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ACT LIKE YOU CAN SELL

Build Trust, Command the Stage, and Navigate Unscripted Sales

by Bryan Christie

Sample pages — approximately ten manuscript pages

INTRODUCTION: THE STAGE IS YOURS

“Regarding excellence, it is not enough to know, but we must try to have and use it.” — Aristotle

Let me start with something most books like this don’t do: An apology. The book has the word “sell” in the title, but it is not strictly a book that teaches you *how* to sell. Good “how to” books out there, written by talented people, offer comprehensive step-by-step methods that promise success if you follow them to the letter. I have read many of them and used some as teaching aids, but some time ago I decided many are similar to diet books. Follow my expert method, and you will lose the weight. Simple, right? Then why aren’t we all at our ideal body mass, fit and glowing?

With thousands of diets to choose from, how do you know which one will actually work for you? Why do they all carry the same small-print disclaimer that they are “designed to be used alongside exercise”? The truth is that we already know what we need to do. Eat a bit less, move a bit more, and the weight comes off. It is simply not that easy for most people, and so we recruit motivation from wherever we can find it: a coach, a nutritionist, a fitness influencer, pharmaceuticals, or a health scare.

I wanted to take a different approach with this book. Rather than hand you another script, I wanted to explore something closer to a perspective, one built on your own perceptions, and on finding and expressing your own version of the truth. It assumes you want to become a different kind of sales professional: one whose success comes from understanding how an honest portrayal of that truth creates a genuinely positive response in other people. I call that enabling the willing buyer. The method threaded through this book rests on a close alignment between the

philosophical approach actors use to perform truthfully on stage, and the role sales professionals play, often without realizing it, every working day. Hence the title, *Act Like You Can Sell*.

Some vocabulary earns a permanent place in your head the moment you hear it, because it names something you'd already been sensing without the words for it. I first heard the phrase "premature elaboration" decades ago, sitting in one of the very first Solution Selling training classes taught in the field, and it has stayed with me, through every sales conversation and every demo since. Aristotle's vocabulary did the same thing for me, only later in life and at far greater depth.

Let's start by borrowing from one of history's most famous philosophers, Aristotle, born in 384 BC, who held a single, stubborn, empirical belief: that all human concepts and all human knowledge are ultimately rooted in perception. Everything you think you know about a buyer (their mood, their intentions, their trustworthiness) arrives filtered through perception, yours and theirs. Selling, properly understood, is the art of managing that perception honestly.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* gives us a working vocabulary for that perception that I'll lean on constantly throughout this book, so let me share the three terms with you now before we go any further. Aristotle's three appeals are what we use, even subliminally, with anyone who is trying to persuade another human being of anything, and he argued that all three are always in play.

Ethos is the appeal to character: your perceived credibility, integrity, and goodwill. It is judged almost instantly, often before a single fact has been exchanged, and it decides whether anything you say afterward gets a fair hearing at all.

Logos is the appeal to reason: the evidence, the structure of your argument, the case a buyer can defend later, alone, in a room you're not in. It matters enormously. It rarely matters first.

Pathos is the appeal to emotion: the felt cost of staying exactly where you are, and the felt relief of change. It is, more often than we like to admit, what actually moves a person to act, with logic recruited afterward to justify the decision emotion already made.

I'll return to Ethos, Logos, and Pathos constantly, and there's a fuller treatment of Aristotle's rhetoric and poetics a little further into this section. For now, just remember the three words. You'll see all three in action before this introduction is finished.

So, let's start with how *you* buy, because you are a buyer as often as you are a seller. How important is a truthful seller to you? In a world where truth is manipulated more casually than ever, how do you know whether you can trust the person you're buying from? And in today's one-click, algorithm-recommended world, is trust even implied anymore, or have we simply stopped asking the question? Do you always chase the lowest price, or does it matter that you've built a bond with the person on the other side of the transaction? Do they make you laugh? Do they trigger your curiosity? Did you ever stop to ask yourself why you actually said "yes"?

How many of you have talked to a stranger on a plane or overheard a conversation at the next table in a restaurant and felt the hairs on the back of your neck lift as a small internal alarm went off: *I bet you're in sales*. Maybe you've thought the same thing about people you know, reacting to their style, their patter, their habit of dropping sports analogies into conversations that don't need them.

To many people, the word "sales" produces the same emotional flinch as discovering your eldest child, the one destined to carry the family torch into law or medicine, has just dropped out of the hundred-thousand-dollar degree you paid for and joined a commune in Oregon. You can be furious, but you already know that the harder you fight it, the fewer

postcards you'll get. And you also know that you'll fight it anyway and try everything in your power to change their mind, and in that very instant, you will have become the salesperson you try to avoid.

With that in mind, let's start from the assumption that selling is not magic, and it is not something you are simply born to do. It is a trained profession that blends art, science, and the humanities and, for the best practitioners, a dose of ethics and morality that earns a genuinely positive response from today's educated buyer. Most of those people, especially in today's advertising-saturated world, are pitched to so relentlessly that they have gone numb to the steady stream of polished marketing messages, to the point where the numbness itself has become a cultural norm. Even today's technology start-ups cannot secure funding to grow without first convincing their lenders they can drive sales through advertising and subscription revenue. They need you to use their app, funded either by someone else's advertising budget or their own. How else can they afford a house in the Bay Area?

What actually separates a great salesperson from an average one? How do some people step into those promised six- and seven-figure incomes, year after year, while others plateau? Are they simply lucky (in the right territory, with the right accounts, in the right social circles)? Is knowing how to play golf really that important? Where does their assured self-confidence come from? Do they dress a certain way, always? Do they seem to know everyone by their first name, connecting with strangers as though they'd known them for years?

Here comes the first moment of truth. If you just glanced up, caught your own reflection, and nodded knowingly, mouthing "yes, that's me," this book probably will not help you very much, and because I would still like a good review, please show at least another minute of interest, flick to the final page, and then gently return the book to the shelf. At least let the people

nearby see that you considered it. But if you are still looking for answers, still working at improving your sales impact and your customer relationships, this book offers a different lens: not a sales professional's lens, but an acting professional's.

If I've piqued your curiosity, now is the moment to take the book to the till. Don't keep reading in the shop and miss your flight. Invest in the experience, catch your plane, and read on.

TAKEAWAY

Aristotle mapped what a person must feel, and in what order, before they change their mind. Improvisation is simply the discipline of delivering that sequence live, when the other person refuses to follow your outline.

ENABLING THE WILLING BUYER

I used that phrase a few pages ago and let it pass without much explanation, so let me go back and give you more detail, because it's the single idea underneath everything else in this book, and it describes something that has genuinely changed about our profession, not just a cleverer way of talking about the old one.

For most of selling's history, the salesperson was a gatekeeper. If you wanted to know a product's specifications, its pricing, how it compared to three competitors, or what other customers actually thought of it, you had exactly one reliable route to that information: a rep, on the phone or in a showroom, controlling the pace and the content of what you learned and when you learned it. The entire approach of traditional sales training (the qualification frameworks, the staged discovery questions, the carefully sequenced feature reveal) was built for a world where the seller knew more than the buyer.

That world is gone, and it isn't coming back. Today's buyer has almost certainly already read the reviews, compared the shortlist, scanned the analyst reports, asked their own network who they trust, watched the demo videos you didn't personally deliver, and built a rough version of the business case in their own head before your name ever entered the conversation. They are not walking into that first call to learn what your product does. In a great many cases, they already know, better than many of your reps do, because they've spent real hours comparing it against everyone else on their list. What they don't yet have, and what no amount of self-directed research can give them, is the thing this entire book has been building toward: enough trust in you and enough emotional permission to act now rather than defer the decision.

This is the real, practical meaning behind enabling the willing buyer, and it's worth being precise about what the phrase does and doesn't claim. It does not mean creating something out of nothing, the way an old-fashioned pitch tried to talk a reluctant stranger into a decision they hadn't considered. It means recognizing that a great deal of the traditional sales job (informing, comparing, justifying) has already happened, silently, without you, before you ever entered the room, and that your actual job has shifted to something narrower and, in some ways, harder: confirming fit, removing the last friction, and giving a buyer who has already done most of the thinking the confidence to finally stop thinking and start doing.

One force has accelerated this shift faster than any other single change in the history of selling, and it's worth naming directly: generative AI. A buyer today doesn't just read reviews and compare specs anymore. They ask a chatbot to summarize the reviews, draft a comparison table across your three closest competitors, and rough out a business case, before you've had a single conversation with them. The buyer walking into your first call isn't just informed. In a growing number of cases, they've already built the argument for buying, or for walking away,

and your job in that first meeting is no longer to inform them. It's to confirm, in person, that the trust behind the argument they've already built is well-placed.

This doesn't make the seller's job smaller. It makes it narrower and, in exactly the way this chapter has already argued, harder. A machine can compress the research phase of a deal from weeks to minutes. No machine can sit across from a skeptical buyer and be trusted, because trust isn't information; it's judgment about a specific person, formed in real time, and that has never been something a tool could manufacture on your behalf.

A quick note on the phrase itself, since I'd rather be transparent than let you assume I invented it out of thin air. "Willing buyer" is old language, borrowed from contract and valuation law, where a "willing buyer and willing seller" standard has defined fair market value for well over a century, a hypothetical, reasonably informed party acting under no compulsion in either direction. I've narrowed it considerably for this book. I'm not using it to describe a legal fiction useful for appraising an asset. I'm using it to describe something much more specific and personal: a real person, sitting across from you, who has already done the informing and comparing on their own, and who needs exactly one more thing from the conversation that no amount of further research could supply: permission, felt rather than argued, to trust you enough to act.

Logos Arrives Pre-Built

Go back to Aristotle's three appeals for a moment, because this shift lands differently on each one. Logos (the reasoned case, the ROI, the ninety-slide comparison of specifications) increasingly arrives at your door already assembled, at least in rough form, by the buyer themselves. They've built their own savings model. They've read your competitors' pricing

pages. In a genuine sense, the modern buyer often walks in as their own first analyst, having done the desk research a rep would once have had to walk them through step by step.

This is precisely why Act Two of this book is not really about persuading a buyer of your logic from scratch. It's about testing the logic the buyer has already half-built, correcting what's wrong in it, filling the gaps their outside research couldn't have filled, and, most importantly, per the chapter on making your partner look good, arming that logic well enough that it survives contact with everyone else in the buyer's own organization who wasn't part of that early research.

What Self-Service Research Cannot Solve

If Logos increasingly shows up pre-built, Ethos and Pathos do not, and this is where the actual value of a modern seller has almost entirely become. No amount of reading a vendor's website tells a buyer whether the person on the other end of a future support ticket will actually pick up the phone and mean it when they say they'll help. No comparison chart tells them whether this specific vendor relationship will feel like a partnership or a slow-motion disappointment eighteen months in, after the contract is signed and the account gets handed to someone they've never met. Research answers "does this work." It cannot answer, "can I trust these people when something goes wrong," and it is precisely that second question (unanswerable from a browser, answerable only in a live, unscripted human exchange) that this entire book has been training you to answer well.

Pathos works the same way. A buyer can read a hundred case studies describing someone else's relief at solving their problem, and feel almost nothing, because it happened to someone else, in someone else's words, filtered through a marketing team. The felt, personal permission to act, the actual emotional move from "we should probably do this eventually" to "let's do this

now,” still requires a real human moment, and no amount of self-service content has yet found a way to manufacture that at scale.