

Leigh Brown

Outrageous Authenticity

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The Trouble with Sales

You’re at a networking event.

You’ve got orders from your boss to make three hundred calls or contacts per day, and this is a prime opportunity. You’re supposed to push your product on every person here. You’re supposed to thrive on this kind of thing.

Instead, you’re pretty miserable.

Because the truth is, you hate networking events. Every time you go to one, you feel like a fraud. You don’t want to talk to *everyone* in the room. You want to have meaningful conversations with a few people, and if your product comes up, then hey, maybe you’ll talk about it. But you really don’t want to bring it up on purpose. And you hate the way people stand away from you when they find out you’re in sales.

At the same time, you do want to take your business to the next level. You would like to have deeper, more meaningful relationships with your clients. You would like to make more money. You want to take care of your family and live the kind of life you imagine for yourself.

And let’s face it: you also love winning! You want your name on top of that leader board, because at your core, you love being number one. But you don’t want to win using the traditional methods. Those just are not working for you. You need to sell in a way that makes you feel genuine instead of squirrely.

You need to sell with authenticity.

Outrageous Authenticity (Out of the Box, into Your Skin)

Jim Rohn's famous definition of insanity goes, "If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll keep getting what you've always got."

You can keep on trying to fit into the mold of what everyone says a salesperson should be: pushy, missing a conscience, willing to say or do anything to make a dime. And if you do that, you'll keep getting the results you've always gotten. You'll make ends meet, but you won't be all that happy. You might even question whether or not this career is right for you.

Or you can tear down that old image of what a salesperson is and remake it—your way. Instead of struggling to be what you're "supposed to be," you can be who you are. You can let your personal authenticity redesign the way you sell and live.

And once you let authenticity loose in your life, everything changes.

You start to engage with the public in a new way. Folks understand that you're not trying to force them into decisions; instead, you're guiding them to their right decision. The resistance that you have to selling comes down, and your results go up. You get those higher numbers, those awards, those better client relationships that you've been wanting.

You're no longer afraid to call yourself a salesperson. But more than that, you're not afraid to be who you are.

Your authenticity becomes so honest that it seems outrageous by modern standards. When you start to own your beliefs and speak out about them, what you're really starting is an authentic exchange of ideas. You're communicating honestly, and you're growing and enjoying yourself like you never have before.

You're living out your own outrageous authenticity.

The "No Bullshit" Realtor®

My clients named me the "No Bullshit" Realtor®. That title is the end result of a years-long journey of learning to be outrageously authentic, both in sales and life.

I grew up in a farm family, and I learned the value of money early. My first job was picking up black walnuts for my Papaw—twenty-five cents for each five-gallon bucket I filled. My dad was in sales as a Realtor® and my mom worked at the TV station. My sister and I used to drink half a gallon of Kool-Aid and then pour in more water to make it last. We never went without, but there was no money for extras, so I learned what it is to stretch a dollar.

My first jobs in sales during and after college were waitressing, bartending, stockbroking, and selling chainsaws for Husqvarna. At Prudential, I was the classic cold-call cowboy. Dialing for dollars, baby! (Yeah, I hated that.)

But my biggest test in sales authenticity came later.

I joined my daddy in real estate in 2000. We made a great team, and eventually we bought a franchise with RE/MAX and had lots of great agents. We were doing just fine.

Then the dark years hit.

I'll never forget, it was July 31, 2007 when American Home Mortgage went under. After that, the economy was all downhill. The old real estate selling model of fluff and flattery didn't do a bit of good anymore. It didn't matter how much you *loved* someone's house or dog or kids' artwork on the fridge. The people I met were barely holding it together. They were out of work, and they couldn't afford their houses anymore.

Small talk isn't going to help these people, I realized. They need someone who can ask very hard, personal questions. They need no-frills honesty.

So I got educated on short sales. I learned how to ask those hard questions—my way. Every time new sellers came into my office, I had three things waiting on my conference room table: a bottle of Pepto, a bottle of wine, and a box of Kleenex. “Pick your poison,” I told them when they sat down, “because we're going to talk about this, and it's not going to be pretty. But we're going to find a solution.”

We did find solutions, and a lot of times those solutions were painful. But my clients knew that I understood what I was talking about. They knew that I meant everything I said. “Leigh will tell it to you straight,” they admitted. “She won't bullshit you. She's the real deal.”

Those were hard years. But the authentic belief I held that I could help people if I was honest with them got us all through it. Not only did my team help many hundreds of families, but our business actually grew during the dark years. And that had everything to do with authenticity.

Outrageous Sales Coach

The outrageous authenticity that made me a successful salesperson in real estate works the same wonders for anyone, no matter what you're selling. I know, because I've been coaching salespeople from all kinds of different industries for years.

I speak to over ten thousand people every year on the power of authenticity in sales, and I reach thousands more online. I'm a contributor to several different industry news sources. I have appeared on NPR, HGTV, and CNBC, and I've been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Money Magazine*, among other publications.

I don't just talk about selling with authenticity. I practice it. I've been selling houses since 2000, and my name is in both the RE/MAX and RPAC hall of fame. I've earned the RE/MAX lifetime achievement award, and I've been listed on *The Wall Street Journal's* REAL Trends US Top 200 team more than once.

But the real reason I know outrageous authenticity works for anyone is this:

Every time I speak, people call me, email me, and send me letters and private messages. “I used what you said, and I sold an extra house,” they say. Or, “I tried this out, and I spent Sunday with my family instead of working. When I went back to the office on Monday, my business took off.”

The results are always very heartfelt and authentic. Not only are these people improving their sales, they’re improving their industries. They’re improving the lives of their consumers by serving them better, and best of all, they’re improving their own lives by being true to who they really are.

And do you know what? You’re next.

Motivation Station

This book is designed to be your boost up to outrageous authenticity.

Read the whole thing first, start to finish. It’s short. It’s entertaining. Trust me, you can do this.

Then, come back to these chapters to give yourself an authentic boost when you need it. On those days when you’re in a rut, your business is slumping, and you feel awful, reread some of these principles and ideas. If you’re feeling jaded about social media, read the social media chapter. If you’re worried about voicing an opinion that might tick off some of your friends, read the chapter about embracing criticism.

Use these concepts to reconnect with yourself when life is tough, and they will help you. They will give you that little bit of motivation you need to carry on.

Be Who You Are, Proudly

You’ve been trying to fit the mold of what a salesperson should be for a long time. But it hasn’t worked, and the truth is that it’s never going to. If you want success, you have to get it your way.

It’s time to reengage with who you are.

This book will help you reconnect with yourself and your beliefs. Becoming outrageously authentic means reinventing a belief system that says, “It’s okay if somebody disagrees with me.” By embracing what you believe and consistently sharing that with other people in a respectful, non-confrontational way, you’ll earn trust and respect. Your own authenticity will allow you to better find out what your customers’ needs are so you can help them make better decisions.

And they will love you for it.

Never be afraid to have an opinion. Be who you are—proudly. You sell more that way. And the benefits of outrageous authenticity don't stop at better sales numbers. Not only will your authenticity boost your business, but your life will be different, too—because you'll finally feel like you're in charge of it again.

You're outrageously authentic. And everybody benefits.

Leigh Brown

Outrageous Authenticity

Chapter 1: The “Salesperson” Paradigm Shift

Secret Agents

The Myth of the Pushy Salesperson

Shift Your Paradigm

Reconnect with the Real You

Secret Agents

I teach classes to an average of three hundred real estate agents at a time. When I get up on that stage, one of the first things I ask them is, “Raise your hand if you’re a consultant.”

Two hundred hands shoot up in the air. I give them a nod. “Okay,” I say then, “now raise your hand if you’re an advisor.” Another seventy-five hands go up.

Finally, I ask them this: “Now, raise your hand if you’re a salesperson.”

You might think they all raise their hands for that one. But you’re wrong.

Maybe two hands show up over that crowd of three hundred people. So then what does that make the rest of them?

I call the other 298 people “secret agents.” They’re out there hiding behind their fancy job titles. They simply will not admit to being who they are.

And real estate isn’t the only industry suffering from this epidemic. Salespeople all over the world are doing the same thing. Why? Because they haven’t figured out yet that there’s a whole lot of success and satisfaction to be gained from owning their identities.

They haven’t yet experienced what it’s like to be an outrageously authentic salesperson.

The Outrageously Authentic Salesperson

What does it mean to be an outrageously authentic salesperson?

An outrageously authentic salesperson sells more product and gets more repeat business because he or she creates real, honest connections with consumers. That's because you truly believe in the product and company that you represent—and you aren't afraid to give your honest opinion to customers.

When that happens, your sales numbers shoot through the roof, because your customers—now loyal, raving fans—know that they can trust your outrageously authentic guidance in helping them make purchasing decisions.

This is the way sales should be. So how did we get to the state we're in—where only two out of three hundred salespeople in a room will admit that they're in sales?

The Myth of the Pushy Salesperson

So many salespeople are reluctant to identify themselves because of one simple fact: we've been fed the same tired myth of what it means to be in sales for so long that even we have come to believe it's true.

We're all familiar with the stereotypical image of a salesperson. Most commonly, this is the used car lot or insurance salesman, a pushy, shady guy with slicked back hair, wearing a polyester sports coat. He greets his customers with a big, insincere smile and proceeds to talk to them like they're a choice piece of meat.

Like many myths, this one may seem to have some small basis in real experience. At some point in our lives, we've all been on the customer side of this bad sales equation. You go to the department store and all you need is a pair of black pants. But you get that one salesperson who pesters the living daylights out of you instead of just showing you the one thing you need and helping you get on your merry way.

Or worse, you get an aggressive salesperson who tries to talk you into wanting something else entirely. They push, push, push, trying to get you to make a decision that you don't want to make.

But the pushy salesperson paradigm doesn't take into account the actual needs of customers. It doesn't respect their budget, their intelligence, or their time. And it doesn't honor that customer as a human being—a person with his or her own set of needs, beliefs, and preferences. To be a pushy salesperson is to be an inauthentic salesperson.

And that is why it doesn't work—not long-term, anyway.

Shift Your Paradigm

Selling doesn't have to be icky, but because so many people perceive that it is, we get stuck in the mindset of thinking of what we do as something to be embarrassed of.

So how do you marry the negative public perception of what a salesperson is with the reality that most people need a salesperson in their lives every now and then, to help them make the best purchasing decision?

Simple. You shift your paradigm of what it means to be in sales.

It's time for Realtors® and other sales professionals to wash our hands of that image of the fake, pushy salesperson once and for all, and leave it behind without a backwards glance.

That is not who you are. And that is not what you do.

The new salesperson is authentic. And this shows in his or her ability to connect honestly and authentically with each potential customer who walks through the door.

By embracing your own authentic self, you'll show others that you're not afraid to stand up and speak your mind. And when you're known for that kind of honesty, people recognize that you're not the kind of person who would say anything to make a sale.

Instead, they know they can trust you to say what you really think, and to give them advice straight from the hip. You're not going to waste their time, you're going to honor it. You're going to honor them.

Your authenticity is what will get them there in the first place, and it is what will keep them coming back.

Reconnect with the Real You

Your most successful salespeople out there are masters of authenticity. They use this to win over their secret weapon: the repeat client.

The very best salespeople are masters of asking questions and hearing the answers, and then asking *more* questions. They are masters of remembering birthdays, knowing your favorite color, and calling you when they have tickets to a sporting event that they know that you would love, because it's your favorite team. They are masters of memory and human connection.

In short, the very best salespeople are the best because they pay attention. They connect you not only to the product that they have to sell, but also to other things that are relevant and beneficial to you.

This successful, authentic salesperson is the complete opposite of what people perceive to be the standard salesperson.

So why is it that we let the negative perception of a salesperson control what we think, to the point that those of us in sales won't say we're in sales? Instead of taking that paradigm apart and rebuilding it, we just pretend it doesn't exist.

Well, not any more. Welcome to that sorely needed paradigm shift.

This book will walk you through your own path to achieving outrageous authenticity. Each chapter covers an important aspect of how to get back in touch with who you are and what you believe, and how to connect with the people in your life to maximize and fulfill your potential—not just in your career, but in all aspects of your life.

Define your personal authenticity. The first and most critical thing you'll do is to figure out what your belief system is and how you articulate that so you can positively impact the lives of others. Without that, you're just one more person adrift.

Present yourself to the world authentically. There's a time and a place for being a secret agent. But unless you are in the CIA or the KGB, you've got to let people know who you are and what you do. Only then will they be able to find you and recognize your value.

Use social media right. In this generation, you can reach people where they are before you ever talk to them. If you don't know how to properly use and harness social media to brand yourself and raise your profile *and* your credibility, you squander that opportunity.

Know what you're selling. Today's consumer has an incredibly well-tuned bullshit meter. If you don't know your product, they will sniff that out in a heartbeat, and they are not going to want to buy what you're selling.

Have an opinion and embrace criticism. Once you know who you are and you put that out there, you're going to be criticized. But every critical moment leads to conversation. And conversation leads to sales.

Branding with consistency. Today's consumer craves a consistent environment, so they always know what to expect. Creating an authentic public image through your collateral materials reiterates that the messaging you're putting out there is based on the real you.

The next horizon. When you are authentic in one aspect of your life but not in others, then you're really not authentic at all. Embracing your own authenticity in all areas of your life deepens your most important relationships and attracts new opportunities.

Outrageous authenticity requires mastery of each of these steps. And the first place to begin is to become reacquainted with who you are, what you believe, and what you hold most dear.