foreword by Randy Gage

BONUS TIPS INSIDE

NO IS SHORT FOR next OPPORTUNITY

How Top Sales Professionals Think



Martin Limbeck

NO IS SHORT FOR

next

OPPORTUNITY

"This outstanding book goes straight to the heart of successful selling, showing you how to develop unshakable self-confidence in every sales situation."

Brian Tracy —, author of *Ultimate Sales Success*

"The title of Martin Limbeck's new book, *NO Is Short for Next Opportunity*, is an insight to his positive attitude and his sales brilliance. He lives his expertise, and this book will help you gain yours. A brand new way to address 'no' will lead you to more opportunities for 'YES!' This book is not an option for anyone who has ever heard the word 'no'—buy it and read it today and start getting 'yes' tomorrow."

Jeffrey Gitomer —, author of *The Little Red Book of Selling*

"This book is a must read for all who aspire to succeed in sales—that is selling anything whether it is an idea, product or service. Top producers are not stopped by the word *no*. Hearing *no* only gets their engines going. *No* is a part of life and here is a secret, ready? Top producers hear more no's than yeses. You don't get penalized for the no's, but you do get rewarded for the yeses. Read Martin Limbeck's book and you will learn how to get past the *no* and realize your true potential."

Ron Karr —, author of *Lead, Sell or Get Out of the Way*

"Martin Limbeck takes the reader through a wonderful journey learning about topics such as focus, goal-orientation, and resolve. In his work, *NO Is Short for Next Opportunity*, this highly competent sales professional helps the reader not only with motivation, but with specific techniques to deal with selling in its various aspects. This book is good, not only for beginning sales professionals, but for the seasoned pros who need a reminder of what sales is all about.

I particularly liked the way he stressed the importance of personal responsibility. It is imperative for a sales professional to do the adequate homework necessary before any conversation. There is no shortcut for this and Limbeck provides many examples to show the importance of adequate and

thorough preparation and how important it is not only in the sales process, but in life.

This is a book that is packed full of ideas the sales professional can go and implement immediately. It is a fun read and an important read. Do yourself a favor. Buy this book, or yet, and apply its principles today."

Terry L. Brock —, MBA, CSP, CPAE, syndicated columnist, Speaker Hall of Fame member and marketing coach

"Martin Limbeck has written a book all sales pros should read, whether beginner or top producer. He asks so many great questions and provides so many provocative insights and answers, this book will keep you going and growing throughout your career. I recommend it."

Mark Sanborn —, award winning speaker and author of *The Fred Factor* and *You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader*

"Martin Limbeck is the most dynamic, straight-talking and trusted sales professional I have ever met and had the fortune of hearing speak. In this book, he cuts the nonsense and gets right to the core of what really works for successful selling in a competitive world. With his authentic and honest style he provides all you need to ensure you attract and keep customers, and have them talking about you for many years to come."

Lesley Everett —, creator of *Walking TALL* and personal brand coach/speaker

"*NO Is Short for Next Opportunity* is more than a book; it is a how to guide to win in the increasingly complex business of selling. Straight to the heart with proven principles that will increase your sales and keep your clients. A must read if you want to SELL!"

Dr. Joachim de Posada —, author of the *Don't Eat the Marshmallow...Yet!* series

"*NO Is Short for Next Opportunity* is a sales guide you will want to apply to life. Compelling, complete, and courageous, this book will show you how to sell successfully to others and how to overcome the objections of even your most

important client . . . you. I got new ideas and a new sense of hope from the very first page!

Monica Wofford —, CSP, CEO, Contagious Companies, Inc. and author of *Make Difficult People Disappear*

"Selling can be hard. Or it can be easy. The product or service may be the problem, but more often closing the deal relies on the skills and attitude of the salesperson. Martin Limbeck is a master salesperson. In this book he shares valuable tools for making more sales. Martin knows that you can sell more with a story than a fact sheet. Invest your time and money with this book and you will sell more."

Doug Stevenson —, author of *Doug Stevenson's Story Theater Method*

"The pace has accelerated and so has the pressure. Sales professionals risk burnout if they don't keep their heads in the game. Martin's book helps them quickly move on to the NO—the Next Opportunity—without missing a beat. Avoid the downward spiral of paralysis and inactivity and get this book for your entire sales team!"

Laura Stack —, author of *Execution IS the Strategy*

"Martin Limbeck gets it all right when it comes to attitude and mental toughness for salespeople. This book should be required reading for every serious sales professional."

Steve Siebold, — author of *177 Mental Toughness Secrets of the World Class*

"Learn to think and act like a top sales professional from the guy who wrote the book on it. Oh yeah, this is the book! If you're truly ready to raise your sales game, this book is for you!"

Scott Friedman, — author of *Celebrate! — Lessons Learned from the World's Most Admired Organizations*

"Martin Limbeck is a dedicated sales expert. I had the opportunity to meet him and enjoy his presentation at one of our sales meetings in Munich. He is very powerful and convincing, yet bold. What I like most about *NO Is Short for Next Opportunity* is the way Martin views selling. It is not a job with a negative

connotation but rather a profession that deserves to be done with pride. As the book title indicates, a no is not the end of the world in sales but a beginning, because you cannot lose, you can only win. This represents a mindset that we need in sales. Martin puts things into the right perspective and reminds us that, armed with self-confidence, no sale is beyond our reach."

Christian Gerwens, — Regional Senior Vice President AMANZA (Americas, Africa, Australia, New Zealand), Miele

NO IS SHORT FOR *next* OPPORTUNITY

How Top Sales Professionals Think

Martin Limbeck

Translated from the German by Christian Villano and Esther Lenssen



NEW YORK

NO IS SHORT FOR *next* OPPORTUNITY
How Top Sales Professionals Think

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Translation:
Christian Villano and Esther Lenssen

Translation Editor:
Esther Lenssen

Line Editors/Proofreaders:
Amanda Rooker, Angie Kiesling, Marcia Ford, Emily Kiesling

Managing Editor-In-Chief:
Tiffany Gibson

Author Photograph:
Nils Schwarz

Cover Design by:
Rachel Lopez
www.r2cdesign.com

Interior Design by:
Bonnie Bushman
bonnie@caboodlegraphics.com

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Contents

Foreword: The Essence of Selling ix
A Word Before We Start xi
Acknowledgments xiv
Mindset: What Makes a Sale a Good Sale 1
Formula: What All Salespeople Should Know About Their Customers 16
Reflection: Who Do You Think You Are? 32
Customers: You Have to Like People 47
Flash of Inspiration: Psychology for the Top Sales Professional 63
One-Track Mind: The Art of Focusing 74
Targeting: What Is It You Want? 89
Mental Preparation: Think Before You Meet 100
Tall Tales: The Proper Frame of Mind for Customer Acquisition 112
Valuable(s): Standing Behind Your Price and Performance 123
N.O.: NO Is Short for Next Opportunity 139
Out of Left Field: Techniques for When the Going Gets Tough 149
In Closing: Stay True 159
About the Author 165

Foreword

The Essence of Selling

What does selling really mean to you? What constitutes a completed sale? *NO Is Short for Next Opportunity* will have you asking—and answering—those questions in an entirely new way.

Martin Limbeck brings his real-world experience to the topic, and presents it in a refreshing, different way. He will cause you to see the profession of selling from a far more powerful perspective than you probably do now.

You'll discover selling is not about closing techniques, manipulation, or swindling. That shouldn't surprise you. What may shock you is Martin's assertion that it's not your job to look after your clients, or be their support structure either. The basis of what Martin teaches comes from the true principles of prosperity.

All true prosperity is based upon value-for-value exchange. So even in a sales context, your job is simply to create a mutually beneficial arrangement between yourself and the client. Much more than "win-win," this is an arrangement that is transparent, fair and equitable—and leads to a long-term, strengthened relationship.

What you're about to read is a textbook for succeeding in the profession of sales. But this book is bigger than sales. It's a book about lifelong success. Your success.

Martin is as commanding a presence mentally as he is physically. He's a straight-talking, no-nonsense guy that gets to the point. And he has a point. This book will reveal the mindset you'll need for world-class success. You'll explore the psychology of sales, learn to focus better, and mentally prepare to succeed. And you'll get some lifeboats to use when the inevitable challenges arise.

Martin is a brilliant guy and he channels that brilliance into this book. Devour it, because it will take you where you want to go.

Randy Gage Author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Risky Is the New Safe*

A Word Before We Start

“NO is short for Next Opportunity”: This is one of my favorite phrases, one that I use whenever I am speaking about the right mindset in salesmanship. I have deliberately chosen this quote as the title of my book because it accurately expresses where the difficulty lies for many of my colleagues in the sales profession—namely, in their mindset.

For me, it is the internal and external attitudes of a person that constitute the key factors behind extraordinary success. This applies not only to salespeople but also to all professionals of all ages.

I pull no punches. Whiners, bureaucrats, and “that’s not going to fly around here” kind of people have always turned me off. That’s why I have long wanted to write this book. It focuses on the right way of thinking.

Success

The right way of thinking. For me, mastering this is the paramount challenge that the majority of salespeople face. As I was writing the first pages of this book, I became increasingly aware that I was essentially writing a book about success. I find most books on this topic unconvincing. I was never like most of the people who write about success. I was never broke, for instance, or had to start at rock bottom and rise out of the ashes like the mythical Phoenix. So I had to take a different approach. Instead of a success story, I garnered a range of ordinary experiences, encounters, situations, stories, and simply things drawn from real life that I found would be good examples for salespeople in general. Then I resolved to trust myself to write explicitly about *my own* successes. I can say that today I am successful. In Germany, where I am from, hardly anyone dares to say, “Yes, I am successful. Yes, I am a top sales professional.” If you do say it, you are almost marginalizing yourself, as if you were inflicting bodily harm on your own person. In my home country, that’s breaking a taboo.

If you do talk about your success, would others accuse you of self-adulation? In my opinion, those who begrudge another’s success are simply envious. Pity is

handed to you, but I believe that envy is something you earn. Those who envy you are often those who work closest to you. Still, I have dared to write about myself and my own successes—and my failures. Let me enjoy my successes, just as I want you to enjoy yours.

Courage

Indeed, failures are a part of the story too. You'll read about the tough lessons I've gleaned from my life, about the times I royally put my foot in it, and about the people I met along the way who did not like my style one bit.

But this is not an autobiography. What concerns me first and foremost in this book is you. My aim is to embolden you to go your own way, to follow through no matter what others say and no matter how disheartening their criticism can be. I will serve as an example; I am prepared to do that and am willing to live with the consequences. What I am not saying, however, is that you should do it *exactly* as I have done. I have written this rather personal account not to prove what a maverick I am but simply to show you how a coal miner's son from the Ruhr Valley of Germany can make something of his life. You have to burn with desire for what you do, forge your own strength.

In today's world of sales what is missing is character, individuals with an edge, salespeople who walk up and say, "Hello, I am a sales professional, and I would like to sell something to you!" This is what my book is about. Above all, it is intended to inspire you, to awaken your passion and your enthusiasm. Out with the fear of loss; in with the audacity to try something intuitive and a little crazy with your customer, something far removed from the norm. Throw the rulebook out of the window once and for all.

In the words of the Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig, "Whoever has found themselves can never again lose anything in this world." This applies to all top salespeople.

To make this book as clear and coherent as possible, I have intentionally used both the feminine and masculine genders when citing examples. Those who know me also know that I am a great advocate of women's power in the sales

world. When I use the terms salespeople, sales professionals, clients, or customers, I am referring to both men and women, to male and female clients. I simply want to avoid having to specify saleswoman or salesman; doing so will make the reading easier for you.

Acknowledgments

Thanks

I have learned an incredible amount from my clients, participants in my training programs and coaching sessions, those who have heard my speeches, and my colleagues. They have constantly spurred me on to give my best. For this, I would like to thank you with all my heart!

I would also like to thank my friends and family, and especially my parents, who always had faith in me, even in the most trying of times. No matter what I was up to, they have always been there for me. Thank you.

A Word to My International Readers

I'd like to express my gratitude to all the readers of the various editions of this book around the world—and even more to those who provided reviews of the book. There were so many of you, and the feedback was so positive, that you succeeded in making my book a bestseller. Thank you!

The German version of *NO Is Short for Next Opportunity* was sold out on its first day of sale in the spring of 2011 and had to be reprinted. On Amazon, the book was for a time in the top ten of all published books and today still usually holds the top spot in the categories of sales and selling, customer management, and business administration. On the bestseller lists of leading magazines and newspapers, the book was in first place for numerous months. The book was translated into other languages, received countless reviews, and generated interview requests. The media quickly recognized that the buzz wasn't only about the book. It was also about the fact that I as a person, as an individual, stand behind it with everything that I have and that I am. I have appeared on numerous television shows and have more enthusiastic fans in social media now than ever before.

Among the responses I received are some that really moved me. A twelve-year-old boy, for example, who had found the book on his father's bookshelf,

wrote me an endearing letter in which he proudly said that he now knew what he wanted to be one day: a sales professional.

I must tell you that this touches me!

I could never have imagined this success. And you have made it possible; it is thanks to you. And it makes me incredibly happy. Thank you again. This book was written straight from the heart—and that may be why it has been so well received. I hope you will also enjoy the short inspirational videos that I have provided for every chapter. You can access them on the Internet through the QR codes in this book. Have fun!

Martin Limbeck

Mindset:
What Makes a Sale a Good Sale



Silence. Now take three deep breaths and answer the following question: When you've finished this book and agree with most of what you've read and believe that I have told the truth and nothing but the truth, will you go to your next sales pitch a proud, confident, and wholeheartedly committed salesperson?

Now I would like you to answer another question: If I have convinced you that selling is a noble activity, will you stop selling yourself short to your client? Will you stop convincing yourself that selling to people is something immoral, sordid, or shady?

Will you stop claiming that you cannot sell yourself well?

If your answers are yes, then please read on.

Not to worry, nothing bad is going to happen to you. In reading this book, you've got everything to gain: Either you're not convinced by my case, and you can rest easy in the knowledge that your sales method up until now has been more than adequate after all. Or I have convinced you to do things differently, and you will thereby benefit from an improved mindset in your profession and reap greater success in the future. Granted, reading will cost you time, but it will not cost you business, and it may make your business that much better.

This book is a proposal. You can do what Henry Ford or even my grandma used to do: Always consider each proposal carefully, because it just might be the proposal of a lifetime. I invite you to consider my proposal *right now*.

The Most Important Principle of Selling

Imagine a newly insured policyholder who shows the insurance salesperson to the door, closes it after him, and then scratches his head and suddenly doubts whether he should have put up more resistance when it came to including glass coverage in the home insurance policy and whether he may be a little over-insured now. In a case like this, an unwritten law has
been broken.

As a salesperson, there is one thing you should understand: You are not there to deprive the client of her money, nor are you there to look after her. You are not ripping her off, nor are you holding her hand. You're not a con man, but you're not on a customer support mission either. You are neither the IRS nor Mother Teresa.

So what *is* your job? You are there to offer a deal, a mutual agreement. As it is expressed in Latin, *do ut des*: I give so that you will give. The salesperson gives and takes; the client in turn takes and gives. Both parties must contribute to the deal; both are getting something out of it. It is an open, transparent, fair, and equitable activity, aimed at building a long-term, consolidated relationship. This ancient principle of mutuality not only is the legal basis for mutual agreements but also serves as the foundation for every social community that is intended to last more than half a day. It is known as the principle of reciprocity. You and I are shaking hands; we are striking a deal. And we are striking it in such a way that on our next meeting, we will be able to look each other in the eye. Anyone who does not understand this concept is a savage and is more thief than salesperson.

Swindling is not in your job description!

This is a serious matter. We're talking about the basis of our culture. From our earliest years, most of us are taught to return every gesture of kindness, to conclude every deal with decency. "Did you say thank you? Come on, say it again—a little louder this time!" Outstanding obligations are a burden to most of us. To owe someone, to have shortchanged somebody, leaves us with a cold, unpleasant feeling, even if at times we get something out of it. It's a matter of moral conscience. That's how it is for me anyway. And probably for you too.

Today, politicians, managers, bankers, insurance salespeople, and other groups have to fight for their reputations. Why? Bad salesmanship! Social unrest is nearly always triggered between the privileged on one hand and those discriminated against on the other—or rather between those who in a transaction have come away with more than they deserve and those who get shortchanged. According to a recent poll, equality is the value most dear to Germans. Not "unity and justice and freedom," as they sing in their national anthem, but equality. That's rather incongruous for an individualist like me. In my view, however, this apparent imbalance is a result of poor transactions that are devoid of the principle of reciprocity.

Cheating is divisive. Selling unites. What brought families together as tribes and clans? Among other things, trade through the distribution of labor. I'll go hunting while you tend the fire and collect berries. Fair transactions. What brought tribes together into communities? The traveling salesperson who sold flint and hides, and the market, in which supply and demand struck a balance. And what binds the nations of today's world? The paid ads known as Google AdWords, which draw people from all over the world to my website, and all the other worldwide business deals that we make on a daily basis. Anyone who sells is uniting the world. Communicating. Bringing people together.

This guy Limbeck is nuts, you're probably thinking. Isn't he the one dubbed "The Porsche of Sales" by the press? Of course. And no, I am not nuts in the least—because whoever sells well not only is doing good but is also securing his success in the long run. Genuine success. Whoever does good will receive his just due. You can count on that.

This guy Limbeck is nuts.

I would rather visit a customer ten times and come back home at night able to look at myself in the mirror than visit that same customer once, rake in the cash, and not be able to look at him or myself with integrity.

So, my friends, if selling is really all that—giving, doing good, uniting the world, fairness, sustainability—if it is a noble deed and our sacred duty, then how do you dare go out there and claim that all you're doing is consulting? Does your business card say key account manager? Consultant? Regional manager? Representative? Do you pretend that you're coming for a cup of coffee and some small talk, because you are afraid of admitting what you really are? You are sales professionals. You should be proud of it.

A Question of Attitude

When a top salesperson makes a sale, she is forthright about it. Those things that contribute to the attitude of the best salespeople are focus, goal orientation, and resolve.

When you visit a client, what do you take on board? Your specialized knowledge; that goes without saying, since that is the foundation on which to build your case. Next, your sales documents and the information you've gathered about your client, from A for area to Z for Zinfandel, her favorite wine. A suit that represents you as a sales professional, to be taken seriously. We'll come back to that later in more detail. What else? A positive outlook, naturally, and the justified hope of a sealed deal.

Wait a second.

What was that? The hope of a deal? It seems that Limbeck has just pulled a fast one. Hope? No, you don't hope. You are determined. Hope is disappointment deferred. Let me be very clear about this: Hope is disappointment deferred.

Hope is disappointment deferred.

The kind of optimism that you take with you to the client is a joyful resolve. A focus on selling, on results, and on closing the deal. If you are convinced that it is a good thing for the client to purchase from you, then you will do everything in your power to joyfully close that deal.

Joy is precisely what you need to exude.

When I see the typical sales team *before* my training session has been conducted, what I see is a drove of walking corpses. A funereal mood. Blank stares. Diffident body language. Hushed voices. Seldom do I see fun.

Unbelievable as it may sound, a customer once said that I was the St. Paul of salespeople, meaning that my joy springs from my earnestness. From me you will never hear those dour and whiny mutterings that we hear from too many others these days. Nor will you hear the feeble stammering heard too often in sales presentations. I'm dead serious about salesmanship. Selling is not a playground to me; it is the solid foundation of my existence. Selling is my life, and I have dedicated my life to it. That is why I am as hard as granite when it comes to selling. Everyone takes me seriously. From this earnestness I derive endless joy. This joy simply means that I have a lot of fun doing it. Selling is not cool, calculated, and mechanical but highly charged and passionate.

I ask you to compare this with your own attitude. Go ahead and be honest with yourself.

I can assure you that I was not born a sales professional. A born salesperson? There's no such thing! Just as there are no born street sweepers, tax collectors, or professional athletes. All nonsense. Just like everyone else, I sought out this meaning and purpose and made it my own. Anybody who wants a passionate attitude toward their vocation must simply decide to adopt one.

Unfortunately, most sales presentations perpetuate the notion of selling as personal injury. Dull technical mumbo-jumbo, reeling off memorized catch phrases, a craven kowtowing to the client as king—none of that has any place in salesmanship, and it is neither successful
nor sincere.

There are no born street sweepers,
tax collectors, or professional athletes.

You have to sell with enthusiasm; the client has to have fun with you. And you have to have plenty of fun yourself! Once the client has had a good laugh, he's more likely to buy.

Selling is an emotionally charged activity. After the sale is made, reason always finds a suitable justification for the decision our emotions have led us to. Emotion usually trumps reason. You can forget all of your meticulous arguments if you are not having fun in the process.

Once you have decided to have fun selling, then you'll win either way, regardless of the outcome. In fact, you'll be able to step into the ring as the winner. And therein lies a real mystery: *Clients Only Buy from Winners*—a powerful title, a powerful book, and a powerful premise. I fully subscribe to it. The author's name is H.C. Altmann. As I always say, this is the third-best book ever to have been published in Germany.

What that means in practice is something you can learn too. An example of that is when I travel by plane. The flight from Frankfurt to Munich takes fifty-five minutes. I always take an aisle seat, which gives me a chance to have a little fun. On the half-empty flight during the week, there is usually someone in the window seat. Having the aisle seat means that nobody can get past me. They can't get away from me! For fifty-five minutes. Beautiful. I've made five big

business contacts on an airplane. How
about you?

A Heartfelt Sale Goes a Long Way

You don't have to have a college degree to bring the right kind of focus, optimism, and fun into selling. I don't have one. My education was brief. School and I didn't have much in common. An early separation was inevitable. Instead, I traveled to America to capture what my school had failed to teach me and I had failed to learn: English. And that was a wonderful time, for besides learning English I learned, above all, what selling is.

So here I was, at a high school somewhere in New Jersey—this red-haired, slightly chubby kid with a heavy German accent determined not to only learn proper English but also to adjust to the American lifestyle. In high school I always had a part-time job. During the summer I would mow rich people's lawns; in winter I would shovel snow. I learned that this is how snow shoveling works in America: It snows. You pick out a house. You shovel the driveway. Then you're done. The door opens, and a total stranger comes out beaming, pats you on the back, and offers you some money. Wow! I love America.

A stranger comes out beaming, pats you on the back, and offers you some money.

That's when I knew I wanted to be a sales professional: I give, you take; you give, I take. Four short steps forge a bond between people. Wonderful. And I immediately understood that you *give* first, then you *take*. In that order.

Armed with this fervor I returned to Germany to sell photocopiers and fax machines. And you know what? Although Germans are wired a little differently than Americans, the element of fun in selling is the same. A thousand cold visits, a thousand companies: I walk in the door a thousand times without an

appointment, approach the reception desk, get past reception, reach the decision-maker—and sell eighty-one photocopiers. That's where you learn the basics. Each of those eighty-one clients acquired a copier that was better than the one they owned or was the first that they'd *ever* owned. Each one actually went on to use the photocopier, and each one benefited from it. This made me proud. It was wonderful, and I loved it.

Did I want to see what it feels like to be rejected 919 times? With pleasure! I was having fun one way or the other!

919 rejections? With pleasure!

A quiet approach is not my style, I'll admit that. I prefer some thunder and lightning. I am pretty loud by nature. It's my testosterone levels; I can't help it. That's also why I drive a loud car. But don't let that scare you. Heartfelt enthusiasm doesn't have to be loud to impress someone.

I was impressed by a hotel in Hamburg that a client had booked for me. I entered my room, and the first thing I saw was a basket on the bed with a note. What do you know? The note indicated that if I put my shoes in the basket and left the basket in front of the door in the evening, they would be freshly polished by morning. Just like that, a service of the house. Now, I am a salesperson; finely polished shoes are important to me. So I decided to try it out. I was impressed; this was a good sales move on their part. I may be coming back to Hamburg more often. Even before I got my shoes back the next morning, perfectly polished, the hotel had already won
me over:

In addition to setting my cell phone alarm clock, I had requested a wake-up call from the hotel's reception. Oversleeping is not an option when you have an appointment. That next morning, the phone on the nightstand rang. I picked up,

and a gentle but firm male voice said: “Good morning, Mr. Limbeck. It’s 7:30, and this is your wake-up call.” So far, so good. But here it comes. The voice continued: “Would you like me to call again in ten minutes?” Bingo. That did it. Suddenly I was wide awake. A true salesman in the hotel reception! Someone with focus, fun, and warmth. Someone who can close the deal, who knows what his clients are after. He sold me and in the process earned himself X number of future reservations at the hotel.

I later asked a friend, a hotel manager, why this doesn’t happen in every hotel. His answer: “Do you know how hard it is to get employees to grasp this concept?”

No, I don’t. But I believe it *is* hard. Therefore, let me get you to grasp it too.

Stand Up Straight

Do not sell just anything that comes your way. Sell what you feel you can stand behind. I have to feel at ease with the product, with the client, and with myself. Product, client, self. In that order.

I ask the same of you. First, as to the product: Do not sell any products that are overpriced, of poor quality, or simply scams to rip the client off. The moral high ground in this case lies in knowing what not to sell. You’re not horse-trading. You don’t need that. Second, as to the client: If you’ve got a malicious, dimwitted, or run-of-the-mill psychopathic buyer sitting across from you who is trying to exhibit his supposed power as a customer, just leave. And third, as to you: If you are not at peace with yourself, then read this book first and go back out and sell!

The notion that a good salesperson will sell anything is not one that I subscribe to. A good salesman is not a swindler and therefore does not, for example, propose a real estate financing scheme that the buyer can pay only if he’s lucky and if real estate prices move well above average.

The measure of a good salesman lies in the results—not in short-term sales but in long-term profitability. You can identify a good salesperson when you’re speaking to a longstanding client of hers at a hotel bar and he talks about her

with respect. It goes without saying that she has made a great many sales to this client over the years.

Selling doesn't mean making an easy buck. Easy bucks are usually made through shady deals. Business transactions are concluded in broad daylight. The thing about an easy buck is that it's too good to be true and will not last. Selling, however, can be done over and over; the better you get at selling, the more you will sell in the future. Selling aims at sustainability: long-term collaboration with the client on an even playing field, a constant give-and-take, and a balanced relationship.

Selling doesn't mean making an easy buck.

Greed for money leads to destruction. The market is not the Amazon River, and you are not a piranha. The market is not a forest, and you are not wielding an ax. Do not become undisciplined but remain honest, forthright, and direct when selling. Good salespeople don't resort to lying.

Nobody is claiming that you should disclose everything that happens to be true. But what you do disclose should be true. So don't be rude or boorish and tell your client that his tie is a capital offense to good taste only because you think it's true! If, on the other hand, you try to sweet talk your client to pieces to make a sale, you're effectively prostituting yourself. Salespeople with integrity do not do this.

If you see your client as a cow and making a sale as milking, if your gluttony pushes you to do what's best for yourself instead of what's best for your client, then the money demon has a stranglehold on you. In that case, be aware that things will not have a happy end for you. One law of the universe is this: What goes around, comes around. Those who take without ever giving will never be successful.

Keep at It

Doers have it easier. If you're not a doer, you have two possibilities: Either you decide to become one, or you stop selling. Selling is linked to success. And success is not only imaginable, it is doable. It's up to you. If you're looking for a helping hand, you'll find it at the end of your sleeve. God helps those who help themselves.

A talent for salesmanship? Not so important. In the long run, hard work always trumps talent. To have both is unbeatable. So, you want success? Then you must work hard. Work, work, work. To this day, there isn't a single person who's made it rich overnight. Every person I know who is rich or famous worked very hard to become so. Most, however, don't become rich because they want to reap rewards too soon. I'm telling you, it doesn't work that way. Not a chance. Before reaping comes sowing and a lot
of fieldwork.

OK, we're still talking about what makes a sale a good sale. Well, tenacity, for one thing. Doing instead of wishing. Keeping at it, like a kid longing for ice cream.

In fact, kids are the best salespeople. Haven't you ever noticed that? Kids stick to it when they want something. Take a child walking hand in hand with his father through a shopping mall. He will have countless opportunities to ask for an ice cream. Let's not kid ourselves, he's already taken them all in at a glance. And here he goes:

"Daddy, can I have an ice cream?"

"No, son. We're going to have a barbecue today, and Mom will be making an ice cream bombe. So you'll be getting loads of ice cream later. Let's go buy our steaks now."

"But Daddy . . ."

Well, you know how it goes. In the end, the chances are pretty good that this young salesman will get ice cream *twice* in the same day.

I'm speaking from experience here. I have an adolescent at home, and he is my most effective teacher. From him I have learned the meaning of the word *no*.

N.O.: Next Opportunity.

Giving up? That's not an option, unless we're talking about giving up a bad habit.

Have you seen the wonderful film *Walk the Line*, about the life of Johnny Cash? If not, I urge you to watch it. You'll witness that final scene in which Joaquín Phoenix as Johnny Cash and Reese Witherspoon as June Carter are on stage singing the duet "Jackson." June has already rejected Johnny's marriage proposals about thirty-seven thousand times. Is that going to stop Johnny from proposing 37,001 times? Of course not. He doesn't give up. At one point on stage, he interrupts the song, just stops. Nobody knows what's going on. Silence. June starts feeling the pressure and tells him to keep going. And he does keep going, only not with the song but with another marriage proposal. And she says yes.

Did his tenacity pay off? Yes, it did. Johnny and June were happily married, grew old together, and died in 2003 a few months apart, before the film's premiere and after a wonderful lifelong love story.

I urge you to learn from this! A *no* does not mean that you should give up; on the contrary, a *no* means you should keep at it. Think about my previous example of the thousand photocopier cold visits: 919 no's were required for the eighty-one yeses. Granted, you don't get an Oscar for a *yes* as Reese Witherspoon did. Neither do you have to marry your client if she says yes. But as a salesperson you do have to do this: Offer your client first-class service with first-class tenacity. You never know what lies behind the barrage of no's; it could be a resounding yes and lots of yeses after that.

Before a sales pitch with your client, you must keep one thing in mind: Basically, you can't lose, because NO is short for Next Opportunity.

Don't Play the Psychologist

Selling means moving others to action. It's as simple as that. If you need to consult your client to get him to act, then OK, consult him and conduct a comprehensive needs assessment. However, that does not make you a

consultant. You are still a sales professional. Consulting is one of the five courses but not the entire meal. Consulting without closing is counterproductive, because in the end you're sending your client somewhere else to make his purchase.

Neither should you bend your client's ear with endless technical shoptalk to prove your knowledge of the product. Play the geek, and your client will freak. Most of the time, the babbling salesperson is convinced that what she's doing is consulting the client and benefiting him. But in reality the talk is conveying the fact that the salesperson doesn't dare admit to herself or to her client what she's really there for. The sales pitch is not intended to explain the product but to close the deal. It's about the signature on the paper. The contract. The sale. Don't pretend it's about anything else!

Geeks, babblers, and those who kill the sale before it even gets started are the hypocrites of the sales world. They focus on minutiae and neglect the bigger picture. They insist on the formalities of the sale and appear terribly important to themselves, but they pass right over the fundamental element of the selling process. They are not truthful. They betray all the things that they should hold most dear. They don't stand behind their true intentions—namely, to persuade the client to buy.

Geeks, babblers, and those who kill the sale before it even gets started are the hypocrites of the sales world.

To persuade the client to buy, I have to make an impression on him. I have to exert influence. And I have to be skillful about it. Let's not kid ourselves; of

course we are manipulating the client. Manipulation! That is the whole purpose of this, isn't it? If I work in a boutique and say, "Wow, that blazer suits you to a T!" I am manipulating the customer. Enough said.

But if I am an effective salesperson, then I'm saying it because I am convinced that that particular blazer enhances the woman's appearance. I leave no doubt that, because I think the blazer suits my customer so well, I expect to hear the ring of the cash register before the bell of the exit door.

To recap: Yes, I manipulate. But only under two conditions. First, I am open about my intentions. Second, I manipulate because I truly believe that my words and actions serve my client. In other words, I help her make the decision that is right for her.

Is that so bad? Is fire a good thing or a bad thing? It can warm my soup, and it also can set my roof ablaze. Is a knife good or bad? It can pierce a loaf of bread, and it can pierce someone's ribcage and shorten their lifespan. What about laser technology? Your favorite band is great on a CD, but a laser pointer in the eye of a pilot is not so great. The Internet? The world's knowledge is at your fingertips, but contempt for mankind through child pornography spreads faster on the Internet than wildfire. So, is manipulation bad? Like Johnny Cash, I can employ manipulation to get my girlfriend to say yes to marriage and thereby ensure a lifetime of happiness for two people and their children. Or, if I'm a broker selling derivatives on Wall Street, I can contribute to the collapse of the US mortgage market, to the triggering of the financial crisis, to the loss of millions of jobs worldwide, and to the despair of those upstanding business owners who end up throwing themselves in front of a train.

Don't pretend that you don't manipulate. You do it on a daily basis. With all my experience as a trainer, coach, speaker, and author, I urge you first, to have clearer motives; second, to be more open and honest about them; and third, to be as effective as possible in carrying them out. This philosophy is simply the one that I think is the most effective in persuading the client to act. The clothes you wear in the presence of your client, how you introduce yourself, where you sit,

how you present your business card, and so forth is all directed toward a single goal: To influence the client in such a way that she buys what is good for her.

Is small talk necessary for this? I have a particular view on this matter: You should spend two minutes doing business, then fifty-eight minutes engaging in small talk but not the other way around. Otherwise you'll find yourself under pressure, and the only thing on your mind will be the clock. Don't get me wrong—I can do small talk. In fact, I'm a great small-talk salesperson, and I've done some of my biggest deals over the dinner table. But I only engage in this kind of talk if the client initiates it and then only with the subjects that he broaches. Nothing should feel forced; conversation needs to arise naturally when both parties have an interest in one another.

So you're better off leaving out the usual "Hi, how are you?" You don't mean it anyway. That's not what interests you. What do you do if your client says, "I feel horrible. My dog died, and my wife just left me." Then you *could* play the psychologist, but your sales pitch would go straight down the drain. Trust me.

But we'll get to all that in depth in the coming chapters. This opening chapter is an exposition, as in a classical drama or a Hollywood movie: The first scene places the core theme in the spotlight. From the perspective of the top salespeople, the core theme includes the following: creating a space for open discussion, making your introductions, having a pleasant cup of tea to create a sense of kinship and dispel the impression that you lust after the client's money—that's self-indulgent. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it is devious, immoral, and nothing less than treacherous. All you are doing is putting your short-term benefit over the long-term welfare of your company and your client.

A pleasant cup of tea is not what you're here for.

Groveling to the client is just as despicable. Moreover, it’s unprofessional and hardly successful. The moment you begin to engage in this kind of flattery, your client, whether consciously or not, will no longer take you seriously. He may actually feel flattered if you’re crafty enough to succeed, but you’ll ruin your image in the process, as well as the image of your product and your company. Let’s be truthful: A good sales professional sells without resort to flattery and regardless of the types of clients he is faced with, be they homely, unfriendly, eccentric, hygienically challenged, or the likes of Angelina Jolie. There is room for every kind of client in this world.

If you share my opinion that good salesmanship, Limbeckian salesmanship, is forthright, transparent, passionate, inspirational, funny, serious, upfront, fair, just, hard, sustainable, constructively manipulative, decisive, focused, emotional, tenacious, effective, respectful, and successful, then you will agree to leave your small talk out of the picture during your next sales pitch and start by asking for the sale.

I mean it: *Start by asking for the sale.*



Formula:
What All Salespeople Should Know About Their Customers



Let's face it—the customer of today is a different breed compared to that of twenty, ten, or even five years ago.

Twenty years ago, if someone were racking their brains as whether to get an "Elephant" or a "Typhoon" vacuum cleaner, they had a limited number of information sources at their disposal. They may have bought a *Consumer Reports* magazine, let a door-to-door salesperson or shop attendant advise them, or asked neighbors or relatives what they thought of an Elephant or a Typhoon.

Today, the world is a global community. There are countless magazines that test every conceivable product, from wide-base tires to baby diapers. For every need there are test results, recommendations, tips, and to-do lists. Magazines for iPhone apps, men who cook, city people longing for a country idyll, farriers, hunting dogs, hunting-dog owners, and hunting-dog owners' daughters-in-law's neighbors.

On top of that, we have many more neighbors today than ever before. Internet neighbors, that is. Facebook friends, Twitter followers, LinkedIn contacts, MySpace fans. They too buy cell phones, book holidays, taste red wines. And wherever there is online selling, there you will also find reviews by consumers.

I would never purchase a book on Amazon if more than half of the reviewers said it was dull. Nor would I trust an eBay seller whose customers reported him to be careless, slow, or unreliable.

Hold on, let's think for a second. It seems as though this Martin Limbeck has shot himself in the foot here, saying he wants to educate us on the ways of selling and then claims that buying is better on the Internet anyway, even without a salesperson. Well, no, in fact the opposite is true. The Internet is not a substitute but a challenge to the sales professional. The quantity of information sources has obviously increased. Customers are better and more quickly informed than before, and this alters the way they behave. Customers now know exactly what they want, what they can get, what their rights are, what's cool, what is a great deal and what is a poor one, and when to bargain hard and when not to. The conventional wisdom is that the customer has become more responsible and is thinking more critically. You can see it that way if you want; I, though, find customers to be just as responsible and capable of critical thinking as they ever were, except that now they are certainly a whole lot better informed, on all levels. And this makes them more confident, assertive, demanding, and powerful. But here is the key: The need for security has also grown in proportion. Customers are acutely aware that they can no longer blindly trust the information they receive. This need for security, my friend, is where your advantage as a sales professional lies. Security is something that *you* can give the customer.

On one end of the spectrum you have the dark, evil world of con men, swindlers, and crooks. What used to be a door-to-door salesperson talking a senior citizen into buying a ten-year subscription to a sports car magazine is now an Internet scammer selling empty boxes for the price of a television set on eBay, for example. Or worse, those who hack into your email account, sell overpriced goods in your name, and never deliver the product, naturally. Then it's you who ends up getting charged by the police, who know next to nothing about the Internet.

On the other end you have a person. A person in flesh and blood. A decent person. A top sales professional. Someone the client can touch. Someone she can look in the eye. Someone she can trust and believe in. She knows that she is dealing with someone who will take responsibility, help her make a decision,

and guide her fairly in her purchase. The best salespeople do precisely this and are honest about their intentions from the outset—namely, to sell. This conveys a sense of security. This still trumps any virtual agent, any electronic avatar, any stylish online store. The need to trust people is a part of human nature. To close a business deal with a solid handshake provides more emotional satisfaction than a click of the mouse. And I love handshake business deals. That is why, in the age of the Internet, 83 percent of sales are made by way of personal recommendations and only 50 percent through online recommendations from strangers (still, that is a considerable amount!).

A sense of security still trumps any electronic avatar.

The new breed of top sales professionals is well aware of how their clients think—namely, that they are well informed but equally wary. Through their reliable manner, these top sales professionals are capable of providing the type of security that today's clients are after—failing which, however, the Internet *would* be considered more trustworthy. Bad salespeople who do *not* succeed in providing this security are even more dispensable than before, for in that case, the Internet makes up for and surpasses the difference, rendering itself more reliable.

So, today's customer is more knowledgeable but would still prefer to engage with people on a personal level. Is that it? Not by a long shot.

First, you as the salesperson must take into account that the customer is less reliable in his behavior. Less committed. Via LinkedIn, for example, I received an inquiry from the owner of a software company. He saw my videos on YouTube and wanted to know more. As with so many business people, his biggest challenge was how to successfully close a deal. In other words: How

should his salespeople go about not only creating a good impression but also getting the client to sign on the dotted line? Well, he recognized the crux of the problem and came to the right person. I called him, and we spoke at length. I conducted a needs assessment. I set up a telephone script for him and his company: opening phrases, objection handling, the whole program. Everything proceeded smoothly. He wanted to hear more. Considering he had a small team, I invited him to attend a coaching seminar to learn closing techniques. We discussed the price, which posed no problem. He said to me, “Please draw up a full proposal and book two sessions for us so that we can get started.” In short, we had good chemistry, and everything was running according to plan. Or so I thought.

Then came the basic drill—after three days I called back to confirm that the proposal had arrived and he had received the documents. Strangely enough, nobody picked up the phone. And there was no voice mail. And nobody called back. I tried again—with no luck. I decided to call the company directly, and I was told that the owner was out. I tried a week later, and he was out again. Four weeks later on a Friday night, having already missed the first of our scheduled sessions, I got a text on my cell phone, “I’m terribly busy. Will get back to you on Monday. Have a good weekend.”

Welcome to the twenty-first century.

Apart from the fact that he wasn’t speaking to me, I had no reason to think there was something wrong with my proposal. On the following Monday, there was still no call. By now it should have been clear to me that “I’ll call you back” may very well mean “I’ll never call you again. You can wait all you want. But don’t hold your breath.”

Suddenly my curiosity was piqued, and the situation had gotten my dander up. This time I tried again with an email. No response. OK, I thought, let’s try a different approach. I employed the tactic of self-incrimination: In the next email I wrote that I was sorry if anything in my proposal was misunderstood, but it was obviously my mistake. I would therefore be grateful to learn from it.

Try as I might, this nightmare of a movie simply refused to turn out well. I never heard from the man again. Now, I could brood over this story. Or I could dance with joy and shout, “Yes! The book and DVD that I sent him were so effective that he didn’t need any coaching at all!” In fact, I just think it’s a pity, if only because if I were ever to bump into him in the street, I would like to look him in the eye and say, “Congratulations, you are
my masterpiece!”

I want to be able to say to him,
“Congratulations, you are my masterpiece.”

There are similar cases. These days, few people ever call back. If you persist, you may get a response and a range of excuses for why the potential client didn’t call back. They attempt to appease you, saying that you’ve called at a bad time, there’s too much going on, it’s summer break, it’s the annual report, it’s hard times, it’s the lunar eclipse, the server’s crashed, there’s a tax investigation, there are telecommunication problems, it’s unemployment or globalization or cosmic radiation or the expansion of the universe, and so on and so forth. But it makes no difference. As a sales professional you must be prepared for this. Sometimes shorter callback cycles may be helpful, but the main thing is to *always, always, always keep at it*. That’s the only way you will know if the client is just leading you on or will actually play ball. In short, employ polite persistence, over and over again.

What does all this have to do with the Internet? Well, I don’t have scientific backing for this, but what is clear to me is that in an age of lightning-fast tweets and contract conclusions via text messages, old-school business integrity has declined significantly since the rise of the Internet in the mid-1990s. Trust me on this.

Perhaps it’s because of all the time wasted and time ill spent that the Internet brings with it. For apart from the indisputably remarkable access to all manner of information that the web provides, it also facilitates a flood of conversations whose quality wanes as its quantity waxes. The reliability of one’s statements has diminished; things are said offhandedly, and when it comes down to it, people have likely moved on to the next thing. This is especially true on social media. Take LinkedIn, for instance. Those looking to do it right must do it in a professional manner. They must get professional advice. Otherwise, LinkedIn is no more than a great database for headhunters. However, those who simply hang around there and post for hours on end are essentially confirming that they have nothing better to do. Excuse my bluntness.

Social Media and Cappuccino

Granted, I also use LinkedIn. But not to gab. On one hand, I do it to stay in touch with my seminar participants. On the other hand, I use it to provide new stimuli to my own group. Essentially, though, selling over the web is a lot like a cappuccino. On the bottom you have the coffee, analogous to cold calling. The foam is referral marketing. And the chocolate powder on top is social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and many others.

As for this top layer of chocolate, this is how it works: On the very top of your client wish list is a customer whom you have no idea how to reach. Let’s call him Coca-Cola, which is easy to retain. LinkedIn would be a channel through which you could now try out the law of reciprocity. You remember that law—exactly, the alien concept of “Give and you
shall receive.”

You proceed to search through the database for someone who has once worked at Coca-Cola. You find a former sales director who in his new company is not only looking for capable employees but also seeking out practical literature on the subject of sales. Bingo. Naturally you write the man a letter, “Dear Mr. Coke, I see that you are looking for books on a subject that is of great importance to me as well. I can recommend a particular book to you that has

proved very helpful to me. The title is *NO Is Short for Next Opportunity*, written by Martin Limbeck—that's the gentleman whom the press has dubbed 'The Porsche of Sales,' straight from Germany."

Nine out of ten people will write back and thank you for the tip. Three weeks later, you follow up: Was the recommendation useful? Did the book leave an impression on you? At this point things become interesting, because if this triggers an exchange on a subject common to you both, then a relationship is established.

Only at that particular moment, and not before, is the bond created. It is this very bond that serves as the basis for the following step and the crucial question, "Say, Mr. Coke, I see that you were the sales director for Coca-Cola. Did you train your successor yourself?"

The answer to this question will tell you what kind of relationship your contact has to his former company. If you're lucky, he'll say, "Of course, I remember my successor very well indeed."

Then you ask, "What would you say is most important to your successor? The reason I ask is that I've wanted to contact her about . . ."

And the rest is pretty straightforward. That's how it works. Let me be clear, however: As successful as the professional hobnobbing on LinkedIn can be, it is still only the chocolate powder on the cappuccino. The whole cappuccino also requires the grinding and brewing of the coffee beans and the frothing of the milk. You must know how each of these things is done. The basics come first. Sales means you actually have to sell, even today. That includes prospecting, initial contact, arranging an appointment, first meeting, needs assessment, sales proposal, objection handling, price negotiation, closing the deal, customer relationship management, and referrals. In other words, Selling 101—with or without the Internet.

Professional hobnobbing is still only the chocolate powder on top

only the chocolate powder on top.

Cold calling is different from obtaining clients on the web. Cold calling is all about the numbers. But it requires being better prepared, much better prepared. For me, telephone sales is the quintessential sales discipline. Those who learn to excel at it will also excel at Internet and face-to-face communication.

Under normal circumstances, cold calling operates according to the principle, “Don’t hesitate, and get straight to the point.” For major customers with high revenue potential per call, things work a little differently. There the preparation means detective work. And no, I don’t mean spying on your client or acquiring secrets that can be used against them. Particularly with major customers in the project business or with long-term deals, the salesperson has to have done some in-depth research beforehand: What are the decision-making channels? Who are the actual leaders behind the scenes? Who is my main contact? Who is on my side? Who is against me? Who makes the decisions? Is it an individual or a committee?

With individual or first-time clients, you are seeking information that is available to everyone anyway. What the client can do, so can you. Go ahead and start Googling: What does your contact do? Where was she before her present job? Does her company have branch offices? What are her interests? What brings her joy, and what is she proud of? Whom does she work with? How important is media coverage to her? Does she have hobbies? Is she a member of a club or a society? Has she ever won an award? Trophies, distinctions? When is her birthday? Did she recently get married? Has she recently become a mother or a grandmother? Does she have her own website? Is she on Facebook? On LinkedIn? Top-level management is not often to be found in social media, but the second and third levels may well be. Take advantage of mutual contacts.

What is the point of all this? I simply wish to explain to you how top sales professionals think. Before me stands a customer, the sales director of a large firm. It’s our first meeting. On the previous day, it took me no more than two

minutes to find out that my client had recently run the New York City Half Marathon in an hour and thirty minutes. That's my way in: The client introduces himself, tells me his name, what he does, where he's from . . . and instantly I can segue to, "You forgot to mention that you completed the half marathon in New York City in an impressive time." Then a deliberate pause. The man looks like a deer in the headlights. And in the blink of an eye a connection has been made.

Let's be clear about this. I'm not referring to small talk. Nor am I saying that you should address topics that you know nothing or little about. You are walking a fine line here. When using the Internet, be aware that not every piece of information you come across is up to date or even remotely true; indeed, some of it may even be completely inappropriate. Things can go horribly wrong if you ask your client if his son still enjoys riding motorcycles and you missed the fact that he was fatally injured on one only a week ago. Or if you ask how the merger with X company went, only to find out that it didn't go at all. Or if you ask the pope how his wife and kids are doing while trying to sell him a king-size bed.

Please take note: Small talk is called for only if and when the customer initiates it. Check your ego at the door, and opt for a bonsai instead of a fifteen-foot Christmas tree. Don't brag, even if you know more than the client does. And don't lie. Finally, avoid babbling, be it about the weather or any other mindless subject.

Take note: Small talk—only if the client initiates it.

You *may* talk about sensitive subjects like religion, sex, health, or politics. But it must be at the appropriate time with the appropriate client and never at the outset of a sales discussion. Yes, I'm strict on this point.

Another thing. Have a look at photos of your prospective client on the Internet. You might be avoiding your first blunder that way. Better yet, you can

address your client by her name, even before she has introduced herself. Not bad, right? If your client should respond with pleasant surprise, take it as you would a clean bounce pass and drive your answer home for the easy layup.

In all your detective work, however, don't neglect your existing customers, who deserve no less of your attention. Think of how pleased your client will be when you send her a card for the birth of her child, saying for example, "Dear Oliver, we welcome you to the world. It's nice to have you among us. And we wish you a great time with your first teddy bear." Or try sending someone a survival care package for their honeymoon. The more you know about your client, the closer your rapport will be. And the closer you are, the more you'll know about when, and above all what, to send as a gift.

Friends, what I am talking about here is in no way professional bootlicking but deriving genuine joy from selling. I don't know about you, but for me, customers are, first and foremost, people. And when I'm given the opportunity of bringing someone a little joy, then I get joy out of it too. And that's when I get the most out of selling. It's simply human nature.

In the Mind of a Top Sales Professional

You're right—all of this is easy to say but harder to do. It's OK; you can admit it: There have been more than a few times when you've thought to yourself: Good Lord, this client is an absolute jerk, a pencil pusher, a nitpicker, a moron, a dimwit, a jackass, a neurotic, a loser, a screwball, a lunatic, and
so forth.

Even if at the time you're convinced that you're right, I think that you're passing judgment too quickly on your client. I know it's hard, but I want you to make an effort on this point.

Take a deep breath and ask yourself what this is really about. Does your customer want to become your son-in-law? Does he want to move to a deserted island with you? Does he want you to donate a kidney? For heaven's sake, no!

Does he want to do business with you? Maybe. But you certainly want to do business with him. And that's what it's really about. I don't have to like

everyone I meet, and I don't need my client to be my friend.

What I do need to have, however, is *respect*. I have to have respect for the customer. I have to respect her accomplishments. I have to respect her situation, her mood, and how she's feeling on that particular day. This is *imperative*. Paraphrasing the words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, I say: If you treat people as they are, they will become worse. If you treat them as they could be, they will become better.

Don't be too quick to judge, like former US President George W. Bush. During a press conference, he reprimanded a journalist who was wearing dark glasses, telling him it was impolite and disrespectful to stand before a president like that. The journalist was wearing dark glasses because he was blind from birth. Disrespectfully blind, indeed.

Don't judge someone by what they are wearing. Just imagine your client was Pablo Picasso, who could range anywhere from sloppily dressed to scantily attired, and who might even have been seen walking around with blotches of paint on his face. Or take Keith Richards from the Rolling Stones. When is the last time you saw that man freshly groomed, without shades, and in full command of his own language? Here I would invoke the words of Nikolaus B. Enkelmann, "Never judge people by their clothing, but rest assured that that's exactly what they're doing to you!"

The success of your sales ventures will not hinge on the first three minutes of your sales meeting, as everyone tries to drum into you, but on the three hours *before* your meeting. Namely, in your head. In your own mental programming. Boris Becker once said, "The outcome of the match was decided between my ears."

If you're standing in the elevator, heading up to your appointment and thinking, "Damn, here I am meeting these penny-pinchers again," then the chances of your failing to close the deal are high. If your client appears to have absolutely no redeeming qualities, well, then you'll just have to look harder! And if you have to invent some . . . so be it.

One particular participant in one of my seminars was at a loss. He said that he just couldn't seem to find any affable qualities in his client, a peevish know-it-all. In the seminar, we tried to approach the problem factually: "Mr. Client, I like you because today a good sales professional and a good businessperson are about to strike a great deal."

In the following seminar, the participant came in beaming and said, "Mr. Limbeck, I can hardly believe it, but it worked."

"What did you do?" I asked him.

"I met my client's wife at a customer event!"

"I met my client's wife at a customer event!"

Of course, everyone got a good laugh out of this. But there was something important here. He proceeded to tell us, "His wife was charming and bright. I thought that if my client could have a wife like her, then deep down in some hidden chamber of his innermost being there must be a shred of likeability. And indeed, since then our meetings have shifted noticeably. They're much smoother and more constructive."

So, my friend, let me tell you what really happened here: The salesman employed a psychological ruse to manipulate his own way of thinking, thereby getting himself to relax a little. As a result, the client began to unwind a little himself. Relaxation being an infectious thing, the salesman relaxed even more in turn, and so on and so forth. Do you see?

Another seminar participant was utterly desperate. He wasn't finding any common ground with the customer. Every meeting for him meant torture, heart palpitations, and stomach cramps. "Limbeck, how do I win this guy over?" I told him to try using his birthday. Call him up personally and give him heartfelt congratulations. Don't pretend, be genuine. So my participant called his client.

His assistant informed him that the client was in France at the moment, on a business trip to purchase some production machinery. My participant already had visions of the client yelling at him for raising his cell phone roaming costs, on his birthday of all days. Nevertheless, he mustered up all his courage, thinking that the relationship they had couldn't get any worse, and made the call. He wished him a happy birthday. The response: an excruciatingly long pause, and then, "Wow, I'm really touched that you remembered. Thank you."

Since then, the rapport between them has found its stride. You see, little things in sales don't mean much; they mean everything.

Little things in sales don't mean much; they mean everything.

If at first you fail to see the human side of your customer, there is always a button or two you can push, and lo and behold, out comes a regular human being. I once had a customer who had a hard time showing his personal side. His appearance, too, was decidedly inauspicious. You know the type—an old-fashioned plaid suit jacket, a bus conductor's tie, orthopedic shoes. He couldn't look me in the eye when I spoke with him. Our feedback discussions hardly ever took longer than a minute, at most a minute thirty. That went on for two years. Business always ran smoothly between us, but there was no rapport to speak of.

At one point we had a lunch appointment. Desperate, I put two and two together and called his assistant to find out what he liked to eat. What can I say? In the end I still managed to pick the wrong place. So we sat cramped at a popular locale; he was visibly ill at ease and still didn't look me in the eye. He would probably have preferred to sit casually at a bar. In the course of the meal things got a little better, but there was still no rapport. In the end, I needed a little stroke of luck. One of his employees, who is one of my best friends today, was

getting married and had invited me to the wedding. My client had also been invited. It was only then, as we sat together at a table, that the ice was truly broken. He was able to look me in the eye and ended up being a perfectly friendly man. That's just how it goes sometimes; you can't always rush things!

What Always Works

Question 1: Are all people different?

Yes.

Question 2: Are all people alike?

Again, yes.

Question 3: Has Mr. Limbeck gone crazy?

Not at all.

If you were about to answer yes to the last question, then I urge you to read on. If you said no, then you should at least read on to see if we mean the same thing.

Let's start with the notion that people, and thus customers, are all different. And I'm not simply referring to gender, skin color, age, intelligence, or education. Those are obvious. For a salesperson, however, it is crucial to adopt a meaningful typological system. The model you use makes no difference; there are many to choose from. I'll give you an example. Take the following five categories. First, the status and prestige-seeking type. Second, the numbers type, who needs everything quantified. Third, those who do what many other people do to be part of a group—the herd mentality in a positive sense. Fourth, the independent type. And fifth, the environmentally and socially conscious type.

Every good salesperson I know approaches people based on their individual nature, according to what makes the client tick and not on what makes the salesperson herself tick! The age-old adage of "Treat others as you would want them to treat you" may have worked in kindergarten. In the world of salesmanship, it's utter nonsense. Instead, it should be, "Treat others as *they* would like to be treated."

Top salespeople recognize the guiding principles underlying the personality they have in front of them. They glean them swiftly and through the smallest

detail—almost like a criminal profiler who has to spot behavioral patterns of the perpetrator to reliably predict the next crime. This art is mastered no less by beach vendors than by top sales professionals in the B2B capital investment world, as well as by the best American presidents. Call it situational, type-orientated, intuitive, brain-friendly neuro-something or other, or whatever you choose to call it. The point is: First listen, observe, recognize, and understand. Only then start talking. And talk in such a way that you get through to your client.

The status and prestige type, for instance, needs to hear statements like, “In this way you will set yourself apart in the market. The market will be impressed by your innovation . . .” The group-oriented person on the other hand will appreciate things like, “With this venture you will be in good company. More than 80 percent of the industry sector values this product because . . .” The independent type will feel better if her financial package leaves her independent of the government pension plan. The environmentally conscious type will appreciate the fact that the coffee she is buying is fair trade and was developed in an environmentally sustainable manner.

It’s simple, really. The good salesperson recognizes the principles that are dear to the client and takes them seriously. Not to say that this is always easy, but this is how top sales professionals think.

Now to the other side of the equation: All people are alike. Clients are people. And all clients are essentially alike. All people, at their core, despite having different preferences and character traits, have the same needs and aversions. Nearly every human being, and thus every customer, for instance, wants praise and recognition. Experts say that every person needs six ego strokes daily for their emotional well-being. A good sales professional offers her client recognition. That doesn’t mean that she starts showering him with praise. Nobody can stand a bootlicker. What people do like is genuine recognition. Something kind, friendly, appreciative. That’s music to anyone’s ears, including yours and mine. Sigmund Freud couldn’t have said it better: “You can defend yourself against attacks, but against praise you are powerless.”

The law of reciprocity also belongs to the realm of praise and ego-stroking. Give something first, and you will receive in return. No one can resist reciprocating this gesture of giving.

First give, then receive.

But be careful: Among your clients there are those who know this strategy and master it just as well as the new breed of top sales professionals. These are the top purchasing professionals. And that's where you learn that this principle works just as well the other way. At one of my speeches a few years ago, I met a sales director who worked in the fitness industry. He sold energy bars, protein shakes, and the like. We hit it off instantly. We had common interests and preferences. Our interaction was relaxed and pleasant; we had a friendly rapport. He regularly sent me a package with some of his products. Out of gratitude, I sent him my books and CDs, and once even a bottle of wine. But he always seemed to make the first gesture, and I was always under pressure to return the favor but was never really conscious of this fact. It just felt good. Recently we met up somewhere in southern Germany. We went out to dinner and talked about private matters. In passing, he asked me if I would hold a seminar for his employees.

And it was here that we entered uncharted territory. On this exact point I was torn. What price should I offer? He already knew my rates. Should I be giving him an exclusive rate in light of our friendship? And why should I? Business and pleasure don't mix. From a rational standpoint, I knew that a discount was not justified. I wouldn't gain anything in return.

So what did I do? Naturally, I gave him a discount. A small discount. Even if rationality dictated otherwise, it would have felt amiss not to; somehow I was in his debt. For whatever reason, that was my feeling. I'm also a good-natured guy.

Our friendly relationship didn't suffer as a result of this business deal. Thank God for that. I was just happy when he said, "Sure, the price sounds good to me."

In this case, things turned out wonderfully for both parties. Protein shakes and energy bars come regularly in the mail to this day. But this case also illustrates how clients can sometimes behave: You as a salesperson can reach the client expeditiously, and, in turn, quickly build a rapport, and that's great. However, the customer's willingness to have an open and amiable relationship also means that they expect something in return, often unconsciously. This puts you under pressure.

This might lead you to believe that the demands of the client are increasingly brazen. They expect more, be it in terms of performance or in terms of price. And that is indeed true. You must be clear on the fact that the closer you get to a client, the more concessions you must be willing to make, bigger concessions compared with your other clients—and perhaps bigger than you should make or it would be justified to make.

In my experience, if the customer finds himself in a situation in which he may be able to exploit a particularly close relationship with a salesperson, then he likely *will* try to do so. This could apply to cancellation policies, general rates, or payment deadlines. It's something you should keep in mind about your client.

What may be useful to you in a dilemma like this one is to remember not to try to be your customer's lawyer. She is an adult. She knows perfectly well how to make her own decisions. The better your relationship is with her, the more she deserves to be treated with confidence and integrity. A cardinal rule is that the price is what it is. Another rule is that there is no service without compensation. A third: Business means that both parties benefit.

I'm one to talk, when I have just admitted that I also caved somewhat under social pressure. But if you see no other way out and decide to make a concession, make it a symbolic one and not an unreasonable one. Stand by your decision. In hindsight, reason always justifies a decision our emotion has led us to. That is your solution: Give the customer a signal, a minor symbolic

concession, that says nothing more than “You are my friend; I am yours.” But don’t go any lower than that. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that, for the customer, price is all that matters.



Reflection:
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?



In all the seminars that I have given over the years, in all the training sessions, at all the banks, wireless service providers, insurance companies, other service providers, and technology firms, I have been waiting for a very specific question to be posed by my guests. The one question that really counts. But it never came.

The question was never posed, although it's such an obvious one to ask. My hope is that after reading this book—or, at least this chapter—you will ask me that question the next time you see me. What is the question? We'll get to that later.

You can only pose the question if you know the person who peers back at you from the mirror. You have to know who you are before the question can occur to you.

I would like to think that I know a little bit about you, since you probably wouldn't have picked this book up, let alone have read up to this point, if you were not somehow involved in selling. But what does this actually mean in your case?

Exemplary Salesmanship

If you've ever worked with a trainer before, you probably know the answer to the following question: What does a cat see when it looks into a mirror? The answer: a lion. And what does a lion see? The answer: a cat.

And what do you see in the mirror? A top sales professional? A consummate salesperson? A tough negotiator?

Easy now. Even if you are a good salesperson, having the self-image of a "good salesperson" is not necessarily a great thing for your confidence. Oh Lord, I hear you saying, what is Limbeck getting at now? I'm saying be careful. Any time you consider yourself a perfectly respectable, decent, or competent sales professional, you are resting on your laurels, and your laurels, I'm sorry to say, will not be worth a penny tomorrow. What matters is not what you were, what you did, or what you accomplished yesterday but what you are *today*. The belief that you achieved something great in the past will be too obvious to others, even if you don't intend it to be. The result? Arrogance. Not a likeable trait. And now, how is the unlikeable, arrogant sales professional supposed to do a decent, respectable job? Believe me: Yesterday's success is today's failure, if you don't continue to improve yourself. That's how
it is.

Just forget who you were. Focus on the person you see in the mirror at this very moment. And see that person not as a mirror image but as a guiding image. The person in the mirror is not someone who has already achieved something but someone who still takes pleasure in accomplishing things *now* and who wishes to accomplish even more in the future.

Think for a second about how much more you are capable of. You cannot fathom how much is still possible for a person to accomplish. And if you have difficulties in seeing that person in the mirror as a guiding figure, then I can propose someone who fits that role perfectly.

His name is Thomas Geierspichler. He began his life like millions of others. He went to school, studied, worked, had problems with his father, liked to go out, and liked to dance. He was an ordinary young man. One night, on his way back home from a nightclub, his life took a devastating turn. Thomas was sitting on the passenger side of a car, and the driver fell asleep at the wheel. When Thomas woke up, he was a paraplegic.

If you thought that it couldn't get much worse than this, you'd be wrong. Thomas's life shattered into even more pieces. His relationship with his

girlfriend fell apart. He began to drink and smoke too much. He took drugs. He was heading for complete disaster, and his downfall seemed inevitable.

At some point, a friend dragged him to church. Thomas consented, less out of persuasion than boredom. And then? Then it happened. This visit to church transformed him. A phrase out of the Gospel of St. Luke, “Everything is possible for him who believes,” was from that moment on his guiding principle. Thomas quit drugs and alcohol and took up sports. While he was playing wheelchair basketball he met a wheelchair racer, and again something profound occurred. From that instant onward, sports was no longer recreation but competition. He finally had a goal to set his sights on. As a young boy he had watched the ski jumpers and downhill skiers on television, winning medals and having their national anthem performed.

Thomas had a new goal now: He wanted to become so good at wheelchair racing that they would play *his* national anthem when he won. He succeeded in doing just that and much more besides. Thomas Geierspichler won five gold medals at the Paralympics. Five times he heard the Austrian national anthem played in honor of his win. He also earned countless other medals and triumphs.

His accolades are too numerous to mention.

You don’t have to be confined to a wheelchair to accomplish great things. These accomplishments do not have to include a gold medal or the playing of your national anthem. It can simply be the glow in the eyes of a client. The analogy of Thomas Geierspichler applied to the sales professional means this: It’s not only the sale I’m after; I also want the client to enjoy doing business with me.

Why does the customer enjoy doing business with me? Because I provide her with a benefit. I make her life easier. I contribute to her own success and

development. I do her a good turn. The money? The profit? That takes care of itself. And that's how salesmanship has functioned for thousands of years.

Granted, comparing yourself to those who have accomplished less or comparing yourself to your own past achievements can make you feel better. But this is not going to help you improve. Imagine that improving yourself—that is to say, becoming better than you were yesterday—is the only meaningful thing that you can do. Otherwise, your heart no longer yearns for selling. If that happens, you may as well give up.

Shaping the future instead of measuring up to one's past is incidentally something that my son has managed to do. After every report card he gets, he has no interest in whether this report card was better than the last one or whether he got a B instead of a C. What's the point? It's inconsequential, yesterday's news. Instead, he already pencils in the grades he plans on getting on the next report card. Trust me, this visualization, this self-motivation, is child's play.

That Client Is Mine

Recently I was asked to train a corporate regional director's sales team. According to him, his employees had become complacent and needed fresh motivation, which I was to provide. I was sitting in a seminar with him and his team when the door opened and in walked a gentleman in a suit who took a seat in the back row. He didn't introduce himself but simply said hello. At that moment, the body language of my seminar participants altered visibly. As if someone had delivered a silent command in an invisible barracks, they snapped to attention and heightened their focus.

OK, I thought—someone from high up has just entered the room, higher than the regional director. Then, before the seminar ended, he got up and left, and the regional director promptly followed. Indeed, this must have been someone from high up, a powerful decision-maker. Bingo—a member of the board of directors, as it turned out.

What would you have thought at this juncture? Was it a good thing that he was gone? No. I'll tell you what I thought: What an opportunity! That client is mine. Just as soon as I finish this seminar.

The seminar concluded. I headed to the regional director's office to get my coat and briefcase. Naturally, I was intercepted by his assistant. Casually I asked, "Are they both in the office?"

And that's how it works. I don't go groveling and ask whether it might be at all possible to inconvenience the director for an eventual meeting, if he could spare a moment, please. No, I said, "Are they both in the office?" The assistant accepted my password and gave me the green light. "Yes," she said.

I knocked, walked right in, and said, "Hello, gentlemen, I just wanted to get my belongings."

I went over to the regional director to say goodbye. Wasn't it a little audacious, you're thinking, to ignore protocol and not address the board director first? No, I didn't think so. After all, he hadn't introduced himself to me either! Only fair. Besides, kowtowing is not an option. So, I approached the regional director, shook his hand, said goodbye, and then turned to the board director. I nodded and asked him, "Do you enjoy reading?"

Who's going to say no to a question like that? He nodded. I said, "If you give me your card, I'll make sure you receive a copy of my best-selling book."

He withdrew a card from his pocket and handed it to me. Now I could go. I had his card—bingo.

I then sent him a letter together with my book, explaining that he would presumably have thought the worst of me as a sales trainer if I hadn't taken the opportunity to make myself known.

Why have I related this story to you? Because seizing an opportunity in this manner is not a question of courage but a matter of self-perception. If I'm just a nice guy who enjoys the occasional sale, I will fail to spot the word "opportunity" on the forehead of the unknown intruder in my seminar. Sales professionals, on the other hand, genuine sales professionals who are *always* on duty, will recognize it instantly. I am a sales professional. If a top decision-

maker like the board director comes my way, I have no choice but to act, regardless of the consequences, whether or not I get a deal out of it. Don't listen to those who always tell you that you have to go through the proper channels. You don't *have to* do anything. The only thing you have to do is sell. That is, if you're a true sales professional. The top decision-maker can always refer you to a lower-ranked employee if he wishes to.

You have to go through the proper channels?
You have to do no such thing.

Who Does Limbeck Think He Is?

It's pretty high up here where I'm standing. Higher than a theater stage. I look to the left, then to the right. There are no windows here in the Muffat Hall in Munich. In front of me are six hundred people peering up at me expectantly. Everybody's here: my parents, important clients, friends, relatives, all my colleagues. Everybody. Most of them professional speakers. Some of the big names in Germany. Just like me, everyone is to give a one-hour speech.

Nervously, I begin to speak. After a mere fifteen minutes I glance at the clock. Time seems to drag by, and my presentation is no closer to finishing. The interminable sixty minutes feel like three hours. I'm struggling arduously through the speech. Worse still, my audience is struggling too.

It was so awkward. So laughable. It was the worst presentation of my life. I was only too happy to get off stage. It was appalling. What was I thinking? I, the novice, wanted to prove myself to everybody. I wanted to show all and sundry that I was someone to be reckoned with. And now I had
failed miserably.

How did it come to this? Well, actually, I *had been* on the right path.

I got into sales early in my life and became self-employed fairly quickly. At twenty-seven, I was a sales trainer. I had received a good education and launched into my career as a trainer head first. In the first year, I was booked on 141 days! Try topping that! And after that? Naturally, I wanted to seek out the next challenge. I looked up to the illustrious stars of the speaking world: Zig Ziglar, Bill Gove, Nido Qubein, Tom Hopkins, Brian Tracy, and so forth. They all knew exactly what they were doing and had positioned themselves with precision in their respective areas.

But what exactly was my positioning? What would set me apart from the rest? To put it another way, who was I exactly?

Today I am known as "The Porsche of Sales." I help sales professionals develop *passion*, *pride*, and *perseverance* so that they will love their jobs and seal more deals. My background is in hard selling. I think that I'm at my best in a hard sales pitch. I'm a hard seller by nature, precisely what the top salespeople in the United States used to advocate in the 1960s and 1970s. It was clear to me that times had changed significantly since then. That's why a new approach was called for, an approach that suited me and my values—namely, the New Hard Selling: Respect your customers, be honest and fair, but still, focus on closing the deal. I knew what I was capable of and what I wanted. I also knew exactly what I had to say and what was to set my hard-selling approach apart from the rest. The best way to approach market positioning was taught to me by the pros —namely, to write a book. So I proceeded to write one in which my entire approach was clearly outlined, and it was a success.

What happened after that? Onwards and upwards as a sales professional, as a trainer, and as an author. Naturally, Limbeck sought the next logical step: to move up. Limbeck wanted to speak and wanted to do so on the big stage. Limbeck wanted to become a public speaker.

That was at a time in which prominent figures like a Zig Ziglar or a Les Brown spoke to audiences of ten thousand people or more. It was mesmerizing, and I wanted to be a part of it. And why did it have to be one speaker covering only one topic, I asked myself? Why not get all the best speakers on one stage?

Something like the “Three Tenors” but for business speakers. And so I founded an event with a few fellow speakers that today is known as the “Sales Leaders.” As the venue for my first major event I chose the former power station in Munich—the Muffat Hall. That’s how it started.

And then this fiasco. Utterly dejected, I groped my way off the seven-foot-high stage. I had just given the worst presentation of my life. I wanted nothing more than for the earth to open up and swallow me whole. And it would have been appropriate. Limbeck, what were you thinking? You wanted to play with the big boys and managed to embarrass yourself royally in the first round. Cobbler, stick to your last! You’re a good sales trainer. But a good speaker? That’s one thing you’re not. Oh God, I was so low that it physically hurt. I could have screamed for hours on end.

Limbeck, what were you thinking?

On the following day I spoke to Alexander Christiani on the phone. He had learned how devastated I was after my presentation. He agreed that it was bad. Great, thanks. But then he said, “The fact that it was bad doesn’t mean that you can’t become a good speaker, but it does mean that you have to practice as we all do. Why should you be any different? Everybody has to start somewhere. And nobody goes straight to the finish line. Forge your own path, and don’t look for shortcuts. You have it in you, the ideas, the body language. Don’t stop now. Practice.”

“Hmmm.”

“Practice!”

“So you’re saying . . .”

“I’m saying practice!”

Four years later, I was at a major event in Darmstadt that featured topnotch speeches. And one of them was by far the best. Whose? Limbeck's. My friend Alexander Christiani was right. I forged my own path. Today I am certain of it: I am a top speaker.

Now you know who I think I am. Presumptuous? If you think that, then you haven't understood Limbeck fully yet. Practice is the key. Practice, practice, practice.

Remember that unasked question at the beginning of the chapter? Hold on—it's coming. I haven't forgotten it. Honest!

You Live, You Learn

If you think that as soon as you get to the top your self-doubt simply vanishes, you'll be disappointed, no question. That's not how it works. It will always be there. Am I really a top seller? That question never goes away. If the self-doubts should disappear altogether, there are generally three possible reasons: One, you're in a coma. Two, you've changed professions. Or three, you've lost your grip on reality. In the third case it's because you've become arrogant and obnoxious. That is, incidentally, an occupational hazard for us salespeople. Butchers wake up to find they have fewer than ten fingers. Soccer players can't wake up without their morning exercise. Salespeople lose their grip on reality.

This happens to a lot of good sales professionals. But it doesn't happen to the *really* good ones. And why not? Because they work with an abiding sense of doubt. Top salespeople need failures in order to reflect on what went wrong. Doubt and failure are the necessary building blocks of those discussions and feedback that make you better at what you do. A top salesperson can be carried around on the shoulders of her cheering colleagues for a week because she has just closed a colossal deal—as if she had dragged a whale onto shore with her bare hands. The same salesperson can feel dispirited and full of self-doubt simply because on the following day she failed to win over a particular minor client. That is something you have to live with, if you want to excel—the dizzying highs, the crushing lows. You're probably asking yourself, and rightly

so: Is he serious? Are all salespeople supposed to be bipolar now? Do you have to be nuts to be successful?

I'm not saying no, but what I can do is address the issue of how to deal with these emotional ups and downs without losing your grip. The key lies in two words: learning and feedback. Pretty straightforward.

Concerning the first point, the following has to be said: Beware whom you learn from. Don't take advice from a financial adviser who is broke. Avoid attending a conflict management class in which the trainer has a broken nose. Never go to a marriage counselor who's been divorced seven times. In short, don't consult anybody who isn't at or near the top of their field. That applies to salesmanship too. Of course, it's always a nice feeling to see someone at work and think, "Hey, I can do that better." But that doesn't *make* you better.

Study those who impress you most. How do they do it? How do they speak? What do they say? How do they structure their presentations? How do they argue their cases? What makes them so impressive?

Learning doesn't mean imitating. You're not a copycat, right? Ask yourself this: From what I've seen, what are the elements that suit me? What fits my personality? What can I adapt, assimilate, develop, modify?

Select, analyze, adapt—one, two, three. And number four? Practice. Practice what suits you best until it becomes second nature, until you grow sure of yourself, until it is a part of you, and until others can confirm it. Which brings us back to the second point: feedback.

You need feedback from other people. Who should it come from? A customer. A colleague. A family member. A competitor—no wait, I mean an admirer. Your confessor. Your dog. It can be anybody, provided you trust them. Someone who is both fair and honest and is able to judge what you are doing. Someone who means well.

At the beginning, I used to ask for feedback from anybody who crossed my path and probably got on a lot of people's nerves. Today I approach it differently. I stick with some of my friends from the Sales Leaders, whom I find fair and forthright. Whenever we perform together, we make note of what we

liked of the others' performances and what we were less fond of. General comments are not always helpful—the aim is to ask for specifics on what they found effective or what bothered them. Then ask them again: What specifically worked and what didn't? And how can I improve?

Consider feedback a gift and a precious one at that. Once you've weeded out the notorious grouches, and once you can face the enviers with equanimity, then even the feedback of a total stranger can bring you not only a step forward but also a step upward.

Consider feedback a gift and a precious one at that.

An example: Sales Night in Wiesbaden, Germany. One of my most esteemed colleagues had given the best presentation of the entire evening. It was powerful and compelling. He was better than I had been on that evening. After the event I was standing at the bar and a woman from the audience approached me. "Mr. Limbeck, can I give you a little feedback?"

"Of course, please do."

"I've heard you give a speech before, and you were better last time. Yes, you were good tonight too. But somehow I was missing some of
your cheekiness."

The lady was right: I was good but not great. The reason was that my day hadn't gone very well. As always, I arrived three or four hours before the event to get a feel for the venue and the crowd. But I had a few family problems that I was carrying around in the back of my mind. Anyone who had seen a past presentation of mine and could compare the two—like this lady—would have noticed the difference.

This woman was neither envious nor a grouch. She wasn't getting anything out of this, and she wasn't currying favor. She simply wanted to offer some

feedback. I thanked her and accepted the gift because I could learn from it. What did I learn? That it's not the audience's fault if you had a bad day. That the client deserves the best sales professional that you can summon. Whether you've just walked through hell and back doesn't make a difference. Complaining won't help. Be patient with yourself and assess the situation so you can continue to improve.

The two opposing forces in this system are casualness and perfectionism. On the one hand, casualness poses the risk of you becoming too lax and complacent. Perfection, on the other hand, provokes in others aggression, and the desire to destroy that perfection. That is just as unhealthy.

Both carelessness and perfection are an illusion, and they are dangerous because they are both a form of arrogance. The aim is to strike a balance between the two so that in the end, a realistic, honest, and forthright self-image is forged—the one that suits you best.

The Top Salesperson's Genetic Code

The higher you go in the hierarchy, the greater the decisions you will see made there. The greater the decisions, the bigger the budget, the orders, and the revenue potential. The more expensive a product or a service is, the easier it is to sell, because fewer are the people who make the decision to buy it. That is why a top salesperson is only too happy to make contacts. He is not afraid of position or hierarchy.

What else can we say about the top sales professional? She has an average of four customer appointments and makes about twenty calls to clients every single day. She has at least ten to fifteen years of sales experience under her belt. She is not easy to lead because she already considers herself at the top of the heap. Is she really at the top? It doesn't matter, because in any case that's where she's heading.

Every consummate salesperson has forged his own path in the selling process. Be it soft selling, hard selling, the new hard selling—regardless, it isn't a question of possessing a formula. What they all have in common is a well

thought-out, practiced, tested structure with which they conduct the sales pitch, in order to close the deal. None of these approaches is beholden to a norm. Let me be clear: I don't want you to sell exactly as I do. Rather, I would like you to sell in a way that allows you to achieve the best possible results—and in a way that makes you feel comfortable.

In the last thirty-five hundred years, clients' objections have not changed a bit. And they will not change in the near future either. A top sales professional knows them all by heart: No time, no interest, we already have our trusted salesperson, it's too expensive, we've got everything we need, we've just signed a contract, and so on and so forth—they're always the same.

The top salesperson knows all the objections by heart:
No time, no interest, we have all we need . . .

Not only that—a top salesperson also knows the answers to them. Within half a second she has already decided which method she should employ to be successful.

She can also live with the error of striking the wrong tone on occasion, because she is always pushing the envelope a little more than the average salesperson. In all the business transactions that have been made, I would bet that there are more failures, flops, and flounders than successful deals. Some salespeople continue to talk the client's ear off long after he has stopped listening and is on his way out. Or worse, the client might be *all for* the deal and call it off only because the salesperson will simply not stop talking.

Top salespeople are not the client's tour guide. They are not his guardian, his host, or his caregiver. They are not there to educate the client about the product or parade a series of memorized operating instructions. They are not conveyors

of knowledge or informational anesthesiologists. They don't offer techno enlightenment, fun-fact symposiums, or complimentary product feature massages.

Instead, they use their time wisely. While others are already at home watching "Dancing with the Stars," they're still at work. They are willing to go the extra mile for the customer. They do more than is expected of them. They are diligent, even if that doesn't sound particularly glamorous. They are as keen to learn as first-graders and are all on the quest for *the* decisive phrase in a sales pitch, the Rosetta Stone. The question is: Does it even exist?

Top sales professionals also have high self-esteem. They never whine. In fact, they can't stand it when the average seller whines. It turns
their stomach.

They never whine.

They are always well-prepared and well-dressed, according to their industry, of course. A classy watch, an elegant pen, a nice suit, a fine shirt, an exquisite tie, immaculate shoes. They are always hungry—for success. Whoever complains that a coconut has a hard shell has never experienced true hunger. Steve Jobs was spot on when in 2005 he gave his legendary, enthralling commencement address at Stanford University, ending with the words: "Stay hungry. Stay foolish."

The Reason the Key Question Is Never Asked

How do you recognize a salesperson who is "merely" good or average? You recognize him in his shortage of self-doubt on one hand and the excess of doubt he has about everyone and everything around him on the other. He sees the customer exclusively as the means to an end. He always finds someone or something else to blame—the product he's selling, the company he works for,

his stressful job, his company car, even his own customer. What he doesn't seem to notice, however, is that he is average at his job, and for his failure there is no one to blame but himself.

Average means arriving at work at nine on the dot, and leaving no later than five. It means seeing an advanced training class or a sales seminar as a punishment or a tedious duty. Average is being averse to feedback, new ideas, tips, or methods. It means having the need for titles like area sales director, direct sales manager region east, publisher's representative, or general sales director. Average is something there is certainly no shortage of.

Average means seeing advanced training as a punishment.

Now, I might be stepping on some toes by asking you to try the following test. You are presumably reading this book because you are a sales professional. So, how much time do you spend in the field in the course of a year? Let's say you travel around thirty thousand miles by car annually. With an average speed of 30 mph you spend a total of a thousand hours in the car—more than forty full days, far more than a month. What do you do in these
thousand hours?

Hmmm. Now I see your brows furrowing. "What do you mean, what do I do? I'm driving my car. What else am I supposed to do?"

I'll tell you what you can do—further training. There are countless great audio CDs. What if you spent merely half of those thousand hours—no, let's say a quarter—on further training? How much better could you be at your job in, say, two or three years?

Do you see where I'm going with this? This brings me back to that particular question that I mentioned at the start of this chapter, the one that I was never

asked. Why is it never posed? For the same reason that many salespeople listen to the Top 40 hits on the radio while driving: The willpower and the degree of self-motivation are simply not sufficient to be proactive, to be able to spot the word “opportunity” flashing in neon lights on the forehead of a potential customer.

And now I’ll tell you what the question is.

Of all the people who have attended my seminars, whether they are working in financial services, telecommunications, or insurance firms, not a single one has bothered to ask me:

- Where *I* invest my money.
- Which telecommunications provider *I* use to make my calls.
- What car insurance *I* carry.

It never occurred to anyone that Limbeck himself is a customer, that Limbeck might also purchase a product that a seminar guest was looking to sell.

Are you a sales professional? Then be one anytime and anywhere.



Customers:
You Have to Like People



An old colleague of mine from the photocopier business recently recommended me as a sales trainer. He works in a big telecommunications firm and one day told a department head about me. I was hired, and I proceeded to bring the sales team up to speed. It was a good seminar, and I was in great form. All was well.

Now I'm sitting across from the department head who hired me, and we're having dinner. It's a small hotel in northern Germany, with excellent food. I observe him, trying to size him up a little. He's an affable person: poised, well-balanced, conscientious, analytical, introverted, an engineer type. Definitely not a windbag. I take an immediate liking to him. Because we are sharing a particularly fine meal and some quality wine, I decide to ask him point-blank what he thinks of me. With direct questions like this one, you are leaving yourself highly exposed.

"You're a great trainer, Mr. Limbeck," he says calmly. "On the other hand, you're not exactly the type of person I would want to have a beer with in my spare time."

Um, I see.

The waiter approaches and asks us if we would care for anything else. No, I'm fine, I say. Then I look over at my client and find myself at a loss for words. His remark hit home, a little bit like a punch in the gut.

OK, this is not someone who would appear to say these things lightly. So where did this remark come from? Me, someone you wouldn't want to have a

beer with? Someone you're sharing wine and dinner with out of duty? A burdensome duty? OK, stop, wait a second. Don't start reading too much into this. Limbeck, respect this man's opinion. This broadside you just got is a gift, because he's being open and frank about it. Why did you ask the question if you couldn't handle the answer? But I can handle the answer; I just have to think this through a minute . . .

While my inner voice is still grappling with the issue of how to interpret his remark, I think back on the day's seminar: I was pretty demanding and domineering. I was pressing the audience, goading them. An introverted type of person may very well have found it aggressive. And the line between aggressive and abrasive is a fine one. After all, who wants to have a beer with a taskmaster? I get it.

Actually, it's no big deal. He only knows the side of me that was on display today. And to be honest, I wouldn't want to hang out with a high-powered type like Limbeck the sales trainer at home or at the bar either. How can I expect him to know a different side of me when I haven't shown it
to him?

In the end I appreciated the fact that he was so forthright. The evening proceeded smoothly, and he must have been pleasantly surprised that I wasn't miffed about what he said. Later, when I was back in my hotel room, it took me a while to get to sleep because I had to admit that his comment had been quite a blow, regardless of how tough I may often appear. Let's take a second and be honest with each other: At the end of the day, we, you, and I want to be loved. Like those moments on your mother's lap, if only for a short time. I admit it, I am human. That applies to me as well as to you—assuming you are human too. I was fond of this business associate, and I wanted him to be fond of me. Simple. That's why it stung the way it did.

This is what I learned from the incident: The question "What is wrong with *him* that he doesn't like me?" is the wrong question. The correct question is "What did *I* do that caused him not to like me?" Because, after all is said and

done, I remain utterly convinced of my self-efficacy, even in its negative form. I take full responsibility for it.

What was interesting was that the man had the integrity and professionalism to still acknowledge that I was competent at what I do, because he went on to book more of my seminars and training programs. In fact, as the weeks of collaboration, feedback, and business dinners went by, we forged a professional candor. Eventually I was able to open up more easily and talk about more private matters. And eventually he let me know that he had changed his mind about me. Today we are business partners and call each other three or four times a year to catch up on how each other is doing. And although he is a Werder Bremen fan, he still congratulates me every time Eintracht Frankfurt, my favorite German soccer team, wins. He's a good guy.

Among Noble Merchants

Envy and resentment are nothing new to you. Am I right? Of course, every good salesperson encounters social envy—all the malicious thoughts that you can read in the faces of clients, buyers, business partners, and colleagues. Things like, "He's one to talk, with the commissions he gets." Or "With the rates he charges I'm not surprised he's constantly grinning." And "Who did you sleep with to get that job?"

Sometimes you can simply hear the envy between the lines. Mostly though, it is others' actions that betray a touch of hostility and aggressiveness. Often, you find out from others what these enviers are saying about you. Well, I'm here to tell you that this is completely normal and is no cause for concern. To be blunt, a loser wouldn't have this problem.

This kind of resentment seems to be a typically German phenomenon. The land of consensus-craving, over-insured, and ultra-conscientious people is also the land of enviers. You don't find this in most other places in the world. In America, in particular, I know from first-hand experience that if you share your success story with someone, often the first thing you get is hearty encouragement, "Well done, boy. Good job!" Achievement is honored, and you

get considerable positive feedback from the people around you. You hear things like, “I wish I was as good as you. What do I have to do to make it? How did *you* do it?”

You’ll be waiting a long time to hear something like that in Germany. In Germany, seeing another’s success as an incentive to create your own success is as frequent as a belly dancer in the Vatican. Events like the “Million Dollar Sunday” in America, where businesspeople convene to celebrate breaking the million-dollar revenue mark and where access is by invitation only and proof of financial status is required, are things you simply don’t find in Germany. When you come out of an event like that in America, total strangers standing around in the lobby might break into spontaneous applause. If that event was held in Germany, you’d come out having to fear for your personal safety.

Don’t get me wrong, I love Germany, because there, other kinds of things are possible, even though these things are sadly becoming less and less common. At the outset of my career, I was at a hotel for a meeting with a client. I was in my late twenties, and I wanted to win over a client who was almost twice my age. Although well-prepared, I kept pacing nervously through the fully booked hotel. The fact that there was an annual gathering of the Siemens works council didn’t help things. I had never seen such a throng of gray-looking gentlemen in my life and began to fear that my client would be no less of an ill-humored, fastidious killjoy.

The truth? Everything went off without a hitch. The man was on the ball. Highly poised. Brisk. Quick. Precise. I could feel the deal in the air. I wasted no time and put the offer straight to him. Sign here, please. It was my first contract with him, and I wanted a clean deal. My mentors had impressed upon me that without a signature, none of it counted. And there’s a reason for this. So there I was, *your signature, please*. And I’ll never forget what happened next.

I wanted a signature now, as I was trained to do.

The man stood up, inspected me with a sharp eye . . . and said nothing. Then he stuck out his hand and said in a deep, earnest voice, “I am a businessman. I give you my word.”

Whoa. Nobody had prepared me for this. What exactly was I supposed to do here? My instincts told me, *If you insist on his signature now, he’s gone, and so is the contract.* So I stood up, shook his hand and just as solemnly said, “And I give you mine!”

What can I say? We ended up working together for years—without a single signature. There was never the slightest problem. He paid promptly, kept every appointment, and upheld even the smallest agreements we came to. He was a top-tier customer, just not one who happened to like fountain pens. He possessed a business ethic, a noble merchant’s integrity of which every sales professional dreams as he falls into a worriless sleep at night. It was a highlight of my career—and typically German.

But again: Don’t be fooled! The everyday world looks completely different. In general, too many people see the world of sales as a boxing ring in which the only way to win is underhandedly with loaded gloves, where every salesperson has to be ready at all times to deal not with a noble merchant whose word is gold but with the exact opposite—the dishonest, conniving, haggling, backstabbing, swindling, unreliable, long-winded, devious, and fraudulent people of this world.

Some believe that the more it is about survival, the more underhanded you must be.

This is not always the case, but you will come up against their kind time and again, and you have to take them into account and react accordingly. I often

meet this type, like the time I was at a software firm in a southern German city. The contract had been signed without problems, except that, contrary to my usual practice, I accepted a compromise on the payment—half of my fee before the seminar and the other half afterwards. What a mistake.

The two decision-makers I was dealing with soon began to diverge in their requests. One of them wanted the seminar to deal with the issue of prospecting; the other one wanted to cover closing techniques. Consequently, as we began they seemed to lack structure, and we ended the first session with an awkward feeling. Somehow the chemistry between us wasn't there, and I couldn't put my finger on why. Neither did their feedback do anything to clarify things.

When I subsequently called them for my routine follow-up, we hit upon an aspect of my training contents that we wanted to flesh out further in our next meeting and which might help the situation. It had been two months since the first sessions, and there was no sign of the second half of my fee. Still they insisted on improvements. I made my position clear: I was all for improving, but they had to uphold their end of the bargain and pay me. Now came more objections: There was this problem, that problem . . .

When I held firm, the truth finally came out: These brothers were strapped for cash—no liquidity. But that hadn't stopped them from booking seminars! Well done, guys. *OK*, I thought, *let's be frank*. I insisted on my fee and proposed a payment plan. The next thing I know I get a letter from their lawyer, proposing a settlement—they'll pay me half of what they owe.

Well, what would you have said? Should I have accepted the settlement? Better to get some quick cash now than wait and perhaps see nothing at all? No. Absolutely not. Strong brands have strong rules. From that moment on, it became a question of principle. I picked up the phone and called my preferred lawyer.

Thank God I can afford it today and have worked hard to do so—no more haggling, bargaining, or half-baked decisions. You have to avoid dilettantes like the plague. If you let yourself in on deals with them, you're on
shaky ground.

If the chemistry isn't there at the beginning, it is very probable that by the end it still won't be there. I have clients with whom I get along and others with whom I simply don't. If there is no tangible spark, if I can't say I like these people, I either have to make more of an effort to create the spark myself or let it go and focus on other customers. Making confident, unequivocal decisions is healthier and more successful in the long term than giving in, adjusting, and renegotiating. At the same time we have to be clear about one thing: Some people do business with us because of the way we are, and others *don't* do business with us for precisely the same reason. Sad but true.

And the Oscar Goes to . . .

It is good to set your own boundaries. But for a sales professional, such clashes with clients should not be the all-important issue. You get ahead by keeping those clashes to a minimum. The more spiteful your thoughts about the customer, the more spiteful and obnoxious you become.

And don't think that this is something you can play off—you're not Robert De Niro. Customers can sense this. Your key asset is that you are someone with whom customers enjoy doing business and not someone who passes himself off as more likeable than he really is because he wants to close a deal at all costs.

Even the most insensitive, bumbling oaf of a client possesses instinct and intuition and unconsciously registers your gestures and your minutest facial expressions. He notices if your eyes glaze over, if you're dismissive, or if your laugh is forced. He senses if your breathing is strained, if you're nervous, or if your voice is listless or curt.

You know how the theory goes: Whatever you give off is what you will attract. If you are honest, you will attract honest customers. Everyone gets the customers that they deserve.

Samy Molcho, a great pantomime and body-language guru, always spoke about the body being the glove of the soul. If you're standing in front of the client and your soul clenches its fist, how is your body supposed to reach out an open hand?

The body is the glove of the soul.

Once I gave a speech at the Hofbräuhaus, the famous beer hall in Munich. As I stepped into the hall to begin, I was suddenly seized by an oppressive feeling. Everything in the venue was paneled in gloomy, dark wood. Between me and the audience there wasn't much more than three feet of distance. It all felt as if I were an accused standing trial at the Royal Bavarian District Court. In the audience all I saw were sullen people dressed in somber blue
and black.

Dark, narrow, oppressive, and stifling. Now try giving a presentation! On the narrow strip that served as my stage I began pacing up and down like a caged lion. Normally I enjoy walking through the audience. Not this time. Because the space was so tight, my gestures felt cramped, and my body language was almost brought to a standstill. Naturally my presentation didn't come off well. How can a pianist perform if half of her fingers cramp up? I had succumbed to the circumstances and performed poorly.

And the audience? They succumbed as well—because of me. No wonder the feedback included things like "couldn't get through to the audience," "tried to reinvent the wheel," "motivational drivel." The people didn't like me. Needless to say, I didn't like myself either. The truth is, you cannot *play* at being affable and trustworthy; you have to *be* those qualities. And that only works if you feel at ease.

You can't act likeable; you have to be it.

However, that’s no excuse for a bad performance. To feel at ease is part of your job. Not every customer is equally likeable. I don’t like all my clients to the same degree. But even if I like some of them less than others, it’s not my job to make them more likeable or better people or to act as if they were likeable when really I think they’re a pain in the neck. My job is simply to close good business deals with them. And for that I owe the customer my esteem and respect. Even if I could temporarily hide the fact that I can’t stand a particular customer, in the long run it would likely not work out. If I don’t manage to find my client’s strengths and more affable traits, I will sooner or later lose respect for him and eventually lose the client altogether.

The moment I lose respect for the customer and carry on anyway simply for the sake of a deal, I will end up disliking myself for it. A salesperson who doesn’t like himself cannot be likeable to the customer. And if a customer doesn’t like you, then you can forget it.

I want to be clear on this point: I don’t want you act *as if* you respect the customer. I want you to actually respect the customer—wholeheartedly. If you find yourself incapable of respecting her, then you are simply not the right salesperson for her.

A person can only be a top sales professional if they possess the following two qualities and abide by the following two rules.

The qualities: likeability and competence.

The rules: The competent salesperson will close the deal, even if the incompetent one is more likeable. But if they are equally competent, it is the more likeable one who will close the deal.

These rules work and can be easily illustrated. Whom would you rather have your open-heart surgery performed by—the competent but unlikeable surgeon or the friendly village doctor? Who should fly the plane—the competent but obnoxious female pilot or the pleasant young copilot who just stepped out of flight school? Who should be appointed conductor for an orchestra—the haughty genius or the lovable older man with a hearing impairment?

To ensure that the client likes you is very simple—you have to like the client. And it's only fair, because the client can't help how the salesperson is feeling that day. Your bad mood has no place in your meeting with the customer, period. Before you begin to object about your right to self-expression and the right to have a bad day, I will tell you that this has nothing to do with your rights. You're not selling your soul, after all. A friendly rapport with the client is a sign of professionalism, of a sound work ethic.

Imagine your child is taken to the hospital with a ruptured appendix. An emergency operation is performed. The surgeon says to you, "I'm going to have to make the stitches a little simpler, because I'm already on overtime."

On the following day the stitched area becomes inflamed, and the surgeon says, "Well, I was having a bad day yesterday, and that was my eleventh operation. I had to cut a few corners. I have the right to a bad day too, you know."

What's wrong? Too extreme? You don't think it's a good analogy? Limbeck is breaking a butterfly on a wheel? After all, a business deal is not a matter of life and death, right? Of course not. But still, the analogy is apt. A moral principle is not subject to degrees; it is not relative. And neither is the work ethic, namely that either you do your job well or you don't. Everything in between is a euphemism for failure. The fact that a salesperson has done something well is not only seen from the fact that she was able to close a deal. That's a given. The goal is more far-reaching: You want the customer to leave the deal more fulfilled than he was when he came in. And you won't pull that off if you look as if you're in a funk because your home football team just got creamed by five touchdowns.

Is Limbeck breaking a butterfly on a wheel?

The Cure for a Bad Customer

But what happens if the sales professional feels *worse* after the deal is closed? If the client is practically poisonous and the mere prospect of continuing an effective relationship is more than you can bear? How much discomfort does a salesperson have to endure? How far can you go before it becomes detrimental?

A tip I can give you from my experience: Don't give up just yet. Show resilience. Take it as motivation. I'm going to get this client. I can do this. I'll grit my teeth. I'll find something positive in him.

But I'll be the first to admit that on occasion, I just let it go. Sometimes I just stop looking for the green shoots in the desert. Why? For my own pride. For my mental well-being. Sometimes it just feels good to say, "Martin, my friend, you really don't need this. You don't have to do this to yourself."

Take, for example, this guy from the fitness sector a few years ago. The initial meeting with him had actually gone pretty well. The first impression I had of him was a pleasant one. Still, it didn't last long. Before starting the first sessions, we met for dinner, and he proposed a wager, "So, Mr. Limbeck, I wonder if after a single seminar day you'll be able to tell me who of my employees has a positive attitude toward their job and who seems to clash all the time."

I bet him a good bottle of wine that I could pull it off after the first coffee break. This seemed to be his way of testing my skill at the outset. In any case, I ended up winning the wager. What I also noticed immediately, however, was that the mood in the firm was abysmal. The organization and combination of employees was already problematic. There was a division between permanent staff members and independent sales representatives. Another fault line ran between bodybuilders and non-bodybuilders. Whatever the divisions, they all had one feeling in common: They were being treated poorly. It soon became clear who was at fault—namely, the boss. The same one I was dealing with. He ran his firm like a fiefdom. And that first wager he had laid down should have served as a warning.

He ran his firm like a fiefdom.

Then came the day when I wanted to discuss the next seminar program with him and his sales director. He said abruptly, “Mr. Limbeck, admit it, you must be laughing yourself silly about my employees. You must think they’re a pathetic lot. With them you’re earning your money in your sleep.”

I was shocked and perplexed. I didn’t even know how to answer him. And I’m not normally at a loss for words. Then I shot back that I was in no position to judge my seminar guests so disparagingly. Even if I were, I certainly wouldn’t presume to do so.

To which he retorted, “C’mon, Mr. Limbeck, you’re not fooling me! You could do these seminars blindfolded. This is child’s play for you.”

It astounded me how dismissive this man was toward his employees. It was apparent from the start. I wasn’t able to dissuade him from holding the seminars in the cheapest hotels, in which the sessions at times even took place in basements. To cut costs, we even met in a cramped, airless room where tacky artwork lined the walls—personal creations by the boss himself. Granted, taste is subjective, but still . . .

Even before I was able to complete all the scheduled sessions, the haggling began: Were the remaining sessions really that necessary? Did he have to stick to the contract? Were my seminars really worth the money? And so on and so forth. My God, if this man was already an ordeal for me, imagine being employed by him.

This man was already an ordeal for me,
let alone his employees.

Naturally, my respect for him swiftly deteriorated, and inevitably our business relationship did not end on a pleasant note. In the end I had to concede that I was wrong about having won that bet. In fact, I had lost it royally—not to the boss, mind you, but to the employees. Every unpleasant thing they attributed to their boss was true. They weren't sticklers but realists. And I was happy to have ended the business relationship.

We as salespeople are often faced with the prospect of rejecting an assignment. Therefore, even we have to learn how to say no. For example, a friend and colleague of mine told me about a meeting with a financial service provider. The client had booked a seminar with him and wanted to bring a group of thirty employees along. The initial meeting was a little odd. The client arrived late and wanted to cover the usual customer acquisition topics, but something was off. There was something underlying his demeanor that was peculiar, something unspoken.

Finally it came to light: What this client wanted was borderline illegal and in any case unethical. The product he was looking to sell was highly dubious. All the promises he made about commissions and returns on investments turned out to have no legal basis. The methods with which he wanted to obtain customers were more akin to the ways of door-to-door soliciting than to proper customer acquisition.

My colleague followed his conscience and made a decision right in the middle of the first meeting. He stood up and walked out. Then, finding he had the entire day free, he used his time to take his daughter to the zoo. As luck would have it, the same client called me a few months later. I didn't make the connection until I asked my colleague if he knew this man. I'm glad I inquired, because I had already held one training session with him. I broke off the relationship immediately. As for the money he owed me, it came as no shock when I was made to wait for it.

Believe me, at times it is good for your soul and your ego when some deals just don't work out.

I had another experience that was similar. I was asked to give a seminar for a photocopy manufacturer. First I was greeted by the CEO, who then introduced his marketing director, who, in turn, began with the phrase, “So, Mr. Limbeck, please introduce yourself and explain to us exactly why we should even book you.”

Excuse me? I replied, “*You* booked a seminar with *me*. If you don’t know who I am and what I do, and if you don’t know why you booked me, then you haven’t done your homework. No homework, no class.” And I got up and left. I admit that was a little brusque, but I had simply listened to my instincts, which had begun seething as soon as this woman opened
her mouth.

No homework, no class.

A few years ago I refused an assignment after the initial meeting. The boss wanted me to write a profile and an assessment for each of his employees. A boss who after a four-day training course trusts a sales trainer’s judgment of his employees more than his own is a weak leader. His request only served to expose his own lack of leadership. So I declined the assignment. It wasn’t my place to pass judgment on the customer’s employees anyway.

If now you’re thinking that it’s all too easy for Limbeck to say no to a client, then you’re only half right. Of course, I have to be able to afford to decline an offer. But there is virtue in foregoing an assignment, a virtue that you must first work hard to earn.

Hunters and Farmers

Not every good salesperson is flamboyant. The typical extroverted sales professional can be likened to a hunter. But there are also the introverted types, and they are more akin to farmers. The farmer sows his work diligently and

meticulously. He is conscientious and precise, follows a routine, and shows patience and perseverance with his clientele.

The hunters are swift and use their lightning-fast reflexes. They seize upon every given chance intuitively. The hunters are the ones that immediately ask for someone's business card when meeting them at the airport or at the train station. They quickly tire of daily routines and are always on the search for the next kick. That includes me. In their free time, they go hang-gliding, free-climbing, or parachute-jumping—naturally, always with their business card handy, should they meet a prospect along the way.

The farmers prefer to go fishing, for example. That applies to me too. They like to play Scrabble, put puzzles together, or busy themselves making models. Farmers are usually good team players. They have a community spirit and patiently nurture relationships with their clients. They are good key account managers.

I assume you see where I'm going with this. A firm needs both of these archetypes, because ideally there can be a division of labor along these very lines: The hunter brings the key account home. The farmer nurtures and cultivates it. But the best salespeople can do both.

In every business transaction a relationship is formed between a buyer and a seller whether you like it or not, even when you visit the local baker in the morning. Selling where there is no relationship does not work. The fact that this is inevitable should not be seen as a burden but rather as an opportunity to shape this relationship. How close the rapport becomes is up to you.

Let's take the example of a soccer coach. First of all, he has to sell his team on a concept that will allow them to score enough goals, keep the defense tight, and come out on top. If this goes according to plan, then everybody wins—the coach, the team, and the fans. How is this supposed to work without a relationship? It doesn't. And this relationship doesn't necessarily have to be a close one, either.

Felix Magath, for example, a former German soccer player and team manager, prefers to keep a constructive distance from his team. When commenting on his coaching style, he says that he has no interest in playing the father figure to his

team. He keeps his distance, addressing players informally while they address *him* formally. “I try to approach them in the least emotional manner possible,” he is quoted as saying in an interview. “I can only elicit excellence from my players if I allow myself to be unpleasant from time to time. I don’t believe that players deliver their best performance voluntarily—so things can get pretty heated on the field or in the locker room. I am the one who dictates how the team should play. And there is no room for dissent. To keep a team of twenty to thirty players from sixteen different nationalities unified, I cannot afford to respond to everyone. Here, clear policies are indispensable. That is what ensures success, and this success unifies the team.”

“Clear policies are indispensable.”

I like what Magath has to say. The friendlier your ties to the client, the trickier it will be to remain professional. Being professional as a salesperson includes insisting on cancellation fees, prices, and payment periods. This is exactly what should apply to the relationship between business partners: professional distance. Clear messages. And respect.

The point is, regardless of distance and professionalism, most of us need recognition. Even the pompous feudal lord wants to be loved. This desire for love and recognition is so deeply rooted in us that we will do anything for it. The less a person has of it, the more they need and strive to get it. The lower a person’s self-esteem, the more recognition they seek outside themselves.

This applies to the customer as well. However, coddling your client poses the same problems as feigned amiability: The customer senses when you are false, when you are not genuine. And above all, she senses when your behavior is at odds with the situation. After all, you don’t give the taxi driver a medal of honor just because he sat soberly at the wheel and didn’t cause an accident.

At one time, sales trainers made much of the issue about the client's need for recognition. Today, the emphasis has shifted away from the amount and technique of bestowing this recognition to the suitability of a given approach to a given situation. It used to be a question of flattery. Now, it is about nuance and striking the right balance, the right words for the right occasion. I would call it honest recognition, sincerely conveyed. If it comes across as contrived, I can already see the customer grinning at you with pity before remarking, "You sound like you just walked out of a sales seminar."



Flash of Inspiration:

PSYCHOLOGY FOR THE TOP SALES PROFESSIONAL



I was standing before the executive assistant and the human resource development manager for a sales presentation. I was looking to sell them my training program for the sales team of their electronics company. As far as I was concerned, it had gone well. As always, when it was over I wanted to know where I stood. I also wanted to find out anything I could about the CEO and somehow get some face time with him. In fact, that was the downside of my presentation—that the boss wasn't there to see it. First I asked his assistant, "Assuming you run into your boss in the hallway, what are the positives that you would give him regarding our meeting?"

The assistant replied that he liked my professionalism but wondered whether my domineering manner might not be a touch too aggressive for his people. OK, I get that a lot. I told him that it wouldn't be a problem, I could easily tone it down. I simply came on so strong to show that I could. "You see," I explained, "I always come out in high gear. Because if I had come out lukewarm and you wanted fireworks, then you wouldn't believe me if I told you I could *give* you fireworks. Toning it down is never a problem." He was amused by this, and it put him at ease.

Now I turned to the HR development manager and asked her the same question, to which she promptly replied, "I'm not going to tell you."

I kept looking at her, smiled, and gave her a light nod. I knew she would say something else if I just kept my eyes on her. And she did. "Mr. Limbeck, I know

that you've studied neurolinguistic programming and so forth, but to be honest, I don't appreciate this kind of manipulation. Besides, there are three other sales trainers who have presentations to make."

That's OK, I thought. She'll come around. First I have to get to the boss. That's why I was sticking to the assistant for the moment. As he escorted me to the parking lot, he looked admiringly at my car and said, "Is this yours, Mr. Limbeck? Well, finally a trainer with a decent car. The last one pulled up in a beat-up Toyota and told me that he was forced to drive his girlfriend's car because his was being repaired." I winked at him and said, "What kind of man would allow his girlfriend to drive an old Toyota?" Again, he laughed. I had just struck a chord with the assistant. It was a good day.

On our next meeting, the HR manager was there again and this time—finally!—so was the CEO. My performance was a shade better than last time, and at the end of it I asked again where I stood in the running. The boss's reply was similar to the assistant's last time, and I had my counter argument ready for it.

Limbeck, why are you making the same mistake twice?

Then I made a slight mistake. I turned to the HR manager and asked her the same question, again. Her answer: "Mr. Limbeck, I told you last time that I'm not going to discuss that."

I shouldn't have done that. Now I had simply added fuel to the fire. But no, that wasn't enough! Because then—and I have no idea why I did this—I deliberately took another shot at her. Maybe because she irritated me somehow. I said, "If you refuse to give me any feedback, it's not exactly the best way to establish trust for a collaboration."

A week later I got a polite rejection letter in the mail. Signed personally by her, the HR development manager.

So, what did the young Limbeck do at that point? Did he turn his attention to other, more worthy matters? No. Too stubborn to let it lie, he commits a third and final error, with the same exact person. Because an offense is the best form of defense, and considering I already had a rejection letter (NO is short for Next Opportunity, remember?), I wrote directly to the CEO and proposed two pilot training sessions free of charge and requested that the employees decide for themselves who they felt catered best to their needs.

Again, I got a letter. And again, not from the boss but from the HR development manager herself. This time, though, she was livid and laid into me about how tactless and disrespectful I had behaved from the moment I set foot in the firm. She stated that from this moment on the company wanted no more contact of any kind with me or my business.

Now she was really livid—and rightly so.

The door was slammed shut, the bridges burned. Way to go. And the worst part of it was that she was right. She was right to be angry. And do you know why? Did you notice?

Fool that I am, I failed to notice. Only now, with the second scathing letter before me, did the penny drop. The person making the decisions about the training program was the *HR development manager*. Not the executive assistant, not the human resources director, and not even the CEO; *she* was the decision-maker.

And I very stupidly didn’t see it. I had ignored her. I had disregarded the fact that from the very beginning, she had expressed mistrust in my regard. I had simply paid no attention to her, leaving her in the lurch instead. I had not been

able to disarm her resistance, because I hadn't shown her the esteem she deserved. I had wanted to plow through every wall before me and hadn't even realized which wall was the right one!

Put another way, I had lacked compassion. I hadn't used enough psychology in the matter.

With, Not Against

The Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research long ago established the motives that lead a person to make a purchase. These rules still hold today. According to the institute, people buy a product because it raises personal prestige, it is cost effective, it contributes to one's comfort, it represents cutting-edge technology, it satisfies a social need, it is good for the environment or for personal health, or it fulfills the need for security or safety.

Seven solid reasons. For the overwhelming majority of consumers, it isn't just one of these factors that is decisive; it is several, and in some cases, all of them play a role. But in most cases, it is one or two of them that stand out and determine the customer's decision to act on the purchase or not.

Let's take an example. A man in his mid-thirties strolls into a car dealer's lot and stops in front of a minivan. The salesperson can already tell a few things from this: The man is probably not a student looking for a small, cheap car. He is also not a developer seeking a prestigious convertible for weekends on the golf course. He is most likely a family man interested in this type of car to ferry his family around in a secure, comfortable, and effective manner to shops, school, weekend tournaments, grandpa's and grandma's house, or holiday resorts.

Nevertheless, the average salesperson will likely focus on the technical innovations as compared to yesteryear's model: the powerful engine, the torque, and the bragging rights awaiting any buyer who pulls this car into his driveway. And this very salesperson will fail to sell the customer a single car on this occasion.

The top sales professional, on the other hand, is bearing the most important buying motives in mind and can already begin to eliminate and prioritize. She

already knows that cost effectiveness, comfort, and safety are decisive for concluding the sale. Prestige and technology will count less. She will have to find out which of the following factors are most important to the customer: the number of airbags, the variability of the seats, the storage space, the safe entry and exit of children, or the engine's consumption value. That is why she has her questions ready and proceeds to inquire first, instead of talking the customer's ear off. In short, she begins her approach with the motives of the customer, and therein lies her potential sale.

A good salesperson is like a midwife. Sometimes the baby is born of its own accord, almost sliding out into her waiting hands. Other times it is more difficult, and the midwife has to resort to forceps or a ventouse. At times the procedure feels interminable, without visible progress. Perhaps the baby is born by caesarean section. But regardless of how easy or difficult, how quickly or how long it takes, in the end all parties involved should be happy that the baby has seen the light of day.

The midwife doesn't need to have studied medicine, but she does need a thorough knowledge of human anatomy, in particular of the woman's reproductive organs. You as a salesperson do not need a degree in psychology, but knowledge of certain key elements of the human psyche are indispensable. Among these are the motives underlying your customer's purchase.

Limbeck, the psychologist.

There are all sorts of psychological paradigms that serve to break down the transactions between people: neurolinguistic programming, transactional analysis, biostructural analysis, family constellations—countless methods are used for this purpose. Neuropsychologists teach us that for purchase decisions, it is the limbic system that is crucial. This area of the brain, which is relatively old

in evolutionary terms, resides between the brain stem (old system) and the cerebral cortex (new system). This is also where endorphins are released, those hormones that help manage pain and trigger feelings of euphoria and joy. It is in the limbic system that emotion, intuition, and instinct are rooted, even though other parts of the central nervous system also contribute to their formation. Many studies suggest, however, that things like buying decisions of a consumer are first triggered in the limbic system. It is only at that point that rational explanatory patterns are formed in the cerebrum, long after the "gut decision" in the reptilian brain has been made.

The astute sales professional also knows that when a customer weighs her reason and her gut feeling about whether or not and from whom she should buy, it is invariably her gut feeling that prevails in the end, even if her reason subsequently provides wonderful justifications. This also means that depending on her motives, whether the salesperson is friendly or unfriendly has a lot of bearing on the transaction itself. The top sales professional succeeds in forging a common feeling with the customer. He feels with the client; he feels as the client feels.

The sales professional also knows that all of his acquired knowledge about neurolinguistic programming, transactional analysis, family systems therapy or family constellations, and neurobiology are too abstract and too complex for the current selling context. In the end, whoever stands before the customer and begins to ponder these abstruse methods is wasting too much energy and resources theorizing instead of focusing that energy on sympathizing with, observing, guiding, and seeing the customer through to the finish line.

Neurolinguistic programming (NLP), neurobiology, family systems therapy—all theory. Where does that leave the practice?

Seeing, Hearing, Feeling

The most powerful selling tools at my disposal are my curiosity and my knowledge of human nature. If I'm in top form, I can pretty quickly tell what emotional state my client is in. Initially, I observe how she presents herself, what she says and how she says it, how she moves. In the first few seconds and minutes of our meeting I use my inner radar to detect all incoming information. Then, I allow her feelings to guide mine; I begin to feel with her.

Psychologists employ the same motivational patterns as the Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research: social recognition, safety and emotional security, trust, self-respect, independence, and responsibility. If I am able to discern, or better yet, if I can *feel* that social recognition is what is most important to my client, then I could say to her, "You will be one of the first to own a Porsche Panamera Turbo. You'll be a 'first-mover,' and let me tell you, nothing beats watching everyone admire your car as you drive past."

If I sense that independence is what she wants, I could say, "If you use this itinerary, you'll be venturing off the beaten track."

Whoever seeks emotional security likes to hear that she is in good company: "The five most successful companies in your sector use the same software you do . . ."

Those who value self-respect tend to weigh things meticulously. They are often opinionated and want to see proof for everything. Numbers, graphs, facts, and control are what sways them. They are often skeptical. Skepticism, though, is a form of resistance; skeptical people are usually not open-minded. They must first be made to relax. My way to relax them is to let them browse through my documents while I'm presenting something to them, to share precisely those elements that make them skeptical in the first place.

I disarm the skeptics by letting them browse through my documents.

But it isn't only their motives and needs that distinguish one client from another. Each one perceives their surroundings in a unique way. Each of the five senses of an individual is wrought and weighted differently.

A visually oriented type is more receptive to visual verbs and adjectives and retains them better: "*See* how *vividly* this software *shows* your employees how it is applied."

The kinesthetic person will be more sensitive to phrases such as: "It will *impress* you how easy it is to *handle* this iPad, how information is always at your *fingertips* regardless of where you are, how the wireless keyboard is so *ergonomically* built and responds beautifully to every *stroke* of the key . . ."

Auditory people will respond more readily to things like: "*Listen* to how that twelve-cylinder engine *rumbles* as it's idling and what an imposing *roar* it emits when gunned—even the *resounding boom* of the car door as it closes."

You get the idea. A good salesperson employs a host of strategies to establish a solid connection to the client, strategies that can readily be explained in psychological terms. Some people use psychology unconsciously; if they used it deliberately, they would be even better at it. But in the end, it is better to master one or two methods with hundreds of clients than to ineptly muddle your way through Freud's entire legacy.

As I said, it will come down to your own knowledge of human nature. After all, we are talking about practical applications here, not theoretical erudition. If the customer suspects that you're mentally leafing through your Psychology 101 book, you may as well go straight to the chapter on "Coping with Loss"—because that's where you're headed with that customer. If your conversation is full of psycho-babble, you're certainly not going to be mistaken for a good salesperson, which means you're not going to make any sales, period. It is much more important and helpful to work on your own feel for human nature than to probe your customer's knowledge of it.

I can’t say it often enough: It is crucial in the very first minutes with the client to keep all your senses alert. Take note of details: Is he wearing spotlessly polished shoes? Does he cultivate his outward appearance? Does he wear a watch? If so, is it a simple one or an expensive one, conspicuous or plain and old-fashioned? Are status symbols important to him? Cuff links? Haircut? Does he have a firm handshake or a flimsy one? What does his voice sound like? His tone and cadence? Is it commanding, loud, or hushed? Is his speech leisurely or frenetic? How does he articulate his own name? All of these mannerisms say something about the customer and go far beyond the mere content of his words.

When you’re a top salesperson, these are things that you register in fractions of a second and process just as quickly and intuitively. This constitutes the analytical part of learning about human nature. And the results from this can be processed and used further. What for? For the aspect of “feeling with” your client. The more precise the observation, the more accurate the judgment. The more accurate the judgment, the better the lesson in human nature. The better the lesson in human nature, the more powerful the connection to the client. The more powerful the connection, the more likeable the salesperson. The more likeable the salesperson, the more likely the sale.

One day I was sitting in a seminar room with the executives of a medium-sized firm. The atmosphere was tense and expectant. “We’re still waiting for the boss,” someone said.

I see. Obviously around here nothing happens without him. The door suddenly swung open, and even before anybody appeared, the executives gave a start and instantly straightened up. If they had been school kids, they would have sprung out of their chairs and burst into greeting in unison. Out strode a confident, jovial man with the spirited body language of a Julius Caesar inspecting his legions. He peered at me and said, “Aha, you must be the secret weapon of the sales sector who wants to show my employees how it’s done. However, do you even understand what our company is about? Have you taken the time to look at what we do?”

He strode in with the spirited body language of a Julius Caesar.

This was a tricky cue. I replied, “That’s a great idea. Let’s start there.”

Naturally he insisted on taking me on a tour himself. The point is, I was able to take his cue and roll with his domineering and proud entrance. I showed him the esteem he deserved for what he saw as his life’s work. A man like him likes to lead and likes to showcase his accomplishments. So I let him lead. During the tour of his company I gave him the respect that he appreciated, telling him, “I’m very impressed with what you’ve managed to create here.” And I meant it too.

Limbeck in a Pigeonhole

I was at a large investment bank, dealing with the human resource development manager. She had just finished lunch with her company’s thirty-two top salespeople. She wanted to know from them how the seminar, to which she had sent their entire sales team, had gone. My seminar.

She said that the seminar had been a success with everyone in the team. But at one point, she seemed to hesitate, and her voice faltered. “My people said that you were a little eccentric. Can I ask you something, Mr. Limbeck?”

Sure she could. Now I was curious.

“Is there really a huge poster in the seminar room with your picture and logo on it? I saw the sign on the entrance door that said, ‘This is where the employees of company XY train for their future success,’ and I found that delightful. But is it true that you also wear cufflinks with your Limbeck logo on them? And do you actually drive a Porsche 911 with your logo embossed on the door frame?”

What can I say? That’s all true. I told her that she should tell her employees that Limbeck had a rough childhood. Hence, his assertive approach. And hence also the posters, cufflinks, Porsche, and embossed car-door frames.

She laughed.

“Well,” I said, “if it helps people to put me in a pigeonhole, then that’s OK with me, as long as they engrave my name on it—and don’t forget that I gave a good seminar.”

And of course I get pigeonholed: The self-made man who never got anything the easy way, who had to work hard for everything he has, and who is never at a loss for words. The sales authority, who loves the fast lane, impeccable suits, and exquisite cars. Of course he drives a Porsche, and he drives it fast. Or leisurely, to feel the wind in his hair. But this same Limbeck can also ride in a diesel-engine family minivan, to unwind and socialize. And in this case he relishes the fact that he only has to tank up once every five hundred miles. The same Limbeck can sit outdoors for hours on end at a fishing lake and keep his mouth shut, throw a steak on the grill if the fishing didn’t go so well, and savor a cold beer as the sun sets. A pigeonhole, after all, is no more than that.

But yes, the working Limbeck is flawlessly dressed. He comes with cufflinks and has his own display, his seminar folders, and so forth. Why? Because Limbeck embodies his own brand. Because this brand has a representative: Martin Limbeck. And because this brand has a logo.

Nobody is particularly surprised to see Nike shoes with the Nike logo. Every other Harley-Davidson rider also has a Harley tattoo under their leather jacket. Limbeck happens to have his logo on his cufflinks. It only means that I live my brand and stand behind it 100 percent. I’m proud of it because I have spent the last twenty years building it.

Nobody is surprised to see logos on shoes.

Whether a customer realizes it or not, a brand that is successful and uniquely identifiable also works on a subliminal level. There are no purely rational decisions. Even apparently rational decisions are driven by the subconscious and

hence the emotional. That is why it is so crucial for a good sales professional to know exactly what he stands for to forge an honest, emotional bond with the customer. He must deftly strike the right emotional chord to bring the transaction to a successful conclusion for both parties. On one end, he must know the chains of reasoning, the effective wording, objection handling, and so forth. But on the other, he must also sense when to be dominant and when to hold back. And incidentally, in 90 percent of the cases, you should shoot for a shade more dominance.

If you have considerable control over the pigeonhole with which your client has identified you—in other words, if you are a brand that is infused with a wealth of positive qualities—then the mutual esteem between you and your client will be established much more quickly and will multiply your chances for success.

Pigeonholes, striking the right emotional chords, manipulation, psychology—in the end there are only two options. When the meeting is over, either the client will think, “Maybe I should have gone with someone else on this,” in which case your psychological approach was not good enough.

Or the client thinks, “That went well. I can trust that man, even if he didn’t budge on his price.” Then you’ve done your job.



One-Track Mind:
The Art of Focusing



Now, concentrate! But what exactly does an outstanding sales professional concentrate *on*? On revenue? On the commission? On her suave, affable approach? On the customer? On the product? Well, none of these is off the mark, but none is completely
correct either.

When selling, a top sales professional concentrates on . . . selling. C'mon, Limbeck. Isn't that obvious? True. I realize that that sounds trite. But think about it. What I mean by that is that you as a salesperson need to focus on the core aspect of your profession. No salesperson is paid for visiting customers, sales pitches, traveling, objection handling, a good entrance, appropriate attire, sound elocution, or dealing with customer complaints. These are all preconditions, collateral obligations, but they do not address the actual issue. They are the mountain climber's equipment but not the climb itself, and they are worth nothing if the peak isn't reached.

If selling is the focal point of your thoughts, it means you have *already* fulfilled many preconditions. You have, for example, thought about what kind of information you require for the task. You have practiced your smooth and friendly entrance, you know the typical objections of a customer and can counter each one, you know your product inside out, and so forth. To be clear, all these sales techniques are necessary. A good skier would never enter a race with old, cheap, worn-out equipment. The best NASCAR racers use the best available engines. The best-run football team offers the best training facilities, stadium,

and coaching staff. The fact that you are fully equipped is simply a matter of professionalism. But the cutting-edge skis aren't going to take themselves down the awaiting black slope, a powerful engine doesn't climb the winner's podium alone, and the coaching staff does not score touchdowns. Though you handled the client's objections perfectly, your company still hasn't earned a dime.

In the end, what matters is the result. If we're talking sports, that means medals, trophies, decisive touchdowns, prestigious titles. That is why Joe Montana is a superstar and Donovan McNabb is not. That is why Richard Petty is a NASCAR legend, while Dirk Nowitzki is hardly talked about, even though he is one of the world's best basketball players. Nowitzki just happens to be on the losing team in most decisive games. In the end it is not your performance that counts; it is the results you reap from that performance. And if selling is really about selling and not putting on a good show for the client, then there can only be one goal in your mind from the very beginning.

What Really Counts

If you are a true salesperson, then that's how you want to make your living. A good living, for that matter. Anyone who has decided on a commission-based sales job is looking to earn good money. In sales there is always money to be made. Let's not kid ourselves. A salesperson is not after titles, positions, or power—that is all surface prestige and adulation. A full-blooded sales professional doesn't strive to be president. Neither does she want to be the pope, a prima ballerina, a world champion, or an Oscar winner. She wants to be number one in her territory, not the leader of the Thanksgiving parade.

Remember, this is a book about the mindset of a top salesperson. And that includes, among other things, the right attitude toward money. On this point I want to share something essential with you. To me, money is a wonderful thing; it is delightful. I can't imagine someone going into the sales profession if he thought money was something dirty or shameful that has to be hidden. Money is a means of trade, and if I have plenty of it then I can trade plenty. If my company has a great deal of it, then it can trade a great deal. And if my customer

is loaded with it, then she can do the same. This is always a good thing, never bad.

However, and I can't stress this too much, if money, and in the salesperson's case the commission, is what is driving the salesperson, then she is headed in the wrong direction and will never become a top salesperson.

As I was starting out on my first real sales job selling photocopiers, my veteran colleagues would tell me, "Limbeck, whatever you do, don't make the mistake that all rookies make. When you finish an appointment, don't take out your calculator to tally up your commission."

I set out on my assignment, sold my first photocopier—and what was the first thing I did when it was over? I pulled out my calculator. I couldn't wait to see how much I had earned. But the more time passed and the more I understood what it was really about, the less interesting that aspect became. Of course, it's easy to talk that way when you've got it, you're probably saying to yourself, but that is an excuse, not an objection. And you're right, I can afford to talk this way now. Yet, through the years, the sales professional becomes less concerned with his percentages. The one who does his job well, exceedingly well, does not measure his success by the number of zeros on his paycheck. What counts for a NASCAR legend like Richard Petty is that he is a seven-time NASCAR Championship winner, seven-time Daytona 500 winner, all-time wins leader in NASCAR Sprint Cup Series, all-time poles leader in this series, record-holder for most Sprint Cup Series wins in one season, record-holder for most consecutive wins in this series, leading this series in wins seven times. Not to mention his Hall of Fame awards and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The money he made wasn't what he was after. I am thoroughly convinced that had he driven primarily for the money, he would have won neither the titles nor the cash.

A top salesperson doesn't focus on the commission—in spite of the fact that her livelihood depends on it. She has assimilated this apparent contradiction and lives by it. It is akin to Zen Buddhism: Hear the sound of one hand clapping. In other words, sell without the thought of money in mind.

The top salesperson does not focus on the amount of her commission.

Otherwise, you can end up on the wrong side of things. Here's another relevant story from the beginning of my career. At that time I was a capable and industrious salesman. A strength I possessed that set me apart from many others was that I didn't shy away from cold calling. At the same time, however, I wasn't bold about my customer acquisition. I deferred to the client much more. The confidence I displayed was a superficial one. It was acquired by training, but it didn't come from the heart. At that time I can even say that I was scared to death of speaking on the telephone.

Today, as far as cold calling is concerned, I'm hard to beat. But at the beginning I was truly inhibited when calling clients. As a nineteen-year-old field representative, I was terrified at the thought of losing a customer. At that age I thought my job was about the money. At my first interview, the human resources manager had shown me copies of two paychecks—one from the best salesperson at his company and the other from the worst. You can imagine how I felt when I saw that even the worst one was earning three times as much as I was after my apprenticeship.

This causes someone to focus very quickly on the money. For the first and only time in my life, I found myself closing a dubious deal. One of my veteran colleagues was supposed to support me in selling several photocopiers to a law firm. He had convinced me that it was a normal and perfectly legal practice to sell restored photocopiers with exceedingly high mileage. Looking back, I should have followed my instincts, not to mention my Catholic upbringing. But who was I to go against the wisest of photocopier salesmen?

In the end, the inevitable happened. The photocopiers, which were supposedly designed for five years of use, collapsed after two. The whole time I felt guilty,

and with every service call I thought, “God, I hope these things hold up.”

Finally the ax fell. With the copiers out of order, the seller was held responsible for cheating the customer. The contract was lost, and so was the customer.

The seller was caught cheating the customer. The contract was lost, and so was the customer.

That time I swore to myself that I would always heed my gut feeling and never again try to con my customer. And you don’t have to be a Catholic to feel guilty about it. It’s the same in every culture: A lie is a lie is a lie. Period.

It is what it is—so what do you do about it? You cut your losses and let bygones be bygones, even if you think that things in the past were rosier, that clients were more loyal, the grass greener, and the ice cream sweeter. The past is made to be learned from, not to be lived in. The past is like a lamppost in the dark—it’s there to illuminate your way home. But only drunks hold on to it.

Get Your Contract on the Table!

Focus also means that every sales professional should sell in such a way that her strengths are brought to bear. There isn’t only one way to be a good salesperson; the Limbeckian way isn’t the only one out there, and that’s something I should probably mention from time to time. If you really want to benefit from this book, let its notions work on you first, then tailor them to suit your specific needs. My aim is to get you to think, not to compel you to follow.

As to the topic of strengths, I always say that there are two basic categories of salespeople: the hunters and the farmers. Those who derive the greatest pleasure from acquiring new clients are hunters. Farmers, on the other hand, find customer acquisition a burden and an onerous duty. That’s why their strength

lies in developing a relationship with the customer and ensuring that he is always happy and satisfied and comes back to purchase again. A happy and satisfied customer remains a customer. In inside sales, there are the appointment specialists, those who are able to line up contacts one after the other, without tiring and without losing their commitment. For every kind of profile there are jobs that suit their strengths: field representatives, business development managers, key account managers, in-house staff, and
so forth.

The question is, what happens next? Once I know where my strengths and talents lie, once I've chosen my position accordingly, once I know what to wear for the occasion, once I can express myself in an articulate manner, once I am honest and forthright, once I know everything there is to know about myself and my customer, once I've garnered enough redeeming factors in my more difficult clients to be able to like them, once I've investigated and found out what the client has, wants, and needs, once I've grasped and taken all of these things to heart—what is my next goal?

To offer good professional advice? Nonsense.

To present the product in detail? Not at all.

To advise the client on how she can make the best use of the product? Wrong again.

No, from the very start, there has been one goal and no other:

Close the deal.

I'll tell you what you do, my friend. You're going to close the deal. Right now. And dispense with all detours. Now is the time to strike. Not later. Now. That is the goal, and that is the task before you. It is the purpose of your activity. When you close a deal, your firm makes money, and you earn your living. Money is a result and an outcome, and therefore is secondary. The conclusion of the deal is paramount.

This is where all this has been heading from the very beginning, the instant you picked out your customer. You proceeded to do your research and spent hours gearing up toward your sales pitch. Now the moment for sealing the deal

has come. Don’t miss it. Remember—you’ve only sold once you’ve closed the deal.

Here’s something I had trouble believing in the past. I thought stories like the following were fairy tales, anecdotes, fish stories, or simply hyperbole—the stories of how a salesperson had failed to close a deal. Don’t get me wrong; I’m not talking about the salesperson’s alarm clock failing to ring and causing her to miss the appointment. Nor am I talking about a salesperson trying to sell an obsolete product. No, I’m referring to a sales professional who, in the midst of a sales pitch, doesn’t realize that the customer is ready to
buy *now*.

Believe me, it happens, more often than you might think. I see it and hear about it time and time again.

I still remember a story from the early years of the mobile phone industry. It was also a time in which the sector saw only hunters—no farmers yet. It was a matter of filling as many orders as possible to occupy the market. The contracts were being closed as breathtakingly fast as the commissions were high. At that time I was selling seminar sessions to mobile phone client hunters, where I was also asked to train salespeople in real time, in the field with real customers. The organizers would introduce me as a colleague of the salesperson in question, and I would assess those areas where they could improve.

So we were sitting in the office of a Scandinavian shipping company, and I was getting increasingly edgy. The client had just agreed to ten cell phone contracts and was trying to figure out which model he was going to select for his department. The salesperson I was observing was making no move to obtain a signature. Instead, he was extolling the virtues of the cellular frequency bands. Then the color of the keypad. Then the amount of phone numbers that the client would be able to store.

I couldn’t believe it. This customer wanted ten contracts. He now knew exactly which cell phone he wanted, and my “colleague” was busy showing him how to write a text message. I was getting restless and was on the verge of giving him a slight kick under the table.

It got worse. The client asked, “So, what do I have to do now?”

My sales rep still didn’t get it. He still didn’t have the contracts on the table. The client was more than ripe; he was practically begging to sign, and the dolt beside me looked at me questioningly, as the client asked for the second time, “So what now?”

That was the last straw. I had no choice but to step in and say, “Well, let’s get the contracts out, shall we?”

Can you believe that? Now you might be thinking that this was an isolated case, one that we sales trainers might share as an amusing anecdote. But no, following this incident there was a whole series of others just like it. After twenty years in the business, I’m convinced that there are more deals botched in this manner than there are successful ones. There is no wrong time to close a deal. And the right time is always the same one, namely, anytime. Better to lay everything out on the table before you miss your chance.

Today I am convinced that more deals are missed by neglect than the number that are made.

I know what you’re thinking: There are times when the situation just doesn’t permit it. I’m here to tell you that those situations do not exist.

Another story: Again I’m traveling with a client, and this time I’m training a landline consultant during a business appointment with a client. The director of an advertising agency in Hamburg is sitting before us. He was a strapping fellow, the kind of man who takes over a room as soon as he enters. From the outset, he makes sure we know who’s running the show. Then he gets down to business and shows us two telephone bills, his private one and the firm’s. He suspects that there have been errors in the bills for a few months. He, his wife, and his daughter have regularly been charged the equivalent amount of a firm

with twenty employees. There must be a mistake, and that mistake must be ours. He is furious.

So, we are in the thick of a lively claims discussion. Naturally we verified the bills before coming, and they are all accurate. There are no technical errors to be seen and no uncertainty in the matter. All the calls on the bills had been made.

In a situation such as this one, you are negotiating a terrain that is as safe as a minefield, because among the possible scenarios accounting for the running up of a phone bill, some are delicate—adultery, sex hotlines, or compulsive gambling, for example. Therefore, my line of questioning in this case is like a perilous walk on eggshells.

My line of questioning is like walking on eggshells.

Luckily we find the culprit, and in the end it's not so bad. As it turns out, the client's daughter has a boyfriend who moved to Munich three months earlier for his studies. Because we brought the itemized bill along with us, we see that almost every evening at 7:30, someone on the landline calls a cell phone and talks for hours. Bingo.

At this point, an average salesperson would get up, breathe a sigh of relief, and go. A job well done, disaster averted, time to call it a day.

But wait. Not so fast. As I mentioned before, the right time for closing a deal is anytime. In other words, right now. But in a claims negotiation? Exactly. Then too. NO is short for Next Opportunity.

At the beginning of the discussion, the client happened to mention a new cell phone. I have to pursue that. The objective: Close a deal, because in the meantime, having found a plausible explanation for his exorbitant phone bill, the mood has lightened. Within ten minutes we've sold the gentleman a new cell phone.

When he asks us for one of our cell phone catalogs because his wife can't seem to make up her mind about which one to get, we are handed another cue. Close the deal: "How about surprising your wife with a brand new, top-of-the-line model?"

Ten minutes later we've sold him a second phone. Now, a good sales professional would have been delighted to have turned a claims discussion into a successful deal and would have gotten up and said goodbye. I, however, don't budge from my seat. NO is short for Next Opportunity.

Who's left? Do you remember? Bingo. The daughter. How can she go without a cell phone? Instead of calling her boyfriend from a landline, it would be much cheaper to phone him from a cell phone using the same provider. Again, seal the deal. Ten minutes later, and there goes the third phone, together with a new phone contract.

Every conversation is a sales negotiation. The fact that the person at the other end is taking the time to speak with you, the salesperson, means that there is no better time to conclude a deal. Get the contract on the table. In principle, there is no situation in which this cannot work, as long as you maintain your focus.

Stick with It

There is another important facet of focused selling. This focus should not be confined to the day and hour of your sales pitch but should be embedded in your long-term memory: You should never give up on a customer that you haven't won over yet.

You can always turn to other customers, if for some reason you have decided that this particular one is not for you—for example, if you discover that her deals are shady, and your conscience will not allow it. But the simple fact that the customer has not said yes yet is no reason for you to give up the chase. Customers with whom you haven't been able to close a deal, or who have already said no, or who have rejected you twice, five times, a hundred times, are precisely those whom you must never forget. Just like Johnny Cash never forgot June Carter—until she finally said yes.

It works, believe me. I've been self-employed for more than two decades now, coming of age so to speak. At the start of my career, I was a partner at the Institute for Business Education. As in other sectors, the rookies were often sent out directly into the field to cut their teeth on the hardest clients. It was a strategy with which the firm had everything to gain: Either I returned without having concluded a deal, in which case the firm didn't lose anything and I learned something in the process. Or I came back with an unexpected contract, in which case I learned even more and earned something for the firm at the same time.

"OK, Limbeck, why don't you try your hand with the photocopier people. After all, you used to sell copiers yourself. We've never had any luck with them, so maybe you can change that."

So there I was, sitting in my first meeting at a leading photocopier manufacturer. And the first thing the branch manager says to me is, "Mr. Limbeck, your firm did not make a good impression on us. Someone from your team wanted to sell us a telemarketing training program. If your programs are as lax and unprofessional as the person we spoke to on the phone, then we see no reason to do business with you. Anyone who wants to teach others telemarketing should be able to do it themselves."

Anyone who wants to teach others telemarketing should be able to do it themselves.

Target hit and sunk.

All right, it seemed as if my only option now was to put a brave face on this failure and make a graceful exit. There was obviously bad blood here.

Well, not completely. I could still sense some untainted blood in there somewhere. After a moment's silence for the missed opportunity of my predecessor, I took a deep breath . . . and stuck with it. The only reason the

gentleman continued to negotiate with me was because he knew me from my past work in the photocopier business. That was my trump card. The plan to find my way into a deal with him seemed promising, despite the odds. However, I got my hopes up too soon—after three subsequent meetings the deal failed to come to fruition, for budgetary reasons this time. My contact at the firm ended up going to work for another manufacturer after nearly ten years. In the meantime, our relationship had improved enough for us to stay in touch. Through the years, my regular phone calls to his firm had become a running joke: “Oh, it’s Limbeck, again. You’re calling to sell us something, I take it?” A question that was invariably followed by a chuckle.

It took twelve years, until 2005, for something to give. At that time I had sent my contact my new book, and on this occasion it was he who called me. “Limbeck, I enjoyed your book a great deal. We should have dinner sometime.”

No sooner said than done. As I walked into the restaurant, he was sitting at a table nursing a cocktail. My first words were, “I have one condition tonight. Because I don’t want to look the fool with my colleagues, and because I’m meeting with you for the umpteenth time and you’re not going to buy anything anyway, I’d like you to pay for dinner.”

He had a good laugh at that. And you probably know what came next: I made a deal that evening.

This client was like an exotic breed of tiger in my jungle, and I was the big-game hunter. I always knew that one day I would bring him down. Maybe not today, I had thought, but maybe in a month or a year. Sooner or later, the time would come, and I was sure to be ready.

Sweet Dreams

Of course, the analogy of the tiger is a rather harsh one, when in fact I am dead set against shooting wild cats. I don’t see my customers as game or my selling techniques as weapons. And yet, in a peculiar way, the metaphor accurately expresses the mindset of a top sales professional. For example, a hundred years ago, every big-game hunter dreamed of getting the “big five” in his crosshairs:

the elephant, the rhinoceros, the buffalo, the lion, and the leopard. Good sales professionals think in these terms. They also have a wish list, that is to say, a list of clients who are so formidable, eminent, and elusive that they can only dream of gaining them.

Good salespeople draw up their own wish list.

Whatever industry you happen to work in, the moment you've drawn up your wish list, you've effectively calibrated your compass. You've set the course of your career. Don't sell yourself short; your goal could include the five most influential and prestigious brands in the world—companies like Google, Apple, IBM, Microsoft and Coca-Cola. Or set your sights on the seven biggest banks or the city halls of the three biggest US cities, depending on what industry you work in.

Allow yourself to dream and have faith that one day you will catch a fish of that magnitude. And another one after that. Because faith can move mountains, as the Bible says, and indeed, I believe that.

I once dreamed that I had all the MDAX companies on my client list. That's a stock index that lists fifty German companies. Had you asked me at the time what I thought of the prospect of training eBay, for instance, I would have undoubtedly replied, "You must be joking." But secretly it was I who was dreaming of precisely that. For ten years. And now I've made it.

The conviction of a top sales professional lies in the words "I want." What the average salesperson says is: "Let's see how it goes." The words of the poor salesperson are: "Hopefully this works out." And the motto of a salesperson who should change jobs as promptly as possible or else he'll starve is: "Here goes nothing."

At the end of a recent open seminar, we handed out the feedback forms as we usually do. “What did you think of the seminar?” “What did you like most about it?” And so forth. I had ninety-nine forms with consistently positive comments. Only one participant found the seminar “satisfactory.” What he particularly liked were the “breaks,” “Limbeck’s suit,” and the “surreptitious advertising for Hugo Boss,” followed by a smiling icon. An odd response. Because I’m a salesman, I decided to call him the following day and find out how I could turn his “satisfactory” into an “outstanding.” And because I’m a salesman, we are now doing business.

Straight, No Chaser

Are you asking yourself at what point you begin to get on the customer’s nerves? From the third phone call? The third call per month? Per week? Per day?

Why this fear about getting on the customer’s nerves? If you get on her nerves, she will let you know. She will say, “Mr. Limbeck, this is the third time you’re calling me. It’s annoying. Give it a rest.”

And Limbeck would immediately counter by saying, “Madam, you’ve just paid me a great compliment, because the tenacious commitment I’m showing you now is the same commitment I will show you the day we do business together.”

I would rather lose one customer because I’m too tenacious than lose ten because I wasn’t tenacious enough. Let me put it another way: I cannot lose any client by being relentless, because any client I don’t win over is no less than I started with. I can’t lose. In fact, there isn’t a single reason not to keep at it. Not if you think your product is second best, not if other salespeople have the better territory for customer acquisition, not if you think your company car is not distinguished enough, not even if the competition is
too fierce.

If any of these reasons is important to you, it’s because you’re focusing on the wrong issue. You are wasting too much emotional and intellectual energy

dwelling on what's wrong. On what's missing. On the negative. Instead of seeking out a solution to make it happen.

In the future, focus your energy on how to make things work.

Change your perspective. As you're casting anchor, don't look at the water; look at the island. Don't focus on the hurdles but on the race. And above all, let go of what's weighing you down. Let go of everything that is not part of your core activity, anything that deviates from what you're best at. I know from experience that letting go is not easy but is necessary. As a trainer I began with a hawker's tray full of services. I gave coaching sessions for customer orientation, seminars for buyers, telephone training for assistants, conflict management for in-house staff, speech training for product managers. The fact that I didn't give pick-up lessons for beginners or skid control training for drivers was purely because I didn't think of them.

Was my schedule full? Yes. Was I successful? In a sense. Could I have been more successful? Most certainly. Others were a lot more successful than I. What were they doing differently?

They directed their focus in a different way. They all had very specific positioning: Bill Gove was "The Father of Professional Speaking." Zig Ziglar was "The Master of Motivation." Randy Gage is "The Prosperity Guy." Laura Stack is "The Productivity Pro." Doug Stevenson is the expert in "strategic storytelling in business."

Today, however, my hawker's tray is gone. And what does that make me? I am not just any trainer; I am Martin Limbeck, dubbed "The Porsche of Sales" by the press, at the top of my field. My main focus: selling. Because that is both what I want *and* that is what I am capable of.

Today, my hawker's tray is gone.

Targeting:
What Is It You Want?



Receiving a full and unsolicited testimonial from someone is like scoring a three-pointer. Like bowling a strike. Like hitting a home run. Like connecting a Hail Mary. A full and unsolicited testimonial is the Mount Olympus of recommendations—that is to say, when someone, without being asked, speaks in glowing terms about another person and offers their unequivocal endorsement. Unsolicited!

The woman standing next to me in the entrance of the seminar room had, in the course of a single day, already scored four home runs with me. Her employees, whom I had been training that morning, had spoken of her on four separate occasions in almost saintly terms, without my even mentioning her name. She was the absolute Grande Dame of the company, a remarkable lady who had received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for her achievements, who still personally paid visits to her top clients, who at well over fifty years of age was still eager to learn, and who was, in short, the quintessential businesswoman.

People like her are true role models. Everybody can learn something from them. And on this particular day, it was I who had the privilege of learning from her. So we were standing there, in the middle of the training day, and I noticed that she wanted something from me. She turned to me and said, “Mr. Limbeck, please do me a favor.”

She already had my consent before asking, because I was ready to do anything she wished, no matter what it was.

“Could you please address the question of the dress code for my salespeople?” she said. “You’re always so good at that.”

She didn’t say, “I’m not good at that kind of thing.” No, she said, “You’re always so good at that.” What she meant was that she didn’t want employees visiting their customers with cheaply dyed hair, wayward piercing, garish makeup, vulgar tattoos, and clothes straight out of a rap video. Those who represent her firm needed to present themselves with style and dignity. Whoever is looking to relieve someone of their money in exchange for a product should look a little like money themselves. She was right about this. She was also right in not wanting to talk directly to her employees about this matter, for there was a danger that she might offend them in the process.

Then something dawned on me. In sales, it is not a matter of what you believe the customer needs; neither is it a matter of what the customer says she needs. After all, I had been hired by her as a sales trainer and was supposed to be training people on the full program of objection handling, closing techniques, and so forth. That was the official plan. But then came this remark of hers, and I thought, Limbeck, as a salesperson it is a matter of finding out what the customer *actually* wants beyond what she *appears* to want. I am not a big fan of the word “actually”; usually I find it superfluous, but here it is apt. What this woman *actually* wanted was to upgrade the style factor of her sales team. Their style, not their skills.

If the trainees had left my training program with improved questioning techniques but failed to change their manner of dress, my client would not have been satisfied. The employees’ attire was obviously the burning issue for her at that point. That is why she had intentionally come to see me, pulling me aside to casually make her request. That was the real reason she had hired me. That was my job.

The Salesman Who Called It a Day

In fact, that is always my job, your job, and the job of every sales professional to resolve an issue that the customer can’t or won’t resolve themselves. Thus it is

not a question of the goals of the salesperson (car, home, boat) but the goals of the client! The salesperson's mission is not to reel off a perfect sales pitch; the true, meaningful, and enduring goal of a consummate salesperson is to recognize what the client really wants.

And it isn't necessarily what the client says he wants, either. It's not that easy. Nor is it something that's written into the assignment, printed under his logo, posted on his website, or tattooed on his forehead. But if you're good, you can still find out what it is.

The requirement you must meet to figure this out is to strike a specific chord with the client. If you are there to improve your client's welfare; if you want to help the client make the best of his possibilities; if you want to bring your client a step closer to his hopes, dreams, desires, beliefs, loves, visions, and interests, then you have a real chance of bringing to light what your client *actually* wants from you. In that moment, you will know what your job is.

Well, I can already see how some readers will be grinning at these words and shaking their heads sadly about their fickle and impulsive customers. And rightly so, because the Grande Dame in my story was an exception to the rule. She knew exactly what she wanted and expressed it to me in such a way that I understood her, but she is a rare breed. The majority of people with whom you will have to deal are incapable of this. That would provide you with a great excuse, wouldn't it? How are you supposed to do your job if your customer is incapable of telling you what he really wants? Right?

Wrong.

It is *your* job to find out what the customer wants. Even more than the customer herself, it is you who has to know it. Because that is *your* specialty, not the customer's. But to do that, you have to give yourself a kick in the pants, or you might end up like the car salesperson in the following story.

It was a few years ago. My son had just recently come into the world, I was due for a new car, and I had a plan.

I drove to the biggest Mercedes dealership in the city. As I walked in, I looked like many young fathers on a Saturday afternoon in high summer: I wore

comfortable moccasins, stylishly ripped jeans, and a T-shirt, while leisurely pushing the baby carriage. Beside us trotted our mutt Gizmo.

The salesman in a short-sleeved shirt and a tie also looked as one would expect, but he didn't seem intent on getting up from behind his desk. Judging from my appearance, he thought I was obviously not on his target list. Did I look like someone who couldn't afford a Mercedes? Too young? Too casual? Too new to parenthood to invest in one? Perhaps he was thinking too hard about calling it a day and going home, because the dealership was due to close in a half hour.

So I told him that I was interested in the C-Class station wagon and in the SL. A question mark hung in the air. A station wagon *and* a sports car? So which is it? And then I saw what was going through his mind: For God's sake, this young upstart is dreaming of an SL, when he can barely afford to finance a station wagon. Tsk, tsk, and this on a Saturday afternoon, of all times.

Preconceptions are quick to appear. It was obvious that he wasn't taking me seriously. He didn't even want to show me the SL and simply said, "The catalog is near the entrance."

Then he drew himself up and proceeded to show me the cheaper end of his product portfolio, condescendingly pointing out the C-Class. But I wanted to know something about the SL. There were so many varieties in that line. I asked him what exactly were the differences.

"It's in the catalog."

That was it. I said, "You know what, you'd be the first salesperson to make me read the catalog."

He turned to look at me for the first time.

"I came here to buy two cars." Two!

I walked out pushing the baby carriage and went to my 7 Series BMW. Not a Toyota Tercel. Slowly it began to dawn on him that something had gone wrong. He came out from behind his desk and called something out after me, but I was no longer interested. This Mercedes salesman had had his chance and had blown it. Through his behavior he managed to conjure up a bad emotional image of his

brand. Let’s see if a polite and tenacious sales professional will manage to reverse the trend and convince me to buy from Mercedes in the future.

No one will make me read a catalog.

Had the salesman shown a minimum of interest in me, he would have discovered that the lease on my car was running out and that I was in the market for not one but two cars, a station wagon as a family man with a dog *and* a sports model as a car lover. He would have found out that I was not partial to BMW, that I wanted to buy and not lease, that I was solvent, and that I was a customer who insisted on having both of my cars from a single brand so as to have only one repair shop to go to.

Instead, he allowed his preconceptions to determine what I really wanted. Never do that!

No Woman, No Frills

Things went a lot better when I was renovating my home. At the time I was planning the house only for myself, with no woman in mind and no frills. This meant that Martin Limbeck was setting up his home as he had always envisioned it—with no interior walls, not even in the kitchen. The question at the time was simply what kind of kitchen. I thought about it for weeks and looked at all possible models. Then finally, I realized what I wanted: a pristine, high-gloss white kitchen with a gray, understated concrete countertop—stylish. Now it was just a question of who would build it for me.

One day I was invited by some friends to a housewarming party. I thought their kitchen was exquisite, and the host proposed to put me in touch with his kitchen salesman, named Tobi. Soon thereafter I met the man himself. He had a Rod Stewart haircut, an earring, and a Hawaiian shirt. An eccentric type. Tobi looked more like someone who might sell electric guitars rather than kitchens.

Then again, I had not looked like someone who would be buying two cars at a Mercedes dealership.

I proceeded to tell Tobi about my vision of a super-white, high-polish kitchen. He said that he would gladly come by, take some measurements, and have a look at the rest of the house. The whole house? I wondered. Why? Did he want to sell me a bed, too? Regardless, Tobi came over, took measurements, and inspected the entire house. He didn't say a word. He was a pretty odd character, and I was amused by him. Three days later he phoned and said, "I've thought about your kitchen. So, Limbeck, I would say forget it. No ultra-white glossy kitchen for you. It isn't you. You need something completely different. Why don't you come on over—I have the perfect kitchen for you in my showroom."

I admit that I was a little taken aback. This guy had some nerve. I had made it crystal clear to him what I wanted, hadn't I? A little edgy, I drove out to see him. And before I knew it, I found myself standing in front of a *black*, high-gloss kitchen, with thickly varnished amberwood fittings and a *black* granite countertop. I was speechless.

"Limbeck, I noticed that you're after something unique, something that not everyone has. You don't want your kitchen to look like a bathroom from IKEA, do you? You don't want a kitchen that *looks* like a kitchen but rather like a stylized living space with a choice décor. Besides, I would suggest putting the main unit in the middle. And, you need to get a built-in grill, because you're going to be making steaks much more often than hassling with vegetables for a ratatouille. Am I right, man?"

You need something totally different:
a kitchen that doesn't look like a kitchen.

You got it! Bulls eye, Tobi! I was stunned. This kitchen was awesome. The man had thoroughly understood me. He managed to translate my way of thinking into a kitchen. What an artist! Before I had been trying to soup up a 3 Series BMW; now I stood before a Porsche 911. Before I had been playing Little League; I was now facing a true major league talent. From an attempt to doll up a B-movie actress for a feature film, I now had Angelina Jolie herself filling the lead role.

I bought the kitchen right on the spot. And I love it to this day. Can you imagine that: Someone wants to buy their dream kitchen all in white and ends up in a *black* one, happy and content, without regretting it for a moment. Now *that's* selling.

All right, let's take a closer look. Why did this sale turn out so well for everyone involved? There are three principal reasons: One, the salesperson was self-assured from the very beginning. Two, he didn't tell the customer what he wanted to hear. And three, his assessment of the situation was even better than mine, because he came over to my house to determine what was important to me, out of genuine interest.

He taught me something else as well but this time as a buyer: If I should ever require the services of a real estate agent, I will invite her to my house and tell her, "Have a look around; this is how I live. This is my standard, and I'd like to maintain it with the next house."

Coitus Interruptus

That is incidentally the big advantage of selling door-to-door: A vacuum cleaner salesperson makes a house call, finds herself right in the customer's home, and is in the best possible position to appraise the surroundings and discover what makes the customer tick. While we're on the subject of vacuum cleaners, let's take this example further. Imagine for a moment that you sell vacuum cleaners.

You know your product inside out. You are convinced that you are selling the best vacuum cleaner on the market. You also know exactly how to maneuver your sales pitch to prove that the superlative quality justifies the handsome price.

Now you're standing in the living room, with a family who has shown interest in your cutting-edge model. A nearly perfect sales situation is swiftly moving toward its climax. However, you have forgotten the most important part in the car. Coitus interruptus, as they would say in Latin, or in your case, a sale cut short. So what is it you forgot?

I experienced precisely this sort of thing but from the buyer's standpoint, on a Saturday morning during the Christmas season. The doorbell rang. Dressed in my bathrobe, I went to the door and opened it. Before me stood a gentleman, wearing a black suit with a tie that was a little short, holding a certain type of vacuum cleaner.

"Great!" I exclaimed.

Seriously, I'd always wanted to buy a vacuum cleaner like that. It's just that no salesperson had yet managed to persuade me. And now, for a decision of this scope, the lady of the house had to be present, and she wouldn't be ready for another half hour.

"Can you come back in a little while?"

He stuck with it. Thirty minutes later the doorbell rang again. Good man! He came in and introduced himself in a polite and affable manner. It was a good start: He found himself in our holy sanctum, and fortune seemed to be on his side. To be frank, if he did well, I was going to buy
from him.

I was eager to see what his next move would be.

He proceeded to bring out a remarkably large case, in which lay the product. Perhaps "bring out" is understating it—he rapturously unveiled the wonder that was the vacuum cleaner. His every movement was arresting. A reverential silence suffused the room, and we sat there in awe, watching the skillful hands of a master.

Now I began to test him a little. How would he hold up to a few objections? "You know, we don't have any carpeted floors in the house. Only granite and hardwood and just two rugs in the living room."

He parried the first question brilliantly: “Not to worry, we’ve got exactly what you need. Because this isn’t just a vacuum cleaner.” Pause. “This is a universal cleaning system.” Pause. “For every surface.”

This isn’t just a vacuum cleaner;
this is a universal cleaning system.

Wow. Then came the actual sales pitch. He opened the case and began assembling the precious object with such elegance and precision that I would have bought it for that reason alone. It was as if I was watching someone solve a Rubik’s cube within thirty seconds.

Then came his first question. Impressive—he was asking a question, not lecturing! He pointed to the rugs in the living room and inquired, “When was the last time you passed the vacuum cleaner over that?”

An excellent question. Because not even the biggest slob would admit that it had been weeks, right? So what would you have said? Exactly: “The day before yesterday!”

The salesman didn’t bat an eyelash. He gently moved the chairs aside and began to vacuum. After a few seconds he switched it off and then removed the filter. And what was in it? Dust. A lot of dust. A mountain of dust.

And now, dear client, how do you feel? Ashamed. Endlessly ashamed, because you actually did vacuum two days ago and still there is a pile of dust in the hand of the affable salesman. Embarrassed, you want to dispose of the dust quickly. But he stops you, “No, no, Mr. Limbeck. Don’t worry, I’ll take care of it.”

After he had gotten rid of the first dust pile, he proceeded with his next move. This man had another ace up his sleeve. He switched brushes and made his way to our couch. The couch was made of a micro-fiber, which I thought could even

resist hot spaghetti sauce. Yeah, right. He applied the vacuum cleaner for no more than a few seconds. Then he mercilessly opened the filter again, and my fears were confirmed: Dust. More dust. Another heap of it.

Isn't that embarrassing? You don't even want to know the names of the mites and microbes that are frolicking on your couch—the same couch you were sitting on in your underwear that very morning!

So far, the salesman hadn't done anything wrong, even under my critical gaze. I was seriously thinking of making the purchase. Now I just wanted to enjoy some more of the presentation, but suddenly the lady of the house stepped in.

"And how much is it?"

"$1,700."

"That's pretty steep."

So, now he was in the home stretch, a few seconds away from the finish line, one last hurdle to overcome. Was he going to blow it? At the usual price objection? One last closing argument to conjure out of his hat. He must have been armed with twenty such arguments, and the simplest one would have sufficed to see him through. Something creative wasn't even necessary. Perhaps something like, "And it's worth every penny. I can tell that it fits perfectly in your home." Or, "Yes, you're right, it's a precious piece of equipment." Or at the very least, "You're right, it isn't cheap, but it also comes with . . ." Just something to acknowledge the concerns of the customer, to remain receptive to their needs, wishes, and ideas, to ask himself, What is this couple looking for? What would suit their home? What is my job as a salesperson at this point?

How could he possibly blow this now?

Well, he did. And he blew it so badly that I stood there aghast.

He said, "Steep? Well, if you can't afford it . . ."

Game over.

What had the salesman forgotten in his car? His interest in the client. If he had shown real interest, he would have heard that she didn't say "that's too steep" but rather "that's pretty steep." Looking at our furniture, the size of our house, our behavior, our clothing, the car out front, and so forth, he would have

gathered that a vacuum cleaner of this kind was well within our means. But the gentleman was so taken by *his* sales pitch that he hardly noticed we were there. A good salesperson? Well, at the end of the day I still don't have a vacuum cleaner of that brand.

Chinese-Made Junk in Portugal

Six months later, I bought a no-name product that I neither needed nor wanted, something that wasn't worth the money and that I found ugly to boot. You'll never guess what it was.

This is how it happened. Once a year, the top marketing experts in Europe convene at the so-called "Club 55." At the time, the conference was taking place in Portugal. One evening I was having dinner in a restaurant in Vilamoura near the harbor with a few colleagues and my father, whom I had brought with me on the trip. Every table was taken. We had just placed our order when one of the notorious street peddlers approached our table. It was the same offer you see in all European tourist resorts: battery-operated dancing dolls, flashing sunglasses, and the plastic horns known as vuvuzelas for the soccer World Cup, which was taking place at the time.

The salesperson started with me, but I had no interest in that junk. From my answer he gathered that I was German, so he immediately established a connection: "Where you from?" Apparently, he had also been to Germany, to Munich. All right, he'd managed to strike up a conversation. Well done. Then he laid out the bait, placing a dancing plastic monkey on my colleague's table. Naturally, we were amused: The sales expert gets lured into buying Chinese junk from a Portuguese street peddler. We were grinning right up until the moment when my colleague suddenly raised his eyebrows and said, "You know what? This would be a great little gift to take home to the kids."

The sales expert—and now I'm talking about the street peddler—jumped on the chance and instantly gave it a personal touch. "Children? How old? What name?"

To make a long story short, my colleague made the purchase. The salesman had achieved his goal; he had sold something. And he was very good at it. He saw the chance to build on it. The notion of a gift for the kids is something he deftly turned into a matter of peer pressure and quickly found out who else had children. I still didn't want to buy anything and preferred to observe the unfolding situation, but then my father stepped in. "Martin, you haven't gotten anything for Chris yet."

"Chris?" The expert salesman caught the name in midair, and I had no chance.

Believe it or not, in the end every person at that table had bought something, even before the meal arrived. And that was simply because the gentleman had taken an interest in what we *actually* wanted. Did we want Chinese-made plastic junk? Certainly not. Did we want to see our kids beaming when we got home? Of course we did.

Oh yeah. I bought the yellow sunglasses with flashing lights built in.
Ten bucks.



Mental Preparation:
THINK BEFORE YOU MEET



There is a glass in front of you. Someone pours a liquid into it and stops midway. What do you think? Is it half full or half empty? You say half full. Good answer. Always think positively. And yet, the liquid tastes acrid, and you realize it's a medical contrast medium, because you're in the hospital about to get a colonoscopy. It tastes more like something you would paint your garden fence with than drink. So, do you still think the glass is half full? No, you're actually looking forward to it being totally empty so that you're done with it.

Get rid of this two-bit psychology! Positive thinking, my foot. It always depends on the context. Hermann Hesse expressed it beautifully in his Chinese parable. It's the story of a man whose horse runs away, returning a couple of days later with an entire herd of wild horses in tow. Because of the new herd he has acquired, the man's son learns to ride but one day falls from his horse, breaks his leg, and can no longer be recruited into the army. The point of the story: At first the man's neighbors remark, "Oh, what bad luck that your horse ran away!" Then, "How lucky that the horse brought an entire herd back with it." After that, "What a pity that your son broke his leg." And finally, "Good thing that he wasn't enlisted to fight for the Emperor." The man simply smiles, because he knows that whether it is good fortune or bad depends on your point of view. You're always wiser in hindsight.

Pessimism and optimism depend on your assessment of the situation. But your assessment makes no difference! The pessimist says, "Damn, things couldn't get

any worse.” The optimist counters with, “Yes, they could!” But what these positions have in common is a rigid way of thinking. A desperation.

A top sales professional doesn’t have to convince herself before a meeting that the pelting rain she’s driving through is actually good for the flowers, so that today—thank God!—she doesn’t have to water them herself. There is no reason to try and sugarcoat your thoughts—it’s not going to up your closing rate, I can tell you that much. The top salesperson thinks the way most people think: What lousy weather we have today!

But while she’s driving through the rain, she knows that she’s well-prepared and that she will give an excellent account of herself as a salesperson the moment she arrives. She just knows it, because she has assimilated the seven most important concepts before the meeting even begins. The
seven concepts?

Number One: Be Ready to Win

You’re at a meeting with a client in an industrial area. An important client, a long meeting, several one-on-one discussions, and a lot of money at stake. At around 1 p.m. there’s a scheduled lunch break. You go out to eat. What? One whole hour? Well, how long should your lunch break last? An entire hour? Or perhaps three quarters of an hour? Thirty minutes maybe?

I’ll tell you. I don’t know how long your lunch break lasts. But it will depend on how long it takes to get to your next customer. Because in the very same industrial area, there will probably be ten other potential customer firms. And among them, probably one from your wish list. How do you know that? Because you researched on the Internet the night before and located them. So naturally you go right over to one of your dream customers. Let’s say the trip to that customer takes three minutes; that’s how long your lunch break will be. Then you’ll have fifty-four minutes to dedicate to that customer, before taking another three-minute break prior to rejoining your main meeting of the day.

This is the way you do it, because winning is in your DNA. You spot the opportunity, not when it arises but long before it does. To be exact, you didn’t

spot the opportunity; you planned for it and were ready right from the start.

Those who think and feel this way need not worry about whether the glass is half empty or half full. They are not concerned about whether their worldview is optimistic or pessimistic. For them, it is a question of possessing the mindset of wanting something and wanting it unconditionally. Wanting to win.

That is how Wolfgang Loitzl thinks. The man who won seven gold medals at the World Ski Championships and the Olympics, making him one of the most decorated ski jumpers of all time. Ski jumping is a question of mind over matter. He won the 2008–09 Four Hills Tournament. This wasn't necessarily something unusual, because somebody had to win it. In Loitzl's case, however, it was before his overall victory that he gave an interview to an Austrian newspaper, claiming not only that he wanted to win but also that he was going to win. He simply said, "Nobody can stop me."

Success doesn't come easily. Success must be planned. Loitzl trained for many years and forged his own mindset, his own will to win. It was fourteen years after his debut in the Austrian national team that he finally stood on the highest step of the podium as an individual ski jumper. Up until that point all his medals were "merely" won within the team. But once he had gotten a taste of winning, he never looked back.

The drive to win is not a matter of talent nor of luck. It is not a matter of one's form on the day or the external conditions. This drive to win is there before you step up to the line or it isn't there at all. For salespeople this means that the successful deal is something you already have in your head, before you even walk out your door!

Number Two: Know Every Turn in the Track

The day before a Grand Prix, an IndyCar driver traces the course of the race on foot. He checks the state of the asphalt at all critical points, the height of the curbstones, the unevenness, the different gradients. He looks around, mentally visualizes himself in the cockpit, imagining how he eases on the brakes when

coming out of the straight, shifts down into fifth, fourth, third, slows even more as he hugs the right curbstone, but he's careful not to cut it too sharply, negotiating the apex of the turn. Then he accelerates as he swings left out of the bend, seeking the ideal racing line. Fourth gear, then fifth, as he moves away from the curbstone, sixth gear, then full throttle into seventh. And then he brakes again, and so forth. In this way, the driver plays the scene out entirely in his head the day before the race.

The sales professional visualizes herself walking through the main door of the client's firm, how she will greet the client, with which phrase she will open the conversation, how her handshake with the client will feel—as firm as a vise. She goes through the initial proceedings: Take three deep breaths, drop the small talk, ask your opening question, laugh, conduct a needs assessment, shift into third, fourth, fifth, ease on the brakes; highlight the product benefits, approach the first curbstone, objection handling, accelerate out of the turn, fourth gear, fifth gear, name your price, payment terms, a quick turn to the left, then right, then full throttle ahead, ask for the sale, get the signature, cross the finish line, and victory is yours.

Visualize your sales pitch like a movie. Scene by scene. Shot by shot. Examine your film in detail. It will show you how a smooth sales pitch goes. By this I simply mean what is known as the "ideal racing line."

Even in IndyCar, however, a driver can hardly live up to the way he has ideally imagined his race to be. Your personal visualization is not intended to stop you from deviating from the sales pitch even by an eighth of an inch. Rather, it is designed to offer you a sense of security in your performance. It is designed not to prevent any surprises but precisely for those cases in which there are surprises. If you suddenly find yourself faced with unexpected events, you must be flexible enough to react accordingly. But you can only be flexible if you know what the ideal racing line is to begin with. The IndyCar racer needs to do this as well, because in his case, he has no choice but to abandon the ideal line, at least momentarily, each time he overtakes
another car.

You can only be flexible if you know what the ideal racing line is.

When should you shoot this movie of yours? Certainly not on your way to the meeting. Not in the morning in front of the mirror, either. At the latest, the evening before, in which case you can even dream about it.

Number Three: Find Out Your Customer's Shoe Size

By the eve of your meeting you will have done your homework. No ifs or buts. After all, what would you say if you asked your son or your daughter about their homework, and they answered, "I'll do it on the bus tomorrow."

These are the main questions of your homework: What are the salient business data points of your customer's firm? How big is the company? Does it have any subsidiaries? Where are they located? How is the company organized? What is its legal form? Is it family-run? What industry is it in? Is it active in only one industry? What is its market position? Who is its target group? What does the media say about this company? Who are its competitors? Which of your competitors have contacts with the firm? Who exactly will you be meeting? Do you know their name? Are they the decision-maker? What do you know about them? Their education, title, career, exact position in the firm, responsibilities, scope for decision making, hobbies, interests, family?

Furthermore, who else will be present at the meeting? Are any of your competitors there on that day? Before or after your meeting? If not, on which other day? Do you know what your customer looks like, so that you can recognize them on the spot and address them by name? Are their images accessible on Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pipl, or 123people? What does the company's website look like? Does the person you are meeting also have their own website? How much time will you have for your meeting?

This is your homework. No excuses. A ten-year-old doesn't have the luxury of skipping her math problems; she simply has to do them. So go to it.

Number Four: Drop Your Preconceptions

In my first sales job I had just completed my training. I was to start the following day. I was raring to go. I had acquired the technical know-how for photocopiers and fax machines. Now it was time to approach the clients. I was taking over the territory of one of the veteran salespeople in the company. I was delighted that he had left me all of his client files. Everything was diligently and neatly recorded. The red list contained the current customers, the green list was arranged by year, and the yellow list was according to revenue. Nothing beats good organization.

Then I began to read some of the profiles: "Mr. Smith is a drunken loser and totally unreliable." "Mr. Johnson is a prudish tightwad with bad breath." "Mr. Williams is having an affair with his secretary and is a patronizing idiot with a Napoleon complex." "Mr. Jones is as dumb as a sack of hammers and cannot grasp a single thing. The meeting was useless." And so on and so forth. Profile after profile of scornful and dismissive comments. After three or four days of reading through them all, I almost wanted to cry. Could it be that I would be dealing with nothing but losers, cranks, and creeps? What a horrible job. What a wretched sales territory. What a despicable industry!

Completely dejected, I sat at my desk with my head in my hands. My boss passed by, saw me staring grimly at the profiles, and said, "Limbeck, stand up. Pick up the files and come this way."

He guided me toward the elevator and said, "Press B."

Why were we going to the basement? We made our way down and got out, and he pointed directly toward the big silver garbage cans. "Open them up, Limbeck."

What was this, some bizarre disciplinary drill?

"OK, now throw the files in the garbage and shut the lid."

"Seriously?"

“Seriously. You see, Limbeck, now you can clear your head. You can start from scratch. Now you’ll be writing the reports.”

It was wonderful. It was the best thing that could have happened to me. From now on there was only cold calling, freed from the preconceptions, assessments, and opinions of my predecessor. I was starting with a clean slate, with no negative thoughts about the clients to dwell on. Just because my predecessor didn’t get along with them did not mean that I couldn’t.

A clean slate, with no negative thoughts about my clients.

Every personal piece of information about another person is necessarily subjective. It is better to stick to the facts. And even those facts are things that you should verify yourself, instead of reading them off somebody
else’s reports.

Otherwise, you might end up in the predicament that a saleswoman in my seminar did. She had taken over a customer whose profile had read, “A family man through and through. Family is all-important to him.” She greeted the customer and inquired, “How are the wife and kids?”

“My divorce is pending.”

Oops.

The lady in question had handled it deftly, saying, “I can relate; my divorce is too. It’s tough.”

Even so, her meeting after that didn’t go very well. Never let yourself be influenced by other people’s information about your customers. That information can be false, biased, and outdated. It is your customer, and you have to approach him with new eyes. Your eyes. For my part, that’s how I’ve always handled it, and it has served me well. If a manager proposes to tell me something

about the strengths and weaknesses of individual employees before a seminar, I politely decline the offer. Being unbiased has advantages for both sides.

Years ago, a prominent photocopier manufacturer even made this notion of perpetually starting afresh into a principle. Every four years the employees' sales territories were switched. The reasoning behind it was that their product was so good that once a customer buys from them she stays with them. Any salesperson who has not managed to make a sale with a certain potential client in four years will not make one in five years either, because the problem would lie not in the product but in the salesperson. A new salesperson, though, could turn the prospect into a client. Say what you will about this philosophy, the manufacturer was very successful at the time.

Number Five: Give and Think

How much can you rake in with your next deal? Oh no, you say modestly, it's not about the money. Money doesn't bring happiness, you say. Well, you're being a hypocrite. Admit it! Money reassures you. Money grants you independence. But you are right: Money alone will not necessarily bring you happiness. But neither will no money.

As always, it's about striking a balance. Namely, a balance among the five things that most people strive for: financial independence, good health and a long life, a fulfilling relationship, social recognition, and a rewarding profession.

That sounds pretty good. But very few people succeed in balancing all five. And hardly anyone will be equally fulfilled in all of them at the same time. Take, for instance, the manager who ruins her health due to her excessive focus on money, money that she will then need to restore that health. Has she won? Or the man who is married to his job and whose relationship will almost certainly suffer because of it? Or the poor but healthy elderly woman sitting on a park bench feeding the pigeons, wondering if anyone would care if she disappeared off the face of the earth?

For a good salesperson, of course it's also about the money. Anything else would be a lie. But it's not the first priority. Money is the fuel and the lubricant.

But you also need a transmission, a car body, wheels, brakes, a road, and a driver's license. Whoever focuses too much on money when selling will fall by the wayside or will overshoot her target. In both cases, however, she will fall short of her goal.

A top salesperson doesn't want to know what and how much she can get from the customer. A top salesperson asks herself what she can give to her customer.

Whether I am selling a customer a single sales seminar or twenty days of training comes to the same thing and involves the same joy, the same commitment, the same preparation, and the same effort. There is no "light" version of a sales pitch. There are only good or bad sales pitches. The probability of the good pitch also being the successful one is endlessly higher than the bad one winning out. Even if the deal you make with your customer is a small one, the likelihood of obtaining a second deal is considerable. Because if you've managed to persuade the customer, the money will come of its own accord. Without desperation and without tricks. And if you've found an effective solution for the client, then she will buy a second time. And a third.

There is no "light" sales pitch.
There are only good ones and bad ones.

It's natural that the balance among the five cardinal points mentioned above changes as time goes by. At nineteen I just wanted to be rich. I admit it. Today I'm in my mid-forties, and other aspects of life are more important to me. My balance has shifted more toward my health and my family. But I was able to make this change at my discretion only because I could afford to do so. However, the hunting instinct, the force that drives the sales professional, has not changed. That has nothing to do with money. Today I can simply afford to

forgo a contract for the sake of my own well-being or to pass it on to another colleague.

Nevertheless, a sales professional needs to be convinced of his own product. He has to be fond of it, think highly of, love it. Yes even love it. It is only in this way that he can effectively persuade his customer that she will benefit from it. When I used to sell photocopiers, I always harbored the certainty that I was doing my client some good, that my photocopier was quicker, superior in quality, and more reliable than the competition's.

This way of thinking is vital. Make sure that you have earned the customer's respect. Never think that if you win him over today, you'll cash in big at the end of the month. In the long run, this will lead you into trouble, and shows little respect and even less self-esteem.

Number Six: Gauge Your Dress Code

One day I came into work, looking forward as I always did to seeing my colleagues. My assistant was always in such a good mood, it seemed as though she had swallowed a clown before breakfast. I walked in, and she was already giggling, "Here's an inquiry that just came in, and you will not believe what business they're in. They sell bull semen!"

It was true. They were selling Canadian bull semen to German farmers. I met with their executives, who proved to be dapper, well-dressed, and witty gentlemen, and we agreed on a two-day seminar in a hotel in the Bavarian countryside. So far so good. So Limbeck prepares his attire for the occasion: a suit, a pristine shirt with matching cuff links, custom-made shoes, and a silk tie, rounded off with a handkerchief. He gets into his Porsche 911 company car and hurtles off to Bavaria.

The hotel was in a town of no more than a hundred souls. As I pulled into the parking lot, I saw my first seminar guests—all of them wearing sneakers, jeans, flannel shirts, and jackets with their company logo. All of them dressed very casually, certainly not for business.

I knew that I had lost the second I got out of my car. But what was I supposed to do? I had to get out. No sooner had I gotten out than I saw it written on their faces: This dandy in his wedding suit and with his fancy ride wants to teach us how to sell bull semen? He's never done a hard day's manual work in his life. He doesn't even know the meaning of real life.

This dandy wants to teach us how to sell bull semen?

Although I knew what kind of clientele the salespeople would be dealing with, I had still made the clumsy mistake of dressing like one of their executives and had failed to ask what the dress code actually was. A complete oversight, a novice mistake.

The seminar didn't go any better than it had started. I had failed to earn their respect from the outset. The attendees came and went, left to get refreshments, fiddled with their smartphones—the mood was shot. I tried to salvage what I could by telling them about my youth on a farm and about my uncle the winegrower, but it didn't help. I was the dandy who just wouldn't be taken seriously.

After the coffee break, I turned the tables on them. Offense, as they say, is the best defense. "Gentlemen, I'm getting the feeling that you're behaving like your customers would. Like peasants. That's probably because I didn't prepare myself adequately for the occasion, and I admit that I'm completely overdressed." Then I proceeded to take my suit jacket off, removed my tie and cuff links, and rolled up my sleeves.

This helped, at least for this particular seminar. I had overcome the first hurdle, and they even booked more seminars, but after that things petered out. I

was never able to strike the right tone with my attire, to stay one cut above my audience without going overboard, and the opportunity was lost.

No good sales professional bends over backwards and tries to adapt herself beyond recognition. No good sales professional begs for an assignment. Every good salesperson wants to remain self-sufficient and has to know how to manage money. And your client has to do likewise, if he wants to buy something from you. If you get a raise of $700, put half of it aside, and realize that this is money that you didn't have a minute ago. Don't go overboard the moment you have some money and success. If Limbeck shows up wearing a tailor-made suit, cuff links with his logo, and a handkerchief, it's because it's a trademark that works, not an affectation. Had I worn the same thing at twenty-one years of age, nobody would have taken me seriously. They would have taken me for a poser, and rightly so.

The exhibition of status has to be just right—neither shabby nor ostentatious. A good salesperson is always one notch better dressed than her client. Just one notch. Not two or three leagues. And make sure you address this issue before you make your way to a meeting.

Number Seven: Be There Before the Action Starts

There are many golden rules for a salesperson. We could talk endlessly about each one of them, and I could write a lengthy book about everything a salesperson can and must know. There's one thing in particular, however, that I would like to mention. Although the main focus is on mindset, attitude, and way of thinking and not on skills, methods, techniques, or codes of conduct, there is one rule of conduct that represents a certain mindset: Never be late!

Sure, there are always obstacles: traffic jams, black ice, hurricanes, blizzards, and so on. These are all explanations but not excuses. It's happened to me as well; I've been late too. Twice in twenty years. And on both occasions, the whole day was shot. Not because I didn't have a good reason for being late or because I performed poorly at the seminar. No, because it unnerved me so much that I couldn't forgive myself.

See yourself as a pilot who has to run through her flight route calmly beforehand, then check her aircraft to make sure everything is in order, and finally confer with her cabin crew. When the “go” is given from the air traffic control tower, the pilot must have everything under control and be ready to start.

When you are making a product presentation, you should be at the company at least an hour beforehand. If you have to set up equipment, make sure you are allowed to enter the room well before the presentation begins, because only then can you judge how small or spacious, dim or bright the setting is.

If you’re using a laptop, it should already be booted up and ready to go with whatever program you might be using. Few things are more embarrassing than making your customer wait for you to turn on your computer.

No customer likes to wait
for you to boot up your computer.

This mental checklist that you go over before your presentation—being ready to win, knowing every turn in the track, finding out your customer’s shoe size, dropping all preconceptions, giving and thinking, gauging your dress code, and being there before the action starts—all of this serves to prepare you to be the best sales professional you could possibly be. Nothing should detract from the energy you need to close a deal. Success is not determined three minutes before the sales pitch but three hours before, in our own mental programming.

I was once given a small lucky charm by a shaman. I always have it in my pocket; it is my talisman, my anchor. When I hold it in my hand, I can feel how it puts me in the frame of mind that I need to be in to perform at my best. It helps, but it will never replace the vital groundwork I do long before my first meeting with a new client.



Tall Tales:
The Proper Frame of Mind for Customer Acquisition



As a youngster I was a chubby, red-headed kid with freckles. I wasn't the best-looking boy on the block, and because of this I was often picked on. I wasn't particularly popular either, because I didn't happen to be cool, self-assured, funny, or brainy. In the crowd I hung out with I was the tag-along, the kid who was indulged rather than accepted.

If this was the script for a Hollywood movie, this would be my cue to reveal that I was a prodigious chess player, or a mesmerizing storyteller, or a talented swimmer.

But that wasn't the case. There just wasn't anything that I was particularly good at. My grades were always closer to a D than a C. I was average at sports, even though I went out for a lot of them: basketball, handball, soccer. At least in soccer I was a little better than average, but that was over the moment I injured my knee. I grew up watching my local soccer team whose stadium was near my house. That could have been a great opportunity, but it wasn't to be. However, as a kid I did think that my folks were rich—after all, my father drove a Mercedes. In reality, though, I came from a long-established mining family in Essen. No more, no less.

Are these the makings of a brilliant career? And if so, a career in what? Suffice it to say, I didn't know what to do with myself. The likelihood that I would wind up an electrician on a construction site, following the foreman's orders, was about fifty-fifty.

Nevertheless, I was lucky enough to stumble upon the right people time and time again. My homeroom teacher for instance. With the physical build of a bear, he taught us shop and patiently guided me through school. And then there was my English teacher, who offered me the best tip of my life: “Martin, your English is horrendous. Go to America for a year and do a language course or an exchange program; otherwise it’s never going to get better.”

So I went to my father and told him I wanted to go to America.

“And who’s going to pay for that?” he asked.

OK, so I had to find a way to make some money. I went to visit my grandmother and—looking back—I gave one of the most important sales pitches of my life. She gave me $8,000—to me an astronomical amount at the time—which was how much the entire project was going to cost. But first I had to take an aptitude test for my stay abroad. When the test was over, the examiner said, “Young man, your results are dreadful. How do you expect to survive in America with such atrocious English? You’ve just failed the test.”

So, I was staring at an unequivocal no that was blocking my path. I thought, I’m not going to America. But that’s not so bad, because I’m not in America right now, so what do I have to lose by trying again? It was high time I pitched my sale and closed the deal. My English teacher had inspired me. I just needed the right argument and suddenly hit upon one that included objection handling, cost and benefit assessment, and a closing question all rolled into one: “If my English was good,” I pointed out, “I would have no reason to go, would I?”

I closed the deal and was off to America.

The America Moment

The chubby redhead now found himself with a host family for a year. Every single day I had to come to grips with a language I hadn’t mastered, a long way from home.

But that was precisely the opportunity that allowed me to start from scratch. What else was I there for but to learn? I had no other choice. Learning was now a matter of survival, and suddenly I wasn’t the chubby, freckled tag-along with

the bad grades. I was now the boy who took the initiative, and I quickly noticed that learning and performance have a real effect on the world around me. In my free time I shoveled snow, mowed lawns, painted fences, and earned my first $1,000.

I could hardly believe it: Performance brought immediate results. I found I had an incredible hunger to work hard and was probably making up for lost time. But I realized my performance was better if I was good at something, and the more I learned, the better I became. At the end of the year I had one of the highest-scoring high school diplomas in my class and had put aside some money as well. Great results. *So that's how it works,* I thought to myself, and it wasn't so hard after all. I had fun in the process, and my self-confidence grew.

Why am I telling you this? Because I'm trying to flatter America by saying that it is so great? Because I'm so great? Because shoveling snow makes you rich? Nonsense!

I'm telling you this because every good salesperson needs an "America moment." That is to say, that moment in which you shift from the fear of failure, being embarrassed, being exposed, being rejected, and ending up a laughing stock, to relying on your own volition to learn and perform. Whereas before you were governed by fear, now you govern yourself and your own life. This moment, this America moment, is something you need.

But don't get me wrong; these fears are feelings that are deeply embedded in your personality. You can't simply switch them off. But an America moment can at least set things in motion. My problem was that at the start of my career I was still considerably unsure of myself. The confident front I displayed did not reflect a deeper conviction. In truth, my self-esteem was pretty poor. The loud and at times brash or brazen way that I had was contrived. It was quite effective but sometimes drew resistance and rejection. The more confident the person I was dealing with, the more likely I was to be exposed. A testament to my languishing self-esteem was the fact that I found it very hard to accept no's, rejections, losses, or cancellations. I took them all to heart, and if I had continued in that vein, I would not have lasted very long in the sales business. Those who

take rejection in sales personally will sooner or later end up becoming manic-depressive, befriending Jack Daniel's, or begging their customers for contracts. So I worked at bettering myself, learned from my mistakes, thrived on my successes, and became stronger.

And suddenly you can confront your fear head-on. Imagine you're taking a stroll in the park. From afar you spot a shady character with a shaved head, a bomber jacket, and combat boots. He's holding a leash on the end of which is the grimace of a bad-tempered, black Doberman.

You fear the worst, and you're certain your fears are about to be confirmed, because suddenly the dog breaks loose.

You have three options. One, you run. But I'll bet anything that the beast is faster than you are. The chances of you ending up in the hospital or worse are at about 100 percent. Two, you tighten your legs together and hold your arms close to your body. That way you have at least a fifty-fifty chance of it not biting you. Three, you take the advice of a dog trainer, squat down, and meet the Doberman at eye-level. That way, by the time this killing machine comes to a screeching halt inches before your face, you'll have probably wet your pants, but you might just have the best chance of coming out alive. At least that's according to the dog trainer.

Please don't rely on my advice if this nightmare should ever come to pass; I'm not an animal behaviorist. But you can take home the following lesson from this story: Just as the Doberman can sense your fear, the customer can sense if your interest is heartfelt or contrived. She can also sense if you feel ill at ease in a business meeting and would rather be somewhere else. She notices if you're there only because you need the sale or if you actually enjoy making it.

In any case, the odds are high that you will lose. Face your client on an even footing and remain friendly and open but firm, and your chances for success will be that much greater. Facing someone on an even footing always springs from genuine self-esteem; otherwise the confidence one displays can be distortedly high.

I know a lot of young salespeople who are in the same situation I used to be in. It's also something you can readily observe on television with presenters who display an inordinate amount of confidence. They thrive on undermining other people, at times so savagely that they blatantly target someone's weaknesses until they've crushed them. The audience then roars with laughter out of a perverse kind of pleasure or out of bewilderment at the sheer audacity involved. I can only feel embarrassment for those who treat people like this, because their low self-esteem is plain to see from their body language. It betrays them. Those who feel the need to flaunt their confidence by preying on those who are less self-assured are pathetic and should ask themselves where this need comes from.

One of these media buffoons was once speaking at a kick-off event in a firm that was on my client list. In the front row sat one of my customers. You could say she was robustly built, on top of which she was expecting her first child. He seemed to think this made her the perfect target. First he made jokes about her figure, although he knew she was pregnant. Is that something you do if you respect people? And then, spurred on by a few laughs, he continued. Bending over to her and reading the Arabic family name on her name tag he said, "Well, you seem to be harboring another Al Qaeda fighter in there." A silence fell over the room. On television he wouldn't have noticed a reaction like this one, but in this room he certainly did. He had just lost the entire audience. Trying to salvage himself with a little irony he said, "Lucky for me I was paid before I gave this speech." I think this last comment revealed what he was really thinking.

These types of people are the distorted reflection of someone with low self-esteem and high confidence. As I mentioned before, I had similar issues. However, I never lacked respect for other people, and for that I thank the heavens and my parents. Those who do not respect others do not respect themselves either. And the following applies to all of us: What we say about others speaks volumes about us.

Monopoly for Adults

Increased self-esteem helps combat fear. Without fear you are ready to confront your adversary. And when you're successful against your adversary, your self-esteem grows even more. Every salesperson can gather positive momentum as soon as she stops hiding behind a false front of confidence. That's when selling becomes fun. And what does a top salesperson enjoy most of all? Customer acquisition.

I will never forget the day following my four-week sales training at the photocopier firm. I embarked on cold visits. Without a prior appointment and without established contacts, I drove straight to the closest industrial area in the region. I parked my Suzuki with the racing stripe and the halogen headlights and sat in the car, thinking. Which company should I approach first? There were beads of sweat on my forehead. I got out of the car, my knees weak, and wedged my sleek black sales folder under my arm.

I couldn't decide. Was it better to start with the smaller company? No, because then I would find myself face-to-face with the boss right away. And he might not know whether his firm needed a photocopier or not and would say no right off the bat. So, the bigger firm? But that would mean having to get past the reception. I'd be sent packing before I even got to speak to someone in charge.

Twenty minutes, five cigarettes, and a sweat-drenched shirt later, I said, "Oh well, what does it matter, just hit all of them." I shut my eyes and took the plunge.

And then I noticed something odd: It wasn't that painful. The very first customer exclaimed, "Well, finally another one of you guys comes to visit us. It's been a while!"

To my surprise I realized it wasn't that painful.

Nowadays, I see customer acquisition as a game, a game in which you can only win. Like Monopoly. Sometimes you get the four railroads and you win for sure; other times you get Baltic and Mediterranean avenues, in which case you can forget it. But even then you're having fun. Besides, when it does go badly you know that the dice will be thrown again and you'll pass "Go" once more.

What I have learned from this is that rejection doesn't affect me personally. My sales manager taught me a secret: We salespeople make relatively good money on average, and if you've just been thrown out by a receptionist, realize that what he earns in a month you'll make by Thursday. Then you can happily march into the next client's offices without getting irritated and without letting your performance suffer just because you got another no. Cold acquisition is a contact sport. The more contacts you have, the more sales you make. The formula is that simple. I simply pass "Go" and start over.

Today I would say that 50 percent of your income is compensation for injury and the other 50 percent is for the service you provide. That's the way it is in our line of work; selling is a matter of how much rejection you can take and still manage to thrive.

Years ago I was rejected by the German Dietary Association, ironically by a rather stout woman who was the director's personal assistant. Her figure posed no problems, but her unfriendly behavior did. As I was making my way out of the building, I saw that her fax and photocopier were made by a competitor and were quite dated. I thought, This woman urgently needs a new fax machine. The fact that I could render a meaningful service, and one that her employer would ultimately regard as a wise investment, emboldened me and allowed me to see beyond her gruff manner. I persisted. On one of my subsequent visits, I witnessed how her colleagues cheerfully gathered to eat some cake one afternoon. A dietary association. Eating cake. It made sense, really, and I should have made the connection sooner. And so, a couple of days later I passed by a bakery, picked up a chocolate cake, and showed up at the their offices in the early afternoon, at the appropriate time, inviting all of the ladies to enjoy the cake. I know it doesn't sound very subtle, but it worked.

I'll tell you, I really had a pleasant time there, so much so that any time I had a bad day, I would make a quick stop at the baker's and enjoy some cake with the staff, which never failed to lift my spirits.

On another occasion during my cold visits I was at a company where I failed to get past the reception and therefore could not meet with the CEO. However, I caught a glimpse of the kitchenette by chance and saw the competition's fax and photocopier installed there.

So I called the firm and said, "Mr. Schmitz, six months ago you mentioned that your copiers and faxes would reach the end of their depreciation period around this time of the year and that I should get in touch with you then, so that's why I called."

To my surprise he immediately made an appointment, and I sold him three photocopiers and two fax machines. Afterward, as usual I asked him for the three reasons why he opted for our product.

His answer: "There was really only one reason, Mr. Limbeck. I liked your audacity. I had seen right through you from the start, with your trumped-up story of me asking you to call back in six months, the depreciation of the copier, and whatnot. You don't think I'm stupid, do you? But I thought to myself, whoever is this tenacious will also put in the effort when fixing any problems with the machines."

Granted, it was presumptuous of me, but this is part of the game: You're allowed to be a little more presumptuous and brazen than usual, because it works. And that applies just as well to cold calling.

Dial M for Murder?

The phone receiver feels as though it weighs sixty pounds. You can hardly hold it in your hand, lift it up, and bring it to your ear. Dialing isn't any easier. Your hand suddenly doubles in weight. Do I really have to do this? Cold calling? What if the wrong person answers? What if they lead me on? What if I'm not quick-witted enough? What if I can't think of anything? What if they hang up on me, just like that? I can't do it. This is not for me.

Does any of this sound familiar? It does to me. This was Martin Limbeck twenty years ago.

Phoning was a nightmare to me. Today I can do it and exceptionally well, I might add. Some colleagues have even said that there are only three people in all of Germany that have something worthwhile to say about cold calling, and I'm one of them. This is something I'm proud to hear. But I also know that this only comes with daily practice. That's why everybody can learn it. You just have to do it. I'm telling you now that it is important for every good salesperson to know how to do it, because it is precisely here, on the telephone, where one can separate the wheat from the chaff. The sales professional who excels at the negotiating table is still far from doing so on the phone. In fact, the contrary holds: Whoever is good on the phone is sure to be strong at the table.

Precisely here, on the telephone, is where the wheat is separated from the chaff.

Those with accomplished telephoning skills are the cream of the crop, the elite. They are the strongest and most reliable salespeople. On the phone, you have to be able to size up your customer by her selection of words, her tone, and her voice. You do not have the luxury of seeing her body language or her facial expression, but the best salespeople can *hear* them. Adding to all this is the fact that the inflections of the voice itself over the phone are transmitted to a very limited degree.

Another challenge is that in cold calling, there is no 100 percent success rate. It is usually much lower. The sales professional will be confronted with a lot more rejections than successes.

What is more, the established tools of the trade fall away: Nobody can see your confident walk, your stylish suit, your spotless shoes, your sleek fountain

pen, your classy watch. Your self-confidence is suddenly rendered invisible. Instead, your customer must hear it. Theatricals will not help you here. Self-assurance in the voice can only spring from genuine self-esteem.

What is true of cold visits applies even more to cold calling—namely, it's a game. One of the most notorious challenges when cold calling is getting past the personal assistant, a "human firewall" that almost every decision-maker has placed in your path. How do you get the executive on the phone? Now that is a treat!

"Hello, my name is Limbeck, and I'm from Miller Wallpaper. May I please speak with the manager?"

Now, how far do you think you're going to get with an approach like that one? Exactly—nowhere.

The first sentence you utter is decisive. When I'm introducing myself, I have to make sure the client catches my name, and I'm going to do it in a way that doesn't come across as submissive. First names make a stronger impact than last names. They penetrate more deeply into the listener's awareness. First names are more personable. That means a person whose first name I've consciously registered is one whom I can less easily dismiss.

First names are more effective than last names.

"Hi. This is Martin Limbeck." Brief pause. "*The* Martin Limbeck."

Brief pause.

"Say, is Frank . . ." Short pause. "Is Frank Martinez around?"

If you were an assistant, what would you think? "Not another annoying sales freak"? Or would you think, "That's probably the boss's golf buddy." As you know, thoughts are free, so however you interpret what I've said is your business and not my responsibility.

Notice that I said, “Is Frank Martinez *around?*” I intentionally did not ask, “Is he available?” Someone who inquires if a person is available is implying that he wants something. And wanting something invariably triggers resistance in the assistant.

Someone who inquires if a person is available is implying that he wants something.

The assistant says, “Mr. Martinez is out for a board meeting.”

I say, “OK, then I’ll just leave a message on his voice mail.”

“Certainly,” she replies.

“My assistant gave me the following cell phone number. It’s 917-111-2233. Is that up to date?”

Of course I’ve just made up a number on the spot, and seven times out of ten I’ll get the boss’s cell phone number this way. In the other three cases, I may get someone with a sense of humor or someone with a lack of interest who replies with, “Absolutely, you’ve got the right number!” Then I’ve got no choice but to go back to square one. But seven out of ten times it works.

People who are friendly and open but firm instantly exude both authority and trustworthiness. Losers grovel for appointments; winners claim them as theirs, even if it means pushing the envelope a little more than they’re used to in order to reach their goal. Your goal is to close the deal. The quickest and most effective way to close the deal is to start as far up as possible in the firm’s decision-making hierarchy. It isn’t the receptionist or personal assistant who signs your contract; it’s the decision-maker, and that’s the person you have to talk to, even if that means omitting a little of the truth or embellishing it. Just don’t lie.



Valuable(s):
Standing Behind Your Price and Performance



Should you ever lower your price?

No.

OK, does that mean that we can move on to the next chapter then?

Well, did that answer satisfy you? If it did, then I may have done my job, but you probably wouldn't feel that you were being taken seriously, because the real world doesn't work that way. You may be saying to yourself, "OK, you're saying I should never lower my price and risk losing my customer? That's your advice? That sounds more like dogma than advice."

So let's try this again.

Should you ever lower your price?

In principle, no. However! A price negotiation is more than a numbers game. In terms of sheer numbers, I can say that my fee as a speaker and a trainer is non-negotiable. I don't budge from it. No discounts. Why? Because I'm worth the money. And not only that. I'm worth the client's money. My fee is what it is and will remain that way. Case closed.

But beyond the numbers there are many factors to take into account. I'm not giving you advice nor making any suggestions, but I am making you an offer to show you how important you are to me: You will get this book with a complimentary package of the best tips for price negotiation, even though this book is strictly speaking not a guidebook and doesn't strive to be. This chapter is

therefore a supplementary one, because I realize that simply responding no to the question of price reduction is simplistic.

What Is the Cost of Paying Less?

Recently I considered buying myself a quad bike. I called a dealership with the intention of getting a general idea of the cost. The man on the phone said, “The list price is $8,799, but if you pay cash I could bring it down a little.”

Essentially, what the gentleman was saying was this: My price is flexible. There’s always room for negotiation. I’m practically putty in your hands. Press me, squeeze me, wear me down enough, and you’ll see how low I’ll go.

Whoever names their price and a discount on that price in the same breath is pulling the rug out from beneath their own feet. They’re signaling that they desperately need the sale. They’re waving the white flag before the first shot has even been fired and succumbing to the power of the customer.

In the case of the quad bike, that’s exactly how it proceeded. A few minutes into the conversation I had already brought him down to under $8,000. It was so easy that it was no longer even fun for me, and I ended up asking him if he would kindly recommend one of his competitors. Because the fact is, a victory that looks too easy can be a turn-off.

People, this is no way to do business—at least not effective business that is satisfying for both parties. The bottom line is, do not offer a discount! The customer needs to ask for one himself; that’s the way it works. The customer is otherwise left with a dubious feeling. Take an advertisement for any brand of chocolate as an example: “Get 20 percent extra fudge for the same price!” Any consumer with a sweet tooth will be thinking, “Hmm, either they’ve been asking too much for their chocolate up until now, or they’ve changed the recipe and the ingredients are only worth 80 percent of what they used to be worth.”

The customer in this situation is left with a sense of uncertainty. Uncertainty then breeds doubt, and doubt is counterproductive in sales. A salesperson who already offers the possibility of a discount in her sales pitch is only harming herself. She is triggering a downward spiral that can only get worse, and this will

do harm to everyone involved. The salesperson is undermining her own credibility. She undermines the trust in her own product and weakens the long-term value of her brand.

Instead, look at the issue the opposite way. A client who enters into a price negotiation has in principle already made his purchase, because the moment he mentions the price, he is already indicating that he wants the product. The rest is merely a matter of numbers. And by “merely” I don’t mean that the salesperson necessarily has to accept the lowest price but that the client will normally accept the price that the salesperson stands behind, if she does it well enough. It’s not the highest, or lowest, or the most reasonable price, but the most convincing one —namely, the one that you as a salesperson are most convinced of.

Besides, price is something you can only negotiate if your client is truly convinced by you, your product, your service, or all three put together. Otherwise you’re nothing more than a babbling discount sign.

If a customer wants a discount, this means that he wants something from the salesperson. He wants an additional service; he is saying, Yes, I want to buy from you, provided that we can agree on this additional service, namely that you lower your price. How much will this cost me?

You say, OK, you’d like a little something extra, so let’s talk! Here you must bear in mind that the fundamental principle of economics holds in this situation as well, namely the principle of trade. Quid pro quo. No service without compensation. For example, a discount in exchange for payment in advance, for more orders, for lower investment of time and effort. A good sales professional does business but not for free; she holds firm on the price but is generous with minor concessions. That is how a top salesperson thinks and acts.

Even so, many firms arm their sales team with one of two main strategic negotiation policies. The first is don’t lose a deal over price. In other words, it is better to close a bad deal than no deal. The second policy involves the company giving the salesperson a fixed margin of discount beforehand.

Both options are equally bad. Because what happens then? The salesperson automatically goes the way of least resistance. The initial price quote collapses

because she panics as soon as the client begins to utter the words “price” or “discount.” The moment he says, “Listen, ma’am, as far as the price is concerned we need to . . .,” she instantly caves, saying, “Absolutely! Don’t say another word! Of course I’ll give you the minimum price, the maximum discount! Why shouldn’t I hit rock bottom to close a deal?”

The reason this happens is that many salespeople believe in themselves and in their company but not in their product. Or they believe in their product and themselves but not in their company. Or they believe in their company and their product but not in themselves. Some don’t believe in any of them and still attempt to sell.

This is not good. If you constantly think in one of these three ways, then sooner or later there is only one thing left for you to do: Make a decision. Seek out a different circus for your act, and your company will find another clown. Anything else will leave you unsuccessful, unhappy, and bitter.

The most important feeling to bring to a price negotiation is self-respect. The salesperson has to be worth the price in her own right. Determine the price below which you would never sell your product. In other words, which price is beneath you? Then keep that figure firmly in your mind. Your self-respect is your beacon.

The most important feeling to bring to a price negotiation is self-respect.

How Much Will Michael Pay?

It’s Michael’s birthday. He’s turning forty and wants to celebrate with his friends. Naturally, he needs something special to mark the occasion, and Michael will settle for nothing but the best: Champagne is the order of the day. So he drives to his local liquor store and buys twenty bottles of champagne at $22 a

bottle or $440 total. It's a successful party, Michael's friends enjoy the fact that there's some quality wine, and Michael is happy when his guests are happy.

A week later Michael goes skiing in St. Anton am Arlberg, the illustrious ski resort in Austria, with two of his friends. Mornings and afternoons they ride the slopes, and at the end of the day they're off to the Mooserwirt ski lodge for some après-ski. The venue advertises on the Internet as "Possibly the worst ski lodge in St. Anton." The menu reads: "Damned fine, and damned expensive." As it turns out, the Mooserwirt can afford to be blithe and self-assured; its success speaks for itself. The place has been described by *Playboy* as "the mother of all ski lodges." This venue boasts the highest beer sales per square foot in all of Europe, including the Oktoberfest. Twenty-five miles of plumbing have been installed to streamline the flow of beer to customers. The peak hours of the Mooserwirt are from 3:30 to 8 p.m., no earlier and no later, after which they will promptly throw you out. The lodge is always packed. As much as you're able to drink, falling over isn't even an option.

Michael and his friends are standing at the bar and chatting with three Dutch girls. Michael wants to make a good impression, so he orders some champagne. As it gets dark, Michael and his friends call it a night and make their way home. Michael's bill for the evening: $600 for three bottles of champagne. More than the twenty bottles he bought from his local liquor store for his birthday party. Pretty steep.

Is Michael angry about it? On the contrary, he's happy, because he had a great time and got a phone number from Anna, the pretty Dutch tourist, to boot.

Is Michael angry? On the contrary!

Two years later, Michael is married. To whom? Anna, of course. They're skiing at St. Anton and celebrating the time they first met at the Mooserwirt.

At the resort there is an elegant boutique, carrying the finest brands: Gucci, Prada, Dior, Versace. As the couple enters the shop, the owner leads Michael to a sofa in the middle of the room and hands him first an espresso and later a sparkling wine. Meanwhile, a saleswoman whisks Anna off to a changing room. Anna comes back after a while and is standing before Michael in a designer outfit that looks like it costs $50 per square inch. The boutique owner now asks, "So, what does the gentleman think of his wife in this beautiful dress?"

What would you do if you were in Michael's shoes? You probably wouldn't say, "That would look great for Halloween." Even a frugal man like Michael does what most people would do, namely be happy for their spouse and pay up.

Come summer, Anna and Michael are in Turkey. In the Aldiana Club hotel there is a jewelry store that is always teeming with tourists. The three Turkish gentlemen running the establishment are affable, charming, and attentive. And what's more, they're good salespeople. Customers are instantly offered tea, and their children are given soft drinks. The three young owners play perfectly off each other, and when a female customer seems to have her heart set on a particular piece, they are poised with the clinching remark: "My dear lady, you know there are only three vital questions when it comes to jewelry: One, do I like it? Two, do I want it? And three, should I treat myself to it?"

Trust me, every female tourist staying at this hotel sooner or later purchases something from that shop. No exceptions. And it is never a matter of price.

Therefore, what can we learn from Michael? The situation determines the price.

Even though we don't wish to believe it, this also applies to investment goods and services. Good salespeople have always known that expensive and valuable things are easier to sell than cheap ones.

If, then, we assume that the situation determines the price, what is the next logical step for the sales professional? Don't change the price; change the situation.

By this I mean that I have to create a pleasant, easy-going, convivial atmosphere for the client. Fresh espresso is what is needed, not the lukewarm brown dishwater from the drip brewer, freshly squeezed orange juice instead of the flavorless store-bought variety, cookies from a pastry shop and not from an economy-sized cardboard box. The fresh flowers on the negotiating table are worth their $40, all the more when the client ends up buying
your product.

Freshly ground espresso is what's required, not brown dishwater from the drip brewer.

The situation determines the price.

The price and the service have to be felt as inseparable from the situation. They have to be visible; they have to be tasted. The salesperson who is looking to sell a construction loan of more than $250,000 cannot show up in scuffed shoes or hand the client a cheap plastic pen to sign the contract—not even if the pen bears the company's logo. You wouldn't want the surgeon removing your appendix to be using a pair of Fisher-Price scissors,
would you?

The fact that a salesperson's appearance needs to be beyond reproach is self-evident. A suit needs not only to be worn but more importantly, it needs to be filled out. Leave the loud and tacky jewelry at home. Men should remove their earrings and piercings, because nobody wants to be advised by a pirate. That is, unless your client owns a tattoo studio or a
jewelry shop.

Pay close attention to detail. When wearing a suit, always wear dress socks. Why? Because when you sit down and cross your legs, your pants will begin to ride up. And what will your client see if you're wearing short socks? A spotless

pair of leather shoes, followed by a section of dark socks, followed by a portion of a man's hairy leg.

The suit and the shoes are saying to the customer "I know what it takes." The man's hairy leg is saying "But I don't really have what it takes."

The man's hairy leg is saying
"I don't have what it takes."

To summarize, if you wear a suit, wear dress socks. You're a professional salesperson, not an altar boy. And when you have the situation covered to every last detail, then you'll be armed with a lot more than just your price.

Thinking on Your Feet

"That's too expensive!"

OK, now you've reached that point. In spite of your self-respect and the right attitude toward your product, your company, and your price, and in spite of the attention to detail and your control over the situation, the client throws a monkey wrench into the works: Too expensive! Is the price negotiable? Can you go any lower? And so forth. So what now?

To this day, the word preached in many seminars is the rebuttal of the salesperson: "Too expensive? Compared to what?"

"Compared to other offers."

"To which offers?"

"To companies A, B, C, and D."

"Yes, but you see, we're giving you better service and better extras."

Whereupon the client counters with her killer argument, "C'mon, you know the offers are practically all the same."

What do you do now? Anything you say from this point onward will be nothing more than a justification. And that's how the downward spiral begins.

The moment you're on the defensive, you can only play catch-up, because you've relinquished control of the game. The salesperson, however, must always control the game; that is his role. Otherwise he is not a salesperson but a mere distributor! So forget this kind of price negotiation. With this "expensive-compared-to-what" tactic, you're wasting your breath.

Your only other option is to make clear to your client that you still stand behind your price. Don't even try contradicting the "too expensive" argument. You *are* expensive and that's a good thing. Instead, when the client says, "Limbeck, that's too pricey for me," that's when Limbeck agrees with the client and says, "You're right, it is pricey. It's pricey and high-value. High-value because . . ." and elaborates on the benefits of his product or service for the client.

There are two important things here that make it work. First, the repetition of "high-value." Second, the discussion of the benefits for the client will only be effective if you've done the prior work on the needs assessment of the client, her motives, wishes, hopes, and demands. Otherwise it will
fall flat.

Bear in mind that this principle is known to work well in many service sectors. From the shoemaker to the lawyer, if you want an expert, you're going to have to pay for it. Would you haggle with the lawyer whom you hired to get your driver's license back? Would you let yourself be operated on by a heart surgeon just because she charges less? Would you buy your pacemaker on the Internet? Have you ever bargained over the price at your dentist's office? Or at your hairdresser's? Or for an airplane ticket? Or a ticket to any event, for that matter?

From the shoemaker to the lawyer, if you want an expert, you're going to have to pay for it.

Yes, the ceramic fillings are expensive, but they're a lot more durable than synthetic fillings and certainly healthier. A good haircut is pricey, but at least you won't look like David Hasselhoff on "Knight Rider." Granted, the trip to Fiji costs a great deal, but you'll be in a different world compared to Las Vegas, for instance. True, the ticket for the fiftieth anniversary tour of the Rolling Stones cost more than $600 on average, but I'm sure it was a unique experience to see legends the likes of Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, and crew live on stage. You get my point.

A hardy ego and the unwavering conviction that you are offering the right product is half the battle. The other half is thinking on your feet. The rebuttal to the price objection should come instantly. Thinking on your feet means intelligence at high speed.

Whoever is quick to point out that they are simply not quick thinkers by nature has misunderstood the point. There is no "speed gene" and no "speed hormone." It doesn't have to run in your family; you don't have to hail from specific regions of the globe, be born under a certain phase of the moon, have a special upbringing, or eat special foods to think quickly. Being quick-witted simply means being well-prepared.

You know how quick thinking works? You just learn twenty stock phrases by heart, verbatim, as you would learn your multiplication tables. When the client says, "Too expensive," you draw on one of those twenty stock phrases, the first one that comes to mind. You say it instantly, without hesitation. And you say it swiftly but clearly, firmly, and resoundingly. And that should suffice.

You can compile your own list of twenty stock phrases, or you can draw on some of the following:

- "The other offers are cheaper—and they deserve to be."
- "Discounts are the first signal of bankruptcy—are you sure you want to go down that road?"
- "Quality comes at a price, and that price includes me."

- “If you pay 100 percent, you get a 100 percent. If you pay 90 percent, that’s what you get.”
- “If competence is too pricey for you, then wait until you try incompetence.”
- “Cheap dreams lead to rude awakenings.”
- “What would you advise your own salespeople to do if they were constantly under pricing pressure?”
- “I can assure you, nobody is paying less than you are today.”
- “Thrift is good, but quality is better.”
- “Lowballing is not a sport I play.”
- “You’re also buying our blood, sweat, and tears.”
- “Go with the cheaper option, and things will really get expensive.”
- “The price is a reflection of our experience.”
- “How motivated would you be working for $10?”
- “If you want to haggle, try the flea market.”
- “This is not a yard sale.”
- “Cutting the price means cutting the quality, and that is not an option for us.”
- “The grass is always cheaper on the other side.”
- “Discounts don’t fit in our budget.”
- “If I give you a discount, you may as well give me a donation receipt.”
- “It would have been cheaper without this . . . and that . . .”

Take your pick, but be careful: Not every phrase is appropriate for every customer or every sale. And they all have to be delivered with a smile and a slight twinkle in the eye. Try them out for yourself.

In one of my seminars a participant proved to be very successful in the following situation. The salesperson is negotiating with a buyer, and suddenly the general manager walks through the door, introduces himself, and sits down to work at a computer at the back of the room. Throughout the negotiation, the general manager keeps getting involved in the discussion. The salesperson says,

“You seem to be in the mood to negotiate today; would you care to join us?” In the end, the salesperson ended up clinching the best deal ever made with this particular customer, a tenfold volume increase.

Or try telling a story, using one that might suit the customer. If, for example, the person you’re dealing with is as well-dressed as you are, try the following scenario.

“You know, comparisons are never really appropriate, but see what you think of this: Imagine you’re going to the best men’s clothing store in town on a Saturday morning, to buy a dark blue suit. The sales clerk greets you warmly. You state your request, and the clerk shows you two different suits; one of them is costly, the other cheap. At first glance, both of them look the same. You try the cheaper one on first, and as you’re doing so, you feel a static shock from the carpeted floor. The fabric of the suit is evidently not as high in quality as it initially appeared. So you try the second one on. It fits like a glove. The sales clerk then tells you that the hemming of the pants is included in the price of the more expensive suit. You see, this is how it works almost everywhere. You can never tell what a product really has in store for you at first blush. You wouldn’t want the seller to surreptitiously cash in on the lost profits from the first order when it comes to the subsequent order, would you? We both know that the principles of economics don’t allow great service for little investment.”

Become verbally convincing. Just give it a try. Learn different techniques and apply them, because the client will be more willing to take action if you’re worth the investment. Esteem goes both ways.

Become verbally convincing. Just give it a try.

Another approach is “pencil selling.” With this method you can convince the client by spelling out on a blank sheet of paper exactly how she will benefit from

an investment with you. For this there are only a few ground rules. You start by asking the client for their figures. Normally, the figures you present a client can easily be dismissed. However, the figures that she gives you are ironclad. Whenever possible, let the client tally up the figures for herself.

Back when I was selling photocopiers, I was also interested in closing a service agreement. The advantage for me was clear: First, it meant a larger deal. Second, nobody buys from the competition as long as a service agreement is in force. However, some clients saw declining the service contract as an opportunity to save some money.

It wasn't difficult to show the customer that this wasn't the smartest thing to do. The customer makes five thousand copies per month. That's sixty thousand copies per year. Based on experience, the company could assume that every year brought an increase of 10 percent in copies made. That means sixty-six thousand copies in the second year, 72,600 in the third, and so on, until the end of the depreciation period of five years. It was in the interest of the customer, therefore, that the copier ran smoothly from the first day to the last. If one toner cartridge lasted for five thousand copies, then each copy costs three cents, which makes $1,800 per year for sixty
thousand copies.

I proceeded to make the actual calculation. If something were to go wrong, say the toner cartridge made only four thousand copies, or some Wite-Out fluid got on the glass and nobody noticed, and a black mark found its way onto hundreds of sheets of paper, the service technician would have to be called. Without a service contract, this would cost additional money every time something went wrong, for travel expenses, labor, materials used, replacement parts, and so on.

Travel expenses, labor, materials used, and replacement parts.

When I compared the cost of calling the technician with the cost of the service contract, there was never more than a 10 percent difference. The result was either 10 percent above or 10 percent below.

At the end of my pencil selling, the argument was the following: “In one year we might have to cover the 10 percent; in the next year you might have to cover them. However, with this service contract you have the option of calling the technician every week if you wish, even for a bit of Wite-Out. In other words, you are purchasing security, and compared with the option without a service contract you are, on average, not investing a penny more.” Then you nod, while asking your client, “Would you agree that this is an offer in which all parties stand to gain?” Keep in mind that nodding is subliminally contagious, like a bobble-head doll.

Another tip: When articulating the price, always use diminutives: “The quad bike is going for eight,” or “The service contract is twelve.” If, on the other hand, you are pointing out what the customer stands to gain, use full numbers: “At the end of the day you’ve saved yourself $434.”

We are not dealing with witchcraft but craftsmanship. Just as the craftsman is required to master his tools, so the “rhetorical” craftsman needs to practice until every phrase is in the right place. Until every argument comes off smoothly and without a hitch, until every objection is countered and every critique is neutralized. Just like the craftsman, the salesperson begins as an apprentice and proceeds to learn, practice, and experiment. Then she becomes an assistant and continues to learn, practice, and experiment until finally she is made a master and carries on learning, practicing, and experimenting. That is the inner drive that sets a top salesperson apart from the rest.

Memos Are Masterpieces

“Dear Sir or Madam,

We are offering you the following item:

1 Writing Desk, Catalog No. 43578743/ByK 3-Senator/Beech

Price: $2,999.99

We thank you for your interest and look forward to receiving your order."

It takes time to master a craft. At least that's what I think when I read a proposal like the one above. By the time you've mastered your discipline, you will have sent stacks of written price quotes to the customers. Here, too, there are things to consider.

Imagine for a moment that you are a customer and receive a proposal from a salesperson by email that reads:

> "Dear Mr. Client, I fondly recall our conversation on September 13 . . . yada yada . . . we hereby offer you . . . yada yada . . . This offer is nonbinding and based on our general terms and conditions . . . yada yada . . . We hope to have made an offer suitable to your needs . . . yada yada . . . and we look forward to . . . yada yada . . ."

There is nothing wrong with using boilerplates. They are an important component in how you frame your proposal. But this insipid, soulless drivel is as personal as the copious amounts of junk mail that are looking to sell you potency pills and diet plans. Your customer deserves something unique. He should feel that the proposal is specifically intended for him and not a thousand others. The proposal should reflect not you but him. It's not your proposal but his.

I'll go a step further. Even if my clients say they want an emailed proposal, I will still send them something by regular mail. I want to treat them to the real pleasure of receiving a bona fide package. In the package they will find my book, my DVD, and if possible a small token of appreciation suited to that specific client.

My proposal offers the client a palpable pleasure.

Of course they will also receive an email but certainly not a mass notice with a generic memo. This lax and shoddy form of communication will be no more

effective than if you had cut out letters from a newspaper, glued them together on a sheet of paper, made a photocopy, and sent it off by regular mail. The customer might just be startled enough to think that you've kidnapped her dog and were planning on blackmailing her. An email also has a form that you would do well to adhere to: The email itself should contain the cover letter; and the attachment should be a PDF document bearing your company logo, just as if it were elegantly printed stationery with
a letterhead.

I'm partial to displaying prices with two decimal places. Numbers without decimals give the impression of having been rounded up or down. And let's be honest: Every customer assumes the salesperson rounds up, right?

That's why prices with decimals give a more conscientious impression. They imply that the sales professional has made an effort to calculate the most favorable price for the customer. And I'm not talking about the typical discount-store prices, such as: "Your lease rate is $799.99." A much better option would be, "Your lease rate will be in the amount of $701.23 per month."

Just as in a letter, a PDF file should include a cover sheet stating the name of the proposal's recipient and perhaps also their firm's logo. The text of the proposal should be clearly laid out, coherent, and well-structured. Bear in mind that your proposal is a recommendation, not a suggestion.

The price should be folded into the description of the benefits like the meat in a sandwich:

> "You will receive a new writing desk, with two drawers, as requested, a hanging file folder, and two cable connectors, for $2,942.11. Of course, this will include the adjustable legs, designed for ergonomic sitting positions, and the power strip attachment."

So, in the end there were an additional ten tips for you. Are you sold?



N.O.:
NO Is Short for Next Opportunity



No. I really don't have time for you. No, thank you, I'm not interested. No. I have no need for it at the present time. No. I deal with a competitor of yours and am quite satisfied. No. Your product is simply too expensive. No.

No. No. And once again: No.

How many no's can a salesperson take? A *no* is a rejection, and nobody takes kindly to being rejected. Hearing a *no* is not a nice feeling, and there's no use sugarcoating it. It's just not pleasant. You're a sales professional, and you'd be hard put to find a profession in which you will have to deal with as many rejections as you will in this one. Treasury secretary might be another one. The question is, have you given this some real thought?

This relentless barrage of no's is something that a certain company knew only too well. In the 1970s, Airbus had launched an entirely new product, a product whose market had long been divided up by the big players of the industry. Airbus had developed the A300, an airliner for medium-haul flights, with a wide fuselage, two seating rows, two engines, and a capacity of 266 passengers. At the time almost the entire world was purchasing its aircraft in the US from Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, or Lockheed. Here were these European newcomers looking to break into the American market with their medium-haul, wide-body airliner with only two engines.

Rejections practically hailed from the skies. Not a single American airline wanted to risk buying a foreign-made aircraft that looked too big and moreover

was a completely new model. There was simply no interest nor any demand for it. And besides, they were already committed to the competitor. All of which equated to a resounding no.

Nevertheless, the Europeans believed in their product. They were convinced that it was quieter, more efficient, cheaper, more modern, and simply better than those on the market. From an initial rejection was born a new challenge: How do we break into the market? And from the challenge, in turn, there came new impetus.

This impetus was provided by the then Airbus CEO Bernard Lathière. He had already negotiated with Frank Borman, commander of the Apollo 8 mission and CEO of America's second-largest airline, Eastern Air Lines. In matters of aviation, there were few people better placed than Borman, and he had his share of doubts about what the people at Airbus
were promising.

According to legend, one day in December of 1977, Lathière led Borman into the production hall of Airbus. On the way there, Lathière made Borman an unbeatable offer: He could fly four A300s for six months at a leasing rate of one dollar. If Borman was not satisfied by their performance, then Airbus would take back the aircraft without charge. Borman's risk, therefore, was in the amount of a single dollar. Nobody in the aviation industry had ever made such an outrageous offer before. Borman thought he hadn't heard right. But suddenly, the former astronaut stood in an Airbus hangar and could hardly believe his eyes. Before him stood a brand-new A300—already decked out in the Eastern Air Lines company colors.

"You can take it with you; it's ready to go," Lathière is believed to have said.

You can take it with you; it's ready to go.

From that moment on, Airbus was in business. And the product lived up to its expectations. In the spring of 1978, even before the contract ran out, Borman placed an order for twenty-three additional A300s. That was the breakthrough. The deal had worked out for all parties involved. Borman had saved money and now had jets three times as efficient as the rest. For Airbus, the Eastern deal was the start of a success story in the aviation market.

So, what does a *no* really mean? I cannot say it often enough and never tire of making the following point: NO is short for Next Opportunity.

Your customer has earned your continued efforts to find the right solution for her. A rejection does not mean that you have lost your customer but simply that you have to redouble your efforts. That you have to think differently. It is of little use, and even counterproductive, to repeatedly approach the customer from an angle to which they have become immune. To run your head against a brick wall is destructive—the wall might give but so might your head. A good sales professional doesn't require brute force but does require astute and polite perseverance and imagination. Sometimes four tries are necessary. Or five, or six, over the course of days, weeks, or months.

Sticking with something, having perseverance, is hard work. Every good salesperson knows that a *no* is as much a part of their life as taking a shower or brushing their teeth. Every good salesperson also knows that the clients who do business with him do so because he is who he is and that the same reason applies to those who don't do business with him. You can't please all clients, no matter how much you would like to and no matter how good you are. Learn to live with it!

At times, you as a salesperson also have to say no to your client, and we all know that for a salesperson, saying no is even harder than hearing it.

Get Out of the Rut

Finally it's Monday again. 8:30. The first client meeting of the week. The client begins harping on the price. Both the objection handling and the price discussion fall on deaf ears. In short, the week isn't starting off very well. It's no use. I'm

forced to give the client a discount. This means extending the term of the contract and thus accepting a lower price.

It's just before noon, and I walk into my next client meeting out of sorts. Hopefully this meeting goes better than the one this morning. But no, this client too has nothing but the price on her mind. Once again, I'm forced to adapt. Now it's 2:45 in the afternoon, and you could say that I'm fast approaching a foul mood. The third time's obviously not a charm, because my next customer is insisting on a discount, too: "We have cheaper offers. If you can't beat them, then we'll have to part ways."

On my way to the next meeting I'm wondering if this is the beginning of a losing streak. I've been lambasted by three customers in a row on a Monday, and I'm fed up. It's 5:15, and I'm in front of my fourth customer's office. The door opens. The client already looks disgruntled. This is too much to take on Monday, and I say, "Don't say a word. I can see it in your face. You can have your discount for all I care."

That evening I'm lying on my couch and pull the blanket over my head. The TV is annoying me. So is the radio. And so is the beer. In fact, everything is annoying me. The world is rotten, and so am I.

It's Tuesday morning, 8:30. Hopefully things go better today. My first customer looks more amenable. He understands the mutual benefit of our deal. And the best thing about it: He accepts my price, if a little reluctantly.

Finally, things are looking up. Then the second client asks for a discount. I'm thinking: If I did it this morning, I can do it again now. And, as it turns out, I can. I manage to convince the second client to buy at full price. Now I'm on a roll. The third client falls in line, and a half hour later I've made my third strike. Three clients and three exceptional deals. Life is good.

It's 5:45, the last meeting of the day. Beaming, I make my way to the client and say, "Spare yourself the effort and drop the negotiations. I'm on such a roll today that I assure you, you will buy and at my price!"

Naturally you'll be familiar with these two types of days. You'll also be aware that each client meeting influences the next one, and the sum of these

experiences in turn influences the salesperson. Every emotional experience sets a precedent that colors the subsequent experience. Whoever has seen their life pass before their eyes while driving 100 mph on a highway and seeing a forty-ton truck swerve out of its lane would do only one thing the next time they see a forty-ton truck. Exactly—slow down and pass by
very carefully.

That's human nature. Two hours later you shift gears and step on the gas pedal again. You switch from frustration to challenge, from depression to action.

Two hours later, and you're starting over.

How does this work? Here's a short exercise to do right now with this book in your hand.

Imagine for a moment that you're on a run of bad luck. Everything possible is going wrong: You've lost your job, your cat was run over, your marriage is on the rocks, your house was repossessed, and you're homeless. You're sitting on a piece of cardboard in front of a Wal-Mart. It starts to rain. Look at yourself, huddled over on the pavement, your legs tucked under your body, your head in your hands, your jacket draped over your head. A heap of wretchedness, no bigger than a pile of old rags.

When I say "Now!", I want you to put the book aside, assume the posture of the figure in this scenario, and repeat after me: "I am a winner. I am on my game. I am a top sales professional."

Then I would like you to pick up the book again and read on.
Ready? Now!

. . .

Remarkable, isn't it? In this depressed and depressing posture, I wouldn't even buy my own motivational affirmations.

Not even Limbeck would buy these affirmations.

And now comes part two. When I say “Now!” again, I want you to stand up. Stretch. Shake your head and get on your tiptoes. Raise your arms above your head and stretch your fingers. Look upward. Make yourself as big and tall as you can. Tighten your hands into fists. And now repeat after me: “I am a loser. I am a failure. And I’m about to fail once more.”

Then pick up the book again and read on. Ready? Go.

. . .

Much better this way, right? You probably got a kick out of the exercises as much as my seminar participants did. You can only effect a real change if you redirect your posture, your voice, and your breathing toward action, confidence, and optimism. Indeed, your voice plays a crucial role, because the mood you project comes in large part from your voice. Most importantly, stay active. Go for a stroll, go to the gym, go jogging, whatever suits you, as long as you’re doing something and not succumbing to inertia and depression. The simple exercise shown above illustrates how your body can trigger the right impetus to get you out of the rut. In short, the body provides the impetus that generates the right mindset. We invariably attract that which we project. Losers have loser clients, average types have average clients, and winners have top clients.

Play Where the Puck Is Going to Be

Objection, pretext, condition: three notions that every sales professional confronts on a daily basis. First, it is vital to know what these terms mean. Second, you should be able to identify them in a negotiation. Third, you should be able to distinguish them from each other. Only then can you go on to the next step. But make sure you take one step at a time.

A *condition* is an objective, measurable, reasonable, and understandable factor that describes the demands made on your offer. If the building code in a

developing area only allows for black roof tiles, then despite the many shades of red tiling your hardware store carries, you simply won't buy any from them, not even if they're giving them out for free. The condition is: Roof tiles must be black.

A *pretext* is an emotional reaction from the client concerning your offer. Out of fear or diplomacy she employs a contrived argument to reject your offer. Every pretext is an objection in disguise. For example, your client might claim that at the moment she doesn't have the funds to purchase your product. If this is a pretext, then there are other motives at work. If in fact it isn't really a question of funds, then the customer will come up with yet another pretext as soon you try to address the first one by offering, say, financing or leasing options.

An *objection* is a subjective argument against the salesperson's offer. It can arise from information about the product, or it is an indication that the offer is incomplete, missing, or misconstrued. But one thing is clear: A customer who raises an objection is in no way a customer that you are about to lose. On the contrary: An objection is proof for the fact that the customer is considering your offer. Whoever considers an offer is showing interest, and interest is half the battle.

Eliciting interest is half the battle.

As far as conditions are concerned, the salesperson will not be able to make any significant changes. A customer who is looking to buy a tour bus will not buy a convertible even from the best salesperson around, unless perhaps as a second car.

Pretexts cannot be neutralized, and you shouldn't attempt to do so. A customer who employs a pretext is doing so as a defense mechanism. If you should try to strip the customer of this pretext, you will leave her exposed and embarrassed.

Instead, an astute sales professional will use a series of questions to find out what the underlying objection really is. The easiest way is to float a question such as, “Assuming funds were not an issue, what would
you do?”

The salesperson will then allow the open question to hover noncommittally for a moment, and the ball will now be in the client’s court. The client might then play the ball right back, saying, “Then I wouldn’t buy it either.”

To which the salesperson would say, “Do I sense that there is another reason for this?”

Pause.

Finally, the customer shows her hand: “Well, it’s that your product doesn’t have the best reputation when it comes to its durability.”

And there you have it. In this way the salesperson has managed to coax out the real objection without embarrassing the client. Objections are something you can work with.

I want to be straight with you: Objection handling means a lot of work for the sales professional. However, this is work that is not done during a negotiation but long before—days, weeks, months, or even years prior. Objection handling is something you learn as you would a foreign language.

A good sales professional learns these terms, expressions, phrases, and arguments by heart. Just as you used to have to study your Spanish verbs or your multiplication tables, the salesperson has to do the same. At first, I found this difficult. Starting out as a young salesman I thought my gift of gab would see me through this process naturally. I thought, “I’m my own person, and I can rely on my own ways of doing this.” Wrong. There is just no way around learning and memorizing these techniques. But don’t be misled: The goal here is not to cram in as many phrases as you can and reel them off to your client. Rather, the aim is to enrich your sales arsenal to such an extent that with any client, in any possible situation, confronted with any imaginable objection, you are armed with two or three fitting and well-suited answers at your fingertips. Fitting and well-suited here means relative to the situation, the client, and your own personality.

Your goal is to expand your sales vocabulary.

It is not unlike the pastor who comes prepared to deliver his sermon and always has a quote from Scripture ready for those whose faith might be wavering. Or in the words of former NHL player and head coach Wayne Gretzky: “A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be.”

Push the Limits

In the 2010 Formula One Grand Prix in Hungary, Michael Schumacher had brusquely forced aside his then teammate Rubens Barrichello. He earned a stiff penalty for this: For his favorite race in Spa at the Belgian Grand Prix, he was handed a ten-place grid drop. Schumacher’s comment was, “I’m here to do a job, and I want to do it to the best of my ability. If you want to win, you have to push all limits . . . There are no ifs, ands or buts; this is the only way. Sometimes you have to be brutal, even with yourself, when you’re in the race.” And here Schumacher wasn’t being obtuse; he was fully aware that he had crossed a line. Later he said, “My move against him was too hard . . . I wanted to make it hard for him to pass me . . . but I wasn’t seeking to endanger him with my move. If he feels I was, then I’m sorry; this wasn’t my intention.”

Whoever doesn’t push the limits cannot know where the limits lie. At times it is simply necessary for a salesperson to take a certain risk without knowing exactly where it may lead. If you don’t hear your client say, “You’re too insistent. You’re going too fast for me,” at least once a week, then you still have room for improvement.

When an entrepreneur contacted me to negotiate a training session for his sales team, it was as usual a matter of price: “Limbeck, we know that your fee is non-negotiable, but it’s pretty pricey, and I’m wondering if you’re a little too good for my team. It would probably be casting pearls before swine.”

I reflected for a split second. It was clear that in that very instant the contract was lost. Using stock phrases was not going to help things; I needed to do something bold. I said, “Two things: The first is that you will get half of my fee reimbursed by the IRS. The second is that any entrepreneur who thinks about his team that way should not speak of pearls and swine but rather should rethink his own attitude toward his team. That might be the very reason your team is not performing better.”

There you have it. There was a long pause. In the silence I could practically hear the man wrestling with his ego. I had no idea how my chances stood at that moment, because I had crossed the line, and there were no signposts beyond.

The entrepreneur was made of sterling stuff. He replied, “Now you’re beating me at my own game. That was pretty severe!”

But he didn’t throw me out. Instead, he booked a session. Not in spite of but because I was severe, clear, and honest. He knew that I would treat his team in precisely the same manner. What I had just done was pivotal. It got me the job. Had I stayed on the straight and narrow path, I would have lost the deal.

Of course, it could have turned out differently, with me thrown out on my ear and being given a ten-place grid penalty. You can only know that after the fact.

A blog reader of mine named Andreas Nolden also pushed the limits but by mistake. This time, though, it wasn’t harsh but funny. It just illustrated how a no in customer acquisition can sometimes be interpreted. Here is his answer to my blog entry titled “Never give up”:

> “I’d like to share an anecdote from my ‘business’ life. As I was starting out, it was my job to schedule appointments for a management consultancy firm over the phone. So I was calling the list of potential clients.
>
> At one point I was speaking to an entrepreneur who just didn’t seem willing to agree to an appointment. I tried convincing her for ten minutes. Somehow it seemed that she was interested but then again not. In the end I didn’t get her.
>
> Fifty names later on my list her telephone number cropped up again, but I didn’t notice that it was a number I had already called. I had just begun my

pitch when she suddenly said, ‘Oh, it’s good that you called back. I’ve thought about it. Let’s make an appointment.’”



Out of Left Field:
Techniques for When the Going Gets Tough



It was quite some time ago, before YouTube and Facebook. A time in which not everyone had their own website, and photos were still sent by conventional mail. I was a young sales trainer with a photo of a client whom I was waiting to meet at the Frankfurt airport. A classic sales situation: the first contact, the opening phrase, the gesture of greeting, the right approach to the customer.

The man came out of the gate. I walked up to him and in a friendly manner said, “Did you have a good flight?”

He replied, “I wouldn’t be here if I hadn’t, would I?”

Just like that, right between the eyes. Limbeck the nimble-witted, eloquent sales trainer opens the conversation with the most insipid, clichéd, elevator music of a question.

This happens. Sometimes you just put your foot in it. Critical situations will occur. Sometimes you find yourself in a tight spot. In those moments it’s good to have a few techniques up your sleeve to save you. Like a lifeboat.

So, how do I salvage a situation such as this one? Gloss over it? Pretend not to hear and ignore it? Make a humorous remark to defuse the situation? No, not in this scenario nor in any other scenario that I will be illustrating in this chapter. The basic approach to take is to remain honest, natural, genuine, upstanding, and truthful. Precisely when I’m on the rocks is when I have to keep my ego at bay. A shot of humility, a pinch of modesty, and all is well. Most of the time.

And so it was that on my client's arrival at the airport I plainly conceded a small psychological victory. You have to learn how to lose graciously. So I replied, "OK, you won the first round. That was a stupid question. Now where would you like to go for our meeting?" That's lifeboat number one.

Hail, Thunder, and Lightning

Recently I found myself in a similar situation. In that case I also admitted my blunder and combined it with a compliment. Lifeboat number two. This is what happened: I had the sales director of a big company on the phone. We'd known each other for years and respected each other, presumably because we were very similar: two men with larger-than-life egos. We were discussing an upcoming seminar and were going through some details. At one point I brought up a particular theme that I wanted to address at the seminar, and abruptly my client went quiet, not unlike an old western where a single cicada chirps while tumbleweed blows leisurely across the screen.

I was perplexed. "So, what do you say?" I asked to ease the tension a little. That's when I heard a wry smile creep into his voice. "Ah, the power of silence. Never fails to amuse."

With that move he had really slid the ball right past me. With his silence he had taken the initiative straight out of my hand. I had to hand it to him, in that moment he was a notch above me. But that's OK; one round doesn't win the match, and next time I'll be on my toes. I said, "Hey, you got me. It's always good to play with a pro."

Situations like these are easy to resolve, because they simply show the client that the salesperson was a little careless. It is trickier, however, when the salesperson's character traits get in the way. And I'm not talking about positive traits like warm-heartedness and compassion. I mean the kind that you cannot tolerate: arrogance, tactlessness, and presumptuousness.

It gets trickier when character traits get in the way.

Presumably nobody is immune to these. I'm certainly not. The question then is simply: What do you do? Can you manage to reel in your ego in time? This happened to me on my first presentation in the Club 55, the European Community of Experts in Marketing and Sales. Membership in this community is by invitation only. The endorsement of other members is necessary, and the aspirant is then asked to give a presentation. Only then do the members decide if the candidate should become a fellow member of the club.

I was in my early thirties, had celebrated my first successes, and was to be the youngest sales trainer given membership at Club 55. I gave a presentation which, considering my present standards, was mediocre. That, however, was not the problem.

In the auditorium sat one of my greatest heroes: Hans-Uwe Köhler, an eminent German sales trainer, speaker, and author. Time and again during my presentation, I noticed him writing something down on a pad. I was so astounded that a great man like him was evidently taking note of something that I, the rookie, had to say that within seconds I lost all inhibition and got too cocky for my own good. As I wandered through the audience I couldn't resist leaning over to him and saying, "It's good to see you making notes, Mr. Köhler, you just might learn a little something today."

And with that, the atmosphere suddenly snapped. I went ice cold. Then I flushed with heat. I felt all the stares of the audience converging right on my forehead, nailing me to the spot. Although looks can't kill, I would have preferred that they did so right then and there. Had I not glimpsed a friendly look from Nikolaus Enkelmann, a well-known German success and personality trainer, my presentation would have foundered in that very instant.

My only way of getting through the remainder of the speech consisted in focusing fully on this warm look from a single member of the audience amid a sea of glacial faces. Lifeboat number three is: Clutch at any available straw and hold on to it like your life depended on it.

One of the big dangers with success is that it can make you arrogant. And on that particular day I was a tactless, arrogant fool—just as if a yoga instructor from Podunk were giving the Dalai Lama tips on how to meditate.

On that particular day, I was a tactless, arrogant fool.

Whoever makes this kind of mistake is at the mercy of other people's generosity. I was fortunate, because after my presentation, Hans-Uwe Köhler rightly remarked that it would be a little while yet before I became one of the greats. If you look carefully, there was something of a compliment concealed in what he said. But this compliment was more of a reflection on Hans-Uwe Köhler's eminence than on my career prospects.

Recently, Hans-Uwe Köhler was speaking to Edgar K. Geffroy, another illustrious German thinker, author, and speaker, after a performance of mine and said to him, "The fact that Limbeck has gotten so good is because I've been hounding him relentlessly." Indeed, he has always spurred me on and represents a benchmark for me. I consider myself very lucky to have him as a friend today.

In addition to the moments of icy moods from the crowd there are also those disastrous instances in which you feel that everything around you is about to explode, situations in which the mood in a negotiation is so highly charged that it will have no choice but to erupt into a violent storm. You can feel the electricity crackling in the air, and the lightning is sure to follow. In such a climate, it is vital for a good sales professional to keep a firm grip on her ego and her emotions. A simple strategy is not to take yourself too seriously and to slow things down: "That is certainly an interesting aspect. If I've understood you correctly you mean that . . . Am I right in my assumption?"

By summarizing your client's position you defuse the situation. You're a pilot making another round over the airport before receiving the all-clear from the control tower to land your plane. That's lifeboat number four.

Some top sales personalities thrive in situations where bedlam reigns. But to do this you have to have a great deal of self-confidence and courage. I was once in a meeting in which a top salesman had the nerve to spring out of his chair in the middle of negotiations and say, "I need some air!" He proceeded to take off his suit jacket and said, "Will you excuse me, gentlemen, nature calls. In the meantime you can order some fresh coffee."

The interruption came at precisely the right moment. Everyone involved welcomed the breather. After the coffee break the negotiation resumed in a constructive manner and ended in a successful deal. That is lifeboat number five or the ripcord.

And now for lifeboat number six. If you notice from the very outset that you've blown your opening strategy for a meeting and the mood is plummeting, try something like this: "I've started horribly today. Please excuse me for a moment. I'm stepping out and coming right back in to start over." In this way you just might break the ice.

Back to Firm Ground

The longer you are in the sales game, the higher the probability that you will find yourself in a situation in which there is simply no way out. At least not for you.

At a pharmaceutical company I was hired to train the sales representatives. The goal of the sales team, a customary one for this particular sector, was to regularly canvass the medical practices and to consistently engage the doctors in new topics. The marketing department of the pharmaceutical company was responsible for generating pertinent scripts for those sales visits and providing product brochures.

Normally I would advise a company to put the sales management and the marketing management at the same table. The advantages are obvious; both departments have the same goal and are therefore working in harness.

In this case it was a little different. At this company the sales director and the marketing director not only had different desks, they also lived in different worlds—opposing worlds. The marketing department complained that their materials did not get enough attention from the sales people. The sales team countered that it should be left to their discretion to decide how to approach their client. Suddenly I found myself between two fronts of a conflict in which there was only going to be one loser: me.

There was guaranteed to be only one loser: me.

The inevitable happened: I became a pawn in each party's campaign. "Limbeck thinks the marketing materials are pointless," one of them said. Upon which the other retorted, "Yes, but only because he hasn't gotten them yet!" And so on.

I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. This firm didn't need a sales trainer; they needed a mediator for the two opposing department heads. As long as two sides are focusing their energy on waging a personal battle, training is useless. When the great Bavarian comic Karl Valentin was asked what he would do if he were a cowboy riding in a ravine with Comanche Indians at one end and Sioux Indians at the other, he said, "What would I be doing in a ravine?"

If I had known beforehand, I would not have taken the assignment. But I had taken it, so my only choice now was to remain frank and candid and avoid any stray bullets. In this case I didn't really pull it off. I had evidently said something about the sales scripts to one party, which was promptly used against the opposing side. This in turn drew the accusation that I had stabbed the other side in the back. What was I to do? I opted for lifeboat number seven: an apology.

If a salesperson has made a blunder that is not even her fault but was thrust upon her, often there is no option than to state that it was a mistake, own up to it,

and apologize.

Fortunately, thorny problems such as these are rare. More often, and I would say most often, the problem is that the salesperson talks her client into a coma, sounding as interesting as a broken record. And what happens then? The customer simply tunes her out. Whoever has decided to tune someone out will no longer tune back in when the salesperson finally decides to come to the point and close the deal. A customer who doesn't instantly concur with a salesperson's argument may have already concurred inwardly and may just be pondering how the product will fit into his personal situation. While the sales professional is thinking, "Oh no, he seems to be in doubt. I should throw another argument out there," this will only serve to corner the customer more and make him clam up. In turn, the salesperson will panic and keep babbling on and on and on.

At some point, you may notice that the customer is no longer following the thread of the conversation and that you won't be able to bring him back on track. One way in which you can reorient yourself and get back to firm ground is to ask your customer an open question to find out what he might be thinking at that very moment: "How important is it for you that . . .?" "What do you value most in terms of . . .?" That's lifeboat number eight.

Don't wait for your client to finally say, "Yes, you are right. I hereby confirm that I intend to purchase your product." If you're waiting to hear this phrase, or something like it, you're going to blow the deal. The client will sooner articulate an objection or a rejection than a resounding yes.

It is the sales professional's job to bring the negotiation to a close, not the customer's. Ask for the sale and do so in a timely manner. If it's all a little too fast for the customer, he will let you know, without question. In other words, say: "Where shall I send the order confirmation? Can you tell me what your delivery address is? What delivery date would suit you?"

Status Games

A further difficulty often encountered is bad preparation. Out of ten failed deals, nine fail because of insufficient preparation. If something like that happens to

you, you may not be the best sales professional, but you're certainly not alone.

You're in a bind and about to blow a deal. The customer's objection has caught you off guard, and for the life of you, you can't think of a counter-objection. Why? Because you haven't practiced your list. The ninth life boat for this shipwreck is the following: honest admission. "You're right to bring up this critical point. I understand that with such an investment you would want to protect yourself against any possible risk. In case you wish to use the product with your employees, it will bring you the following benefits . . . How important are these benefits to you? And when would you need to have this product up and running in your firm?"

Do you see what happened here? You start with an honest admission, follow with a statement of the product's benefits, and conclude by asking for the sale. A complete game plan.

An alternative is to conduct a thorough needs assessment, to compensate for your information deficiency. However, this strategy is risky because it betrays how badly you are prepared. This can turn out well or not so well. It all depends on how friendly and genuine you come across as a person, how well you judge the character of your customer, and whether you believe that the customer will not use it to your detriment.

Regardless of how it turns out, whoever aspires to be a good sales professional has to remain true and honest in this context as well. Pretending to be knowledgeable, acting as if you are something that you're not, doesn't pay off. On the contrary, feigning competence is counterproductive. Forgetting your lines during a play is one thing and can be forgiven. That's what a prompter is for. But a bad actor who doesn't know his lines to begin with will be booed off the stage.

Now for the tenth lifeboat. The client in this scenario makes it clear to the salesperson that he is king. He makes her feel like a servant by looking down his nose at her. The pressure that is brought to bear in this context usually concerns money—price, discount, terms of payment, or cancellation conditions.

For a top sales professional, it is forbidden to grovel, kowtow, or become submissive. A top sales professional has her pride and her price. A high price-to-

performance ratio means precisely that—not only a high price but also high performance to go with it. If the client should approach the top sales professional in the manner of a feudal lord, then the salesperson will show some backbone, politely and affably, and force the power dynamic back on equal footing: “Let’s be clear. We are both professionals, we’ve been doing this for long enough, and we both know that we . . .”

For the top sales professional it is forbidden to grovel.

Or say you’re with a client, and suddenly his phone rings. What do you say? “Go ahead and take the call”? No! Equal footing! What I recommend is lifeboat number eleven: You say nothing and look the client squarely but politely in the eyes. If it happens a second time, you say in a firm but affable tone, “I can see that you’ve got a lot going on today. Shall we postpone our meeting to another day, or is there any way you can have the calls passed to your assistant? It is important to me that we use our time well, so that we can get the best deal possible for you.”

Another situation: The customer asks you if you’d like something to drink. You instinctively reply, “No, thank you, I had coffee with my last customer.”

Would you respond this way if your rich aunt offered you something to drink? Of course not. You always have to accept a drink. Otherwise you might as well be saying, “You can drink that dishwater yourself, and by the way, I had a better time with my last client.” In this case you can pack your bags right away and head for the exit.

If you should happen to decline a coffee and catch yourself in time, then you can throw out lifeboat number twelve in quick succession: You simply keep talking regardless of having to contradict yourself and say, “But you know what?

Your coffee smells so good that I *will* have one." Or, "But I'd be delighted to have a glass of water if that's possible. Thank you." Who says that you have to drink it all anyway?

A further technique. Say you're making your pitch: "I'd like to make you the following suggestion. I'm offering you a sensational product. Our company is presenting you with the newest version of so-and-so. In exchange we guarantee you a happy and contented life."

Did you notice where the mistake was there? In a sales pitch it's not about the salesperson and his company. It's about the customer. The customer is not interested in what the salesperson does; she wants to know how she can benefit. So get rid of the *I'd like to, I'm offering you, we're presenting you with* . . . Out with the suggestions and in with the proposal: "You will be getting, you will be receiving . . ." Again, if you notice your error in time, namely that you've been referring to yourself instead of the customer, use lifeboat number thirteen: Simply delete your wrong phrases by restating them, correctly this time; use *you*, not *I*.

And a final one. Imagine you're selling over the phone and the customer simply hangs up. Bang. What now? Start crying? Lick your wounds? Take a break, sip a soothing cup of tea, and meditate before your next phone call?

No, but how about this? You call right back and say, "I think we just got disconnected . . ."

The possibility that you'll draw a chuckle from the customer with this is relatively high. And whoever gets a laugh once will not so easily be hung up on again. That's lifeboat number fourteen.



In Closing:

Stay True



Oh, so you're one of those top sales professionals? You want to sell me something, right? Fine. How about we do this over a game of pool? C'mon. Pool is no more difficult than your day job, you'll see.

So, what do we need? A pool table with six pockets. A cue stick. Some cue chalk. And sixteen balls.

What about you? Do you have everything you need? I see that you do: products, services, appointments, selling points . . . Well then, let's begin, and please, after you.

You've come prepared. Good. You know your client, and you know how the game is played. The white ball is placed on the far side, while the fifteen others are arranged in the rack. The black ball is placed in the center, in the middle of the third row. You have to spin the black ball and then remove the rack. OK, we're ready to go. Now for the break: With a crisp, firm strike of the ball you set the play expertly in motion. Respect! That's the
right mindset.

Clack, clack, clack, the balls scatter around the table; you've made your first move and earned your first points with the client. Are you in control? Remember, you're striped, I'm solid. Everyone has to know who they are. Now it's my turn. Ha! I've just sunk the 5, the 1, and the 7. But that's where my break ends. You're up. Let's see what you've got. No, that's not an objection; I'm just curious. Genuinely interested. You have to like people, remember?

I can see that you have a good eye. Your presentation of the benefits was persuasive. Using the cushion to sink two balls at once, that was deftly done. That's what I call focus. You're leading by two. Now stay calm; no need for any unnecessary experiments or sloppy shots. Stay true, honest, and forthright. Keep your eye on the 8-ball. You know exactly what you're after. But you also have to keep in mind what your customer is after. Break!

All right, now it's my turn to sink the 3, into the left side pocket. We're about to close the deal. How's the price looking?

Ouch! Your cue on the 12 was a little overshot. You sank my 2 in the process. Now you're up against it. Your customer crosses his arms. But don't stop now! Keep your ego out of it. Line up another shot. You're one ball behind, but I'm sure you'll catch up. Now opt for a simple strike, which is always a useful technique for when the going gets tough.

You're right. Apply some chalk, so that you can cue accurately the next time around. Remember, it's about the Next Opportunity and simply boils down to closing the deal. The 8-ball! You see, there aren't that many balls left to play.

Wow. That was a masterful shot: sinking the 8-ball in the left corner *after* having called it. You've got the deal in your pocket.

It was a pleasure playing with you. You think like a top sales professional. I'll see you at the next deal.

Selling for Adults

A top sales professional is successful at her game because her personality exudes competence and affability, such that she is able to persuade her client of her case. She has evolved a winning personality because she has worked hard to do so. She has shaped her character. She has patiently labored through the intricacies of her profession. She's done her homework and continues to do so day after day, for every client that she encounters.

Just as aircraft Captain Chesley B. Sullenberger practiced every standard procedure and every non-standard eventuality over and over again in a flight simulator over the course of decades.

However, there was no program in the flight simulator that had prepared him for both engines being disabled by bird strikes, after the fully occupied and fully fueled aircraft had taken off from New York City's LaGuardia airport and found itself over the city. Sullenberger had no time. He needed an immediate solution.

He grabbed the controls and said to his copilot, "My airplane!" taking his life, the life of every passenger on board, and those on the ground below into his own hands.

It quickly became clear that a return to LaGuardia airport was no longer an option. The nearest airport, in Teterboro, New Jersey, was also out of the question, because the plane's altitude was not sufficient to make a safe descent. Air traffic control could offer no other solutions. He dismissed their exhortations and made a decision. He saw his chance in the Hudson River, in the heart of New York City, just west of Manhattan, offering the only spacious, broad, and level surface that could accommodate a landing without buildings and people in the vicinity. Between the failure of the engines and the decision to make an emergency water landing, a mere three and a half minutes had passed.

He would only get one shot at this. No second chances. Sullenberger had to raise the nose of the aircraft just prior to contact with the water to avoid submerging the aircraft. To do this, the wings had to be kept perfectly level, so that the engines wouldn't tilt into the water and bring the plane off balance. The velocity had to be as low as possible yet high enough to prevent the wings from stalling the aircraft.

"I knew I would make it," he said later in a remarkably professional and humble manner. "We did what we were trained to do."

A top salesperson doesn't have to save lives. Nevertheless, he needs mental fortitude. He needs considerable self-esteem, experience, professionalism, and a keen focus on essentials, as well as composure and the belief in his own efficacy, the same traits possessed by the hero on the Hudson River.

He needs considerable self-esteem,

He needs considerable self-esteem, experience, and professionalism.

The right mindset will always drive a person to seize their chances and succeed. A sense of self-esteem breeds confidence. Both of these elements, combined with technical know-how, will allow her to master even the most critical of situations and bring her to success more often than the average person. But it isn't fear that governs her actions, be it fear of mistakes, of embarrassment, of hearing a *no*, of rejection, of loss, of a superior, of high expectations, of failure. The entire mindset, the basic attitude, the way of thinking of a top sales professional can be summed up by a single notion: having a winner's mentality.

Those who have this mentality don't judge their customers. Any fool can boost his social status. He can simply buy a tailcoat, a bow tie, and get through a gala dinner without stabbing himself with his knife and fork. However, to wholeheartedly respect a cleaning lady, a taxi driver, or a homeless person, that is an art. Those who are able to do this have no reason to tremble in fear when meeting a board of directors.

Those who can apply the respect they have for others to themselves will dress appropriately for the occasion and show their esteem for the client through politeness, tactfulness, and, above all, punctuality.

A salesperson like that will also see herself out of a losing streak; she will get out a sheet of paper and make a comprehensive list of her successes, starting from the very beginning: The success of a single sperm that was swift enough to reach the egg and fertilize it, leading to her miraculous birth. The first great victory. She overcame mumps and rubella, learned to swim, and made it through elementary school. She passed her driving test on the first attempt and became captain of her volleyball team. She went on to get her high school diploma, was the valedictorian of her class, and mustered up the courage to kiss that gorgeous classmate of hers at the prom. She eventually mastered her first serious sales

pitch. Finally, after compiling this list, she says to herself, I made all of this happen. What are my chances of being successful again? Very high indeed, so clearly, I'm a winner.

As a salesperson she has always remained true, honest, and fair, even if at times she has had to be a little crafty to reach her goal. Lying has never been her thing simply because the facts, dates, and numbers that she presented to the client have always been accurate. When she wonders how her customer of twenty years might respond to the question, "So, what is she really like as a salesperson?" she will take pride in hearing his answer: "She's good. Very good."

Tough in business, fair with people—this captures the credo of a top salesperson who is so good at what he does that he has no need to shortchange anyone. But neither is he naïve, because he knows that a job in sales is not always smooth sailing. He will always be sure to remain on an equal footing with the customer he is selling to and will never let himself be undermined. He will always be thoroughly prepared for his customer, standing behind his product and his company with full conviction. In this respect he is demanding of himself. He will enter into the negotiation with great force of will because he knows his bottom line and will not settle for less.

The rest, and by this I mean good fortune and success, will fall into place naturally, even if initially the prospect doesn't seem likely.

Don't Sell Your Soul

"Limbeck, you should really meet our CEO," says the human resources director of a reputable company. "It's important that we arrange that the next time you're here. But I have to warn you: I think it would be better if you didn't park your Porsche in front of the entrance. The boss wants to avoid an outbreak of social envy."

You want me to hide my Porsche? That would mean having to hide myself. And why should I do that? I've never done it before. So forget it. I don't have to hide myself just because I'm successful. Besides, this car is a part of my life and

an expression of my passion and my energy. I possess considerable power as a person, too, and the horsepower I have on the road reflects precisely that. So it's out of the question. I'll take my chances, no matter what the
boss says.

I drive up to the company building. My presentation is scheduled for an hour, giving me enough time to see my home soccer team, Eintracht Frankfurt, play live at the stadium in a very important match of the season.

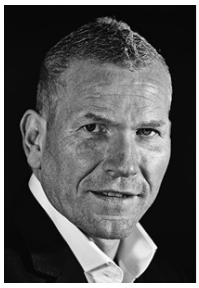
The presentation goes smoothly, but I don't get to the main point of my visit because the CEO isn't there. The soccer match starts at 7 p.m., which means I have to leave at ten to five to get there in time. At 4:38 p.m. the CEO walks into the room, approaches me, gives me a warm and confident greeting, and strikes up a conversation. At ten after five I can't bear it any longer and say, "I really have to get to the soccer match. I have an appointment with eight friends for the game. For me, soccer is the most important outlet and the thing that keeps me balanced in my job. Besides, I've got a bottle of wine riding on our victory tonight. I'm really sorry, but I have to—no, I want to leave now."

I jump into my car, hit the gas, and arrive right before kick-off. Did I lose the contract at the company? No. Was the boss angry? No. Did the Porsche or my passion for soccer turn the boss against me? No, the opposite in fact. Since then we've been on a first-name basis and have developed a relationship of respect and camaraderie.

Once you've earned people's respect as an expert in your field, there is simply no need to demean yourself. And for those who no longer feel the need to demean themselves, the universe has no failure in store.



About the Author



Martin Limbeck is an international sales authority and sought-after keynote speaker, dubbed “The Porsche of Sales” by the press. He helps sales professionals develop the right attitude toward selling so they will love their jobs and seal more deals. Fast-paced, driven, and passionate about sales, Martin inspires his audiences to reach the next level in their professional development. Drawing on real-life sales experiences, he talks about successes, challenges, and lessons learned. He also provides concrete tools and techniques for today’s sales world. His high-octane storytelling is captivating, and it is obvious that he has a big heart for sales professionals and a true interest in their success.

Sales is Martin’s life. He started his professional career selling photocopiers. As a trainer and entrepreneur, he has trained and inspired sales professionals in sixteen countries for more than twenty years. In 2011, Martin was awarded the National Speakers Association’s Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation. He was the first German to speak at the NSA convention. Martin has been honored as Speaker of the Year 2014, International Speaker of the Year 2012, and Trainer of the Year 2011 and 2008, and was presented with the meeting and event industry’s Conga Award in 2010 and 2009. He gives 150 speeches and seminars per year around the globe, teaches at Reutlingen European School of Business, and has published several books in various languages. He is the cofounder of the Sales Leaders team of top trainers and a member of Club 55, the European Community of Experts in Marketing and Sales.

Martin lives in Königstein, near Frankfurt, Germany.

Connect with Martin:

Web: www.martinlimbeck.com

Twitter: www.twitter.com/martinlimbeck
Facebook: www.facebook.com/hardselling.experte
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/martinlimbeck
YouTube: www.youtube.com/hardseller