they want to be more successful. What does that mean? It obviously means different things to different people. To some, success might be earning \$25,000 per month and buying a new BMW. To others, it may mean getting a promotion, having time to do charity work, or spending more time with family. Again, being clear about what you're trying to achieve will help you get the specific feedback you need.
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What Are You Willing to Give Up?

Although the advice I've given in this chapter might seem simple and clear, that doesn't mean it's easy. Accepting responsibility, learning from our failures, asking for constructive criticism—none of this stuff is easy.

For many of us, the tendency to blame everyone but ourselves goes very deep. When we're children, we learn that if we can take the blame off ourselves, we can avoid punishment and escape our parents' anger. Unless we're lucky enough to have learned about the value of constructive criticism and honest self-assessment, many of us carry this behavior into adulthood.

I want to share one last story about how my mentor Greg helped me get comfortable with this process early on in my career:

One day, I stood with him on the balcony of our sales office. The trees were full of the previous night's frost, the clouds dark and undecided.

"What's your goal for the New Year?" Greg asked me.

"\$100,000," I said. "I'm going to be number one in the company *and* I'm going to buy a white BMW."

"Wow. \$100,000?" he said. (Keep in mind this was 1987, so that would translate into about a half a million today.) "Well, what did you make last year?"

"\$33,000."

"And the year before?"

"\$29,050."

Heart and Sell

He looked at me and scratched his head. “Let me get this right,” he said. “Just because you’re with a different company, selling a different product, you think all of a sudden you’re going to triple your income?”

Suddenly, I wasn’t so sure of myself. “Here’s the deal, Shari,” he said. “In order to get something that you’ve never had before, you have to give something up. So, what are you willing to give up?”

I thought about it for a moment. “I don’t know,” I said.

“Well, go home and think about it,” he said.

It didn’t take long for me to come up with an answer. Every night, at 6 on the dot, my colleagues and I would go to the Jackalope Bar for drinks. We were young and had all the answers, so discussions surrounded how much better things would be if we were in charge.

I realized that all our talk wasn’t getting any of us closer to running the company. If I really wanted to get better, I needed more training.

When I told Greg my plan to trade in the Jackalope for sober evenings at home reading books by Tom Hopkins, he said, “Great. That’s a start. That will get you to about \$45,000. What else can you give up?”

That night, I thought some more. I knew of only two ways to make more money in sales: more training or more customers.

I returned to Greg’s office with my plan.

“Excellent,” he said. “That will get you to about \$55,000. But there’s one more thing you have to give up if you want to succeed.”

I didn’t know if I had anything else to give, but I wasn’t going to back down now, so I asked him to tell me.

“Well, I’ve watched you for a while and it’s going to be the hard,” he said. “I don’t know if you have it in you.”

How dare he say that, I thought? I can do anything I put my mind to. (That’s what my mother always said, anyway.)

He looked at me and, after a few moments, he said, “You have to give up your ego.”

I let that sink in as he continued.

Success Starts With the Growth Equation

“There are two kinds of ego: good ego and bad ego,” he said. “Good ego gives you the ability to claim greatness. It’s your good ego that says, ‘I’m going to be number one in my company and I’m going to buy a BMW.’”

“Then there’s the bad ego,” he said. “Salespeople with bad ego blame everybody when things aren’t going right, they defend their positions rather than accepting feedback, and they choose complacency over mastery.”

I listened to what Greg had told me, and by the end of 1994, I had made \$108,000. I bought a brand-new, white BMW.

I wish I could tell you that I’ve abandoned my bad ego for good, but every once in a while it rears its ugly head. In fact, it’s one of my worst default behaviors.

What I do know is that paying attention to whether my ego is out of whack is just like every other aspect of the growth equation. It’s a process: one that we must repeat, practice, and eventually master. The rewards are endless.