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Part One

Bringing Out the Value Within

LESSON 1: A crooked carrot can be as valuable as a golden apple. To get what you want, you must first learn how what you have is of value to others.


LESSON 2: People have busy lives. If you want them to be receptive to your product, service, candidacy, or idea, you first need to create “speed bumps” to slow them down.

LESSON 3: To create receptivity with the greatest number of people, be prepared to do business in a way that makes them comfortable.

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Chapter 1

Finding Worth, Providing Value


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My early years were spent in rural New Hampshire on a small farm that barely supported our family. Every evening we'd gather around the dining room table to enjoy a meal made primarily from the fruits and vegetables grown on our own soil. Not the best-looking produce—that was reserved for sale at market—but the fresh, perfectly edible fruits and vegetables that were bumpy and misshapen and considered nonsaleable. Our crooked carrots, oddly shaped tomatoes, and unevenly colored squash would become stews and soups—what in those days was called “poor people food” but today is prized as healthy, delicious comfort cuisine: “heirloom” vegetables fresh from the farm.

While mealtimes were lively, I was a lonely eight-year-old. There were no neighbors in sight of our farm, only the cars that drove by with strangers in them, and I imagined those strangers must have fascinating lives and stories to tell.

On the wall of our dining room was a framed needle-point quotation: “Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man.” It inspired in me countless childhood daydreams about meeting new people from exotic places. I was a child who desperately wanted to connect with others. We did live “by the side of the road”—on

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Route 9 between Keene and Portsmouth—but in a place so remote it was extremely difficult to be a “friend to man.”

One day when our family drove into town, I focused intently on the big, paper, grocery store signs advertising the same type of produce that we grew: “carrots, 10 cents a bunch,” “tomatoes, 25 cents a pound.” Meanwhile, I thought of how the type of “imperfect” produce we ate for dinner, just as healthy as that sold at the store, was often tossed on the compost heap or left in the ground.

Those odd-looking carrots and pretzel-shaped squash weren’t valuable to the grocery store, where only “perfect” produce was sold. But I knew they would have value to people who would chop them into salads or soups, can them, or use them to make pies, because that’s what we did with them. They were fresh and clean and came straight from the good earth. Why couldn’t others also benefit from that value? I could save people the trouble of going into the store by making my produce accessible at the side of the road, and that would provide value, too. Surely I could convince people to pay half of what the grocery store charged and to feel lucky about the bargain. Suddenly, I saw a connection between those bumpy vegetables on our table and the needlepoint on the wall. In that moment, I found a way to satisfy my longing for new friends. These homely fruits and vegetables would become my Golden Apples.

Using as a display table a well-worn pruning table wheeled down to the side of the road, I set up a produce stand to sell this fresh, nutritious, nonsaleable produce from the farm. I called my stand the Happiness Patch because I knew it would provide me a way to become a friend to man.

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Over time, my little wooden pruning table was upgraded to a larger, wooden telephone wire spool that had been left by the side of the road. The people driving by who wanted a quick snack for the road, who were looking for a place to stretch or to break up a monotonous drive, or who were looking for a “genuine country experience” became my customers. Many began to return to my little stand week after week. As the seasons passed, I learned that different customers were seeking different kinds of experiences at the Happiness Patch, and I improvised ways to please each type of customer who stopped by. In the process, I was learning how to determine what a customer values and how to convey that value to different types of customers.

I didn't realize it at the time, but in order to be successful at the Happiness Patch, I was developing criteria to determine the value of my misshapen produce to every type of customer that might stop by. Those criteria would in later years help me and hundreds of my clients determine the value of anything. I learned first at the Happiness Patch and confirmed later in my career that *determining value is the first step toward success in virtually every type of transaction and interaction, whether it's conveying an idea, navigating a negotiation, solving a problem, getting a job, cementing a relationship, or selling a product, a service, or an idea.*

Checklist: What Is Value?

1. Does it meet a demand?
2. Does it save time and/or effort?

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3. Does it carry authority?
4. Does it convey credibility?
5. Does it provide value by association?
6. Does it offer a positive experience?

Meeting a Demand

My produce didn't meet the "perfect" test, but for bargain hunters like the two elderly ladies on fixed incomes who became my regular customers, it did meet a demand for food that was just as fresh and nutritious, but not as expensive, as the produce sold at the grocery store. I knew I would be able to sell it, because I knew its value to these customers.

❧ LESSON I ❧

A crooked carrot can be as valuable as a golden apple. To get what you want, you must first learn how what you have is of value to others.

In today's rapidly changing, technologically complex world, it may seem difficult to determine and meet a demand. But you really don't need a team of market researchers to help you in this process. If you are realistic, are willing to think creatively, and trust in common sense, you'll find ways to meet a demand that may not be obvious to others. I have worked with many people who have

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turned adversity into success by determining a demand and filling it when others weren't.

Sales Athlete Michele Laven, director of Integrated Media and vice president of Clear Channel Radio, recalls her family's swimming pool business in Cleveland, Ohio. Hot summers and freezing winters limited the demand for their product to less than six months out of the year, so the family barely made a sale until her father figured out a way to meet a demand that fit his skills and inventory during the cold winter months: backyard winter wonderlands. Transforming bleak yards and their empty pools into dazzling landscapes with thousands of tiny lights and decorations, the family business not only filled a demand but also provided a way to keep in contact with customers all year long.

By adapting their business to the seasons, Michele and her family also recognized a truth that people in business ignore at their peril: *Demand isn't constant. It's up to you to adapt to the demand of the consumer or to create demand by offering something new.*

Rather than eking by until another summer came along, this enterprising businessman found a way to use his skills to create year-round demand.

In the same way that successful businesspeople recognize how to spot and meet a demand, they also adapt quickly to changes in the economy. A professional home chef in California, for example, had finally built his business to where dozens of regular clients demanded his home catering services, and dozens more were on a waiting list. When the dot-com boom went bust, however, his

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clients were quick to call and say they could no longer afford the hundreds of dollars a month he charged for the high-end meals they'd been ordering. Instead of simply accepting the loss of these clients, the chef quickly adjusted to the changing demand, switching from lobster and exotic mushroom dishes to meatloaf and delicious stews. Not only was he able to lower his prices, but he offered less extravagant packages of once a week, rather than a minimum of three times a week. His newly unemployed clients, along with several from his waiting list, were grateful for the less expensive comfort food. This chef made it through a trying time that put many of his peers out of business.

Sometimes, you can create a demand simply by reminding people of what they need. Every spring in my apartment building, just before the summer heat sets in, an air-conditioning service notifies the building that they'll be coming through the building on a specific date to change filters and do a routine check of the air-conditioning systems. The company charges a set price to each apartment scheduling a visit on that day. Now, of course the company would also come to the building a dozen different times if a dozen apartment owners each called separately and arranged appointments to have their systems checked. But by announcing "We're coming through on this date" (with a "take it or leave it" implicit in the one-day-only offer), the service creates a demand. And by scheduling a day to change everyone's filters, the company has provided value in a second important way—and this leads to my second criteria.

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Saving Time and Effort

By saving customers the time and effort of scheduling their own appointments, the air-conditioning service was providing value. The same principle applies at convenience stores, where the promise of a quick and painless transaction, with no long line or miles of shelves to navigate, trumps the savings of buying an item at lower cost at a supermarket. Why do you buy prepared granola instead of making your own? Time and effort saved. Certainly I can wait for my husband or myself to have the time and inclination on a weekend to rake the leaves in our yard. But if an enterprising teen sees the demand and offers to save us time and effort by knocking on my door with a rake in his hand, I'll pay him money on the spot to do the job.

Carrying Authority

I may have been only eight years old when I started out in business at the Happiness Patch, but I carried the authority of one who had helped to plant, fertilize, harvest, and clean the produce I sold. I could say with authority, "This type of squash holds up well and tastes delicious in vegetable soup. We enjoyed some just last night." I could show my customers the field where the produce was grown, and I could name the day it was dug from the ground or picked from the vine.

People pay for authority because buying from an expert saves money and time in the long run. Knowing that a

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product, service, or idea is backed with the mastery and expertise of an authority provides the buyer or listener with confidence and security. Making yourself an authority or working to become an expert in your field automatically provides value. How many times have you heard or experienced the frustration of a customer at a warehouse store trying to make a choice on a piece of electronic equipment? When the salesperson has no idea about the difference between products or even how various features work, the customer loses confidence and is often ready to pay a premium to buy from someone who's an authority on the merchandise.

There are fewer jobs for generalists today than for people who have claimed a niche and developed solid expertise. People who have followed their bliss—steeping themselves in the subjects they love—have managed to create professions that are both satisfying and lucrative, because they convey both authority on the subject and joy in their work. An authority who provides a valuable, specialized service can transcend a lack of academic credentials, age discrimination, or economic downturns. Employees who develop themselves into the indispensable go-to person for a specific issue area are much more likely to have success and security in their careers.

Conveying Credibility

Credibility comes with authority, but it also must be conveyed in the way you present yourself, your product, your

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service, or your idea. If you were considering plastic surgery, for example, would you feel comfortable if the surgeon explaining the procedure had the letters “L-O-V-E” tattooed on his fingers and a six-month training certificate on his wall? At the Happiness Patch, I conveyed credibility because I understood and believed in the value of my produce. I was polite, wore clean clothes, and was clearly eager to serve. I could show customers exactly where and how my fruits and vegetables were grown.

I once knew a man who was for many years a superb consultant, but who refused to wear a suit. His “trade-mark” outfit was a safari hat with its strap hanging under his chin, an aloha shirt, cargo shorts, and sandals. This man was truly an expert, and people in the field valued his expertise. But it was widely known he never went as far as he could have because a first impression would convey the idea that he was a wild card. Don’t forget that your appearance, speech, manners, and personality can convey credibility, and credibility has marketable value. By choice, you should never wear anything that diminishes the power of the message you are there to convey.

Value by Association

Association is one of the things people are buying when they purchase a status symbol, join a country club, or support alumni organizations. It’s what gives us peace of mind when we see the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval or the AAA logo. Does your product, service, or idea

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convey something people want to be associated with? Which people? There's value in providing a sense of association with others. Determining and providing positive associations will help you win receptivity to your product, service, or idea. The Happiness Patch, for example, was only a tiny produce stand, but its association with our family farm brought it credibility. People buying my vegetables felt connected to the earth, to the farm, and to a rural way of life.

Offering a Positive Experience

When customers came to the Happiness Patch, they weren't only there to buy bumpy vegetables. The experience of stopping by a family farm to buy fresh-from-the-earth produce from an earnest little girl was simply more enjoyable for them than buying the same vegetables from the supermarket, even if our vegetables weren't perfect. My produce stand carried positive associations for people, and for some it became part of a treasured routine. It is hard to overestimate the value of offering a positive experience. People pay more to go to their neighborhood grocer not only for the convenience but also because it is the place where they're known and are likely to run into friends and neighbors. I've placed many Sales Athletes in jobs that offer less compensation up front than an alternative offer might because of the prospect of a more enjoyable work environment and more compatible coworkers.

Nothing is of more obvious value than a product or

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service that *feels* good. Women pay hundreds of dollars for spa treatments they could do far less expensively at home, because it feels more relaxing and pleasant to be pampered by another person. On the other hand, if the manicurist cuts your cuticle or the masseuse leaves you with aches you didn't have when you first lay on her table, all value is gone, and your relationship with that business is *over*. Why would anybody buy anything from a company if it doesn't feel good?

Anytime you have an idea to convey or a product or service to sell, run it through the checklist for determining value. Does it meet a demand? Save time or effort? Carry authority? Convey credibility? Provide value by association? Offer a positive experience? You'll be prepared to convince others only when you have determined all the ways you have to offer value.

Nothing Happens Until You Sell Yourself

Before you can convince any listener, whatever his or her needs, that what you have is of value, you must first see and believe in and be able to convey your own value. Why? Because you are the first thing your listener sees or hears. Nothing happens until you can sell yourself.

Don't forget to use the checklist for determining value on pages 14 and 15 to remind yourself of what *you* have to offer your listener, customer, or prospect.

Where are you in demand? Has technology or other

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changes created new places and ways for you to provide value?

During the darkest days of the economic slump in 2001, many laid-off middle managers came to my placement service hoping to find jobs. The typical job seeker was frightened and frustrated. Often past middle age but not ready for retirement, they found their positions had suddenly been outsourced, eliminated through downsizing, or moved elsewhere in a merger. While I was able to find jobs for some of them, most often I advised these job seekers not to seek a job but to fill a demand that was growing outside of the traditional workforce. Because of the economic downturn, jobs were scarce, but *work* remained plentiful. The companies forced to lay off workers still had a demand for projects to be managed, but they did not have the ability to make long-term hiring commitments.

Once these job seekers thought creatively about their own value to potential employers and looked realistically at the job market and economy, they were able to fill a demand consistently and well. In the process, they updated and expanded skills and contacts, putting themselves in a better position for long-term employment. Many have also found that filling a demand through project work can provide as much income and satisfaction as a long-term, full-time job.

Technology may have changed the landscape when it comes to what consumers demand, but it has also made it possible to meet demand in creative new ways. If you are

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willing to continually update your skills, technology will offer you the ability to reach and provide value to a much broader audience. Technology can also help you move past ageism and other prejudices, but if you fail to develop technological skills, you risk becoming a dinosaur even if you are still in your twenties.

I worked with a woman who found herself disabled with severe diabetes, who was no longer able to go into her job every day as a clerk in the vital records office of a county. So, being both realistic and creative, she found another way to meet a demand for skills she had honed through years in public service. Today, she makes a better income and more satisfying living with an online records search business run out of her home, finding and having delivered to lawyers records they need in lawsuits, negotiations, and employment searches.

When determining where you are in demand, think about all the types of people and businesses who might find value in your skills, product, service, or idea. Then list how those people would use your skills, product, service, or idea. You might think of nontraditional ways of filling a demand and, in doing so, create a successful market for what you have to offer. Ask yourself these questions:

How can you save people time and effort?

You'll have a receptive audience only if you make it immediately clear to potential customers or clients that you will not steal their precious time. Instead, let them know early in your presentation how you will *save* them time and effort.

What expertise do you have that lends you authority?

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While a license, degree, or certification conveys expertise, so do years of experience in your career, numbers of clients satisfied with your service, and the level of demand for your speaking, teaching, or mentoring skills. All of these are part of a hard-won career, and you should not hesitate to list them all on a resume or in a scrapbook that chronicles your career accomplishments. In today's rapidly changing workplace, maintaining expertise requires a commitment to continual training and updating of skills. Your value to prospective clients or employers increases when you can demonstrate both a solid foundation of experience and an eagerness to stay on the cutting edge.

In what ways are you credible?

At The Sales Athlete, Inc., I put my credibility on the line by offering a "satisfaction guarantee with no fine print." It's simple, it's powerful, and I stand behind it. I can offer guaranteed satisfaction because I know what I'm doing and I know the value of my service and the results it provides. When placing a candidate in a job, I work with the employer to do a complete breakdown of the job description so that every aspect of that job will be understood. There are no surprises to the new employee, and I only place someone who is qualified to do every aspect of that job with the skill and enthusiasm of a Sales Athlete. You, too, can offer a guarantee of satisfaction if you carefully research the needs of your client and understand completely how your product, service, or idea will fit your client's needs. Businesses as varied as Costco and Nordstrom have built business on satisfaction guarantees, and the goodwill and loyalty such policies buy far out-

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weigh the rare occasions when someone might abuse it. You can also build credibility by being active in your community. Serve on boards, volunteer your services to non-profit organizations, and give back in ways that reflect well on you and the work you do.

Are you professional in the way you present yourself?

The way you dress, speak, and behave in all situations should create receptivity in the people you meet.

What associations do you have that lend you credibility?

Mine your contacts and think of what associations you have that lend you credibility and authority. Whether you can claim leadership in a community organization, membership in an alumni association, military service, religious affiliation, or membership in a service club, remember that these associations lend you credibility and authority and provide a level of comfort to your customer or listener. Associations also provide connections with others that are automatic icebreakers: “I went to State University, too. What years were you there?”

In what ways do you offer a positive experience?

Perhaps nothing is as important in determining your value as someone to trust and do business with than to be a trustworthy, likeable communicator. In his bestseller *Blink* (Little, Brown, 2005), Malcolm Gladwell describes research findings that doctors who make their patients *feel* cared for are rarely sued for malpractice, even when they have made critical mistakes in patient care. On the other hand, I’ve known people in business who have excellent skills, an impeccable resume, and other strong points, yet

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they consistently fail to succeed because of a negative attitude that leaves potential clients wanting to flee from their presence.

If a client, customer, or listener walks away from an encounter with you feeling enriched, you are much more likely to develop a positive, ongoing business relationship that will be satisfying to you both.

In the same vein, CEOs and human resources managers of companies I deal with know that to attract Sales Athletes, a company must create a culture where people leave the office each day believing they are worth more than when they walked in that morning. That outcome means a culture that values balance, continued training, a spirit of vitality, and the need to replenish daily—all as a way of living and doing business.

Different people will perceive in a variety of ways your value and the value of the product, service, or idea you are trying to sell. So your understanding of who buys what and how (Chapter 3) also will add value to all of your encounters in business.

Once you have determined your own value, and once you believe in what it is you want to do or to have happen, you have determined your destiny. You'll soon know how to deal with those people and factors that stand in your way, and nothing will stop your progress!

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