



Jim Cathcart

Sales Readiness:

How Preparation Leads to Opportunity



The Relationship Selling™ Series

Published by Acanthus Publishing
a division of The Ictus Group, LLC
343 Commercial St
Unit 214, Union Wharf
Boston, MA 02109

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ISBN: 978-1-933631-76-9

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The Relationship Selling™ Series

A rowing team works as one seamless unit, yet is made up of unique individuals. In order for it to be successful, this team must have the complete commitment of each of its members. They must immerse themselves in the activity of rowing and release their individual interests and concerns so that the group can work as one.

The same is true for sales competence. Many different skills are required in order to excel in sales. One must be able to manage oneself, target the right prospective customers, marshal the resources that will help make the sale, communicate clearly and convincingly, connect with all types of people, and much more. But in order for a salesperson to sustain a successful sales career, all these skills must work in concert. It is not enough to merely be strong in a few areas.

Each person on a rowing team is necessary if the team is to remain competitive. Each must regularly exercise their skills and expand their abilities. When one rower doesn't stay in shape or improve with the team, all the others will feel their limitations.

Likewise, you and I as sales professionals must attend to each skill-set on a regular basis. This will keep us in shape for the long run and give us the mastery needed day to day.

Assessing opportunities. Targeting contacts. Connecting with your customers. There are many different skill-sets that must be refined on a regular basis for a salesperson to become successful in Relationship Selling™.

Preparation is the first of eight competencies in Relationship Selling™ that will give salespeople the tools to rise to the top one percent of their field. In this eBook, you will learn how to build and sustain your Sales Readiness. The value of concepts such as Professional Equity, The Daily Question, and The Sales Planning Guide will prove to be indispensable to the salesperson striving to become the best.

The cumulative effect of studying and applying this information is that you will become worth more to your clients, your company, your industry, and your own career. As an expert in Relationship Selling™, you will reach the top one percent of the people in your field. You will build "professional equity," a set of personal assets which give you clout and increase your potential for success.

Be Ready To Do Your Job Well

"Are you ready?" I asked.

"I was born ready!" he replied.

So we made the call.

As we walked in I tried to notice all that I could. I looked at the signage and logo, the selection of brochures on the coffee table, the way the receptionist was dressed. I listened to how others were being greeted and picked up one of the flyers from the reception desk that gave the news of the company's newest product. We told the receptionist, who we were, gave her a business card so she could see the name, company and title when she announced our arrival. She asked us to have a seat and called to notify our prospect that we had arrived.

I was along as a subject expert and following the lead of this sales representative who invited me there. While sitting and reviewing the new product flyer I asked my colleague, "What is the first question you want to ask?"

He stared at me like a deer in headlights. "First question? I thought I'd just greet the prospect and see how things unfold, and then I'd make my presentation."

My heart sank. We were about to meet with a major prospect and the person who was in charge of the call was not prepared to listen. He was only prepared to talk.

It got worse. As I inquired about the company it became clear that he had not visited their website or done much research about what they did and who they served. He was here simply to make a "sales pitch" and hope for the best. He figured that anything else he needed to know could just be discovered during the call.

He might have been ready to do a presentation but he wasn't ready to do an effective job of selling. He needed a good understanding of the person, the company, and their situation. He also needed to know exactly what thought-provoking questions he would ask in order to show the prospect how helpful we could be to them. In short, he was not ready to sell.

Preparing for the Sales Contact

There are several factors that go into preparing to do your job well:

Know Your Prospects

First, prepare your prospect knowledge; visit their website, maybe visit one of their business locations, research your prospects, and find out who they are, where they are, what they need, and how they think. Determine how they can benefit from your offer and look for ways to document and measure that value for them. Learn who they trust and respect and who/what they don't.

Rehearse the Sales Contact

Rehearsal is one of the most overlooked areas in selling. A lot of sales people think about what they're going to do, but seldom do they think it through as if it were actually happening. I've found that one of the most powerful things we can do is to role play either live with another person or in our mind exactly what's likely to happen in the ideal sales contact. A good exercise is to think about the person you're calling on and then see the sales call unfold in your mind.

At the Cathcart Institute, Inc., our work with various sales people over the years has proven that even those who know what to say and how to say it still sometimes get tripped up during live conversations. Part of the problem is that they are fretting over what to say rather than what they need to learn. They are planning to talk more than listen. Somehow the pressure of a real dialogue causes them to forget all the good things they know until after the meeting. Then they beat themselves up with comments like "Why didn't I say 'this'? I knew what to do but I didn't do it!"

It is not enough to just "know" what to do; we must actu-

ally practice the dialogue if we are to make it a natural part of us. Role-playing is the simplest and most effective way to begin this process. It is especially useful to role-play scenarios where things don't go as planned. Practice answering, "What if...we get interrupted? Or the time frame is cut in half? Or the decision maker can't be present? Or they've already bought from someone else?

When you are interrupted, the best recovery process is often to briefly review what you were talking about before the interruption and then proceed naturally to your next point or question. Don't discuss the interruption or worry about it, just take it in stride and get back to selling.

Reloading

Review your previous notes and gather your background information so that you really are ready, mentally, to have the facts you need in the front of your mind. Refreshing your knowledge about your own products and services is essential. Do you regularly "reload the database" in your head? If so, what do you do for that? In other words, *how do you get the information you already know from the depths of your memory to the top of your awareness?*

Whenever I'm traveling to a speaking engagement, I always re-read the entire client file on the plane. Even the information that seems insignificant. I also review it once again the night before the presentation. On many occasions this habit has paid off. I'm able to make instant references to people's names, product designations, quotes from company officers, and more. The clients rave about how well I know their company and how I customize my comments to their group. It is not what you know that helps you, it is what you remember accurately when you need it. Did you ever meet someone for a second time and forget his or her name? This can be an embarrassing or uncomfortable moment for both people. If you had reviewed their information one more time, you may have recalled it with ease and avoided that awkwardness.

Anticipation

Anticipating what this particular customer might need or want is the next step in the preparation process. Thinking from their point of view, what is it they need in relation to what you do? What about their wants? And what about the feelings they have?

Also, try to anticipate potential concerns or objections: What is it they might be bothered about, or concerned about? What kind of things would cause them to resist

saying “yes” to you today?

Visualization

Let the “law of attraction” work for you. What you think about yourself will tend to bring about similar results. Visualizing your desired sales accomplishments will put your sales focus in the right area. Think it through and get to the end of the sales contact and think, what is the outcome I really want? What would that look like? What would it sound like? What would it feel like? How can I see that in my own head happening in reality, so that when I get there, it actually takes place?

For example, when I was in Canada on a sales tour of several cities the first few presentations had produced disturbingly few sales. In the fourth city, I sat quietly in my hotel room before the presentation and visualized what I would do and how the group would react. I “saw” them rushing to buy and standing in line to place their orders. I tried to hear and feel what that would be like. As I involved more of my senses in the exercise, the vision became more realistic. Then an hour later in the actual meeting room, I relived my visualization and ... it worked! They bought everything I had with me and ordered more. My change in mindset led to a change in my behavior and a resulting change in theirs.

Outside Coaching

One way to achieve the results you visualize is to recruit the assistance, or coaching, from someone else, like a sales manager, immediate supervisor or an up-line leader. Do you seek out other people’s coaching? If so, how do you do that and how could you do it more effectively?

I often work as a professional speaker and I’m a past national president of the National Speakers Association. In this role, I’ve come to know many of the top speakers and contemporary authors. One thing that impresses me about them is that the best of the best tend to be the most likely to hire a speech coach! These folks are at the top of their game and yet they seek out coaches to help them improve.

Professional athletes do it. Actors and performers do it. And Sales Professionals should do it, too. Find someone who can help you see how you come across to others when you sell. Meet with them several times a year and practice a variety of sales scenarios. Pay them out of your own pocket. Do not expect your employer to pay for this. It is YOUR sales career and you need to feel the com-

mitment to making it successful. Pay your own way. Get objective feedback on what you do well and coaching on what you could do better. You will be amazed at how much better you can become.

Seeing the Next Steps

Thinking beyond the sale—what would happen after the sale? Once this person says “yes,” what happens next? How can I be ready for that? How can I help them be ready for that?

Before you even make the contact with the person, ask yourself:

- What if they say no?
- What if they want twice as much as expected?
- What if they need an earlier delivery?
- Who will be the next person they communicate with?
- How can I help them get the maximum value from this purchase?
- Will any orientation or training be necessary?
- How can I leverage this sale to get more sales in this industry or area in the future?”

The 30-Second Sales Message

Prepare yourself with a variety of specific, 30-second sales messages. Little sound bytes of ideas that you can present, one at a time, or all strung together will become effective sales tools you will use over and over again with your customers. When someone asks you a question, you should have a series of micro presentations already thought through in your mind, so that you can instantly describe, in the way you’d like to, the benefit or value that you want to convey to the customer.

I’ve found that the best structure for these is what I call “Value Units”. A value unit is a statement that specifies their need, my product’s feature that relates to the need, some proof that this claim is valid, the benefit they will receive from the feature (how it solves their problem), and their agreement that this matters to them. More on this in later eBooks, but remember the pieces: Need, Feature, Benefit, Proof, and Agreement. That becomes a value unit and it acts as a weight on the Yes side of the buying scale. Build enough of these and you’ll soon see a buying signal that shows your prospect is ready to buy.

Example #1: “You said that your cell phone was a “safety” resource to you. (**Need**). With our extended plan you get

two automatic links (**Feature**) that can be preprogrammed to contact emergency services and/or close family members. It's kind of like your personal "911" link. Here is the button that activates it (**Proof**). This not only makes you feel safer, it also assures that you don't have to remember the full phone number at a time when you might be under stress. (**Benefit**). How does a feature like that make you feel about your phone?" (**Agreement**)

Example #2: "Training programs must produce a measurable change in behavior if we are to justify spending the resources and time on them (**Need**). Our "Sales Readiness 360 Assessment" (**Feature**) allows you to measure both attitudes and behaviors before and after (**Proof**) the training, so that you can see the results for yourself (**Benefit**). This not only helps you justify the training in real measurements but also motivates your sales people to truly commit to the training, since they know their learning will be measured.

Where do you think the first results are most needed?" (**Agreement**)

Increased Awareness

A clumsy product demonstration can spoil a sales opportunity. Consequently, your own awareness and skill level as it relates to your products and services is very important. It's not just knowing about your products and services, but also being able to use, apply, or illustrate what value your product or service brings to someone, because you've practiced it, you've seen it in action; you've recently refreshed your awareness of this. The prospects will often judge your competence by your confidence. So, the more confident and prepared you are, the more trust they will invest in you.

Know Your Competition

You must learn to self-assess your level of awareness of competitors' products or services, and their features and benefits. Knowing how you stack up to the other options that are available to your customers puts your products and goals into the proper perspective. By knowing a lot about what others are offering, you gain credibility as a subject expert.

Your Frame of Mind

Start thinking good thoughts about your product, your prospect, and yourself. It always shows on some level, so bring good energy to the sales call. If you are in a bad mood, fearful, stressed, frustrated or angry, then do NOT make the call until you have your own mood under control.

You want your call to deliver sunshine to the contact—not clouds or rain.

In each of these areas, as you prepare for a sales contact, if you have refreshed and renewed and sharpened your skills in each area, you truly will be ready to do your job well.

(To sign up for Jim's Relationship Selling™ e-Course, visit https://secure.parkerwebsolutions.com/cathcart/relationship_selling_elrn.html.)

Preparing Yourself To Excel

We are all continually faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems.

—John W. Gardner

The trouble with opportunity is that it often arrives in overalls and looks like hard work.

—Thomas A. Edison

There's quite a difference between merely being prepared and being prepared to excel. For one, all that is expected of you is competence. For the other, you are expected to achieve excellence. So, what does it take to be prepared for excellence?

It takes the right knowledge, the right information, the right resources, the right skills, the right physical readiness, the right attitude, and the right circumstances. Another way of looking at it is: You need a clear target, the tools to do your best, the training to use the tools fully, the time to prepare, the truth about what is going on, the check points for tracking your progress, the "touch" or interaction with others who can help, and the trust of others which allows you to use your own good judgment.

Try this checklist before each sales contact:

- 1.** How ready am I to do this task well?
- 2.** Do I know what I need to know for this call?
- 3.** What information that I may already know should I review in order to “reload my database” for instant awareness and responsiveness when needed?
- 4.** Have I reviewed the customer’s public information (brochures, website, annual report, etc.) so that I know what I should before this contact?
- 5.** Do I have the resources and tools I will need to do this call professionally and well?
- 6.** Have I sharpened the skills that will make me excellent at this?
- 7.** Am I rested or warmed up enough to be at my best physically?
- 8.** Am I groomed and dressed appropriately for the impression I want to convey?
- 9.** Have I gotten into the right frame of mind for a successful outcome?
- 10.** Is my attitude toward myself positive? Is my attitude toward my customer respectful and positive?
- 11.** Is my attitude toward my company, industry, and competition strong and appropriate?
- 12.** Have I created or chosen the right circumstances for this contact?
- 13.** Have I visualized the outcome I want from this contact?

With this questionnaire you can identify any neglected areas that might trip you up on a sales contact. Answer these questions in writing for ten sales contacts. While answering these questions for ten separate contacts in writing may seem tedious, there is a reason behind this methodology. Writing down this information or typing it on a computer will cement the process in your mind. Going through the entire list ten times will condition your thinking so that subsequent calls get a more thorough preparation. Once these self-check questions become second nature to your preparation, your level of sales readiness will be increased and you will have put yourself in a position to excel.

(To order Jim’s Relationship Selling™ audio CD with 19 interviews, visit <https://secure.parkerwebsolutions.com/cathcart/orderform.html>.)

Assessing Your Professional Equity

I’d like to introduce you to a concept I call *Professional Equity*. When we use the term *equity*, typically we either think about fairness and balance or we think about ownership. In real estate terms, equity means the degree to which you’ve removed financial encumbrances, like mortgages, and acquired ownership.

In your sales career and in your professional life, you also build equity. Equity is an important concept that deals with the degree to which you have removed the encumbrances to your career and opened up your possibilities for achievement.

Here are some of the professional assets that make up your professional equity:

- Your reputation
- Your credentials
- Your relationships or connections
- Your education
- Your depth and breadth of product knowledge
- Your professional background experience
- Your level of skill
- Your personal wealth

Each of the assets that you build is a step towards eliminating a liability that could inhibit your career growth. Together these assets constitute your professional equity.

If you want to reach the top one percent of your field, the quickest way to do it is to build your professional equity, to cultivate the qualities, the skills, the experiences, and the connections that will cause you to be at the top of your field.

One of my colleagues figured out the importance of professional equity early in his consulting career. He envisioned the maximum level of success he could think of and then asked himself what personal assets he would need in order to achieve that and sustain it. Over many years he completed his college degree then went on to get a Masters degree. Many years later he earned his doctorate. This was done with part time school while working full time. He also became very selective about who he associated with.

He upgraded his circle of friends and found some older mentors to coach and guide him. He also studied money management diligently. He held himself to higher standards of personal behavior, too. No profanity, no heavy drinking, etc. As he got more active in his community, he found that he had a love of philanthropy. So he served on fund raising committees and chaired some events. Then he held offices and served on boards of directors. In each case he added to his reputation and relationships as well as his experience. Today he is a multimillionaire and the head of numerous large organizations. He has a multitude of friends and great respect from all who know him. He is truly a self-made success...and you can do likewise.

Let's take a moment to assess how much equity you've built in your sales career. On a one-to-ten scale, rate yourself in the areas that are listed below. Ten indicating you're at an optimal level of achievement in that category at this point in your sales career, and one indicating you're at the bottom of that category at this point in your sales career. For best results, do this exercise twice. First, do it by yourself to see how you think about your level of professional equity and your skills. Then, do it again later with a partner to uncover how others perceive your strengths or needs. Ask a trusted friend or a manager to rate you in these areas and then discuss the results of your rating and their rating.

Determine the implications of your scores in each area and see what you can do to advance your professional maturity and build more professional equity in each.

Sometimes a small increase in one of these areas will add up to a major advancement in your career. For example, if you are working in the educational profession, the acquisition of a Masters degree in teaching would open numerous doors to you that would be otherwise closed. If you move to a new community, building a relationship with some of the city or town's leaders could create opportunities. Improving your language skills allows you to communicate with and be accepted by larger numbers of people. Cultivating a reputation for integrity and helpfulness will draw people to you that you might never have met otherwise. And, making small improvements in each area over time tends to create bursts of opportunity at times when you least expect them.

Again, circle a number from one to ten rating where you think you are right now in the following categories:

- Your professional credentials
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your on-the-job experience
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your professional maturity
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your interpersonal skills and ability to relate to people
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your self-management skills; getting yourself to do what needs to be done
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your professional appearance; how you present yourself; how you look
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your professional demeanor and how you carry yourself
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your social skill; your ability to interact with various people and to perform effectively in a social situation
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your breadth of knowledge
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your specifically, industry-focused expertise and knowledge; your depth of knowledge in one particular area
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your relationships or connections with influential people in your field
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your vocabulary; your ability to articulate and communicate
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Your knowledge and awareness of business trends, community trends, and marketplace trends
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(To take Jim Cathcart's Relationship Selling Online Sales Readiness 360 Self-Assessment Test now: <http://www.relationshipsellings.net/assessmentorder.asp>.)

Look back over the numbers. This shows you where you feel you stand right now. What you've done is not an evaluation of the facts, but rather an observation of your opinions. This is not necessarily where you actually are in your career, but it is a very accurate evaluation of your perception of where you are right now.

Some people say, “Where I am is where others think I am.” Maybe they’re right. Some people say, “Where others think I am is not necessarily the truth.” Maybe they’re right, too. Dr. Willard Gaylin said, “A man may not always be what he appears to be, but what he appears to be is always a significant part of what he is.” So both your perception and the perceptions of others count.

The next step is to sit down with someone else in the know to compare your rankings with their rankings for you. Then talk about what you need to do, or if you don’t feel comfortable talking with them about it, think about it on your own. What do you need to do to advance each one of these items on the scale? As you go on, you’ll be building professional equity, and sometimes one small improvement will make all the difference.

An opportunity is only your opportunity if you are ready for it.

So how can you increase the number of opportunities you are ready for? By building your professional equity. Become an “eligible receiver.” In football, the only player who can legally receive a forward pass is one who is “eligible” due to their position on the team and where they line up in the open field so that they can receive the ball. In business and in life, we can increase the opportunities available to us by becoming qualified or eligible through the cultivation of talents, knowledge, skill, and positioning. It’s only the right place at the right time when you are the right person for the task. You can become the right person for the job by building your reputation as a businessman or businesswoman your customers respect.

**“Know your strengths, that’s the important thing.
You’ve got to know what you are good at.”**

– Peter Drucker, *in answering interviewer Bill Moyers’ question as to what he would tell young adults in the 21st Century*

Reputation Management: How Do You Want To Be Known?

If other people were talking about you in a favorable way, what would you want them to say, ideally? How would you like them to describe you to others?

Imagine for a moment that you could mold the way others think and talk about you. Using the following sentence as a prompt, describe yourself as you wish others would describe you. “He or she is a person who _____.” Or try this one: “The way I feel toward him or her is _____.” Here’s an example: “She’s a person who truly cares about her customer, who takes pride in her work, who is trustworthy and enjoyable to be with. She is a person I admire and would like to learn from. I feel that she is someone I trust to do a thorough job. She is someone I look forward to meeting again. And she is someone who will continue to have a highly successful sales career.”

Wouldn’t you like to have someone say those kinds of things about you? Well, you actually can. You determine how others talk about you. You’re in charge of how you’re known by other people. No, you don’t control it completely; you don’t have one hundred percent control. But you clearly influence the way others think about you every day through your choice of how you look, what you know, how you dress, how you present yourself, how you perform on the job, how you follow through, how you relate to people, and how you manage yourself.

I recommend that you engage in “reputation management.” Anyone can build and deserve the reputation they want over time.

So how do you want to be known? When you’ve identified what your ideal personality looks like in your own journal or your personal notes—including the way you would like others to think about you, to talk about you, to feel toward you—then you can cultivate in yourself the qualities that make you worthy of that description. The more you build these qualities in yourself, the more

likely you are to hear someone else saying those things about you.

Try this exercise: Write down in one or two sentences exactly what you would like others to think, feel, and say about you with regard to the following categories. Be specific, as if you were putting the actual words in their mouths. To make this easier, think in terms of what you would like for them to say about you three to five years from now.

- Your friends
- Your family members
- Your co-workers
- Your customers
- Your colleagues
- Your industry
- Your competitors
- Your community

For example: You might want your friends to say, “Bob is a person I can depend on to always be there for me. I admire his dedication to his career and I like myself even better when I’m around him.”

You may want your competitors to say, “I hope I never have to compete with Sally. She does her job so well that she spoils customers from doing business with anyone else. I have to get better just to compete with her.”

Have your community saying, “John is the kind of citizen everyone should be! I admire his dedication to the community and willingness to serve. I hope to always have neighbors like him.”

Now write some of your own statements.

The statements you write out for each of these categories can probably be reduced into a single, all-encompassing paragraph that applies to all of them. Once you have refined the “reputation” statement into a few short sentences, write it on a separate card or sheet of paper and review it everyday. In the morning and again in the evening, look at the card and read the reputation you wish to earn. In a short time you will begin to deserve it, and over time you will have it in reality. Take charge of your future by building the reputation you want.



**When he began to use his nickname
Theodore seemed more approachable.**

BCC115-TS

The Daily Question

Anyone who has ever heard me give a keynote speech at a big conference has probably heard me share the story about meeting a young man named Tim Seward.

Tim Seward came to a seminar that I was doing in Chicago in 1979, when he was 19 years old and had just begun his new business in the field of auto detailing, cleaning and polishing cars. At the end of that seminar, Tim had come to me and asked if I could give him an idea or a slogan that he could use for daily motivation to keep himself on track in achieving his sales goals.

The first question I asked Tim was, “What are your sales goals?”

He said, “I want to be the international sales leader for the company.”

Impressed with his goal, I told him to do the following everyday when he woke up:

“Ask yourself this question: *How would the person I’d like to be do the things I’m about to do?*”

He said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Think about your goal of being the international sales leader. How would the international sales leader start his day? How would the international sales leader dress? How would the international sales leader solve problems, work with customers, and react to challenges that came up?"

Tim's face lit up and he finally exclaimed, "I've got it, I've got it!"

So Tim went back home to Bay City, Michigan, and went to work on the idea of becoming the international sales leader. He knew that at the end of the year the person who became international sales leader would get to go to New Orleans to the international convention and would win a white Chevrolet Corvette.

Tim went to the local Chevrolet dealer in Bay City, Michigan, and got a photograph of a Corvette out of one of their brochures, took it home, put it over the workbench in his garage, and put another one over his bed.

That year the Corvettes pictured in the brochures were blue, so he painted his white and had it hanging there. He looked at it every day and he asked himself, with this in mind as his prize, "*How would the international sales leader do what I'm about to do?*"

Tim also changed the way he dressed. He stopped wearing his usual outfit of a t-shirt and jeans, got a professional looking jumpsuit that said "Tim" on the pocket, and had his company name printed on the back. As he went about his work, he did a little bit more for each customer than he had done in the past, thinking the international sales leader would probably be the kind of person who would be gracious and do more than the people expected from him. He also organized his files a little better, did more follow through on each sales lead, and handled his business in a more professional manner.

By the time the international convention in New Orleans rolled around, I had agreed to attend and give a speech. Tim, in the meantime, knew that he had achieved several goals. His business had grown so much he had to hire other people to help him. He had to lease a service station so he'd have a permanent location from which to do business.

His business continued to grow and he knew because he

had been invited to New Orleans that he was eligible to win the award of international sales leader, but he didn't know if he had won it.

In New Orleans, at the conclusion of the international convention, I gave my speech in the grand ballroom of the Hilton Hotel in the famous French Quarter. There was a great stage, and on the stage was a white Corvette with little spotlights shining all over it. The people were seated at tables with elegant tablecloths and candles; the dinner entrees served were steak and lobster. Overall, it was a very delightful evening.

At the end of my speech, the president of Tidy Car, International, Gary Goranson, stepped forward to announce the winner of the competition.

He said, "This year, we have had an amazing competition. The person who finished second led the person who finished in third place by only one point. Third place led fourth place by one point. The fourth spot led the fifth by two points. Fifth led six by one point. It was a tight competition... except for first place. The person in first place led the competition by over 300 points! There was no competition for first place. We have a clear winner. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome with me, from Bay City, Michigan, your International Sales Leader, Tim Seward!"

The place went insane. People jumped up and screamed and cheered, started hugging each other, dancing around the room. With music playing and spotlights sweeping the group, they brought Tim on their shoulders to the platform where he stood and admired the Corvette.

I walked over and gave him a big hug of congratulations and I said, "What in the world did you do?"

He said, "I just did what you said to do back in Chicago." I asked, with a grin, "What specifically might that be?"

He said, "Jim, come on, I'm talking about the daily question. *How would the person I'd like to be do the thing I'm about to do?*"

Twenty years later, I saw Tim in Ft. Myers, Florida, where he drove me from Ft. Myers Airport to his home in Southern Florida. We had dinner by his indoor pool with his wife and son.

He told me about his new life.

He said, "Jim, I sold my business detailing cars to another individual and then I built another company and I sold that. Then I built another company and I just sold that one for seven million dollars. And I'm retired now at age 38."

Age 38. He retired, managing his investments and enrolled in a local college where he was taking courses to get his MBA. When he was not doing those two things, he was flying around the world, taking his wife and son to places they never dreamed they'd ever be able to see. Tim is phenomenally successful. He's young. He's an industry leader. He has built and sold companies. And now, he is very, very wealthy.

I said to him, "Tim, I have just one question. Do you have a quote, or a slogan, or a motto you could give me as a daily motivator?"

He laughed and said, "I sure do. Ask yourself every day, how would the person I'd like to be, do the things I'm about to do?"¹

The Need For Product Knowledge Versus Selling Skill

Anyone can turn himself or herself into a top-notch seller in their field like Tim did if they can hone their preparation skills and learn how to optimize their product knowledge. What do you need to do to be ready to make a sale?

Years ago, I worked as a sales consultant to a financial services organization. I had a group of sales representatives who were on my team. My job was to work with this group of people to cultivate their sales ability and to keep them self-motivated to be out in the community making sales, generating business, and building the reputation of that agency.

Once, we were having a sales training meeting and one of the agents said to me, "I'm not making enough sales calls, and I'm certainly not making enough sales."

"Those two would kind of go hand in hand," I responded.

He said, "Yeah, but what I *really* need is more product knowledge."

Now this was a guy who already had a lot of product knowledge. He was a very savvy sales person and a subject matter expert when it came to the products he was representing. *But his lack of confidence, he thought, came from a lack of product knowledge. In actuality, it came from a lack of selling skill and a lack of customer knowledge.*

So we focused on practicing or role playing with some selling skills that would allow him to know more clearly what he was going to do when he talked with a prospect. We went over how he was going to present his ideas, and how he was going to gather information from them. We put special emphasis on what he needed to know about each person in order to prescribe the right solutions and make their life better. His sales instantly increased. Not because he knew more about the products (though he knew them well enough), but because he knew more about how to make a sale.

Selling is not educating followed by order-taking. It is a dialogue in which you explore needs, wants, and possibilities until a conclusion is reached. It is collaborative decision making followed by decisive action. Product knowledge is only a small part of the mix.

When you're preparing for a sales contact, the way to build your confidence and increase your sales readiness, is to know your customer, know your company, know your product, know your market, know your competitor, and know yourself. It is more important to know your customer than to know your product. But if you don't know your product, then you become dependent upon those who do. So learn about your product constantly, but don't procrastinate and wait until some later time to make sales contacts. Make them now.

It is not important to know the answer to every question a prospect might ask. What is important is knowing what kinds of questions *you* will ask. Building confidence is born out of knowing how to find the right solution for each prospect. From your confidence, your customers' trust will grow and their resistance to buying will disappear.

In the 20th Century sales world, the person with the most product knowledge would usually win. But that sales world is gone and a new millennium is upon us. 21st Century customers have access to high-speed internet connections and a whole wealth of information that was

1. This story is also shared in my book *The Acorn Principle*.

not available in the pre-World Wide Web sales universe. In today's sales world, the customer might know almost as much about your offer as you do. In some cases, the customer may even know *more*. When knowledge has migrated from only the few (the sales people) to the many (the prospects & competitors), via the internet and other accessible sources, then your ability to educate the prospect is unlikely to secure you the sale.

What does win you the sale more often than not is your ability to understand and empathize with your prospect. They expect you to know your product, but they admire you when you also know their needs, wants, and concerns. Customers can sense when you have done your homework and they will reward you with their business when you demonstrate this knowledge to them. Meeting with a prospect when you are not properly primed is like taking a final exam without doing any studying. As you will read in the next section, knowing how to plan can make all the difference in the world.

(Start becoming a better salesperson today. To sign up to receive Jim's online e-letter, visit <http://www.cathcart.com/eletter.html>.)

The Sales Planning Guide

The Importance of Planning

Historians readily agree that General Dwight David Eisenhower was one of the most successful military commanders of the last two hundred years. His ability to organize a plan led directly to many decisive victories by the Allies in World War II. When asked the importance of planning by a reporter after the landings at Normandy on D-Day, Eisenhower said matter-of-factly, "Plans are nothing; planning is everything."

President Eisenhower's sentiments proved true in war and they are true in the business world as well.

You could spend an entire week developing a sales plan for a big new account only to discover on your first call that the prospect you were calling on had received a new position and moved to another company. You could have a perfect sequence of sales questions to guide your prospect into the awareness of how much you could help him

or her succeed, but then a budgetary crisis inside the company could change their priorities and make your questions temporarily irrelevant. A plan that started with a major product demonstration could be derailed by a snowstorm that kept the participants away. The best laid plans, as they say, often go astray.

So, why plan? Because the ACT of planning makes you better at what you do!

That is what Ike understood. Planning is the training necessary for success.

Don't look at planning as something that builds your sale. Look at it as something that increases your preparation and confidence to make the sale.

I suggest that you regularly use a Sales Planning Guide. Before you call on an account, you have to have a purpose for the call, of course, and it can be as simple as calling to confirm that a delivery arrived on time, or as complex as meeting face-to-face for an information-gathering session. But you've got to have a purpose for the call.

So no matter what the reason, the more organized you are, the greater your chances of achieving your objective become. Here are some questions that you can keep in mind for each sales call that you intend to make so that you're better able to do that job well.

Think of a specific upcoming sales call. Then answer these questions as fully as you can. You will gain the most benefit from these questions if you write down the answers and keep them in a notebook or sales journal.

- Who is the decision maker?
- What is their current situation?
- What are their goals and objectives, as you understand them? And what are your goals and objectives as it relates to them?
- What potential problem areas or need areas will you need to uncover, probe, and focus on?
- What objectives should you be seeking to achieve with this account on this sales contact? What about on the next call?
- Overall, what would you like to achieve with this client?
- If the key contact that you have now is not the decision maker for this, how can he or she influence the outcome that you're trying to achieve?

- How can this contact be an asset to you even if they are not the decision maker?
- What questions can you ask—specific questions—to uncover, clarify, or amplify prospect problems, needs, or goals?
- What decision-making criteria are really important to this prospect?
- What possible benefits could this prospect be seeking?
- What services or company features do you have that provide those benefits for them?
- What kind of proof do you have? In other words, what kind of letters, testimonials, brochures, and demonstrations could you use to prove to the person that they will, in fact, get what you're promising?
- How can you be of more benefit to this prospect than anyone else who has called on them?
- What possible concerns or objections might come up and how might you answer those?
- Based on your objectives for this call, what specific commitment will you ask this person to make?
- Why should they want to make that commitment?
- By what criteria will this person judge whether or not you or your company are a satisfactory solution to their problem?
- What methods, procedures, or forms can you use to measure whether or not the actual results they got did in fact meet the criteria that they were judging those results by?

By keeping all of these questions in mind and using a Sales Planning Guide, you can be far more effective with each account and far more effective in your overall selling. The Sales Planning Guide will develop a habit of thinking that will cause you to cover many of these areas automatically; and you won't need, in many cases, to have a written guide. But first you must start with doing the written guide several times to develop that new habit pattern, that way of thinking.

The real reward of success is not what you get from succeeding but what you *become* by doing what it takes to succeed. Building your professional equity pays off in many ways but the best payoff is the person you become as you acquire each new professional asset. When you grow, the reputation you want with each of your “publics” also grows. The reward to you is an ongoing base of sup-

port, encouragement, and friendship from all areas of your life. As you ask The Daily Question, you become more and more likely to do what it takes to become the person you want to be. Finally, by planning for each sales contact several times in a row, putting it in writing, and reviewing your plans after each call, you become an exceptional sales professional. Sales Readiness increases with each of the above actions. After a while, the written part may not even be necessary because your mind will follow the proven path due to the training and mind-building of having done it again and again.

Sales Readiness is the result of thorough preparation, which is achieved through a combination of *knowledge*, *skill*, and *confidence* in every aspect of the sales cycle. Preparation is the first step in that sales cycle and the first competency of Relationship Selling™. However, like a rowing team working cooperatively, all the components (or competencies) must work in harmony. Preparing works in conjunction with the other seven competencies, such as *connecting*, *assessing*, and *assuring*, which you can read about in later eBooks in the Relationship Selling™ Series. By building a strong foundation with your customers, you can ensure that you do not let a golden selling opportunity pass you by.

(To browse products in Jim Cathcart's Relationship Selling™ Series, visit <https://secure.parkerwebsolutions.com/cathcart/orderform.html>.)



About the Author Jim Cathcart

High achievers from around the world credit the advice and inspiration of Jim Cathcart as keys to their personal advancement. As the author of thirteen books on business and psychology including two best sellers, *The Acorn Principle* and *Relationship Selling*, Jim Cathcart's works are in use by businesses and universities worldwide.

CEO and founder of Cathcart Institute, Inc., Jim sits on several corporate boards plus the Board of Visitors of Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management.

He is one of the world's top professional speakers and business authors and has been inducted into the Speaker Hall Of Fame, received the Golden Gavel Award from Toastmasters International, and the Cavett Award from the National Speakers Association. Jim became a member of Speakers Roundtable, 20 of the top professional speakers in the world, in 1986.

Cathcart Institute, Inc., founded in 1977, is a network of highly qualified business advisors who teach Jim Cathcart's concepts and strategies for Relationship Selling and personal advancement. The Relationship Selling Sales Excellence System is built upon the principles of personal accountability and structured to utilize all of an organization's learning resources, not just the material in this book. Business leaders and top salespeople turn to Cathcart Institute, Inc. for training, inspiration and personal advice in their quest to reach the top one percent of their field.

With over 2,500 speeches delivered to more than 1,500 different clients worldwide, Jim Cathcart has reached hundreds of thousands of business professionals in person.

To contact Cathcart Institute, Inc. at their California Headquarters visit <http://www.cathcart.com> or call 800 222 4883.