

Chapter VII

Being the Best!

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.

—Aristotle

For some people, the easiest thing about sales is finding excuses for why they're not selling. All they have to do is to open the paper or turn on the news: "Will you take a look at the economy! How am I possibly supposed to do well when businesses everywhere are struggling to stay open?" It's the same old story. When in doubt, blame the government, the economy, the weather, or some other distant force that you can't control. Then there are the "personal excuses": "I get no support from my boss! The competition has a much better product and at half the price! My clients have no idea of what they want." I could go on and on. I've heard them all a million times in many countries and in multiple languages from the salespeople I've been asked to train, coach, and mentor.

Do you know what? Each of those excuses probably has some merit. We are in a down economy, with businesses closing all around us. Your boss may be a gigantic jerk, the competition may be cheaper, and maybe your client has problems deciding what color socks to put on in the morning, never mind making crucial decisions for the multi-million dollar business that his grandfather left him. Life is so unfair!

But!

They are still just excuses, and until you stop blaming them for all your problems, they will continue to plague you! Get over it! Kipling once said that there are "forty million reasons for failure, but not a

single excuse.” I would add, “unless the excuse is you!” Rather than getting dragged down by every imaginable excuse, make the decision once and for all that you will not be bogged down by your problems. Instead you are going to conquer them!

Our Aspirations Are Our Possibilities!

Remember that just about everyone faced tough times at one point

“*Difficulty is the excuse history never accepts.*”
— Edward R. Murrow

or another. I know I did. In fact, twenty years ago I was convinced that my life was in a tailspin. I had just gone through a miserable divorce, my credit cards were all maxed out, and this was having an impact on my numbers. I was a wreck! But once wallowing in self-pity got to be a bore, I decided to take a self-help course, and found myself a mentor who turned my life around – in a single night!

At one of the sessions I attended, Ivan Burnell asked us to pull out a piece of paper and write down where we want to be ten years from now.¹ Actually, it’s a pretty common exercise, but the way we did it had a special little twist. We were told to “Write it as if you own it!” We were supposed to make that future ours!

I still have that piece of paper. The ink is faded, and the paper is starting to show signs of aging, but none of that really matters. It’s the words that are remarkable.

- I have a career in training/speaking (*the underline is in the original*) – ✓
- I am making no less than \$X per year (*there’s a number in the original too, which I have exceeded many times over*) – ✓
- I travel to exciting places when I want to, doing #1 – ✓
- I am famous among that class of people that know my work and business – ✓
- I have free time when I want it to travel, relax, and learn – ✓

1 For more about Ivan Burnell, see <http://yesfactor.com/>.

- 1) I have a career in Teaching / Speaking ↗
- 2) I AM earning no less than
Gross Pay #1
- 3) I Travel To exotic places when I WANT
to Do #1
- 4) I am famous among the best & people
know my work & success
- 5) I have free time, when I WANT it, to
Travel, relax & learn.

Twenty years later, I still keep the note from Ivan Burnell's self-help course. It was a personal "As It Should Be" statement for my life.

Back then, it all seemed pretty darn impossible, but with hindsight I realize that Samuel Johnson was right. Our aspirations really are our possibilities, if only we choose to make them that.

Fake It Till You Make It!

How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? One, but it has to really want to change! Or, perhaps, more simply put: To make things work, you have to really want to change! Do you *really* want to change?

“There is nothing wrong with change if it is in the right direction.”

— Winston Churchill

For most people, there is no easy answer. Change can be intimidating, and plenty of people live by the saying, “Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t.” You may decide that change is too risky, even in a down economy, even if your numbers are stuck in a rut. People like that can take comfort in the words of a French nobleman, the Comte d’Artois (later King Charles X), who admitted that “It is *not* necessary to change; Survival is *not* mandatory.”

But if survival does appeal to you, consider what changes you must make now to break free of the circle you’re trapped in. Envision what you can become, and start to act the part. To be a winner, you have to act like a winner, and if you act like a winner, people will think of you as a winner. So visualize what life will be like once you’ve succeeded, and start behaving as if you’re already there. Pretty soon everyone will pick up on the little cues you leave about the new you, and start paving your way to success.

Visualize success every time you face a problem, and you’ll see how quickly the problem disappears. It can be as mundane as trying to find a parking space on a crowded city street. Before I get there, I’ve already started visualizing what the perfect parking space will be, and sure enough, believe it or not, I’ll usually find that parking space waiting for me. And whenever I have a “do or die” meeting,

instead of running through all the possible outcomes, I just visualize one – the best one – and make it mine! Then, when I do attend the meeting, all that I am actually doing is going through the motions on my way to success.

On the Other Hand ...

On the other hand, there are plenty of people who are committed to failure, no matter what they do. In fact,

“Men do not stumble over mountains, but over molehills.”

— Samuel Butler

with all the self-help books out there, I sometimes wonder if people would buy *How to Fail in Sales: A B2B Guide*. Not that anyone really wants to fail, but if you get caught up in any of the following pitfalls, you have no chance of surviving. By the way, as you go through this list, I am sure you’ll notice that nowhere will you find even the slightest reference to a bad boss or a bad economy. In fact, they’re all about the salesperson – you!

- **Lack of belief in yourself:** If you don’t believe in yourself, no one else will believe in you either. The worst salespeople are the ones who convince themselves that they won’t make the close, even before they make the pitch. So get out there and convince yourself by saying “I can do it!” Repeat it to yourself again and again, in front of a mirror and in front of the prospect’s door. This ability to believe in myself was probably the most important lesson that I learned from Ivan Burnell. At his self-help class he shared his mantra with us, and it has since become my mantra too: “I am important. So is everyone else. I will never use my importance to put someone else down, and I will *never allow their importance to put me down.*” That’s exactly the attitude a salesperson needs. When approaching a customer, regardless of whether it’s the head of a multi-billion dollar corporation or the senior editor of a small local newspaper, go in there as an equal. You’ll find

that they will respect you more when you respect yourself!

- **Lack of belief in your product:** If you can't even convince yourself that your product is worth every penny, how can you possibly convince your customers that it is a worthwhile investment? Nobody is that good of an actor, and nobody is that good of a liar either. So before you go out pitching your product, make sure that you fully believe in it, and if you need to resort to deceptions and half truths, it probably isn't worth it. After all, half a truth is a whole lie.

- **Lack of belief in your company:** This is no less serious than failing to believe in your product. If you don't trust the people you work for, why would you trust the service they provide, or better yet, why would your customer trust it? The real problem is that none of us wants to face up to our own sense of inadequacy, so we tend to pass the blame off on those nearest to us. That's why, if you find yourself skeptical of your company, you should ask yourself honestly who is really to blame for the problems you are having: your company or you? If it is your company's fault, perhaps you should be pounding the street, looking for another job. But if it is you, don't fool yourself into believing that it's your company's fault. Your company is just an easy target for you to cast the blame.

- **A poor image of sales and of your role as a salesperson:** It's not your fault. Salespeople can and do get a bad rap, largely because of the enormous number of bad salespeople out there. In fact, the bad salesperson has become iconic to our culture, whether it's Willie Loman or the sleazy used car salesman who appears all over the movies and television. Who can forget the Door-to-Door Salesman on Pee-wee Herman's *Playhouse* shouting, "I'm going door to door to make you this incredible offer!" or Pee-wee Herman's horrified response, "Salesman!" as he slams the door in his face.

It's no wonder that even we forget that sales can be one of the noblest

professions. It's what keeps the whole economy churning and the free market in motion. RCA would never have made the effort to put a radio in every home and share news and entertainment with every American if they didn't see a profit in selling companies the advertising messages that came through those speakers. The first communications satellites would never have been sent into orbit if the networks hadn't been able to sell advertising around the programs they sought to beam back to Earth. Google would never have continued developing its product line making vast amounts of information accessible to every single person on the planet if it wasn't for their ability to sell advertising and make a profit. If there are bad salespeople – and I have no doubt there are – the down economy will siphon them off, so that only the best survive.

- **Lack of confidence in your ability to communicate with your customers:** It's all part of visualization – if you believe you can do it you definitely will, but then there's the flip side of that coin: if you don't believe you can do it, you won't! Especially when it comes to words: if you don't think you can get your point across clearly, the chances are that you won't. So practice your lines again and again. I do it every morning in the shower, and trust me: it sounds much better than even my finest arias. My inspiration in this is NBA Hall of Famer Ed Macauley, who once said, "When you are not practicing, remember, someone somewhere is, and when you meet him he will win." Survival sales is all about winning!

- **Lack of confidence in the "roller-coaster" of sales:** Let's face it. That's exactly what sales is – a roller-coaster of good days and bad days, good economies and bad economies, sky-high earnings and barely breaking even. Imagine the excitement when you're just about to make a close, only to have it pulled out from under you because of some ridiculous objection. It's always like that, and it will always be like that: steep climbs and spine-tingling descents. We all know people who prefer the safety of the merry-go-round, circling around

the same old spot at a nice, leisurely trot.

But one thing people forget about sales is that unlike the average roller-coast, you can actually set the pace and decide how high and how fast you go. Sitting at a desk job is like riding the merry-go-round, following the same, circular route, day after day after day. And in the end, what do you get? A 5 percent raise at the end of the year to match the rising C-o-L index. It's a totally different ride in sales. You set the pace, and you can even set your salary, because the harder you work, the higher you climb, and the more money you get to take home. In sales, you're not just riding the roller coaster; you're actually operating it too! Of course, that brings us to our next point though:

- **Lack of confidence in your ability to really manage yourself:**

That's because, even if you are accountable to a boss, in sales the first person you are really accountable to is you! You are constantly on the move, prospecting pitching, ascertaining, and closing. In short, you are a private contractor, given the honor of representing a fine product. So ask yourself honestly whether you have the self-discipline that's absolutely necessary to survive in sales. And if you decide that you really don't, then work out what it takes to get that discipline, and thank God for the guilt you must feel that you don't have it yet!

- **Lack of investment in yourself:**

It's not enough to believe that you can do it. You have to make sure you look like you can too, whether it's through the car you drive, the suit you wear, or the way that you present yourself to others. But investing in yourself goes much farther than that, because when any of us takes a good look in the mirror, we'll always find some way that we can improve ourselves. So do it! Constantly examine yourself, identify the challenges you face, and design the strategies you need to overcome them. As in just about everything else in life, you can't begin to tackle a problem before you know what the problem is. And just as we tend to focus on our strengths, we also tend to gloss over our weaknesses.

Do you really believe in your product and your company, in your skills and in your ability to communicate? Does the emotional roller-coaster of sales make you queasy? Do you need help managing your time, so that you make the most of it? Most of all, are you ready to take the leap and make the changes you need? If you've answered *Yes!* sincerely and honestly, you've already taken the first, giant step. After that, everything else is easy. Self-improvement is a never-ending task, but the upside is that you're competing against yourself!

The Secret of Success

When I was young, my mother always told me, "Michael, life is choices, not

"Our aspirations are our possibilities."
— Robert Browning

chances." It's a lesson I always took to heart. Only one in a billion will win that lottery. The rest of the people who succeed in life are the people like you who choose to succeed, and are willing to do what it takes to get there. Anyone can dream when they're asleep. It's what we do to keep the dream alive when we're awake that determines whether we can make our dreams come true. So by all means set goals for yourself, but set a strategy too. Without a road map to success, it's easy to get lost along the way.

Who are the truly great salespeople, the people with the clearest road map to success, who will reach their destination no matter what obstacles they encounter along the way? They are the people who have a healthy good dose of each of the following ten qualities: