

You Need to Sell, Sell, Sell

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

A strange misconception among many people, especially professionals, is that there is something wrong with selling. When I talk about selling, I am referring to any number of sales activities:

- Selling yourself in an interview
- Selling yourself in a cover letter to an employer
- Selling yourself to a client
- Selling yourself to any other person
- Packaging yourself in a "sellable" way

In every single interaction we have with others, we are selling. The more you sell, the better you will do in your life and career. The best and most successful people are always selling. You should have no preconceived notions about the value of selling because it is among the most important skills you can have. If you understand sales, you understand and control your life.

Several years ago, I was sitting in my friend's office who was a window washer. While he was on the phone, I picked up a magazine about window washing from his table. In it, I read an article which appeared to be part of a series. The series was about a man with a window washing squeegee and a towel who was transported to various American cities with no money and given the task of getting back each day. He might be transported from Chicago to Miami one month. The next month they might send him from Chicago to a small town in Oregon. He could be sent anywhere in the country. The article was titled something like this:

Give me a squeegee and a towel and send me to any American city with no money. By the end of the day, I will have a steak dinner in the most expensive restaurant in town, spend the night in a nice hotel, and take a flight home in the morning.

After being dropped off in a city in the morning, the window washer would go from business asking to wash their windows. Regardless of the city, he would always make enough money for his steak, hotel, and flight home. When I read this in the early 90s, flights often cost close to \$1,000, so what this window washer was doing was really impressive. Without any knowledge of the city he was in and with no contacts, he would end the day with clients and plenty of money.

I remember this series exceptionally well because it inspired me to understand the power of sales and how it can completely change your life regardless of your other skills. When you know how to sell something, you can do well wherever you go.

I want you to take a moment and think about the power of the window washer's story. What makes this story so remarkable to me is that being a window washer requires no education and no investment. All it requires is the ability to wash a window, which is teachable in a few minutes, and to find people who will pay you for the service. The ability to sell the service is obviously among the most important elements of this job.

What impressed me so much about this particular story is it shows if you have the ability to sell, you can make something from nothing. When you have the ability to sell, you are in control of your life and what happens to you. Knowing how to sell something is a key to survival, advancement, fame, and fortune--if you are after these things.

I believe selling is the most important career skill you can have. All people are involved in sales, even if they don't realize it. However, there is some sort of bias against [effective sales people](#). It's often considered "uncouth" or not businesslike to be good at sales. People often feel if they try to sell something, it will reflect badly on them. People feel sales is a low-class profession. When I hear people talk about sales like this it makes me sick. Selling is the most important career skill imaginable and the most important people in the world are absolute masters at sales.

Every time there is a presidential election in the United States, the winner is determined by that candidate's ability to sell the notion that he or she would be the better president. The winning candidate debates with his or her opponents, gives speeches, creates taglines and slogans, and travels all over the country trying to spread his or her ideas. When the candidate gets into office, he or she travels all over the world trying to sell those same ideas to other countries. The President tries to sell these ideas to the Congress and the Senate. The President tries to sell these ideas to constituents as well.

If you are the [CEO of a corporation](#), your job involves sales. Think about auto industry CEOs who travel to Washington asking for money. Their ability to obtain money involves their ability to sell to politicians. They, too, are in sales.

The [most important jobs](#) involve sales, as do the least important. If you want time off from a job, your ability to get that time off will depend on your ability to make a sale. If you want a raise, it may depend on your ability to sell your superiors on the reasons why you deserve a raise. Every single thing we do is about making a sale. Getting a good grade in school is often about making a sale. Everything we do is about making sales.

I used to know a guy who sat in his apartment all day not doing much of anything. He watched television and occasionally made a few phone calls. He smoked a lot of cigarettes and had about five or six beers each night. He was also single and probably always would be. He had a pretty lousy career. He was at least 40 pounds overweight and, despite being in his mid-30s, hadn't had a girlfriend since he was in high school. What was this guy's problem? He didn't think it was cool to sell himself. He wouldn't sell himself to an employer, a potential mate, or anyone. He didn't care. I haven't spoken to the guy in a long time, but I remember he was always making fun of people who sold stuff, making fun of commercials on television and making fun of people trying their hardest to do well in life. This guy was someone who needed to learn how to sell.

Think about the people you know who aren't selling themselves or putting their best foot forward. What would be different for them if they did? How would your life change as well?

Selling yourself is about more than simply telling others how good you are. It's also about showing others the value you can bring them. Things like being fit, being enthusiastic, taking care of yourself emotionally, taking advantage of opportunities presented to you, are all related to sales. Because you are paid by the market, you are a product. And because you are a commodity, you need to sell yourself and do so exceptionally well every chance you get.

A huge mistake a lot of people in the [job market](#) make is forgetting they are a product. Yes, you are a product. Everyone is a product. We are products because in order to make money and add value to the world, we have to get people to "buy in" to whatever services or skills we offer. Regardless of the job you have, people need to like you and/or what you're personally selling if you want to reach your full potential.

Selling yourself will really help you stand out in your job or in your job search. This means packaging yourself in the right manner. This is all about how you look and how you come across. In the most competitive jobs, employers can afford to be incredibly picky. If you go into a high paying investment bank, for example, you will see most new recruits are fit, sharp, and enthusiastic. Most investment banks can hire anyone they want, and they hire the people who make the best impression. This is how it is in a [competitive industry](#) such as this. In fact, one of the first times I met a group of investment bankers I thought they were male models--these people are very good at packaging themselves. What I want to see you do is make the most of who you are. This means packaging yourself to the best of your ability, always being at your best, and selling yourself.

I want you to develop your [sales skills](#) and to never be afraid to sell anything. Whatever your goal in life may be, becoming an effective salesman will help you achieve it.

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