



## Activated Selling™

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Preface:

My colleague Brian and I made our way carefully across the frozen sidewalk. It was dusk on an icy November day in the frozen Midwest, and we'd just finished up a software demo for a prospective client. It had not gone well. The audience glared at us from around the conference table. With arms crossed tightly against their chests, they peppered us with questions that sounded more like accusations.

We knew what had happened. Our ruthless competitor had visited with the client just days before. Their primary strategy was to verbally rip on our company and our character – and sometimes that strategy worked.

Suddenly, in the fading light, I saw one of the key members of the selection committee leave the building and trudge toward the parking lot. “Wait here!” I said to Brian. Without knowing exactly what I planned to do, I sprinted across the frozen lawn, my dress shoes crunching through the icy crust of snow. “Janet!” I shouted out.

She looked skeptically at the skinny, 6’ 5” Texan dashing toward her, trying to decide if she should make a break for her car.

When I got up alongside her, I quickly poured out my disappointment with the meeting. I asked if perhaps we could buy her dinner and have a second chance to make a first impression. I explained that we had come thousands of miles, and how excited we'd been to compete for their business. I knew that we could solve their business challenges—but equally important, whatever their final decision, I hoped we would all be friends. In short, I told her the intimate truth as I saw and believed it to be.

In spite of Brian's horrified expression throughout this entire exchange, the end result was a dinner invitation, half-a-dozen follow-up meetings, and a signed deal one month later! Not only that, but we also cemented a multi-year relationship that resulted in vastly higher future sales to the client—and a friendship that endures to this very day.

What began that day as an unplanned “Hail Mary” pass, soon took root in my brain. I began to wonder how this little one-act play might be applicable to the sales process in general, and I began to formulate the theories that you will find in this book. Many years of study in the principles of Method Acting have helped to refine and reinforce these theories—and to create what I believe to be the best advanced sales system in the world.

At this point I must point out that Activated Selling does not replace fundamental sales training, but rather serves as an indispensable supplement to it. I will not be telling you to, “call high”, “sell solutions,” “research your prospects,” or “create detailed project maps.” I am assuming that you have a basic command of the geography of sales, and that you are turning to my technique to find that missing element that keeps you from becoming the very best at what you do.

So how can I assert that Activated Selling is the best system in the world?

You've heard all your life that there are certain qualities that cannot be taught to a salesperson. "Either you've got it, or you don't," is the common refrain. What this system will teach you, however, is exactly those things that most people say, "cannot be taught." Empathy, situational awareness, "narrative flow," adaptability, and many other key characteristics can indeed be taught through the principals contained in the following chapters. I know this because I have helped countless individuals obtain these skills.

So if *you're* ready...let's get started!

## **Chapter I – Your Teachers Lied To You**

Let me ask you this: How many business books, blogs and posts have you read in the past five years? How about material on sales strategy, marketing, and motivation? Whether you've slogged through two books or two hundred, they all had something in common. They all promised you "BETTER RESULTS!", "MORE MONEY". "GREATER HAPPINESS!", and "WINNING STRATEGIES!"

They were also filled with painful (and often fruitless) exercises, a few funny stories, and lots of silly chatter. Additionally, many of these books seem to enjoy completely demoralizing you by describing how the author turned fourteen cents into sixty three million dollars by the time he or she was 24 years old.

The biggest problem with these books, however, is that they are based on the expectation that you will learn skills and master strategies that may be completely foreign to you.

If I told you that I was going to train you as a professional cyclist in order for you to win the Tour de France, you would tell me I was crazy. If I proposed to make you Heavyweight Champion of the World, or a Noble Laureate in physics, you would similarly dismiss my claims.

But what if I told you that I was going to teach you to ride a bicycle? Or make a fist? Or be a competent practitioner of basic arithmetic? "Uh, James," (I can hear you saying it now,) "Everybody already *knows how* to ride a bike, make a fist, and add and subtract numbers."

Excellent, now we're getting somewhere!

Here is what I am going to do for you in the next hundred-or-so pages: Based on the principles of Method Acting, I am going to teach you how to organize your thinking and focus your behavior using simple strategies that you already know how to perform—just because you are a competent adult with a range of life experience. I will show you how you can apply your basic powers of observation, and your own expressive emotions to give you the strongest possible chance of winning every deal, every sale, and every negotiation that you enter into.

To extend my previous metaphor, all *you* will need to do is to know when it's time to hop on your bike, recognize when the other guy is making a fist, and make sure that your numbers all add up correctly! In short, I will not ask you to do anything that you do not *already know how to do*.

Yes, there are additional helpful exercises—but in keeping with the nature of this book, they will be fun and they will be useful. Most importantly they will be simple extensions of basic behaviors and skills that you already perform a million times a day. I will be encouraging you to watch and to listen to the world around you with an extra dose of mindfulness and attention. The fact of the matter is, when it comes to other people (or even ourselves), there are very few surprises. In the words of a great former TV show, “The truth is out there!”

At this point, you are probably wondering what all this has to do with acting. And what in the world is *Method Acting* anyway?

At its most basic level, Method Acting is simply the act of truthful living. The fact of the matter is, all of us are acting *all the time*. We are acting; our spouses and children are acting; our friends are acting, and our sales prospects are acting up a veritable storm.

Now before you get offended and think that I am calling you inauthentic or worse, just imagine this; how do you behave while sitting on the porch with your spouse drinking iced tea on a warm summer evening? What does your face look like? Is it relaxed and happy? How does your voice sound? Is it stressed and moving toward the higher registers, or is it low and soft? Are your legs tightly crossed and are you leaning dramatically forward, or are you more likely to be at ease in your chair?

Now, think of yourself in a friendly meeting with your boss. Move the camera back to your boss's point of view. Your brow is slightly furrowed (to indicate that you are considering the merits of what she is saying.) Your head tilts a few degrees to the side (to indicate that you are listening). You ask precise questions in a firm and emphatic voice. Perhaps you have a look of wry amusement and you snort a quick laugh from time to time to show that you've gotten her jokes.

We could run through any number of other scenarios—but you can imagine what those might be. Your behavior and your public persona will differ, often quite dramatically, when you are speaking with your subordinates at work (if you are a manager), your child's teacher at school, the cop who pulls you over for speeding, and the guy who serves you your morning coffee at Starbucks.

Did anyone have to teach you how to act in each of these situations? Oh sure, somewhere in the distant past, your mother scolded you for being disrespectful to an adult. Your school friends probably teased you for acting inappropriately around a girl (or boy) at some point. And certainly you have received all sorts of cues—both overt and subtle—from co-workers,

neighbors, and friends which have guided you toward appropriate behavior in the many life situations in which you find yourself.

But interestingly, the most basic “acts” that you perform are not acts at all. They are really just universal human expressions of standard human emotions.

You would not need to know the details of an aboriginal society in New Guinea to know if one of its members was afraid, or angry, or sad. You do not need to be able to speak German to understand if a person from Munich is in a hurry, or lost, or fighting with his girlfriend.

It turns out that the “game faces” each of us puts on in varying situations in our own lives are simply variations on these universal behaviors. Which gets back to my original point. We all know how to act—and we all know what emotions and motivations are being expressed by others who are acting for our viewing pleasure.

As we begin the journey of Activated Selling, I’ll ask you to open your eyes, your ears, and your mind to the people around you. I’ll ask you to share in their pleasure, and feel their pain. I’ll expect your level of empathy for others to grow, and your own self awareness to increase. I hope this sound like a good recipe for more than just sales success. I truly believe that by following the lessons in this book, all of your personal relationships will grow and prosper. And if that is not the definition of success, I don’t know what is!

Throughout the book, I will use terms like “performance” to denote the sales process, and “actors” and “players” to describe your colleagues and prospects. This by no means suggests that I consider the sales process to be contrived or artificial. Quite the contrary, I hope to express how real life can match the organic beauty of the stage and screen, and how you can truly express yourself in ways you may not yet have imagined.

I’ll expect you to rely upon your natural emotions, and your heartfelt sense of what is right and true. By following the advice in this book, you will not have to sit around waiting for artistic inspiration to strike. Rather, you will be able to employ the concepts and techniques that I describe to produce sales performances of great elegance—a word that we don’t normally associate with our profession!

As the greatest acting teacher of all time Constantin Stanislavski said to his students, *“If I were you, I would give up chasing this phantom, inspiration. Leave it to that miraculous fairy, nature, and devote yourself to what lies within the realm of human conscious control.”*