
"Selling is not optional"
How to master the most important skill in business and life
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The Best Salesman I Ever Met … Wasn't a Salesman. Do you think you know what a successful salesperson looks like? Are you picturing an expensive suit, a flashy smile, and a smooth, practiced pitch? That's what we imagine when we think of sales, but the truth is that some of the best salespeople aren't like this at all. In fact, the best salesman I ever met wasn't intending to be a salesman at all; he was a mountain climber!

Before I tell you about this reluctant, yet remarkable, salesman, let's look at another ordinary guy who turned out to have great success in sales. His name? Mike Brunel.

Humble Beginnings

My first job did not look at all like a sales job, but it was. I was a roustabout, or shearing hand, in a shearing gang. It was good job for a New Zealand teenager. I learned loads from the shearers—huge, uncompromising men with incredible mental stamina and fortitude.

A professional *shearer can* shear a sheep in under two minutes, removing the fleece in one piece. My job was to quickly pick up the fleece, throw it over a table like a blanket, and inspect it for maggots. When I heard the shearer yell "maggots!" it was my responsibility to remove the critters. I am still trying to forget the squirmy sensation of maggots running up my arm. I don't recommend it.

The shearing job was all about speed, as shearers back then were paid $35 per hundred sheep shorn. Speed was crucial: shearing a flock took two minutes per sheep, completed in one-hour stints, eight hours a day, four to five days a week. They made hundreds of dollars a day, yet any interruption cost money and time.

Therefore, the shearer needed me to be an integral part of his team. I needed to be listening, working with the others, understanding their motivations and quirks, knowing when to back off, and recognizing when to invite conversation. Right there, on the sheep farm, I used the same skills as any successful salesperson.

We are all in the business of sales.

From my experience as a teenager, I learned that people interact with people they like. People buy people. Learning these skills is not difficult. The basics: know your goals, listen well, understand your audience, and expand the relationship with that audience.

The word “sales” is often thought of as a dirty word. Successful business owners rush to assure me that they are “not in sales.” They are, though. Salespeople should not be ashamed of their role. Sales skills are something everyone can, and must, learn to be effective in any industry.

Since my roustabout days, I have accumulated a lifetime of learning about sales. For over thirty years, I have made money selling services including sales training, marketing, and sales promotion. I built a business from nothing into a multimillion-dollar international consultancy with sales in excess of $300 million, serving over 400 clients annually.

The bottom line: I know sales. I can help you generate more sales for your organization by teaching you how to approach your client the right way, and how to ask for—and get—their commitment.

Small Changes, Big Results

Out-of-the-box thinking about sales served me well when I started out selling media. Media is an unusual thing to sell. Not only is airtime an intangible product, it is also a time-limited commodity. If you don’t sell that 6:00 am commercial slot on your New York station, it is gone forever. Selling seats on airplanes is the closest analogy. If that seat beside you is not sold once an airplane takes flight, it will never be sold. The same principle applies to media, especially radio and television. “Here today, gone tomorrow” was a real problem for radio stations. We used to ask radio advertising executives, “What unsold airtime have you got and what can we do to package that up and sell it?”

Media companies sell out, on average, only about 70% of their airtime. We solved that problem by building a seminar-selling program that presold 30% of radio airtime. We would say to the media people, “We’ll show your sales team how to presell 30% of your inventory.

We will help you build a database and then invite all the advertisers from the database to a seminar where we present the benefits of buying the media. After that, we make them an offer: they can buy a twelve-month advertising contract at an exceptionally good price, but they have to make the decision on the spot because you only have 30% allocated." The first media company that we used this technique with was one of our partners. We sold a million dollars in six weeks.

If I could learn how to build a global company from a little place called New Zealand, anyone can do it. Eventually we had offices in Atlanta, Toronto, Sydney, and the United Kingdom. New Zealand is a very small country, but we actually changed the way that media sales companies sold their inventory worldwide. No one else was doing it this way before us.

I harbor a deep passion for this business, and I struggle when I come up against businesspeople who reject the word sales. They freak out. They say, "Oh my, God, I'm not a salesperson." I reply, "Yes you are. Let me show you how."

To The Top of the World

You may suspect I just got lucky. Maybe only a certain type of person can expect this kind of good fortune.

Remember that mountain climber I mentioned earlier, though? His name was Rob Hall, and he was an athlete, not a businessperson. Yet, he made one of the most memorable—and successful—sales pitches I ever heard.

Picture the scene. It was a blistering hot summer's day in 1990 and two men were pacing up and down in a small conference room, one dressed in a suit and the other one in full climbing gear.

We were nervous, frightened, and excited. Just a few feet away sat several key executives from one of the biggest multi-national companies—Unilever—waiting to make a decision: would they sponsor Rob Hall in his quest to conquer Mount Everest? These guys were holding Rob's future in their hands. Rob was one of our country's finest mountaineers; he wanted to

be the first New Zealander since Edmund Hillary to reach the top of Mount Everest.

To make that happen, Rob needed money. He required at least $300,000 before he could take a single step. Even though asking for funding didn't come naturally to this outdoorsman, there he sat, ready to make his pitch.

Rob's unique idea was take an expedition—three climbers including the son of Edmund Hillary, his son Peter, and another great climber named Gary Hall—to the top of Mount Everest. They also wanted to take one hundred children with them to help clean up the base camp. The base camp looked like a litterbin; climbers dump trashcans and rubbish there when they stop to rest before heading to the peak.

Rob approached my media company with an intriguing idea. He wanted to broadcast live back to our network of radio stations on his way to the top of Mount Everest. He would report back via satellite phone, which at the time were quite innovative.

That is why we were sitting in that conference room and Rob was in his rain pants, with ropes around his shoulder and his ice ax in one hand. I had asked him to do something different to make his case and he rolled with it. We knew we only had one shot.

Rob's presentation was infectious. As Rob walked into the boardroom—six foot five, sporting a giant beard—all the executives from Unilever opened their eyes a little wider. I spoke first, while they sat and wondered what this mountain man was going to say. I talked about the commercial support an event like this would offer an advertiser like Unilever. I remember shaking, I was so nervous, but I had to present the concept: we would invite Unilever's Coldwater Surf washing powder brand to sponsor the climb to the mountaintop. One hundred schoolchildren would come along to rejuvenate the base of the mountain. The cleanup hook was a strong match for the brand. We wanted to call it the Coldwater Surf Everest Challenge.

I introduced the idea, and then Rob got up. He nailed it.

He told them why he wanted to take these men to the mountain, why he wanted to be the first New Zealander to climb Mount Everest since Edmund Hillary, and why he needed

sponsorship money. He described how he would climb the mountain and how he would teach the children the importance of looking after the environment. As his presentation warmed up, the body language in the room shifted; the executives were enjoying the show. Finally, Rob picked up his ice axe and banged it on the table—not too loudly, though I think they got a bit of a start.

“See this ice axe?” he asked. “I’m going to take that to the top of Mount Everest and when I come back, you can have it. You can put it in the boardroom.”

A couple of things about this presentation resonated. First, Rob’s appearance was unique. Second, his enthusiasm and knowledge were crystal clear. He shared a wealth of information and enthusiastically expressed his passion for the plan. He was great at selling because even though he was a reluctant salesman, his commitment to the project shone through.

Rob got the deal. His commitment paid off handsomely, and didn’t end with the sponsorship. Afterward, he built a strong relationship with that company, which opened up other opportunities. He asked himself, “Why should this client choose to invest over a quarter million dollars in sponsorship money for a mountain climber?” and he answered the question convincingly.

There was no sleazy sales team. It was just Rob being real and it was a huge success.

What did Unilever really buy from Rob Hall and me? More than advertising, they bought an experience. The top of Mount Everest is a very, very unfriendly place, but it is human nature to go to those places. Rob wanted to take every radio listener into the wilderness with him. What Unilever bought was that unique intrigue. Ultimately, they bought it because they liked Rob and they wanted to add some value to the world.

Hitting the Trail

What can we learn about selling from Rob’s story? He wasn’t a salesperson at heart, but he could motivate a buyer on the basis of his knowledge. Even though Rob was reluctant to be in the sales arena, he totally committed to the process. Many people aren’t willing to make that

kind of promise because they're turned off or intimidated by selling. Mastering selling requires only what Rob Hall had—expert knowledge of his product and a strong belief in it.

Although Rob's story has a sad ending—he died saving a client during another Mount Everest climb—he died doing what he loved. To this day, I remember his passion, his commitment, and his ability to make things happen.

If a mountain man like Rob can do it, you can do it. This book is all about mastering the selling journey and understanding the buying journey. Let's get on the path to success.

If you like that story, there are heaps more in my book with real live examples and tips you can use in your business.

Or why don't you download a FREE chapter of my book right now!

Just a the bottom of this page download the rest of the story about Rob and other adventures.

If you want to overcome your fear of selling then email your details and we can set up a FREE session to answer some of your questions around sales.

In the meantime, good selling.

Have a great week…

Mike