

How to Market Yourself – Part One

By Ron McGowan

If you ask employment seekers what their biggest challenge is, most of them will tell you it is marketing themselves. They either hate it or are very uncomfortable with it. This is a major problem because their success is directly tied to how effective they are at marketing themselves. The good news is that marketing can be learned.

The main reason for their discomfort with marketing is ignorance. They don't understand it and assume that since they don't have a background in it, they won't be effective at it. The challenge is to unload their current perceptions about what marketing is and to accept the fact that, with hard work and being prepared to move out of their comfort zone, they can become effective at it.

The myth of the backslapping, loud, aggressive sales type is just that, a myth. Successful salespeople are professionals who are well trained, attend to the needs of their customers and are genuinely interested in helping them. They sell solutions to problems and products and services that satisfy a genuine need. They're also resilient. They've fallen flat on their face in front of customers many times before becoming successful. And they've endured a lot of rejection and bounced back from it. Some of the most successful salespeople are quiet, unassuming people – not quite the stereotype often attached to salespeople. The main reason why they're successful is that they're sincere. Their customers pick up on that because sincerity can't be faked.

The common view of what selling is about is pure bunk. The “gift of the gab” is not an asset – it's a liability. There's no such thing as a born salesman or saleswoman.

Successful sales people achieved their success through working hard, believing in the product or service they sell, knowing it inside out, knowing how it can benefit potential customers and by not being easily discouraged. These are characteristics that you must acquire. If you have any lingering thoughts that you're not good at selling yourself, you need to get rid of them. Your selling challenge is to communicate to a potential employer or client how they can benefit from using the skills and experience you have to offer. Not in a fancy, forced or insincere way but in the way of having a normal conversation with them. If you are a low-key individual, be assured that many successful sales people are like that too. The last thing a potential employer or client wants from you is a sales pitch. The primary reason employment seekers fail at selling is lack of preparation, or failing to do their homework before getting in front of an employer or client. To succeed, you need to be absolutely clear about the following questions:

1. **What do you have to sell?**
2. **Where are you going to sell it?**
3. **How are you going to sell it?**

What do you have to sell?

Most employment seekers are weak in this area. They've never taken the time to thoroughly analyze themselves and the skills they have to offer. It's no longer sufficient to identify yourself as an engineer, accountant, MBA, graphic designer, or whatever. You need to be very clear about the skills you have to offer, and more importantly, why a

potential employer or client would be interested in them. How will hiring you make their lives easier? What problems and challenges do they have that you can help them with? As you begin to analyze your education, experience and the skills you've acquired, play devils' advocate with yourself. Put yourself in the shoes of the employer or client you want to work with and take a "so what?" attitude towards your skills and experience and be prepared to respond to that attitude if they project it.

The key to success is to know as much about their business as you can and to be absolutely convinced that your skills and experience will help them. If you are convinced of this and have thoroughly analyzed their business, they will pick up on that. Most people don't do this. They often assume that their skills and experience speak for themselves. They don't. It's your responsibility to explain to the employer or client how they can benefit from hiring you. They're not interested in how many people you managed in the past, or how big the budget was for the department you managed. If you have a lot of experience and your background includes operating at a senior level, you need to be careful about how you come across, especially if you're dealing with a small organization. If you're not careful you might unwittingly scare them off. Your challenge is to assure the business owner or manager you're dealing with that you will support them and can offer solutions to the problems and challenges they face.

If you stay focused on the key question that is always on the back of the mind of employers or clients, i.e. "How will hiring this person make my life easier?" you will have your share of success. If you can demonstrate to the employer or client that you've done your homework and know their business, they'll be impressed. And be prepared for them to test you. If you are an accountant, for example, they may give you their most recent financial statements and ask you to point out areas where they can improve. If you are a professional, you won't be intimidated by this. Just be careful that in your eagerness to impress them, you don't give your expertise away. The trick is to demonstrate that you are a professional and can help them with the challenges and problems they have.

Ron McGowan has helped thousands of college/university grads and experienced people to find work for over ten years. His book "How to Find Work in the 21st Century" <http://www.trafford.com/00-0131> is currently in use at over 200 colleges, universities and secondary schools.