

Who Is This Book For?

If you're reading this book, it's because you're a passion-based business owner.

What does that mean? It means you're someone who's passionate about your product, or about the service you provide to people, rather than being someone who's delighted about the idea of owning a business. Maybe you're an engineer who's got a great solution to a persistent problem in our society, or maybe you're an artist who loves the work you create. Perhaps you're a doctor who's really committed to helping people, or an activist who wants to solve world hunger.

What happens with a lot of passion-based business owners is that they start out excited about the possibility of their career, but quickly find themselves realizing that more and more of their daily lives is now being taken up with activities that *aren't* the thing they're passionate about. They have to deal with accounting, and marketing, and human resources, and sales.

Oh, God, sales! Nobody told me I'd have to *sell* my work! I thought that all I had to do was put up a website and the calls would start rolling in! Salesmen are awful people. Let me tell you these thirteen examples of all the horrible experiences I've had with salespeople trying to sell me something I didn't want! When *I* own *my* business, I'm never going to do that.

Well, that's great. You *shouldn't* want to sell someone a product they don't want. There are words for people who do that— words that tend to have a less than favorable implication in our society, like pushy, or slimeball, or con artist, or scammer. We've all had that experience, and no one likes it. It's not authentic; it's not empowering to anybody.

But the reality is that in order to succeed as a business owner, you must be effective at selling. It's simple math. It's the transacting of business that allows you to be in business. You only get to do what you like to do if enough people are actually buying what you have.

A lot of people find that thought dreadful. Which is the whole reason I created this concept. I'm not suggesting you practice unethical strategies or tactics, but I am suggesting there's a whole other approach to looking at selling and what it is and how it can be done in a way that's graceful and effective and easy on the soul.

Do I have your attention? Great. Let's dig in.

Contribution Selling

Contribution Selling, at its core, it's a shift in the *context* of how you approach a sale. This shift moves *away* from *getting someone to do something* and toward *offering someone an opportunity that empowers everyone*.

If you really think about it, you could say that almost all human-to-human interactions involve one person trying to get the other person to agree, to acknowledge something, or to respond in a particular way. Even if it's just setting up a dinner engagement with someone, you might find yourself lobbying for which restaurant we're going to go to and which movie we're going to see and whether we're going out for coffee or to a bar after. You're trying to direct the overall outcome, or you're being directed by it. Every TED talk, every business conversation, even small talk conversations there is some kind of subtext around what can I get out of this person? Do they agree with me? Is there any threat here? Etc. With rare exceptions, conversations revolve around two people interacting with each other in a self-interested way.

What I'm suggesting is that salespeople be responsible for the phenomenon that most conversations involve two people interacting with each other in a self-interested way.

Amygdala Hijacking

When a human being experiences a threat, a typical response is called hijacking, in which the amygdala—the reptilian brain, which controls all our survival instincts—takes over. The emotional brain and the cognitive brain effectively shut down. In that environment it's almost impossible to process feelings, to think clearly or strategically, or to behave in a socially adept way, because the whole purpose of the reptilian brain is to be reactive: when it's threatened it responds immediately in order to maximize the chances of escaping without getting eaten by a lion.

The reactions generally fall under four categories: Fight, Flight, Freeze, or Appease the descriptions of which are pretty self-explanatory. Some people when they get threatened attack immediately, some people run, some people freeze, and some people try to make everybody happy to calm them down.

Surprise, surprise, for a lot of people meeting a salesperson is the modern-day equivalent of being threatened by a lion. But you also want to recognize that if you hate sales, *you* walk into that conversation with that same degree of hijack. You hate sales, the fact that you're a salesperson is threatening to your id, or whatever, so your cognitive and emotional brain shut down, you become socially less adept, you behave reactively, and your ability to behave professionally and argue cogently is diminished. We'll talk in a little bit about how to deal with that.

Equally important, though, is that your *customer* is likely to be hijacked. They're likely to be in a defensive mode. They might start to attack you or your product (fight), they might tell you they're not interested and try to walk away (flight), they might get quiet and shut down (freeze), or they might agree with everything you say, whether they mean to or not (appease). But your job is to have them feel safe—and not just have them *feel* safe but actually *be* safe, because you're not trying to trick people. You have to organize yourself to where you are a safe person for them to talk to with regard to their issues or concerns.

Seven Steps to Contribution Selling

With that background, the process of selling becomes a different beast altogether, with a map that becomes peaceful and intuitive:

First, you prepare yourself to empathize with the person and be there *for them* and their needs. You start out the conversation just with the intention of getting related with them, so that the two of you feel comfortable in each other's space. At some point the conversation will naturally shift to the topic at hand, at which point you want to delve a little deeper and find out what their issues and needs are. Confirm that you've gotten all that information correctly. Then, if you've got a solution that works for them, share passionately about what your solution is and what a difference it could make. Finally, you make the offer.

Let's take a look at each of those steps in more detail:

Step One: Empathy

Put yourself in the shoes of the other person. Try to anticipate which threats they're under. Maybe they really want what you have, but are going to have a hard time affording it. Maybe they're afraid you're going to talk them into something they don't need or want. Maybe they're afraid you're going to lie to them or hurt or their business in some other way. By putting yourself in their shoes, you can respond appropriately to what's going on.

In this paradigm, it would be unprofessional to show up operating from anything other than an empathetic point of view. You're not trying to be forceful. You're not operating in a way that's manipulative or purely self-interested. Your interest is to have them feel safe and well served, so your whole job is to get connected to whether or not they feel that way.

The process for this is pretty simple: first, make sure that you're *clear*—i.e., that you're not all cluttered up internally, worried about the outcome, or upset about something completely unrelated—so that you can be present to them and ready to serve them. There are any number of ways to do this: talk to a coach (or a friend, or a colleague) to get your concerns out of your head; fifteen minutes of meditation to clear your mind; write down the things that are distracting you, so that you can come back to them and deal with them later; etc.

Then, once you're clear, create something: Who are you, for them? What are you trying to provide? How can you contribute? You're not being empathetic just for the sport of it, but to look at the world from their point of view so that you can create the best way to contribute to them.

Step Two: Warm-Up

This is the part before the business happens. It can last a few seconds or most of the conversation, but it's actually an essential part of contributing to someone, because people want to work with people they're comfortable with. They want to work with people they feel connected to. And this is the part where you get comfortable and connected with each other.

This is **not** about manipulating people. It's not about getting ready to go in for the kill. It is about giving people a minute to adjust to you being there. At the risk of stating the obvious, before you showed up, you weren't there. They were doing something other than being with you, and now there has been a transition. Maybe they've been looking forward to this all day, maybe they've been dreading it, maybe they've just had great news or bad news, they've almost certainly got a million things on their to do list. Whatever it is, you are not a regular fixture in their work cycle, but now you've introduced yourself into it, so give them a minute to deal with that and get comfortable with you.

Now, some people are into this and some people just want to get to business. Keeping in mind that empathy was step number one, it's your job to figure out how much warm-up is needed, and what kind. I don't really go in talking about the weather, but if that's what helps the client wind down and connect and get used to my presence, then absolutely let's talk about that.

Really, what you want to do, is tune into their frequency. What does that mean? It means notice their tempo of conversation. Notice their body language, volume, eye contact, and match or tune into that. Everyone has a slightly different channel that we communicate on. Your job as a professional is to tune your frequency to match their channel. People almost never do this, but when you do it makes it very easy for the other person to receive your communication with ease and respect, leaving them feeling "warmer" toward you.

As I said, people want to do business with people they feel connected with. And you want to do business with clients you feel connected with, too, right? So connect.

Step Three: Discovery

At some point the conversation will weave into discovery, which is where you figure out what it is they need and how you can help.

On the surface the discovery phase will manifest very differently for different businesses. If you're a wedding DJ, you need to find out what the experience the bride and groom want, what kind of music they like, what kind of vibe they're looking for, whether they want somebody on the microphone getting everybody up on their feet, or if they want the music to fade into the background, and so on. On the other hand, if you're a consultant, your questions need to get to the heart of the problem that they're trying to solve. What's stopping them from achieving the results they want? How much does it cost them to have this problem? What other solutions have they explored, and what kind of results did those produce?

In reality, the two aren't that different. In sales we talk about the "pain point," which is how the client is hurting. By identifying the pain point, you can present the solution to make them feel good again. And while it may not be obvious at first, a wedding DJ absolutely is addressing a pain point—because everyone has been to a wedding where the DJ has sucked, everyone has songs that they hate, and when you're planning a wedding you've got a thousand different details to manage, one of which is making sure that you're throwing the kind of party you would want to go to. So the pain point is what are all the crappy songs the bride and groom don't want to hear? It's whether or not the DJ will play the music that will give them the kind of event they'd actually enjoy. It's whether they'll have to focus a lot of energy on this detail, or if they can just write the check and forget about it. If you, as a wedding DJ, can solve those problems for the bride and groom, not only will you increase your chance of getting a sale, but you'll be delivering to them on the promise of making their special day everything they want it to be . . . and that's what it's all about anyway, right?

Whatever your business is, you can see how the warm-up leads directly into this. By getting connected to them, you start to get connected to who they are and what kinds of problems they need to solve. What's essential at this stage is that you dig deeper. Be thorough. Ask tough questions. Most people will try to discount the severity of the issue, both because it is uncomfortable for them to discuss and because they want to have a back door when you ask for the business. But if you get the pain out on the table, you can resolve it. And that's your job!

Step Four: Information Confirmation

This is really just an extension of discovery, but it's the part where you show them that you understand what their issue is. Repeat back to them the things you discovered that are important to them.

This might feel awkward to you at first. Here, I'm going to give you a script that'll make this really easy: "I'm just going to repeat back to you what you said, to make sure that I got everything right." Practice saying that in the mirror five times. There, doesn't that feel better? No? Try five more times. Better now? Okay, good. Magic.

It's best to do this in a way that the client would most like to hear it. You don't necessarily want it to be word for word, but nor do you want it to occur like you're making things up or assuming things about their situation. If you have to take notes to do this, fine. But show them that you listened. It's a sign of respect, and it's also an opportunity to demonstrate being a professional—because of course a professional at whatever it is you do would listen carefully so that they know what it is the client wants.

Step Five: Sharing

Now that you've shown the respect of actually listening, this is the part when you can tell them how it *could* be.

Let's be real for a second. If you've been listening carefully, and you're really invested in serving this person properly, and you're being honest, your service may or may not be the best one for them. How it *could* be might not involve you. So it might be at this point that you decide to qualify yourself out and be ready to refer them to somebody else.

On the other hand, if you think you're the best solution for them, now's the time to *share passionately* what your solution could provide for them.

Two things about this: First, I always suggest, rather than just beating them up with your great ideas, that you ask for permission to share something with them. When you ask for permission, it makes them feel respected and puts them at ease. It's a remarkably effective tactic and removing the experience of pressure. That being said, it's essential that you *wait for them to say yes*. They will almost always do so, but if you ask for permission to talk and then just launch into a pitch, it will backfire completely: now you've shown that you're *not* listening, and that you *are* trying to convince or pressure them. So don't do that. Give them the space to say no, and if that's what they do, thank them politely and go back to Step Two to close out the meeting. By continuing to develop a connection, they could easily turn into a referral source.

The second thing, assuming you've asked permission and they've said yes, is that sharing passionately is not about trying to convince them of anything. Don't try to sell them on anything or overcome objections. Your goal is to have them feel inspired. Have them get that you understand what the problem is, what it's costing them to have this problem, and have them experience the possibility of what it can look like to have that problem fixed.

Step Six: Making the Offer

When and only when they're lit up, you tell them the details about the brilliant solution you would love to provide, what you charge, what you promise to deliver, the timeline, and what you anticipate the return on investment to be.

Having a real answer to the question in Step Three—How much does this issue cost to have around?—is really key at this point. It has to be clear that it is more expensive or painful *not* to take action. Your solution has to be awesome, helpful, and a good return on investment. Make sure your offer makes sense, is appropriate, and is something you are proud to discuss.

Now's the time when you take questions and address any concerns. Again, it's not about convincing people. If it's not for them, it's not for them. But maybe, in your exuberance and your enthusiasm, you missed something that's important to them. You want to make sure you get to all of it. So ask open ended questions like xxxxx. Perhaps give them a space to share as well. This way you can maybe hear something you hadn't heard or they feel like they can share something they hadn't shared yet.

Step Seven: Urgency

Make it even more delectable and easy for them to say yes.

One of the biggest failings of people who hate sales is that they're so afraid of pressuring their prospects that they send them away without giving them the chance to say yes. But you'll notice that out in the world, companies are always putting deadlines on their offers—the coupon expires, the sale ends, act now.

Some of you reading this, I can feel your sphincters tightening up as you read that. What probably went through your mind were echoes of late night infomercials: “Act now and I'll cut the price by 80% AND I'll throw in these five bonus extras ABSOLUTELY FREE so you're getting \$2,642 value for only three payments of \$7.99!” Don't worry. If you're sick of those sorts of tactics, I don't blame you. But there's a broad gap between that sort of infomercialese and what's possible for you as someone who genuinely cares about your customer.

Now, for some of you, an act now offer might make sense, to make the offer even more delectable: “If you say yes today or tonight or this week, I'll throw in x, y, or z.” If you're selling something finite (like a one-of-a-kind art piece, or time on your schedule for a specific date), let them know that the piece they like might sell or someone else might come along and book that date. You can even share a story of someone who waited too long, then they came back and it was too late, and they were devastated—don't be obnoxious about it, just let them know that this sort of thing happens. Give them a reason to say yes now, because it's good for them if they say yes.

Step Eight: Closing and Follow Up

Here's your bonus step. At this point either you're going to get a yes, a no, or a maybe. Depending on your business, all of your sales might happen on the spot, they might take months of negotiations, or anywhere in between. It might be that some people sign right away and some people take a few days or weeks to decide. If it's a yes, great. If it's a no, great. If it's a maybe, there might be follow-up strategies appropriate to your business, or perhaps you should go back into Step Six to address any issues or questions they might have.

At some point the issue will be resolved *for now*. Again, you may be following up later, but the thing to do now is to close out the conversation in a powerful way that makes them feel good about having spent the time with you. Thank them for their time. Add some value. Maybe you can do this referring them to someone else if you weren't the right one to solve their problem. Maybe show them a few things they can do on their own. Let them ask any questions.

Often, it will be appropriate at this time to ask for a referral. If it's clear they had a good time and the connection is there, even if they said no, the reason may be something that isn't a reflection on you, you just weren't the right fit for them—maybe you were too expensive, or you lacked a key feature they needed. In that space, ask them if they know anyone else who needs whatever it is you do. They'll either say yes, no, or I have to think about it.

Then, help them transition back into whatever is going to happen next in their day. Just like in Step Two—you weren't there and now you are—at the end of the meeting you've been there and soon you won't be. But again, people want to do business with people they feel comfortable with and connected to, so when the “business” portion of the conversation is over, strengthen that connection.

At the end, this has been a conversation between adults in an environment of contribution. You go into it with the intention of contributing, and you come out of it with both people feeling like they were better off. Win, lose, or draw you're providing value and you're enjoying connecting with people.

Essential Traits of the Contribution Salesman

Be Someone People Want to Do Business With

This goes into the first two steps when you're empathizing and developing that connection with people, although really it encompasses all of it. The time before you go out, when you clear and create, you want to create being a contribution. But it's worth noting that what you're really doing is organizing yourself as someone people want to do business with. You deserve their business, because you're someone who cares about them and about other people.

Have you ever noticed that you tend to gravitate toward the people you like? And this isn't just with your friendships, it's your business relationships, too. Have you ever bought something from someone who just approached you a certain way? Maybe you thought they were funny or they really had your best interests at heart, or whatever it was. It's natural for people to want to do business with people they like.

Conversely, have you ever found yourself doing business with someone you didn't like and looking for ways to get out of it? Or avoiding getting into that business relationship altogether?

Communication

If you look back at the steps I listed out before, I'd like to put something out to you: Being empathetic and getting into someone's shoes is about communicating with another human being. Clearing your own clutter so that nothing in your way mentally is about communicating with another human being. Getting them comfortable with you at the beginning of the conversation is about communicating with another human being. Finding the pain, uncovering the challenge or the blind spot, and listening for the opportunity, are about communicating with another human being. Confirming that you heard everything correctly and sharing passionately are about communicating with another human being.

Notice a pattern? Sales, every step of the way, is just communication.

In life, communication is less about what you say than about what you hear. Where most salespeople go wrong is that they come into situations all hot to trot on what they're going to say, and they miss having their attention on what the other person is saying. Listening gives you the best opportunity to say the right thing . . . and there is no right thing to say, until you actually hear what it is they want you to say.

So there is no fixed approach to this. There is no script that is perfect and immovable. There are no 30 things to say on a sales call. When you're in an actual conversation, you have to be able to go with the flow. And what you say is necessarily going to be influenced by your expertise as well as the things they say—if I'm a technical expert I'm probably listening for technical issues I can address, if I'm a coach or consultant I'm probably listening for soft skills I can improve, if I'm a glass blower I might be listening for the kind of art they like or the experience they've had with glass blowing in the past.

The one thing I would recommend, given the strategy I'm espousing, is that you operate with an intent to contribute. Note that that, too, is not a hard and fast rule—it is perfectly possible to be a salesperson without caring about other people (and we've all met that person). But given the framework I'm suggesting, I recommend you make that your one rule. Listen to what's important to that person over there.

Something else I want to bring up as a part of this comes from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). Now I'm not a scientist and I'm not certified in NLP, I know just enough to get myself in trouble. But the main takeaway from NLP for me, as I understand it, is that every person broadcasts and receives communication on a particular frequency: speed, volume, intonation, accent, vocabulary, content, body language, and so on. I talk fast, some people talk slow. Some people like to talk about their feelings while others focus on logic; some people use big words and others don't; some people slouch and others have upright postures. You get the idea.

Now, slow talkers kind of drive me crazy and I kind of drive slow talkers crazy, but there's no correctness to it, it's just the frequency that we operate on. But as a salesperson, guess whose job it is to make sure you're on the right frequency. Yours. So you want to listen for things like, what is their tempo of speaking? Are they highly descriptive? Do they want to engage in small talk or get right down to business? Are they leaning into you while they talk or to the side or leaning away? I talk very fast, I'm very creative, and I love getting right to business, so if you come at me slow with lots of small talk and want to tell me 13 stories before you get to business, you'll lose me quick. But if I'm the one trying to make the sale, I've got to get off it and tune myself to that frequency, or else I'll lose you.

Now this might occur as manipulative, but really, it's just learning to communicate more effectively. It's being someone people want to do business with. And especially when you're starting out, it'll take constantly noticing how the person is talking and adjusting to their frequency. But if you're listening and doing that, it'll make a big difference for them and it makes it easier for them to receive your communication and, in turn, want to do business with you.

Look for People Who Are Looking for You

Everything I'm saying here ties in together, and this is no exception. But the one place to stand that guarantees you won't be pressuring people into buying your product is to look for people who are looking for you. If you're a plumber, and you're only ever talking to people who need a plumber, well great, half of your job is done. Now it's just about being the *right* plumber.

Maybe you're not that lucky, and you doing something that people don't know exists. No problem. Did you know that once upon a time, there was no iPad? Seriously! For thousands of years of human history, nobody had tablets, and they didn't even miss them. Then one day, Steve Jobs stood on a stage and created a whole new market where none existed before. But practically overnight, millions of people decided they needed an iPad, and it took almost no convincing at all. Overnight, millions of people said, "I'm someone who's looking for an iPad."

This actually speaks to the part *before* the sales conversation, to the *lead generation* part of the sales cycle. If you're someone who does cold calling, you're not looking for people to talk into something, you're looking for people who are looking for what you have to offer, which is why cold callers are so quick and to the point and have no problem hanging up when you tell them you're not interested. If you go to networking meetings, you're not trying to convince anyone at the meeting, you're trying to find someone who needs what you have to offer—the ideal referral. So get to the bottom of that real quick.

To use myself as an example, I'm looking for entrepreneurs or solopreneurs who want to have a whole new experience of selling their business and a whole new level of effectiveness so they can enjoy the process and fulfill the promise of their business. When I run into somebody who says that they love what they do, except they hate the selling part of it, or they're struggling to make ends meet, or they're thinking about giving up, bam! I know they're looking for what I have to offer. So at that point I'll let them know what I do, and I'll ask if they want to set up a time to meet, to see if I can contribute to them. But if I run into someone who's already blowing past their sales targets, I'm not going to try to sell them, because they don't need me—they've already got it figured out.

Don't worry about the formula of it just ask yourself the question what would be the highest contribution right. You're not gonna get it right every time but you're not going to get it right every time anyway.

Branding

As a passion-based business owner, you probably want to keep doing what you're doing for a while. If so, branding becomes really important.

What I mean by that in this case is *directing how people think of you when you're not there*. If two people you know are talking about you behind your back, what are they saying? If one person were to ask another about your product or service, what would they say?

You would love to hear terms like professional, kind, a contribution, a problem-solver. You want to make sure that your brand supports your success. I like to play a little game of having lots of allies out in the world and very few enemies—i.e., very few people who would say anything negative about me and lots of people who say great things. So I make it my business to be known for being a contribution in my community. And so I leave every sales call and make every engagement really delightful and viable. In fact, I create being a contribution in every part of my life—not just in my business—so just by being me I'm marketing for my business or service.

Business Is Life

Part of why this works is because it's transformational in nature. So you'll notice that we're taking a conversation—that sales is manipulative or combative—and we're throwing it away. We're saying it's not real it's just a conversation, and we're replacing it with another conversation that selling is an opportunity to contribute. It just looks different, it feels different and I tell you if you really practice this way of being in a conversation with people to discover how you can be valuable to them, it will provide a profound experience. And you *could* do this just in your business, and that would be fantastic, but you could also use it in every part of your life—with friends, family, and acquaintances.

What I mean by that: in all your interactions, make sure you're being empathetic and your personal space is clear and you're really listening for how to contribute to people. Focus on relating with people. Ask questions to determine what's important to them. Ask for permission to share and then share passionately about what you contribute to the world.

This might sound weird. But I think you'll find people will start responding to you differently, both in your business and in every other part of your life.

A Challenge to the Reader

I sincerely hope that the book provided you with value, that you can take away some of the tools and strategies I've talked about and have it have some kind of impact in your business—if it results in a sale, great. If it results in you giving yourself permission to think about “sales” a little differently great. This book isn't a panacea, but if you took even one thing away from it, for the \$10 and a few hours that it cost you, it was worth it.

That being said, I'm going to let you in on a little secret. This whole book is part of my Step One and Step Two strategy. Obviously with a book you don't have the same level of personal connection that you do in person, but part of what I've been trying to accomplish here is for you to get to know me, to feel comfortable in my space, for me to contribute to you and to share what selling *could* be like.

So with that in mind, now's the time for me to make an offer to you. If you've gotten any value out of this book, I'd like to make it even more valuable to you by inviting you to join me on a challenge call—this is a free thirty minute phone call where we can discover how you might be able to use this model and these strategies and this way of thinking to produce huge breakthroughs in your business.

To do that, go to www.kirkmcdow.com and click on the button that says “Click to Schedule a Challenge Call.” It should be pretty obvious. And if you do it right now, I'll throw in a free toaster. Not really. But the sooner you do it, the sooner you can have a breakthrough in your business.

So what are you waiting for. Come join me and contribute your passion to the world.