

Introduction

There are certain moments in life that always come to mind when you want to illustrate something very fundamental. Before I start this guide to how I became a top salesperson in one of the most competitive industries, let me go back to the day I met Timothy.

I was in the market for a new car. Having carried out extensive research, I decided on the model I wanted and found an ex-demo in stock at the main dealership with the exact specification I required. In many ways I had mentally and emotionally committed to buying it, so I wasted no time in booking a test drive. As the car was almost new, I was expecting simply to agree the details of the purchase soon after my arrival and take it home.

The showroom was plush and felt inviting as I walked in. I had parked directly outside the large glass-fronted doors but, as I approached the front desk, the woman whose

primary function was to smile and greet customers did not look up for about ten seconds. “That’s fine, if a little awkward,” I thought. “But fair enough, she must be finishing some paperwork.” When she did eventually acknowledge me, I stepped forward to explain I had an appointment. It was then that I noticed she had been reading a women’s gossip magazine under the counter. So, within half a minute of entering, I couldn’t help but feel a little undervalued. Especially as this was a dealership where the cheapest car in the showroom was £35,000 and I had just pulled up in an immaculate Porsche 911. In terms of hot prospects, I must have been in the top 1%.

She sat me down on the other side of the showroom and explained that the salesperson would be with me shortly. Well, I could see the salesperson at his desk and made eye contact with him on occasion, but he didn’t acknowledge my presence for some 20 minutes. I was wondering if there had been some sort of mix up, so I went back to the reception and asked if there was somebody else that could set me up with a test drive. She walked over to the salesman who, having finished shuffling some papers on his desk, finally decided that he was now ready for me. He stood up, looked straight at me, and immediately contrived the most disingenuous smile I have ever seen. As he walked towards me, I couldn’t help but notice his cheap shoes, tatty suit and dirty hair. He was like a caricature out of a spoof teenage movie and I felt more

uncomfortable with his every step. When he had covered the 20 feet between us, he offered me his limp and excessively clammy hand which, when I shook it, had no resistance at all in its clasp. I found his overall lack of effort offensive.

He introduced himself as Timothy, and I couldn't help feeling a little ashamed in having to consider him a fellow salesperson. However, I immediately put my feelings aside and hoped he was at least good at his job. He ought to be, given his title of Senior Sales Executive. I gifted him a salesman's dream with my opening gambit. "Timothy, we spoke on the phone. I am here to test drive the car we discussed and take it home today. I presume you have worked out the trade-in deal for my Porsche. So, what have you come up with and how long will this process take?" Three sentences, pre-closing the deal for him and laying out my simple expectations. All he had to do, in order to generate rapport with me, was to make it look as though he had cut some sort of reasonable deal and make the process quick and straightforward.

Timothy explained that the car wasn't ready to be test driven, but that it would be available the next day as he wanted to ensure it had undergone the standard, prerequisite checks. I told him he had already had 24 hours to sort this out and asked why he hadn't called me to rearrange the appointment. To ensure that my trip wasn't entirely wasted, I wanted to at least flesh out the

details of my trade-in and the purchase price, should the car meet my satisfaction. Timothy said that he was still waiting on a couple more quotes to ensure that he could offer me the best deal. I wasn't going to mention it at this point, but I would have been happy to pay cash for the car and sell my Porsche privately if he had made it worth my while – it couldn't have been easier for him. However, Timothy assured me that it would all be sorted by the next day. I noticed he was unapologetic for his failings but, still keen to buy the car, I agreed to return and start afresh.

The following day, all seemed fine. The receptionist was more responsive and Timothy greeted me upon my arrival. Of course, I was subjected to his smile again, but I was looking forward to jumping in the car and getting home. Timothy went to get the keys and transparently feigned surprise when he couldn't find them. It turned out that the car still hadn't arrived at the showroom. He explained this, and I explained to him, very concisely, how poor my experience had been so far. I told him that he needed to go and get the car *now* if he wanted to make a sale. I had spent an hour getting to the showroom on two consecutive days and their treatment of a potential customer wasn't acceptable. Timothy then went on to explain that he still hadn't heard back on the quotes for my Porsche. He promised me that, if I came back in two hours, all would be sorted. So I decided that, rather than wait around, I would use the time to visit another

luxury car showroom in the area. I immediately liked the salesperson at the new garage and ended up really liking another car that I hadn't even considered. This helped me disengage from the first car and opened my mind to an alternative. I returned to Timothy's showroom far less interested in being there or even in buying the car, which was finally ready. The car was nice and another salesperson took me for the test drive. He was more on the ball than Timothy and, although I was not as excited as before, I still reckoned I would buy it.

I was expecting to be able to finalise the deal when I returned to the showroom but had decided, regardless of the offer, that I would consider it over the weekend before committing. I wanted Timothy to sweat a bit for making it such an unpleasant experience. Needless to say, when I returned after the test drive, Timothy still hadn't completed any of the paperwork, but he promised a formal proposal would be emailed to me that evening. My frustration peaked; I insisted on seeing the dealership sales manager and detailed the poor performance of his sales staff. He promised to ensure a smoother process going forward.

Timothy's proposal never did arrive and, after a cooling off period that weekend and a more professional experience from the competing dealership, I decided to buy the car from them. I considered writing a letter to Timothy's management explaining the diabolical series of events

that resulted in the loss to them of a £45,000 sale – but decided against it. I felt a far better punishment would be to let them continue trading in this way.

As a matter of fact, the second salesperson who had stepped in to take me for the test drive had told me that I was “in good hands” with Timothy as he was their resident product expert and *top salesman*. This blew my mind, and made me want to re-examine my own feelings towards Timothy because, as far as I was concerned, he had failed on every single level. What had he done so wrong? Was it that he was treating me how he would like to have been treated? Perhaps waiting a few days to buy a car would have been no big deal to him and that he thought I should be more relaxed about it. Maybe sending a proposal a few days late meant as little as leaving a customer hanging on for 20 minutes or so in a showroom before being introduced to the salesperson. Equally, perhaps, he would have been more understanding if it were he who was buying a car that wasn’t ready as promised, because it was undergoing last-minute quality control checks. After all, in his mind, maybe it really showed that they were thoroughly checking the vehicle before sale.

It is also possible that he didn’t apply any standard sales processes to me because, in his experience, his customers are all high net worth individuals who don’t typically appreciate sales techniques. Moreover, if Timothy really was a top salesman, maybe he dressed down because

he didn't want to flaunt his success in the showroom. It was all possible. I will return to Timothy's true failings, however, at the end of this introduction.

We all know a Timothy and have experienced poor salesmanship. In many regards, I sometimes feel that poorly executed sales processes have become the norm, and I often despair when dealing with the average salesperson and their lack of pride in providing the best product or service. However, the purpose of this book is not to focus on the poor performance of others; rather it is to describe what makes a top salesperson different from their colleagues. Specifically, I want to share the things that I have done – differently from others – which have ensured that I have always been the dominant salesperson across a variety of different roles throughout my career.

From the very beginning, when I landed a chance job in telesales, I quickly rose up the ladder to work in consultative, enterprise and, later, more cut-throat transactional sales environments. During a diverse career, mainly focused on selling financial technology, I have held sales roles in large US, UK and European-based corporations, and have sold extensively across most countries in these regions, as well as in Asia. The benefit of such varied experience is that I am able to compare the underlying styles and sales approaches of different organisations and cultures, and to share the most effective sales strategies of each.

The nucleus of this book is Chapter 2: The Basics. This describes the key differences in my approach, which led at one time to establishing myself as the highest grossing individual globally in my industry. The product I sold had few distinguishing features from a competitive standpoint, so the key determinant behind this result was pure positioning and salesmanship. My clients were C-Suite executives and professionals from the most prestigious investment banks in the world, and the deals were often high value, with an extremely short lead-time from first contact to securing the mandate. I couldn't have reached this pinnacle of sales success without doing something a little extra than my colleagues or competition, and in each role I refined my own set of learnt skills and applied them with the utmost precision.

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Dominant salespeople in any organisation are, by definition, shrewd individuals with a natural instinct for finding and closing deals at the maximum price. These

top salespeople understand better than any of their peers the mechanisms by which to sell their products or services. They place themselves within the most pertinent information flows in order to source deals, and they strive to meet all the influencers and decision-makers to understand what each expects from the

service being offered. In closing they are then able to convey a powerful message: I understand your requirements, my organisation, with my guidance, is best suited to meet those requirements, and I am passionate about working with you. Put simply, through rigorous preparation, a top salesperson somehow wins deals from the offset and makes the art of being a salesperson look deceptively easy as they consistently generate more revenue than anyone else.

Novice and mediocre salespeople often dismiss the skill of top performers as luck or put it down to natural talent. I acknowledge that having these traits does help. But in my 15 years of selling and competing against the best in any of the industries, it has become clear that it is more than natural talent that keeps the few of us at the top. Rather, I know that success comes from a rigorous combination of trained mind-sets, drive and methodology, which result in an ability to read clients, understand the decision-making matrices and know instinctively when and how to close. With the exception of an individual's innate drive, which is a critical component of success, all of these skills can be developed over time and I certainly did not possess them at the beginning of my career. It is also often said that sales success is primarily based on whether your product is better than the competition. Again, it certainly helps – but I have proved many times that a superior salesperson can often sell an inferior product.

Granted, people have lucky years or find themselves on massive deals just because they are in the right place at the right time, but to stay at the top of their game through good times and bad, a salesperson must be consistently doing something right. On the subject of luck, I consider the luckiest aspect of my career to be that I have been able to learn from, and emulate, some really great salespeople, many of whom I refer to in this book.

I have been asked many times to share my secret to consistent sales success. I tend to pacify most people with a simple one or two sentence answer but, of course, I know such a short explanation can never be truly adequate. For example, I have sometimes told people that the key to my success is, “I simply treat my clients exactly how I would want to be treated.” I do believe this, but as Timothy has kindly allowed me to demonstrate, there is a twist in the interpretation of this statement that most salespeople miss. In the first place, there isn’t a person to whom I have said this who hasn’t agreed with me or felt they could connect with the statement. There’s an obvious truth at its core and, to most salespeople, it usually results in the satisfactory end of the conversation. This has always suited me because, before writing this book, I had never wanted to share or discuss my sales approach with my peers.

However, if the truth of the statement is so obvious,

then why do so few salespeople appear to act on it? The complexity of the truth behind this statement is that everyone's personality and standards are unique. What I have observed, however, both in myself and in other top salespeople, is that our standards are based on perfection in every aspect of our sales approach and this, most importantly, includes adopting a sales process based entirely on the needs and standards of our prospect or client. Without exception, I visualise every aspect of client contact from *their* perspective. With this in mind, a more correct statement would be, "I treat my clients as they wish to be treated." This statement is, however, prone to discussion and, in the past, that's something that I have tried to avoid.

I have also been known to tell people that I work harder than my colleagues, execute the same basic sales process on every prospective client, or talk to more people than anyone else. Others sometimes get, "It's not so much what I do that is the key to my success but, rather, what other salespeople don't do that allows me to close deals." Again, all this is seemingly fairly straightforward conceptually but, as you may by now be beginning to understand, these aphorisms have much deeper connotations. I will be addressing my interpretation of each of them throughout this book.

“...success comes from a rigorous combination of trained mindsets, drive and methodology.”

Writing this book has required an enormous amount of self-analysis and reflection in order to share my approach to selling in a structured manner. This process has highlighted the fact that, in many ways, I view my role as a sales professional very differently from my colleagues. I want to start with a principle that resonates through all that I have to say – to make it very clear how I measure sales success. My definition is quite simply how much money hits my bank account. So, the top salesperson is the person who earns the most. It is not the person who is praised the most or who is the highest revenue generator for the company – unless they are also the highest paid. At the most basic level, this means that I don't consider a sale to be closed until the commission hits my bank account, and this mindset ensures that I maintain the same exemplary service throughout the entire sales cycle.

“ ...the top salesperson is the person who earns the most.

Similarly, my definition of hitting target is that of achieving my own personal financial goal, and not necessarily that of the company. My aspirations are always greater than those of my employer, and by focusing on a personal goal, independent to that of the company, I feel that I am able to operate with a clearer sense of purpose. This allows me to minimise my emotional response to the many non-revenue generating distractions that are so often

present in highly driven and political sales environments. Everything I do in the office and in my role as a salesman is channelled towards my goal, from the products that I choose to sell and the contract negotiated before I join, to my day-to-day activities. This unfaltering commitment to personal success is a common intrinsic trait that I share with other top salespeople I have met throughout my career.

This book is not intended to be an instruction manual. There are many different types of sales positions and team structures, so what I write will not apply in its entirety to every sales professional. Neither do I claim to know, or to have attempted to list, every aspect of sales technique. What follows is simply an honest reflection of my early career selling technology platforms and services to the financial markets with the aim of sharing what I did differently that kept me at the top of the game. It is divided into four sections, which collectively build up to a description of the full methodology.

The first section describes the key markers for how I choose a company and product to sell. Product selection has always been key to my success. If the selection is not made in a structured and quantified manner, then it will not support the mechanisms that will allow me to exceed my sales targets. *The Basics* describes the things I learnt to do that have always kept me at the top of my profession. The third section focuses on the various, and

often unspoken, obstacles that have hindered my path to success and that experience has taught me to manage. Finally, the fourth section highlights many important aspects of negotiating a sales-based employment contract. There is also a free audio download to accompany the section “Product evaluation and pitch preparation”, whereby I articulate a previous pitch to demonstrate some of the principles that I have described.

However, before I begin, let’s revisit Timothy. When you read the story about his performance from the buyer’s perspective it becomes very clear how poorly the sales process was conducted. I am glad to say that I just don’t have the personal capacity to treat anybody in the way in which Timothy and his colleagues treated me. On the most basic, human level, I consider it completely indecent to ignore someone or not communicate with them when commitments are being broken. My high standards are part of my personality and upbringing and, combined with rigorously applied sales techniques, results in a whole package that has proved to be a potent recipe for sales success. However, Timothy’s deficit in this department is not what cost him the sale.

Whether Timothy felt his sales approach would have been acceptable to him is completely irrelevant because he wasn’t the one looking to part with £45,000. If he did feel this, then he has made the same mistake as other below average salespeople. They fail because they cannot

put their egos to one side and bother to understand that selling a product is about the customer and not about them. Timothy then is the antithesis of everything I believe is acceptable in sales, but he certainly isn't unique.

I have seen many such characters throughout my career. In one respect, people like Timothy have made my job easier over the years, and I have won countless mandates only to hear from my client afterwards just how poorly my competition conducted themselves, or how little they understood the client's requirements. Timothy's promises were as genuine as his smile. I instinctively tuned into his insincerity from the outset, which is why I did everything in my power to make the transaction end as quickly as possible. I knew the process was going to be a bind because he didn't respond to the very first thing I said to him, which laid out the deal on a plate.

Maybe Timothy was the top salesman for this dealership, but I can guarantee that he wouldn't have been if I had worked there – and he would be lucky to have lasted a single day in some of the environments in which I have worked. So what, exactly, cost Timothy this deal? His real failing, and the thing that turned a guaranteed sale into a loss, was that he didn't acknowledge or care about *my needs and expectations* as a buyer – despite my having spelled them out for him at the very beginning.

As a top salesman for my entire career, I can say of the

literally thousands of people to whom I have pitched, that I understood exactly how every single one of them wanted to be treated. It's a bold statement and it must be hard to imagine which cutting-edge sales technique I employ to ascertain this privileged and key information. Well, after a firm handshake and a short introduction, if my potential customer hasn't told me what they want, as I told Timothy, ***then I just ask.***