

The Startling Truth About Why Honesty Sells

Chapter excerpt from the book: *Honesty Sells: How to Make More Money and Increase Business Profits*

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It seems everyone has had an experience with a less than honest salesperson. We'll bet you've heard some stories yourself. Perhaps you experienced some similar or worse than those listed in the Sales Hall of Shame in Chapter 1. We're not saying that all salespeople are dishonest. Not all all. But like it or not, that reputation precedes all of us who sell.

Clients may not believe this, but most salespeople have their own stories to tell. We bet you do, too. Have you ever felt like a client or a prospect wasn't being totally honest with you? Well, the bad news is that possibly they were not. According to James Patterson and Peter Kim, authors of *The Day American Told the Truth: What People Really Believe About Everything That Really Matters*, 91 percent of people admit to lying regularly to family, friends and associates – 91 percent! It's no wonder buyers and sellers have had a history of contemptuous behavior.

It's an unsettling statistic and yet it's an all-too-common complaint made by clients about salespeople – and vice versa. To borrow an adage, in sales – like war – the truth often tends to be the first casualty. Let's consider what compels people – both salespersons and clients – to lie.

Why Salespeople Lie to Clients???

Ask almost anyone to describe a salesperson and you won't hear the most flattering terms. Huckster, snake-oil peddler, fast talking con-artist, swindler, liar. How did we ever get such a fine reputation? It is unfortunate. Those of us who sell today do so in an environment created by a few unscrupulous salespeople in it for the short term and the short-term buck. These unprofessional hucksters are not interested in creating long-term profitable relationships with their clients.

The reality is there are many reasons why salespeople lie to their clients. Here are three major ones:

1. They don't know their product. Some salespeople lie because they are insecure or unsure about the products they are selling. In short, sometimes they are too embarrassed to say, "I don't know." Have you ever met someone who doesn't know his stuff? Frustrating, isn't it? Wouldn't you prefer the person just admit it? If you're anything like us, then you'd at least like to hear the salesperson say, "I don't know, but I'll get the

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information you're requesting and get back to you."

2. They are too empathetic and they don't like conflict. Some salespeople lie because they are insecure about themselves and their relationship with the prospect. For some salespeople, the driving factor is, "I just want the clients to like me!" In the process of trying to build a friend first and a client second, they lie, telling the client what he wants to hear. Salespeople who lie out of insecurity will work to preserve the relationship at all costs and are often notorious for over-promising and under-delivering. Salespeople in this category promise to send out a client's proposal by Thursday – only to ship it out Monday of the following week.
3. They are only focused on the money. Some salespeople see lying as the only way to make a quick buck. They are focused on greed instead of helping clients. Salespeople who lie for this reason

do it because they want the prospect to move too quickly so that they can make a quick sale, pocket the commission, and move on to the next prospect. In our opinion, these are not so much salespeople as “con-people.” They use tricks and techniques that are designed to railroad a client into making a decision. Now there is nothing wrong with making money, but there is a problem with this approach. The problem doesn’t just affect the clients; in the end these lies will catch up to the salespeople , too.

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The fact is that salespeople who lie will eventually be found out and lose all credibility in the eyes of a potential client. Ironically, they then lose their ability to close the fastest and most profitable business there is – the repeat sale – because it is virtually impossible to sell more to a client who does not trust you. In fact, a study of decision makers by Bill Brooks and Tom Travasono published in *You’re Working Too Hard to Make the Sale*, showed that 98 percent of cases where clients do not trust their salesperson, they will shop around when they need to reorder!

Honesty Will Hurt Sales

It’s true. You may know a very successful salesperson who lies. We do not deny that possibility. Some people believe that lying is effective in making short-term sales. Lying is not a profitable long-term strategy. The current sub-prime housing and mortgage debacle in the United States is a great case in point. Many unscrupulous lenders duped unsuspecting clients into terrible mortgage deals. If those lenders were still in business, do you think any of those clients would ever come back for repeat business? No way! Lying produced a lot of “success” in the

short term, but the long-term success will be zero.

This leads to an important point. As you read this book, you may think of a situation in which you were honest and you lost the business or didn’t get the sale. Unfortunately, when things like that happen, we tend to get spooked. Instead, remember that nothing works 100 percent of the time. Don’t toss out the standard because of a setback. Honesty builds trust; integrity in your communication will pay off. And remember the top 10 percent of salespeople practice honesty as a long-term strategy to build business and profits.

It is honesty with ourselves and with our potential and actual clients that establishes and maintains our credibility. Honesty means not lying to your prospects or clients either by what you say or by what you choose not to say. Dishonesty and withholding information is never a good strategy. It shouldn’t be rationalized and it does not affect sales outcomes. Let’s look at the issue of dishonesty from a client’s perspective.



Consider Anna’s experience, described here: (which could also make the Hall of Shame as item 11!) My husband and I were shopping for a new car. We found one we liked and the sales rep was friendly, helpful, and treated us with respect...until after the test drive, when he leaned over the hood of the car, looked me straight in the eye, and said: “You know, that’s a really popular car you’re looking at. I sold 50 of them last year. This steel-gray one you like is hot. I can guarantee that unless you put a deposit on this last gray one today, this car won’t be here on Monday.

I normally would have either laughed or just walked away, but I was so shocked at his approach that I couldn’t resist firing back: Me: Are you using the “impending-doom

close” on me? Salesman (flustered): Excuse me? ” Me; You know the impending-doom close. It’s an old closing tactic where you tell me that if I don’t take action today, there’s a risk that the opportunity won’t be available tomorrow. Are you actually trying to tell me that the factory is never going to make another gray car again?

Needless to say, he lost the sale. And we bought the car a month later from another dealer who had plenty of steel-gray cars on his lot. Would you have bought the car, knowing the salesperson was deliberately misleading you? Not likely.

Why Clients Lie to Salespeople

Why do so many clients and prospective clients have so much trouble telling the truth when dealing with salespeople? One of the most common reasons is that they have been lied to in the past by a salesperson. Let’s face it, the sales profession has a bad reputation and is considered by some to be among the least-respected occupations. Given this, it’s little wonder that clients might be tempted to be selective with the truth! They’ll lie to avoid an annoying sales pitch. They’ll lie to protect themselves against the persistent phone calls and e-mail follow-ups and to avoid being pressured into making a decision. They’ll lie to protect their reputations, their budgets, their time, and their jobs. They’ll lie because they can – because they assume all salespeople are liars and they want to make a preemptive strike.

Think about how salespeople are portrayed in popular culture. Movies such as *Tin Men*, *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, *Tommy Boy*, and *Glengarry Glen Ross* don’t paint a flattering portrait of this profession. That’s a pretty swift current that our profession has to row against. But it’s not an impossible challenge. Gaining the trust of your clients and potential clients just takes a little extra effort and forethought, as well as a complete dedication to honesty in how you conduct your business.

What You Can Do

The fact is that dishonesty breeds dishonesty and honesty breeds honesty. This is good news, because it means the ball is in your court. As a salesperson, you truly can help turn the tide with your potential clients and begin to breed more honesty.

Suppose you can sense that your client is withholding information. You can just feel it. Perhaps he's telling you that there's no allocated budget for a purchase. But you know there's almost always some budget. In such a case, you might say, "Thanks for letting me know. I'm not trying to burn your whole budget. What I can do is give you the best possible solution within the investment that makes sense. Are you saying there is no budget for any purchase, at any price or just no budget for the \$100,000 project we proposed?" A direct and honest question expressed without frustration can often provoke prospects to reveal their budgetary constraints.

Honesty must be a two-way street. If it's not, sales and clients will suffer. If a potential client doesn't clearly tell you what they're looking for, it's hard to satisfy the demand. Haven't you ever thought, I wish they would have told me what they were really looking for, or I wish they had just told me their real budget so I didn't waste all this time? Most of us have. You can't sell if you don't have all the information. This is why two-way, honest, open communication is so necessary.



For example, an IT consultant needs to respond to a Request for Proposal (RFP). The more the consulting firm knows about the potential client's needs, the more persuasive its proposal will be. Getting the right information from the client about their needs and budget is essential to customizing a proposal and getting the business. As salespeople looking to increase sales we need to communicate with honesty and openness, and we need to help

others communicate with us in that way. Not only is honest communication the key to long-term success, it's crucial in today's work world.

Why Honesty Matters Now More Than Ever

This discussion about lies and honesty is critical today. It used to be that the average unsatisfied client would tell a handful of people about a bad experience. The internet has changed the game. Now, the same unsatisfied client can share his experience with millions of people.

Furthermore, Yahoo! estimates that only 56 percent of people trust the information on a corporate web site. (Saga research estimate the numbers are as low as 4 percent), but 87 percent of people trust user testimonials and comments. Given that a full 78 percent of your clients do online research for all products (online and off-line sales), what your clients say about you online will affect your ability to sell. Let's look at a revealing example. Mary, a software rep, was planning her wedding at a beautiful and exclusive European hotel. She booked the entire hotel and all the rooms for her parties and her guests. She was told her guests would have exclusive use of the property. In fact, it was written in her contract. The hotel sales rep subsequently received a call from the manager of a very famous rock band requesting rooms at the hotel. While they didn't need very many rooms, they did have strict requirements for privacy, security, and all adjacent rooms to be vacant. Desperate to please the rock band, the hotel rep lied and said the hotel was available. She closed off part of the hotel and moved the wedding guests to a different hotel. She did not tell the bridal party and, in fact, told the guests to play along with the lie, asking them not to tell the bridal party. During the reception the bride's mother found out that more than half the guests had been moved. The hotel managers and reps tried to cover it up, but they had no excuse because of the contract they had signed. The hotel was forced to return money to the wedding party,

causing it to lose money that weekend despite the rock stars' fees. But the worst news for the hotel is yet to come.

The bride's mother not only told her friends but posted the story on Trip Advisor and other Web-based travel review sites. These sites are frequented by tens of millions of potential travelers.

Given that one unhappy client can go online and tell millions, we're certain you'll agree that lying and withholding information are not worth the risk. Not only does dishonest communication cause you to miss out on repeat business, it can easily ruin your reputation. This is why honesty and sales are no laughing matter.

The Problems with Popular Strategies

Successful salespeople use a range of styles and techniques, and they all share one thing in common: They know that honest communication is the secret to increasing sales effectiveness in the long run. By focusing their efforts on creating a positive client experience based on openness and trust, these professionals sell more, get more referrals, and experience less stress. More than that, it's the easiest sales strategy out there because it's not manipulative.

The trouble with a lot of sales strategies is their insincerity. Such strategies only work if the other person doesn't know what you are doing. If the client realizes you're using a manipulative strategy on them, watch out! It could easily damage your relationship and undermine the potential business. Have you ever taken a seminar that encourages you to label or categorize people? In this type of training people take a test and categorize people into certain quadrants or groupings. Then they figure out how each group of people likes to be talked to. The theory sounds good. In reality it can be hard to implement.

The truth is people are not that easy to figure out. Psychologists make a lifetime study of human

behavior. And do they ever get it wrong? Sure. How are we ever going to get it right after a training course that lasts a day, two days, or even a month? You're right. It's unlikely, because people are not that simple.



If we try to categorize and analyze our clients, we could be dead wrong. Do all your male clients act alike? Do all managers appear to think

the same way? Of course not. If we judge people by their titles or a characteristic and talk to them accordingly, we most likely won't get the results we're looking for. Besides, who has time for all that personality profiling and categorizing when there are sales to close? A two-way, open, honest conversation with all clients will enable us to discover what our buyers really want and need.

These course and seminars are not all that bad. They can be helpful if they cause us to think more deeply about how to meet individual needs and how to best communicate with others. But we have seen people try to analyze others after these sessions. It's far more effective to realize that all people are different and motivated by different things.

Rather than walking into a meeting and giving the same canned presentation geared toward a stereotyped personality, characteristic, or demographic, wouldn't it be better to engage the clients in some candid conversations? Then the presentation can be adjusted as appropriate to fit the clients' needs and desires. This approach will always be more

effective (and profitable) than a sales presentation based on some initial assessment and categorization.

Another popular sales strategy is mirroring. It's a common rapport-building strategy. The idea is to mirror someone's behavior, tone and tempo of speech in an effort to bond with them. The theory is sound; people like people who are like themselves. The problem is that if someone catches us doing the monkey-see, monkey-do routine, not only does the strategy become ineffective, it can cause the entire relationship to unravel! When someone is fake, we disconnect. To compound matters, we will then begin to look for more evidence that proves we cannot trust that individual and it sets off a whole downward spiral.

The great thing about honesty is that you're just being yourself. Think about it. People bond most easily with people who they can trust. Honesty and sincerity – or the lack thereof – comes through loud and clear.

The more we act like ourselves, the more likely we are to connect with our clients, establish rapport, and eventually make that sale. It's a lot easier to remember to be yourself than to mirror each of your clients. Phew! That's hard work, and we like to leave the acting up to the paid professional actors.

Summing Up

We advocate honest communication because it's the easiest and most profitable sales strategy available. When communication is honest, everyone says what needs to be said, which eliminates all the figuring out, analyzing, and categorizing – as well

as the chance of getting things wrong.

Honest dialogue will provide you with lasting success and measurable results in your work. Applying the advice and insight in this book – based on our experience both as consultants and as sales professionals who have been there – will make a difference. It will help you build your confidence and teach you steps to take to be prepared for challenges that you will encounter in your sales career.

In short, with the right attitude and a modest investment of your time, this book can help you build lasting solutions, keeping you on the road to professional success. You might be asking yourself: So how do we get there?

In the chapters that follow we'll provide tips and techniques that will help you transform the way you communicate with everyone you encounter on the way to making a sale and keeping the client. Clients, prospects, vendors, suppliers, managers and colleagues all need to be communicated with honestly in order for you to have the most profitable sales career. We'll explore the way to create two-way, honest, open relationships – the best overall strategy for long-term sales growth. All that's required is a willingness to learn a new and more effective way of doing business with people. It's that simple. The first step? Being honest with yourself.



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Steven Gaffney is a leading expert on increasing team performance, collaboration, and managing change with the goal to increase revenue and profits. He is one of the recognized authorities on the subject of honesty. He is also the author of three ground-breaking books, *Just Be Honest: Authentic Communication Strategies that Get Results and Last a Lifetime*, *Honesty Works! Real-World Solutions to Common Problems at Work and Home* and *Honesty Sells: How to Make More Money and Increase Business Profits*. For more information visit: www.StevenGaffney.com