

# PRICELESS!

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Practical Nuggets for Your Sales Problems

*BOOK TWO*

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## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to you. It is especially dedicated to those who have read and implemented the nuggets in Book One..

This book is also dedicated to all those that have realized that selling skills are useful to everyone whether you are in the profession or not because:

*“The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you’re a salesman, and you don’t know that.  
(Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman)*

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## INTRODUCTION

Priceless! Practical Nuggets for Your Sales Problems, Book Two, is the second of several upcoming e-books that are a compilation of my practical sales articles which have been running weekly in the Business Daily for over three years now and appear in my weblog ([www.lendmeyouears.co.ke](http://www.lendmeyouears.co.ke)).

Just as Book One, Book Two encapsulates 24 nuggets; the books will be released in 6 month intervals. Ideally, each book captures 24 weekly articles from the very first one and progresses sequentially from there but not necessarily in the same flow as they appeared in the newspaper.

Unlike Book One, this book version has been arranged in random sequence and focuses largely on the salesperson and a bit on organizations and businesses. Like Book One though, navigation has been kept simple via hyperlinks that connect with the table of contents after every nugget.

I hope you will find this book useful and I look forward to your feedback on how we can make it better

Thank you very much for downloading and reading  
**Priceless! *Practical Nuggets for Your Sales Problems***  
**(Book Two)**

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## 1: BROCHURES DON'T SELL, SALESPEOPLE DO

*Salespeople who make presentations with their trump card being the strategically laid out brochures have a long way to go. They inadvertently hand the prospect ammunition to use against them*

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Brochures don't sell. Salespeople do. Few people take the reading culture beyond formal schooling; a glossy, creatively designed and cleverly worded brochure won't change that. Salespeople who carry brochures as the largest part of their sales arsenal serve only two purposes, none of which the brochure was intended for: they waste costly stationery and they shoot themselves in the foot. Institutions go to great lengths to populate their receptions with brochures and because sight is the most powerful of senses (plus they come for free) brochures will attract and help a client while away his time in the queue; clients will pick it because of the images of the exotic places on it; they will even pick one because its shaped like a pyramid! But attraction is one thing; reading, another and purchase a different ballgame.

Salespeople who make presentations with their trump card being the strategically laid out brochures have a long way to go. They find themselves "selling" by taking the prospect through each of the aspects within the brochures. And then the defensive prospect uses the very ammunition the sales person hoped to win him over with, against him. After the didactic presentation, the salesperson waits for the prospect to keel over and buy but instead he says, "Leave me with these brochures to read and then I'll get back to you. Your contact is on them isn't it?" And just like that, the sale is lost. The prospect won't read the brochure-at best he will dump it in his drawer or car. Ultimately, it ends up as trash. It's a double tragedy: information material is thrown away and it wasn't even read

But why do sales people convert themselves to brochure distributors? My take is that they are in denial. They don't read nor act on brochures dished out to them by other salespeople but somehow they expect their prospect to do so theirs. Another reason is that they don't know any better; now that they have gotten the appointment, what else do they say besides what's in the brochure? And then there is the sheer terror of having to make a presentation-it's easier to just jot down a name and number on the brochure and whisper a prayer that the prospect will read and call.

It gets worse. Even the few who make an attempt at reading will be convinced that the brochure is hiding the small print and will therefore be skeptical about acting on it.

Does this mean that a battery of brochures is useless as part of the salesperson's arsenal? Especially for the service industry, I think they are not necessary. Human interactions are what sell; not an inanimate brochure. If the salesperson must carry the brochure or flyer or such other marketing stationery, I believe it is to be submitted as a last gambit. After he has presented and the sale made, a brochure may be given to remove buyer's remorse; plus, given after the sale, the salesperson does not impede himself.

And why do brochures exist? Because human beings are a paradox. On the one hand we won't read, nor act on a brochure, if at all we do; yet on the other hand, we still want to have something to see or touch to prove to ourselves that this service or product is a reality - marketers call it physical evidence. And so banks have the brochures in their banking halls; chemists have them at their counters and electronic shops have them in the show room. On occasion though, the prospect reads of this new product or service from a brochure, and what does he do? Buy? No. He seeks out more information (read, a salesperson)

And the progressive salesperson knows that it is the dynamism of emotions that wins over the prospect, not the static logic of the brochure.

## 2: CHANGE JOBS IF YOU MUST BUT KEEP YOUR CONTACTS

*A database is an indispensable tool to the progressive salesperson. It allows him to keep a pulse on the changing circumstances of his prospects because he knows that today's decline is tomorrow's close*

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The progressive salesperson never abandons his contacts. Even when she changes industries, she moves with them. The average salesperson, has them for the while she needs them. As for the below average one, she doesn't even keep the contacts. For each, the results over time are telling. The progressive sales person finds herself prospecting organically, less and less; she also finds the quality of her prospects becoming higher and superior as most are via referral. Even if she switches industries she knows she will still face the same prospects or others who know them. After all, whatever one is selling, one is always selling to people. And as they say, it's a small world.

A database is an indispensable tool to the progressive salesperson. You never know how the prospect that didn't buy will react months, even years, later when you meet; what you do know is that being human, the reaction will greatly be informed by how you parted and how much of him you remember. A database comes in very handy here.

The term CRM (Customer Relationship Management) was a buzzword at one time and in many ways still is. It describes a company's strategy in handling customer interactions. Whole systems exist that help companies manage their CRM. For the progressive salesperson CRM isn't a buzzword to be bandied around-it's a lifeline. And without seeking to give it a fancy acronym, for the salesperson, it is a simple, but comprehensive, database of clients and prospects.

The database needn't be a complex IT system; a simple Excel Sheet will do. People may not buy one product from you but that doesn't mean they won't buy another. Today you could be selling life insurance and tomorrow FMCG. The same persons who may have been avoiding you with the former may surprise you when they embrace you with the latter! If however, you did not keep a record of them, you will struggle to work from memory remembering their contact or from scratch seeking fresh prospects.

To keep a database however is not as simple as it sounds. Record keeping isn't everyone's cup of tea. But then again, neither is selling. Most prospects don't expect the salesperson to follow through especially if the sale didn't go through. Sadly, most salespeople don't, even when it

does. A database is a simple tool that allows the salesperson to easily manage follow-ups and achieve exemplary results doing the unexpected. A database acts as a never-ending source of prospects and it allows the salesperson to measure his efficiency. Seasoned salespeople know that people's circumstances change-today's decline is tomorrow's close. Salespeople who have been in the profession long enough will tell of prospects who give you an appointment in October for February-and they honour it! Progressive salespeople track prospects for a change in their (prospects) circumstances that eliminate an obstacle that acted as a reason not to buy e.g. an impending shift in the corporate politics, a promotion that was hanging in the balance or even a divorce becoming final. Such details are best documented in a database. That aside the progressive salesperson understands the game of numbers. Using the database he keeps refining his conversion ratios. This is his suspect to prospect to client conversion ratios. All these critical aspects to the sales profession are only possible if a comprehensive database is kept. It also makes compiling reports much easier and so much more. A database forms a basis from which the salesperson can feel a sense of progress in his profession.

The salesperson who doesn't keep a database is really shooting in the dark. He denies himself the ability to build momentum, wasting away every contact because it is based on a hit and run.

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### 3: WHAT IMPOSTORS CAN TEACH US ABOUT CONFIDENCE IN SELLING

*Buyers may claim to have bought the product because they needed it but it's more likely they bought it from the fourth salesperson who attempted to sell it to them because they liked him or because "he was so confident"*

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How does someone playing a critical role on a global stage, amidst powerful Heads of State, at the memorial service of the iconic Nelson Mandela, end up being nothing short of a con man? Simple. Confidence. Until his cover was blown, [Thamsanqa Jantjie](#) had the world's attention as his antics at being a sign language expert were beamed to a global audience. There may be collective condemnation of the incident and the man but you must admire his confidence. In Kenya you may remember the gentleman who was caught on camera seated between the then President Kibaki and former president Moi at the funeral service of the late Njenga Karume's wife. How we wondered? Simple. Confidence. The same confidence that oozes from the fictitious man of the cloth who fixes his gaze on a hapless passerby and convinces her of his ability to double her money through prayer. There is a lesson to be picked from each of these examples: confidence sells.

The product or service may be just what the doctor ordered but it's useless if it is not communicated in a demeanour to reflect its importance. Confidence in communicating the product across is what carries the day. The glossy brochure, impeccable suit and meticulous PowerPoint slides all pale into insignificance against doubt, fear and hesitation. "He had an impressive CV and dressing, but he did not inspire the panel with confidence", is a common lamentation among human resource personnel about interviewees.

If it's been said once it's been said a million times-body language carries much more weight in communication than does verbal. This is information the progressive salesperson carries to heart. He is not an underwriter but will sell the insurance product better than the underwriter would; he knows not how to write the savior software but will persuasively communicate it to decision makers; he may not be a sign language expert but he will not hesitate to present himself as such. Indeed, the very term con is derived from the word confidence

Perhaps it is for this reason that many view the profession of selling negatively and listen to the salesperson in a guarded nature. Statements like, "he can sell a fridge to an Eskimo" and "diplomacy is the ability to tell someone to go to hell in such a way that they actually look forward to the trip", all serve to lend credence to the importance of displaying confidence in communicating ones product or service.

So profound is the importance of communicating with confidence that when you stop to think about it, many prospects don't question the authenticity of the individual selling his services to them. For instance, if he called in and presented himself as an expert at talent search, besides his confidence, his business card is just about as much evidence as he will give. And all will be well down to and including signing the contract unless the expert displays timidity, cowardice or apprehension then it all comes down like a house of cards.

It is a sad truth about school. It may make you academically literate but socially illiterate. School may teach you how to read, write, add and subtract but life demands something totally different. Life demands confidence, courage and determination. Sales school may teach us to prospect, interview, demonstrate, validate, negotiate and close but the field demands more than this: the field demands confidence, assurance and pluck.

Objectivity may be what many would look to, to justify the purchase they made but in truth subjectivity is what tilted the balance. They may claim to have bought the product because they needed it but it's more likely they bought it from the fourth salesperson who attempted to sell it to them because they liked him or because "he was so confident"

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## 4: CONNECT THE DOTS TO BEING A SEASONED SALESPERSON

*Among the ways progressive salespeople connect the dots, is by looking forward to objections with the sole intention of finding suitable responses to them.*

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*Connect the dots is a form of (children's) puzzle containing a sequence of numbered dots. When a line is drawn connecting the dots the outline of an object is revealed...In adult discourse the phrase "connect the dots" can be used as a metaphor to illustrate an ability (or inability) to associate one idea with another, to find the "big picture", or salient feature, in a mass of data. (Wikipedia). In the sales profession, connecting the dots will determine professional health or morbidity. It is unfortunate that many sales people fail to connect the dots of their cumulative experiences to become seasoned salespeople.*

To illustrate, a client hired us to “take his invention to market” - his words. In lay language, make it commercially viable. They only had the prototype and tons of faith that there was a huge market out there that needed this service. That was it. Based purely on an emotional connection (something about the client's passion) we asked for a week to establish viability before consenting. Interestingly enough, a few days of secondary research later, demonstrated that the faith the client had in the prototype was not at all misplaced. In fact, the product was ‘bang on’ what the target market required. Armed with these new found and credible statistics, we had connected our first dot. We sought to connect the next one. Based on the statistics we developed a sales presentation and called up our first prospect. Two more dots had been connected. We presented, received objections and general feedback. Just like that three more dots were connected. From a very long distance an object was emerging.

Following the feedback from first presentation we improved our presentation in commensurate manner for prospect number two. Another two dots were connected. We soldiered on inspired by the very prospects whom, though none bought, both admitted we were on to something. The presentations to prospects number six and seven differed sharply from one and two. Now we had industry examples that supported our presentation, choice words we could use that the prospect could connect with and relevant industry jargon to show we had cut our teeth. Listening to us, one would imagine we were veterans in that industry.

Meantime, all we were doing was merely connecting the dots. We consciously and deliberately borrowed from previous experiences to improve and inform subsequent ones. We trusted we would, in retrospect, see the light. Lo and behold from being utter novices, seemingly, we were now industry experts! Our audience was warmer, more receptive, we spoke their language. We

had come of age! By this time the object which initially was a haze in the distance was now coming closer and taking shape—we could make a calculated guess as to what it could be.

But why was the foregoing possible? Simple. We connected the first dot, and then the next, then the fifth, the ninth and so on. To improve in the profession, salespeople must be prepared to connect the dots. Seeing sales as a profession prepares the salesperson to accept that he may start seeing the light after months of connecting the dots and connecting the dots is a never-ending process. Much like a doctor knows that to remain relevant learning is infinite.

Among the ways progressive salespeople connect the dots, is by looking forward to objections with the sole intention of finding suitable responses to them. These salespeople have learnt over time that irrespective of the industry, objections are not infinite; the key ones rarely get to ten. And so they have listed the objections and repeatedly tried various responses until, Eureka!, they find the one that is most appropriate to each. In other words, they connect the dots until the object that was a blur comes into focus.

Failing to connect the dots works against the salesperson; she is unable transcend to being a seasoned salesperson. The unique experiences in the profession weigh heavily on her when she focuses on why the dots can't be connected, instead of how they can be.

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## 5: WHY POINTS OF CONTACT SHOULD GET OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONES

*Sales people initiate the relationship but only those in service can deepen it. .*

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The sales job has an element of customer service in it, which, sadly, many sales people frown upon believing it's not their job. Once the account is delivered they are out, so they argue. In the same breath, many customer service representatives strait jacket themselves in their job description and put blinders on even the most glaring of sales opportunities.

Both are points of contact, and so, whereas the former is much more in the fore front of initiating the relationship, the latter has the enviable opportunity of deepening it. Even if the employer or business owner has it structured that the two are mutually exclusive so as to enhance specialization, the progressive salesperson knows only too well that it's a hazy line where he cuts off as the direct sales person and the customer service representative picks from. Travel agents for instance, may have sales people who source for the business, and having done so, hand the client over to the ticketing officer to execute the orders. The smooth transition of account acquisition to account servicing is the salesperson domain; so is handling heady customer complaints arising in the course of servicing the account; and so too, following through on how the client feels about the service being administered. And why? Because retaining an account is cheaper than losing one and because such care will most likely lead to a referral. This does not make the salesperson a ticketing officer. No. In fact, to counter technical questions he most likely may not be versant with, the salesperson might opt to go along with the ticketing officer on a customer visit. However, continually feeling the pulse of the customer service being administered on the account he landed comes with the territory of the progressive salesperson.

By the same token, having taken over the account, the customer service representative cannot cocoon herself in her job description and be purely an order taker. She too has a component of selling in her profession. Like in normal human relationships day to day engagements allow people to open up more; this is the opportunity the salesperson does not enjoy but the ticketing officer does. If the client books for a flight to the Mombasa, for instance, the ticketing officer can offer ideas on places to stay and invite the client to book through her-and just like that, an extra sale is made.

In a popular supermarket, the cashier will always ask me for my loyalty card. The supermarket knows that at strategic level, having instituted the loyalty program, the success in running it is

heavily dependent on the cashier-shopper interaction and they have therefore trained the cashier to ask that simple question- “Do you have your card?” At a food joint in Upper Hill, the forever jubilant fellow serving fish, will notice the disappointment on my face when the dish is over, apologize for this and entice me to try the chicken (not beef even when it’s there; he knows if I like fish I most likely prefer white meat). And to make the offer sweeter he’ll throw in the *ugali* for free. In the grand scheme of things the price of the *ugali* is insignificant, but the value it adds to the transaction is priceless.

In today’s world, where a plumber is wise to learn the basics of being an electrician, and the electrician a plumber; where human resource personnel are being challenged to go beyond merely knowing staffing to understanding how business runs; where rigidity in a profession is akin to taking a professional suicide pill; to stay stationery, in today’s world, let alone get ahead, knowing the basics of something else closely related to your job is a basic must. It is even more pronounced when that “something else” is an opportunity to deepen the client relationship through an extra sale.

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## 6: SELLING WITHOUT CLOSING IS AKIN TO PLAYING FOOTBALL WITHOUT SCORING

*Your company does not judge its growth by the number of meetings held; it's judged by how the decisions arrived at in those meeting convert to profit. Your closes construe that profit. .*

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"Last week we observed that the sales cycle is a guideline, not a linear plan. And that movement along the cycle is much akin to a dance. The song, "Atoti" by Gidi Gidi Maji Maji captured it well: "Atoti, go, Atoti, come, Atoti this way, Atoti that way, Atoti panda, Atoti suka...". This however does not suggest in any way that the waltz does not hit a crescendo; it must. And in selling the crescendo is a close. Selling is like football; scores are the ultimate count!

It's all well and good that you played well-but did you score?! Yes, you had 85% ball possession, but what did you do with it? Yes, you mesmerized the crowd with your dazzling footwork, but your opponent won the game. You had 6 of the 7 corner kicks; 82% of the match was played on your opponents half; you even had two penalty kicks; oh yes, your game had all the hallmarks of an enchanting football match. Good to know. BUT! Did you score?!

The run of the mill salesperson will be heard lamenting that no-one is appreciating her efforts. She wants commendation for her efforts so that she can bask in it. "I made 100 calls to prospective clients, got appointments with 30 of them, made a brilliant presentation to 15 of them and yet I'm still last in the rankings. Sob! Sob! No-one likes me!" Well, you are there to sell! And the rankings are based on closes made, not effort put in. So, for as long as no conversions to a close are seen, your name will not be budging from the tail position any time soon. By all means, play the game well; dazzle the crowd; keep the commentator lauding you throughout the match, and have the most shots at goal. But remember what took you there and what will move you forward-SCORE!

Surprisingly, to many salespeople this is heavy stuff. During an appraisal they will even argue with their supervisor that they don't deserve the low grade they are getting yet they put in so much effort. Don't get the supervisor wrong; your efforts are indeed commendable-possibly he has even repeatedly challenged your colleagues to emulate you as the best example of effective and efficient movement along the sales cycle. BUT! Your company does not judge its growth by the number of meetings held; it's judged by how the decisions arrived at in those meeting convert to profit. Your closes construe that profit.

Closing isn't just intrinsic in selling, dancing or football. It is so in life. You cannot afford to be on a perpetual courtship with a girl. Call her Atoti; if you are not moving towards a close, Atoti will want to know sooner rather than later where all this dancing is headed. "Are we getting

engaged? Are we just having fun? Are you wasting my time or what exactly are we doing? Just point me where we are headed: close!”

It’s no different in professional selling. Subconsciously, the prospect expects the salesperson to move him to a close. But just like football isn’t a simple penalty kick, the salesperson and prospect know that some fancy footwork on the selling field is expected before a shot at goal is made and then a third, and perhaps a fifth, before the commentator screams, “GOALLLL!”.

The calls, interviews, demonstrations, and validations are not to be diminished in any way. Just like the continual footwork on the field to enable a clear shot at goal, the steps in the cycle are critical and necessary to grow towards a close.

However, football is a ruthless game. At the end of the day what matters is one thing only: the score. Sales is no softer; what ultimately matters is one thing: the close.

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## **7: DON'T BE TOO QUICK TO SHIFT BLAME WHEN SALES ARE DOWN, MAYBE IT'S YOU**

*When the streak of sales you were making begins to decline, before blaming it on the weather, go back to the basics and in analytical fashion see whether there are gaps in the cycle you need to fill. Chances are, it's not the economy that needs fixing; it's you.*

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Many are the times that the sales person that has many misses and rare hits is told by others: "It's not you; it's the prospects that don't have money" or, "it's the economy that's bad." I don't agree; maybe it is you. Let's go back to the basics, which is what one should do when they find themselves in this sales quandary.

If you're consistently not meeting your targets, chances are, there are gaps in your basic selling skills. Sometimes, when a sales person is on a roll with consistent sales, it gets to his head and he believes it is happened because of his "greatness"- he forgets that it is the result of a concerted building of momentum along the sales cycle. And when the momentum stops building, the sales wane. Full of himself, he may be easily convinced that the many misses are due to the conditions of the market and not his defective sales methods.

Regardless of where one's sales numbers are, it's important for all sales people to take an occasional break to review the basics of good selling behaviours.

Let's look at the sales cycle again. Google reminds us that the steps along which the selling process follows are prospect, interview, demonstrate, validate, negotiate, close, referral and back again to prospect.

Simple though these steps sound, even the best get thrown off track sometimes. And sales is unforgiving; sales is perhaps the only job in which what you do when no-one is looking will come to reward you or haunt you; either way it will show in your results. When the sales person doesn't regularly prospect with a view to increasing the quality and quantity of his prospects he misses a core basic step and he can only stagger and fall thereafter. Staggering begins when he does not make enough calls, and therefore doesn't make enough appointments, nor presentations- the natural consequence for this is that he gets less closes. Soon enough, he falls. A research done to determine if there was any other way to increase closes returned a sound verdict-the only way to increase closes is to see more people and increase the quality of the people you see. Adequate prospecting (the never ending art of looking for people to buy your product or service) is the number one basic. Trying to beat the system because no one is looking, serves only to backfire on the salesperson.

Another basic. Sales people regularly shoot themselves in the foot by failing to understand their customer's business, not listening to their client's needs, or not asking the right questions. "The prospects don't know what they want" they reason. But before you pass judgment, are the prospects who don't know what they want, buying the same product you are selling, but elsewhere? You may have degenerated to being a run-of-the mill salesperson. You don't research your client and so make generic presentations; you don't seek to inform subsequent presentations with experiences from past ones; you don't rehearse presentations you are going to make because, after all, you reason, the prospect needs my product like they do oxygen and so you carry yourself with indifference to the prospect and your language and your attire follow suit.

It is easy for the salesperson to believe he is not the problem. He knows! And because he knows he cannot be told. He tells! And because he tells he does not listen. And he doesn't listen because, you guessed it, he knows! And so the vicious cycle continues.

When the streak of sales you were making begins to decline, before blaming it on the weather, go back to the basics and in analytical fashion see whether there are gaps in the cycle you need to fill. Chances are, it's not the economy that needs fixing; it's you.

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## 8: BE PERISTENT TO SUCCEED IN SEELING

*There is no failure in sales; only feedback*

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The *Business Daily* captured his story thus: “Initially running a one-man operation in which he was the only worker on the ‘factory’ floor and the chief salesman, Mr [Kinuthia](#) would package his goods and walk from one beauty salon to another introducing his products to prospective customers.”

And Forbes magazine continued about this successful salesperson, “Paul Kinuthia started (Interconsumer) in a makeshift apartment in the Kariobangi Light Industries 20 years ago with a start-up capital of 3000 KSh (\$ 40 USD). He sold it, twenty years later, (to L’Oreal) for over KSh 1 billion. Though extreme, Kinuthia’s is a remarkable story on persistence.”

There are so many lessons to learn from Mr. Kinuthia’s story, that only editorial space limits it. I shall thus stick to one aspect; persistence. “Nothing in the world can take the place of Persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan 'Press On' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.” Spoken close to 70 years ago, these words by Calvin Coolidge still ring true today especially for the progressive salesperson

The most successful salesperson in your organization in all probability has the most failures. That statement will surprise most, but it’s true. The reason why most will be surprised is because we don’t see successful salespeople (or any other successful person for that matter) in the light of failure; it’s almost as if they shield us from seeing that side. But the truth is they don’t; they just don’t let the many rejections, the false promises, the ignored emails, the disconnected ‘phone calls and the aborted meetings clutter their conversation; they just take these in their stride. They come with the territory; they are part of the job and an intrinsic one at that. And because they rarely mention (let alone lament) over these woes, we never get to know about them, and therefore assume these successful salespeople have their path always brightly lit and paved in gold. In truth, it’s not-what they do is persevere.

As the quote aforementioned says, education, talent and genius are secondary to persistence. Look around you: the most successful person is not necessarily the most

learned; and possibly, like me, you may know many who have a flair for the sales profession but hope that their talent will work for them even if they don't.

If you want to sell your product/service the key is to do it. Try. And try again. And try yet again, even if it means getting rejected all the time (which is very probable). Like the successful salesperson, if you want to double your success rate you must double your failure rate. Usually though, you find you triple your failure rate to double your success rate.

The other day, a pregnant wait for a major deal fell through. A business partner, lamented, "this is very discouraging. What do we do now?" And the response he got from yet another partner: "We knock more doors." Just like that; no qualms about the "failure", no bickering about who was to blame, no crying over spilt milk. Just knock more doors! There is no failure in sales; only feed back!

Persistence does not mean repeatedly banging ones head against the wall. That's foolishness which leads to your head cracking. Persistence means banging your head against the wall but shifting the angle again and again based on feedback until the wall, not your head, cracks. Persistence could also mean questioning whether it's only your head that can crack the wall; a sledgehammer just might do the trick

The foregoing is all good news for the progressive salesperson. It means that giving up on the second phone call isn't acceptable; statistics show that 84% of breakthrough comes after the fourth call. It means that the spell of nil sales that has you at rock bottom means with persistence the only way is up. After all, "nothing in the world can take the place of persistence..."

## 9: REDEFINE THE ROLE OF YOUR SALESPEOPLE TO ATTRACT BUYERS

*Contact translates to touch, feel and hold. These are very emotive and delicate senses and they come with the territory. Both employer and salesperson must handle them with the gravity they deserve.*

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The salesperson isn't one who merely sells the product or service. That's an archaic way of defining the profession. The world has dramatically moved from the days when the only source of information for Kenyans was VoK. The prospects have become wiser and the market boasts many players.

Today, the modern salesperson is a point of contact with the prospect and customer. A point of contact implies touch, feel, hold. With these in mind emotional aspects, human interaction and socialization come into play. And they should; because that's where sustainable exchange of goods and services for money happens. Looking at the salesperson as the point of contact, away from the staff member who sells, opens up a whole new world for the employer and the salesperson.

For the employer, his bottom line is only as strong as his frontline. And his frontline is manned by his sales force; his frontline is his point of contact with the only person, in his many significant business others, who actually shows him the money- the customer (prospective and existing). It therefore defeats all logic to invest heavily in space, décor and equipment to attract the numbers and totally ignore to invest in the salesperson who will ultimately perpetuate or destroy the already lofty perception the customer has of your service.

I give a lot of credit to the CEO of a renowned travel agency who has found a way to freely (yet respectfully) interact with his drivers-he knows his brochures, website and campaigns are only as good as the experience the tourist says he had with the driver in the Mara, for instance. And so the CEO has found a way to get raw data of the tourist experience and driver's professional health. He knows well on which side his bread is buttered.

There is a tendency by some employers to see the salesperson as belonging to the bottom of the food chain. It doesn't help matters when the salesperson accepts this position. This self-perception is extended to customer interaction and another sale is lost despite the product being superior. A furniture shop along Mombasa Road with ample floor space, imported goods and a tainted salesperson exemplified this recently. It was my second visit one year apart and the indifference was intact. My business partner, finally said, "Let's just go to the other one we'd been too first; at least there was rapport from the saleslady." And so we did and a sale was lost.

For the salesperson, seeing himself as a point of contact changes the whole ball game. It means he is in the frontline; he takes the bullets, staggers but keeps on fighting. As a point of contact he most times acknowledges that there will be instances when there is dirty linen that needs cleaning but gives the sanitized version to the prospect.

The point of contact is where first impressions are made by the prospect and extrapolated to the service expected. It matters therefore how the salesperson handles this awesome responsibility; he cannot see himself as being at the bottom of the food chain.

He is expected to be knowledgeable and friendly on the one hand but on the other, especially when under intense pressure, be strong enough to say, "I don't know but will get back to you with the information."

As the client evolves so must he. That means constantly learning new things. Contact translates to touch, feel and hold. These are very emotive and delicate senses and they come with the territory. Both employer and salesperson must handle them with the gravity they deserve.

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## 10: THE SALES CYCLE IS A GUIDELINE, NOT A LINEAR PLAN

*The progressive salesperson does not look at the steps in it as silos; she knows they are fluid in nature and it is possible to back track while on it for clarity's sake, but to always ensure general movement forward.*

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Why is the sales cycle called, well, a cycle?

A cycle implies a circle. Incredibly smooth and perfectly round. But, in practice, there's nothing smooth nor round about the sales cycle is there? The movement from point A to Z and back to A is so erratic it surely cannot be cyclic. In fact, it's only a cycle when drawn on paper; that is, in theory. In practice, however, it's as jagged as a hunting knife. To the uninitiated, the sales cycle represents the steps along which the selling process follows. Google will tell you that the steps are Prospect-Interview-Demonstrate-Validate-Negotiate-Close-Referral and back again to Prospect-Interview....

When the cycle is demonstrated in class, the novice salesperson feels his twin cab turbo engines gunning at the chance to execute this simple cyclic procedure and he wonders why there is so much hullabaloo about selling. Then he is released into the field and the drama begins. No one told him the sun was this hot; no one mentioned the gate keepers would be so unhelpful; and why didn't the tutor mention that confirmed meetings would abort, promises would be broken and rejection would permeate the air? The revving of his turbo engines begins to subside, and soon enough they can barely be heard beyond a whimper. The unblemished sight he had of the perfectly smooth circle quickly fades away to be replaced by a labyrinth of pain; what he thought was going to be a simple linear motion turns out to be anything but.

Sometimes, rarely though, the movement is linear. The salesperson prospects, presents and closes as if at the drop of a dime. But not only are such moments rare they also defeat human logic. Which is why, only the greenhorn salesperson will be excited that they closed at the blink of an eye. The more progressive salesperson will tell you that they will raise an eyebrow at such a flawless transaction; it doesn't feel right-the cycle is not meant to be this smooth; they smell a rat and doubt the viability of the sale. If the prospect has signed the dotted line, they doubt whether the cheque will come through; and if they have the cheque in hand they wonder whether it will go through.

Does this mean that all linear faultless sales will come a cropper? Absolutely not! And this only adds to the erratic nature of the cycle; seldom as it may be, a sale *can* follow the cycle smoothly and still be genuine. A client *can* call up the real estate agent and say, "I was referred to you by your client Juma; I want to buy the flat on Ngong Road next to his. I have downloaded the forms from your website, completed them and transferred 50% deposit into your account. I will transfer the balance within 21 days. Is it okay if I came by your office and dropped the forms, banker's cheque for stamp duty and bank confirmation of transfer?" In theory, there was no prospecting, interview, demonstration, validation nor negotiation here. Just the beginning of a close. In practice though, it is

the continued investment of the realtor in the sales cycle that has now given him returns. That investment is never-ending, which is a large part why it's called a sales cycle.

The sales cycle is meant to be a guideline, not a deadline. As such the progressive salesperson does not look at the steps in it as silos; she knows they are fluid in nature and it is possible to back track while on it for clarity's sake, but to always ensure general forward movement. For instance, when validating (handling objections) she may realize that at the demonstration (presentation) stage she missed out on something, and so go back to clarify it, and then come back to continue with the validation while moving towards a close. The sales cycle more often than not takes a zigzag movement; this awareness is instrumental to guiding the salesperson.

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## 11: SEEK FIRST THE RIGHT ATTITUDE AND ALL ELSE WILL FOLLOW

*Unlike breathing, however, which he doesn't think about, the progressive salesperson keeps aware of his attitude, towards selling. When it's negative he arrests it time before it rapidly springs forth behavior much akin to a cesspool.*

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*“Third World is a state of the mind and until we change our attitude as Africans, if there is a fourth, fifth and even sixth world, we will be in it.” (PLO Lumumba ).* A lot has been said about attitude, but for the salesperson enough never will be. Unchecked, sadly, the salesperson's attitude is more likely to see him sink into the sixth world of his profession than raise him to the first. The dictionary defines attitude thus: a settled way of thinking or feeling, typically reflected in a person's behavior. The operative words here are thinking and feeling which are internal and result in behavior. Thinking and feeling, and therefore attitude, are a choice. If behavior were a natural spring, attitude would determine how powerfully the water would eject from the ground and for how long. The weaker the power within, the weaker the flow without.

The skill of prospecting, interviewing, demonstrating, validating, negotiating and closing can be taught. It is all for naught though if the thinking and feeling towards the lessons are negative. For instance, if the thinking and feeling of the salesperson towards prospecting is that it is difficult work or beneath him then the behavior that will result is an erratic effort at prospecting at best, and no effort at worst; if on the other hand, the thinking and feeling towards prospecting is that it is exciting and stimulating then the stream that will spring forth will be a powerful one; the salesperson's will go at prospecting with full gusto. It's really as simple as that.

But in that simplicity lays a complex web of thought and feeling. Complex because human beings rarely share the truth about what they are thinking and feeling. Only *they* know when they are lying to themselves. Thankfully though, the behavior does not lie. The supervisor sees the quality of reports rapidly diminishing; the prospect sees the indifference in the salesperson's presentation; the client notices that the lack of interest in the email response to his complaint. On the other end of the spectrum, however, the salesperson avidly seeks appointments; prospects cannot help telling him how engaging he is and clients are happy to refer prospects to him because of his deameanour.

One of the most successful salespeople in the insurance industry in Kenya aggressively competed for the bottom three position in his company rankings for three years. By some weird twist of fate, his supervisor's death made something snap in him. He became like a caged

animal unleashed. Today, he effortlessly perambulates among the top two in the industry. What changed? He can't put a finger on it he says, but suddenly his thinking towards selling changed. Look around you-you know salespeople who changed their own fortunes for the better and everyone around them was left impressed yet lost at the cause of the sudden change. What happened? Prospects didn't suddenly sign up with no objections; they didn't suddenly start to buy with reckless abandon; calling rates didn't become cheaper; the supervisor didn't start giving him accounts. Nothing at all changed externally-it all happened internally; he turned his thinking and feeling towards selling for the better, and the natural spring sprung forth a powerful geyser.

Admittedly, thinking and feeling are not as reflexive as breathing. They fluctuate. Unlike breathing, however, which he doesn't think about, the progressive salesperson keeps aware of his thoughts and feelings, and therefore attitude, towards selling. When they are negative he arrests them in time before they rapidly spring forth behavior much akin to a cesspool.

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## 12: THE SALESPERSON IS THE POINT OF CONTACT WITH THE BUYER

*It's the human interactions that makes or break a sale. The presence of lackluster salespeople unable to carry on the standard already set by the furniture and décor deserves a kick in the backside.*

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Why does this happen?

We invest heavily in a business complete with extensive grounds, imported furniture and manicured lawns, then sit back and expect the money will roll in; then get surprised when it does not! And why doesn't it? Because, whereas all the visuals were prim and proper, they did their job of wooing the customer; however, *keeping* the customer was the domain of the waiter, the attendant, the sales lady.

I'll share two experiences. Twice I've been to this establishment. And on both occasions I drove in excited at the prospect of a relaxed family Sunday outing, only to have my bubble burst right from the parking attendant! The establishment is off Thika Road and sells itself as a team building destination and restaurant. I estimate its green grounds easily occupy two or three acres. As I struggled to park in the almost non-existent parking, two fellows, one in uniform, stared nonchalantly at me, busy chatting away, totally unmoved at my predicament. Finally, I drove up some embankment. I also decided not to judge this book by its cover. I wish I had!

My family and I hopelessly walked around, like blind men feeling their way forward, seeking the restaurant. Mercifully, a restaurant appeared in front of us. And the torture continued. One waiter, standing a few meters from us was busy on his 'phone sipping away at a soda. Another two sat a distance away chatting. No one bothered to acknowledge us. We waited to see what would happen. Suddenly a supervisor appeared issued some orders and the soda-sipper hurriedly came over to take our order. Then he disappeared with it. He only resurfaced eons later when we spotted the supervisor to ask about our order. Long story short, it was one pathetic interaction after another. All the attractive outer trappings simply faded to nothingness.

The other experience was a furniture shop along Mombasa with a wide array of impressive office furniture covering an equally impressive floor space. Only problem is the receptionist had this 'phone call which our presence was inconveniencing. Ultimately, she pointed us towards another lady. We walked over; she said she was the sales lady, and what did we want. We told her. We asked to browse the shop all the way upstairs and proceeded to do so; she joined us several minutes later with a brochure. What did we want, she asked again? We told her, again. She kept referring to the brochure with every query we made. Her indifference was coming through and our appetite to shop there was waning in commensurate measure.

Ultimately my business partner said, “let’s go back to the other shop we had started from-even the saleslady was warmer and engaging.”

Personally, I have been to both establishments twice; last year and this year. Yet 365 days apart, the customer contact point was lacking basic selling skills. The furniture shop we went back to was not as grandiose in variety nor floor space as this one we had just left but the sales person’s demeanor was. And despite being slightly more expensive it’s anyone’s guess where we finally purchased the furniture. Likewise, it’s a long stretch of imagination to think I’d go back to the green restaurant.

The sales person is the point of contact with the client. It’s the human interactions that makes or break a sale. The investment in floor space, manicured lawns and imported furniture deserves a pat on the back. The presence of lackluster salespeople unable to carry on the standard already set deserves a kick in the backside.

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### 13: PROGRESSIVE SELLERS STAND FOR THEIR PRODUCT/SERVICE

*The salesperson should be the authority on his product or service. When he falters or balks it reflects on the product/service and a sale is compromised*

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I read this on a poster somewhere where the king of the jungle had this to say: “No matter the economy of the jungle, I can never eat grass...it’s not pride, it’s just who I am.” Are you able to stand for what your company offers or do you balk at the first sign of resistance? Mediocre and average salespeople acquiesce at the first sign of protest; progressive salespeople on the other hand, learnt a long time ago to draw the line beyond which they will not cross and beneath which they will not sink.

One salesperson tactfully responds to an objection for a discount thus: “this is fine; which 20% of the product do you wish me to remove, Sir?” Bold; and to most, unbelievable. Yet it happens because the salesperson stands for the price of his product, is sure of its value and refuses to be dragged down the discount drain.

One may argue that it is easier to firmly stand by a comparatively successful product than one not so. For instance, if I’m selling space for the Daily Nation whose circulation is 10 times the nearest competitor and is among the top 10 newspapers in Africa, I may even have a glint in the eye, and a spring to my walk; this should be an easy sale, yes? NO. True, such statistics should give the salesperson impetus to go sell; also true is that many are the products which should be easy to stand for, but the average salesperson balks at the challenges that come with selling such products. When selling space, they find they cannot undersell the brand. Firmly standing for a product may be assisted by the product’s positive standing in the market, but such confidence must be exuded by the salesperson or it’s all for naught.

Services tend to be most affected. “How do I stand for “air”?” as I once heard a salesperson refer to service. After all, there is nothing to show the prospect.” This belief in itself is the beginning of the inability to stand for something syndrome. Services especially require a salesperson who looks and speaks the value he promises to deliver. His words, demeanour and general disposition are the promise he is selling. Is it easy? Absolutely not! You may find yourself stammering at the prospect of mentioning your well above industry average consultancy fee for instance. That doesn’t mean you don’t, or that you balk; as a prospect recently told me, “it’s important to have space to say no.” (In other words stand for something)

When a salesperson doesn't stand for something, like an animal of prey exposed, he reeks fear and the predator prospects, circle in, gently at first, and then more boldly until they zoom in for the kill. And the prey is had; the salesperson limps away, his ego bruised, an excuse to rationalize the interview playing in his mind. Such repeat exchanges by the salesperson, wear him down; reasons to look forward to another day dim; the job becomes "hard", and soon, he is looking for the exit sign. It's a heavy toll the salesperson pays for not standing for something.

Standing for something is not just a price issue; it is also cancelling the profitable contract because the incurably foul-mouthed client has created a toxic business environment; or, confidently taking the heat for your company's error and seeing through the correction; or, walking away from a mega deal, because you feel it will compromise your values; or, despite the prospect's badgering, admitting you don't know the answer but will come back with a response soon enough.

The salesperson should be the authority on his product. When he unwisely recoils merely to suit a prospect he puts undue pressure on back office (those who are meant to deliver); he puts unnecessary strain on himself, trying to get the 16 by 8 space he sold, fit the 8 by 4 price he acquiesced too; and after back office has said no, and the salesperson has suffered an ulcer, he still has to go back and face the client, tail between the legs- to seek absolution and amendment, having, hopefully, stood for the error of his ways

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## 14: MAKE YOUR SERVICE STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD TO SUCCEED

*Standing out from the crowd is the beginning of progress for the salesperson. It's the zone in which the learning curve becomes a sharp angle not a straight line.*

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Have you seen it? The *tuk tuk* in town complete with an umbrella? Absolute genius I thought when I saw it. I haven't ridden on it to confirm the service matches the look but I'm already drawn to it. Among the myriad *tuk-tuk's* in town, all giving a standard service, the owner has stood out from the crowd. And by doing so, he has made his sale that much easier. With the oncoming heat, stepping onto a *tuk-tuk* with a shade is oh-so-welcome. I couldn't help thinking of how the progressive salesperson cuts a niche and distances himself from the army of sales people lookalikes.

For some salespeople their umbrella (niche) is their appearance. They are dressed to the nines complete with the latest electronic gizmos. Others are the Mpesa agent who has earned the reputation of always having float and the newspaper vendor who doesn't frown upon a Kes. 1,000 note-if he doesn't have the change he knows where to get it. Still, the umbrella could be the sales manager whom salespeople look up to because he holds their hand until they are not just walking but running and is there to hold them thereafter when they stumble.

But why bother standing out from the crowd? Because most products and services are similar and at par value this presents a challenge for the sales person; it makes it difficult to differentiate. The most successful bank sales rep, sells products much similar, if not identical to, what the competition does; the shop in your estate with the highest footfall, probably sells the same household and personal care items the least successful one does; I have a customer service rep I will happily await to be free just to be served by her; the Daily Nation has a circulation almost 10 times higher than the nearest competitor yet news is news. I could go on and on. Generally, perhaps the only time one has a product that another doesn't is the two week window before it is copied if not bettered. But whereas products and services may be similar, I also know that salespeople are not. And therein lays the magic.

Standing out from the multitude isn't a complicated exercise. I mean, how complicated is placing an umbrella on the *tuk-tuk*? Or, the tout who genuinely compliments his lady passengers on their dressing? Though not complicated, standing out from the army of sameness isn't as common as one would imagine. It takes courage to go against the tide and as I once read somewhere, and I have seen in my workshops, the opposite of courage isn't cowardice-its conformity. And therein lays the challenge for the sales person-conformity; going

about the job same as how everyone else does, without asking why, how or what. After all, questioning the status quo will mark me he thinks; I won't belong. It's much easier to have group think, to go with the flow. The problem of going with the flow is that even a dead fish does.

Standing out from the crowd is the beginning of progress for the salesperson. It's the zone in which the learning curve becomes a sharp angle not a straight line. The salesperson becomes a sponge for information. And why? Having put pressure on himself to stand out, he cannot remain static-he must get better and better at his game. The traffic to his doorstep is already high-he cannot afford to let it go to waste. It would be a wasted investment if, when I hop onto the shaded *tuk-tuk*, I find the rider speaking foul language or driving recklessly or doing anything that adversely diminishes the height of the pedestal I have already placed him on.

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## 15: THE SALES CYCLE DOES NOT TELL YOU HOW TO SELL-THAT'S YOUR JOB

*The sales cycle won't flow if you don't. And flowing with it means being flexible. The progressive sales person is fluid in nature. He is always seeking to add value to the sales process*

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Here's sad news! Intently studying the sales cycle won't bring you any numbers. The sales cycle won't work if you don't.

Google reminds us that the steps along which the selling process follows are prospect, interview, demonstrate, validate, negotiate, close, referral and back again to prospect.

Experience reminds us that the steps along which the process flows are bumps, more bumps and yet more bumps. In between text book definition and experience on the ground, lays the game changer: the place where the salesperson adds value to the process by being flexible.

Value addition is in the handicraft seller who, having objected to buying a piece as I didn't need it, tells me, "but you can buy for a friend"-and I did. Value addition is when my barber tells me I can pay next time as he doesn't have change for the Kes.1,000 note I have right away; and value addition is the bank rep who determines to do all the leg work for his lucrative accounts yet in theory he shouldn't. Adding value to the sales cycle is what brings in the numbers-studying the sales cycle with blinders on won't teach you that; but a desire to add value by trying new things will.

Adding value to the sales process injects vibrancy to the inanimate sales cycle. The value addition is what war stories are about. It's the space where the sales people who stand out from the army of look-alikes play. It's the stuff that makes sales legends.

Consider this sales predicament. A salesperson wishes to demonstrate to a prospect that his internal processes need adjusting as the cart is placed before the horse. There is the sales person who will use several PowerPoint slides to drive the point home; and there's another who may write a lengthy email detailing the whys and the wherefores of the situation; and then there's a third who may come along with only a stick and a carrot and using just these two show why the prospects aren't able to get to the desired carrot because of the dreaded stick. There is no right or wrong way here-just different methods of adding value to the process while

seeking the one that will drive home the point in the simplest, effective and most memorable fashion.

I know a salesman who having unsuccessfully tried several times and ways to reach a high flying prospect got creative. He befriended the prospect's personal assistant and got a sneak preview of his calendar. The next time the prospect was flying business class as usual, guess who was seated right next to him? The salesman tells me the three hour flight was the greatest investment he had ever made in his career. When they landed and parted ways, he hang around the airport and waited for the next flight back. Mission accomplished.

Flexibility wins because prospects are human being and not robots, programmed to act in specific ways at specific times. Human beings are by their very nature, fluid; and therefore situations are too. Nothing is permanent. An infuriated prospect will simmer down at one point in time; he can be approached then. Market situations also change; even the show-stopper general election comes and goes, as former President Kibaki liked to remind Kenyans.

The sales cycle won't flow if you don't. And flowing with it means being flexible. The progressive sales person is fluid in nature. He is always seeking to add value to the sales process by trying different ways of doing so until, voila!-bulls-eye!-the flow continues.

The progressive salesperson knows that there is no failure in sales; only feed back; and feedback sometimes gets us to mark time, take a few steps back or even go back to the drawing board and make a new foray.

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## 16: WHAT KENYA AT 50 TEACHES US ABOUT SELLING

*Kenya may be 50 but these are the fundamentals: sales is much older but the basics remain the same.*

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Kenya is 50 today (it was at the initial time of writing this piece). Being a public holiday, you are most probably reading this at home, rested, watching the celebrations as they proceed at the impressive Kasarani grounds and historic Uhuru Gardens. Watch closely. Amidst the multitude seated in the stadium, notice an extremely few standing, steadily engaging the majority. Watch closer still. This latter minority has a container ensconced in their arms; every now and then they dip into it and present the majority with something from it in exchange for cash. You have just witnessed a sale. The minority are selling groundnuts, sweets, bottled water, ice-cream and a myriad other snacks; and with a captive market of nearly 100,000 persons they are doing roaring business. The minority are hawkers; and while the rest of the country is in a restive carnival mood they are celebrating too-that manna has fallen from heaven. In one day, they will have the opportunity to sell to more people than they could ever dream of. This is peak season for them and they will fully exploit it.

What does all this mean? Kenya may be 50 but these are the fundamentals: sales is much older but the basics remain the same. First, every industry has its high and low seasons; and every industry knows to capitalize fully on the high to compensate the low. The progressive hawker in the opening story ensures his granary of goodies is well equipped to satisfy the demand of the multitude. He also hopes the weather will co-operate but doesn't think much of this-come rain or shine, manna from heaven is not to be merely savoured-it's to be hungrily devoured. It is depressing therefore to find salespeople who don't study their market to understand its dynamics; they therefore miss the bi-annual cattle dip day where their target market (farmers) congregate in the hundreds and to whom they would have demonstrated the workings of their latest pesticide; they also miss the quarterly in-house training that brings together 100 employees and in which they would have sought an invitation to speak.

Notice also the items the hawkers are selling. They are necessities. Water and soda to wet parched throats; sweets and ice cream to appease the children; cakes and bread to keep the hunger pangs at bay; and bespoke golden jubilee flags and T-shirts to placate the patriotic with a souvenir. So relevant are the goods on sale, the crowd itself occasionally calls out for them. Nothing magical there you are thinking, huh? Its common sense you say. But is it really? How many times do sales people insist of pushing a product to a prospect which is relevant to the sales person's commissions but totally irrelevant to the prospects needs?

Yet despite the relevance of the products, the progressive sales people are not seated pretty waiting for the client-they are out there in the multitude, sinking deeper and deeper into it, competently handling objections as they go along. They learnt a long time ago that in sales Moses goes to the mountain; the mountain coming to Moses is welcome but not banked on. And yes, contrary to what most may think, there are objections in their job. *Hauna maji baridi?* (Don't you have cold water?) *Punguza bei, bwana.* (Give me a discount please) *Tafuta change, sina pesa ndogo* (I only have this 500sh note, go get change) and on and on. The objections prove yet again that they arise out of human nature and not the nature of the product.

Kenya may be 50 today but these are the ageless sales fundamentals: understand your market enough to exploit its highs, offer it relevant products and handle the objections that come your way.

## 17: PAPERWORK MAY START YOU OFF IN SALES, BUT IT IS EMOTION THAT DRIVES IT ON

*Mama Nanii who runs the shop in your estate does not extend credit to all her customers. Over time she has learnt whom to trust and whom not too. Relationships deepen the sales process. Emotional connection delves into the inner sanctum of the sales process. Saelling is simply a transfer of emotions.*

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My bank wrote to me towards the end of last year. Just like they had done two years running before then, I was being invited to take up a 30% increase on the limit of my credit card. This third invite would effectively more than double the limit I had started off with and which the bank's assessment of my application then, showed I qualify for. Based solely on my payment and expenditure habits over time, and as conservative as a bank is known to be, they still deemed it fit to double my limit. In what is now appearing to be an annual ritual, no paperwork of earnings has been asked of me, no application requested, not even a 'phone call nor the rigmarole a bank can put you through in the name of knowing you better- just an email inviting me to take up the offer, which is even made more enticing by having a time limit on it. Every year I receive this email I marvel at the sales genius who thought it up. Where credit is concerned character supersedes ability to pay. Paperwork is considered important in our sales transactions, but emotional issues based on character, like trust and confidence, are what really carry the day.

Mama Nanii who runs the shop in your estate does not extend credit to all her customers. Over time she has learnt whom to trust and whom not too. So profound is this concept that lending institutions are already toying with the concept of having kiosks in local shopping centers act as their (lending) agents. This is deeper than the bank agency concept we are all familiar with.

Relationships deepen the sales process. Emotional connection delves into the inner sanctum of the sales process.. As a renowned speaker once said, sales is simply a transfer of emotions.

Understanding this progresses the salesperson further along her career. The understanding allows her to make credible decisions on her feet, largely ignoring the red tape; it is because of this understanding that you will hear a salesperson fervently defending a client's case which is inconsistent with a company's parameters because, "I know this guy". She cannot explain on paper what exactly she knows but she knows that having the prospect on board is a sound decision. Field experience does this-it galvanizes the salesperson-prospect bond. Admittedly, those to whom she is pitching her case usually don't share her sentiments because they don't share the emotional connection. Despite

being told to advise as “she is the one on the ground” she will not win all the battles, and despite having the strong bond with the prospect, time will not always prove her right but win or lose she does not stop to understand her client and make decisions made on the progressive understanding and not necessarily what the rules say. Selling largely an art; not a science.

This is not to rubbish the importance of paperwork in the sales process. Documentation is what helps start off the relationship and also further it. Databases feed off this collection of data. As a salesperson however, as the relationship progresses, rigidity with the process does not help movement along the sales cycle-it hampers it! Had my bank chosen to stick to the rules and have me make an application and submit the necessary supporting documents it is very possible that I would have failed to meet their parameters-assuming in the first place I would have agreed to do so. Yet, because of a progressive salesperson who understood relationships, they have deepened my connection to them and their pockets too.

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## 18: CAUGHT IN A TIME WARP? WORLD OF OUTDATED CALENDAR & DIARY BECKONS

*Time has grown beyond the hold of its “custodians”, that is, calendars and diaries. For the business owner and salesperson, let not time overtake you too.*

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What happened to the calendar and diary? Like me, you have possibly witnessed a steady decline of the two with every passing January to a point this year, when I’m almost at zero sightings. There was a time when the two were all the rage. The transition to the New Year would be heralded by a flurry of diaries and calendars crisscrossing town as deliveries were being made to clients. Possibly you were the well spring from which calendars sprout, and, like a standing order, your friends and significant others expected their annual dose of the life giving calendar. So critical was this annual dose that relationships were known to die when it was not administered. Today I find my parents’ generation keener on receiving the calendar than their children and grandchildren. Some of the reasons forwarded for this decline include companies cutting costs and the ubiquitous mobile ‘phone aggressively sapping up the calendar and diary space. Whatever the reason, the calendar and diary have lost their sizzle. So what?

Well, for the business owner, be warned: the jackpot of a product that set you on the golden path to the fat bank account isn’t a perennial panacea to the needs of your clients. Never sit too pretty on your laurels. The product you are successfully selling today could be incurring you rising storage costs tomorrow because it is no longer flying off the shelves. Keeping abreast with emerging trends could be the difference between closing shop and opening for business. Those who read the signs early enough adapt. There are those who increase sales in other lines of their business, like Safaricom successfully pushing non-voice segments ahead of voice. Then there are others like my barber, who has started to cater for ladies beauty needs and is looking for space to grow the salon; or, Nakumatt setting camp in the estate where I stay, possibly informed by the trend of concentration in gated communities. Your guess is as good as mine as to what will happen to the kiosks that have always been there. Even we writers would quickly be divorced by Publishers if we were not current or relevant. Those that stubbornly stick to only the product they have always sold are left with it, frozen in a time warp. Monitoring sales uptake and market trends is an intrinsic part for sheer survival in business.

As for the salesperson, the title isn’t confined to a product-it’s expressive of a process. Insisting that the product you sell is the only one you know how to, is sounding your own professional death knell. If the product or service moves solely because, like the calendar and diary, people can’t get enough of it and not because of any special skill on your part, then be warned- you are

redundant; professionally fossilized. You are little more than an order taker and delivery man, kept relevant only by the unquenchable demand for the product. And it's only a matter of time when the business owner, responding to new trends, dumps a new product on you, for you to sell or cross-sell. I wish I could tell you that he will understand your being adamant that you can only sell the original one; I really wish I could but I won't-he won't. For the progressive salesperson, this continual change in products that more effectively meet clients and prospects needs, is reason enough for her to continually grow in the profession; to internalize the basics of selling to the point where it is she (and not just the product ) that drives sales.

Time has grown beyond the hold of its "custodians", that is, calendars and diaries. For the business owner and salesperson, let not time overtake you too.

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## 19: SHREWD SALESPEOPLE DON'T PLAY BY THE RULES BUT STILL CLOSE

*While the bank insists that all documentation must be in order before an account is opened, the salesperson gets all the documentation and has account opened but not necessarily in that order.*

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Progressive salespeople don't acquiesce to authority and cut corners in the field that would make the employer cringe. When a sale is brought to the office for processing, it is assumed that what the company theory says should happen in the field, did. But the progressive salesman is not the king of wishful thinking; he learnt long ago that being a salesman is much akin to being a soldier. Whereas months of training and anticipating every conceivable scenario in class is important, following the model exercise when under heavy gunfire in the field is suicidal.

Consider the mild case of the bank sales rep. The *askari* manning the gate gets him to jump the queue oftentimes because the sales person buys him lunch and once gave him a T-shirt branded with the bank's logo. He completes the account opening form in the ladies washroom because it's the only place the lady prospect can be free from her boss's eye during working hours. If, for the account to be opened, the employee must write to the employer requesting for the letter confirming employment, the progressive salesperson will have standard copies of the drafted letter as part of his arsenal with gaps for name and employee number which, once obtained, he will input and give the employee to sign. Unlike those doing as they are told, he will not wait for the employee to do it but will personally take the request to the secretary in HR who does the letters, and cajole her to doing it ahead of the work on her desk. If copies of ID and pay slip are needed, while the rest dutifully await the prospect to make the copies himself (and in the process wasting precious time), the progressive salesperson long ago developed a rapport with the person manning the photocopier and (again) his unauthorized copies take precedence over authorized company work.

While the bank insists that all documentation must be in order before an account is opened, the salesperson gets all the documentation and has account opened but not necessarily in that order. The order is dependent on the situation at hand. Like a soldier, he adapts to the situation at hand. If the situation needed the prospect to have the bank account before payroll closed and the paper work was incomplete but forth coming, then the account opening takes precedence over paperwork. He is able to bend (he doesn't see it as breaking) all these rules because he has invested in relationships that see him through them. These actions gall many who do not understand his world-they see the actions as indiscipline; yet when the chips fall,

these spectators become like passengers who may have complained about the *matatu* they were in cutting corners but now jubilate that they successfully beat the traffic and arrived at work ahead of time.

The foregoing does not imply carelessness or recklessness on the part of the progressive sales person; far from it. He understands the gravity of his responsibility. He stretches the rules to the point of snapping, but just about there.. On occasion, though, the stretch does snap and a reprimand may follow. Possibly he gets kicked out of a prospects office for being a nuisance, or gets a memo from his employer for cutting corners. Again, the progressive salesperson knows just how far he can stretch the reprimand. If three memos mean he is fired, he will strive not to get any, but won't hide in a cocoon if one shows.

Progressive sales people are not sticklers for rules, and the more they get ahead, the more the spectators' irritation veers to admiration, and what were once examples of how the progressive salesperson got the memo, now are stories of how he became a legend.

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## 20: BE SELFISH TO SUCCEED IN SELLING

*Two things drive the selfish reason-the stage in life the salesperson is at and his personality. Naturally the selfish reason must emanate from the salesperson and is not static as he passes through different stages in life.*

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What's in it for me? That's what the salesperson who wants to progress in his profession must ask if he is to succeed in selling; especially now in the beginning of the year. Here's why? Sales is not a desk job. Systems and structure for reporting is something the salesperson may be given but execution is unique to the salesperson. The dynamism of the profession and the heightened human interaction in it deems it so. The downside of this dynamism manifests itself in continual rejection, unending pressure to deliver numbers, being out rightly lied to by prospects, a debilitating feeling of being continuously on the run and long dry spells of nil sales. For the uninitiated, these are not rare occurrences in sales – they are common place. Just reading about them can weigh you down. How much more then experiencing them? Small wonder then, that selling is the job with the highest professional casualties.

Unlike a desk job where one can push pen and paper and get by, the same cannot be said of selling; getting by gets you out pretty fast-either by the emotional weight of the job crushing you or the employer reaching the end of his emotional tether. It is for this reason that to pull through one must have a selfish reason for doing so. It is for this reason that progressive sales managers will tie commission payments to a tangible item the salesperson can aim for. I knew a manager who would pointedly ask the fresh recruit what he wanted; for many (as they were just starting off in life) it was a TV set. He would then zero down on the make and size of the set. Once that was settled upon he would take the salesperson to an electronics shop and they would both identify the set, it's cost and leave there with a photo of it and by when the TV set would be bought. Having set this goal, the manager would drum acquisition of the TV set as the basis of why the salesperson must overcome the temptation to yield to rejection, the pressure for numbers, the lies and the long dry spells. It was a much more successful gambit than driving the sole agenda of "you must meet your targets otherwise we can't keep you".

Two things drive the selfish reason-the stage in life the salesperson is at and his personality. For the latter the selfish reason could be the fulfillment he gets when thriving in the limelight of recognition; for instance, he could be feeding off the applause he gets having his or her photo pasted for all to see as Salesperson of the Month or Year. For the former, I know of another sales manager who called in the wife of his most promising salesperson and told the wife that her house would get a complete makeover if her husband (the promising salesperson) delivered

the set targets. The hapless fellow never knew where to hide-the pressure for numbers was more intense at home than at work; suffice to say, the house was made over at the end of the year.

Naturally the selfish reason must emanate from the salesperson and is not static as he passes through different stages in life. It could be dowry today and a promotion tomorrow; building a house today and several for rent tomorrow; a flat screen analogue TV today and home make over tomorrow. To progress in the profession the salesperson must have a selfish reason for doing the job and it helps the manager effectively do his, if he knows this reason. The salesperson must know *why* he is selling; correctly answering that question places him much ahead of the negative energy that *will* manifest in his duties and which he must overcome.

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## 21: SELL ETHICALLY FOR SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS & COMMISSIONS

*Being at the frontline, the salesperson has the grave responsibility of determining whom he lets into the fold and whom he doesn't. Only time will inform the rest whether it's a sheep that was let in, a glaring wolf or a wolf in sheep's clothing.*

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I was recently invited to a sales achievement awards ceremony and six things stood out for me. Today I share one. I'll share the rest in the next chapter

Like in any other awards ceremony, there were different categories. The one that I found of greatest interest is the category that rewarded those whose business had not turned to absolute loss for the company. There was an acceptable cut-off point for loss of course, and those above it were rewarded handsomely. It was interesting to note that only a select few of the overall winners met this cut off point; in my world they were awarded for selling ethically. This category had my absolute attention. Here's why?

Being at the frontline, the salesperson has the grave responsibility of determining whom he lets into the fold and whom he doesn't. Only time will inform the rest whether it's a sheep that was let in, a glaring wolf or a wolf in sheep's clothing. Admittedly, genuine losses will occur but it's irresponsible of the salesperson to look away and let Lucifer in, merely for the short term gain of earning commissions while compromising long term sustainability of the very commissions and the company's wellbeing; in effect biting the hand that feeds him.

Ethical selling cannot be overstated. If the sales process were the alimentary canal, the sales person would be the mouth that opened to let the poison in. Once past the throat, only the resulting seizures, vomiting and diarrhoea by the body would raise the red flag that poison had been ingested. With luck, the system gets cleaned and doesn't die. You may recall the relentless punitive campaign a telecommunications firm held against a former employee charged with fraud and the court proceedings involved.

According to reports, last year alone, financial institutions lost a staggering Kes. 2B to fraud. That is roughly enough to educate every primary school going child for free for a term! These losses are not all made at the frontline of course. Still, a portion of the fraud that occurs in these financial institutions is possible because an account was opened. Such an account is not limited to that of a bank; suppliers, distributors, creditors and all business significant others irrespective of industry have an account through which they pay or are paid.

The sales person in the manufacturing concern, or the insurance company, or the media outlet is charged with the responsibility of canvassing for the new accounts, proceeds from which will keep the entity afloat. This responsibility is a double edged sword; it can benefit or bleed the company. An organization's frontline is truly its Achilles heel. Just like a country's borders can be porous and let in elements bent on ill, as we have recently experienced in Kenya, a company's border, manned by its points of contact, is thus just as exposed to the extent of their being ethical. There could be innocent reason for letting in the wolf. The salesperson, naïve in matters operational, and driven purely by the pressure to meet targets, may not make the mental leap from harmless sales statistic to potentially harmful account. To be fair to the salesperson, in the quest to rapidly stimulate the sales numbers, some organizations have forgotten to educate him of the repercussions of letting the snake into the garden. In the process, an avalanche of accounts have been opened and an equally painful onslaught of closing many of them has followed.

Selling unethically presents both a financial and reputational risk to both the salesperson and the business. The Daily Nation has a Public Notice page. It's sad that most times the mug shot is of a salesperson turned rogue. Such repeated actions by a firm cast aspersions on its credibility.

Selling responsibly is a mutual task. Continual education and reinforcement by the business owner on the one hand, while on the other, the sales person being ethical.

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## 22: WHAT WINNING SALESPEOPLE AND COMPANIES HAVE IN COMMON

*Achieving is not about becoming CEO-that's only one way. Winning is being the best you can in your chosen field.*

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I was recently invited to a sales achievement awards ceremony and a few things stood out for me. The most prominent one (selling ethically) was the topic of the previous chapter. Today we focus on the other five.

The event was held at a prestigious hotel in town. The naysayers will look to this as a company merely observing its image, but that's only one aspect: the other, which I chose to adopt, was a company wishing to develop, in the mind's eye of the salespeople, an image of aspiration, and therefore a desire to achieve. Some things like the desire to strive and be better at what one does cannot be instilled by telling; showing on the other hand stands a greater chance of teaching that lesson.

The second thing that stood out for me was the schedule. It was an event held at breakfast time. We were done by 9am having started at 7.30am. The company respected the salespeople's time and also knew that because a salesperson is only as good as his last sale, releasing him early enough to face more opportunities makes good business sense. For this reason they were not only focused, they also stayed focused on the subject matter of the morning.

Next, the hall was packed. In total we must have been over 300. The winners however, were about 5% of the crowd. From an army of hundreds only a handful were generals and colonels. And so it is about sales. Those who stand out do so like an oasis in the desert. As for the multitude most watch and wonder; others gossip and downplay the winning; sadly, only a select few, feel sufficiently inspired to learn and emulate. It is true what they say about personal development-many eagerly embrace it's theory but then shoot themselves in the foot because deep down they really don't want to change because it means going outside a comfort zone and this is work, change. The sea is full of fish; it's not full of sharks. As for the sharks in the hall, most bit and bit again, tearing away award after award, with merciless abandon. They had no apologies for winning.

The other thing that shone like a beacon was the winners. It confirmed to me what is pretty obvious but still hits me between the eyes again when it happens. There was nothing special

about the array of winners. They came in all shapes, size, gender, height and complexion- just like the “losers”. In fact, standing in a parade you wouldn’t tell one from the other. There was absolutely nothing special about the winners’ physical features. There were short and tall ones; plump and slim ones; dark-skinned and light skinned too; jovial and the stern; impeccably groomed and presentable. Engaging with them, it was evident there were eloquent ones but also those not so eloquent too. And such is the thing about winning-it’s got nothing to do with physical features and everything to do with the mental; nothing to do with the visible but everything to do with the invisible; nothing to do with what the crowd sees, but everything to do with what it doesn’t, as is hidden in the salesperson’s mind.

The fifth thing that cannot go unmentioned is the presence of the company’s full top brass. Like attracts like. The event was about celebrating winners, awarding those who have grown the company’s bottom line. The CEO freely and proudly mingled with them. Achieving is not about becoming CEO-that’s only one way. Winning is being the best you can in your chosen field. The top salesperson in a company most probably has the CEO’s ear; I know one who has that of the Chairman of the Board.



## 23: WHY MAKING SALSPEOPLE LEADERS MAY NOT HELP FIRMS

*Like many salespeople, Steve Ballmer (Microsoft's stellar seller turned CEO) was seen as a bit too short-sighted*

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Acres of editorial space globally were assigned the transition at the helm of Microsoft. Finally, a Satya Nadella took over as captain from Steve Ballmer. The Business Daily captured Reuters as stating that *"Steve Ballmer was regarded more as a salesman and cheerleader than a visionary"*. In addition, it went further to quote an analyst who said, *"Microsoft's employee base never really bought into Ballmer and whatever vision he had for the business...like many salespeople, he was seen as a bit too short-sighted"*

And this begs the question-why do we have few salespeople rising to CEO level? For a long time, CEO position was the preserve of those with a financial background. But times have changed and we have for example pharmacists (Dr. Evans Kidero, Mumias) and engineers (Titus Naikuni, KQ) who have been CEOs. Thinking of a CEO with a sales background however would require one to wrack their brains.

It gets tricky. That Ballmer was a successful salesperson is not in question; it has been said of him from the Economic Times: *"Ballmer's aggressive salesmanship during the boom days of the personal-computer industry exemplified how Microsoft became the world's most valuable company....He also built one of the world's most profitable and efficient sales and channel organizations."* It would appear then that the traits of success in sales do not translate to those in leadership.

The very nature of the sales job deems it necessary for the successful salesperson to be aggressive as he moves along the sales cycle towards the close. And that's his job; to wisely help clients arrive at a purchase decision quickly without badgering them to do so. The more successfully he does this the more profits his company enjoys. Yet this trait does not serve him well at board level-it gets defined as short sightedness. What sees him rise the ranks (because he is a fabulous closer) suddenly becomes an impediment.

And rightfully so: Joshua Oigara (CEO, KCB) while being interviewed by the Daily Nation said: *"aspiring CEOs must be willing to put in the work to expand their knowledge base. To run a business you don't have to be a specialist. It is more of a job for a generalist. The bank can hire the best accountant or marketer it needs. The CEO is a captain. The key task for the captain is to*

*inspire the team. It is not enough simply to get the degree in marketing or finance. One should be able to broaden their knowledge base considerably.”*

And there you have it. Leadership is not merely about a perpetual 45 degree incline in profits. That's sales. Leadership is about long term thinking, sharing a compelling vision and inspiring people to succeed; this calls for a “generalist”. A salesperson is a specialist, which is a narrow approach to leadership. To grow into a leadership position, he must “*broaden his knowledge base considerably*” so as to have a 360 degree outlook to all arms of the business.

Away from the upper echelons of the organization, it is also true that most successful salespeople usually make ineffective sales managers. Organizations tend to misconstrue selling with management. Because he is such a successful salesperson, they think, we should promote him. And so they do-but to frustration. The promotion cuts him off at his knees; caught between the rising expectations of his new promotion and his inability to manage, they lose him to the competition. Organizations that have the structures to allow successful salespeople grow as salespeople have benefitted immensely: the salesperson grows his and the company's income tremendously. The insurance industry is an example of such. Successful salespeople who make effective managers are few and they do so more because they already had the skill in them (and could therefore be trained) than the fact that they had a knack for selling.

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## 24: HOW ORGANIZATIONS SHOOT THEMSELVES IN THE FOOT IN THE QUEST TO HAVE A SALES CULTURE

*To support a sustainable sales culture, organizations must invite those complaining within the pyramid, to step out of it and into the wild, and enjoy the benefits therein, instead of encouraging them to having their own cake and eating it.*

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The typical pyramidal organizational structure does not favour the sales orientation many organizations say they want. We shall look at two scenarios, starting with the first now and the next one in the first chapter of Book III.

To begin with is the organization that chooses to have a specialized sales force. Everybody from the top of the pyramid down agrees this is the way to go. They also agree that these staff are contractual (meaning not permanently employed); as such they shall not enjoy the “benefits” that come with being inside the pyramid, like medical cover, leave days, pension scheme, staff loans etc. The sales people are like animals in the wild that are not meant to mix with the domesticated ones in the protection of the pyramid. Even their remuneration is unique—a retainer plus commissions; and that the retainer is just about enough to get by because the magic of their income is in the commissions. And magic it is: from a paltry retainer of say 15,000shs it is demonstrated to them that they can build their commissions to hundreds of thousands of shillings—“your job is special; you determine your income; the sky is the limit.” Heads of Department and Sales Managers who understand salespeople expertly inflate their motivation like a balloon. And so the salespeople are released to the wild to go hunt and fend for themselves.

By and by, the normal distribution graph takes shape and the lions in the wild emerge. The most successful salesperson’s commission’s rise unabatedly with every passing month until someone, possibly in human resource, starts questioning the huge payoffs to him. “How do we pay him 300,000shilings in monthly commissions? And we are told this figure will keep rising. He is earning more than staff three times above his pay grade. We can’t keep paying him this amount.” There is so much to say about those even holding such a meeting,; suffice to say, they lack a business orientation. When the salesperson was being recruited, it was clear he was outside the organizational chart; now he is being victimized based on the very organizational chart he isn’t a part of. That aside, listen to the unsaid part of the basis of the victimization— “it is because he is bringing in too much business”—talk of shooting oneself in the foot! It’s even worse when the salesperson starts earning in two years’ time what those “three grades above him” took fifteen years to earn!

And so the unsolicited domestication of this wild animal begins; “let’s ‘promote’ him; let’s bring him into the fold; let’s give him a salary; he must start reporting to work at 8 and come back again at 5. His pay is causing animosity with senior managers. We should also increase the pay of other persons at the same level (whatever level that is).”

And on and on. And all this because the structures of the organization do not support the growth of the salesperson as a salesperson; it’s almost as if to suggest that it works so long as the salesperson is earning amounts which are “acceptable” to the pay scale. But when he bursts at the seams, then no, it’s not okay.

Sadly, few people, including human resource personnel understand the sales profession and are able to nurture the salesperson’s career growth. Using the typical pyramidal organizational structure as the yardstick to the salesperson’s growth is an exercise in double standards. The sales job is comparatively unstructured, relative to the desk job for which the pyramidal organogram was designed; equating the two is comparing the domestic cat to a lion!

To support a sustainable sales culture, organizations must invite those complaining within the pyramid, to step out of it and into the wild, and enjoy the benefits therein, instead of encouraging them to having their own cake and eating it. For this to happen there must be someone within the pyramid with the business acumen and managerial strength to drive this message home in the interest of staff development and business growth.

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## EPILOGUE

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