

Robert: Hi, everyone. This is Robert Middleton of Action Plan Marketing and the Action Plan Marketing Club. Today, I'm interviewing Mark Slatin of True Colors Consulting. Welcome to the call, Mark. I think we're going to have a great interview on "Trust-Centered Marketing and Selling."

Mark: Thanks so much, Robert, for having me. I appreciate the opportunity to join with your audience.

Robert: First, I'm going to tell my audience a little bit about you, and then we'll get right into the interview.

Mark Slatin helps his clients attract and retain loyal customers through trusting relationships. He believes you don't have to sell your soul to sell.

His firm, True Colors Consulting, specializes in coaching, speaking and training service professionals throughout the US. Mark's career in sales and sales management in the Fortune 500 has spanned 25 years. He designed the "Trust-Centered Selling" program, a business development program for service professionals.

He's a staff instructor at the Maryland Association of CPAs. He's a contributing editor to *On Point* magazine, a quarterly publication reaching the business products and service industry. Lastly, as an adjunct professor at Loyola University, Mark teaches sales management and strategies to MBA students.

That is quite a resume, Mark. As we were talking, you told me that you had left the corporate sales world and opened your consulting practice after leaving OfficeMax after being with them for 13 years. You left in 2007, and your

team, you told me, had a record sales of over \$50 million and experienced double-digit growth three consecutive years.

That begs the question, “Why on earth did you leave when you were on such a roll?”

Mark: Well, that is a great question, and I will tell you that was really a difficult decision for my wife and I because we were, in fact, in the middle of one the best years that I had been with the organization. Yet, it was probably time to move on.

What had happened is what I call “quarter-itis.” Quarter-itis is a focus on Wall Street and what they thought of what you were doing. That resulted in a number of decisions that someone in management, like myself, had to carry out, and I couldn’t quite understand all of them, if you know what I mean.

I loved the coaching and the training aspects of my role and being in front of clients, but I found that over the years, I was doing less and less of what I really enjoyed and it was probably time to move on.

Robert: Welcome to the self-employed world.

Mark: Thank you.

Robert: For the last couple of years, you’ve been doing quite well, right? You’ve done all kinds of training in all kinds of places and worked with a lot of small firms, professional firms and small businesses, and some bigger businesses too, right?

Mark: Exactly. I spent a lot of time in the professional services area, so for example, IT, accountants, lawyers, engineers, other service professionals, but also still some traditional, industrial, commercial sales organizations.

The real audience for me is people who are in relationship-oriented selling. If you're in a transactional sale like a retail store or a one-off sale, probably not the best fit for me, you know what I mean? Those people in relationship-oriented sales are people that I tend to help the most.

Robert: Now, Mark doesn't do many public programs. Once in a while, he does some webinars, so we're lucky to get him on this call. Mostly, he goes in-house to companies and does them onsite. So I'm going to kind of pick Mark's brains here about this whole concept of trust-based marketing and selling.

So, everybody is wondering, Mark, "How do I grow my business? How do I market and sell more effectively? What are the techniques? What are the strategies? What do I do? How do I do it?" The theme that you keep coming back to first of all, perhaps more important than anything else, is, "Learn how to build trust." Is that correct?

Mark: Yeah, that's exactly right, Robert. I think we tend to get gun-shy and almost have a self-defeating attitude because of the myths, the myths about selling and what wins in selling. We think it's expertise.

Oftentimes, we hear that, and if you're in one of the trades, it's features: the fastest, the quickest, the hottest. Low price is another common one. And then processes.

We hear a lot about “the one with the best sales process and the best follow-up.”

Well, all those things are extremely important. Don't get me wrong. But at the end of the day, it is people who buy from people they perceive as trustworthy. That's what makes the difference because relationships are not linear. They're not just something you can drive through a process.

Now, don't get me wrong. It's important to have a process and systems to do what you do, but at the end of the day, people are still buying from people and people are complex. They're not always rational.

Robert: You know, I'm a believer in a great selling process, but if you haven't built the trust, at the end of it, they're going to say, “We'll think about it” because somehow people don't want to do business with people they don't trust. It's way beyond the sales process.

Mark: Exactly. What we often lead ourselves into believing is what they're telling us is the real reason we don't get the deal. For example, things like price or features, those are real tangible and they're also objective, right?

They're easy for the buyer, whoever that may be, a client, to tell you that, “Well, someone else came in lower” or “Someone else has more CPAs,” more attorneys or whatever the case may be when the reality is there's something that had to do on the trust level.

They're not as comfortable sharing that because it may be personal, it may involve conflict, it may just be something that you can argue about, or it may be a personality issue,

especially if you're in a bid situation where they're supposed to be as objective as possible.

Robert: No one is as objective as possible. Everyone is connected to their feelings. It's an emotional decision to work with somebody, right?

Mark: Exactly. If I could, I'd like to just share a quick story along those lines. You reminded me of this story of a friend I have who works in the Washington, DC area. They call it "No Such Agency." Other people know it as NSA.

Robert: And we're not talking NSA, the speakers organization. We're talking the National Security Agency, right?

Mark: That's right. And I can't tell you exactly what his role is, but I can tell you that he is involved in buying large-ticket items and large purchases that take years to buy and years to spend, and works with very large budgets.

I asked him to share with me the process, and he said, "Well, trust probably as big a deal for you as you may think because we have to be as objective as possible." I said, "Okay. Describe for me the things that happen in this process that make it entirely objective."

He said, "We meet with suppliers. Then we put out an RFP, and they have to respond back completely and fully to the RFP. That's objective, right?" I said, "Well, it sounds like it could be objective, depending on how you evaluate what they wrote."

"Then we narrow it down to a list of finalists, and we go into a room. We pretty much shut the door for a few days, talk about it and decide who should be in the final

finalists. We bring them in for a presentation.” I said, “Okay. What are you looking to get out of the presentation?”

“Well, we kind of want to see the people behind what was in the proposal.” I said, “Okay. And how are you completely objective about the people you meet in this presentation?” There was a big pause because that creates problems.

“We go back into the room and review the notes that we have from the presentation. We talk about it for a while,” all this under the cloak of secrecy in this room, you can imagine somewhere on their grounds. I said, “Okay. You go through this and figure out based on some sort of point system who the number-one supplier is, right?” He says, “Yeah.” “Then you contact them and tell them they won.”

He said, “Not exactly.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, then we go to our division chief and tell him what our recommendation is.” I said, “Well, what if he’s not okay with that?” “Well, then he can overturn our decision.”

I said, “So, you’re telling me even in what’s in theory the most objective process in a secure government agency with all levels of security and a formalized bid process that you’re still subjective?” and he said, “Yeah, I guess ultimately we are.”

Robert:

Even in that interview process, they’re going to be somewhat subjective. It might look great on paper, but if they come across as idiots, they’re not going to do business with them, right?

Mark: That's right. And you know what, Robert? At the root of all of these decisions is a saying that resonates with me that was by Jeffery Gitomer. You make have heard of it. It goes something like this. "People buy from people based on emotion and justify it with rationale."

When you think about what happened at NSA, it's really just another version of, "Well, then we can go back to what the documentation said and make the numbers match what we need them to match."

Robert: Right. Let's get into some of these specifics, Mark, about some of the keys of building trust in a business relationship. What are these things that build trust, and how can we work at developing those and expanding those?

Mark: Well, that's great. I love the model that Charles H. Green and David Maister came up with in *The Trusted Advisor*. The model basically says, "Let's consider it as trustworthiness." Trustworthiness is how the client or the customer perceives us on our side of the fence.

First of all, we have to get it in our head that no matter what we try and do, what matters is how they perceive us. That's based on our words and our actions.

It's set up sort of as a mathematical equation. A trustworthiness on one side of the equation equals three numerators that are added together, credibility + reliability + intimacy, all over a denominator of S, which is self-orientation.

Let me kind of drill down a little bit further, if I could, on that. If you just think about it from a mathematical

standpoint, this self-orientation, which is all by itself in the denominator, has the most power.

Robert: What do you mean by “self-orientation”?

Mark: Yeah, that’s a good question. Self-orientation simply means that we’re more other-focused than we are on ourselves. So when we think about a typical scenario, think of the stereotypical used-car salesperson, and I apologize if any used-car salespeople are listening to the call right now. They’re pretty much about going past the handshake and into your wallet.

Robert: At least that’s our perception of it.

Mark: That’s right. Each day, we’re reminded of telemarketers and other people who pronounce our names wrong and have this incredible timeshare that we’re going to win. Ultimately, we can kind of see through that mask and recognize that some way or another, they’re kind of more out for themselves than they are out for my best interest.

That’s what we mean by self-orientation, more of an other-person focus. And it should make intuitive sense, too, that as the customer or the client perceives our self-orientation as low, then our trustworthiness goes up.

Robert: Aha!

Mark: The more they think we are out for ourselves, our trustworthiness goes down.

Robert: In my book, the *InfoGuru Marketing Manual*, I talked about selfless selling and selfish selling. It’s a bit like that, right? The more selfish, that is, the more self-oriented, the

more it plunges. The more selfless or other-oriented, the higher it goes. It's the same idea, right?

Mark: The same idea. Now, to get into the other factors or to drill down just a little bit deeper, when we talk about credibility, Green is talking about words, the truthfulness or the credentials we bring to the table.

Credibility synonymous with trust means, "I can trust what she says about this," whatever it is. It may be the lab coat that the doctor has on. He comes with a certain amount of credibility. The designation after your name, if you're a CLU. She might have the credentials as an underwriter. That's the credibility piece.

Then we've got reliability, which is much more about the actions, whether you're dependable and predictable. "I can trust him to follow through on what he says," "deliver that on time," "get it done right." Those are all things that have to do with our actions, and they relate to the reliability aspect of trust.

Robert: Right. We had a 2:00 appointment with a professional the other day, and they didn't call until late. It turns out they had a car break down, etc., but my wife's trust plummeted dramatically because of that reliability factor. I figured there was probably a good excuse for it, so I wasn't too worried. After all, things happen, but people judge us on all that stuff.

Mark: Exactly. That's the reliability one. By the way, the reliability piece is the only one of these factors that really absolutely requires the passage of time because it's based on our actions.

You might think intimacy requires time, and that's the next one. Let me just share what that's about. That is sort of a matter of security, whether the client or customer feels they're secure with you, whether you can be discreet with the information they share, and whether you empathize with them, with their situation.

Trustworthy synonymous with intimacy means that I can trust her with this information, or to share something kind of personal in nature with this person and they'll know what to do with it.

That intimacy piece is the third one on the numerator, and I mentioned before that self-orientation, the denominator, is really, like I said, a matter of focus. What are your motives? What's your intention? Are you out for yourself, or do you really care about the customer? All of this is from their lens.

If I could just kind of share a little bit about examples of how, in these instances, we could actually bust trust, when we may or may not even be aware of it.

Robert: Okay.

Mark: So, for example, when we fly out the door like Superman with our cape because we're all excited about an opportunity or because we're going from place to place to place, and we don't know their business.

So, I've actually been on sales calls in DC with my reps in the past that have walked into a client site with me and said, "What is it you guys do again?"

Robert: That's never a good sign!

Mark: Not a good sign. Some of us really, if we're honest with ourselves, we ought to know more about what they do. That was sort of a far-end exaggeration of how bad it can get, but it does pay to spend some time, and I'm sure you're aware of this and many of the listeners are, to do research before you go out there for the call.

Robert: The thing is, Mark, for independent professionals who are out there marketing and selling themselves, selling and marketing kind of get collapsed in a sense.

That is, you're out networking, meeting people, exchanging cards, talking to people, following up. You're demonstrating your self-orientation, credibility, reliability, intimacy way before you even have a real sales conversation. So it happens not just in the selling meeting. It can happen during any connection with that person.

Mark: Well, that's right. When you're out there at a networking meeting and this is before you get to that point where you're in a sales conversation, the expectations are a little different.

The expectations may not be, "Well, I expect them to know what their business is," but by the time you sit down across a desk from them or over the phone with them and you're involved in a sales conversation, if you haven't been to their website, if you haven't spent even a little bit of time really getting to know them, it's going to be kind of obvious and you will have missed a huge opportunity to build trust.

Robert: Right.

Mark: Just to share a couple of more, one is that we tend to tell rather than listen. That means we show up and for some reason we feel the need to share everything about ourselves, about our company, about how many locations we have, how many employees we have. “The company started way back out of somebody’s garage in 1927.”

We’re really not listening to the verbal and nonverbal cues of the client. I often say we really ought to be listening rather than telling when we’re in front. That’s a good way to bust trust.

Robert: You know, someone called “talking” the salesman’s disease. I don’t know where that came from. I heard it years ago.

Mark: I can see that, yes.

Robert: It’s sort of like, “But we’re not selling unless we’re talking,” and so a lot of people have the perception of salespeople as fast-talking people. They don’t want to be that, and yet... So it’s very confusing. What you say is so true. It’s about listening, much more.

Mark: Yes. In fact, printed in the summer of ‘07’s *Harvard Business Review*, they did a special sales issue. There was a company that did a study that said that according to people who bought products or services from people in a selling role, 42% claimed that failure to listen was the number-one mistake that sellers made.

Failure to listen combined with not following their directions, which includes going around them or not listening to whatever they said, which is all in the category of not listening.

Robert: Very interesting.

Mark: Just to kind of go down the list quick, badmouthing. It sounds almost implausible that we would badmouth people as people on the sales side of things, but it happens all the time. We badmouth, as a group, people in our own organization. We badmouth our competition. I've also seen people badmouth people in the client's organization.

All those things come across as low trust, highly self-oriented, that you're saying these things maybe to try and make a sale. Whatever they are, they don't come across as appealing to the client.

Robert: Exactly. When you're badmouthing or gossiping about somebody, I always think, "Well, if he's doing it behind their back, how am I to know he's not doing the same thing behind my back about me?"

Mark: Exactly. There is no reason you wouldn't think that.

Robert: Even though I might agree that the person they're talking about is a horse's ass, or whatever, it still backfires on you because who knows what they're going to say about you. The trust goes down is the whole point.

Mark: Exactly. And just a couple more that come to mind. One is in this world of technology, it's real easy to kind of hide behind the computer. What I mean by that is if we use email only to communicate, we miss the opportunity to get at least a couple of those other aspects and dimensions of communication involved, to hear someone's voice, to hear their emotion.

You lose all that in email. It's so impersonal, and there's a huge opportunity for misunderstandings if we use email only and don't get into a live conversation, particularly when there's an area that's what I call "sensitive."

"Sensitive" would include anything that has to do with a price conversation or a billing rate, anything to do with a complaint or a problem that the customer voiced. That probably requires a live conversation, and yet for a variety of reasons, whether it's speed or ease or just the uncomfortableness with confrontation, we use email.

Robert: I want to underline that. In a way, you're saying when it gets difficult, hard or touchy, when it would make most sense to talk, we retreat to email. We do the worst thing possible when we need to do something else, in other words. We actually undermine ourselves. Email is fine up to a certain point, but definitely not around touchy matters. Interesting.

Mark: Precisely. This is another trust-buster, what you just said, which is really a failure to confront the tough issues.

I had a client recently we did training for, and they had one of their customers who continued to bring up the price issue. So I said, "Did you share that with them? Did you confront?" "No, we kept kind of lowering our price or changing the features." I said, "That's something that you could have done."

We talk about a way to do this in the training called "Name It and Claim It." The concept behind that is that if there's an elephant in the room, if we don't address the elephant in the room, it's just going to get larger and

larger and larger. Eventually, it's going to take over the room.

So, we're afraid of these thorny, tough issues, and pricing could be one of them. There's a whole slew of other ones, but whether it's service professionals or others, there's reasons why. Sometimes we're afraid we're going to lose the sale if we bring it up. We're afraid that they won't like us.

The fact of the matter is that the "Name It and Claim It" technique or process says that we take small risks now so we avoid much larger risks down the road.

To do so, it's a two-step process. The process is, number one, use as many caveats as possible. Overcompensate with the caveats. For example, "Robert, I may be way off-base on this," or "Robert, you may have already thought about this," or "I realize this may be a little awkward at this point in our relationship, however it seems like we keep coming back to this price issue."

The second part of it is to speak the truth. Say what the truth is. Those things that we fear the most that are going to hurt the relationship end up being the thing that can build the most trust.

Robert: Another word for this might be "diplomacy," right? You're being diplomatic about it, but you're not bearing it.

Mark: Yes, you want to be gentle with the caveats. At the same time, you want to confront the tough issues, speak the hard truths. That's a great way to build trust. A lot of people have a lot of trouble going there.

Robert: Definitely. I've seen that a lot. I've also seen in a sales interview, I realized that if I didn't bring up that issue, it would probably blow up on me later.

Mark: Exactly.

Robert: I learned how to do that. I don't know how I learned how to do that, but I hear what you're saying. "I have a concern about XYZ and so-and-so. Can you see that?" At least it brings it out in the open and you can talk about it. It's never usually as bad as you think it's going to be.

Mark: Exactly. And you're giving them permission, then, to share with you what's on their mind. Maybe they haven't even really articulated or thought through it fully in their own mind, but you're creating a space of trust for them to bring it up.

Robert: Great. Are you going to go more into credibility, reliability and intimacy, or is that it on that? Are there specific other things we can do to build those and work on those?

Mark: Of course, what we just talked about, the "Name It and Claim It" piece, is a way to increase intimacy. If we look at those four factors we just talked about, credibility, reliability, intimacy and self-orientation, which ones would you think are the ones that most sellers, lawyers, CPAs, engineers, IT service professionals and even business entrepreneurs and small-business owners probably do the best on?

Robert: Gee, reliability? I think it might be reliability because everybody wants to do the best they possibly can, get back to people, keep their deadlines and do a good job. They realize, "If I am reliable, then that results in trust and

good word-of-mouth because people will ask if I'm reliable."

This is my perspective. The problem with that is it's hard to prove reliability up front. As you say, that's something that happens over time. How do they know you're reliable until you start working with them?

Mark: Exactly. Reliability, time and time again, is one of the stronger factors in this category. If we looked directionally, they're pretty darn good at reliability.

The other one is credibility. Part of credibility is people tend to be honest and they come with certain credentials. They're credible from that standpoint.

Robert: There are also issues about credibility. I just have to throw this in, Mark.

Mark: Please do.

Robert: We look at someone's website. For instance, before this interview with you, I looked at your website. Just looking at the professionalism of the website, the way it was designed, the content, to me, that spoke volumes about your credibility.

You articulated well what your business is, what your service is and all of that. I didn't look at your educational background, although people will look at different things of course.

We can undermine our credibility simply by how we present ourselves. If you go to a high-end client and you're wearing a dirty shirt and jeans, I don't care if you're

a genius. You've lost all trust just because of the presentation.

Mark: Yes.

Robert: Presentation is part of credibility, and we often forget. We have a website with wonderful content, but it looks like garbage, for instance. It's a poorly designed site with typos all over the place. It has bad design, bad colors, small typeface, you name it. That, and other things, undermine our credibility too.

Mark: That's exactly right. Each one of these things, because they're not linear, are things that at any given point we can either go really high on or really low on when it comes to the client's perception of our trustworthiness. I agree. Those are all great examples of context.

Having said that, that leaves intimacy and self-orientation, particularly intimacy, as areas directionally. If you look maybe not all the way over, but directionally as a group of service professionals and business owners, we need to build on that intimacy and self-orientation.

Robert: That's very interesting because a lot of people wouldn't think about that as much. That's not so obvious, and yet there's a lot of power there. Can we speak more about intimacy?

Mark: Yeah. When we talk about intimacy, the great example we just talked about was speaking hard truths. When we have hidden agendas and we're not transparent, for example, then there's going to be less intimacy.

When we can speak the truth, we can create a safe haven, if you will, and that's one of the differences between someone who just sells products and is kind of a need-based salesperson and someone who's a trusted advisor. The trusted advisor creates a safe haven.

It sounds like just a small difference between even a partnership to go to someone who's a trusted advisor. They're the person who's creating a safe haven. Two people can exchange information more like friends than even business partners.

Robert: Doesn't it also include basic laws of rapport and stuff like eye contact, really listening and being in a relaxed sort of conversational place in the selling conversation as opposed to overly formal and stiff?

Mark: Yeah. One thing you mentioned initially was listening. I have a listening model that I share with folks in the training. It's acronym is COFEC, which stands for "clear, open, frame, envision, commit." What we're talking about with intimacy and listening, "clear" is the first step. I don't see it in a lot of other listening models or programs out there.

What it essentially says is that in this fast-paced world, we walk into a client site or we pick up the phone with mind-chatter. Our mind is going 24/7, so they might say something business-oriented and we're thinking, "You know, I'm still upset at my dog this morning for going on the carpet." You know?

Then they say something else that's business-oriented like, "Tell me about your company," and you're getting

ready to answer, but you're thinking, "Gee, if I make this sale, then I'll make my numbers for the month."

Robert: "And we can buy that new car."

Mark: Yeah, "We're deciding which cruise line to take." Then they say something else, and we're thinking, "Gee, did I forget to defrost the chicken?"

Robert: By the way, humor is a good thing to create intimacy too.

Mark: Exactly. It really is.

Then you've got that. Then when you get there, you know, maybe they say something or they're wearing something, and we start to pass judgment. Judgment gets in our ability to really hear and listen deeply.

In *The 8th Habit* book, Covey talks about how important that is. What he says is that next to human survival, the second-most important and significant human need is to be understood. He says that being understood, appreciated, validated and acknowledged are all in the category of being understood.

Just think about it. When you're on the other side of the fence as a buyer in a buying role, and you're trying to explain something and they just kind of pass right over it and go to what they want to talk about, they're off-base and not really getting it. The more intimate of a thing that you share with them, the more you get upset that they're not understanding you.

Robert: They're not reflecting anything back. You're not really making much of a connection.

That's so interesting because I've been doing a lot of thinking about this and work on this, this whole being understood and being listened to. If that doesn't happen, you sort of get the reverse. People get angry at you, don't like you, don't feel that you're trustworthy. People just want to be heard, for god's sake, and if they're not heard, it just brings up feelings of anger and violation.

If you wonder why you're not getting the business, intimacy is a big part of it.

Mark:

Exactly. One of the things that can help intimacy is this kind of mental exercise that you do before you either walk in the door or pick up the phone to call and have a conversation. First of all, we said "clear" is the first step of the COFEC model. Clear all this stuff out of your mind. Turn off your PDA device. Clear your mind from passing judgment.

Also, here's the other thing. Check your ego at the door. It's not about you. It's a focus on them. So really, check your ego. Make believe there's a hanger there on the outside of the door. As you're going through it, say, "Okay. I'm going to mentally leave my ego here, and whatever my agenda is, I'm going to leave it to the side for now."

Listen to them, and be curious, genuinely curious. Have a spirit of curiosity.

Robert:

By the way, that wouldn't be a bad idea for networking meetings as well. Leave your ego at the door when you go in to meet new people just in that kind of situation. I like that.

Mark: Yes, well said. In the area of intimacy, I don't know if I answered your question, but those are some things that we can do that are very practical. The spirit of curiosity is critical to building intimacy and really making them feel understood. It's empathetic listening.

Robert: Yes. I have this concept that I call "The Contribution Factor." We're trying to contribute to people, but to contribute to people, we have to do exactly what you're saying. It's not just, "Here. Let me contribute to you. Let me tell you what you ought to do." We sort of want to do that, but that never works. That just doesn't work. It doesn't. I wish it did. It would be a lot easier, wouldn't it?

We have to really try to find a way to like this person, connect with this person and really get inside of their mind and their heart is what you're really saying with intimacy. We often talk about intimacy obviously in male-female or romantic relationships, but there's definitely a parallel here, right?

Mark: Exactly. You know, it's not as hard as you might think to do. Some of the things we talk about to do a better job of listening is to look out for what I call "red flags" when they're talking. Red flags could be changes in tone of voice. It could be enthusiasm. It could be disgust. It could be excitement. It could be patterns of speech, body language. Are we really looking?

Let me give you an example. This one has to do with pauses, which is another great one to be on the lookout for. I was sitting across from a lady who was a prospect of mine. We were having lunch together, and I asked her a

question about an event that I was at that she was at maybe a few months earlier.

She was telling me about the event, and she just paused in the middle of her sentence. Her face went back as if she was recollecting the event and the day, and she stopped for maybe a second and then continued on. She kept going.

I said, “Before I answer that question, could I just ask you a question? A few moments ago, you paused when you were speaking. Tell me more about that.” She kind of smiled.

A smile broke out on her face, and she said, “Mark, that day that we were together back then a couple of months ago was one of the worst days of my life. My husband served me with divorce papers that morning.”

Robert: Oh my god!

Mark: “I saw you just moments after that all happened, and I was in another world.” Then she said, “You know, I wouldn’t have shared that with you had you not asked because that’s not something I share with a lot of people.”

There you’ve got this spirit of curiosity which really was an interest to me. I had no idea where it was going to go. Oftentimes, we don’t if we’re listening to be curious. Notice the conversation isn’t linear when we said before that relationships aren’t linear, but think of the trust that got built that quickly.

I didn’t do anything magical, and you don’t have to either. It’s just being there. As someone said, almost channel the

other person. Be in the dance. Be in the moment, as Covey says.

Robert: Here's an interesting kind of paradox, Mark. This whole thing about intimacy as it relates to trust is obviously a big key thing. I think it's very important to emphasize this. When you see the distinction of this, and hopefully this conversation will open up some possibilities for people, it really isn't that difficult if you do it, but it's extraordinarily rare, in my experience, on the other hand.

It might not be that hard, but when we're having conversations with people, there isn't a lot of listening going on from both sides in most cases. It's sort of, "Well, I did this." "Oh yeah? Well, I did that." "That reminds me of a time when I did that." There's not a lot of intimacy there, and it's definitely not a great model for effective selling, either.

Mark: It isn't, and I think a lot of it has to do with us coming in with an agenda. If you think about where I came from in the corporate sales world, we were told when we got back to the office, "Who are they currently buying from? How much do they spend? Tell me about the landscape of the competition. When are they going to make a decision? Who are the key decision-makers?"

When you get in front of a client, if you don't get out of the room with that, you know you're going to be asked that when you get back to the office. It really was the measure of success, how much information you got and, "Did you get the second appointment?"

Robert: That was obviously part of it, but not all of it.

Mark: They'll give you a limited amount of information, only at a shallow level. You won't get the intention, the motive and the why behind it if they don't trust you. You're going to get kind of the same information as they would share really with the world.

Robert: So big deal.

Mark: You're really no closer to a relationship and ultimately a sale than the next guy is, even though you walk out of there pumping your fists.

Robert: "I know all this stuff. They seem interested," but was the relationship there? Was there intimacy there? Fascinating. You have to tune in at a different level here.

Mark: You do.

Robert: It's way beyond the information or the words that are exchanged.

Mark: Exactly. And it's hard to let go of your agenda when you walk in there. We're trained even from children. We want to jump to the solution. According to one study, the two biggest things that we do wrong that break down trust is we don't listen and we jump too quickly to the solution.

I know that's part of your program. You talk a lot about, "Don't get B before A." This is it. We jump too quickly because ever since we were little kids in the classroom, we're taught to raise our hand and the first one with the right answer gets rewarded.

Robert: It's true.

Mark: But that's not building relationships.

Robert: Instead of going in with an agenda, we can go in with really well thought out deeper questions. “I really want to find out about them. I mean really, really. What’s the possibility here, and what kind of questions would start to lead to that?” That can be part of it as well, right?

Mark: Exactly. You know, what we talk about a lot is, number one, do your research. And it doesn’t take as long as people fear. Now almost everybody has a website, and that’s sort of low-hanging fruit.

But I say look at three things. Look at the industry they’re in and do a little bit of research. There’s places like Yahoo Finance if they’re a public company. Do a little bit of research on their industry. It won’t take you that long.

Then look at the company itself. Obviously, the website is an easy place to look. And thirdly, look at the individual, and it really is amazing how much we can find out if we just google their name or go to LinkedIn. They give you their whole resume.

Robert: Sure. Not everyone on the call is necessarily selling to big companies where you can find out a ton about the company, but you can always find out something.

Mark: That’s right.

Robert: If nothing else, you can talk to the person who referred you and interview them. “Tell me about this person. What are they like? Why are you referring them? Why do you like them? What are they about?” Then they’ll tell you some nifty things that will really help you create some of that intimacy before the meeting ever happens.

Mark: Exactly. You probably should come in with a point of view. You should have a little bit of background and then have something to say to add and create value which you can find out if you can do some research.

Then you can filter those things out, I say, by what you think based on all your research—and like you said, there may be limited amounts if it's a small client or they're privately held—might be emotional and also important to them.

It really isn't that difficult to know based on the research. A lot of times there are recent statements by the executives that are published or even something as simple as the home page of their website, what we stand for and maybe our core values or core principles or mission or vision. It's an easy way to have an understanding of what they stand for.

Robert: That might come up in the conversation. You might say something like, "In that white paper that you recently published about such-and-such, you talked about the importance of so-and-so. How does that relate to this particular project?" That sort of puts you head and shoulders above most people that are out there because it really shows you took the time to be interested.

It can totally shift their perception of you and their willingness to open up, whereas if you have none of that, you're just, "Gee, what is it your company does?"

It's more often the opposite. It's more often, "We don't know anything. Tell me all about your company." You're just wasting the person's time then.

Mark: Exactly, yes. You're right. It is not rocket science, but it is hard to do because we have to kind of unlearn some habits and think of it in a different mindset.

Robert: That's another thing to talk about, a shift in mindset. By the way, this is my hobby right now, looking at mindsets. The more I get into it, the more I discover that it's the key to everything. With a workable mindset, given a particular situation, you can produce miracles. With the wrong mindset, nothing happens at all.

Can we talk a little bit more about selling mindset, effective selling mindset, intimate selling mindset or whatever you want to call it? Can we expand on that a little bit?

Mark: Yeah. I think there's a paradox in selling, and the paradox in selling is that the less we work to make the sale and the more we make the relationship the sale, the more success we have.

If I could just share a story again that Charles H. Green, who is one of the co-authors of *The Trusted Advisor* book, shared. It's called "The Sandpaper Story." It goes like this.

When he had first graduated business school in the Boston area and was getting ready to go visit a major client—he had a great opportunity—his manager was going to join him on the call. He was all pumped up and excited about going on the call, and it was an industrial company in the area.

He was preparing himself to go on the call. He was going to look good. make the sale, impress his manager. They got into the office and there's this kind of old stodgy guy

leaning back in his big cushy leather chair, feet up on the desk.

Robert: The salesman's nightmare.

Mark: Exactly. They sit down, and they get into brief small talk. Then the person on the buying side of the desk says, "Can you tell me what you know about industrial consumables? Have you done any market research on industrial consumable?"

He stopped for a minute, and in a nanosecond he thought to himself, "Well, let me think. We've done a lot of research in different areas, but number one, what the heck is he talking about industrial consumables? What does he mean?"

"Number two is I don't think we've done anything in that area, but I can kind of dance around it. I can tell him we did a little bit, maybe something in plastics and a little something in corrugated."

Before he had a chance to answer, in that split second, his manager blurted out, "Nothing much. I can't think of anything. Given that, is there anything else you're like to talk about?" Just like that, just like if he'd asked him what time of day it is and he just looked at his watch and said, "Two o'clock." No big deal.

Now if you think about that process, it makes you crawl out of your skin if you've been in corporate sales for a long time and not having the perfect answer. But building trust is a lot about being willing to not, and this is the perfect example, worry about making the sale, but being

transparent, being honest, being authentic, and if you don't know, being honest about it.

The client in this case kind of laughed and giggled and said, "I ask that question to all the salespeople. What I'm talking about is sandpaper, and nobody has done any research on sandpaper." And they got the client.

Robert: Aha! Interesting.

Mark: So it's this whole idea of thinking about what I call the four principles of trust. The first one is transparency, and that is having no hidden agendas.

The second one is collaboration. Collaboration means sitting side by side with the client to write your next proposal. It means that a rising tide lifts all boats and that you're willing to work with them together on a solution rather than trying to come up with the perfect solution and going back to your cave and trying to throw a dart at the wall and hoping you hit the target. Working side by side, being not afraid to think out loud and to encourage it. That's collaboration.

By the way, very counter to traditional selling models. They want you to hold your cards close to your hand and give away as little margin as possible.

So, we're talking about transparency, collaboration, having a long-term orientation. In this case, forgoing that notion that I can get the sale on this sales call and saying, "Nothing much. No, we haven't done anything in that area. Anything else you want to talk about?"

A long-term orientation means sometimes being willing to take those risks, as we talked about earlier in “Name It and Claim It,” and speaking the hard truths in a gentle way. Those are long-term orientations.

It also may mean having a difficult pricing conversation, saying, “Look. If I give you these prices now, I’m going to have to creep them up at some point, and I don’t want to do that behind your back. So let’s have that conversation now.”

Then the other one is client focus or customer focus. The fourth one, customer focus, is something a lot of people talk about. In fact, they have it in their core principles or core values that, “Customer satisfaction is our core value,” or client focus or customer focus.

Those are all things that they say, but sometimes when salespeople, entrepreneurs or someone in the seller’s role is opposite from a person in the buying role where there’s a client-client manager situation, they are client-focused from a vulturistic standpoint. They’re just waiting for an opportunity to pounce down with their solution and make the sale.

Robert: That’s not the mindset of client focus that we’re talking about here.

Mark: That’s a different mindset. These are all different mindsets. We often have a locker room mentality. If you think about professionally sports, we’re going to make our game plan. They buyer’s going to have their game plan. Their job is to pay as little as possible. Ours is to make as much margin as possible. So we’re on opposite sides of the fence.

Robert: Another way of looking at it is some of the mindsets of selling that don't work. Some of those are what everybody thinks are the right mindsets.

Mark: That's right.

Robert: That is, it's...

Mark: Conventional wisdom.

Robert: Yeah, it's conventional wisdom, but it's adversarial, for instance. We often think that only one person wins. Win-win is a certain kind of mindset, but our mindset is often adversarial or win-lose. If I win, they lose. "I get the most price, they pay me more, and then I have won." But where does that leave you? It really doesn't work at all.

But the thing is that most people, Mark, who are independent professionals, know this intuitively. They're not interested in those old paradigms or those old mindsets, but they haven't really created these distinctions about these new mindsets and figured out how to expand them, work them, put their methodologies within them

Instead, what they do is they're just passive and they don't do anything. A lot of professionals are extraordinarily passive about marketing. That's a mindset in and of itself. Does what I'm saying make sense to you?

Mark: Yeah, it makes perfect sense.

Robert: It's, "I don't want to be a used-car salesman, so I will just sit here and ask a few innocuous questions and see if they maybe want to work with me." It's pathetic. Not to insult anybody on the call, but I see this over and over.

It's like the questions that people ask. It's just an avoidance of intimacy. It's an avoidance of engagement. It's an avoidance of really getting into it and collaboration and long-term results and client focus and transparency or openness. I mean, we're not even working those brilliant kinds of mindsets that could change everything.

Mark: You talk about mindsets. I think of the old mindset, which is still being used, which is leading with expertise or features, being polished and put together, avoiding discomfort, as you just shared. We don't know what to say, so we just kind of ask these innocuous questions.

Instead, we should be leading with the heart, risking looking bad, and saying what's so. Different mindset.

Robert: We've all been in an uncomfortable or sort of artificial kind of sales conversation when someone was trying to sell to us. It was all formulaic, and you felt that every question they asked, they'd ask the exact same way 727 times. We feel techniqued upon instead of just a conversation. It's tricky.

Mark: Yeah, it is tricky. What you're describing is sort of what we think we're supposed to do because that's the way it's always been done.

Robert: Yeah, and yet that's not what we're supposed to do. We don't have to be fast-talking, hard-driving, super-persuasive, manipulative people to be extraordinary salespeople. In fact, the best salespeople are not like that at all. That's what we're saying here, right?

Mark: Well, it is. That's right. What I found after being 25 years in the corporate sales world with my team is that the reps

who were the most successful were the ones who were able to build strong relationships.

Both in opening accounts and in fending off the competition when the market got really, really tough, we would get handed the competition's prices from the client saying, "Here's what I'm dealing with. What can we do?" or "Hey, just for your information. Go do what you want with it. I'm not speaking to this guy. I'm happy with you."

Robert: "We really want to keep working with you because we like you and we trust you." Then you have a real conversation, as opposed to getting a call one day saying, "We've switched to the competition," because there was no loyalty and there really wasn't a relationship, or a deep enough relationship.

Mark: Yeah, or in one case, we broke trust, if I could share a quick story about that. I'll share it now because I guess enough time has passed since I've left there, but Georgetown University was a major account of ours. We went through a rigorous bid process and signed a five-year, \$10.5 million agreement with them.

Robert: Wow!

Mark: Just three months earlier, we signed the agreement with them, and they were totally happy. Then one Friday afternoon, I got a "Dear John" letter in email from their director of procurement. I was scratching my head and said, "What in the world happened?! They were so happy. And not even a phone call?"

What happened was we had this corporate mandate to divide the sales force into hunters on one side and farmers

on the other. What I mean by that is everybody had sort of a mix of responsibilities, and what they wanted to do was separate out those people they thought were good at hunting down new business and clean off their plate so they can just hunt new business.

Then people who were the “farmers,” called “business relationship managers,” were going to get an increased quota and be responsible for handling more accounts, the ones that kind of slid over from the new hunters.

The problem with that is you’re just moving accounts around, and we had done that to Georgetown. So we severed the relationship that they had between my rep and the procurement department and all the trust that had been built up over eight years. They turned around and severed the relationship between our two organizations.

Robert: That was a rude awakening.

Mark: It was. We talk about how you measure trust. In that case, it was \$10.5 million, but it won’t show up in any of the traditional sales call statistics.

Robert: Yeah. Very interesting.

Mark: So, we can bust trust all sorts of ways, but that was really a testimony to the power of relationship.

Robert: Very interesting.

We have another topic, at least one more topic, that I think you really like to emphasize, which is the important role of creating and delivering value and what role that plays in relationship building.

So, what do you mean by “value” and how does that all fit together?

Mark: So, let me maybe start off from the back end of it, okay?

Robert: Sure.

Mark: This is a question I had to ask myself. What is the difference between creating value for clients or customers and trust? How do they fit together?

I got this vision of a wineglass and the wine that goes in it. If you think about the value that you bring, whether it's your services, whether it's your products, whether it's warranties, whatever it is that you bring to the client. Maybe it's cost savings. Maybe it's the ability for them to grow their revenue.

That's sort of like filling their cup. The wine in this case represents the value, but the cup itself is the trust. What happens then if you pour more and more value but you only have so much trust? What happens to the wine?

Robert: It spills over.

Mark: It spills over. It's not going anywhere because they don't trust you enough. You could keep throwing things at them, but it doesn't really matter because, “I just only trust you to this level.”

The good news is that you can grow the size of the container. You can grow the size of the wineglass by growing trust by using the principles some of which we shared already.

So then, Robert, what happens if you break the trust like I just shared we did at Georgetown? What happens to the wine?

Robert: It just is gone.

Mark: Yeah. Think about what happens when a politician breaks trust, or an athlete or an entertainer. Someone once said, “It takes decades to build a reputation and seconds to destroy it.” That’s how powerful this concept of trust and value is.

Neil Rackham, who wrote *Rethinking the Sales Force* and developed a sales training program called “SPIN Selling,” had done research in the UK and interviewed a number of different sales organizations and buyers. He’s a researcher by trade.

He said, “The only single truth that seems to be holding true for all sales forces is that they have to create value for their customers if they’re to be successful. Just communicating the value inherent in their products isn’t enough.”

What do we mean by “value”? I don’t know if you know the quote from Ted Levitt who wrote *Marketing Myopia*.

Robert: I haven’t read that.

Mark: It was written way back in 1960. What he said was real simple, but I think it was elegant: “People don’t buy a ¼-inch drill bit. They buy a ¼-inch hole.”

Robert: Oh, he’s the guy who originally said that. We’ve heard it a million times.

Mark: Right, right. So, what you're selling and what you're bringing to them in terms of value is the hole. The value, just like the trust, is in the perception or eyes of the client, always through their lens. If you could say you're going to save them X amount of dollars or throw in this benefit or that benefit, it doesn't matter. It's how they perceive it.

The value that you create for the client is up to them. You know in terms of products, features, benefits. Those are kind of the standard ones, but I suggest there's another one. That's you, as the client manager or the attorney or CPA or entrepreneur. You in the selling role, the way you interact, the way you listen to them...

Robert: The way you build trust.

Mark: The way you build trust, that's one key way that's way underestimated, way underappreciated by us as sellers, that we create value for the client.

Robert: I just got an insight about this. This is a great conversation. I've noticed that some people have responded to my marketing because they've been on my list for a long time or whatever. The trust has been built. They like my stuff. They've bought a product or whatever. Then I present a program or whatever it is.

Often, I see that it's sort of an intangible. They are creating value for themselves out of that trust. That is, "Given that I trust Robert so much and what he does, I can see that this program will be fantastic and I can see all the value," even if I didn't say some of that explicitly. Does that make sense?

Mark: Right.

Robert: It's like, "Well, with this level of trust, it must be good." So we don't have to oversell the value because the trust provides that cup, so to say, in which of course there will be value there. There always has been, and there always will be.

So, trust is the bigger issue than value itself.

Mark: That's right. And at the same time, it's sort of like this relationship I mentioned with the wine and the wineglass. You know, we get the opportunity to pour wine in and share our stories, our ezines and the information there within once we build this relationship.

Then, the barriers go down, what I call the "invisible wall of distrust" that was created by people way before you. And when you walk in the room, it's there whether you see it or not. It was built by the bricks of incompetence and the mortar of false promises by people who came before you.

The first thing is to just be aware it exists.

Robert: "Other people have promised this, this and this, and they didn't deliver. What do you have?" Yikes!

Mark: Exactly. How are you different? It's sort of guilty until proven innocent, unfortunately. But there's a way to be different, and that's what we talked about earlier, the four principles and being really good listeners.

Robert: Yeah. One of my big things is to give people samples, give people tastes, give people an experience of what you do, sometimes even before the selling conversation. I suppose that also builds trust and value as well, right?

Mark: That's a great point. Because some of us are in the intangibles world...

Robert: Yes, and a lot of us on this call are.

Mark: Excellent. You know, we're selling a service, a concept, a mindset, these things that you can't just put a bow on so easily. I think that's really important.

I think about Hamburger Helper and what the value is. I mean, that worked for General Mills for 27 years, so I'm still having trouble getting rid of the thought of Hamburger Helper.

Robert: You would bring this stuff home, right?

Mark: We got it by the truckload pretty much.

Robert: Really?

Mark: Yeah. And people don't buy it because of its gourmet taste. I can attest to that. They buy it because when a mom comes home from work, for example, and she's got a kid in one hand and a bag of groceries in the other and she doesn't know which way is up, she can prepare something that at least resembles a decent, hot meal in about five minutes or less. That's creating value to that person.

So what we have to do is be able to help them visualize the solution. So the free sampling, if I can get back to what you started this with, is a way that those of us in professional services, help the client visualize the solution.

Robert: Right.

Mark: So that may show up as writing. It could be anything from a blog to an ebook to a webinar to a brown-bag lunch & learn to a free one-hour strategy session.

Robert: Exactly. Those can start to build trust. It's kind of like any connection with the prospect is an opportunity either to build trust or to lose trust.

Mark: True.

Robert: That's sort of good news and bad news at the same time because you have to be vigilant. You have to be thinking and focused. You have to be thinking, "How do I build trust now, and now, and now with everything that I do?"

Yet if we're thinking that way, huge opportunities open up that we might not have even conceived before. "Oh, I could offer this. I could do this. I could find out that." It becomes kind of fun then.

Mark: It does. It goes back, I think in some respects it kind of covers all the principles I shared, but the client focus is a big one because you're thinking about them even when you're not with them. So when the time comes and you come across something that could help them, you share that with them.

Robert: Yeah.

Mark: That could even be part of your lead-nurturing plan.

Maybe if we talk about how to create value, I'd like to share how people on the call might be able to do what I call "creating value drivers" for their client.

Robert: Great!

Mark: This is ways to think about how you would normally talk about your product which, by habit, tends to be more feature-oriented. It includes more nouns. It's more of a description of what the product or service is, rather than what it can do for the client.

Robert: Right. You're speaking my religion here.

Mark: Okay, so right up your alley. I think about the training we do with groups. One of the examples we give is outside. Often we include one inside of their particular scope or industry, but one that we do that's generally outside, unless you happen to sell this product, is the Keurig coffee machine.

If you're not familiar with that, it's like a one-cup coffeemaker that you put these little round cups in the top and close it, and it pumps out just one cup.

One way to talk about that is its modern design, its K-cup feature. It has this little cup you can buy. It's got no pot. It has a digital readout. It's stainless steel and easy to fill. And those are all features.

But instead, if we think in terms of what the client is hoping to accomplish, or in all probability, most likely the problems that what you're offering helps solve and the needs-gap it helps close, we start with the goal.

In a small break room, say in a doctor's office, the goal could just be simply to have a peaceful kitchen because nobody wants to clean the darn coffee machine. So how do we get a peaceful kitchen? And the needs-gap there is that nobody wants to tend to the coffee-making cleanup hassle. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Robert: Yeah, absolutely.

Mark: You've walked into offices where the coffee is smelly because nobody's bothered to clean it up. There's the filter to clean that's been in there for three days.

The value driver itself is in the form of a question. After you've figured out what the goal is and then gone to the needs-gap, what's the question? That's the value driver.

The question here might be something like this. "When co-workers get their coffee, would morale improve if they could make a single cup of their choice of beverage and don't have a pot or filter to clean?"

Robert: So what you're selling is morale, not coffee.

Mark: Exactly. And that's the peaceful kitchen. It goes back to their goal. But you're right. You're selling morale. That's very well-said.

What I'll do is I'll give you a link where people can download this value-driver developer document so they can get it for free.

Robert: Fantastic!

Mark: Because it's hard to visualize. So the value-driver question is broken down into components that they can insert in any of their offerings into.

It starts off when your coworkers get their coffee. That's number one. There's four steps.

Number one is, "What event is happening? What's going on at this time? What's the context?"

Number two is, “What positive change needs to happen in the eyes of the client?” In this case, that’s, “Would morale improve?”

Then the question is, “Who would benefit from it?” This is important for your own sake, as you’re developing this, to get the focus off of you and get the focus on exactly who is going to benefit from this.

In this case, we say, “They could,” because we talked earlier about coworkers, so we can use a pronoun, I guess it is, at that point. They could make a single cup.

The last part is the new experience. Earlier, I talked about how to visualize a solution. This is the new experience. “They could make a single cup of their choice of beverage and don’t have a pot or filter to clean.”

Four steps: What event’s happening? What’s the positive change? Who could benefit? And what’s the new experience?

Robert: Right. And pow! You have them visualizing a whole new possibility.

Mark: Yes.

Robert: And of course, you could sell the same product to an individual just with a different benefit, maybe focused on fresh, not stale, coffee or something like that. Or less hassle, “Would you be less hassled if...”

I like that you have a formula to that and you script it out and think it out. Each part has a particular purpose. Very sophisticated stuff, Mark.

Mark: It is, and I try to make it simple with a little template where they can fill it in. Once you get comfortable with it, these things really should just kind of roll off your tongue.

What I recommend is that we kind of go through the different offerings that you have and develop these. What it forces you to do is get the focus off the features and the product itself, and get the focus on the client and how they're going to benefit. Really help them, more than benefits, but help them visualize the solution.

Robert: Right. And when you can visualize it, then it's real and you move toward it, whereas all these wonderful features don't really mean anything to you directly. They're nice to have, but they're in the service of that real benefit.

Mark: And this is important because of a point that got brought up in a book called *Made to Stick*. Are you familiar with that book?

Robert: Yeah, by the Heath brothers.

Mark: Exactly. They go through an acronym, I think it's called SUCCES, of ways to make your ideas stick and why some ideas survive and others die. Without going into the acronym, the thing they talk about as the enemy of sticky ideas is something called the "curse of knowledge."

If you think about this example that we're talking about in terms of creating value drivers, the curse of knowledge would be we're talking about the features of our product, we know how it works, and we know how they would benefit from it. It's in our head. But the client or the customer doesn't know. They can't visualize what's going on in our head as it would help them."

Often, we either leave things out or we talk in jargon, and we never create that visualization for them,

Robert: We hope they'll make the leap from features to benefit, but most people can't think that hard. Some people do, ultimately, but you make it easier for them.

Mark: Yeah, because we're cursed with the knowledge because know it.

Robert: I talk about this thing called "process speak."

Mark: I like that.

Robert: It's very simple. It's like, "Here's my process: _____. Here's what we do: _____. Here's how it works: _____." Everyone's thinking, "Yeah, but what does it mean to me? What'll I get?" It's the same concept, but I really like your formula.

This all ties back together to trust because when you're communicating clearly like this and you're speaking in what I call the language of results, not the language of process, then people are immediately attracted and interested. You have their attention. They want to know more. Trust builds just in that very simple interaction.

Mark: Well said.

Robert: It comes down to trust.

This has been a fun interview, Mark. I love speaking to marketing people, and some people in this call that I interview are more pure marketing than others. We have all kinds of different topics, and this is definitely pure

marketing and selling, really the essence of powerful communication, building trust and building intimacy.

I think for many people the biggest takeaway from this will be this whole concept of intimacy. I actually created a mind map as we were talking, so I have “intimacy” in the middle. Then I have “listening,” “safe haven,” “being understood,” “curiosity,” “great questions.”

There’s a whole almost system for intimacy, but that is one of the biggest things to create trust that we often undervalue and don’t put enough emphasis on. That can be your secret weapon to marketing and selling is more intimacy. I love that. That is really powerful.

Mark:

Yeah, and it’s something that everyone can do. Like I said before, it’s not rocket science. It’s just hard to do. Part of it’s because of how we’re trained, you know. We’re trained to come up with the answers and raise our hand in class.

This is about them. It’s about giving up the ego, giving up our agenda and being all about the client. I’m not saying that we give our stuff away. That’s not what I’m implying.

I’m implying that when you have high trust, you have more acceptance to your ideas. You have a willingness to cooperate. You’ve got them thinking out loud and less “my side” versus “your side.” You’ve got decisions by individual rather than by committee, you know, less bids and all that that we have to deal with because there’s this trust. If they trust you, they’re going to do business with you.

Robert:

Yeah. You know, we could call this the deeper side of marketing and selling. That’s where I think we really need

to go if we want to have breakthroughs, have transformations and also have more fun in the process.

I mean, isn't this a heck of a lot more fun building intimacy and trust with a client than trying to manipulate them into doing business with us? Nobody wants to do that. No wonder we hate marketing and selling because we think of it as that, but it doesn't have to be that, which is your big point.

Mark: Right. That's a big deal. If anyone's still out there having trouble making the connection between high levels of trust and business results, I point to another study that was done by three Harvard professors that turned into two books. One is called *The Service Profit Chain*, and the other called *The Value Profit Chain*.

They studied a portfolio of clients across industries. So take for example, and I don't know if it was Nationwide, but they took insurance agencies. They took fast-food restaurants. They took tire distributors. And they looked across their entire portfolio of customers and found that there are essentially five types of customers.

We view ourselves as the first client, which are hostages. They often say, "Can you think of someone you feel a hostage to?" They usually say one of the utilities.

Robert: Right. "We're the phone company. We don't need to care."

Mark: Right. Robert and I had some questions because my phones were going up and down before this call, but we finally got them hopefully figured out. But yeah, the utilities are one, but you can think of who it is that you

feel hostage to. They represent about 4% of everyone's client base.

There are people who you buy from on a regular basis, not because you want to, but because you feel you have no other choice.

Then the next group are antagonists. So these are people, only maybe 3% of your base, who buy from you, hit and miss occasionally, but they generally don't like you. They're not satisfied with you. They rarely buy from you. These are the kind of people who, when I was in the office products industry, would buy a \$99 task chair and then return it with three parts missing.

You know what I'm talking about. People who never pay their bills, don't return their calls and expect everything from you. Those are antagonists.

As you slide up this curve into higher levels of satisfaction and higher levels of loyalty, you've got the next level which are mercenaries.

"Mercenary" sounds like a harsh word, but these are people who buy from you. They even buy on a regular basis. They do business with you, but if someone comes along with a new widget or a better price or some other promotion, they will leave rather quickly.

Robert: It's all about price. No loyalty, in other words.

Mark: Yes. And the scary thing, Robert, is according to the study, it was 74% of everyone's customer base.

Robert: Really?

Mark: Yeah.

Robert: In the mercenary category? This is brilliant stuff.

Mark: Yeah. It's kind of scary. Depending on what your business is, you may not model out like this, but this is across a portfolio of clients. The service profit chain was only service companies, so they're not excluded from this.

As you move up past mercenaries, the next group and the second-to-last group here is loyalists represent about 17% of everyone's portfolio. These are people who not only buy from you, they buy everything you sell and they sing your praises to everyone you know. They're great people to have, but they're not the top of the chart.

The top level of buyer is what they call "apostles." Xerox used to call them "unpaid sales reps" because they sell for you.

Robert: What percentage is that?

Mark: That's only 3%, and you may have a higher percent, but according to the study across portfolios, that's where they land. These are people who do everything that loyalists do, but they go one step further. They provide you with constructive criticism, not because they're complaining but because they want you to get better and partner with them in the future.

So you have to ask yourself, "What percentage of my client base are apostles, and how do I move people from mercenaries up to apostles?"

But the big "so what?" in the study wasn't that. The big "so what?" was if we use our own mercenaries as a baseline of

X in terms of lifetime value or profitability, then loyalists provided five times the profit of mercenaries, and apostles provided six times the profit of our own mercenaries.

Robert: Wow!

Mark: So, that is usually enough to get most business owners attention when they look at the value. And if you think about it, it really should make intuitive sense. They're referring business to you. They're buying all your products, not just the low-margin, high-hassle products or offerings that you have, but the high-value stuff. And they're happy, and they tell everybody else about it.

What I say is the glue that is in that link between customer satisfaction which leads to customer loyalty which leads to high profitability which is the value-profit chain is trust that underpins all of that.

Robert: Absolutely. So, to get more loyalists, you work on all kinds of strategies to build trust, which is better service, more responsiveness, more listening, all of those kinds of things. Very interesting.

I love it when people give me models like this because then it becomes a lot more tangible. I've talked about a lot of these things, but I've never had percentages on these before, so this is great stuff.

You read a lot of things, don't you, Mark?

Mark: I'm like you.

Robert: You studied a lot of these. It's great stuff.

Mark: When I'm passionate about a topic. This is kind of, to a certain extent, uncharted waters. If you look at traditional sales programs that you see out there in the world—not just for corporate sales, but there are people who go into professional service organizations—there's very little that talks about relationship building.

Robert: Really?

Mark: Usually what I have found, and I don't want to name names because we talked about badmouthing being not a good thing so I'm not going to badmouth anyone, is they talk heavily about techniques and, what you talked about earlier, scripts and manipulative ways to box people in and use positive affirmations, reverse closes.

I even heard one called the “Tonka Toy close” which is when the kid's making noise at the real estate table, the real estate agent slides a Tonka Toy across the table knowing that the kid's going to reach out and grab it and start playing with it to keep the kid quiet. Or if the guy's got his hand on the pen, he'll lift it up and grab it.

It's just really amazing what people come up with.

Robert: Are you familiar with Alan Weiss?

Mark: Yes, I am.

Robert: He had a good comment. He says, “All techniques are neutral.” It's the mindset that you put into it. It's the intention behind it. You can use any of these techniques in a very trusting, loving, appropriate way, even with the Tonka Toy, or you can just think, “Oh, this is a great

manipulation,” and don’t give a damn. It’s where you’re coming from.

Mark: You’re exactly right, and that’s the bottom of the equation we talked about up at the top, the trust equation. That self-orientation is a matter of focus, and it’s a question of whether the client or customer perceives you as doing it for what your intent is. Is it self-oriented to make the sale, or are you just having fun?

Robert: Right.

Mark: To notice it’s from their lens. It’s not from your own lens. They are aware of it. When you think you’re clever because someone gave you a technique to use, don’t think that they buyer hasn’t seen it before somewhere. Do it in the spirit that you just mentioned. They can see your intention, so be genuine. Be authentic.

Charles H. Green says, “Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken.”

Robert: That might be a good saying to wrap up the call. “Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken.” That’s brilliant stuff.

This is really been fun for me, Mark. It really has.

Mark: Me too.

Robert: We’ll put the link in to your website, which is www.TrueColorsConsulting.com. We’ll put that on the page where we list the interview and the transcript. Then you’ll also be giving us that model. What’s the name of it?

Mark: The value driver.

Robert: The value-driver model that you'll be able to download. And I highly recommend going to Mark's site and subscribing to his newsletter. Read some of his past blog posts. He's a very good writer and obviously a very good conceptualizer and synthesizer of a lot of ideas.

He has just come up with some fabulous stuff that I think you'll find useful. Maybe there will be some way for you to work with Mark in the future.

Mark, you have to create a book and some products.

Mark: I have a proposal ready, and I hope next time we get together we'll be able to talk about it.

Robert: Great! It's really been fun. Thank you very much for doing this interview with me.

Mark: Thanks so much for having me, Robert.

Robert: Okay, great.