

2

Selling Is a Learned Skill

If you want to increase your success rate, increase your failure rate.

—Thomas Watson, Jr.¹

Fear of failure, or the related fear of rejection, is probably the biggest obstacle that you have to overcome to learn better selling skills. To become good at a new skill, you have to fail. The more often you try, the more you'll fail and the faster you'll learn.

This concept is not unique to learning to sell accounting services. As we get older, many of us stay within our comfort zones. We don't want to learn something new that is difficult, whether it is surfing or snowboarding. Believe me, learning to sell your services is a lot easier than learning to surf, snowboard, water-ski, and so on. And you don't fall down as much! With your services you're selling something you know a lot about that can help others. If that's not true, you should get out of the business.

During the many years I have trained CPAs to sell, I have discovered that the most successful rainmakers have certain characteristics. Most of these characteristics are the result of learning and environment, not genetics. Tom Hopkins, the noted motivational speaker, once told me, "An interested introvert can be a better marketer than an interesting extrovert." This is indeed true in the accounting industry. I have found that most accountants can be solid rainmakers—if they are willing to study, practice, and focus on improving their selling performance.

Jeff Everly, a partner with Yount, Hyde & Barbour in Winchester, Virginia who is profiled in Day 4, says, "I think anybody can learn to play golf. If you practice hard, you can play a good game of golf, but not everybody is going to be able to go on the PGA Tour. By the same token, I think anybody can learn to sell. You just have to make up your mind to do it, work really hard, and have some fun."

18 Better Selling Starts with You

Deborah Bailey Browne, a graduate of The Rainmaker Academy from Newburgh, New York, who is profiled in Day 19, says, “I think that everyone can learn to become a Rainmaker and to use their assets, their strengths and weaknesses in different ways. I do feel that certain people are better rainmakers. For example, I have a friend who is an artist. He tells me that I need to be a painter to relax. I can’t draw. He said ‘No, everyone can learn to draw.’ So I said, hum, maybe one day I will take some classes. I don’t think I could ever paint or draw as well as someone who is naturally gifted. However, I could to learn draw enough to do some things. So I think I’m using the analogy with the rainmaking and I think that you’ve got to still do some rainmaking. I think you can learn to sell. Perhaps your strength is more technical. If you are also rainmaking, coupled with the technical skills—that’s a huge positive.”

PORTRAIT OF A SALES LEADER

BILL FINGLAND is managing partner of Baird, Kurtz & Dobson, in Springfield, Missouri. Growing up in a small town in Missouri, Finland wanted to be a lawyer. His love of debate, speech, and theater classes steered him toward a career in communications, and he thought the law might be a good fit for him. Working in his father’s business, Finland Glass Company, he developed a strong work ethic. Bill says, “My dad worked long hours and my mom was a nurse. Working with my dad in the glass company helped me to develop an interest in business. Maybe because the office was air-conditioned and the warehouse was not, I gravitated toward the office during my younger years.”

Finland’s cousin wanted to be a lawyer but, in college, he changed to accounting. This influenced Finland to study accounting at the University of Missouri, where he received his BS and MA degrees. However, he was still very interested in speech, debate, and theater. Finland says this training was very instrumental in him being comfortable making presentations today before boards, committees, and other groups. “Every successful CPA must be able to communicate,” Finland says.

Finland joined Baird, Kurtz & Dobson’s (BKD) Springfield, Missouri office directly out of college. At the time, BKD’s revenue was less than \$30 million. The firm now reaps nearly \$120 million in annual billings. Said Bill of his early years at BKD, “I worked in the Springfield office under three people who had a major influence on me: Dave Henderson,

Like and Trust

Businesspeople do business with people they like and trust. They don't do business with someone they don't like, no matter how great that CPA might be. If you are unwilling to meet personally with prospects, "like" doesn't have a chance to develop. Spending time with prospects, so they come to like and trust you, is crucial to building a strong sales machine.

Often, I have the opportunity to follow up on a winning or losing proposal in a competitive situation. In over 70 percent of the winning proposals we have analyzed, there is a strong correlation between the length of the personal relationship between a key decision influencer and the winner. The decision influencers report things such as: "We had known Anne for a number of years and just felt comfortable hiring her firm." Or "I worked with Brad during the United Way campaign and found him to be a class person." Or

Dick Donaldson, and Jim Glauser. Each of them taught me a different aspect of marketing and selling."

In the mid-1980s, Finland moved to the firm's Tulsa office to develop a healthcare practice.

The office had a tiny amount of healthcare work when he arrived, but a few years later had gross billings of nearly \$5 million. Finland became the firm's director of the healthcare practice in 1994 and managing partner in 1997.

Finland is a strong believer in training his firm's employees to be strong communicators. "You can be the best damn CPA in the world, and if you don't tell somebody about it, you'll starve to death," he says. In 1999 his firm initiated the BKD Sales Academy for managers and young partners. Selling is as vital in public accounting as it is in any other business, according to Finland.

During his years of developing the Tulsa practice, Finland learned to pilot an airplane. "I wanted to be very efficient with my time, and the plane could get me several hundred miles very quickly," he says. Whenever he flew to a client's business or hospital several hundred miles away, Finland would make stops along the way to visit with clients and prospects. He'd call ahead and suggest a meeting with the prospect, saying, "I'm flying just over you to visit a client and I'd like to stop in for a short visit to catch up with you. Would you pick me up at the airport?" "Not only was this a little different to many people, it helped me to cover a lot of Oklahoma territory very efficiently," Finland says.

20 Better Selling Starts with You

“Our chairman knew your partner, John, from a former business relationship.” Although in most cases a deep friendship does not exist, the buyers almost always genuinely like and trust the winner more than they do the loser.

There’s a world of choice out there. People are looking for products they can trust, not just ones that meet their needs.

—Lou Pritchett²

12 Steps for Recovery

We teach a 12-step selling process for accountants that we call our 12 steps for recovering accountants. Developing “like and trust” actually is step 5, after qualifying (step 4) and before discovering needs and wants (step 6). Often accountants begin the discovery phase of the work before gaining the trust of the prospect. When this happens, the prospect may be evasive about real needs. After all, company owners may not want internal financial problems spread about. And until someone likes and trusts you, it is unlikely that you will gain access to his or her real needs.

Bob Gaida, whom you will meet in Day 15, says, “One of the most important aspects of early selling is: If I could only do one thing for this person, what would be the one that wins his heart.” Winning the heart early in the sale is what power sellers believe and practice.

During our proposal follow-up, we have discovered that gaining access to a key piece of information is critical to winning proposals. In many cases, the losers never gained access to this critical information. You obtain critical information on which you build a winning proposal through an effective like-and-trust phase of selling or during an effective investigation phase (discussed in Days 23 and 24). Getting a prospect to state a need, in the form of a desire or want, will enable you to respond with a strong benefit statement.

Accountants who are effective at steps 4 and 5—developing like and gaining trust, and discovering needs and wants—rarely prepare written proposals. Many buyers in these situations form such a strong bond with the seller that the competitors are ruled out early in the process.

Mike Kruse, of Kruse and Associates, says, “When I go on a sales call, my first thought is to make a friend for life, even if the prospect does not work out now. In some cases, I am laying the groundwork for a future business relationship. I know if people trust me, they will share, sometimes secret, key information, with me.” Kruse founded his firm in 1993; now it has grown

to nearly 100 employees. Kruse partners sell all of the time, but most of the proposals are done on a laptop computer. A partner enters data and then prints a summary of recommendations for the prospect. In seven years of phenomenal growth, partners in Kruse's firm have done fewer than five formal written proposals.

12 Steps to Selling Success for the Recovering Accountant

- 1** Prospecting for leads
- 2** Gaining access to prospects
- 3** Qualifying prospects
- 4** Identifying decision influencers
- 5** Developing "like and trust"
- 6** Discovering problems and needs
- 7** Creating wants
- 8** Handling objections
- 9** Demonstrating capabilities
- 10** Creating value perceptions
- 11** Persuading decision influencers
- 12** Closing the sale

Accept Responsibility for Results

Too many people use a variation of the old line, "The dog ate my homework." Today it is in vogue to blame your parents, or your grandparents, or your partners, or your competitors, or the client's personnel for your own failures. But the best rainmakers don't blame something or somebody; they take full responsibility for results they achieve.

If you don't succeed at winning a new account, you must program your mind to not blame. Instead, learn from the situation and work harder next time. Bob Gaida says, "Leadership and sales have a high correlation. Leaders take responsibility for success. You've got to be in it to win it. You must try. It doesn't matter that you fail, just get up and go and you will have your fair share of success. Good leaders and sellers say, 'Okay, now I understand that I have to get up and bat in order to hit a home run, but my challenge is how many times can I hit a home run those times I get up to bat. I'd like to have a good batting average.' But people who can't sell will say, 'The reason I won't even get up to bat is because everybody knows I can't hit a home run.'"

22 Better Selling Starts with You

Process beats substance. . . . The rhythm of the unfolding relationship, the way you are handled (informed, misinformed, belatedly informed, not informed) explains more about how you react to a product or service than the so-called result itself.

—Tom Peters³

Failure Is Necessary

Programming your mind for selling success requires that you handle the fear of failure. Fear of failure paralyzes many great people. The key to overcoming your fear of failure is to redefine what constitutes failure. If you allow the depression that comes when a prospect says no to your proposal to defeat you from making more proposals, then it is the fear that holds you back. With any selling effort, there are going to be a number of proposals that you will not win. Learn from them, and then move on. Don't let fear stop you from making another sales call.

If you view each sale as a life-and-death situation, then be prepared for a life of depression. In the business of selling, there are going to be more defeats than victories. So we must broaden the definition of success by tracking your proposal success rate over multiple selling situations or each year's proposals. Then calculate your percentage of success. Now you can focus on your overall record.

Bob Fifer, in his book *Double Your Profits*,⁴ says: "The ability to see successes and failures in groupings is a valuable game to play." You learn to see the bigger picture and to balance the failures against the successes. Doing so will cause you to worry less about rejections. The result will be bigger successes as well as fewer failures because your confidence will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Be realistic. Would you rather have 100 percent success on 1 proposal or 30 percent success on 10? A major league team will not hire the ballplayer who can bat once a year and hit one home run even though his average is perfect. If you are going to play in the major leagues, make a resolution to double your failure rate. By doing so, I promise that you will more than double your successes.

Selling is a numbers game. The only way to be successful is first to insure that you are engaged in a sufficient amount of activity to have a success rate. As Bob Gaida says, "You lose 100 percent of the proposals you don't make."

Selectively target your marketing efforts. The most successful marketing has a high failure rate. Even the best direct mail campaigns obtain only a

3 percent response rate. If you focus on the 97 percent failure rate, you'll never launch the campaign, but if you focus on what you can do with a 1 to 3 percent response rate, you begin to see the possibilities.

Progress Requires Action

To be successful in selling, you must take responsibility for your actions and be willing to fail. For accounting firms to succeed in training their staffs to sell, there must be a climate that encourages action. If accountants are as critical of your lack of success each time you attempt a marketing initiative as you are of your accounting work, most of you will not even try. We must encourage everyone in the firm to try marketing by encouraging people to fail more often.

For many of us, a better understanding of the marketing process will enable us to better deal with the fears that hold us back. When you feel the need to come back from a chamber of commerce business mixer with a new client in tow, the pressure is too great. Yet if you talk with several people at the mixer and increase their awareness and familiarity of you and your firm, count this as a success.

You will be rewarded for your successes in marketing. When you achieve a small percentage success rate, often the clients you obtain bring in big-time fees. You will not be rewarded by the percentage of successes, but by the number of successes.

Above-Average Willpower and Ambition

Any person who has the willpower to pass the CPA exam has an enormous amount of ambition. Self-discipline is a key for top sellers to succeed. No matter how tempted they were to give up, they persisted toward their goals.

Recently I met with a successful music producer. He told me that for every top-selling music star, there were hundreds of people with more talent than the star who made millions. Fascinated, I asked if there was anything that set the stars apart from the talented but average musicians. His answer was startlingly simple. He said, "The superstars have remarkable self-confidence." Many of the "stars" believed in themselves so strongly, or had someone else believe in them so strongly, that they were able to persist, even when the odds were against them.

Every year I meet talented CPAs who manage practices far below their maximum potential. Why? In my view, it's not because of lack of opportunity or of talent. Instead, it's because these CPAs do not believe in themselves.

24 Better Selling Starts with You

Lack of self-esteem will hinder the most talented CPAs from reaching their goals. An accounting firm full of people with low self-esteem can't be highly successful in marketing.

Be Intensely Goal Oriented

Goals crystallize and energize your selling. We ask students in The Rainmaker Academy to write 21 reasons they want to succeed in selling. With each personal marketing plan, we ask people to write specific goals. We do this because I have found that goal setting is crucial for people to be top sellers.

Goals help us overcome and work through some of the energy-sappers of successful selling: lack of time and the fear of success.

We All Have Time

Once at a presentation, I heard Zig Ziglar⁵ say, "Son, if you are going to have to eat a frog, you don't want to have to stare at the sucker too long." In other words, he was saying, do the most difficult things first in your day.

Time constraints seem to be a huge barrier for lack of selling by accountants. Time is an accountant's most precious commodity. And although a continuous supply of time is available, it cannot be stored for future use. You cannot manage time. You can manage your activities and yourself, but time is and will be the same forever. Many accountants, however, feel trapped and manipulated by the demands others make on their time. When you have clearly established goals for your selling, you will tend to place a priority on achievement of the goals and not allow time to slip away.

Many successful sellers focus on the activities that demand no extra time. The way in which you communicate with your employees and clients can be positive marketing encounters. When you communicate management recommendations, internal control weaknesses, or adjustments, do you consider the selling impact they have?

Any fact facing us is not as important as our attitude toward it, for that determines our success or failure.

—Dr. Norman Vincent Peale

Fear of Success

The fear of success is really the fear of failing in the future. What we really fear is obtaining a new client and not being able to provide great service. Of course, some accountants believe they are not worthy enough to build a great

practice. They suffer from the guilt of past deeds. So their continuing procrastination, which results in continuing failure, is atonement.

To deal successfully with the fear of success, you must plan to bring in new clients. To do this, you must leave holes in your schedule so that you are able to accept attractive work. If you fill the factory with junk work, you will not have the ability to add attractive work.

Many accountants are worriers. They ask, "If I bring a new client into the firm, will I be able to provide better service than the client has received in the past? Will I be able to meet the client's needs? Do I really have the time, or will this new client overwork me?" A more positive way to look at the fear of success is to see it as an opportunity for growth.

Fear of success can be understood and managed as positively as other psychological fears are managed. A thorough and objective analysis will assure that you, your partners, and your staff have the technical abilities to meet the client's needs, or will indicate where additional expertise is needed. Then you can make appropriate adjustments, if any are needed. Managing the fear of success is a road to improving the capabilities of you and your firm, preparing you to capitalize on any opportunity of interest.

Just because your prospect is currently being served by a first-class local or national firm does not mean the prospect is getting first-class service. Recognize this fact. Furthermore, if you focus on selling services that your firm is providing to other clients in an excellent manner, contact the prospect and stress how valuable those services could be to the prospect. Last, match the prospect with the appropriate person in your firm.

Make one of your personal goals to eliminate 50 to 100 hours of junk work every year. Then focus your marketing effort to bring in the kind of work you clearly love. Your clients will steer you in the right direction, you will be more attractive to new clients, and your enthusiasm will excite you so much that you will not fail.

Every year, you will grow to enjoy your work more and more as you act on overcoming your fears. I have trained thousands of people over the years to improve their selling abilities. Many of them held a false idea that they could not succeed, but when they began to step out and try, their success in marketing excited them.

Ability to Approach Strangers

Every seller has some level of call reluctance. But the best rainmakers train themselves to overcome their butterflies and get out of their offices and meet people. Harvey Mackay, author of *Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty*, says,

26 Better Selling Starts with You

“If I had to name the single characteristic shared by all of the truly successful people I’ve met over a lifetime, I’d say it is the ability to create and nurture a network of contacts.”

Your greatest asset in successful marketing is a strong belief in yourself and the great service that you are providing your clients. Armed with strong confidence in yourself and a determination to meet people, you will be able to attract the type of clients you want.



Character consists of what you do on the third and fourth tries after you’ve failed.

—James Michener

When CPA Terry Orr’s managing partner told him that to make partner he would need to bring in \$50,000 of new client business, he went into action. “My first attempts were simply going around to people that I knew, friends and people I’d worked with, saying, ‘I need help, can you help me?’ The response was overwhelming. Everyone wanted to help, and then I would explain what the situation was: ‘I’ve got to generate new business.’ So I started going out to my contacts who were clients and asking, ‘Do you know of someone? I’ve given you great service. I need your help.’ And they started making referrals. I went to bankers and attorneys and people who I didn’t know. The gratifying thing was I never had one person say, ‘No, I won’t help you.’ Every single one said, ‘Of course I’ll help you.’ They started sending me referrals and, all of a sudden, this thing started to flow and my eyes were finally opened to the fact that this was not something that was that difficult. It was as easy as sitting down with someone and asking for their help on a personal basis: ‘I need help, can you help me?’”

Fear of Failure

Let’s talk about channeling the fear of failure into energy that will drive you to succeed. Discomfort or mild anxiety has some positive aspects. When we are mildly anxious, we work at peak performance levels and actually accomplish more than when we are comfortable. So if you are uncomfortable meeting strangers, push yourself into these mildly uncomfortable situations. Start by associating with your client’s executives who are outside the accounting department. Get to know the sales force, the manufacturing team, the design group, and any of the other people who work with your client.

Once you learn to put yourself into mildly uncomfortable situations, teach your staff to do the same. As you become conditioned to the discomfort, you will be able to increase your marketing prowess dramatically. Trying to force people straight into situations where high anxiety sets in will create avoidance behavior, the source of procrastination and disorganization.

Bill Jenkins, former CEO of Kennedy & Coe, says, “Not everybody is going to be the same. Not everybody is going to be as creative as others. Some are going to do better, but I think all of them have a significant potential for selling. But if it is left just to them—if they don’t see somebody else do it, if there is not somebody else in the room encouraging it, if they are not having their hand held—they may have difficulty.

“The only way a CPA learns to sell is to take her selling. He or she has got to be with people who know what they are doing, see other people do it . . . then they follow your lead . . . they try it themselves. When they do try, they have some luck; when they do, you celebrate it and give them encouragement, and they try it again and they get better at it.

“You have to be careful with young accountants. A young person goes out there and finally sells something, but he typically underprices the work by at least half. But he’s made a sale and is pretty fired up about it. He can’t continue to go on underpricing jobs, so you’ve got to talk to him. But you’ve got to be careful about reprimanding him for underpricing it. Otherwise, he won’t sell again because he’s experienced negative consequences for selling.”

Fear of Rejection

All sellers must cope with the fear of rejection that comes before the contact and feelings of rejection after the contact has occurred. The fear of personal rejection prevents many accountants from making a marketing contact. Most marketers can separate themselves from the product to overcome fear of rejection. Because our services are our products, however, we are the product, and detachment is harder for us.

Research has shown that moving a prospect from contact to contract will take about nine actual positive marketing interactions with your firm. These contacts might include dozens of ads or mailings because the reality is that your prospects miss many of your attempted interactions.

The first technique to deal successfully with the fear of rejection is: Don’t go for the kill on the first call. Set the objective for the first interaction at a very low level—maybe just creating awareness. Then if you can build each

28 Better Selling Starts with You

successive call into a sales strategy, the overwhelming fear of rejection won't stop you.

Most people give up just when they're about to achieve success. They quit on the one-yard line. They give up at the last minute of the game, one foot from a winning touchdown.

—H. Ross Perot

The second technique in dealing with fear of rejection is planning your response to rejection. Your contact may have a rational reason for not doing business with you right now. She may be having a bad day and her lackluster response is not your fault. A steady, consistent approach will win out. The average sale in American commerce is made on the fifth sales call, but the

Of Self-Esteem, Self-Respect, and Pride

The most important single quality of success and happiness is a positive mental attitude, a general feeling of optimism about yourself and your future.

There are four universal principles, or laws, that determine your levels of self-esteem, self-respect, and personal pride.

- 1 Law of Belief.** Your beliefs become your realities. Biggest single challenge? Self-limiting beliefs.
- 2 Law of Expectations.** Whatever you expect, with confidence, becomes your own "self-fulfilling prophecy."
- 3 Law of Attraction.** You are a "living magnet." You attract into your life people and circumstances in harmony with your dominant thoughts.
- 4 Law of Correspondence.** Your outer world is a mirror of your inner world.

There are three key ideas that explain your levels of self-esteem, self-respect, and personal pride:

- 1** All causation is mental.
- 2** You become what you think about most of the time.
- 3** If you change your thinking, you change your life.

—Brian Tracy

average marketer makes only two or three calls. My experience shows that for accountants, it takes more than five contacts to achieve a sale.

The feeling of rejection you have when someone does not respond positively to you can be depressing. However, if you expect that over 90 percent of your marketing activity will not close the sale at that moment, the feeling will not overwhelm you. As accountants, we are trained to avoid making mistakes. We avoid low-payoff activity. We must make the mental shift to seeing marketing as a numbers game.

Teach yourself that marketing that is not successful today will be successful tomorrow. The activity of teaching yourself will help you build the potential client relationship or will prepare you to market better. Engage in positive self-talk and separate your ego from the sale.

Last, maintain a healthy balance of positive client interaction with new prospect activity. The client relationships will enable you to be confident with prospects. The fear of rejection is a very powerful psychological force that affects persons in every walk of life. It often prevents accountants from initiating any marketing activity whatsoever. Many accountants experience this fear before meeting with a prospect, imagining that the prospect will not be interested. Success at marketing requires, first, recognition that the fear of rejection exists, followed by action to deal with it and overcome it.

The best way to overcome the fear of rejection is to adopt a positive attitude and actively market your services with the belief that some prospects will indeed want to engage you.

Remember that all fear is conquered through experience. If you have a positive frame of mind when you encounter prospects, you will experience an increasing level of acceptance. The fear of rejection will steadily diminish as your experience and expectation of acceptance increase.

High Level of Empathy

Until you are able to put yourself in your clients' shoes, understand their needs and concerns, and then respond appropriately, you will only be a minor league rainmaker. Mark Kaland, partner at Clifton Gunderson in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, says, "I am still uncomfortable with the side of selling that seems pushy. I prefer to listen to my client's needs and then match these needs to a Clifton Gunderson solution. Just looking out for the client's best interests always results in increased business for us. That is the type of selling I like."

Sometimes we get so involved in the technical side of public accounting that we overlook the human side. Michael LeBoeuf, in his powerhouse book *How to Win Customers and Keep Them for Life*,⁶ says that clients only buy two things from us: solutions to their problems and good feelings.

30 Better Selling Starts with You

Most CPAs are great at solving problems; after all, that is what education and training have prepared us to do. We are extremely valuable to our clients because of this ability. However, when it comes to providing good feelings, we often fail to recognize the tremendous profit potential.

Clients will pay premium fees, will pay on time, and won't complain as much about our bills when we provide them with good feelings. Tax season is a good time to plan to improve your dedication to giving your clients good feelings.

Summary

Selling is a skill, and, like any other skill, improvement comes with focus and practice. Just as you wouldn't expect to get better at golf without practice, you can't expect your selling skills to improve without practice. Failure in the selling situation is not failure if you learn from it. Even a no can begin to develop the relationship. In fact, someone who has turned you down is more likely to hire you later over someone they meet for the first time because you are both familiar and persistent.

Developing a solid bond of liking and trust is a key factor in getting commitment from clients. It is one of 12 steps in the selling process.