In my last blog I talked about the importance of qualifying your client (read it here)

Qualifying a client may seem like a colossal waste of time. After all, if the person standing in front of you is interested in red sweaters, you can sell them a red sweater without asking any more questions, right? Not necessarily.

Remember that what they are buying is a solution to their problem, not a specific product. Maybe the potential sweater-buyer wants to make a good impression at the company Christmas party; the new sweater needs to be festive, but not too revealing.

How are you going to find that out without asking? Very often, it's not the product that the customer is really buying at all. You might think it comes down to quality and price, but there is a lot more going on when a buyer makes that decision.

It may depend on how, where, and to whom you present your advice.

A Showman Selling Potato Peelers on the streets of New York.

Take, for instance, the humble potato peeler profiled by Howard Kaplan in a 2009 Vanity Fair article:

"In the early 1990s, a man named Joe Ades began showing up in the bar at the Café Pierre, Manhattan's famously posh hotel on the corner of Fifth Avenue and East 61st Street. Joe liked the crowd at the Café Pierre, but the real draw for him was Kathleen Landis, the dimpled, piano-playing house chanteuse who still entertains there five nights a week.

Joe was a five-nights-a-week man as well, always seated at the same round table with a front view of the baby grand and a back view of Landis. He drank only champagne, and never alone. On most nights he casually ordered a bottle, which always appeared with two champagne glasses—one for himself, the other for Landis.

Even by the standards of café society, Joe cut a noticeably soigné figure in his classic, British-made Chester Barrie suits and bold shirts and ties from Turnbull & Asser. The clothes went

well with his English accent and late-period Sean Connery salt-and-pepper beard.

He looked so distinguished and was so free with the bubbly that the Café Pierre crowd, Landis included, at first had him pegged as one of the “owners”—the tycoons who actually live at the Pierre in stupendously high end co-op apartments.

The Café Pierre was way off about Joe, or so it decided after some probing. if no one was brave enough to ask him where he lived, quite a few people asked him what he did for a living.

“Holding his glass of champagne by the stem, Joe would say simply, “I sell potato peelers.” The probers had a good chuckle over that. “Right,” they all said. “Now pull the other one.”

While walking the streets in the months that followed, some of the probers, who may have still doubted him, came upon Joe in the middle of a spiel with a crowd gathered around him at some busy corner.

He sat on a campstool, peeler in hand, and performed all manner of surgical wonders on carrots, zucchini, and Idaho potatoes. A long slab of Lucite served as his worktable, which rested on storage bins filled with all his produce.

The table and his campstool were so low to the ground that he worked from a perpetual crouch, like a catcher.

Meanwhile, he kept up a constant patter, belted out at the top of his lungs in a scratchy, theatrical Cockney singsong.

After three or four minutes—not before—he announced the price of his “machine,” as he called it, produced a wad of bills from his left coat pocket, and began dealing peelers as fast as he could to the outstretched hands flapping money in his face.

As if all this weren’t astonishing enough, he had on his beautiful café attire, only now bits of potato peel flecked his lapels.

He bowed his head low over an operation, sweat from his brow coursed its way down the bridge of his nose and dripped onto the cuffs of his Turnbull & Asser shirt. Joe is still working the peeler in New York.

This past December he turned 72, but unless there's snow on the ground, he's out pitching. Joe loves the peeler, which he sells for $5. "I love it for several reasons," he says.

"It's portable; it works; I never get a complaint. Never ever. When people first see it, they don't believe it. They buy it sceptically, cynically. They can't believe it's going to do what I say it'll do, but they take a chance and they buy it.

And during the course of the sale, somebody will walk past—always do—and say, 'I've got one of those. They're great!' And it's true—they're not shills. You don't need a shill with something like this." The Swiss-made article is a gleaming frame of stainless steel that fits in the palm like a carpenter's plane."

Joe is the only one in the city who has it—a true boast he saves for that moment in the pitch when he names his price and the wad comes out (in the street game, a moment known as "coming to the bat"). In private Joe says,

"The Company in Switzerland that makes the peeler will only supply people who can demonstrate the product. There's a minimum number you have to buy, and the minimum quantity is far more peelers than one store could handle in 20 years. If you saw the peeler hanging up in a store—for a dollar—you'd walk right past it. It has to be demonstrated."

His selling locations have no fixed pattern. One never knows where Joe will turn up. "I like to be an event," he says. "Boredom sets in when people expect you."

In part, Joe is making a virtue of necessity. He has no license to do what he does, and he often gets moved by the cops, who all know him. "All of them have nicked me in the past," he says. Joe pushes his gear through the streets on a hand truck, which he in his English way calls a trolley.

He and the trolley are often stopped by strangers ready with a heartfelt line: "Sir, you're the greatest salesman in New York!" He likes the recognition and is never ungracious, but privately he quibbles over the use of the word "salesman."

"I couldn't sell one-to-one," he explains. "I couldn't sell real estate or cars, for example. What I like to do is pitch to a crowd, draw a crowd together, and have them give me their money." —Reprinted with permission from

"The Gentleman Grafter" by Howard Kaplan, Vanity Fair, 2009.

This is an inspiring story about being a professional conversationalist. A Salesperson. A potato peeler in New York selling $5 kitchen tools to a crowd of people on the street. He lives a full and wonderful life, where every evening he dines out on the fruits of his profession with his beloved.

Joe was not a salesperson, but a performer. His stage was the street, and he worked hard. He knew that people would buy it if he put a dazzling show that provided a solution to their problems.

Never forget that selling your stuff can also be a show.

Sales takes many forms, but we are always doing it one way or another.

If you love this video please make sure to subscribe to my YouTube channel.



Mike Brunel started mikebrunel.com after being a successful entrepreneur and founder of NRS Media. He co-founded NRS Media in Wellington, New Zealand, expanded it into a global

powerhouse in media sales and training, and was eventually responsible for opening offices in London, Atlanta, Toronto, Sydney, Capetown, and Bogota. His products and services are now sold in 23 countries and in 11 languages generating $350 million annually in sales for his clients. Mike sold the company in 2015 and now spends his time following his passions which include rugby, travel. His promise: “I can find thousands of dollars in your business within minutes – GUARANTEED” TRY ME!