

DON'T PAINT YOUR KITCHEN

**HOW TO SELL YOURSELF
& GET THE JOB YOU WANT**

JOEY HIMELFARB

Don't Paint Your Kitchen
How to Sell Yourself & Get the Job You Want
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ISBN: 979-8-9865812-0-0
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Cover Design: Eric Labacz, www.labaczdesign.com
Cover photo and other photos of Joey by Laura Pedrick,
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To Lennon

*From the day you arrived and blinked into the sun, the
Circle of Life continues with you, little lady.*

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INTRODUCTION

*How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?
Just one...but the light bulb has to want to change.*

When I was let go from my corporate position in sales, I was afforded the opportunity to make use of the resources of an outplacement company. After my outplacement stint was complete, it was suggested that I start attending networking groups. Up until that moment (mid-2003) I had never used networking and groups in the same sentence. I didn't know what they were. Today, in 2022, these groups are all over the place, but back then, they were few and far between.

As it was explained to me, these groups, composed primarily of unemployed professionals, meet regularly: weekly, biweekly, or monthly. Typically, these gatherings take place at a public location such as a library, a church, or a synagogue. Some businesses will open their own conference rooms for these groups. These job seekers gather to provide support and offer guidance and direction to each other during their period of unforeseen or unwanted transition.

In addition, speakers with different backgrounds are traipsed in meeting after meeting to teach the group things

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to help everyone land their next job. Topics of discussion might be how to write a resume, how to research a company, how to dress for an interview—technical-type stuff.

The networking group I was referred to was highly recommended. Meetings occurred every Tuesday evening for two hours at a YMCA about thirty minutes from home so I decided to check it out.

My life changed in so many ways because of the Career Forum at the Somerset Hills Y in Basking Ridge, New Jersey. The people I met who supported me, and vice versa, were from all walks of life. Bob, Lloyd, and Denis (may he rest in peace) are responsible for helping me break new ground by offering me a platform to share my experience and expertise. You could say they indirectly had a hand in the development and creation of this book. Thank you, gentlemen!

I soon came to discover the attendees at these meetings were out of work for periods ranging anywhere from two days to two months. Sometimes even two years.

Some of the participants were recent college graduates looking for assistance to find their first job. Some were experienced professionals from various industries such as healthcare, finance, hospitality, retail, and construction. And some folks were returning to the job market after being away for years.

All of them identified as their last title—marketer, accountant, product manager, auto mechanic, customer service representative, computer programmer—or role—caregiver, student, mom, dad, professional in transition.

Over time, as we got to know each other, it became

clear that most of us, including yours truly, were anxious and slightly concerned about our futures. Some people were sad and clearly worried. A select few were downright despondent, totally frustrated, pissed at the world, and ready to punch their fist through a wall. Or into a hiring manager's face if a job was not being offered.

One night while waiting for a meeting to begin, several of us were chatting about our job searches in particular and our lives in general. As I heard more and more negative and downtrodden comments surfacing among the crowd, I stopped the conversation midstream and said: "I've been selling for many years and have learned to embrace a positive and upbeat attitude, and to surround myself with people who demonstrate that attribute as well. I need to be around Positive Paulas and Gung-ho Garys, not Negative Nellies and Toxic Tonys.

"Secondly, I'm not clairvoyant, but if you maintain this defeatist mindset and continue to lay blame for your current plight at the world's feet, you're gonna be here next year still looking for work. You are not doing a good job of selling yourself."

Well, while they stood there stunned by my diatribe and transfixed by my soapbox delivery, I had an epiphany. ***Looking for your next job IS selling yourself.***

My experiences in selling, which continue every day, have taught me there is a science to selling but there is also definitely an art. Ask P.T. Barnum or Ron Popeil. Just know there are tried and true ways to sell effectively and definitely ways NOT to sell. We will explore them both.

For now, I contend that your quest to find meaningful work and land your next dream job are directly related to

how successful you are at selling yourself.

You see, I love to sell, and I love to teach. I thrill for the opportunity to be on a stage, present information, facilitate a conversation, and influence an audience hungry for knowledge. It's an indescribable feeling watching proverbial light bulbs turning on over people's heads while leading a conversation. Actually, I can describe it. *It's fantastic! Cathartic! Satisfying! Rewarding! Fulfilling!*

Anyway, in that split second, I realized I could be one of those speakers who present to these groups. So during that meeting and the half-hour drive home, I formulated an outline in my mind of a presentation I thought might resonate with this group.

At home, I quickly did a brain dump by typing my thoughts into a brief description of my idea for a presentation. The next day I reached out to the group's moderator and shared my idea for presenting "Selling Yourself." I suggested making this presentation once or twice and then slinking back into the audience. It would be my contribution to everyone.

"Sure thing, Joey. We're always looking for new blood and would welcome your contribution," he said.

So off I went and worked on developing and creating a sixty-minute presentation that extrapolates the art and science of selling to the job search process. What you are about to read is a collection of some of the concepts I've shared with networking groups over the years, and still do. I'll be sharing with you how I believe selected parts of the job search process can be likened to the process of selling—theoretically, conceptually, and creatively.

I've successfully facilitated these strategies and tactics

with college students, unemployed professionals, and others who have returned to the job market. I hope to do the same for you and help you land your dream job sooner than expected with minimal stress and strife.

At the end of each chapter I've included action items for you to think about and/or complete. Some are simple; others not so much; they will demand introspection and require deep thought. All are suggested to help put you in the mindset of a successful salesperson.

Take your time going through these activities. There are no time limits, per se, nor are there right or wrong responses. There is no answer guide at the back of the book. Whatever you feel makes sense to you at the time is correct. Let your gut be your guide—it hardly ever lets you down.

Completing these activities will better prepare you for the individual tasks that combine to achieve the overall objective of finding your next job, perhaps your dream job. Please suspend all thoughts of you as a job seeker. Instead, imagine you are a salesperson tasked with closing your next sale.

Remember, looking for a job is selling yourself. Let's work to make you the knight in shining armor that the hiring manager has been looking for. If she offers you a position on her team and wonders where you've been all this time, and why it's taken so long for the two of you to get together, then you've succeeded.

Onward and upward.

CHAPTER 1

PUT ON YOUR SALES HAT

We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better.

—Jeff Bezos

SELLING IS...

If you agree with me that looking for work is akin to selling yourself, then let's define what selling is so we can operate from the same script.

At the beginning of my seminar entitled "Selling Yourself," I lead a quick exercise and ask the audience to let me know what activities they think are used by salespeople to sell. My only prompt is "Selling is dot, dot, dot. How would you complete that phrase?"

I don't give them any hints or clues as to what should be included in this list. It's theirs to create. I'm their scribe. I write their responses on a whiteboard or easel so everyone can see them. Or I'll capture their input onscreen if the seminar is being delivered online. Regardless of the

medium, everyone can see the list.

Participation swells and the list grows as audience members share their opinions of what they believe selling is. I don't judge their input. I might ask for clarification or request they summarize an extensive thought or idea. The total wisdom of the group is captured in a collection of verbs and nouns. Simple. Easy to understand. Relatable. This is a small sampling of the responses I've received over the years:

- Helping customers
- Demonstrating products
- Negotiating prices
- Answering questions
- Listening to customers
- Creating urgency to make a purchase
- Handling objections
- Influencing decisions
- Uncovering concerns
- Building relationships
- Asking questions about customer wants and/or needs

WE ARE ALL SALESPEOPLE

When everyone is in agreement that their list is somewhat comprehensive and representative of what salespeople do, I ask how many members in the audience have experience selling. Typically, less than ten percent raise their hands. I expect that. Then I ask how many have been on a job interview, and practically everyone raises their hand.

This is when I sheepishly suggest that they've all sold, maybe not successfully, but they have sold. That statement generates half-hearted giggles so I let those giggles sink in. I want everyone to grasp the concept that we sell every day.

I use this moment to point out an important lesson to be learned, not to be taken lightly. I turn everyone's attention to the sales activities list, their list, and pose these rhetorical questions to the group:

- Aren't these some, if not all, of the things you do during a job interview?
- If you stretch your imaginations a little and substitute hiring managers for customers in the list above, can you see how you are selling yourself, as a product and service, during a job interview?

Invariably, the yeas outnumber the nays. Now I have a room full of unemployed professionals who are on their way to believing they are salespeople. I usually need the next fifty minutes to help get them over the hump of disbelief, but it's not difficult. I suggest they suspend their belief while we're together and imagine themselves as salespeople, NOT job seekers looking for work.

Of course, I'm faced with some trepidation and uneasiness from a few folks but getting everyone to think they're salespeople puts them in a different frame of mind. Doing this, I believe, better prepares them for the daunting task of finding and landing their next job. In order to define what selling is and is not, let's refer to the list of responses on the previous page; it's a concise description of the activities that capture the essence of selling.

SELLING IS PROBLEM SOLVING

If you ask twenty-five people to define selling, you'd probably get twenty-five different answers. *In my opinion, selling is synonymous with solving problems.* Problems that people have, struggles that challenge them, and roadblocks that impede their progress. Hassles.

Providing solutions that alleviate, minimize, or remove any or all those hassles is what selling is and what clients want. Anything that doesn't meet or exceed a client's expectations means falling short of serving the client. Based on my experience, these are the tenets I've learned to embrace that capture the essence of selling:

- Selling is serving your clients unconditionally with no strings attached.
- Selling is behaving authentically by being genuinely concerned for your client's success.
- Selling demands being all in regarding every aspect of the solution presented.

If I can get you to treat hiring managers as prospects and clients and consider yourself their salesperson, I believe you will see your job search in a different light. After you read about Oscar in the next chapter, you will see what I mean.

I contend that we sell every day regardless of our status in life or our position in the workforce. You could argue we've been doing so since the Garden of Eden (if you believe in that sort of thing). We sell to our families, friends, and neighbors. We sell to our doctors, hairstylists,

auto mechanics, landscapers, accountants. They sell to us. We sell our ideas, suggestions, and opinions. So do they. All. The. Time.

When you post something on social media, you are effectively selling yourself. You don't know who is going to read your post, but it might be your next boss. Or it might be someone you know who introduces you to your next boss. It might even be someone you DON'T know who introduces you to your next boss. It might be someone you don't know who introduces you to someone you don't know who introduces you to your next boss. You don't know. The possibilities are endless.

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW

The age-old adage—it's not what you know, but who you know—takes on so much more meaning and relevance when you are looking for work. Depending upon which survey you read from which decade, anywhere from fifty to eighty percent of job seekers land jobs that were never advertised or published. It turns out someone knew someone who knew someone at a company somewhere that needed those job seekers. Sometimes the job seekers don't even know the hiring managers they meet. If it wasn't for the extended network those job seekers cultivated and tended to over the years, they'd continue to be unemployed.

Just know that what you're putting out there is some reflection of you, your personality, your character. You. How you present yourself can be critical in helping you land your next position.

I've told both my sons, now in their late twenties and

early thirties, since the days they were born, to be nice to people. I emphasized that you don't know who they might introduce you to one day because of your concern for them. Or how they might NOT help you because you were mean, belligerent, or nasty to them. You just don't know who knows who.

It's a big planet, but Disney was right: It's a small world.

ACTION ITEMS

- List additional activities that you feel salespeople perform that job seekers must do. Think of salespeople you've dealt with. What are some of the things they did with you? For you? To you? When was the last time you were successfully "sold" something? What worked? Why did you buy? What didn't they do that you wished they did? Going through this exercise will help you think like a salesperson. You want to take on the persona of someone who helps others. Doing this will differentiate you from the other job seekers that don't do this. Hiring managers will notice that distinction.
- Create a list of people you know in general—friends, neighbors, family members, service providers. Cull through this list to identify which people you know that work and meet with lots of other people. For example, your doctors and dentist have patients, your dry cleaner and hairstylist have clients, and so do your accountant, banker, lawyer, and realtor. You're looking to connect with referral networkers.
- Review your LinkedIn connections. Who knows who? Who can you assist in their work or job search if they're looking? Who haven't you talked to in a while? Who will you reconnect with? Spend time every day deliberately reconnecting with your world of contacts.
- Update your presence on social media sites including photos and profiles.
- Read *Mindset* by Carol Dweck.

CHAPTER 2

SELLING IS HELPING

You can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed.

—Napoleon Hill

Let me tell you about Oscar (not his real name). I met Oscar at a networking event. He was a C-level executive with a wealth of knowledge and experience, and a far-reaching network typical of someone with his background. He had all the right boxes checked and possessed all the requisite skills, abilities, and talents needed to excel in his industry.

At the time we met, Oscar had been out of work for almost a year. He was frustrated because he had gone on so many interviews and been rejected one after another. With all that he had going for him, Oscar could not figure out why it was taking so long to land his next gig. After more than eleven months of researching companies, updating his resume ad nauseam, wordsmithing his cover letters, anticipating challenging interview questions, and writing

well-thought-out and sincere thank you notes, he was no better off than the day he was let go.

Oscar had a sense that he might have been groveling too much with prospective hiring managers. He thought that perhaps he had practically been begging to be hired by them. His Monday morning quarterbacking also suggested that maybe he wasn't doing a good job of explaining how he could be of value to a company. You can imagine how frustrated Oscar must have felt to be unemployed for all this time with no prospects in sight.

But wait.

Oscar had a plan.

SEE IT. BELIEVE IT. THEN ACT AS IF.

Instead of going to his next interview and asking for a job, he decided to take on the role of a consultant and offer suggestions to help the organization. What did he have to lose? He didn't have a job to start with so not getting hired meant he didn't lose something he didn't have. I'll admit it's a little convoluted, but it kept Oscar sane so more power to him.

Sure enough, when his next interview was scheduled, our man of the hour *acted as if* the people in the room were his clients and he was their account manager selling HIS services. Acting as if better prepares you for the task at hand and helps enhance your confidence. Acting as if is also one of the most effective, surefire ways to manifest something out of nothing—but that's a whole other topic for a whole other book.

Oscar had studied their 10-K report beforehand. In the

interview he asked them about their business and validated some of the challenges he had already concluded that they faced. He then went on to describe scenarios he had dealt with in the past that were similar to the scenarios these individuals said were occurring at their company presently. With that understanding in place, Oscar then shared in elaborate detail how he helped solve manufacturing problems, alleviated personnel issues, and reduced supply chain inefficiencies in his previous positions.

Oscar felt the interview went well and took their “we’ll get back to you in about two weeks because we have other candidates to interview” as a sign that he might be invited back. After eleven months of this grueling job-hunting process, he was feeling almost numb and slightly beaten up. Regardless, he knew a positive and optimistic mindset was better than the alternative.

He was invited back a week later and met again with the same people he had interviewed previously. When he sat down in the conference room, they handed him a thirty-seven-page document.

“Oscar, when you were here last you asked a lot of questions about our business and you were kind enough to share with us your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions for helping us get better at what we do. The document you have in your hands is a summary of what you shared with us. If these are the strategies and tactics you used in your previous life at other companies to solve their problems, then we’d like you to implement them here for us, too.”

Oscar started working with these people soon thereafter.

A PARABLE

I share Oscar's story because it reminds me of the parable about searching for happiness. Here's the Cliffs Notes version; Happiness is like a butterfly. When you chase it, even with the largest net you can carry, the butterfly will always elude you. However, if you ignore the butterfly and go about your day, lo and behold, the butterfly will come to rest lightly on your shoulder when you least expect it.

I know it's a little woo-woo and New Age sounding. However, I think with regards to you and your job search, chasing your next job, let alone begging and groveling for it, is both demanding and tiring. The rejections alone could drive you into a tailspin and down a rabbit hole.

If left unchecked, it can be difficult to reverse the feelings of despair you may feel as you receive rejection after rejection. As time marches on and the rebuffs mount, you might start to feel unimportant, unwanted, unworthy. All these "un"s could start to take a toll on your psyche, as it did for Oscar. If you don't nip these negative feelings in the bud, you run the risk of becoming indolent, crabby, incorrigible, and bitter. All that negativity enters your bones and muscles—the very essence of you and your DNA.

Soon you're pissed at the world and, although you started this process with good intentions just like Dr. Henry Jekyll, your demeanor nosedives and you become Mr. Edward Hyde.

Not approachable. Not attractive. Scary. Frightening.

Who would want to talk to you? Would you? Who