The Accidental Salesperson
*How to Take Control of Your Sales Career and Earn the Respect and Income You Deserve (Second Edition)*

by Chris Lytle

**Selling on Purpose**
How to think and present like a sales pro.

**QUICK OVERVIEW**

Relatively few people seek out a career in sales. Instead, most people (maybe even you) unintentionally stumble into sales. By chance, or out of desperation, they take their first sales job and discover a career that can be both extremely lucrative and frustrating. That’s where Chris Lytle, author of *The Accidental Salesperson*, comes to the rescue. Lytle explains that his book isn’t a primer for beginners but a tool for those who want to thrive in sales. To that end, the recently released second edition of Lytle’s book focuses on helping you start selling *on purpose*.

Lytle’s book offers tips and strategies to streamline the sales process using duplicable systems. His book and accompanying online materials offer step-by-step instruction from beginning (getting the appointment) to end (developing and maintaining a relationship after the sale). One new chapter that is highlighted in this summary is “Presenting Like a Pro.” So whether you work with clients face to face or online, you’ll be better equipped to connect with your prospects. And every chapter has been updated to reflect changes in our culture and economy, as well as technology. Whether you’re a beginner or someone who has experienced some success in sales and wants to know how to consistently repeat that success, *The Accidental Salesperson* is a book you’ll want to read.

**APPLY AND ACHIEVE**

Are you busy all day, but still aren’t getting the sales results you want? If so, you may have fallen into the activity trap: You’re expending a lot of energy but aren’t moving forward. Author and sales trainer Chris Lytle explains that any move that doesn’t help you pitch a proposal to a qualified prospect, or get into a position to make that proposal, is wasted motion… and a waste of your valuable time.

The key to getting more sales isn’t simply making more calls, but to make each call or interaction with a client more meaningful. To help you focus on more profitable tasks, Lytle offers a list of eight “outputs” or activities that you should be doing and keeping track of each day. Read about them in the “Counting What Counts” sidebar. Take a moment now to evaluate your week’s “sales” activity. How many of your actions are among the **SUCCESS Points**

*From this book you’ll learn:*

• How to convey a professional image
• What activities you should be focusing on
• How to present more effectively
• Why you should stop making sales calls
eight outputs? Being honest with yourself about your activity is the first step toward getting the results you want.

When you were a little kid, you probably didn’t long for—or even imagine—a career in sales. Ask some local elementary school kids what they want to be when they grow up. You’ll find more future firefighters than prospective salespeople. How many children are anxiously anticipating a career of cold-calling, rejection handling, dealing with price-sensitive procurement officers, coping with delayed flights in center seats, and spending ninety nights a year sleeping in different hotel rooms all next to the same ice machine? For some of us, it just sort of worked out that way.

You may have “ended up” in sales as a second or third choice when something else didn’t work out. You may still be wondering if a career in sales is right for you.

It takes an accidental salesperson to know one. I was an accidental salesperson just like you. As a 1972 graduate with a B.A. in political science, I had three ways to use my degree and maximize the investment my parents had made in my education. I could go to law school, take a job in a politician’s office, or become a journalist and cover the political scene. Having eliminated law school and a political career within six weeks of graduating, I decided to pursue that career in journalism. I would become the next Walter Cronkite.

There was only one thing standing in the way of my master plan. The general manager at the local radio station announced during my first interview that he already had two newsmen. “Chris,” he said, “I could put you on as an advertising salesman.”

“But you don’t understand, Mr. Pricer,” I said. “I’m a political science major.”

“Chris, my offer still stands.”

My inner dialogue went this way: “I’ll do anything to get into broadcasting—sell.” My reasoning was that once I was in the door, I could work my way into the news department. “I’ll take it,” I said.

It took two weeks for me to disabuse myself of the notion that working my way into news was a good plan. The sales manager left every afternoon around four. The news director worked some nights until eleven, covering the city council meetings. The sales manager drove a Cadillac. The news director drove a beat-up Chevy Vega and constantly bemoaned his fate and income. He often berated the salespeople for making too much money.

At that point, I made “The Choice” to stay in sales. I purchased books on the subject. I attended fantastic seminars and devoured audiocassettes and later CDs on success and selling. I studied selling as hard as I’d studied political science, and it paid off.

A lot of accidental salespeople have learned to sell on purpose. But first, they have had to make “The Choice.”

Making the Commitment

Is sales right for you? “Hey, I was looking for a job when I found this one” is the mantra of millions of uncommitted workers today. When you make The Choice consciously and commit to your sales career, you gain a new sense of purpose. Adding that focus makes what you do more relevant.

Developing an obsession with doing things better is vital to success. Until you choose to do it better, no book, audio program, webinar, seminar, or personal growth guru can help you—no matter what your career.

Getting into sales accidentally makes it difficult, but certainly not impossible, to sell on purpose. Therefore, a crucial but simplistic step is to make some purposeful commitments:

- Make a commitment to yourself to succeed.
- Make a commitment to the company you represent.
- Make a commitment to your product or service.
- Make a commitment to your customers.
- Make a commitment to “do it better.”

MARKETING YOUR PROFESSIONALISM

You make The Choice when you consciously commit to your career in selling. In doing so, you gain a sense of purpose. Being able to say, “This is what I do,” and say it with pride and certainty, sets in motion undreamed-of opportunities for success. Choosing to focus on becoming an excellent salesperson is liberating precisely because it eliminates other options you are free to pursue, sometimes to your detriment. Every day, you make choices about exactly the kind of salesperson you are going to be.
Accidental salespeople do make sales, but they’re not exactly sure how they did it. Because they are in a reactive mode most of the day, they don’t feel that they have much control over who buys what. To them, sales involve “timing” and “luck.”

When you begin to sell on purpose, you immediately separate yourself from the crowd of people who are selling but who don’t really want to be. You have made The Choice. You’re going to sell on purpose. You have decided to have one good day after another. The next step is communicating this choice to your prospects and customers so that they can differentiate the “new you” from the “old you.” You have to market your professionalism to the prospect.

So many salespeople skip the step of marketing what they know to the prospect. Yet, if they don’t skip it, they soon discover they have an immediate point of differentiation.

What do you do behind the scenes that, if your customers knew you had done it, would make them feel more comfortable about doing business with you? Most of the work you do on behalf of your customers happens behind the scenes. Customers do not think about you as much as you think about them. They have many other problems and concerns competing for their attention.

Going the extra mile is fine. Marketing the fact that you’ve gone the extra mile is how you gain extra mileage from your efforts. The next time you meet with a prospect or customer, open the meeting with this phrase: “In preparing for this meeting, I....” Then quickly list two or three things you did to prepare. You will experience a new level of attention and respect from both clients and prospects. If you don’t tell them, they’ll never know. Remember the big question: What are you doing behind the scenes for your clients that, if your clients knew you were doing it, would make them feel more comfortable about doing business with you? Once you’ve answered the big question for yourself, tell your clients.

Did you hit your client’s website to gain information about the company? Make that known. Are you getting some extra training, taking a course, or reading a book that will make you capable of better service?

**Counting What Counts**

To sell on purpose you must be brutally honest with yourself about what you are really doing. You do a lot of things to get in position to make a proposal. Let’s look at some possible outputs and label them. Adapt these “truth in sales labeling” laws and you will never again call anything you do a sales call.

Here are eight sales outputs I recommend you start counting today:

1. **Seeds.** Tally the number of articles on business issues you mail, e-mail, or fax to a customer. For every article you send to a legitimate prospect, you count one “seed.”

2. **Letters.** Any introductory letter, thank-you note, or letter to clarify a point counts as one letter.

3. **Dials.** If you dial the phone to try to reach a prospect or customer, you get one dial. Dialing the phone may or may not result in a contact, but you have to start somewhere.

4. **Contacts.** If you accidentally (just kidding) get put through to the person you are dialing or if that person picks up his own extension, you get one contact.

5. **Schedule a Sales Conversation (SSC).** An SSC must be on both the salesperson’s and the prospective buyer’s calendars. The leading indicator of the health of your sales pipeline is the number of prospects who have you on their calendars for an SSC.

6. **Appointments Booked.** If you dial the phone, contact the person you want to talk with, and book an appointment, you get one appointment booked.

7. **Customer Needs Analyses Conducted.** If you have a meeting with a prospect that results in an exchange of information and needs, you get one customer needs analysis.

8. **Proposals.** If you present a solution and ask for an order for a specific amount of money, you have made one proposal. The proposal is the most important output you can make. The seven other outputs help put you in position to make the proposal.
Disclose it early in the meeting.

Have you read any relevant books about the client’s industry lately? Summarize the key points and share them with your client. Making a statement like, “I’ve been reading (blank) and one of the key points for me was (blank),” positions you as someone who is more impressively competent than the last salesperson who darkened his door.

Your customers have a choice of vendors. It may seem that price is the only point of differentiation in a product or service. However, in highly competitive businesses, how you sell what you sell may be more important than the product or service you sell.

How does your client know you’re a pro? Tell the client what you did to prepare. That lets the customer know what you did when he wasn’t looking. It helps you become known for what you know and do for the customer.

WHY YOU MUST STOP MAKING SALES CALLS

For years sales managers have asked their reports, “How many calls did you make today?” Their reports tell them what they want to hear because they end up calling everything they do a “sales call.” They delude themselves and their sales managers into believing they are being productive when they are merely being busy. And this busyness rarely leads to more business.

When you sell on purpose, you understand that selling is about two things:

1. Making a proposal to a qualified prospect (in person or online)
2. Getting into position to make a proposal to a qualified prospect

Making any move that doesn’t help you accomplish one of those two objectives is wasted motion.

Internet technology allows collaborative relationships across a larger platform. Information sharing can still occur in person, but increasingly this sharing is done online and can involve people in multiple locations simultaneously. Proponents say it accelerates the sales cycle and increases sales productivity because a salesperson can interact and follow up with more people more efficiently. I say, it may be the only way some companies will work with you.

Early in my career it occurred to me that I might be better off having multiple interactions with ten prospects at a time rather than having a couple of interactions with dozens or hundreds of prospects. By focusing on fewer prospects, I could maintain the momentum and build trust with a smaller number of prospects, who eventually became customers.

**When you quit counting calls, you can start counting the things that count.**

Adding Quality Rather Than Quantity to Your Meetings

“Quit making calls.” Not the sort of sales advice you expect from a book that purports to tell you how to sell more. But it’s sound advice. I vividly recall the day I came to that conclusion. I had been retained as a sales consultant by a firm that needed one. I asked to see the systems and tools already in place so that I could understand the process the sales managers were using.

“Here are the call [that word again] reports for last week. My salespeople are making a lot of calls, but they’re not closing anything,” the sales manager said with concern. “Maybe I should have them make more calls.”

Although making more calls seems to be a reasonable solution to any sales problem, many misguided sales managers mistake a flurry of activity for real productivity. After reading several of the reports the sales manager had received, I came to this entry: The sales rep had entered a description of his latest meeting with a prospect. It read, “Stopped by XYZ Company. Ed [the contact] was out. He was having lunch with a vendor at Happy Joe’s Pizza. Will call again tomorrow.” I read it again in disbelief. I wondered, why document something that did nothing to advance the sales process? When I asked the salesperson why he had taken the time to document what clearly was a wasted effort, he said, “We are required to make a minimum of five calls a day and that was one of them.” By calling everything he did a call, he was fooling himself and his manager into thinking he was doing his job.

See what I mean about the quality of the interaction? Greek orator and statesman Demosthenes said, “Nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true.”

And so I began my crusade to get salespeople to call what they do what it is. When all you have to measure is the number of “calls,” you get an inaccurate view of what it is you are really doing. Making calls becomes the goal rather than making sales.
When you quit counting calls, you can start counting the things that count. (See the sidebar, “Counting What Counts.”)

PRESENTING LIKE A PRO

Your presence makes your presentation more passionate and persuasive. At least it should. You will be more persuasive when you give off these three vibes:

1. I’m glad to be here.
2. I know what I’m talking about.
3. I love what I’m doing.

If I was in the room when you were making your sales presentation, would I see you standing tall, speaking with confidence, smiling, making eye contact, and being totally present and there for the customer? If you are worried about making the sale, or if you are afraid of getting up in front of people, it will show.

I have been asked if I get nervous before making a presentation. I can honestly answer, “I am nervous when I am not making a presentation, because that means I’m not making an income.”

That said, rehearsing your presentation is the best way I know to gain confidence quickly. The first person who hears a major presentation should not be the prospect.

Confidently Manage the Process

The process is how you and the prospect are working together. Is the atmosphere tense or laid-back? Is the prospect collaborative or combative?

Here’s how you go about managing the process: You stop delivering your content and you make a comment about the way you and the prospect are working together. A positive process comment might be, “You seemed more interested (or excited) when we were going over that last feature.” A negative comment might be, “You seem distracted. Did I lose you somewhere?”

This is not psychotherapy. It’s simply taking the prospect’s temperature instead of simply plodding forward with your presentation. When you sense the presentation is not going well, you need to stop it right there and work with your prospect to get it back on track. You may even have to abandon your written presentation and improvise based on the feedback you are getting. Most salespeople don’t even know they are allowed to make a process comment. Or they are too afraid to comment that the meeting is not going well and instead rush through their content without stopping to resolve any problems they and their prospect are having in working together.

Getting feedback throughout your presentation is paramount. Think of it as closing every page or stage of your presentation. You can elicit feedback and gauge interest all along by keeping prospects engaged. Before you change a slide or move to a new thought, ask one or two of the following questions:

• Does that make sense?
• Am I missing anything?
• What would you add?
• How close is this example to your situation?
• Are we together on that point?
• Do I understand your business?
• Have I restated your issues correctly?

You do have to provide information, demonstrate an understanding of the prospect’s problems and business situation, and prove your capabilities. But the tendency is to tell too much and ask too little.

IT GETS BETTER

The more presentations you make, the better you get. You develop a sense of timing. You create your own shtick. You have customer success stories that you tell that make your point better than a spec sheet can.

Go out and apply one or two of these ideas in a real situation. Note what worked and what didn’t. You will be a much stronger presenter the hundredth time than you will be the first time. But you have to start somewhere.

All that’s left for you to do is to ask for the order. You’ve earned it.
ACTION STEPS
Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you’ve learned. Here are a few questions and activities to get you started.

1. Have you made “The Choice” to be a professional salesperson?

2. Do you rely on luck, or can you duplicate your sales successes?

3. Identify the key points in your sales process.

4. What do you do to prepare for a meeting with a prospect or client? In your next meeting, be sure to explain what you did in preparation for the appointment.

5. Are you relying on price to sell your product or service? How can you create a competitive advantage by offering expertise, skill or value?

6. Are you counting what counts? Or are you simply staying busy? Remember to focus on activity that moves you forward in your sales process.

7. Practice your presentation at least once for yourself and once for someone who can give you helpful feedback on your voice, pitch, stance, mannerisms, etc.

About the Author
Chris Lytle is an entrepreneur, keynote speaker and trainer and best-selling author of The Accidental Salesperson. Since 1983, he has conducted more than 2,100 seminars. His current focus is on revolutionizing the ways sales managers conduct their sales meetings.

Recommended Reading
If you enjoyed this summary of The Accidental Salesperson, you may also want to check out:

Snap Selling by Jill Konrath

The Mackay MBA of Selling in the Real World by Harvey Mackay

The Little Red Book of Selling by Jeffrey Gitomer