



## *Victims, Villains and Heroes in the Sales Process*

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts.

William Shakespeare - from *As You Like It*

*I am on to something.* I'm on to an understanding of what makes some salespersons succeed while so many others fail. It is critical to realize that selling is primarily an emotional activity. The fundamental insight is to understand this emotional discussion is going on at a sub-conscious level, most often hidden from our awareness. In a sense, the sales person, as well as the buyer is trapped in a story they are not even aware of! Once we get the "a-ha" in this area we will become far more effective in our sales efforts.

### ***The Plot***

Our lives are governed by the story we tell ourselves. That story is what drives our emotions, which drives our actions, which produces our results. If we want to change our results we have to go upstream and find ourselves a new story.

The oldest story of all is something that I refer to as *The Plot*. It is the age-old story of Goodness Triumphs Over Evil. It is the basis of every Biblical story, Aesops Fable, book or movie. And, it's the basis of every sales presentation. In *The Plot* there are only three fundamental roles – that of the *victim, villain or hero*.

### ***The Victim***

In every single book, movie or story ever told about the sales process the buyer has been squarely cast in the victim role. I challenge you to identify for me one story, one headline, one movie *ever* otherwise. It is important to understand that these stories reside in our subconscious and that we can't wait to prove them up. So, for example, the buyer expects to be victimized and has a filter, which can't wait to find evidence of manipulation, a lack of integrity, and so forth.

### ***The Villain***

In every story ever told about the sales process (i.e. *Death of a Salesman, Tin Man, Glenn Gary Ross*) the sales person has been squarely cast in the villain's role. During workshops I ask folks what are the characteristics of the villain? All are quick to reply: abusive, manipulative, greedy, uncaring, selfish, controlling and so forth.

*Understand this:* buyers can't wait to prove up this story about you! And, *it makes no difference how much you care.* In fact, as we shall soon see if your "energy" is too strong during the sales process, chances are you will be cast squarely in the villain role- no matter how much you care.

## ***The Hero***

My guess is most of you in the sales profession view yourselves as heroes. You believe in what you're selling. You are certain about the distinctions you can make with the potential buyer. You can't wait to dig for that pain so you can somehow "save them". You have the solution that will carry them off into the beautiful sunset and you will be labeled the hero for doing so. So why is it sooo hard? Why do I sense resistance? Why isn't this working the way I planned?

Do you ever feel the *disconnect* between the role you perceive yourself in and the one have been pre-cast in?

## ***The Solution – Managing Our Emotional Energy***

When we are on the emotional stage by ourselves we own all the energy on it. When giving workshops I ask audiences: "When you are on the stage with someone else that you care about, that you are trying to be fair towards, and sell something to, how much of the energy do you now want to take up on the stage?" Almost uniformly the answer has been 50/50. But my question to you is this: "*When have you ever been 50/50 on a stage in your life?*"

Fact is, depending on the stage we find ourselves on, we either have the weaker or the stronger energy. For example, when on stage with our parents there is no doubt who has the stronger energy. Just the opposite occurs when we are on the stage with our children. When we are on the stage with a sales manager, who has the weaker or stronger energy? When we are on the stage with our customer service rep, who has the stronger or weaker energy? When you are on the stage with somebody who has expertise that you need, who has the stronger or weaker energy? When you are on a sales stage, you will typically have the *stronger energy when discussing your product* but a *weaker energy when discussing their money!*

When people play with a weak energy on a stage, I refer to them as "20%er's". 20%er's gravitate towards the victim role. Conversely, when people play with a strong energy on a stage I refer to them as "80%er's". People who play with strong energy gravitate to either the villain role or the hero role. The distinction between the two is that *the hero remains attached to their heart* in the process.

Anytime our energies are out of balance, I guarantee a *drama* is about to follow. Once the drama kicks in you can forget about closing the sale. Let me explain it this way: When you *step across the line* into someone else's physical space (representing an 80% energy) you cause that other person (especially a 20%er) to engage in *fight or flight* activity. If you cross the line with a strong energy *they will drop you into your default role as a villain* – and I guarantee it makes no difference how much you care. Employees do this with bosses, kids do this with parents, and buyers do it with sales persons. And, it's not something they are thinking...it's something they are *feeling*.

But guess what? *50/50 doesn't work either*. I like to kid, "If my wife and I are planning our vacation from 50/50 where are we going?" Of course nowhere – each of us fighting over our

own agendas. If standing toe-to-toe with each other represents 50/50 then 40/40 is what is known as an arms length transaction. This is what feels comfortable to most folks. When we have laughed from our heart with a client, prospect or friend we have done so from the 40/40 position. In that moment nobody is too weak or too strong. In that moment nobody is in the other person's space. In the business setting, the 20% between us is the room for us to co-create solutions. To work together on developing an insurance program or other sale. *This way each of us can be a hero.*

Again, *anytime we are out of the 40/40 emotional balance, unwanted drama is guaranteed to follow!*

I encourage you to have a set of emotional questions ready for the beginning of the sales process. One of the questions I ask executives is "Have you ever fantasized about going to work without having any people to manage that day?" Every one of us has had that fantasy. Then I ask them why. And then I shut up and listen. Here are some other emotionally based questions:

- "Tell me what feels unfair about..." - Similar to the first question, it immediately addresses the emotions. Then listen. And listen some more. Then be prepared with your responses when they ask you if you have any solutions. There is no excuse for developing sales scripts, recording them on tape and then listening to them in your car repeatedly. Be a prepared sales person.

- “What do you feel excited about?” - This is of course is on the opposite side of the spectrum. How can you help support those efforts?
- “How can I help you succeed?” – *Playing the hero is about allowing other people to become their own heroes.* Rather than saying I can do this for you, you want them to say can you do this for me?
- I’ve had CEO’s come to me because they want to push their organizations to new heights and they are not exactly clear what they want me to do for them. For that executive my job is to help clarify and define their expectations. So I would ask a question like “Where do you see this organization in five years?” Other executives know exactly what they want. Then my job is to repeat what I heard. They will let me know what they want me to do.

### ***Moving from 20 to 40- Coax, Encourage and Inspire***

On the journey from 20 to 40 the buzzwords are *coax*, *encourage* and *inspire*. If you are not doing that as a sales person, *just what are you doing?* If you are not doing that as a sales manager, VP of Sales, or business owner, *just what are you doing?*

To *coax* someone means to have him or her take the first step. It helps build momentum. Maybe the first step is to educate them. Maybe it is to educate yourself. Whatever it is, say something like “*Let’s just try this first step and see how it feels.*” How can anyone have resistance to that?

Take one step and see how it feels. Can anything be safer? I have learned not to try to sell the entire solution all at once. Just the first step. I may create a proposal that shows an entire journey and go offer discount if they go for the whole enchilada. But I will always give a client the option of just taking it one step at a time.

To *encourage* someone means to find the good in him or her. I learn this from one of the most successful insurance agents in this country, Gary Levine. Gary spends about 30 hours a week on his Rancho Santa Fe, CA golf course and about 10 hours a week in his office. Amazingly he out earns 6 other producers at his agency combined! He is deeply involved with his synagogue, community and Boys and Girls club. Gary is obviously someone special. One day I asked him if he had shared his secrets with the other brokers. His response was that they all have had the same training. I suggested they may have unique insights the others could benefit from and that the agency could start developing its “best practices” for the sales process. I brought the entire group together and the first question I asked all of them was “*What is the most important thing you do everyday?*” If I asked you this question what would your answer be? While there was a few wise cracks about “making sure I get up”, most of them gave me a technical response, such as working their plan, making a phone call, analyzing a prospects business or coverage, and so on.

The response I got from Gary however was different in kind. When I asked Gary, “What’s the most important thing you do everyday?” his response was, “*I make people feel good about themselves*”. When I asked him how he did that, he said, “That’s simple, *I find the good in them*”. Gary’s response has helped me to understand the power of encouragement. I will do anything for him. People will buy anything from him. I believe the guy could sell snow to the Eskimos.

Interestingly, I then asked all of the brokers how they prepared for their initial meeting. Again, all had technical responses. Gary of course stated, “*I focus on liking them before I ever meet them*”. There is no wonder why he is as successful as he is. What comes to Gary comes from Gary. That is the power of encouragement.

To *inspire* means to excite somebody with an example. Stories are the very best way to do this. “Let me tell you about a time when...” We can also talk from our experience. For example, “I know of a company that...” or “In my experience” or, “I have observed that...” If we want to change our outcomes we have to change our stories. We can inspire ourselves, clients and prospects through other people’s stories. Through their triumphs and challenges.

### ***Moving From 80 to 40- Being Inclusive***

Most of us in sales are 80%er’s by nature. Type-A, driver personalities on full display. We are wound-up and ready to go, go, go! Give me an ounce of your pain and I am on it like white-on-rice.

When I left litigation work and first started consulting, it was after having helped with some powerful turnarounds with initial clients. I was on fire! Fueled by conviction. I knew I would make a difference! So I went into to sales

meetings after having spoken to CEO's telling them "You ought to do this, and that and this and that". I didn't listen for squat and I didn't get a single assignment. Of course, I was over the line with "you" leading out in front.

The way to go from 80 to 40 is to be an *active listener*. To do so we "mirror" the buyer's conversation, which we may clarify with insightful questions – but *we don't give any advice until it's asked for!* As Covey says "first seek to understand and then to be understood". Unfortunately, many of us know *sooo much* we can't wait to give our advice. And we often leave a great deal of pain on the table because we are too busy talking when we should be listening. The buzzword in going from 80 to 40 is "*inclusion*". The associated fear is letting go of control. But remember- *the less you control...the more you will accomplish!*

Remember, *the goal of the hero is to allow the buyer to become his or her own hero*. Stepping over the line with your energy is only justified under emergency circumstances. Don't know about you but I haven't seen anybody drown or jump off a building during a sales call yet!

I know letting go of control requires a leap of faith. I also have confidence you can do it. If I can, anybody can!

The great part is, when you sell from a 40/40 place, *you leave space for business to come to you*. You are finally able to tap into the **Sea of Abundance**. Try it, you'll see!

### ***Conclusion***

This understanding of how we use our emotions on the selling stage has profoundly affected my bottom line. I no longer exhaust myself trying to convince people in the value I can bring. I have opened up to the Sea of Abundance and finally allowed my clients to become their own heroes in the process. Play with these thoughts and reflect on your own sales activities. When your "aha" button goes off, it will increase the fun and money you make in the sales process!

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