

Sales is a Contact Sport

by John Chapin

A few days ago, I was watching an Ed Mylett interview featuring Ryan Serhant, a highly successful real estate agent in New York City. According to Ryan, a key factor in his success is reaching out to 15 new people daily. This resonated with a conversation I had two months ago with Rick Fingerman, a local financial planner, who shared a similar strategy. He recounted the story of a very successful insurance agent who attributed his success to talking to three new people seven days a week about what he did for a living. He said it didn't matter if they were at the supermarket or he met them at church, the key was to talk to three new people a day.

During my three-plus decades in the sales industry, I've observed many examples of the importance of what Ryan and Rick emphasized. The idea of salespeople going out and talking to *lots of people* about what they do remains a timeless and crucial element of sales success; it was effective from the inception of sales, continues to yield results today, and will endure as long as selling exists.

For another example of the importance of contacting lots of strangers about who we are and what we do, we can go all the way back to 1940 when Albert E. N. Gray wrote *The Common Denominator of Success*. Albert was an official of the Prudential Insurance Company of America where he was in charge of supervising life insurance agents in their sales efforts. In this role, he thought it would be helpful if he could determine the differences between the successful and the unsuccessful agents so he could better direct all of them toward success. What he discovered was that the common denominator of success was the fact that every individual who has ever been successful formed the habit of doing things that failures don't like to do. And what are the things that failures don't like to do? They are the same things that successful people don't like to do. Specifically related to life-insurance salespeople, he said, "We don't like to call on people who don't want to see us and talk to them about something they don't want to talk about." Those who failed gave into this dislike and avoided making calls while successful agents were able to push through this barrier and get themselves to make the number of calls necessary for success.

In a more recent example, I was reading an article about billionaire John Paul DeJoria, the co-founder of two billion-dollar companies: hair products brand Paul Mitchell and tequila company Patron Spirits. To summarize the article, he talks about all the rejection he faced growing up selling encyclopedias and shampoo door-to-door and then later in life building the haircare and tequila companies. He said that dealing with rejection is a tough but necessary skill if you want to be successful. That in order to make it, you need to deal with the rejection so you can *knock on enough doors to get enough people to listen to you*.

In all these examples, the key was to talk to lots of new people about who you are and what you do. The popular saying, "If you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door," carries a crucial caveat—awareness is key because while having a better mousetrap is great, if no one knows about it, they won't be beating a path to your door. Another saying is that 'people need to know, like, and trust you before they do business with you.' This is true but the first part is the most important with a slight twist, 'people need to know *of* you and what you do for a living'. If enough people know you exist and what you do for a living, you'll have plenty that contact you when they need what you have. From that point they'll determine whether they like and trust you. If they do, you'll have plenty of business. So, if you're not a nice person or trustworthy, you want to work on that but assuming you're generally likeable, honest, and have integrity, focus on the first part: making sure plenty of people know you exist and what you do for a living.

Sales is a contact sport; it is a numbers game. In my 36-plus years in sales, literally every time I've seen someone fail it's because they didn't contact enough people to get enough leads to make enough sales. Sales is about people and relationships and in order to get the number of relationships we need to make the necessary sales and be successful, we have to contact lots of people. Even a blind pig finds corn, if you talk to enough people, you'll eventually bump into someone who says, "I need what you have" or, "I know someone who needs what you have." Now go contact some people and let them know you're on planet Earth and how you might be able to help them.

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