

BUSINESS OBSERVER

BUSINESS BOOK REVIEW

Sales tips that really work

GEETA NADKARNI
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Why would anybody want to spend \$40 on a mop (and up to \$60 on mop accessories) when you can get one for \$5 at the dollar store? This was Vanessa Simpkins's challenge. She literally sold mops — the high-end microfibre kind — for a direct-marketing firm. Thing is, she made commissions of up to \$900 a day doing it. She says the secret to her success was a process she calls "authentic selling." And it all started with her discovering the Law of Attraction.

Are you groaning?
Yeah, me, too.
For those of you who haven't watched or read *The Secret*, the Law of Attraction states basically that like attracts like. So if you have positive, happy thoughts, the vibrations you send out into the universe will attract positive, happy things to you. Like jobs that allow you to make \$900 a day selling mops, for example. But if you live your life in fear and regret, bad things will happen.

I'll admit that this facet of Vanessa Simpkins's self-published work did make me a little resistant to her message. While I see the benefits of a positive attitude, I bristle at the idea that every bad thing that happens to someone is somehow their fault. So I went in with a chip on my shoulder.

Luckily, the book, despite its slimness, is full of practical, non-hocus-pocus advice. Simpkins starts off with her own backstory. About how, once she worked through some of her mental blocks and clearly imagined the kind of life she wanted to live (i.e., her goals other than making a very comfortable living), she landed her mop job on Craigslist, as if by magic.



From Bankrupt to \$900 a Day Selling Mops
By Vanessa Simpkins
Self published, 108 pages, \$19.62

The job led her to give live demonstrations at big stores like Sears, Canadian Tire, etc., work flexible hours, spend several months a year travelling and still make more money than all the other salespeople employed by her company.

The most useful chapters of the book help struggling entrepreneurs identify some of the mental patterns and hidden assumptions that might be sabotaging their efforts. And her section on good salesmanship and selling without being slimy is worth the ticket price by itself.

If you've read other books on sales, you might not find anything groundbreaking here. But Simpkins has managed to distil her experience into a very succinct, actionable list. This is a great benefit to busy entrepreneurs who have precious little time to read, let alone figure out ways to implement complicated systems.

Simpkins teaches simple ways to manage your energy (something many self-employed types struggle with), gain clarity of vision and then set yourself and your product above the competition. She talks about gaining customer trust via free samples or promotions and then using that trust effectively to close a sale.

Simpkins takes her own advice on this and provides several free PDF guides, audio interviews and supplementary material (which she says is worth \$597) via her website americassalesattraction.com.

The verdict: *From Bankrupt to \$900 a Day Selling Mops* is a useful guide to entrepreneurs who are looking to overcome unconscious barriers to success or to brush up on their sales skills. If you can ignore a few small typos, you'll get a lot out of this slim volume.

SALES SUCCESS



Vanessa Simpkins made \$900 a day selling mops. Now she sells reproductions of family artwork. There's no shame in sales, she says.

'A SUCCESSFUL SALESPERSON will not blame the economy, the clients, the weather or anything else'

The power of authenticity

GEETA NADKARNI
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Montrealer Vanessa Simpkins, author of *From Bankrupt to \$900 a Day Selling Mops*, shares insight on wealth, spiritual selling and how she used the Law of Attraction to change her life.

"I say sales is a spiritual practice because every masterful salesman has to become a master of one thing: himself," Simpkins says. She says she used the power of positive thinking and authentic selling to earn fat commissions while selling mops at live floor shows at big box stores like Hudson Bay Co., Sears and Zellers.

Her take on "authentic selling" is all about personal responsibility. "A successful salesperson will not blame the economy, the clients, the weather or anything else when a sale doesn't turn out the way he anticipated. A great salesperson will search within, take inventory of what went wrong, what he did or didn't do, his responsibility in it all, and then will act accordingly."

In her book, Simpkins opens by telling the story of how she fled a well-paying job, great house and loving boyfriend because she felt trapped and miserable. She recounts how she was happiest while she lived in Thailand with almost nothing but the clothes on her back; her routine consisting of early morning yoga on the beach and few responsibilities. She says she realized then that the western way of chasing money was "backwards."

But right after, she writes that she discovered the Law of Attraction and used its principles to get her dream job and make lots of money. A contradiction? "No," Simpkins says. "It wasn't just about the money. Making money is great, but it's not the end all of success. Creating a lifestyle that suits you and having the free time to enjoy the money you make doing something you love is where it's at."

The mop job allowed Simpkins to move to Hawaii, work part time and travel, all while making nearly \$900 a day in commissions. "Later, I decided I was going to break into the speaking business. So, with no for-

mal education or university degree, I figured the most effective way to establish myself as an expert was to become the best and highest paid mop lady salesman and write a book about it."

To do this, Simpkins took the road less travelled. She bought a camper trailer and drove across Canada, doing her presentations at stores that had never had these "mop shows" before. "I not only mopped up on cash and blew past the other sales agents straight to the top, but I also had a lot of fun."

Readers of the book might wonder how Simpkins can say she's "authentic" when she clearly admits early on that selling mops was neither her goal nor her passion. She says that the mop job was a means to an end. At 6-foot-2, she wanted to capitalize on her imposing presence and hone her public-speaking skills. The durable, eco-friendly mops happened to align with her core values. And, she says, there's no shame in sales.

"People don't buy products or services; they buy experiences. I really enjoy helping people change

their perspectives on things, i.e. personal transformations. And sales is all about transformation. You buy a plane ticket to another country and that experience changes your life. You buy a new pair of shoes, they make you feel confident, and that changes your life. Sales is at the crux of transformation.

"I'm really authentic in how I present my product. No script, no hidden agenda. Just ... here I am, here's what the product is; do you want it or not? In today's market, if you're in it just for the money and if you don't care about your clients' experience, don't even bother with sales, because you won't make it. There's nothing worse than a slimy salesman."

These days, Simpkins no longer flogs mops. Instead, she uses her skills to sell reproductions of her family's artwork to private buyers via simpkinsart.com. She also works with other entrepreneurs as a life and business coach to help them use the Law of Attraction for their own benefit.

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GROWTH Germany is being held up as a model

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And as high unemployment persists, skills atrophy. This weakens productivity and shuts people out of the job market for longer and longer periods — a danger stressed by Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke at the U.S. central bank's Jackson Hole symposium last month.

Apart from sapping animal spirits and forcing governments to raise taxes or cut spending, diminished growth closes off one route for lowering the high sovereign debt to gross domestic product ratios that have locked Greece, Ireland and Portugal out of the bond markets and are unnerving investors in Italian and Spanish debt.

Against this background, and with the scope for fiscal and monetary stimulus all but exhausted, politicians might be expected to pop the nettle and push through reforms to improve the supply side of the economy — policies such as making it easier to hire and fire, promoting greater competition and investing more in training.

Far from it. Pier Carlo Padoan, the OECD's chief economist, says he is less optimistic about the prospects for deep-seated change than he was at the start of the year.

"I see that measures are being announced. I would like to see them

being implemented," Padoan said.

With policy ammunition running desperately short, he said it was time for governments to overcome their squeamishness about confronting vested interests opposed to change.

"This is a luxury that many countries cannot afford any more. The situation does not allow it."

The vicious circle of rising debt and falling growth is made worse by the fact that those countries drowning in debt on the periphery of the eurozone are also the ones that have dragged their feet on freeing up their product and labour markets or modernizing their education systems.

"They're going through some truly horrible times. I'm very worried about the whole southern European fringe, not just on an 18-month to two-year view but looking out a decade or longer," said Whyte with the Centre for European Reform.

Germany, by contrast, derided a decade ago as the sick man of Europe, is being held up as a model, at least when it comes to jobs.

"The remarkable resilience of the German labour market in the last few years, where wage moderation and flexible time accounting shielded the economy from excessive job destruction, illustrates admirably the promise of well-structured reforms," Jean-Claude Trichet, president of the European Central

Bank, said approvingly in Jackson Hole.

How much are countries missing out by not pressing the reform button? Padoan says Europe's trend growth has fallen in recent years to an average of just 1.5 per cent a year, but he says some members of the 17-nation eurozone could almost double that rate with a supply-side jolt.

Italy needs to liberalize its service sector, open up professions to new entrants and improve energy efficiency, Padoan said. Greece needs to do all that and overhaul its labour

"This is a luxury that many countries cannot afford any more."

OECD CHIEF ECONOMIST PIER CARLO PADOAN

market and competition policy at the same time. Germany, too, could grow faster still if it liberalized services, which would trigger increased investment.

These policy prescriptions are well worn. Leaders of the European Union enshrined them and a host of other reform goals in the 2000 Lisbon Agenda, which they promptly ignored. The pledges have since been repackaged as the Europe 2020

Strategy, but Whyte says the havoc wrought by the near-collapse of the international financial system will make politicians more wary than ever of the social disruption that reforms entail.

"The Great Financial Crisis hasn't been a great advert for free-market capitalism," Whyte said. His research outfit publishes a booklet this week exploring how Europe could take off by embracing innovation. But in this area, too, Whyte fears the political climate means policy is likely to be increasingly hijacked by incumbent firms hostile to competition from startups.

Europe is not doomed to go down Japan's path of economic stagnation. Its potential growth rate is low but stronger than Japan's — estimated by the Bank of Japan at just 0.5 per cent a year because of a fast-shrinking working-age population.

But the spectre of a renewed recession is a reminder for governments that, even if they can spirit away the eurozone's currency and debt woes, they have still to find the elixir for growth.

"I'm not saying politicians will implement reform, but they should," Padoan said. "Some politicians resist reform because they are captive to interest groups. Well, the price for those governments in terms of sustainable growth will be very high."

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