

PRICELESS!

Practical Nuggets for Your Sales Problems

BOOK THREE

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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 Books One and Two, and to those who have chosen to be enriched and enrich others through our community forum. www.asklendmeyouears.co.ke

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 Three, is the third of several upcoming e-books that are a compilation of my practical sales articles which have been running weekly in the Business Daily for close to four years now and appear in my weblog (www.lendmeyouears.co.ke). The column appears every Thursday in the Business Daily and is referred to as Sales Pitch.

Just as with preceding books, Book Three encapsulates 24 nuggets; again, as is tradition, the next e-book will be released in 6 month time. 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.

As with Book Two, this book 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 Three)

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1: BELIEVE IN YOUR PRODUCT, IF YOU ARE TO SUCCEED IN SELLING IT

Believing in your product produces emotional contagion, infecting the prospect and making one less adversarial and open to new possibilities. A salesperson that is able to connect with a prospect is more likely to close than an indifferent one.

Believing in her product is the hallmark of a true salesperson. You will be amazed how many sales are lost because the salesperson did not believe in her product. So profound is belief, that it is the reason why people are conned into believing that they can have their money multiplied through prayer.

Believing in one's product is contagious-prospects sense it and in many ways the onset of the sale starts here; conversely, so too the loss, if the belief is lacking. Selling is an emotional exercise camouflaged in logic. The prospect will state that they bought the pen because they needed it yet most probably that was the third salesperson that engaged them and on prodding will admit that, "this third salesperson knew what he was talking about". In other words, the logic of buying because I needed the pen was secondary; that the salesperson believed in what he was selling was the primary reason that moved me to buy. Human resource personnel are wont to failing a candidate, lamenting that he had an impressive CV but he did not believe in himself. Again, the advert was full of objective logic (i.e. must have a degree, 3 years' experience, consistency in meeting targets etc.) yet despite being excited (emotion) at the prospect of meeting this candidate, what really carried the day was subjective emotion-his inability to exude belief in himself. Whole companies, having listened to a pitch by several consultants, will adjust their budget upwards to fit the one who, despite costing the more than had been budgeted for, believed in himself.

Believing in it does not necessarily mean you would buy it-it means that you implicitly trust that it will resolve the prospects need. The need for believing in one's product cannot be overstated. Believing in your product produces emotional contagion, infecting the prospect and making him less adversarial and open to new possibilities. But how does belief manifest? It does so through an assurance of the prospects fears, a deep understanding of one's product offering and how it solves the prospects need, and resolute confidence in what one is saying. That's the empowering (positive) belief; disempowering belief leads the salesperson to unabashedly state, "I don't even know why they (whoever that is) sell the duvets in only blue and white", or, driven by self-righteousness, "This holiday home in Mombasa is unnecessarily expensive; anyway, why have a holiday home? In fact, if I had Kes.100M I'd put it into apartments in Mlolongo and get a better return"- and just like that she finds herself faltering in her presentation and subconsciously guiding the prospect who is seeking self-actualization, to what she believes is right-apartments in Mlolongo.

In class, to demonstrate the gravity of belief I pick on a delegate and ask how they know that their mother is in fact their mother. Their jaw drops-of course she is! They even look insulted. "But how do you know that," I prod. We look alike, I was told, she brought me up, etc, are some of the responses I

get. I push further-“what if one day you got summoned home by your mother and found her seated with another woman and your mother proceeded to inform you that this other woman is your true biological mother?” Torn between anger, denial and acceptance, agony does not begin to describe the look on the delegate’s face at this point. “The only reason why we know our mum is our mother is just that-belief that she is.”

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2: OVERCOME SPLIT SECOND TENSION AND CLOSE

Don't bother about whether the prospect will 'kiss' you back or not; if you know it is the time, do it and pick up the cheque. Let that moment of tension galvanize you to ask for the cheque. As we've stated before, selling is like football.

To some it's euphoric. To most it's traumatic. That fleeting, tension-filled moment, when the first kiss is imminent. Euphoria is when the man senses and immediately acts on that moment; tragedy is when the man senses it but freezes in place. In the former, the lady is excited that the man took the cue; in the latter, she's irritated that he didn't. In many ways this scenario plays itself out in the sales process, with the climax being the moment when a close is imminent. And it's just that-a moment! It lasts a second but feels like eternity. Many sales are lost here. The salesperson senses the tension, but caves in to it instead of acting on it.

From my sessions I have noticed that those who cave into the moment do so because of these reasons: Fear (what if the prospect doesn't "kiss" me back-I'll feel hurt from the rejection); Pride (I cannot be seen to be initiating it-the prospect is the one to take up the offer as he needs the product); indifference (the salesperson is so engrossed with his presentation he doesn't even notice the moment); intimidation (he's 'senior' to me or I cannot ask him for Kes. 50M-no one has that kind of money) and ignorance (the salesperson doesn't know any better-how do I close?). In all these cases, the deafening 60 milliseconds of tension come, and then dissipate; and Poof!, the moment turns from opportunity to misfortune and a sale is lost.

But why is it important to be alive and act on this moment of tension? Because, research shows that prospects want to be led to a close but will only momentarily let their guard down for this to happen. For whatever reason, prospects want to be guided to a close even for something they want; the hawker probably guided you to buying the pair of shoes and the tailor guided you to the design that suits you. And it's not always because we don't know what it is we want-even when we do know what it is we want, we still allow ourselves to be guided out of it onto something different. Now you know why companies have sales representatives (called merchandisers) strategically placed along the supermarket aisles who will invite you to try their brand of sausage, or soap or spray-which is different from what you had on your shopping list.

With this in mind then, the moment of tension just before the close isn't to be feared, merely understood. For the ignorant, techniques in closing abound and they can start trying them out; for the fearful, separating self from product will help overcome rejection; for the intimidated, start small or better still enlarge your vision about yourself; and for the proud and indifferent, time will open your eyes to your dwindling fortunes, and shock you into dropping your hubris. Easier said than done, I hear

you say. True. But, hey, this is selling-nothing is easy until done again, and again, and again improving with every try.

Let that moment of tension galvanize you to ask for the cheque. Selling is like football. Yes, the appointment, interview and presentation were to die for, but did you close? During a football match, we may be excited by the dazzling footwork, impressive shots and deafening cheering-but when the chips fall, only one thing will matter; did you score?

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3: EDUCATE YOUR BUYERS AND SEE HOW EASY SALES GETS

Educating the customer is a powerful way to communicate the purchase of a solution. Interestingly, the customer does not buy because they have learnt something new. No.

“Shaving your hair like that will make your scalp itch unbearably. Hair looks the same from outside but differs immensely within. Yours grows in a spiral fashion from the cuticle, thus favouring this other hairstyle which is what I recommend.” And so the man who had walked into my barber’s shop, now wiser, conceded to the advice. Educating the customer is a powerful way to communicate the purchase of a solution.

Interestingly, the customer does not buy because they have learnt something new. No. They buy because the seller who educates them inspires them with confidence because he comes out as an authority on the subject. Also, the buyer also feels cared for. My barber was no different from the doctor who assures the worried parent that the scaring rashes on their child are a reaction to exposure to farm animals and that there’s no need to worry-the antihistamine should have it cleared by the end of the week. Sometimes that knowledge may lead you to explore more on the subject (further connecting you to the seller) but largely the buyer doesn’t-instead he tells all who care to listen that some hair grows straight, other hair curls. He is now an authority!

If little education is dangerous, lack of it is disastrous. When you don’t know, you reason unwisely. And many buyers are lay persons in the subject matter of their purchase. For instance, driven by ignorance you argue, “A shock is shock. Why should I buy one for Kes. 5,000 yet can get two for Kes. 3,800?” The equally unwise seller, looks to warranties, discounts and brand names to justify his price. He most probably loses the sale and energizes your ignorance. The wise one asks you the question, “Did you know that a shock can save your life?” And now has your absolute attention. “Accidents kill close to 3,000 people every year in Kenya and maim ten times that number. The condition of the shocks could mean the difference between your car rolling, or not, on hitting an unseen bump. Research has gone into designing our shocks because your safety and that of your family and car are important to us. So sure are we of this that should you have a problem with our shocks over the next 30,000km, we will replace it for you at no cost. A shock is not just a shock. A shock could be the difference between coming out from an accident alive or not. Here’s the password to our Wi-Fi. Please proceed to browse in the lounge while we fit the shocks in your car”

Educating buyers does not end with knowing ones product. It requires one to know what the competition is offering too. It is not enough to state that your quotation of Kes. 43M is all-inclusive yet the completion has quoted Kes. 29M. Help the buyer by asking critical questions which will expose flaws in the competition. “Do you plan on incurring further costs in shipping? ”No. “Did you know that installation and purchase costs alone stand at Kes. 31?” No. To educate the customer in this manner requires the seller to be sure of how the competition operates.

Educating clients is not lying to them. That's conman ship. Educating is genuinely seeking to create understanding and there from connection.

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4: CLOSE FASTER AND GET REFERRALS BY SELLING THE EXPERIENCE

We connect faster to experiences than we do material things; though it is the latter that attracts us. Keeping this in mind allows you to move faster along the sales process.

What brings you more compelling memories? The five star hotel you stayed in or the treatment you got while there? The house you grew up in or the playful noises (or painful abuses) in it? The Caterpillar hiking boots, or the tiring yet exhilarating Mt Kenya hike? I'm willing to bet that in all cases the latter is what is vividly etched in memory; the experience. Selling the compelling experience of the drive with the family to a holiday destination is more likely to tug at the heartstrings (and get a purchase) than merely the aesthetics of the vehicle. Experience sells because we derive much more pleasure buying experiences than we do buying goods

Paradoxically, we tend to be drawn to products for their material attraction yet we love them for the experiences they bring us. The BMW X5 you so yearned for, very soon becomes the tool that takes you from one point to another. Interestingly, the beauty that drew you to it is now consumed by those you pass in traffic, as you cannot do so when you are in it. Electronics manufacturers are most stumped by this. Clients want phones with the latest gizmos when purchasing but when they get home, what they want is a gadget that's easy to use-again experience. And now you know why some dingy joints in Nairobi have the fierce loyalty of well to do individuals who are happy to double park their fuel guzzlers there. Research shows that we adapt quickly to material things but experiences linger forever; it is experiences that we share in conversation and what our stories (and tall tales) are made of -not material products. And when we share we connect and deepen relationships and feel better (more experience) about ourselves and those we interact with.

One of the ways of capturing experience is the use of a mood board. Before establishing, say a coffee shop, the businessperson develops a mood board capturing the mood in competing coffee shops. To help you get a better understanding of this, hop over to Mama Ngina and Lonrho Streets in Nairobi. They are short and parallel to each other and house 3 coffee shops. Notice how the mood in each is different. That mood (experience) is what keeps the patrons there. After all, the coffee is the same. Capturing the different moods will assist the business person cut his niche (different mood altogether) or copy one. Either way mapping the different moods on the mood board helps inform his business model.

Advertisers caught on to this ahead of salespeople. "Value" is added to the brand beer of beer when the ad shows friends having unbridled fun in a bar while holding the brand and the SUV advert, has a camping setting in the back ground.

What all this tells us about sales is that framing a sale in terms of experiential satisfaction as opposed to material possession is more likely to get the sale, a happy customer and repeat purchases. So go easy on the mosquito net being for preventing malaria; that's cliché. Tell more of the peaceful sleep (experience) the parent and child will enjoy (experience) having been a responsible enough parent (experience) to buy a mosquito net for his son (material).

We relate faster to experiences than we do material things though it is the latter that attracts us. Keeping this in mind allows you connect and move faster along the sales cycle

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5: EXPERIENTIAL MARKETERS NEED TO EMBRACE A SALES ORIENTATION

People experience much more satisfaction in buying experiences than buying goods. .

One lunch hour in Mombasa, my son and I walked into a supermarket and our nostrils were accosted by an aroma. We followed it to find two cheerful ladies grilling and selling the brand of sausages, there aprons displayed, at a hundred bob apiece. We had ours grilled as we paid and two hundred shillings later, we were munching away at a freshly grilled hotdog and primed to the brand name. Five months later at a supermarket in Nairobi, same scenario, only, no selling-merely sampling. The girl grilling is eager to get everyone to try a piece, and shoppers flock to do so. Upon sampling, she uses pester power (getting kids to pester their parents to buy) plus a free packet of bread rolls (to make the sausage sandwich with, I suppose) to get 'samplers' to buy. In the half hour period I'm there, 18 people sample and one shopper buys and is awarded with a packet of bread rolls. In Mombasa, over the same period of time, the two ladies make 10 cash sales. In both instances, experiential marketing is at play-the only difference is that the Mombasa experience has managed to seamlessly incorporate a selling experience

People derive much greater satisfaction from purchasing experiences than they do from purchasing goods. As a result, framing a sale in experiential (as opposed to material) terms is more likely to lead to satisfied customers and repeat business. That explains why experiential marketing is all the rage-from caravan on the road to sampling in the supermarkets and all in between. I do not doubt that at its introductory stage, experiential marketing was a hit. Now that it's common (especially sampling), it needs to evolve into selling. Why?

Time was, when buying freshly baked bread from the supermarket was novel; today, what's trending is buying any manner of food from the same outlets. Supermarkets caught onto the fact that shoppers are already in 'buy mode' when in the supermarket and, possibly informed by the success of freshly baked bread, evolved there offering into cakes, juice, milk and entire meals. However, many FMCGs (fast-moving-consumer-goods companies) still haven't. They still prefer merely sampling.

Also, I find the merchandisers (the ladies getting you to try the sausage or cornflakes) incline heavily on hope, that is, the experience, pester power and giveaway to induce the purchase. And as has been said before, hope is not a strategy. Marketers will argue that the samples and giveaways are a marketing expense already catered for and to be recouped through sales with the passage of time, now that brand awareness has been created. On the other hand, business will be interested in seeing a faster return on investment during such experiential marketing sessions; and if the Mombasa experience is anything to go by, it is possible.

The whole set up (process) however, must have a sales orientation, not a marketing one. Starting from the timing and purpose of being there (to sell sausage sandwiches for instance) to the training of the merchandiser. Keeping in mind that the shopper is already in 'buy mode' and is not new to experiential marketing, I envisage cash sale shaving booths for men-not just a sniff of how the after shave lotion

smells; cash sales of bowls of cereals for the child as the parent shops and cups of hot tea while we shop especially in the cold season. Farfetched? What do you think?

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6: THE INTERNET HAS FOREVER CHANGED HOW GOODS AND SERVICES ARE SOLD

Information sharing, not hoarding, is now king.. A seismic shift in selling is necessary, for the snowballing tsunami of seller beware is about to hit shore

How things change. There was a time when the travel agency was the custodian of all information travel, and airlines and tour companies were at its mercy. Information on where to go, how to get there, how much to pay to get there, when to go there, where to stay when there and what to do while there, were all the domain of the travel agent. At that time, hoarding knowledge was a selling gambit in itself, wielded as a secret weapon. For instance, the travel agent would decide to charge the traveller a higher fare for higher commissions, or ignore sharing information about a destination because she didn't like the owner. The buyer didn't know any better.

Driven by buyer beware, however, he trooped to a third and fourth agency to compare prices and sometimes it worked but still the same challenge faced him-information sharing was in one direction: from seller to buyer. If she didn't like the destination or felt frustrated the best he could do was complain to those he could upon return, and, at worst change agencies. That was then; the internet is now. The World Wide Web appeared slightly over a decade ago and a seismic shift in access to information occurred. Seller found himself facing a buyer who was equally if not better equipped than she. Now, the traveller starts his shopping at home and he seeks second and fifth opinions *before* visiting the agency. He Googles, Facebooks and Tweets and by the time he is going to the agency, if at all he must, the traveller is going to **tell** the agency what he wants and the agent who's still in the 'museum' will tap on the screen and share with the traveller raw what it gives only to raise his head in time to see him leaving.

And when the traveller is happy he Whatsapps, YouTubes and Flickr his happiness live. In the same breadth, if he is unhappy, whereas analogue limited his taps for pouring his bile, digital allows him to share it with 100 "Friends" who in turn share this with another 1,000 "Followers", all in a few taps on the keyboard.

Analogue and digital are terms bandied with humour in Kenya but woe betide the seller who laughs along seeing this as another passing cloud. It's not. It's a dark cloud, pregnant with rain, and spreading across the sky darkening it like volcanic ash does, making travel impossible. Impossible that is via the travel agent still in the museum, wielding knowledge as the moat protecting his castle.

Some travel agents may dismiss this saying that their analogue way still works with their equally analogue clients and that may be true. But change is fair-it gives warning unlike the switch of a light. And

so, just like technicians who stuck to the car carburettor and ignored the fridges anti-frost they too will wake up one morning in a museum.

The internet has not just affected travel agents. It's affected all selling. Even hitherto hallowed grounds as doctors and teachers used to walk have not been spared. You will most probably Google the cause of that growth on your hand before you see a doctor about it, just as a student can, Pythagoras' theorem, before going to class. Information sharing, not hoarding, is now king. A seismic shift in selling is necessary, for the snowballing tsunami of seller beware is about to hit shore

7: KEY LESSONS TO DRAW FROM PEOPLE WHO PROMISE BEYOND ABILITY

Passion sells; passion yields an emotional connection that generates followers. Help clients identify problems not merely solve them. Word of mouth is a powerful way to communicate the efficacy of a service. Testimonials may be oral, written or digital

It caught the attention of the Head of State and is still trending. The exposé of self-proclaimed Dr. Prophet Victor Kanyari as a charlatan. In the midst of all the condemnation, pause to reflect- what makes charlatans so successful in their selling and what can we learn from them?

The first lesson is that you help clients by identifying problems-not merely solving problems. Victor Kanyari identified personal pain in his target market and then presented himself as a “solution” complete with “evidence”-that ‘payment’ followed is not a surprise.

Problem solving is selling a drill because the client wants it. Yet clients don’t want drills, they want holes. Identifying this as the problem may lead you to sell nails and a hammer instead of a drill. Or, further identifying why the holes are required may lead you to sell a suction pad or clip-on instead, assuming the client didn’t know there were other, non intrusive ways of hanging a picture on the wall which was his real reason for asking for the drill in the first place. Problem solving leads to selling a product; problem identification leads the seller to know the product to sell.

His (fake) testimonials reinforced his “solution” and is the second learning point. Word of mouth is a powerful way to communicate the efficacy of one’s product or service. Testimonials may be oral, written or digital. Word of mouth also has a downside; in the same way it spreads good news fast, it does so bad news-only faster. The same media that grew Kanyari is the same one that exposed him. Which should only be a problem for the swindler like Kanyari or such unethical sellers who promise warranty to increase sales only to rescind on it when a genuine claim arises; sellers out to give a service rebound easily from bad news with an apology and correction. Like my barber who scraped my scalp much rougher than intended and having apologized, gave me the next cut for free.

A third thing that the unfortunate Kanyari episode teaches us is that nothing succeeds without passion. The crocodile tears, the staged fainting and the theatrical screaming brought out what truly carries any sale-passion. Passion sells; passion yields an emotional connection that generates followers. A salesperson who lacks passion in his product will struggle to sell it. Passion need not be as dramatic as evidenced by Kanyari and his band of merry men. Passion shows when the seller gives full attention to the buyer; passion manifests itself when the seller is excited about the product; passion is evident when the seller is keen on problem identification-not merely problem solving.

Another lesson we learn from the impostor, is the importance of preparation before presentation. His “testimonials” were coached to perfection. If practice makes perfect then be careful what you practice;

bad sales habits are also practiced- only unconsciously. Lack of practice shows in any presentation and at such times, even passion and conviction struggle to come through and a sale is lost.

Finally, if only charlatans were ethical in their selling, they would be runaway successes. Be ethical in your selling for long term sustainable income and reputation. To quote Bob Marley: "You can fool some people some times, but you cannot fool all the people all the time."

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8: KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER TO GROW SALES & TRUMP COMPETITORS

Know your customer isn't a term reserved for the financial world to reduce fraud; every business must know its customer to survive, let alone thrive

“Who is a customer?” Whenever I ask delegates in my session that question I almost always get one or both of these responses. “The customer is the end user of a product or service” or, “The customer is the one who trades his money for the product or service.” Whereas both have elements of truth in them they are also narrow and misleading. Understandably, the responses are borne of a mind filled with academic theory of who a customer is. The business world however is a bit more complicated; therefore businesses must be clear who their customer is as this will determine the most effective way of selling to him.

And so to the latter response, I ask, “Do you all have a free email address?” “Of course!” the class responds indignantly. “And do you consider yourselves customers of Yahoo and Gmail?” I prod. Pin drop silence follows. I can almost hear the minds creaking for what seems an eternity, but is only a few seconds, before insightful understanding spreads across their faces and a bust of laughter follows. “Yes, we are.”

As for the former response it's even more intriguing. If the business model of a company is distributor dependent, for instance, it follows therefore that the distributor becomes a key customer. Most FMCG companies fall in this category. What about the end user then? Well he's also a customer, only different from the distributor.

And there-in lays a world of difference that will either profitably propel the sales activities of an institution or rapidly repel the institution from the customer-clearly defining who its customer is and consequently, selling to that customer in his language and laying business emphasis and resources in commensurate manner.

In today's world many business models are different from the traditional one. In the former example of email addresses, Yahoo and Google have invested massive resources to get the full attention of (read, sell to) a non-paying customer (you and I), so that they can have a leg to stand on when selling to the paying customer (advertiser). In similar fashion, this paper you are reading costs much more than the 60shillings you bought it at and most probably 60 shillings is the unit cost of printing it; much as you are the target market, what keeps the media house that prints it afloat isn't your 60shs, but the advertisers who will pay to appear in it, for you to read about them. In this case both are paying customers and each serves a different but complementary purpose.

In the case of the FMCG, the distributor is an intrinsic part of the business model and for this reason many businesses invest heavily in their distributors. This distributor will of course further sell to the retailer and then she, the end user who buys from his local kiosk. That's the theory-in practice however,

having sold to the distributor, the FMCG cannot sit on its laurels. The end user is still a customer it must reach out to (sell to). This it does via advertising, promotions, and merchandisers (that's the aisle attendant who attempts to get you to try the new sausage). In fact the merchandiser is a classic example of selling to both customers. The distributor (supermarket) has already been sold to by the FMCG, but the FMCG has still gone ahead and planted a salesperson in the distributor's premises to sell to the end user.

Know your customer isn't a term reserved for the financial world to reduce fraud; every business must know its customer to survive, let alone thrive

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9: GET RID OF THE 'CERTIFICATES DISEASE' IN PURSUIT OF FURTHER EDUCATION

Many people go to school for certificates to boost careers or secure employment but not improving skills

One of the challenges of the current education system is that it is perceived as meant for employment and is finite. Most people go to school to get a certificate that will hopefully boost their chances of employment with their next job application. Many others see a PhD as the peak of learning, after which they can heave a sigh of relief; "Phew! I'm done". Mercifully, there is a handful that sees education for what it really is-meant for empowerment (not employment) and infinite (there is always room to learn something new). The progressive salesperson is among this lot.

Many employers will do their best and take the sales team for training and yes that is commendable and is to be fostered; learning, however, must be reinforced to be instilled. We take the skills of reading and writing for granted but they took years of practice before becoming second nature-thankfully, the school system already has this factored in. The progressive salesperson knows the importance of reinforcing learning-so he will not wait for the next training session, lamenting with the mediocre ones that "we need to be taken for more training". No. He will expand his knowledge base considerably-he will understudy a sales person he admires in his team; he will have a network of salespeople outside his industry whom he exchanges notes with on tried and tested methods that have yielded success in the field; he will have informal sessions with his customers to find out how he can improve; he will scour the internet for skills he can employ to boost his abilities; he will thirst for a trickling of knowledge like he would drops of water in a desert. Such knowledge deeply enriches the salesperson-prospect interaction. Selling is a profession. And like any other profession, those who choose it don't qualify, then practice, and then put on the brakes to learning. No. They study continually, they attend seminars relevant to their chosen field, they train, they subscribe to newsletters, they read reports on the latest goings-on and the learning is constant and never ending. And why? Because, when we stop learning and practicing the knowledge atrophies. Just like with the advent of the computer (and therefore typing) you and I find it harder and harder to write at length with a pen-something we did with ease when it was the only way of communicating in literal fashion.

One of the challenges adult education has (training being an example), is that the students' frame of mind is set in a form of education that was meant for examination, not implementation. So notes are discarded after class ends, some are even left in class and others discovered years later, when moving house, stashed on a dusty shelf. After all, there wasn't going to be a CAT or national examination to test what we learnt, so why bother studying?! Certificates are quickly photocopied to supplement the existing job applications and the title of the seminar even quicker still, inserted in the CV especially if the training is from a reputable training firm. Unfortunately, only a few generals emerge from this horde of soldiers and do what the seminar intended – implementation of what was learnt.

New knowledge implies a different way of doing things; it means a replenishment of our reservoir of knowledge; it means remaining relevant. But only if implemented. Even we writers many times get our inspiration to do so from reading widely. Education is infinite and as cliché as it sounds, when we stop learning, we die-not in the physical way, but worse still, the relevance way.

The realization that our childhood education does not dovetail adult education should move us to change and embrace learning for implementation-not examination. Education remains with you-it's an investment in yourself whether you remain with your employer or not. Educate yourself continually.

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10: SPEAK WELL, BUT ALSO BANK ON LISTENING MORE TO THE BUYER

*You've heard it said before – that the most important part of speaking is listening.
Contradictory? Not at all.*

Listen! Did you hear that? No? LISTEN! Do you hear it? If you haven't paused to these instructions you are in good company-the company that hears, but does not listen. Besides sales, we also offer other customer/audience facing solutions and when conducting any of these programs, a key component comes through again and again- the art of listening is becoming rarer. So rare that it startles many when one sets everything aside to listen to them. Try it and see. Unfortunately, many sales people simply do not listen. You've heard it said before – that the most important part of speaking is listening. Contradictory? Not at all. Whether making a speech or a pitch, listening acts as the rudder that steers you to your audiences soul.

Why listen? Because for some reason, human beings rarely speak in black and white-we largely thrive in the grey especially when talking about something that makes us uncomfortable. To discern what is being said, a keen ear on the said unsaid (what wasn't verbalized but was communicated) therefore becomes paramount. Another reason why one should listen is because even when speech is clear it is not clear. Confused? Don't be. In a class I recently held, a delegate explained that her job entitles managing a portfolio-she works for an NGO and she believed her explanation was absolute. In her professional world, portfolio referred to projects regarding health, water, hospitals etc. Well, it turned out that in the same class, was an investment banker to whom managing a portfolio meant having several investment accounts under her jurisdiction; and as fate would have it a third participant informed us that in her professional world managing portfolio meant overseeing a student's artwork, number work and such other subject- this participant was a head of a primary school. One definition, three different interpretations. Why listen? Are you still asking?

Psychologists have demonstrated over centuries that human being are different and thus interpret the world differently. Simply put, "We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are" (Anais Nin). Three people in the same park can give this feedback about it depending on how they perceive the world: "There were beautiful trees with colorful flowers" (sight); another, "Did you hear how nicely the birds sing" (hear) and a third, "Here in the park I feel so much at home"(touch). Why listen? Because the prospect could be giving you his side of the story only based on how he views the situation.

But it's not easy to listen is it? It's not easy to give absolute concentration to one person and what they are saying. Even when you do, from what we have just shared you are still open to misinterpreting what is being said. And truthfully, unless you are an expert in matters yoga and oriental art, your mind *will* drift in out of the dialogue. What to do then for a salesperson, for instance? I find the easiest and most effective way is what doctors do when a patient is sharing her symptoms-they ask questions and, more importantly, write. Forget that you and I have no idea what they are writing, but if we poured our hearts

out to a doctor who just stared at us without writing, chances are we wouldn't take him seriously. For the salesperson, or anyone wishing to improve on their listening skills, writing down pointers to what the other party is saying serves two purposes-it instinctively forces you to listen and somehow, it also forces the other party to focus on the subject matter at hand. Try it. Just like a doctor does, as you go along, the use of questions to seek clarity renews the focus of the listening lens. For instance, asking for a clarification of what "managing portfolio" means could amaze you.

Quit hearing. Start listening.

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11: LOVE WHAT YOU HATE ABOUT SELLING AND BE AMAZED AT THE RESULTS

*Paradoxically, the component we detest is intricately weaved into the success of the job.
Exemplary sellers have a scientific method to the trade*

Three successive fuel stations seeking air for my tires, three successive, “*haifanyi*” (the pressure pump isn’t working”); and three successive disappointments. At least one of them had the sign, “Out of order” clearly displayed. Still though, at all three, the fuel attendants and the hapless *askari* at the pump station largely ignored me. I tend to see this mind-set aplenty at fuel stations-the tendency by fuel attendants to frown upon the client who wants to inflate his tires only. Preference is given to the one who has come to fuel; most probably it’s because he is generating income as opposed to the one inflating tires whose just adding costs by engaging staff in a non-income generating activity. Whatever, the reason however, fuel stations lose out aplenty owing to this discrimination. And it’s not just them: every job we love has a component in it we don’t. It’s just the way life is-the yin and yang I suppose.

Sales people detest doing reports; yet without them, being assisted is difficult and monitoring their own progress impossible. In fact, many who feel the burden of the job usually lack reports with which they can quantify their progress and points of weakness that can be worked on. Truly exemplary salespeople have a scientific method to the “madness”. They can give you their conversion ratios with detailed accuracy, for instance. Some library assistants and supermarket aisle attendants, detest being asked the location of a book or product respectively because, they argue, “can’t the customers read the signs? It clearly says there Science Fiction (or Detergents). Why are they asking me?”. They may win the argument but lose the sale through lost sales from customers or prospects who feel spited by their demeanour.

Yes. Paradoxically, the component we detest is intricately weaved into the success of the job! This realization should be exciting news and progressive salespeople know this. And so, there are those who have staffed that thing they detest: like having someone else do the proposals. This delegation however ends with authority not accountability. The accuracy (of lack thereof) of the proposal lays squarely with the salesperson. Others have seen the silver lining in the cloud and so they invite the walk-in client who asked for a quote to spare a few minutes to come see the products in the showroom knowing that this demonstration of interest in the prospect is an investment in the most rewarding asset-human interaction. And this gesture may be the one that tilts the balance in their favour when the decision is being made about the quote to go with. Progressive fuel stations should train their attendants to not only look forward to inflating the tires but also invite the driver to have their oil and water checked while inflation progresses and even the windscreen cleaned. All free and waste of time you think? I don’t. Especially not where the playing field is level and differentiation must come from other avenues. Whatever avenue is chosen it must start with the realization that there is a problem (I hate doing this), it’s a two-sided coin (in the problem is the solution) and acceptance (I must make a conscious effort and adapt progressively to it)

And in case you are wondering, the fourth fuel station had a functioning pressure pump and the attendant happily guided and me to a stop just in front of it and proceeded to inflate all the tires. Two sales happened. Not only did I tip him, I also fuelled there.

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12: ALWAYS HAVE FACTS ABOUT RIVALS WHEN ENGAGING PROSPECTS

Note to self. That girl you keep deferring to hit on is spoilt for choice of men who are already doing so. Likewise you do not have a monopoly over prospects or customers.

As the progressive salesperson you are, where knowing your competition is concerned, you cannot afford to be flying blind. In a session I had a while back, I was disturbed at how little the delegates knew of their competition. Their average sales experience was two years and yet they struggled to complete the competitor mapping matrix I use. Even knowing basic things, like what the competition's product offering was, were an uphill task. They were flying blind!

Note to self. That girl you keep deferring to hit on, is spoilt for choice of men who are already doing so. Likewise you do not have a monopoly over prospects or customers. Your prospects are someone else's prospects. And, just as a pal of mine once told me, by virtue of being the ones who are hit on, ladies understand the courting game much faster than men. Likewise, your prospects have most probably already been presented or sold to before you came along; that makes them wiser, more knowledgeable, and cautious. Then you come along flying blind and BAM!-you hit a wall. He tells you that Wahandisi Engineering's pump is superior or more affordable than yours. Your jaw drops; you're stumped; you didn't even know this and it's on the homepage of their website!

Besides knowledgably covering your flanks, another reason why it is important to know what your competition offers is because it's your *raison d'être*. If you cannot bring value as a salesperson there are cheaper, more effective ways to distribute. The reason why you exist is to guide your prospect towards attaining a lozenge for his pain. This will involve showing him why the medicine he has been taking is exacerbating his pain and how yours will alleviate it; to do this you will need to understand medicine in general, not just yours in particular. Giving the customer relief will also include referring him to another doctor because your lozenge doesn't cure him; and because your intent is on him getting better, you happily refer him to the competition. And no you won't lose him; he'll respect you for that and you will have done your job.

Gathering intelligence is not meant to pitch, nor badmouth your product against your competition. "Kahawa Coffee is laced with cannabis hence the kick you get" or "unlike Filamu Production, we don't charge you for the models". No. Pitches are done in direct correlation to how they solve the prospects problem and you understand your competition so as to remain the go-to person for your prospect.

There are many ways of gathering intelligence. It's not a mission impossible. You can ask Google; you can be a mystery shopper, caller or "e-mailer"; you can befriend someone in the "enemy" camp or better still synergy with them; you can glean the information from brochures at the reception or the media. Or you can ask the most obvious yet neglected source-the "patient" himself! He knows how the medicine looks, tastes and acts. He is a repository of information. All the "guys hitting on him" have

been sharing their information with him. This resource is especially valuable for sales of big-ticket items for which the sales cycle is longer and the sale itself a project involving several players in the seller and buyer camps. In such industries, the information about how say, a system works, will rarely be in the public domain. Getting the prospects guard down allows him to freely share the information you need.

Your mission, and you should accept it, is to remain relevant by knowing your industry-not just product.

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13: WHAT MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS TEACHES US ABOUT SELLING

All salespeople have to soothe the emotions of buyers to get them to buy. Maslow's hierarchy plays a key role in this

The Chairman of a renowned multinational manufacturing concern once startled his staff when he said that, "Anyone can make what we make. We are not in the business of manufacturing; we are in the business of marketing." This is not a marketing column-it a sales column. Still, I cannot agree with him more. Selling purely on the features of a product invites the client to compare apples for apples- a debate which the salesperson will most probably lose. He makes it difficult to lose however when he makes the prospect perceive his apples as oranges. To do this he must make the discussion not about the lowest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs but the levels above it. And the levels above it are all emotional. The progressive salesperson plays in this emotional space.

First a quick reminder from Google: Maslow's pyramidal hierarchy progresses from basic, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization needs. Unless you are a hunger victim awaiting relief food, you don't eat because you are hungry; it may feel that way but it's not-if it were true you wouldn't be choosing what food to eat and where to eat it and with whom you do so. These secondary reasons are the reasons we eat. It follows therefore that the food establishment does not sell food-it sells the service, the ambience, the *surwa* (extra). Food is a basic need that is no longer a motivating factor to buy.

So profound is the need to employ Maslow's hierarchy of needs in selling that institutions whose salespeople must be technically competent (e.g. those in agribusiness selling beneficial insects or chemicals to large scale farmers), are quickly finding themselves in need of training them to have a sales orientation. Now that the farmer concedes the demo has worked, it does not follow he will keel over and ask to be shown where to sign. The salesperson, after having established all the facts, must still play in the emotional space if he is to make a sale. He must remove his technical cap and don the salesperson one.

In a sales workshop I recently conducted, I learnt that there are 60 publishers in Kenya. This means, size aside, there are 60 companies who can print books. All the public primary schools in Kenya share one curriculum and national exam-and they use books as diverse as the publishers print; therefore, the salesperson of a publishing firm must find a unique way of approaching the market if he is to thrive, and not just survive. Especially because it is not the book that matters so much as the delivery by the teacher. The book is a given; a basic. The publishing firm's reputation is a welcome boost but does not offer sufficient thrust to get the sale! To flourish, the progressive salesperson operates at the levels higher than basic: the emotional zone. For instance, depending on which part of the country he is based, he may opt to hold a monthly *mbuzi* for the various decision-makers from the schools and book shops in

his region. I'm willing to bet most of his sales would be closed at the *"goat-eating"* events and visits to the school would dramatically diminish to mere formalities.

When the salesperson rattles off the features of his service or product that he is selling, he is doing little more than verbalizing the brochure which in itself is an inanimate basic on Maslow's hierarchy. Consider the saleslady selling credit cards who says: "this card has chip and PIN functionality; and the interest is only 3% per month; the Card enables the Cardholder to obtain the Funds in cash by withdrawal from ATMs and/or ascertain information as to the balance on the Card at ATMs or Points of Sale terminals or make payments at Merchant Establishments through Points of Sale terminals." All that is good to know madam but, hey, which credit card doesn't do all that?

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14: NEGOTIATIONS ARE KEY FOR SECURING VALUE FOR YOU AND THE BUYER

*Selling is an emotional exercise camouflaged in logic. Value is only valued if the valuer values it.
Highly valuing our own value is the beginning of successful handling negotiations*

The other day I couldn't get a head massage at my barber's because the masseuse wasn't in. So I asked for the refund equivalent. I laughed at his witty response: "to compensate, next time you'll get a longer massage." And just like that he had retained the sale in full. The issue here isn't about denying customers a refund they genuinely deserve. No. That's plain good customer service and should be exalted. What I'm on about is acquiescing to a price reduction, terrified of negotiating, all for fear of losing a sale.

Experienced buyers are known to force concessions with every aspect of the transaction. A 2% off here and a 3.5% off there may look small but cumulatively will considerably change the package. Learning to negotiate therefore becomes part of the stock-in-trade for the salesperson- like my barber promising me a longer massage (I'm still tickled by this). I once read somewhere that price is what you pay, but value is what you get. And value is a perception. When a prospect is asking for a price reduction he most probably does not perceive its value. This is one reason why prospects negotiate. The salesperson is not to be dragged down with the price but to rise up to the occasion and demonstrate the value equivalent.

How? As the column has averred, selling is an emotional exercise camouflaged in logic. And emotion cannot be grasped-just like perception. However, emotion (an experience) can be regenerated, and in that instant, vividly relieved. Like my getting tickled every time I think about the "longer massage", or, suddenly feeling deeply saddened when one remembers the loss of a loved one a decade ago. In practice therefore, if the prospect wants to buy a new computer and you establish from him that it's because the one he has is slow, don't stop at slow-that's logic and relative. Instead, let him describe his latest computer nightmare. As he relives the frustration (emotion) every time his computer drags (or crashes) you will vividly see the pain on his face and hear it in his voice. NOW he appreciates value-and his need to negotiate the price that will take away this pain will most likely fade away.

Negotiations also happen because it is in our culture. Dukawallas will pre-empt negotiations (bargaining) by stating, "The price of the tire is Kes. 10,000 but I give you discount, so you pay only Kes.8,500"; or, the stall owner, "*bei ni ya kuongea* (price is negotiable)." This knowledge should energize the salesperson to approach negotiating from a point of strength-not fear.

Yet another reason to be confident in negotiations is because prospects smell insecurity in the salesperson. And because Sunday school moments are rare in the field, like a predator smelling the prey's fear, prospect's circle in and lunge for the jugular. Value is only valued if the valuer values it. Highly valuing your own value is the beginning of successfully handling negotiations. It also enables you

have the strength to do the ultimate in negotiations-walk away because your lower threshold has been breached.

Admittedly, there are instances where the salesperson stoops to conquer- like accepting an alteration in the package today, which is obviously hindering more profitable business tomorrow. And that is fine- after all, even this is a form of negotiation.

The whole purpose of negotiating isn't to win. No. That's myopic. Negotiations must aim for both the seller and buyer coming out feeling that value was derived.

15: TO MAKE CUSTOMERS EFFECTIVE KINGS, SELLERS SHOULD BE EFFECTIVE ADVISORS TO THEM

Salespeople should strive to educate potential clients on a company's products or services rather than only focus on closing a deal.

In the Christmas season some things remain the same. Just like last year and all the years before it, like the exodus out of Egypt, families will troop back into the city most from their rural homes. In true Kenyan fashion the bookshops will be clogged a day before opening schools with parents doing back to school shopping. Forget that schools were closed early November and the parents have had two months to shop. The customer's habits are not for the salesperson to judge but for him to work with.

Bookshops and school uniform sales outlets are acutely aware of this annual ritual and have increased their staff complement to meet this tidal wave of humanity about to hit their stores. Some uniform outlets have learnt to make life easy for the customer. They long ago liaised with the respective school and have already labeled the uniform with the name of the school. All a parent needs to give is the name of the school and like magic the attendant appears with the complete set-shirt, pair of shorts and socks, tie, sweater and P.E kit. If the child is present, the attendant will even come with two sets, a size apart, aware that his visual assessment of the size of the child may have been slightly off. What does this all mean for the salesperson? That the seller conforms to the buyer. Progressive hospital front office staff ceased asking the patient their file number: they simply stick it on his medical card which he must have. Cashiers will tell you that the traffic in the banking halls is comparatively light midmorning and overflowing towards closing time when most clients choose to do their banking: last minute. Wanting the customer to conform to you is much akin to climbing Kilimanjaro backwards.

Does this mean that the salesperson fate is sealed? Absolutely not! It does mean though that the salesperson has more education to do. There was a time that over the counter withdrawals were trusted (and therefore preferred) to the ATM; we take Mpesa for granted but it took two years to be fully accepted; we have been on a digital migration for a year or so now. Changing the clients way towards the new product or service offering can be done-not overnight though. The progressive salesperson knows this and accepts to educate prospects and clients alike of this new direction.

The set of uniform marked with the name of the school is simple but nothing short of genius. Imagine if the outlet hadn't done that. The mental workload on the parent and attendant would be excruciating. Every shade of colour would have to be defined and the school would run the risk of finding its students with a rainbow of colours in the name of uniform. Simple, yet effective, selling strategy. Compare this to the salesperson who insists on unleashing the complete array of products or services for the prospect to choose from?

The presence of the child and the attendant's wisdom in estimating the child's size is another learning point. Telltale signs are mostly there for the salesperson to see but the salesperson must be alert to them. The salesperson at the stall in town who invites you with "*Karibu* jeans" (Come in and view our array of jeans) does so because you are clad in jeans; the family photo probably implies the prospect has a soft spot for his family and the stuffed fish may give you an indication of his hobby. Like the attendant at the uniform outlet, exploiting these telltale signs moves the sale further along the sales cycle.

The customer may be always right but he still expects the salesperson to guide him.

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16: YOU DON'T HAVE TO OWN IT TO BE ABLE TO SELL IT

Those that thrive in selling depend on self-drive and passion to sell what they may never buy.

Have you ever noticed how casually dressed a top notch tailor is? Or how worn a cobbler's shoes are? Or how the best performing salesperson is rarely the best sales manager? Such is life and it is not for us to judge it but only to learn from it. In selling, this teaches me that, the salesperson that thrives is not the one who owns the product he is selling but the one who believes in it and himself and is able to communicate this belief to another.

This lesson becomes especially important when the salesperson is faced with a product or service they must sell and which they cannot afford. Consider the salesperson who must sell a multimillion shilling holiday home, or the one in the showroom selling high end European cars. These are niche products yet the person selling them, in all probability, isn't their target market. Unchecked, this discrepancy will get to the salesperson and may turn to a feeling of inferiority or self-righteousness and consequently affect his selling abilities.

Yet despite not being the target market of the products, this is not a reason to shy away from selling them. After all, even those who sell products they qualify for don't sell to themselves either. Most insurance agents don't have policies themselves; many a salesperson for a bank doesn't have the credit card he sells so successfully and the best barber in town probably has unkempt hair.

Have you ever wondered how a complete stranger, dressed as a man of the cloth, gets one to kneel down in mutual prayer in a crowded place, with promises of doubling one's money? Yet the person being made to kneel down does not question why this dubious cleric is not wallowing in untold riches. Well two things are at play here and none of them divine: the fake prophet chooses his subject well-his prospecting is almost textbook. The second thing is that he oozes confidence and believes in what he is "selling" as much as you do that you are reading this sentence.

And that's what selling is about. Having sieved away the suspects and identified the right prospect, proceeding to confidently share what you believe is the truth of your product that will set this prospect free of his needs. On Maslow's hierarchy, the need could be self-actualization and even if the salesperson is still struggling with the need for belonging, this does not mean that he cannot project his mind frame into that of his prospect so as to understand better where he is coming from. A Kenyan friend of mine runs a travel agency in Johannesburg. She arranges tours for organized groups from Kenya. This one time, a wealthy business owner who'd just given her business asked her to join him as he wanted to shop for and buy Mandela shirts. I am told one such shirt goes for Ksh. 100,000! He wanted three! Much as she cannot afford it and would never be caught buying one even if she could, she had made it a point to occasionally browse in the boutiques her clientele shopped in. The client was impressed at how she so easily saved him time by zeroing in on the very shop that had what he needed.

If only it were true that those who own the product or service are the ones who can sell it. If this were only half true then most businesses models would be purely based on multi-level marketing and products and services would almost sell themselves. Alas! Reality is different. The editor of the Business Daily and you the reader most probably wouldn't know where to start selling the very newspaper.

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17: LEARN FROM SOCIAL 'SELLING' INTERACTIONS TO IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL SELLING ONES

Selling is about interaction, just like getting a wife or a husband

Don't over think it. At the end of the day, selling is a basic human interaction. It is the imagination that it's not, that magnifies a molehill into a mountain in your mind; it's the unnecessary painstaking analysis that freezes you in a paralysis. And what the mind cannot handle the hand cannot either. One of the biggest challenges novice salespeople face is the response to the question, "how do I handle the steps in the sales cycle?" How do I prospect, interview, demonstrate, validate, negotiate, close and ask for a referral? Let's look at some.

How do I prospect (get contacts of people who can buy my product)? In human interaction, how do you get friends, girlfriends or boyfriends? When I ask the latter in class, the vibrant delegates respond enthusiastically. That's easy, I'm told. Hang out where they do, blind date; call at work and on and on. Then I ask, how do you prospect, and the mood instantly changes to funereal. This is serious business; I must be careful how I respond; and slowly the molehill starts growing into a mountain. Don't over think it. Just reach out professionally in the same manner you would a socially.

How do I ask for a referral? Ladies, when you stop a complete stranger in the street to ask them what they use for their skin to make it so smooth, you have just prospected and asked for a referral. (Incidentally, I'm still floored by this one). When I quiz delegates on how they ask for a referral, again, the atmosphere becomes grave. Don't over think it. Just be as succinct as the ladies. Notice how specific the query is: it's what she uses to make her skin so smooth; not, "what makes you look so beautiful?". The latter is ambiguous and difficult to answer-just like, "refer me to someone else who can buy my product" is as compared to, "please refer me to your counterpart at ZXV Bank"- if you are talking to a head of operations at a bank, for instance. Just like the lady asking about skin, this query is also specific-it zeroes in on a particular space and makes it easy to get a useful response.

How do I demonstrate? For the phone lovers, how do you show off your new tool? Your eyes are alive with enthusiasm as you take your audience through the features of what your gadget can do. For the technological laggards (like me) you even take a photo, convert it into a pdf document and email it to us while we watch. And in that instant you show us the benefits of having that phone. And then you are asked to do a presentation to a prospect, and you mentally remove your t-shirt and jeans and clad in a three piece suit-and your thought process freezes in place.

How do I negotiate? How do you bargain with the hawker, the stall attendant, the landlord? You understand his position, understand yours, and then you talk your way through it. You may never have thought about, it but that's what goes through your mind every time you start negotiating. Then the

bank calls you because you have missed three consecutive loan installments and you freeze in panic-and your mind follows suit.

Don't over think it. At the end of the day, selling is a basic human interaction. Learn from social relations and blend them into professional ones and be amazed by the result.

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18: USE POWERPOINT AS A VISUAL AID, NOT TO KILL YOUR PRESENTATION

Slide presentations should not be used as a verbal crutch that speaks for the person making a presentation. They should instead be visual aids.

If it's been said once it's been said a million times. PowerPoint Slides don't talk-the presenter does; PowerPoint slides don't connect with the audience-the presenter does. Avoiding Death by PowerPoint should be a speaker's Holy Grail. I am not about to delve into the correct usage of slides. No. Google and others do that better. What I am on about is knowing when to use it-if you must; slides (or any other teaching aid really) must be used as a visual aid and not a verbal crutch.

Last Sunday I listened to a doctor talking to the audience about ulcers. He had 15 minutes to present and had 19 slides! Save for the one slide that showed the diagram of a stomach, the content in the rest was better suited for biology students; it was technical. And the speaker didn't bother to "speak in English" as I like to call it; that is, communicate in a language the audience will understand. Gastrointestinal it was on the slide and gastrointestinal it remained in his speech. Personally, he "killed" me with his slides three minutes into his presentation; and so I drifted towards the audience whom realized were "dead" too, glancing at their watches wondering when this pain would end. Someone who had ulcers put in best after the pain ended; he said, "I came hoping to get some relief on my ulcer but listening to him only stressed the ulcer the more." The doctor had used PowerPoint as a verbal crutch not a visual aid.

A crutch is meant to support. One who has a fracture will lean on it to favour the broken leg. A verbal crutch is anything a speaker uses to "speak" for him. As an educator I have this happens for three reasons: he doesn't know how to say it; or it's too much work Speaking in English, or, and this is more prevalent, he uses a verbal crutch, PowerPoint in this case, because other people use it and successful Microsoft surely must know something we don't. And so the vicious cycle continues-the artificial crutch grows in strength and the natural leg weakens, and, if unwatched, atrophies; at which point, the speaker might as well just email the presentation.

A visual aid on the other hand is used when it's the best (if not, the only) way to show what the speaker is saying. A Science teacher who takes the students outside that they may see what pollination is about has used a visual aid; the doctor speaking about the bone structure is best advised to come along with a real skeleton or an image of one. I know of a CEO of a multinational manufacturing concern who threw out his marketing team who had come to dazzle him with slides of the proposed new packaging – "go bring me a prototype!", he ordered. "I want to feel what the customer will". And there's a head of department who shared the story of how he's never sure where his CEO stands-once he told him he wants one slide-just one; and another time where he stopped him short of starting a presentation of slides, with an assertion: "I can read! What I want to hear is your version". Which reminded me of how so many interviewees stumble at the question, "tell us about yourself"; most start verbalizing what is already on their CV." In effect, using the CV as a verbal crutch.

Tell me. As a lay person, how would you have reacted if the doctor hadn't come with the slides but instead, had started off by equating an ulcer to an open wound in the stomach exposed to the acids which digest food. And equated the burning sensation to a million times that which applying spirit inflames on a wound. And continued "Speaking in English". Would you have drifted? I doubt. I know I wouldn't.

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19: PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION, AND NOT SOLVING, IS KING

*Problem identification, not problem solving is the way to show value and ease the sale process.
Few sellers are sufficiently proactive to engineer a solution driven by problem identification*

In a world of selling armies, sadly only few generals emerge-and it is these generals that thrive, and not merely survive. Recently I met a lady who chose to be a general in her travel industry. While the rest of the industry griped about the challenges to the travel agent of slashed commissions, low barriers to entry (i.e. ease of starting an agency) and the ubiquitous social media, she, on the other hand, devised special international packages targeted for the business fraternity which commercial banks cannot get enough of.

And these generals get richly rewarded by their daring. Besides personal fulfillment, because of the novelty, they break the mould of challenges that bog down the army-pricing being a major one. In addition, they are also rewarded with sustainability- I know a trainer whose leadership program is fully booked two years into the future and so valuable is it, that the impressive growth is all achieved by word-of-mouth despite the price being easily three to four times the industry standard. Meantime the rest of the army offers much the same courses with some claiming differentiation on the delivery or imported programs (franchises). It's the same at work; most managers will tweak a minor component of the previous year's plans to use this year, rather than start from scratch. Very few sellers (individual or business) become sufficiently pro-active to engineer a product, program or plan informed by problem identification. Generic problem solution is preferred. And it's with reason.

Engineering a product for sale from scratch takes time and energy. Sometimes even the prospect doesn't know they have the problem. For these generals who desire to show value, money is rarely the challenge; they find a way to overcome it. It is though, to the army. Starting from the end also invites the possibility for abject failure-yet in the same breadth it invites the possibility of spectacular success. Problem identification implies research, creativity and patience. Traits which the army looks at and wonders, why bother?! Copying is so much easier-after all isn't money the only issue. And I believe that it is that attitude that money is the sole driving force that is the problem-for the generals, value is. Ironically, the money that follows them is one hundredfold what the army is left contending with. In addition, the general's business also finds traffic flowing to any other humdrum products that are sold alongside the unique one.

Another advantage such generals have is that the army of imitators struggles to copy them but it is a hit-and-miss exercise. They simply cannot get the DNA. And when they think a clone is imminent along comes the next creation. Problem identification, not problem solving is the way to show value and ease the sale process. For instance, with the rapidly dwindling price of DVDs and now digital TV allowing viewers to play movies from a flash disk, movie sellers are finding themselves struggling to survive. I think the one who will package movies based on generation will find prospects favouring his stall. I envisage it being a collection of movie hits from the 70's, 80's or 90's dubbed in today's high definition,

packaged and sold as a collector's item. I doubt price would be an issue here-and I even doubt further that buyers would purchase with the explicit purpose of copying for others. It just wouldn't be the same.

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20: PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH TO CLOSE

*Product knowledge is meant be ammunition to be used sparingly and communicated amiably.
Not as a tank to run them over.*

In a workshop I recently conducted, the true essence of selling was brought to the fore for me. The delegates were from a financial institution. During the break, one of them told me that his opening gambit to prospects is, "Excuse me Sir; do you know the bank is giving away credit cards for free?" I'm sure that statement has stopped you short. Who offers credit for free?! The truth of the matter though, was that the bank had waived the joining fee to accessing the credit card. Both statements mean the same thing; however, knowing the latter is product knowledge and communicating the former is selling. Product knowledge is what many organizations thrive in when training staff internally; the staff are pumped up like a balloon with product knowledge like an 8-4-4 candidate about to seat a national examination. And just like the candidate who gets unleashed to the exam room after burning the midnight oil, the novice salesperson is thrust to the field after an intense class on product knowledge.

A fortnight of repeated rejections later, he is torn between continuing with the job and quitting. "Why aren't they buying," he wonders; "I've told them all about the product just like I was told-and it's a fantastic product". Well, they aren't buying because you aren't selling-you are still telling them that joining fee has been waived instead of saying that the bank is giving away cards for free. As another delegate in a separate forum told me, he has learnt that what one is taught in class is very different from what one encounters in the field. When he joined a separate industry (insurance) from the one he was in, on day one, after the first session on product knowledge, he went out and about as a mystery shopper, collecting and completing application forms from the different insurance companies as he would be doing, while asking questions from a customer's view point.

And there-in lays the difference. An organization looks inward when it dwells on product knowledge as the panacea to selling its product; as if to say, "we don't have to listen to you; we know what your sickness is and we have just the right medicine for you; now be a good boy and open your mouth wide. Say Ahhh. There you go; that didn't hurt now did it?" But it does hurt; painfully so. The medicine may be good for me but I could be allergic to it; it may be what will cure my ailment but the dose you are giving it in, is too strong for me; or, the medicine could also be out rightly wrong for me even if it worked for Tom and Dick. Someone must bridge that gap between the inward looking organization and communicating its well-intended medicine to the patient in a way in which the latter will find it palatable. And that is the job of the salesperson-to interpret product knowledge into solution provision; to interpret "waive" as "free"; to see the product through the customers eyes that he may explain it to him (the customer) in the manner he will understand.

Surprisingly, there are those who will call this interpretation lying. Interestingly, they will not want to be told by the fellow in IT to reboot their machine or by the advert, the chemistry behind how the seasoning works. They just want to be told to restart the computer and how the seasoning will make

their food taste and smell good. The customer is king; they want to be told things in the manner they will understand. Product knowledge is meant be ammunition to be used sparingly and communicated amiably. Not as a tank to run them over.

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21: ACCEPT YOUR PRODUCT HAS LIMITATIONS BUT REMAIN THE GO-TO SELLER FOR THE BUYER

And that takes courage. It sometimes means exposing the prospect to the competition.

Your product has limitations; it is not a panacea to all the client's needs. This is a pill most salespeople struggle to swallow. It does not help matters when selling is seen as cut-throat and cutting deals is exalted. Such traditional thinking only fuels the sellers desire to give prospects the product they want instead of the solution they need.

Such sellers struggle to show how their square peg perfectly fits the prospect's round hole. Sometimes the client caves in to pressure or is persuaded to think he can make do and buys, but both times, the sheen fades and regret sets in. And the seller wonders why repeat sales are wanting.

The term solution is a by word in many organizations. We don't sell products we offer solutions you will hear them say. Unfortunately, it is just that: a by word; a term that is bandied about to look hip for the cameras. Behind the cameras its business as usual-they are merely pushing products. Sellers out to offer solutions, accept that their product has limitations but will not stop at seeking a solution for the prospect. What do I mean?

Many times the customer presents his symptom as the root-cause and the hapless salesperson takes the bait. Genuine solution sellers are problem seekers. Despite knowing that their product can solve the symptom, they appreciate that it may not be the solution to its root-cause and will therefore seek to unearth the root-cause first before plunging in with a solution. A two-day sales training program may be what the prospect says he wants but it certainly will not rid him of the 'analogue' culture of his salespeople who shun computers insisting instead on writing with pen and paper. Coaching, reshuffling or rehiring may be the solution that will help the prospect. With this exposed, the solution seeking seller will be happy to admit that he cannot dispense this medicine as he is not qualified to do so but (and this is the point) he is happy to refer the prospect to someone else who is qualified to.

Yes. Solution providers interact with the prospect and market, beyond their product. With every progressive query that is asked of them outside their arsenal but within their industry, they seek a solution. In the example aforementioned, training being in the human resource realm, it is not a stretch to expect the seller to know reputable recruitment firms or coaches that will assist the client secure a solution. The solution oriented seller is always seeking associations that will allow him offer the client a panacea to his pain, because it is beyond the seller's product.

And that takes courage. It sometimes means exposing the prospect to the competition. But only the traditional seller who still thrives on hitting and running will be intimidated by this. The modern one is bent on forging bonds by genuinely offering solutions and positioning himself as the go-to person. Like

my go-to seller at the stall I fancy who has no qualms walking me to the competitor seller's stall, because they have the brand of shoe I seek and he doesn't. His offering me a solution elevates my respect for him, keeps me going to him and referring others to him. That's how the prospect responds to solution seekers.

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22: HOW TO REDUCE INEVITABLE BREAKDOWN IN COMMUNICATION WHILE SELLING

Questions are an indispensable arsenal in selling

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” (George Bernard Shaw). Generally, in life, this predicament is the cause of many arguments; specifically, in selling, it is the cause of many lost sales.

One of the exercises we do in my sessions has all the delegates simultaneously follow precisely the same verbal instructions, yet without fail they all come out with different results. Why? Invariably one of them shares insight: “the instructions were the same, but the interpretation was different.” This is one of the major stumbling blocks to successful selling-what the prospect says and means what the salesperson hears and understands can differ as sharply as day from night.

Psychologists would attribute this breakdown in communication to idiosyncrasies in personality, beliefs, pronunciation, culture and attitudes-in other words, we may be similar in appearance but differ widely mentally and emotionally. In essence therefore, from the outcome of the exercise the delegates are all right and by the same token, they are all wrong. In light of this dilemma, what to do then as a salesperson?

The foremost solution to this quandary is asking questions. Not interrogating, but asking in a conversational manner in like manner to a doctor during a prognosis. Questions are indispensable arsenal in the salesperson armoury. How did that make you feel? (Counseling); when did the cough start?(Doctor); Who was working the pump when it jammed? (Technician); What happened the last time you tried to withdraw money using your card? (Banker); Which of these two items would you like to buy? Or, Would you like to sign with the blue pen or black one? (when closing). Questions, psychologists say, trigger the mind to alertness and offer clarity.

Alas, questions alone are not enough. You may still misinterpret the response. Again borrowing from the medical profession, writing down the responses, not only focuses the discussion (notice how you rarely go off topic when with the doctor), it offers you a record that allows instant recall-just like with a doctor. I used to have a boss who during his meetings (despite already having the secretary taking minutes) would still write down all the conclusions on a jotter he always had with him. And what he would do at the end of the meeting brings me to the third thing that helps reduce breakdown in communication.

What he would do is read back what he’d written as confirmation that it was what was agreed upon. “Kageche, you are to see to it that we no longer have a 90-day column on the NMG account”; “Juma you ensure that all pending accounts have been opened”; “ Karani, you will see me at 3pm on Thursday with

a report on why your departmental targets are still below acceptable". At such times, more than once corrections had to be made-what he understood and what, say, Karani meant, differed. And this anomaly would then be corrected at this stage and he would still read back to Karani what he'd written, just to confirm that they were on the same page. Writing down and reading back also removes biases and assumptions. When selling, you are likely to be equally surprised when reading back to the prospect a summary of what you understood when he says, *"I know you think you understand what you thought I said but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant"* (Alan Greenspan).

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23: STRIKING A RAPPORT WITH THE PROSPECT IS KEY TO CLOSING

The seller must adapt to the situation at hand and still develop rapport without losing sight of the purpose of his visit.

Have you ever met a complete stranger and you immediately hit it off? The conversation flowed effortlessly and so too the silence. Most probably you have and no, assuming it as the opposite sex, it wasn't love at first sight-you had just experienced raw, pure, undiluted rapport. The dictionary defines rapport as a close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well. The word originates from the French and means "the relationship". Rapport therefore is important to building relationships. Rapport is an indispensable ingredient in successful selling.

Admittedly, life is such that such delightful, magical encounters do not happen often enough to be firmly depended upon; in fact, they happen rarely. For this reason, the sales person must culture rapport with a prospect in the early stages of their encounter. Will the rapport created be perfect? A few times, yes, but most times it'll be just enough to break the ice and allow the droplets of conversation to start trickling. And the latter is precisely what the progressive salesperson aims for, from telesales to corporate selling and any manner of selling.

The old school of thought tells us to engage in idle banter as the opening gambit to a conversation. For instance, talk something about the prospects dress or office. "You look very smart in that suit" or, while pointing on the framed picture on the desk or wall, "those are beautiful kids you have there" or if on phone, "you sound like you have a cold, madam, Sorry", and on and on. The underlying message in this old school of thought was to get the prospect to like the salesperson. And it made sense-after all, unless they do not have a choice, people will buy from people they like.

That piece of advice about how to build rapport was doled out decades ago. It is relevant today? Oh yes; prospects still have to like the person they are dealing with if they are to buy from them. However, times have changed from decades ago. People are less warm, prospects are more knowledgeable, and the rat race is moving at maddening speed. The new school of thought therefore, has it that the place for idle banter is being steadily suffocated. With this in mind, striking rapport must be done more creatively but still focus on the prospect. The suit and the kids are therefore something to point out not dwell upon; talk, more relevant to the client's needs and how the sales person service or product can be of assistance will more likely create rapport today than would dwelling on the new coat of paint and how bold the colours are. This school of thought avers that once the client's needs are addressed (that is, once business is out of the way) talk of the weather can then fall in place en route to the lift if the prospect is walking you there.

But wait! Before blindly shunning the old and embracing the new, study your own sales experiences. Whereas generally the world has moved forward, specifically there are still prospects who will feel

offended that you did not notice the change in their new title and wanted to know what it means to their professional progress; likewise there are those even decades ago would have been curt to niceties. Either way, the salesperson must adapt to the situation at hand and still develop rapport without losing sight of the purpose of his visit. When rapport is established there is an air of honesty, a feeling of peace, safety and freedom with each other. Movement along the sales cycle is smoother.

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24: BOUNCE BACK FROM CUSTOMER REJECTION WITH A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

But is rejection the problem really? I don't think so. The fear of rejection is. But even that isn't the real problem; it is the meaning we give to the rejection that is the problem.

Rejection. The salesman's nemesis. Rejection. The leading cause for the high attrition in the sales profession. Rejection. The foremost reason why most people shun sales.

Rejection is painful. Rejection is so painful, that many actively avoid it. Sadly though, for the salesperson, avoiding rejection is a step backwards towards safety, and not a step forward into growth.

Rejection manifests itself in different ways. The ultimate is an emphatic, NO! For the uninitiated, it is painful when you hear NO the first time; and it only cuts deeper the fourth and ninth time. The no could be to the product or even by the superstar salesperson on the novice's request to understudy him. Rejection also happens when the prospect agrees to a meeting with the explicit intention of being unavailable, and then conspiring with his colleagues to report him absent as he hides in the kitchen. Rejection also happens when you are told that you cannot enjoy company benefits because you are in sales and therefore on contract. Rejection can also be from your spouse or siblings, questioning your judgment for choosing sales and even going into denial on your behalf ("Kageche is doing sales, but we're still looking to get him a job" or "He couldn't get a job so he went to sales"). You now begin to see why many would rather speak ill of the profession than admit to the real reason why they detest it.

But is rejection the problem really? I don't think so. The fear of rejection is. But even that isn't the real problem; it is the meaning we give to the rejection that is the problem. I'm not splitting hairs here; the two are as different as night is from day. When I interpret no to mean that it is I being rejected, then we have a problem. It is true that one of the ways prospects fend off salespeople is by abrasively saying no just to hurt them; it's also true that the same prospect who said no to your life insurance policy will probably embrace you whole heartedly when you tell him that you now sell loans. How then are you the problem? If however, you had given meaning to the rejection as, "something is wrong with me", with your change in industry, you will have denied the same prospect a service he needs because you selfishly interpreted the no. There is truth in the advice that the salesperson separates himself from his product if he is to manage rejection. Just like the hawker does when you roll up your window at his approach-I imagine he takes this to mean, not today, and casually moves on to the next vehicle.

And when this happens, a whole new world opens. Ask seasoned salespeople. They will tell you of abrasive prospects turned clients who now hold them with respect for having successfully weathered the storms of rejections. And such is life, isn't it? We all admire those who overcome adversity, with aplomb.

Another demonstration that it is the meaning we give to rejection that is the problem and not rejection nor the fear of it, is in this simple logic. Before asking the prospect to buy, you didn't have the sale; now that he has rejected your product or request, you still don't have the sale. You are precisely where you were before engaging him. You haven't lost nor gained. How then is that a problem? Unless of course, you give meaning to it as such?

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EPILOGUE

Thank you for reading this book.

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