

Life Is Sales

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Gary L. Ford and Connie Bird



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Life Is Sales is dedicated to everyone who faces this harshly competitive world and wakes each morning and takes control of their life. Your powerful self-talk, persistence, and commitment to being of service to others makes a difference for millions.

To all our workshop participants, we love your enthusiasm, generous listening, and playful participation. Your hunger to learn, your courage to try something new, and your commitment to creating the right solutions for your clients are why we do this work. We celebrate your successes and honour you in these pages.

Enclosed you will find the keys to creating meaningful conversations, making powerful requests, and becoming more persuasive. As you ponder these pages, we invite you to highlight your “ah-ha” or “light bulb” moments and your new insights. Each time you read this book, you will discover new ideas and approaches to getting to “yes.” You will be inspired to take new actions. Read it, play with it, practice it, and tweak it to fit into your life. We promise you amazing results. Learn with *Life is Sales* and your accomplishments will surprise you. You can get what you want! It is there, just for the asking.

Acknowledgements

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Finally, to those of you turning these pages, whom we have not yet had the opportunity to meet. Our heartfelt thanks for buying our book and starting out on the *Life Is Sales* journey with us.

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Chapter 1

Life Is Sales

Why is it that some people are so successful at sales and others are not? Why is it that some can persuade others to their way of thinking and others simply go along with the crowd? Why is it that some can be influential with those in their lives and others are being influenced? The answer lies in our ability to get what we want and need in such a way that everyone wins.

Gary: Two years ago, my first beautiful granddaughter, Avery, was born. As a doting grandparent, I spent considerable time playing and observing Avery's every action as a newborn. It was interesting to note that she was influencing her parents and her grandparents to get what she needed within mere minutes of her birth. When uncomfortable or tired, she would cry and would get the immediate attention she demanded. When she was hungry, she could communicate her desire for food, and her mother would comply. She communicated to her parents in the only way she could: by crying. Her behaviour was reinforced, as she got what she "asked" for. As the days and months passed, Avery's needs expanded and so did her sales skills in getting what she needed and wanted.

Avery has a unique way of communicating her

dislike for certain foods. She likes potatoes and so will eat off her plate just fine, but stick anything green on the plate and it immediately goes over the side of her high chair onto the floor for the dog. This is a more forceful sales technique in communicating what she doesn't want, which gets her more of what she does want. Her mother tries to camouflage the green vegetables but to no avail—Avery can find them again and again, and over the side they go. Is Avery training her mother through influencing techniques? It certainly appears so.

The minute we are born, we begin learning how to get what we need to survive. Babies are at the mercy of their parents, as they are unable to fend for themselves. The only communication tool they have available is their voice, and so they use it to communicate what they require. When hungry, a baby cries; when thirsty, the cry will be a little different; and when a diaper needs changing, they will cry yet another way. Parents learn very quickly the communication techniques of their children. Even at this early age, babies learn sales skills to help them get what they want and need. As we grow older, our wants and needs expand, as do our skills in obtaining these things from those around us. We first influence our parents and grandparents; soon it becomes teachers, friends, and other family members.

In time, we are influencing fellow employees at work, customers, bosses, spouses, and our own children. Influencing and persuading prospects to become clients and purchase our wares is the objective in all sales roles. That's right, "Life Is Sales"—and the more effective we are at influencing and persuading others, the more successful we become in getting what we want and need.

A good definition for *sales* might be: "Getting what you ask for." We really do want to change the actions and behaviour of those we wish to influence rather than just have them think about our proposal in a positive way.

Who are the very best closers and salespeople in the world?

1. They are the most successful.
2. They are the most tenacious.
3. They always ask “one more time.”
4. They always have more than one way of asking.

The answer? Your kids.

That’s right, your kids! If you have children, you know exactly what we mean. Why do they lose this amazing skill as they get older? Why can’t we recapture the exuberance of our youth in making powerful requests and being persistent in getting what we ask for and what we want without being childish?

This book will explore the human condition and what influences others to say yes to requests. Armed with this knowledge, you will discover new and effective ways to be more influential and persuasive with those around you, enabling you to get more of what you want. As we mature, we seem more afraid to ask for what we want. We instead hint at what we want, which is really not asking at all. We seem to be afraid of hearing the word *no*. Asking for what you want and making powerful requests will make you more successful than those who only hint. This book will show you how!

Sales isn’t a bad word; it doesn’t mean “manipulation” but rather an effective way to move people in the direction you would like them to take. Parents use sales techniques to grow and develop their children. Parents want their children to have certain social skills and achieve certain academic standards. Children, on the other hand, use sales techniques to get their parents to buy them the things they want and, as they get older, to gain the independence they need to grow and mature. Boys and girls, men and women all use sales techniques to attract their future mates. Sales are used in the workplace to build a better team, to get a promotion, to gain opportunities, and, of course, to actually sell products and services to others.

In the past fifty years, there has been significant psychological research that provides clues as to why people say yes to requests.

We will review this research in some detail and then take these findings and apply them to what we all do every day in our lives as we strive to be more successful. We will review what Robert B. Cialdini calls “the six principles of influence” in his book *Influence: Science and Practice* and discover ways to apply these principles to enhance your success, in all areas of your life. We will also review the other criteria for success, such as honesty and integrity, how to deal with rejection, and what personality traits lead to greater success.

The seven principles we will discuss in some detail are reciprocity, concessions, commitment/consistency, authority, consensus, scarcity, and liking. If used effectively, each of these principles will have a significant impact on your life and allow you to be more successful in getting what you ask for. We will also investigate other influence tools and human qualities that allow you to be more effective and successful. The first and perhaps most important quality any person brings to a relationship is honesty.

Honesty and Integrity

“Honesty is the best policy.” —Robert Ingersoll

Significant research has been done on what employees look for in a leader. The number one item listed in literally every research program has been honesty. People want to know that their leader is an honest individual. We all want to work with people we can trust. The best way to achieve trust is to be honest—honest with our strengths and our shortcomings. Yes, admit to our own shortcomings.

This honesty factor is evident in all walks of life. Employees need to be able to trust their supervisor, managers need to be able to trust their employees, parents need to be able to trust their children, and customers need to be able to trust the person who is selling them a product or service.

Honesty leads to a feeling of trust between individuals, and trust builds a relationship of integrity. It’s what we all want in a rela-

tionship. Trust and integrity are at the basis of all human interaction. Relationships are built with trust as the foundation. In selling, trust is the basis for all win/win relationships. A win/lose relationship might result in one sale but will not likely lead to future business or referrals. Life is for the long term and therefore must be based on honesty and integrity. When the honesty disappears, friendships, marriages, and businesses quickly dissolve. Trust must be established in any business or personal relationship before persuasion can be effective and long-lasting.

It is credibility we all crave when making any buying decision. When we look at buying any major item, we want to know whether the person explaining the product or service is telling us the truth. Would you buy anything from a salesperson you knew was lying about the product's features and benefits? Would you want to work for a supervisor who continually lied to you about the priorities of the company or your career future? Would you remain married to a spouse who continually lied to you about their activities? We need to be in a trusting relationship if we are to move forward in any meaningful way.

Honesty is the cornerstone for your career and your life, and this cornerstone will assist you in becoming more influential and successful. Sometimes the appearance of honesty alone will win a sale, but in the end, the full truth always comes out: your reputation will be sullied in the marketplace and your future success will be severely limited. Being honest allows trust to grow so that what you say next will be appreciated as the truth. Truth is a powerful persuasive quality. Honesty, truth, and integrity all work in unison to enhance relationships and enhance the ability to be influential.

There have been countless books written about sales techniques and approaches that will guarantee success. These skills will only work if the basis of the relationship is built on mutual trust. It is your personal choice to be honest, and we all need to look deep within our souls to find that seed of truth and nurture it into full bloom. Research has indicated that most of us lie once every twenty minutes, so it is an uphill battle for all of us, but a battle well worth

fighting and a battle well worth winning. How many times do we say things we really don't mean? "Give me a second" really means at least five minutes. "I will be right down" means fifteen minutes.

Later in this book, we will be discussing various strategies you can implement that will showcase your honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness early in the sales process. This, in turn, will significantly enhance the closing ratio of every sales conversation. It is really up to each individual to decide to be honest in building relationships for success. This doesn't come easy, as the desire to close a sale sometimes overpowers our desire to be honest. But it is quite clear: People want to deal with those they trust.

To illustrate this point, just shift the perspective for a moment and put yourself in the customer's shoes. You're buying a new big-screen TV at a price of \$4,800. You have done some research online and you therefore know some of the strengths and weaknesses of this TV already. The salesperson you're dealing with works on straight commission and proceeds to lay out all the features and benefits and stretches the truth about the quality and guarantees. Your immediate reaction is to question everything else the salesperson has told you, and you begin to wonder if they even know how to install the TV properly and hook it up to the surround sound system.

Gary: This exact situation happened to me. I was convinced by the sales skills of the individual that they were trustworthy and reliable and I was getting the very best deal in the city. The price was the best in comparison to others, so I bought the whole package: a plasma TV and surround sound system with five speakers for a cost of \$10,000, and I had them install it for yet another fee. Well, it didn't work after a week. I noticed that I couldn't get screen-in-screen TV, so I couldn't watch two programs at once, which was one of the features the salesman explained to me. The surround sound didn't work for the TV on pay-per-view tel-

evision, but did work for the DVD player. I looked behind all the equipment and the maze of wires told me this was a job for a professional, certainly not an inept technician such as me. If you own one of these surround sound setups, take a few minutes to pull the unit out from the wall and you will see what I mean. Wires running everywhere.

When I called the salesperson on the phone, they were not all that co-operative but did say someone would call from technical support. I waited two weeks—and no call. I called back, and this time I asked for technical support only to discover that they didn't have a technical support department at the store and I was on my own to hire someone to come and look at the setup. Fib number one. I never read manuals, but I attempted to find my problem in the 100-page booklet that came with my system. Needless to say, I was just as confused after I read the chapter on setup as I was before. Fib number two. It is easy to setup, just follow the simple directions and diagrams.

I called the salesperson and managed to get through. They confirmed I was on my own with this purchase. Fib number three. He had said they would provide after-purchase service. The after-purchase service had to go direct to the manufacturer, who was located in Korea. I finally hired a friend of a friend who did fix all my problems except the picture-in-picture, which was not actually a feature of this television unless I purchased another add-on. Fib number four.

So, what did I think of this salesperson, this company, and this manufacturer? Did I trust them? What were my actions after all these ne-

gotiations? My actions were to tell everyone the story of my problems with this store. I would never purchase anything else from this store, and I would recommend that all my friends and acquaintances buy elsewhere. The salesperson made one sale, but lost countless others because of the trust component. A year later, the store had gone bankrupt, which meant the salesperson was out looking for work. They missed the importance of honesty and integrity in building relationships and creating a win/win for customers and the store. That is how powerful honesty and integrity are in the world we live in today. Successful people and businesses thrive when honesty and integrity are the backbone of their philosophy. Relationships thrive when honesty and integrity are the basis of that relationship. Lose honesty and lose business.

Persistence, Initiative, and Assertiveness

We call these three qualities “PIA.” Actually, it was our friend Deb Shepherd who used this acronym to help her remember the three qualities, and now we use it too. These three qualities are attributes of every successful person in the world today. When built upon the foundation of honesty and integrity, these three qualities ensure success in all walks of life. When hiring people, we have always believed that these three qualities are absolutely necessary for any new hire, especially in a sales role.

Persistence

“Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”

—Thomas Edison

“Never give up” is the key to success for so many of the world’s top performers. Athletes live by this mantra. Vince Lombardi once said, “Winners never quit, and quitters never win.” Just look at how many hours an Olympic athlete puts in as training for just one event. Their commitment to persistence is amazing to behold. The athlete overcomes fatigue, boredom, pain, and injury as they persist for countless hours every week for years in preparation for that one day on the Olympic field of competition.

Most successful businesspeople are also known for their persistence. Colonel Harland Sanders is an outstanding example of persistence in action.¹

Colonel Sanders was born in 1890 and actively began franchising his chicken business at age sixty-five. Most of us are retired, playing golf, fishing, and travelling, but here is a man at the age of sixty-five starting a new business!

Sanders held a variety of jobs in his youth, including railroad fireman and insurance salesman. He operated the Ohio River steamboat ferry, sold tires, and operated service stations. He even studied law by correspondence. When he was forty, he started cooking for travellers at his service station in Corbin, Kentucky. He didn’t have a restaurant then but served the guests at his own dining room table. As more people started coming just for the food, he moved across the street to a motel and restaurant that seated 142 people. Over the next nine years, he perfected his secret blend of eleven herbs and spices and the basic cooking techniques that are still used today.

In the early ‘50s, a new interstate highway was planned to bypass the town of Corbin and the Colonel’s restaurant. Seeing the end in sight, he auctioned off his operations, and after paying all of his bills, he was reduced to living on a \$105 social security cheque each month.

Confident of the quality of his fried chicken recipe, the Colonel devoted himself to the chicken franchising business that he started in 1952. He travelled across the country by car from restaurant to restaurant, cooking batches of chicken for restaurant owners and their employees. If the reaction was good, he would enter into a

handshake agreement on a deal that stipulated a payment to him of a nickel for each chicken the restaurant sold. Legend has it that the Colonel was turned down over 900 times before he made his first sale, but he persisted, and in 1955, the governor of Kentucky made him a Kentucky Colonel in recognition of his contribution to the state's cuisine.

By 1964, the Colonel had 600 franchised outlets, and in 1971, when the company was sold, there were 3,500 franchised and company-owned restaurants. The company was sold to Heublin, Inc. for \$285 million. In 1986, the company was acquired by Pepsico for approximately \$840 million, and by 1997, there were 29,500 restaurants worldwide in nearly 100 countries.

In 1976, an independent survey ranked the Colonel as the world's second most recognized celebrity. Santa Claus beat him out.

Let's look a little closer at the Colonel's success. He actually demonstrated all three of our key criteria for success with persistence being the number one key to his success.

At age sixty-five, Colonel Harland Sanders became an American fast-food pioneer. Most people would have given up after one month of rejection, and others would have given up after six months of rejection. But not the Colonel. Persistence in the face of overwhelming odds and constant rejection turned a one restaurant operation into a 29,500 unit chain worldwide.

The power of persistence is an amazing force that is available to all of us. We just need to choose fight over flight. This power is well within your grasp. Failure was not an option for the Colonel, and with each rejection, he became more persistent in accomplishing his task. It seemed that rejection fuelled his ardour to continue in his quest to bring his chicken recipe to America.

Did the Colonel demonstrate initiative? Absolutely. Here is a man sixty-five years of age with no real experience in franchising a chicken operation across America. He knew he had a winning chicken recipe with his secret blend of herbs and spices, but he took it to the next step—the critical next step—and demonstrated the initiative to actually go out and attempt to persuade perfect

strangers to buy into his chicken recipe. It is this initiative that got the sixty-five-year-old Colonel out of his rocking chair and into his car to tour America to build a fast food empire.

Did the Colonel demonstrate assertiveness? Absolutely! Here is a man sixty-five years of age with minimal sales training and experience, persuading a nation to buy into his chicken franchise operation. Can you imagine running a small restaurant and this guy with a white suit and white goatee comes to your restaurant wanting to sell his chicken recipe? We expect it was quite an experience for those early converts to see this man in action. He convinced these small private restaurant owners to allow him to cook for them and demonstrate the quality of his product. They didn't agree at first, but over time they did. The Colonel didn't take no for an answer, and his assertiveness was based on his conviction that his product would help his potential customers be more successful. A win/win situation for both the restaurants and the Colonel. The honesty component was clearly identified, as the Colonel would seal the deal and the arrangements with a handshake. Trust on both sides of the counter helped build his reputation across the country.

This is an extraordinary story of success, but the Colonel is not the only highly successful individual to overcome extreme odds to take a place in the history books. Review this history and see if you can identify this man:

At age 23 – Ran for state legislature, but failed to get elected

At age 24 – Failed in business

At age 26 – Sweetheart died

At age 27 – Had a nervous breakdown

At age 29 – Defeated for Speaker

At age 34 – Defeated for nomination for Congress

At age 37 – Elected to Congress

At age 39 – Defeated in re-election bid for Congress

At age 45 – Defeated in Senate race

At age 46 – Defeated for nomination for Vice President of the United States

At age 49 – Defeated in Senate race

At age 51 – Elected President of the United States

Answer: Abraham Lincoln²

Yes, Abraham Lincoln was persistent, even though he had suffered tremendous defeats both professionally and personally. Perhaps these failures better prepared him to be one of the finest presidents in the history of the United States. Getting back up after a defeat is the measure of a truly successful person. Wallowing in the pain of defeat and blaming others for your misery is a surefire way to limit your success. This is really the magic of persistence. If you never try again, you will be assured of never achieving success. It is only those who actually continue in their quest who even have a chance at it.

The phrase “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again” has been around for decades for a reason. W. C. Fields once said, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. Then quit. No use being a damn fool about it.” But W. C. Fields was a great comedian, not a great philosopher. The power of persistence is at your command only if you choose to invoke it.

Think back to when you learned to ride a bicycle. Did you master the art of balancing on two wheels as a youngster on the very first try? Not likely. Most of us fell off many times and had the skinned knees and elbows to prove our persistence in learning to balance and steer at the same time. Did you give up after your first failure and simply say, “I can’t do it,” and return to the tricycle, or did you climb back on the bicycle and give it another try? We all continued until we had mastered the art of the bicycle and felt proud of our accomplishment, with a big smile at our parents and friends as we circled the neighbourhood. Persistence is a way of life for children as they learn new skills, and yet somehow, as we get older, we lose that drive to overcome failure. We lost that “can do” attitude and it was replaced with fear of failure and embarrassment. Truly successful people return to their childhood roots and never

give up until success is attained.

Most of us have heard of Dr. Seuss and probably read children's books by this famous author. Theodor Seuss Geisel, who wrote under the pen name Dr. Seuss, had his first personally written and illustrated book rejected twenty-seven times by publishers until it was finally accepted by Vanguard Press. Persistence in the face of continual rejection is one of the key criteria for success for so many amazing people. Dr. Seuss books have now sold over two hundred million copies in over fifteen different languages. How would you feel if you were one of those publishers who declined to publish that first book by Dr. Seuss? How different would our world be if Dr. Seuss had given up trying to publish after twenty-seven individual rejections? There would be no *Cat in the Hat* to read to our children and grandchildren. But Dr. Seuss persisted and we are all richer in our lives for his persistence.

Warren Buffet, perhaps the most successful investor of all time, is a living example of persistence. His buy-and-hold strategy exemplifies the ability to be persistent when investing in quality stocks. His strategy of buying and persistently holding quality companies through the vagaries of the market has proven to be the most successful over time.

We will discuss specific strategies later in the book on how you can unleash the power of persistence within you to achieve greater results. We all have the ability to persist, but we often decide to give up instead. We follow the W. C. Fields quotation. Persistence and stubbornness are close cousins and we will discover the difference so you will become more successful in all aspects of your life.

Initiative

“Screw it, let's do it.” —Richard Branson

With his book *Screw It, Let's Do It: Lessons in Life*, Richard Branson is a perfect example of initiative in action. He states that the

best lesson he ever learned was to “just do it.” It doesn’t matter what it is, or how hard it might seem, as the Greek philosopher Plato said, “The beginning is the most important part of any work.”

This second key attribute of success is closely linked to persistence. Initiative is the driver that allows successful people to ask for the business. Initiative is what opens doors; it allows salespeople to make cold calls. To benefit from persistence, you must make the first effort, and that is where the attribute of initiative comes in. The beginning is indeed the most important part of any work. After all, if you don’t begin, finishing something isn’t even possible.

Children seem to be born with the skill of being able to ask for what they want, which is an important characteristic of taking initiative. They have no fear in asking for what they want and no fear in asking many times in many different ways. They don’t seem to be influenced by social pressures and norms and just go ahead and do things. They don’t wait for instructions and just decide for themselves what is important. This ability is somehow lost as we get older. For example, asking for the business is always mentioned in literally every sales book and sales seminar on the planet, and yet most of us don’t follow this advice. Why are we hesitant about asking for what we want? We are humble by nature, so we prefer to hint at what we want.

This is partly a result of our socialization. The teenage years begin the transformation of adjusting behaviour due to peer pressure. Fitting in becomes more important than personal initiative as social skills are developed during this period. Being part of the group becomes a paramount driver for teens. Their interpretation of being unique means being different from parents but the same as friends. This trend continues through high school and university.

It’s when we get into corporate life that the real damage is done by managers who want to sap the life right out of new hires. Following procedures and guidelines begin in our school system, are reinforced in business, and rob us of our youthful initiative and creativity. Company policies become mantras, and micromanagement the norm. No wonder we find so few in business with the kind of

initiative that creates innovation and success. Managers spend far more time discovering what's wrong than they do discovering what's right with employee performance. The results in changing behaviour are obvious. We all become hesitant to take initiative for fear of being rejected or blamed. We hint at asking for the business rather than make powerful requests. We all have been subjected to this compliance training. The successful salesperson recognizes this and learns how to overcome the socialization to try new and exciting approaches outside the norm. They have the initiative to drive their own personal success rather than be a part of the compliant group and be held back by the status quo.

One of the finest examples in our generation of a man who has the initiative to drive his own personal success rather than be part of a compliant group is Steve Jobs of Apple.³

Steve Jobs started his career designing computer games for Atari. He and his friend Steve Wozniak created the first Apple computer in Jobs' garage when he was only twenty-one years of age. From there, they built the company into the mega company it is today. In 1980, Apple went public at a price of \$22 per share, giving the company a market value of \$1.2 billion.

Jobs was a radical leader and creative genius. His moves were fast and furious. He had initiative and drive. The company grew and prospered under his leadership. However, with the introduction of the Macintosh, the then president John Sculley felt Jobs was hurting the company with his unusual approach and persuaded the board of directors to strip Jobs of his power.

Sculley had tried to change the culture of the company with strict discipline, controlling costs, reducing overhead, and rationalizing product lines within an organization that had been previously undisciplined by nature. Sculley came to the conclusion that they "could run a lot better with Steve out of operations."

The man who had started the company was being ousted by the board of directors and relegated to a meaningless role. Jobs couldn't function like this, so in 1985, he resigned as chairman and went off to start the NeXT Computers company. In 1988, his company

launched the NeXTSTEP operating system.

Under the bureaucratic leadership of Sculley, Apple soon began to lose its edge. Initiative was replaced with “followership” and company protocol. Sales declined, and the stock price suffered. This is one of the finest examples of taking a company built on wild and crazy ideas, innovative skunk works, and a corporate culture of initiative and encouraging mistakes to one of complete compliance to company policy and expense control. It was stunning how quickly the corporate culture changed under the micromanagement of Sculley and his team.⁴

It took a while, but Steve Jobs is now back at the helm of Apple, and the results are quite clear. Apple purchased NeXT and used OPENSTEP—a descendant of NeXTSTEP—as the basis for their current operating system, OS X. And Apple is once again at the forefront of innovation and initiative with the iPod, iTunes, and the iPhone.

Steve Jobs, a college dropout, was an unlikely candidate to have become the prototype of America’s computer industry entrepreneurs. He is a perfectionist, an inspirational leader, and a visionary. He demonstrates the three attributes of all successful people: persistence, initiative, and assertiveness (PIA).

When it comes to pulling all three attributes together, Benjamin Franklin said it best: “Never leave till tomorrow what you can do today.” The procrastinator never wins and never gets started. It seems getting started is a key to success that all of us should heed.

Assertiveness

“Never allow a person to tell you no who doesn’t have the power to say yes.” —Eleanor Roosevelt

Assertiveness is the final component of our PIA acronym. This particular trait is a favourite one for self-help books, psychotherapists, and personal development coaches. Assertiveness is really all about the individual. It is closely tied to self-confidence and self-esteem.

Hinting at the business is the approach used by salespeople who don't know the assertive technique. Their self-confidence might be at a low ebb and they might fear rejection, so it becomes easier to hint rather than ask. The self-confident individual makes a powerful request and doesn't fear rejection. Later in the book, we will go into much more detail about handling the word *no* and how a response of "no" can really be a tremendous opportunity to close a sale.

In communication, assertiveness is sometimes confused with aggression. The aggressive or pushy approach becomes too demanding and could result in resentment and rejection. It could even damage the relationship, causing you to be less influential and persuasive. Assertiveness is the ability to express yourself positively without violating the rights and sensitivities of others. It is direct, open, honest, and respectful.

Assertive people use phrases such as "I want to..." "Would you...?" or "I recommend..." These phrases are direct and to the point. Words spoken by a less assertive individual might include "if," "maybe," or "perhaps." The difference is clear. The assertive approach takes ownership of the conversation and makes powerful requests.

Acting assertively enhances self-esteem and gains the respect of others. It increases the likelihood of developing honest relationships and in turn increases the effectiveness of sales presentations. Assertive people have an aura of authority around them, which is one of our principles of influence we will discuss in more detail. When asking for the business, be assertive so people understand your request.

We were recently hired by a company to conduct a training session on asking for referrals from satisfied clients. We were surprised by the number of people demonstrating the passive approach. When asking for a referral, most of the participants would respond with, "If you have any family or friends who would be interested in my services, could you give them one of my business cards?" At first blush, this might seem okay, but the documented results of this approach were not meeting expectations and the company required a

better payback from satisfied customers by getting additional referrals. The company asked us to do some further research and analyses on the approach used to gain referrals.

In future sessions on referrals, we decided to restate what we had just heard but inserted a pause in the sentence to help create some dramatic effect. We inserted a pause as follows: “If you have any family or friends (pause)....” The participants laughed immediately. The longer the pause, the more people understood the impact of what they were really saying to a client. Light bulbs popped on all over the room for these salespeople. They finally realized what they had been saying to clients. They might appear to be questioning whether their clients even had any family or friends. Now why would any salesperson question whether a satisfied client “had any friends or family”? We would look at one of the participants and say, “I doubt it very much if you have any family or friends, you look like an orphan and I can see why you would have no friends.” They all laughed again but admitted to being unassertive. We back off a little and give the client an easy out because we are afraid. We are often afraid they will say no.

Referral success ratios increased immediately once the staff simply assumed the client had some family or friends and changed their referral request to reflect this new approach. This is what they said: “Here are five of my business cards. Will you pass them out to your family and friends who would be interested in our products?” It’s so simple to shift the emphasis to getting referrals rather than using the word *if*. But we weren’t finished yet.

The next important step was to find out what the salesperson really wants this happy client to do. They usually say “more business” or “hand out their cards” or “talk about them with their friends.” Sometimes it takes ten minutes to get them to tell us what it is they really want, which is an introduction to a friend or family member. There is no better referral than when a satisfied customer actually brings in a friend and introduces them to you. The sale is virtually assured, and yet we never make this powerful request. We don’t ask because we haven’t fully developed the assertive quality

in our sales presentations.

We will learn more about this assertiveness quality later in the book. We will discuss specific examples and tips on how to make powerful requests more comfortable for you and significantly increase the chances that your client will say yes. We are generally humble people and don't have the self-confidence to make these powerful requests. When you have completed this book, you will be amazed at how much more comfortable you will feel with the sales process. You will be much more effective at influencing others around you and be more in control of your life and your business.

A good analogy to put the three attributes of persistence, initiative, and assertiveness into perspective is the game of golf. Now, for those of you who enjoy golf, you will be familiar with the terms, challenges, and frustrations of the game. For those of you not familiar with the game, golf is a game that, like life, requires all three attributes and all three are demonstrated in most rounds of golf. The average golfer rarely breaks 100 on a decent golf course, so these three skills, or lack thereof, can be quite evident.

Persistence is an absolute must, given the fact that we rarely break 100 and shot after shot is simply not up to our expectations. We stand up to the tee and pull out the big driver with all the confidence in the world. We do a little wiggle before pounding the ball straight down the fairway—for about 100 yards until a funny thing happens: The ball seems to have a mind of its own as it suddenly veers off to the right and heads straight for the trees. We call this a slice. If persistence wasn't at play, the average golfer would call it quits after one round of eighteen holes. But, oh no, we continue to pound away at that little white ball and continue to drive it into the woods, into the water, or sometimes right into the ground, and it dribbles forty or fifty yards down the fairway, day after day all summer long. This game is loaded with rejection, and yet we come back for more and more. We pay for lessons to fix that slice; we think we can buy a better game, so we invest in the new golf technology with a larger sweet spot on the driver or the latest putter, but to no avail.

What keeps the golfer coming back again and again? It's per-

sistence and that sweet taste of success when once every twenty shots or so we find the perfect backswing, the club face hits the ball in that tiny sweet spot, and we watch the smooth arc as the ball explodes from the ground and lands softly on the green. It's the chance for immediate gratification after a perfect shot and the feeling of success that feeds that persistence. If we could only hit the ball like that every time, we would master the game of golf. Needless to say, it rarely happens, but we persist in our quest for the perfect round of golf. This is persistence at its finest. Failure after failure, and yet there we are on Saturday again, out on the links, searching for that perfect shot that we know is there just waiting to appear.

It's not just persistence, it's also initiative at work here. We need that drive of initiative to get out of bed in the morning and pack up the car with clubs and shoes and head off to the course. We need initiative to take those lessons and we need initiative to search golf shops across the country for that perfect club fit and that huge sweet spot on the driver. Without initiative, all mediocre golfers would stay in bed and cut the grass Saturday morning.

Finally, assertiveness has perhaps the most powerful impact on a game of golf. Have you noticed that golfers speak forcefully to their clubs and to the ball and sometimes to the actual golf course itself? Watch professional golf. Even the fans get into this assertive approach as they forcefully instruct the ball to "get in the hole." We don't have any statistics on the merits of this approach to verbally encourage the ball into the hole by fans, but we do know it is widely used.

We suspect the ball responds better to the actual owner rather than a fan. We've often instructed our own balls to avoid the water and have even lied to them about it. We hate to admit it, but when water is nearby, we will tell the ball and sometimes the club that there's no water in sight. We believe this technique has merit.

The assertive approach of yelling at the ball in mid-flight—"No! No! Not the trees!"—has an effect of causing the ball to actually hit a tree and bounce back on the fairway. This is a clear indication that an assertive approach does work. Assertive body

language also works, as a good golfer will twist in various gyrations to influence the mid-air flight of the ball. Apparently, the ball does have eyes in the back of its head, as most golfers use this technique. On the green, we will demand that the ball stop rolling if past the hole, and on occasion we will use the body language technique to assist with a break in the green to have the ball get even closer to the hole.

Golf is indeed a marvellous game and a perfect analogy for the three attributes of all successful people. If only we would apply these techniques in the same degree to our business and personal lives, where it would actually have an effect. We would all be amazed at the results and have a lot more fun at the same time. We personally intend to continue our PIA exercises on our golf game until finely honed and then unleash them on the world of business. Colonel Sanders will have nothing on us—or you—if we decide to develop these three attributes.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

“You get what you settle for.” —*Thelma and Louise*

We have talked about getting what you ask for as a key indicator of success. The challenge for all of us is to discover what it is we really want. As the saying goes, “Be careful of what you wish for, you just might get it.” If you don’t know what you want, then you end up getting what you settle for.

“Self-fulfilling prophecy” is a term coined by Robert K. Merton in his book *Social Theory and Social Structure*. The concept is quite simple. Once a prediction is made, the prediction actually causes itself to become true. In other words, if a false prophetic statement is declared as the truth, the statement will influence people so that their actions ultimately fulfill the false prophecy. If we believe something, we have a tendency to create activities that will make that belief come true. Unfortunately, the self-fulfilling prophecy dictates that if we believe we will fail, then we will put

into motion activities that will ensure failure.

It would appear that we prefer other people to behave as we expect them to behave and we will change reality until it conforms to our expectations. People meet our expectations not just because they want to but because we create the environment for them to meet those expectations. The interesting aspect of this is that we do it and don't even realize we are doing it. A key study on this philosophy was published in the book *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. Pygmalion is from Greek mythology—he was the sculptor who carved the statue of a beautiful woman and then fell in love with it. He believed so strongly that the statue could come to life that it finally did come to life.

Harvard professor Robert Rosenthal collected the results of over 300 studies showing the self-fulfilling prophecy in action.⁵ In classroom experiments, a group of children were divided into two classes. One class was given a teacher who was told that the students were high achievers and should do well. The other teacher was told that her class was composed of underachievers who needed help.

At the beginning of the school year, there was no difference between the two groups of children in terms of ability. By the end of the school year, the class that was labelled “high achievers” was doing above-average work. The class that had been labelled as “underachievers” was doing below-average work.

In addition, the study revealed that children who made gains in the “high achiever” group were generally better liked by the teacher, but the children who made gains in the “underachiever” class were generally less liked by their teacher.

It can be said that people prefer those who live up to their expectations, and that people unconsciously create situations that encourage the expected behaviour. If the expectations are positive, people are encouraged to behave positively. If the expectations are negative, people are encouraged to behave negatively. This has huge ramifications in all aspects of our lives.

Think of this in terms of your own children and the expecta-

tions you have as a parent. Think of this in terms of your employees and the effect this might have on them. Finally, think of this in terms of the expectations or lack of expectations you place on yourself and how this can affect your performance. What you expect to come true is often what you make come true. We all know the pessimist at work who is always complaining and for good reason. Bad things always seem to happen to this person, or at least they perceive bad things. How much fun are they to work with every day? We also know the optimist at work who always sees the bright side of issues and opportunities. They are generally better performers and a lot more fun to be around.

It seems that even a name can invoke the self-fulfilling prophecy. It is common folklore that teachers believe boys named Mike are troublemakers, and sure enough, they can tell countless stories of boys named Mike who get into trouble. Is it because they are troublemakers or is it because the teacher believes a boy named Mike will get into trouble? This was an especially interesting question for Gary and his wife, Jan. They named their son “Michael” and did their best to ensure everyone called him “Michael” rather than “Mike.” It didn’t matter—he still got into trouble, and to this day, they aren’t sure if it’s because of his name or their parenting skills. The fact remains: we judge based on minimal knowledge and then create the environment to prove ourselves correct.

This self-fulfilling philosophy has been around since the dawn of time. The philosophy works in two ways. If you think you can, you will have a much better chance of being successful. “What we think, we become,” said Buddha. But on the other hand, Henry Ford once said, “Whether you think you can or think you can’t, you’re right.”

The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper, published in 1930, is a classic children’s story illustrating the self-fulfilling prophecy as its basic theme. Read it to your children; it really does teach valuable life lessons for young people. If you recall, a little train engine was relegated to moving train cars in the yard, as it was too small to handle the long haul routes. One day, a big train

with many cars came into the yard and the engine was broken down. The train was full of animals and rides for little children. This train was to be in the neighbouring village the next day for a circus for all the children. The village was on the other side of the mountain range, and the old engine couldn't make it. The only available engine was the little yard engine. They begged him to take the train over the mountain into the village and not disappoint all the children. Well, the little engine had never done anything like this before and said, "No, I can't do it, it is too far and too high a climb for me. I am only a little engine and I can't do it." All the animals begged the little engine, and finally he said, "Okay, I will try and climb the mountain." So off they went. The little engine hits the incline and can feel the strain of the heavy load.

The animals can hear the sound of his engine working overtime, and it sounds like: "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can." He climbs up the incline and the sound gets louder: "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can."

With tremendous effort, the little engine reaches the top and starts downhill, and you can hear this sound: "I knew I could, I knew I could." The self-fulfilling prophecy is everywhere in children's literature. The little engine thought he could and it created the energy needed to accomplish the task. This is a powerful force in our lives and it all depends on how we choose to use it. "Yes I can or no I can't." The choice is yours. This story illustrates the power available to all of us if we just believe we can. We can accomplish amazing results through the power of positive thinking. The little engine was using self-talk to build confidence and the self-fulfilling prophecy came into play to allow him to complete the task. We can complete our tasks with the same approach to self-talk and allowing the self-fulfilling prophecy to work in our favour. Setting a goal works magic to produce results.

There is an interesting motivational story you can find all over the Internet on the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy:

There once was a bunch of tiny frogs who arranged a competition. The goal was to reach the top of a very high tower. A big crowd had gathered around the tower to see the race and cheer on the contestants.

The race began. No one in the crowd really believed that the tiny frogs would reach the top of the tower. The crowd was saying: “This way too difficult!” and “They will never make it to the top.” The tiny frogs began collapsing. The crowd continued to yell, “It is too difficult! No one will make it!” More tiny frogs got tired and gave up.

But one tiny frog continued higher and higher. This one wouldn’t give up! He was the only one who reached the top! All of the other tiny frogs naturally wanted to know how this one frog managed to do it. A contestant asked the tiny frog how he had found the strength to succeed and reach the goal.

It turned out that the winner was *deaf!*

The wisdom of this story is a life lesson for all of us. Never listen to other people’s negative comments about your attitudes or dreams for success. They take your most powerful dream and wishes away from you—the ones you have in your heart.

Always think of the power words you have. Everything you hear and read will affect your actions! *Be positive!* And above all, do not listen when people tell you that you cannot fulfill your dreams. Always think: “I can do this!”

The winning frog was not influenced by negative words from the spectators. He could not hear what others heard about the task being impossible. The negative vibes influenced the other frogs to give up on the task, but the winner listened to his own voice, which said, “Yes, I can.” When we think we can, we do.

Positive Self-Talk

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”
—Eleanor Roosevelt.

The following is an interesting poem about life. This poem describes the self-fulfilling prophecy. You can if you think you can, and conversely, you will fail if you think you will. Your thoughts generate activities that support what your mind is saying.

“The Man Who Thinks He Can”

If you think you are beaten, you are;
If you think you dare not, you don't.
If you'd like to win, but think you can't,
It's almost a cinch you won't.
If you think you'll lose, you're lost,
For out in the world we find
Success begins with a fellow's will;
It's all in the state of mind.

If you think you're outclassed, you are;
You've got to think high to rise.
You've got to be sure of yourself before
You can ever win a prize.
Life's battles don't always go
To the stronger or faster man;
But soon or late the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can.

—Walter D. Wintle

This poem should be a wake-up call for all of us who underestimate the power of thought. You can choose to be positive or negative. The positive thoughts will always win the sale and win the day. Unleash this power within you and you will reap the rewards.

We have all heard the childhood phrase “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” The problem is that words do in fact hurt us if we let them. We choose to let the words of others or our own little voice in our head have an impact on our ability to function. This is why it is important to keep your positive self-talk louder and more meaningful than what others might say. We can choose not to be hurt by others words. Remember, no one can hurt your feelings without your consent. You decide; put yourself in control.

You can decide that your own voice in your head will take precedence over the voices of others, and you can use the self-fulfilling prophecy for positive results or you can choose to let the prophecy have a negative impact on your behaviour. What a powerful tool your mind can be in changing behaviour and changing results.

Positive self-talk is simply the ability to tell yourself that anything positive is possible. Take command of your own attitude and tell your self again and again that “if it’s to be, it’s up to me.” Only you can decide what you can accomplish, and you must tell your self of this goal constantly. This will build confidence in your abilities, making anything possible.

The way you think can and does affect your entire life. This can be positive or it can be negative. You can go through life thinking the glass is either half empty or half full. If you are less successful than you think you should be, it is likely because you have limited your thinking and your thoughts. Are you putting your mind into a positive position through self-talk, or are you letting your self-talk create doubt? Do you expect to win more often than you expect to lose? It’s your choice.

If you have been expecting to lose more than win, it is time for you to take command of your thoughts and choose the self-talk that will open opportunities, and today is the day to begin that process. Try saying this into a mirror at least four or five times every day: “Yes, I can.” This will influence your thoughts and move them into a more positive perspective of yourself.

This exercise might be difficult and seem foolish at first, but don't let that stop you—be persistent. You can change your habits. Success won't happen on the first day, but if you practice and stick to the exercise, you will take charge of your thoughts, expect to win, and your chances of success will be greatly improved. Furthermore, you will feel a lot better about yourself, which is a beneficial side effect.

Give it a try. You have nothing to lose but so much to gain with a simple little exercise in self-affirmation. When negative vibes come your way, be ready to overcome them with your own powerful positive thoughts. When your own little voice speaks up about the impossibility of this task, just remember it is only trying to protect you from failure and embarrassment or from feeling uncomfortable. Don't let that little voice prevent you from accomplishing your dreams and fulfilling your desires. Take the initiative, be persistent, and be assertive with your self-talk. This is within reach for all of us if we want it and go for it.

Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret* is a recent smash best-selling book. In a nutshell, "The Secret" is the self-fulfilling prophecy. It states that whatever you want, you can have. If you want it bad enough and focus on it, then you will get it. The book indicates that "The Secret" has existed throughout the ages and was used by a number of exceptional men and women who have gone on to become known as some of the greatest people who ever lived. The book states that Plato, Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo Galilei, Napoleon Bonaparte, Abraham Lincoln, and Albert Einstein were among the many who knew and implemented "The Secret."

You can easily implement "The Secret" today. Write down a personal goal and put it on the fridge. Look at it every morning and evening and once before you go to bed. Do this every day for as long as it takes. You will be surprised how this simple objective over time will change your behaviour and you will slowly start to see results that will move you towards this goal.

Many self-help books use similar techniques that are actually quite effective. Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* was written

in 1937 and has sold more than 60 million copies worldwide. Hill presented what he called “the secret of achievement.” He presented the idea of a “definite major purpose” as a challenge to his readers to make them ask of themselves “in what do [they] truly believe.” According to Hill, 98% of people have no firm beliefs, putting true success firmly out of reach. Simply stated, most of us don’t know what we want and we therefore have no chance of getting what we want. Hill believed that thoughts are things, and this allows success-oriented individuals to attract like-minded people in order to accomplish anything.

Several passages of Hill’s clarify the similarity between *The Secret*, *Think and Grow Rich*, and the self-fulfilling prophecy:

“Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.”

“Desire is the starting point of all achievement, not a hope, not a wish, but a keen pulsating desire which transcends everything.”

“A goal is a dream with a deadline.”

“What you think, so you will become.”

Napoleon Hill was a firm believer in the power of the mind in attracting the right energy to achieve results. Thinking and believing will lead to commitment, and commitment leads to results. You can if you think you can.

Hill also believed that people who don’t succeed have one specific trait in common. The failures always know the reasons for their failures and are quick to point out the reasons to anyone who will listen. They have excuses ready to explain their performance. Here is a short sample from the list of the fifty-five famous alibis detailed in Hill’s book:

“If I had a good education....”

“If only I had time....”

“If I could live my life over again....”

“If I had been given a chance....”

“If I could just get a break....”

These examples are simply negative self-talk that will continue to hold the speaker back from success. Eliminate the “if,” and all of

a sudden possibilities appear. “If only I had time” becomes “I have the time.” What a difference in motivation and focus when self-talk leads to possibilities rather than obstacles.

It all boils down to you and the way you think. It isn’t really a secret, as all of us really know. It’s in our hearts, but we simply don’t hold onto it long enough for it to work its magic. The main reason companies establish goals and objectives is to create a vision so everyone knows the desired outcome. Personal goals work the same way. Many years ago, Peter Drucker introduced Management by Objectives (MBO) into the field of professional management. MBO teaches that establishing objectives results in the objectives being attained more often simply because they were stated. The psychology behind this tactic is the commitment and consistency principle. Once we make a commitment, we all want to act consistently with that commitment. We will explore how to be more influential using this principle later in the book.

Earl Nightingale said, “You become what you think about.” How does this apply to the context of your own life? Take a moment to jot down some of the strengths that make you the unique individual you are and list three specific goals you have for yourself. If everything were possible, what would you be doing with your life? Ask your family these same questions. It’s interesting to observe how people automatically go to the negative. They say things like, “Well, that won’t happen, so what’s the point?” or they will say that they simply don’t know. We should all know! If you’re reading this book, then you know, so write it down right now!

Gary: Five years ago, I wrote down the title of this book on a whiteboard in my office— *Life Is Sales*. I wasn’t thinking about a book at that time, but I liked the philosophy and it kept me focused on how powerful influence techniques were in getting what I wanted. Five years later, I have a publisher and I have a book that I hope you are enjoying. I certainly enjoyed writing it, and my goal of de-

livering the philosophy of “Life Is Sales” to a large audience has come to fruition. I hope it doesn’t take you five years to achieve your goal, but if it does, it will be well worth the wait.