

PART ONE

The Choice . . . the Chart . . .
the Challenge

Making the Choice

It's 11:45 a.m.

A coworker walks into your office or peers over your cubicle wall and says, "I'm hungry."

"Me too. Let's go to lunch," you say.

"Where do you want to go?"

"I don't know. Where do you want to go?"

"What are you hungry for?"

"Nothing special. You decide."

Chances are you have had this conversation recently with a coworker or spouse. With so many restaurants, narrowing the choice to just one becomes a daunting task.

A comedian once joked, "People don't go to Denny's restaurants. They end up there."

They end up there precisely because they begin without a plan. They react to the hunger pang instead of anticipating it. It doesn't occur to some people that they've been getting hungry every four hours of their waking lives. When they finally choose a place to eat, a long line or waiting list often confronts them. As a result, they "end up" settling for something less.

But we're still hungry, so let's get back to the restaurant—any restaurant. Have you ever watched people order? Some people summon the harried waitperson and want her to act as arbiter.

"If you were me, would you have the steak or the fish?" they'll ask, as if one or the other of these portion-controlled entrées would give them a memorable culinary experience.

“Do you like steak or fish better?” says the waitperson, who is forced to do a customer needs analysis to get her 15 percent “commission” out of this sale. Taken to its logical conclusion, the waitperson could be forced to make the choice for the person. “How is your cholesterol, sir? If it’s over 200, may I strongly suggest the broiled fish?”

Meanwhile, other customers wait impatiently for their second cup of coffee and mentally deduct a few percentage points from the tip they are planning to leave.

It happens all because it is so hard for some people to make a choice—any choice!

Try this little experiment. Choose a restaurant for lunch a day in advance using just two criteria: 1) Choose a local favorite that is not a chain. 2) Choose a place that takes reservations. Make one choice. Then tell (don’t ask) a customer (not a coworker) that you want to take her to lunch. Say, “I’ve made reservations and I want you to join me at 12:15 p.m. tomorrow afternoon for lunch at The Edgewater, if you don’t have other plans.”

When you get to the restaurant, look at the menu for five seconds or ignore it altogether. Say, “I’m going to have a cup of the baked onion soup, half a club sandwich, and an iced tea with extra lemon.” (Order whatever you feel like having. Just do it decisively.) Prediction: Nine times out of ten your luncheon guest will order two out of the three things you ordered, just because your decisiveness is so comforting and eliminates any need to deliberate further.

Choices are hard for people because they already have too many. There are too many channels on television. There are too many sizes of detergent, too many brands of mustard, too many websites to surf. It’s hard enough to choose where you are going to have lunch. Think how much harder it is to choose what you are going to do for a living. The hardest part of all is committing to the choice you’ve made with all of the career options still available. By making choices quickly and firmly, you position yourself as a decisive, take-charge person.

Making the Choice

When you were a little kid, you probably didn't long for—or even imagine—a career in sales. Ask some local elementary school kids what they want to be when they grow up. You'll find more future firefighters than prospective salespeople. How many children are anxiously anticipating a career of cold-calling, rejection handling, dealing with price-sensitive procurement officers, coping with delayed flights in center seats, and spending ninety nights a year sleeping in different hotel rooms all next to the same ice machine?

For some of us, it just sort of worked out that way.

You may have “ended up” in sales as a second or third choice when something else didn't work out. You may still be wondering if a career in sales is right for you.

Whether you are an engineer or shop foreman, CEO or account executive, your job increasingly requires excellent sales skills. When I told my neighbor, a prominent veterinarian, I was writing a book called *The Accidental Salesperson*, he said, “I'll buy a copy.” No matter how you got into sales, this book is going to show you how to sell on purpose. It will guide you through the entire selling process and show you how to move your prospects through that process without skipping any steps.

It takes an accidental salesperson to know one. I was an accidental salesperson just like you. Sales, it seems, is the final frontier for liberal arts graduates who have learned how to learn but don't know how to *do* much else.

As a 1972 graduate with a B.A. in political science, I had three ways to use my degree and maximize the investment my parents had made in my education. I could go to law school, take a job in a politician's office, or become a journalist and cover the political scene.

Although my grades in school had always been great, my score on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) was the lowest on any standardized test I had ever taken. The score barely would have qualified me to attend an unaccredited night school. I took that as a signal that law probably wasn't right for me.

After graduation, I landed a job as a summer intern for my congressman. There I was, two weeks out of college and working on Capitol Hill in the Cannon House Office Building. But instead of catching “Potomac Fever,” I was appalled by the political process as it is played out in real life. The pace is agonizingly slow, and bills become laws by a series of compromises and political favors.

Having eliminated law school and a political career within six weeks of graduating, I decided to pursue that career in journalism. Reporting on the political process I so despised seemed like a good career. I would become the next Walter Cronkite.

At the end of my internship, I returned to my parents’ home and began my job search. Since Newark, Ohio, did not have a television station and I didn’t have any money to move to a big city, I figured I would start my journalism career by landing a job in the news department at the local radio station. Then, after establishing myself in the business, it would be a fairly simple thing to move to Columbus, Ohio, and be a TV reporter. That would lead to local anchor on the ten o’clock news and then to the network level.

There was only one thing standing in the way of that master plan. The general manager at the local radio station announced during my first interview that he already had two newsmen.

“Chris,” he said, “I could put you on as an advertising salesman.”

“But you don’t understand, Mr. Pricer,” I said. “I’m a political science major.”

“Chris, my offer still stands.”

My inner dialogue went this way: “I’ll do anything to get into broadcasting—even sell.” My reasoning was that once I was in the door, I could work my way into the news department.

“I’ll take it,” I said.

It took two weeks for me to disabuse myself of the notion that working my way into news was a good plan. The sales manager left every afternoon around four. The news director worked some nights until eleven, covering the city council meetings. The sales manager drove a Cadillac. The news director drove a beat-up Chevy Vega and constantly bemoaned his fate and income. He often be-

rated the salespeople for making too much money. From an income and status standpoint, I learned quickly that you don't "work your way into news" in a small-market radio station.

At that point, I made "The Choice" to stay in sales. I purchased books on the subject. I attended fantastic seminars and devoured audiocassettes and later CDs on success and selling. I studied selling as hard as I'd studied political science, and it paid off. That choice led to a successful sales career, a promotion to sales management, and radio station ownership in my mid-twenties. In 1983, I founded a company to train radio advertising salespeople. With the publication of *The Accidental Salesperson* in 2000, CEOs, VPs of sales, and owners of family businesses started calling me. All of a sudden, I was doing sales training for start-ups, software companies, manufacturers, and Fortune 500 companies.

Nearly forty years after strolling into that radio station to get a news job, I have conducted more than 2,100 live seminars and keynote speeches; developed dozens of correspondence/distance-learning courses; and created an online-coached and time-released training program based on many of the principles in this book.

Today, I am in what my wife, Sarah, calls "speaker semi-retirement." I work with a few select clients. I am more likely to do thirteen presentations a year rather than the thirteen a month I used to do. But every Monday morning, I turn out a new Knowledge Bite, a digestible three- to seven-minute MP3 file that I upload to my Fuel website, and salespeople worldwide download it. You can get a sample at www.sparquefuel.com.

I was always frustrated with the start-and-stop nature of training programs. Business stopped for a day or two, everyone came to a hotel ballroom and "got trained," and then they went back to work. Some people implemented the training. Others didn't. But I've found that time-releasing training in small bites gains more traction. The idea of continual improvement was a hit in the manufacturing sector, thanks to W. Edwards Deming and others. Today, you can have continual salesperson improvement.

Making “The Choice” to stay in sales and become good at it worked well for me. Choosing to read this book and commit to improving yourself and, therefore, your sales will, I suspect, work just as well for you.

But you know what? Even if I had ended up in law school, I still would be in sales. In a law firm, a “rainmaker” is the attorney who brings clients into the firm. An attorney who can sell is also called a partner.

One day, when I was skiing with a friend who is a dentist, I asked him, “What is the biggest issue in dentistry today?”

“Sales,” he replied. “You’ve got to close people on having their wisdom teeth out. You have to handle objections. You have to persuade and convince them to put up with pain, expense, and time away from work. They don’t teach you sales at dental school, but they should.”

He made the choice to become a dentist and ended up an accidental salesperson.

So you see, you are not alone. A lot of accidental salespeople have learned to sell on purpose. But first, they have had to make “The Choice.”

You do, too.

You make The Choice when you consciously commit to your career in selling. In doing so, you gain a sense of purpose. Being able to say, “This is what I do,” and say it with pride and certainty, sets in motion undreamed-of opportunities for success. Choosing to focus on becoming an excellent salesperson is liberating precisely because it eliminates other options you are free to pursue, sometimes to your detriment.

You can experience much the same feeling of liberation tonight by choosing to turn off the TV instead of flipping through channels to find something worth devoting your time to. Or, if you must watch TV, focus on one show to the exclusion of all the others, and take comfort in knowing that you’ve made the right choice and don’t need to zip through the channels so you won’t miss anything.

By not focusing, you miss everything.

That’s The Choice.

Making the Commitment

Is sales right for you? “Hey, I was looking for a job when I found this one” is the mantra of millions of uncommitted workers today. When you make The Choice consciously and commit to your sales career, you gain a new sense of purpose. Adding that focus makes what you do more relevant.

Developing an obsession with doing things better is vital to success. Until you choose to do it better, no book, audio program, webinar, seminar, or personal growth guru can help you—no matter what your career.

Getting into sales accidentally makes it difficult, but certainly not impossible, to sell on purpose. Therefore, a crucial but simplistic step is to make some purposeful commitments:

- Make a commitment to yourself to succeed.
- Make a commitment to the company you represent.
- Make a commitment to your product or service.
- Make a commitment to your customers.
- Make a commitment to “do it better.”

Bringing Good Ideas to the Table

An axiom is a self-evident truth. It requires no proof because it is so obvious. If you buy the axiom below, you are on your way to a fulfilling and rewarding sales career.

A corollary is something that naturally flows from the axiom and therefore incidentally or naturally accompanies or parallels it. Imagine that the corollary starts with the phrase, “It follows that . . .”

Accidental Salesperson Axiom:

Your clients get better when *you* get better.

Corollary:

Your clients are praying for you to get better. They want to work at the highest levels with the best salespeople in the business.

You can master all of the sales skills and have abundant product knowledge and industry experience, but you will sell even better when you have good ideas to bring to the table. Ideas that make your client's business better make you a better salesperson. Let me explain.

One night after dinner, my friend Tom and I were reminiscing about our sales careers. Tom started his career as a wine salesperson. He called on grocery store managers trying to get them to stock cases of his company's products.

Tom told me a story about one particular store manager who had agreed to purchase two cases of a Sangria-like summer wine. "My goal was to sell him 100 cases," Tom said. As Tom explained, it was a cold day in early spring, and while on his way to meet this manager at the store, he passed a boat dealer putting up a sign advertising preseason prices. This chance occurrence gave Tom an idea.

"You know what you ought to do?" Tom said to the grocery manager. "You ought to get a boat and put it at the front of your store so that people see it when they come in. Then we can fill the boat with cases of the wine to make the tie-in with boating and summer. It will really grab people's attention, and it should be a great way to merchandise this wine."

"Where am I going to get a boat?" the manager asked.

"Let me worry about that," Tom responded.

Tom then drove back to the boat dealer and introduced himself.

"How's business?" he asked.

"Pretty slow. There's still snow on the ground. Nobody is thinking about boating yet."

"You know what might help," Tom said. "You could put one of your boats in the grocery store about a mile from here. Thousands of people would pass by it and see the name of your business right before the season starts."

"How am I going to get the grocery store to let me put a boat in there?" the boat dealer asked.

"You leave that to me," Tom told him. "Could you trailer a boat to the store and get it set up inside?"

"I can trailer and set up a boat anywhere," the boat dealer replied.

Tom went back to the grocery store to tell the manager he had a boat, and as a result of his ingenuity, the store ended up purchasing and selling hundreds of cases of the wine.

Tom's idea solved three problems: (1) his problem of selling his wine, (2) the grocery store owner's problem turning his inventory, and (3) the boat dealer's problem of building traffic in a slow season. Like a chess master, Tom was thinking several moves ahead. He was thinking about how the grocery store could sell more wine to its customers, not just how he could sell some wine to the grocery store. By coming up with an exciting merchandising idea, he made it easy for the store manager to stock up on his product.

You can view yourself as a salesperson with some price sheets and spec sheets. Or you can see yourself as the eyes and ears of your prospects and customers, bringing them news about what's going on out there in the marketplace. After all, you have the advantage of seeing different businesses and different applications of your products and services. You become what sales trainer Jeff Thull calls a "source of business advantage" because of the ideas you bring to the table, not just because of what you are selling.

Paying the Price

Okay, you've made The Choice. You are ready to embark on your own personal sales boom. Let's get something straight, though. If you are going to rise to the top of any profession, you are going to have to pay some kind of price. Imagine putting in four years of college, four years of medical school, and then four years of residency at a hospital where you're on duty for twenty-four hours at a time just to become a physician.

It's called delayed gratification.

Delayed gratification means sacrificing now in anticipation of a bigger reward at some future date. Not only do doctors put in twelve years of intense study and work, they take out massive loans to pay for the privilege.

You got into sales for free. But somewhere along the way you are going to have to pay the price in the form of study, hard work, and long hours. Albert Pujols inks a \$240 million contract. Rory McIlroy wins the U.S. Open and the prize money, exemptions, and endorsements that revolve around that championship. What you *don't* see is all the work they did for free before they got paid for it. All these “overpaid” pros spent years on the practice field or range in elementary school, junior high, high school, and college getting good enough finally to be paid.

If you are going to make an above-average income in sales, you have to be willing to put in an enormous amount of time and energy (for free) before you are in a position to earn that money.

Sales is hard work, but the rewards for many top salespeople are well worth it. Before you commit to the hard work, you must answer a very important question:

Do you need to be **wanted** or
do you **want** to be **needed**?

Part of the price you pay in selling is dealing with rejection. When you sell on purpose you will start to recognize that most of what you used to call rejection is merely indifference. Still, it is easier to sell things people want to buy than it is to sell things people need but don't necessarily want to buy.

As an outside salesperson, you do a lot more work than a retail clerk. A customer who walks into a clothing store looking for a blue, double-breasted suit is already predisposed to buy. Sure, the salesperson can mess up the sale by not knowing the product, not having your size, or not being attentive. But contrast this in-store situation to a scenario in which the salesperson in the blue, double-breasted suit is calling on a buyer and trying to discover a need for a new product or process. This salesperson has to sell the first meeting, sell the second meeting, and sell the client on investing enough time to determine if there is a need. Then the salesperson must persuade the prospect there is a need and develop a sense of urgency so that

the prospect acts. The salesperson does this by creating a vision of a more efficient and profitable operation and offering evidence that purchasing the product will result in the vision.

There is one opportunity after another to fail. Clients reject your approaches and hide from your phone calls.

That's why outside salespeople earn more money than retail clerks.

Then there are your well-meaning parents, friends, and spouse.

They question how you can take the rejection and uncertainty of selling. One of my friends once told me that he didn't understand how I could go to work not knowing how much money I was going to bring home at the end of the month. "That's a lot of pressure," he said.

I thought to myself, "I'd rather not know how much I'm going to make this month than be sure about how little I'm going to make. I'd rather have a job where I can get rewarded for productivity and not just get a cost-of-living adjustment at the end of the year."

Working on commission or some kind of salary bonus arrangement gives you the tremendous opportunity to give yourself a monthly merit increase. That's the good news.

Your clients also want you to get better, but they are not always encouraging. You may get all excited about "doing it better" one day and be looking at the want ads at lunch because a client rejected you. It's going to take some time.

If you want to be needed, you must persist despite the resistance. You must make your clients' lives better and their businesses more profitable. Then something wonderful happens: Your clients give you referrals and your prospects promptly return your calls.

At that point, you are wanted because clients realize how much they need your expertise. You have become a partner instead of a vendor.

Sales is a series of defeats punctuated by profitable victories. If you focus on the defeats instead of the victories, you can easily lose sight of your goals. If you understand that you are paying your dues and that it does get better, you will hang in long enough to enjoy better and more profitable relationships.

Becoming a Lifelong Learner

Accidental salespeople don't have a philosophy of sales. Why should they? They are still deciding if they like sales. They doubt selling and themselves. It's hard to develop a philosophy "on the fly." All of a sudden you're in sales. You patch together a sales style that's usually based on salespeople you've met, or as an opposite reaction to stereotypical salespeople you've seen in movies and on television.

A philosophy is a theory underlying or regarding a sphere of activity or thought. Let's start working on your philosophy of selling right now. First, let me share with you my philosophy of selling. I've come to firmly believe that . . .

Life is one big seminar, and lifelong learners get more out of life.

One day a brochure crossed my desk. The headline caught my eye. It read, HOW TO WRITE BROCHURES THAT SELL. The brochure advertised a six-hour seminar. The cost of the seminar seemed reasonable. I wanted to learn more about writing brochures that sell. So you know what I did?

You guessed it. I studied the brochure for three hours and incorporated all the ideas I found into my brochure. Hey, if you were trying to sell a seminar on how to write brochures, wouldn't you take your own advice when you produced the brochure? So why invest \$129?

Now think about this. I've sold sales training for the past thirty years. When I call on a prospect there is an interesting dynamic at work. He is getting a free sales clinic. I practice what I preach. He is taking in my presentation and also deciding if he wants his salespeople selling to their customers the way I sell to him.

There are sales trainers who teach tactics your gut tells you are wrong. Trust your gut. Unless you are selling time-share condominiums in Mazatlán or fake Rolex watches on the streets of New York City, avoid anything that feels funny or seems tricky. If you want repeat business and referrals, trust and truth will trump tactics.

Professional buyers go to seminars that teach them how to spot salespeople who are using manipulative tactics. As a buyer, there is nothing worse than sitting down with a salesperson who is mechanically mouthing a technique that feels foreign to him.

Imagine that you are in a car dealership and the salesperson looks you in the eye and says, “If you were my own mother, I would suggest that you buy this car today. It’s that good a deal.”

The salesperson wants you to think to yourself, “I guess this is a really good deal.” What you’re really thinking is, “What kind of a sucker does this guy take me for? I bet he says that to all his customers.”

I wouldn’t use a tactic like that on my own mother. I don’t teach them, either.

Just as I learned lessons on how to write brochures from the brochure I received, you can learn as much from a tough customer as you can from a professor or professional speaker. Some of the best sales seminars I’ve ever attended were free. In fact, they weren’t even billed as seminars. They just turned out that way. They were “accidental seminars.” They were powerful nonetheless.

In each chapter of *The Accidental Salesperson*, I’ll tell you a story of an ordinary salesperson giving an extraordinary clinic on how to sell or about a client who taught me how to sell.

ACCIDENTAL SALES TRAINING SEMINAR

The Shoeshine Guy

I am walking through Terminal 2 at Chicago O’Hare International Airport, lugging two heavy bags. I see the shoeshine stand directly ahead. The shoeshine man is looking for his next sale.

I’m walking and thinking about getting to my connecting gate. Somehow he catches my eye. When he has it, he looks down at my shoes. My eyes follow his. As I pass, trying not to look him in the eye again, he says, “Sir, let me shine those Cole Haan loafers for you.”

“Uh, no thanks, I’ve got to catch a plane,” I reply. (Now there’s an original objection he’s never heard before.)

I keep walking, but now I'm thinking, *How did he know these are Cole Haan shoes? That was an interesting approach. I wonder if they are Cole Haan shoes?*

I duck into the nearest men's room and, balancing on my left foot, I take off my right shoe to read the label. It reads "Cole Haan," and I put it back on and return to the shoeshine stand.

"I've changed my mind. I need a shine, after all."

Are you willing to learn from someone who is not a trainer or teacher? This shoeshine professional sold me a \$5 shoeshine and threw in seven sales success principles absolutely free. Sure, his service isn't very complex and his sales process isn't nearly as complicated as yours. At the same time, you can benefit from and form a philosophy around these seven ideas:

1. *A strong opening is critical.* When you pass the "typical" shoeshine man, he says, "Shine 'em up?" My pro had taken his approach to a higher level with a customized opening line for each customer. This shoeshine man's opening question and confirmation question are one and the same. Strong opening leads to strong closing.
2. *Product involvement is a powerful success trait.* By calling out the brand of shoe, he was communicating, "Hey, this is what I do. I care about shoes." Wouldn't you rather buy anything from a salesperson who is into what he's doing?
3. *Controlling the focus of the meeting is critical.* The salesperson broke my preoccupation with catching a plane and forced me to focus on my shoes. When you control the focus, you gain more control of the situation. He shifted the focus from getting to my gate to getting my shoes shined.
4. *Eye contact is an important trust-building tool.* You convey confidence with eye contact. Look customers in the eye

and smile with your eyes and mouth. This practice helps to build trust and reduces reluctance to doing business with you.

5. *Helping customers discover needs is part of the process.* By getting me to look down at my shoes, the shoeshine guy allowed me to discover for myself that it had been a while since my shoes had a shiny finish on them. People rarely resist their own data and discoveries.
6. *Doing it differently is refreshing and memorable for the customer.* I have passed thousands of shoeshine stands and had hundreds of shoeshines. I still remember the shoeshine guy who did it a little differently. Will your customers remember you?
7. *Customers buy from salespeople who align their behavior with the things that customers value.* Customers want to buy things. They want to work with professionals. They want to be engaged and challenged.

Because I believe life is one big seminar, and lifelong learners get more out of life, I can get a \$129 seminar out of a \$0.50 brochure, and I can get seven key selling strategies from a \$5 shoeshine (plus tip).

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Life is a succession of lessons, which must be lived to be understood.”

On his way to make that sales call on a grocery store manager, my friend Tom passed a boat dealer who had nobody on his lot; by simply noting that the boat dealer could use some business, Tom parlayed his observation into a huge sale. Keep your eyes and ears open. Ideas are everywhere.

What lessons will you learn today? Who will your teachers be? You never know. Just be open to learning from everyone.

* * *

I am not a motivational speaker. Salespeople leave my seminars with a clear understanding of specific steps they can take to suc-

ceed. This “job clarity” can be very motivating. You’ll experience it when you finish this book and start to implement the strategies I suggest.

This book will not motivate you to become successful; it will help you be more successful so that you will become motivated. That’s the “secret” of motivation most motivational speakers don’t speak about.

Achievement is motivating. Closing a sale can boost your enthusiasm.

Look around at the successful people you know who can afford to retire. Few of them do. They are looking for the next challenge and the next achievement.

Life is too short to demand anything less than the best from yourself and to give anything less than your best to your customers. And being the best is a choice you can make today. Choose and you set yourself apart. You’ll approach your job and your customers with a renewed sense of interest and purpose. You’ll set in motion a chain of events that changes everything for the better. You can do it. You can align yourself with things that buyers value.

It’s no accident that you picked up this book. It was a choice. Every day, you make choices about exactly the kind of salesperson you are going to be. Making conscious choices will set you apart from your competitors.