

Praise for #SalesTruth

“Bold. Blunt. Truth. Mike will disrupt your thinking and challenge you with simple sales solutions as only he can. Proceed with caution—powerful insights on every page.”

—**MARK HUNTER**,
author of *High-Profit Prospecting*

“It is rare that a book speaks a truth so strongly and so clearly that it defines an era. #SalesTruth is that book. Weinberg tells the #SalesTruth in his blunt, inimitable style, delivered with a sense of humor, and heavy on the practical, tactical approach that is his trademark.

—**ANTHONY IANNARINO**,
author of *Eat Their Lunch:
Winning Customers Away from Your Competition*

“You likely have never before gasped while reading a sales book, so brace yourself for some real, honest, potentially painful, truths including a debunking of my personal favorite sales myth that ‘everything has changed.’ You will be a better salesperson and sales leader after implementing these #SalesTruths. Do yourself a favor and read this book now.”

—**ANDREA WALTZ**,
coauthor of *Go for No!*

“Mike Weinberg takes a blowtorch to the trendy sales ‘shiny objects’ and fads, most of which are counterproductive to the fundamental sales activities that always have, and always will, produce results. He offers his no-holds-barred, back-to-reality framework on exactly what TO DO to crush it in sales and prospecting. Entertaining and educational, this book should be part of every salesperson’s toolbox.”

—**ART SOBCZAK**,
author of *Smart Calling*,
host of *The Art of Sales* podcast

“Mike Weinberg has done it again. He obliterates all of the latest shiny sales shortcuts and reorients us toward real selling and real results. #SalesTruth will leave you motivated and ready to kick butt. Happy hunting!”

—**EVAN WALDMAN**,
CEO, Essex Industries

“The #SalesTruth is in this book, and it’s on a short list of the most impactful books about professional selling I’ve ever read. Absolute gems include the ‘Bridge Line’ in chapter 10 and the ‘Money Line’ in chapter 11, and the ‘Not-So-Extraordinary’ keys to success in chapter 15 could alone double your revenue!”

—**JEFF BAJOREK**,
host of *The Why and the Buy* podcast

“I love this book, and if you or your team are confused or struggling to bring in new business, get #SalesTruth now! While I prefer to have Mike in front of our sales team in person, this book is the next best thing to deliver the straightforward, easy-to-implement, powerful advice you need. #SalesTruth is now required reading for our managers and will be part of our sales reps’ training.”

—**PAGE NAFTEL**,
President, Ram Tool Construction Supply

“Beware the false prophets who proclaim the death of traditional hard work—prospecting, calendar management, listening before pitching! Business owners, sales executives, and salespeople will find #SalesTruth to be a pragmatic and practical guide to what works in sales with common sense, hard truths, and direct takeaways that debunk the excuses for poor sales performance. Mike’s got great advice and relevant case studies that smart sales reps and their managers will want to implement ASAP.”

—**GINA HOAGLAND**,
Cofounder, Collaborative Strategies, Inc.,
and Chairwoman, Triad Bank

“My friend and long-time sales advisor, Mike Weinberg, delivers a bold, blunt call to action for everyone seeking to grow their business! Just like a great golf swing, mastery of fundamentals has a bigger impact on your success than the hottest trend or technology. Ready to improve your sales game? Read this for a solid reminder of the basics, sales lessons from the 2016 election, and examples that will help you improve from the moment you start reading.”

—**MARK PETERMAN**,
CEO, Cornerstone Solutions Group

“If you liked *New Sales. Simplified.* and *Sales Management. Simplified.*, then you will LOVE #SalesTruth. Mike Weinberg is practical and to the point, and brings clarity to today’s most critical sales issues and challenges. Every sales professional should own this book!”

—**JAMES MUIR**,
author of *The Perfect Close*

“Buckle up and get ready for an entertaining journey, as Mike Weinberg navigates the tumult created by today’s so-called sales experts. In his unique and engaging style, Mike delivers actionable truth you can start using immediately to close more sales.”

—**JOE TARULLI**,
General Manager and Sales Leader, Pyrotek

“The sales faculty at Kansas State University are huge Mike Weinberg fans! Thanks to Mike and his great work, our students know how to prospect, articulate value, and create and close new sales opportunities. #SalesTruth delivers even more no-nonsense wisdom and most certainly will be the next reading assignment for K-State sales students. It should be your next reading assignment, too!”

—**DAWN DEETER**,
Director, National Strategic Selling Institute,
and professor, Kansas State University

“Packed with piercing honesty, Mike Weinberg’s #SalesTruth is a must-read for winning salespeople who want to win even more! It’s not an exaggeration to say that those who read it and live by these proven principles will double their earning potential.”

—**PENNY QUELLER**,
Senior VP and General Manager, Monster Worldwide

“Bold, brilliant, and packed with blunt truth! There’s no secret to sales success, and Mike brazenly drills right at the core foundational level, delivering much-needed tough love while laying down the sales gauntlet. Take #SalesTruth to heart because Mike poured his heart and soul into every page.”

—**LARRY LEVINE**,
author of *Selling from the Heart*

“Highly funded sales-tool vendors and social-selling experts would love to convince modern sellers that everything has changed in sales. Mike proves conclusively with case studies from his clients across all industries that that’s simply not the case. And I love that Mike presents proof that procurement is not omnipotent! #SalesTruth is not for the faint of heart and is the perfect 202 companion to *New Sales. Simplified.*”

—**JUSTIN MICHAEL,**
VP of Sales, Kochava

“A wonderful reminder that sales is a noble profession and that the most successful sellers have their customer’s best interests at heart and are motivated to deliver a valuable outcome that improves the customer’s condition! #SalesTruth powerfully captures the challenges created when we chase the ‘secret sales sauce’ instead of executing the basics that drive results.”

—**TRACEY CRAIK,**
Regional Sales Director, TEC Equipment, Inc.

“Execute the basics, utilize every tool, listen to your customers, and deliver value on time, every time. No one distills the truth about the dignity and hard work of sales professionals—from every walk, industry, and corner of the world—better than Mike Weinberg! He raises the game of both sellers and sales leaders, and delivers #SalesTruth that is helping our team drive results.”

—**DAN GRANT,**
VP of Sales and Business Development, Skyline Champion

“Mike’s previous books *New Sales. Simplified.* and *Sales Management. Simplified.* improved our team’s approach to selling and managing. #SalesTruth continues the trend, providing fabulous content for our sales coaches to have candid conversations around creating opportunities, rather than chasing them!”

—**SCOTT COUP,**
Director of Commercial Sales, Enterprise Bank & Trust

“Mike is vulnerable and pushes the limits with #SalesTruth. Written in his familiar straightforward and anecdotal style, he debunks myths, speaks honestly, and will convict those who insist on searching for the silver sales bullet.”

—**TODD HOLCOMBE,**
Director of Training, Ram Tool Construction Supply



#SalesTruth

Debunk the Myths.

Apply Powerful Principles.

Win More New Sales.

MIKE WEINBERG



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Published by HarperCollins Leadership, an imprint of HarperCollins Focus LLC.

Book design by Pauline Neuwirth, Neuwirth & Associates.

ISBN 978-1-5955-5754-4 (eBook)

ISBN 978-1-5955-5722-3 (HC)

ISBN 978-1-4002-1746-5 (ITPE)

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019930197

Printed in the United States of America

19 20 21 22 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

#SalesTruth is dedicated to the warrior sellers and sales leaders who drive results and create value for their customers, their companies, and themselves.

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i> by Anthony Iannarino	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv

PART I

The #Truth About the “Experts”

CHAPTER 1: Truth, What Is Truth?	3
CHAPTER 2: Be Very Wary of the Nouveau Experts and False Teachers	9
CHAPTER 3: Just Because It’s Published Doesn’t Mean It’s True	23
CHAPTER 4: Seven Powerful Sales Lessons from the 2016 US Presidential Election	31

PART II


The #Truth About Winning More New Sales

CHAPTER 5: To Win More New Sales Requires Focus on Winning New Sales	57
CHAPTER 6: The Most Valuable Salespeople Don’t Chase Opportunities, They Create Them	65
CHAPTER 7: The Right Attitude Toward Developing New Business Changes Everything	73

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 8: Take Back Your Calendar to Become More Selfishly Productive	79
CHAPTER 9: Naming Strategic Target Accounts Is the First Step of a Successful Sales Attack	93
CHAPTER 10: A Compelling Message Increases Your Confidence and Effectiveness	109
CHAPTER 11: Prospecting Is Not Optional	127
CHAPTER 12: Stop Rushing to Present and Demo	151
CHAPTER 13: Own Your Sales Process to Stay Out of the Procurement Pit	159
CHAPTER 14: You Most Certainly Can Win with an Older Product or a Higher Price	187
CHAPTER 15: Two Extraordinary Sales Professionals’ Not-So-Extraordinary Keys to Success	199
CHAPTER 16: Beyond All Else, Great Sales Leadership Is Still the Key to Winning More New Sales	213
CHAPTER 17: Stop Searching for the Secret Sales Sauce, Ignore the Trendy Voices, and Get to Work Mastering the Fundamentals	227
<i>Index</i>	233

Truth, What Is Truth?



I have spent such a ridiculous amount of time on airplanes this past year (often mulling over ideas for this book) that it's only fitting I am writing the first chapter on a flight to South Africa. After a day to recover from this twenty-four-hour journey, I'll be doing what I pretty much do every week—sharing blunt observations with business leaders, executives, sales managers, and salespeople about why they are not winning as many New Sales as they'd like, and then providing simple, practical, powerful fixes to help them create a healthy, high-performance sales culture and close more new business. Said differently, I tell them the truth about sales.

It's an honor and a privilege and seems to have become my calling—speaking #SalesTruth to sales leaders and salespeople.

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Who Are You to Declare What's True?

I get it. It's nervy and could certainly be perceived as self-righteous to declare that you've got the corner on *the truth* about something as big and important as sales. Please hear me on this: I don't have the corner on the truth and would never claim I did. When I observe, consult, or coach an executive or salesperson, or facilitate a workshop or training session, I learn something new Every. Single. Day. That is why I absolutely love what I do. I am always learning, and I get to experience firsthand what is working in sales and sales management, and what is not. Then I get to share those observations with my readers and clients.

Those who know me, read my books and blog, or follow me on Twitter and LinkedIn are keenly aware (and even appreciate) that I simply call it like I see it. Yes, on occasion, I speak and write in extremes to make a point, often in an attempt to deliver a wake-up call, hoping to swing the pendulum back toward the center, and that is *exactly* my hope in writing this book.

The amount of noise and flat-out disinformation about sales and sales management are at an all-time high. It was bad seven years ago, so bad—particularly surrounding prospecting and developing new business—that I was motivated to write my first book, *New Sales. Simplified*. And, amazingly, as hard as it is to believe, the confusion and chaos are even worse today.

There has never been more confusion, frankly, because there have never been more theories and opinions and so many (free) channels to broadcast this disinformation. Self-proclaimed sales “experts” and “thought leaders” have sprung up everywhere—many of whom have amassed significant followings by preaching popular nonsense that tickles the ears of sales leaders and sellers craving an easy-button or magic fix. Point out the stupidity, inaccuracy, and inconsistency of what these “experts” are posting, and

TRUTH, WHAT IS TRUTH?

they are quick to reply defensively, pointing to the number of “likes” their articles receive. To quote my friend and author of *High-Profit Prospecting*, Mark Hunter, “Salespeople cannot take likes and clicks to the bank.” And I have joked that the credibility of many of today’s faux sales improvement gurus is inversely proportional to the number of people who “like” their posts. Translation: Popularity does not equate to the helpfulness/usefulness/effectiveness of the information presented. In fact, it’s often quite the opposite.

Everything Has Not Changed

Many of today’s nouveau “experts” love to tell us that *everything* has changed. It’s a dangerous new world and all the rules have changed, they claim. Nothing that used to work in sales or sales management still works today. *Nothing*. Traditional approaches, techniques, and methodologies are no longer effective. In fact, they proffer that if you dare even try to deploy old-school, traditional methods, you’re not just an idiot bound to fail but also a Luddite from the Dark Ages who deserves to be ridiculed. And if you think that I might be exaggerating even a bit here, see the examples in the next chapter.

What’s so amusing and so irritating to me is that I see the exact opposite. The. Exact. Opposite.

The most effective executives, sales managers, and salespeople I observe are masters at the basics. They have perfected old-school, traditional approaches. Instead of constantly entertaining themselves by shopping for the latest, greatest, and trendiest new tool, toy, or trick, they stay with the tried-and-true, proven fundamentals of sales and sales leadership. Not sexy, but incredibly effective.

SALES TRUTH

Let me make that point again from a different angle, because I desperately want you to digest this truth: Despite what you hear and read from today's trendiest, self-proclaimed thought leaders, I have *never* seen a salesperson or sales team fail because they lack a recently invented sales tool, or because they had not yet adopted a newly created sales process.

I don't know how to make this next point graciously or without coming across as arrogant, so I am just going to say it in abject frustration because I am so tired of the half-truths and false promises giving false hope to salespeople and managers: You would be hard-pressed to find a sales consultant/trainer/speaker who's been on more airplanes and in more companies than I have the past few years. I have been around the globe helping sales teams in every industry—from mortgages to machinery, from plastics and polymers to payroll services, from defense to distribution, from big data to big trucks, and from SaaS (software as a service) to trash. And I can emphatically and unequivocally state that, regardless of what the so-called experts are writing on LinkedIn or quoting in their "studies," it's not their beloved, new-found tool or process that's missing—it's a solid execution of the basics. They can wax eloquently about their theories, brag about how many people "like" their posts, speak for free at the online virtual sales conferences, and cite supposedly valid research to their hearts' content. I know what I am seeing and hearing with my own eyes and ears: The sales world is desperate for rigor and discipline around the fundamentals, not fancy new tricks.

Almost every week, I speak with leaders of struggling sales organizations who have spent crazy amounts of money and time buying into and then attempting to implement new tools and methods because they (wrongly or sadly) believed that the promised panacea would solve all that ails their sales. Well, the fact that they're calling for help *after* spending (wasting) all those dollars,

TRUTH, WHAT IS TRUTH?

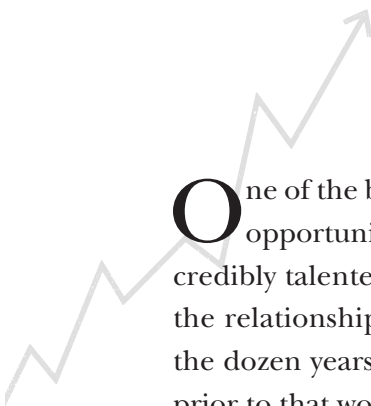
all that time, and all that energy chasing the shiny new [fill in this month's hot sales topic here] sure says a lot, doesn't it?

Let me make sure you are not reading more into this than I am writing. I am not declaring that you and your sales team don't need tools, processes, or technology. Of course, you do. What I am most definitely stating is that the people winning big in sales today are doing so because they have mastered the basics, and those who are struggling, particularly in the area of developing new business and winning New Sales, are flailing because they are not executing the basics well. Despite loud protestations from many "experts," the flat-out truth is that what has worked exceedingly well in sales and sales management for the past couple decades is still the (not so) secret to sales success today. As crazy as it may sound, if I introduced you to the top-performing salesperson at each of my clients across that eclectic mix of industries listed, you would see these top producers deploying the very same mindset, approaches, behaviors, and disciplines that I observed in top-producing salespeople five years ago, ten years ago, and fifteen years ago. #SalesTruth. The best sellers and the best leaders excel at the fundamentals of their job. They are masters at their craft, because they have mastered the basics.

Before we unpack these critical fundamentals in part II ("The #Truth About Winning More New Sales"), please indulge me a bit further as we take a look at the hypocrisy and nonsense preached by these dangerous, disingenuous "experts" who I believe are actually hurting, not helping, the sales community.



Two Extraordinary Sales Professionals' Not-So-Extraordinary Keys to Success



One of the biggest blessings doing what I do for a living is the opportunity to observe, learn from, and befriend some incredibly talented salespeople. I could not be more thankful for the relationships I've built and the lessons I've learned during the dozen years as a consultant and coach, and the dozen years prior to that working in sales.

When outlining my thoughts for this book, I felt compelled to include a chapter on the best practices of the very best sellers I've encountered. As I pondered how to present the information and struggled deciding which of the many truly great salespeople to highlight, the same two names kept coming to mind: Tom and Ron. What's interesting about these two men is that neither work at clients of mine. And even more intriguing, these two men are polar opposites. They could not be more different in their personalities, their styles, or in what they sell.

Tom is the top Volvo car salesperson in North America, happens to work at my local dealership, and is the only human being on this planet to have sold me more than one automobile. I am



SALES TRUTH

a car nut, have purchased twenty-six cars in my lifetime, and as you may have surmised, am also rather opinionated about sales. Tom is the very best there is. Bar none.

Ron has been a top producer in the corporate financial services industry for more than two decades. He is a dear, dear friend, trusted adviser, and a mentor. At pivotal moments in my life, he's one of my very first phone calls. He has cheered me on as my business and platform have grown, and he's the one who asks the most challenging questions.

Tom is fun, fashion forward, and relatively public. Ron is serious and conservative, dresses the part sporting his Allen Edmonds, and is more private. They are both as competitive as you can imagine, numbers and results driven, and as hungry as ever. Both have plenty of hardware in their offices demonstrating their consistent status as top producers. In fact, Tom is so important to Volvo that factory workers at the Gothenburg, Sweden, plant know him by name. And Ron has personal notes of appreciation from C-level execs at his gazillion dollar company. These guys love what they do, have a blast doing it, but are dead serious about playing to win and staying on top.

I sat down with each of them before crafting this chapter. I probably didn't need to interview Ron because we know each other so well, but I wanted to provide an opportunity for him to fill in some blanks for me. Because Tom moves so fast and most of my conversations with him are very brief, I managed to pin him down for a sushi lunch where he attempted to answer my questions between texts and calls from customers. His pace is beyond what I can process and his ability to multi-task exceeds that of anyone else I know. There was actually a day at the dealership when I watched him close a new sale, send a prospect out on a test drive, deliver a new vehicle, and handle a service issue, simultaneously—while smiling the whole time and making others smile as well.

TWO EXTRAORDINARY SALES PROFESSIONALS' KEYS TO SUCCESS

Mind boggling.

These “formal” conversations with Ron and Tom only confirmed what I see day in and day out with my client sales teams. There is nothing magical about what the top salespeople in the world do. They work really hard. Really, really hard. They are really competitive. They go the extra mile whether they're prospecting, prepping, probing, presenting, proposing or following-up. They know their business and their competitors. And beyond their incredible work ethic and resolve to win, they understand that winning the sale requires connecting with the customer on a personal level. Before reading on, go back and reread this paragraph. So many people in sales are looking for the shortcut to success, but there are no shortcuts. Everyone wants the trick, the secret, the hack. But there are none. The best car sales guy and the best corporate B2B sales guy on planet Earth work their asses off—still! After years of being on top, they continue working their asses off and working to master the basics of selling. Please ponder that #SalesTruth. There. Are. No. Shortcuts. Hard Work + Mastery of the Basics = Top Sales Performer.

Tom is so good at what he does and seems to love it so much that I could not wait for the chance to sit down, outside the dealership, and just talk sales with him. The retail car business is a great mystery to most of us, even to car nuts like me who devour car magazines and websites. I was looking forward to getting more of the inside scoop and hearing the thoughts from the only person in my thirty years of car buying who earned my respect enough that I sought him out a second time.

No, when Tom was young he did not see himself in the car business and never envisioned achieving the level of success he has. He repeated several times that part of what keeps him sharp and focused is that the business is so hard and requires so much energy to stay on top. I pressed him from several angles on

SALES TRUTH

specifically what it is that sets him apart that has allowed him to personally sell exponentially more cars than the typical dealer salesperson. As hard as I tried to crack his code, all his answers pointed to the same basic theme: He goes above and beyond what his colleagues do. Sure, he admits that his DNA fits the business and his values and taste align well with the brand, but Tom sweats the details and leaves nothing to chance.

Just last Sunday I was standing in the kitchen with my wife after returning home from church. I was about to head to a café to write this very chapter when my iPhone rang. It was Tom, so I held up the phone to show Katie, who just shook her head. Bizarre timing.

“Tom, you can’t be calling to tell me how gorgeous my family looks on the Christmas card because you won’t receive it until tomorrow. To what do I owe the pleasure of this Sunday call?”

Tom responded that he couldn’t wait to see the card, told me to give his best to Katie, and said he was calling because we just drove past each other on Manchester Road and he wanted to say hey. The reason we drove past each other is because the dealership is between church and my home. That’s Tom—working on Sunday to line up the week ahead for maximum productivity. That’s Tom, keeping in touch with his customers even when they’re not shopping. That’s Tom, being likable and enhancing relationships. Of course, I couldn’t resist and had to ask how his year was finishing up. He said that it would be very close whether he hit his number. It would come down to the last few days and timing of deliveries. Keep in mind that Tom’s number is probably five times the typical car salesperson’s number, so it’s all relative.

During our lunch meeting, I asked Tom how he set himself apart from others in the business, particularly in light of the negative view of car salespeople and lack of trust consumers have

TWO EXTRAORDINARY SALES PROFESSIONALS' KEYS TO SUCCESS

toward dealerships in general. Tom said he does everything possible to come across as the anti-stereotypical salesperson, and the key to accomplishing that objective is how the entire process feels to the customer. His primary goal is finding the right fit—the right car for the right customer. As Tom shared his sales philosophy, I delved further, hoping to get him to unpack his discovery process and how he learns what he needs to know about prospective customers. Interestingly, he does a lot of probing and discovery, but says that he often doesn't even realize he's doing it because it's his natural curiosity. He truly wants to know why they're there and what's important to them. Tom says that very early on in this dialogue with prospects he mentally puts himself in the customer's shoes and begins to imagine what the perfect car is based on what he's learning about this person's desires, values, needs, ego, and so on.

As someone who has gone through this process with him twice, all I can say is that he gave me a very different feeling than anyone else from whom I've tried to buy a car. It truly felt as if he were taking in all the variables that mattered to me, so he could present the perfect answer. It seemed much more like he was looking to create a bespoke, custom solution rather than put me in a car that happened to be available. As I pressed him to share more about his process, I got a glimpse of his obsession with preparation. Tom believes that if he does his job right and gets a good feel for what's important to the customer and his or her color/taste/visual preferences, there is a very good chance that the first car he shows will be the one the customer purchases. He's convinced that the first look the prospect gets of the car is critical, so he never rushes the process. In fact, he is so obsessed with making this first encounter perfect between the customer and the potential new car that he is fanatical about how cars on the lot are prepositioned.

SALES TRUTH

I was in awe as he described the amount of work he does on a regular basis to know exactly where different models, different exterior/interior color combos, and different option-packaged cars are on the lot. But he doesn't just need to know where they are, he needs to be able to get to them fast without having to jockey a bunch of cars that may be in the way of the one he wants. The whole thing is a giant Jenga puzzle, and he refuses to have his process and his customer's first impression jeopardized by not being able to show them the exact car he believes is the perfect fit. Just for grins, contrast Tom's obsession with doing this well with the typical test drive experience at most dealerships. As a perpetual car shopper, can I tell you how many times a salesperson took forever to bring me a dirty car in a color combo I didn't like, that wasn't optioned the way I wanted and barely had enough gas to make it to the gas station around the corner?

What I most want you to take away from Tom's passion and work ethic is that this highly compensated, award-winning, top seller spends a whole lot of his off hours doing grunt work backstage that no one ever sees. That enormous backstage effort sets him up to succeed when he's frontstage face-to-face with customers. Please don't blow by this point. Tom isn't lucky, and he doesn't wing it hoping to guess right and present the right car to the customer. He prepares like a professional. And as fanatical as Tom is preparing for time in front of the customer, just wait till you read about Ron's process for preparing his teams to present in the boardrooms of his gigantic prospects. There is a consistent theme here that applies to every top producer I know. Preparation is not optional, and the most successful, professional salespeople invest the most time prepping and practicing for customer meetings and presentations.

The very first day I met Tom, I felt like he understood me. A new model was just released and while I had not previously

TWO EXTRAORDINARY SALES PROFESSIONALS' KEYS TO SUCCESS

fancied myself as a Volvo guy, there was just something about the unique look of this gorgeous car combined with the unique positioning of the brand. After having owned all of the marquee German luxury brands, I was ready for something different but wanted to be assured that the car I purchased sent the right messages to prospective and existing clients, who undoubtedly would form opinions based on the car I drove. From his probing, Tom sensed that this was important to me, and I could sense the light bulb in his sales brain turn on as he got an idea. He asked me to wait at his desk while he ran to grab the car he thought would be perfect. In what felt like less than a minute, he showed up in an immaculate new car dressed in ember black metallic over beechwood (baseball glove color) leather. It was drop-dead gorgeous. When I walked around to the driver's side to start the test drive, Tom didn't get out of the car. Instead, he lowered the window and said: "Not yet. Hop in the passenger seat." This was different, but I liked that he had a plan, and it made me feel like I was with a thoughtful pro.

We drove about a mile to a local park. I wasn't sure what he was up to but went along because he was so confident. He pulled over at a place where I could see the entire loop that cars took around the perimeter of the park. He kicked me out of the car and asked me to just watch as he circled the park and approached from various angles. For the next few minutes, I stood there as he drove *my car* around the park, so I could experience it the way my clients would as I pulled up to their offices or picked them up at the airport. When Tom finally came back, he explained his thinking and I realized that I was in the presence of a sales genius. He not only listened to me but wanted to ensure that this particular car addressed the number one concern I had shared with him. It certainly did. I drove the car for a few miles and headed back to the dealership to buy it. It was the most fun, professional, and painless

SALES TRUTH

car purchase I had ever experienced. And I'm 100 percent confident that I negotiated the price less intensely and paid more for the car because of how much I enjoyed Tom and his process.

I wish I could share more of Tom's secrets to success with you, but after knowing and watching him for seven years, and sitting down with him specifically to talk sales and best practices, I am even more convinced that he doesn't have many secrets. He loves what he does, and his heart is fully engaged in his work. He's indefatigable and as competitive as all get-out. He takes his business personally and takes full responsibility for his results. During our lunch, Tom casually asked me how my friend Donnie was doing. Tom had sold Donnie two cars but mentioned that he had not seen him in a while. I felt terrible having to tell Tom this, but looked him in the eye because I wanted his immediate reaction. "Tom, this is awkward, and I hate breaking the news to you, but Donnie actually bought a certified pre-owned Volvo from another dealer. I am sorry to break that to you." Tom pursed his lips and shook his head gently. Then the first thing out of his mouth was worth triple the cost of the sushi: "Ouch. I hate that, and that's on me. I should've done a better job keeping up with him."

I was floored by Tom's reaction. No one, and I mean no one, does a better job getting to know and keep up with customers than Tom. Tom knew Donnie, his family, his preferences, and so on. And Tom was constantly initiating contact. But take note of his reaction to hearing that he had lost (at least temporarily) a long-time customer. Did he blame the competitive dealer who made a low-ball offer to steal his customer? No. Did he accuse the customer of being irrational or cheap? Nope. Did he blame his own company for not supporting him well enough? Not at all. Where did Tom immediately place responsibility for losing a sale? Directly on himself. What a rare and refreshing reaction!

To help end our interview on a more positive note, I asked

TWO EXTRAORDINARY SALES PROFESSIONALS' KEYS TO SUCCESS

him to share a fun recent sales success where he really had to fight for the win. He told me a story about a woman who had bought cars from him for years but whose husband was a loyal Mercedes guy. She got her husband to look at the largest Volvo SUV, but he seemed committed to purchasing yet another Benz. Tom gathered every bit of intelligence he could about the husband's preferences and picked out what he believed to be the perfect car for him. The next Sunday morning, Tom filled the gas tank of that beautiful new Volvo and parked it right in front of this couple's home. Tom texted the wife, letting her know that he left the key in a flower pot on their porch and hoped they would enjoy the car. On Monday, the couple came in together and purchased the car.

As we were leaving the restaurant, I thanked Tom for investing the time with me and then asked how he kept himself humble and hungry after having been on top for so long. As serious as I've ever seen him, he looked at me and stated as plain as day: "Mike, I never take this for granted. I stay humble because the business is so hard, and all of this success could go away tomorrow if I let myself get complacent."

As different as Tom's business and personality are from Ron's, I see the very same drive, focus, humility, and work ethic in Ron, maybe even more so. I've enjoyed a front-row seat as Ron's career has progressed from prospecting his way into small and midsize companies to his current position where he works on the very biggest deals with the very biggest companies. If my life depended on winning a long, complex, hairy sale to a giant company, without blinking I'd put Ron in charge. And truth be known, I'm pretty sure he and I would both agree that if push came to shove, he could outsell me. He's so stinking good, works so stinking smart, and so stinking hard. Even after having watched him crush it year after year, he still amazes me when he describes what he's

SALES TRUTH

working on and how he preps his teams for enormous customer meetings.

What I find most surprising is that while Ron is in what feels like such a sexy, appealing business—representing one of the best known and most respected financial management firms in the world and selling to the biggest and best US companies, most of what he does to win giant deals is very unsexy. Many of us in sales like to fantasize about what the very best salespeople do when selling the very biggest deals for and to the very biggest companies. Well, having watched Ron do this successfully for years, what I am about to share may disappoint you. While Ron is a special human being whom I love dearly, and he's smart and focused and mature and wise and disciplined and has just the right temperament to thrive in the industry in which he sells, the #SalesTruth as best as I can surmise is that Ron executes the fundamentals of large-company business-to-business selling better than anyone I've met. He is the very best in his entire industry because he is the very best at the basics.

If you were to poll Ron's coworkers, including everyone from the executive suite to the client service teams or to a person, each and every one would tell you that he is fanatical about these particular aspects of selling:

1. **Preparation.** Ron is the poster child when it comes to preparing for customer meetings and presentations. He leaves absolutely nothing to chance. As crazed as Tom was about setting up the cars on his lot to give him the best chance of presenting the perfect one, Ron is more crazed about learning everything he can about his prospective client's situation and then preparing his company's team to meet with that prospect. Everyone at his company understands that if it's Ron's deal, then they

TWO EXTRAORDINARY SALES PROFESSIONALS' KEYS TO SUCCESS

are going to be asked to do more work on the front end. In fact, Ron shared that over the past few years, he actually invests more energy selling internally, getting team members ready to go face-to-face with prospects, than he does selling externally.

- 2. Practice.** If they were truly honest, most salespeople would admit that they expend a pathetically low amount of energy practicing for early stage sales calls or even for later stage presentations. It's a pretty sad commentary that sellers admit that the majority of the time, they are just winging it. Unlike professional athletes who spend hours laboring on practice fields, driving ranges, free throw lines, and batting cages, most salespeople don't practice at all, and the ones that do, skimp. Not so for Ron. Not only does he insist that the entire team presenting to the prospect must meet to rehearse the day prior to the big meeting, they practice everything, even how they will introduce themselves. Just for grins, how do Ron's requirements for practicing before a big meeting compare to yours? What minimum standards are in place to ensure you (and/or your colleagues) are truly ready for your precious moment in the spotlight? Who is coaching the difficult engineer or the sales support specialist on what not to say? Whether it's how you share the agenda and introduce team members, or how you are going to highlight key differentiators that set your company apart without sounding like you are belittling your competitors, where and how are you practicing and who is providing feedback and coaching? Some may consider Ron obsessive in his standard for prepping and practicing, but no one ever complains about his win-rate against his fiercest competitors.

SALES TRUTH

- 3. Personal.** Ron makes his selling personal and he takes it personally too. Along with his taskmaster reputation for getting his side ready to host customer visits or deliver big presentations, he is probably best known for this sales theory: Connection trumps Content. While everyone else is running around arguing about the language in one bullet point or trying to perfect a slide deck, Ron is constantly reminding himself and others that sales is personal and that people make buying decisions for personal reasons. That is part of the reason he has his team work so hard on how to personalize their introductions when kicking off a meeting. Right from the outset, he is looking to establish personal connections between his team members and the prospect's team members. It's also why, at times, Ron asks unusual questions early on during what is supposed to be a presentation. "When you looked at your calendar this morning and saw the two hours blocked with our firm, what were your first thoughts about this meeting and us?" Ron gets prospects to talk because he asks interesting, different questions that others typically are afraid to, and he learns valuable things key people are thinking and feeling that his competitors don't.
- 4. Follow-Up.** Rather than share general ways Ron follows up with his prospects, this story about how he successfully helped me to follow up with one of mine is even more valuable. Fifteen years ago, I was working for a great company and trying to close one of the largest deals of my career. Everything had gone really well throughout the entire twelve-month sales cycle, and we were pretty much down to waiting for a decision. It was killing me that I couldn't figure out what else I could do

TWO EXTRAORDINARY SALES PROFESSIONALS' KEYS TO SUCCESS

to increase our odds of winning, and I was sensitive about doing too much follow-up with my key contact at the account. There was also this nagging feeling I had a hard time articulating—I just had the sense that there was something in our final proposal that the prospect didn't love. I finally came to my senses and called Ron. It took me ten minutes to share the backstory on this massive opportunity, and then Ron asked a half-dozen questions to get a feel for where the deal stood. He paused for what felt like eternity but was likely only five seconds.

He audibly exhaled, sounding troubled, and said: "Mike, this doesn't feel right. Your gut is telling you something, and based on everything you shared, I just think you have more selling to do here. You need to follow up without coming across like an impatient, immature salesperson, and you must offer value to the prospect while doing it. Call your contact; you know she likes you. Tell her that you have the sense that they don't have all the critical information necessary to make the best decision. Then ask her what she sees as the Achilles' heel in your proposal. Just ask her flat out what she perceives as the weakness in what was proposed so you can clarify it or provide additional information." I took Ron's advice and called my contact. She thanked me profusely for asking the question and then spelled out exactly what her side's biggest concern was with my company's approach. It probably would have killed the deal if unaddressed. We scheduled another meeting with the prospect's key people and adapted our approach to address their concerns. We were awarded the contract, and I realized right then that Ron might be the very best salesperson I knew.

SALES TRUTH

Sales Friends, I grant you that Tom and Ron are exceptional sellers who have produced extraordinary results for a very long time. They truly are two of the very best salespeople I've ever seen, and my hope is that as you read their stories you were also inspired that their best practices, for the most part, are not extraordinary. Aside from each one's natural sales instincts, which are uniquely theirs, there is nothing they do on a day-to-day basis that you could not do. There is nothing magical or mysterious about how they go about their jobs. Both of these men became top-producing sales professionals through tremendous effort; they had to work at it, and they worked hard to master the fundamentals of selling. As you can see, both still work very hard.

Be encouraged that there is no secret sauce you're missing. Neither Tom nor Ron would tell you that their success came easily, and I know for certain that neither took shortcuts or think they've cracked the "secret sales code." And that is part of the reason I went so hard after the charlatans and false sales teachers in part I of this book. I know we all wish there were shortcuts to sales success, but there are not. Be wary, my friends. Be very wary. Follow the examples of the highly successful sellers I've shared here in part II, and run away as fast as you can from the peddlers who promise you they've got exactly the thing you need to become a sales superstar.