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Marketing the real you

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I often wonder how the practice began of pretending to be someone else in order to market your business. You know what I'm talking about -- it's the marketing face, the selling voice, which you often put on in order to attend a networking event or make a sales call. Who taught you to do that?

I have a suspicion where we learn this behavior. Most of us spend a lifetime observing showroom salespeople, product spokespersons in the media, and hucksters on street corners. What we see demonstrated there is artificial enthusiasm, manipulative use of language, feigned interest, and in some cases outright deception.

Sounds awful, doesn't it? So why copy any part of this distasteful way of selling?

Psychologist Abraham Maslow said, "If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." Perhaps we believe this is the only way we can sell because it's the only way we know. I'm not accusing anyone of consciously deceiving prospective clients. What I'm suggesting is that what we do unconsciously and automatically is to behave authentically around them.

Intuitively, many of us feel as if something is wrong with this way of operating. When we have to sell ourselves, we find it unpleasant, disagreeable, and even repulsive. But what if all those negative feelings were simply because we hate the artificiality and manipulation we think must be a part of selling?

Imagine what it would be like to go to a business networking event as yourself. No facade, no pretension, just plain you. When someone asks your reason for coming, you tell them the truth. You don't have to claim you wanted to hear the speaker (if you didn't). You can come right out and say, "I'm hoping to make some contacts that will lead to business for me."

You wouldn't have to invent reasons to start a conversation. You can walk up to someone who looks interesting and say, "Hi, I haven't met you yet." If you're shy around strangers, you can tell the first person

you meet, "I'm sort of a wallflower and feel awkward at events like this. Could you introduce me to some folks?"

Now imagine placing a follow-up call to a prospect where you are completely honest. You could say, "I have some days open on my calendar soon and I'm wondering if this would be a good time for that project we've been discussing." Or, "We haven't talked in a while and I'd like to find out if you're still planning to start the new training program this year."

I see so many professionals and consultants struggle with trying to find an "excuse" to call a prospect. You don't need some manufactured excuse. You know the reason you're calling. Most of the time THEY know the reason you're calling. Just say what it is.

Let's extend this same principle to making a cold call. Instead of stumbling around awkwardly trying to make a polished -- but unnatural -- sales approach, imagine yourself saying, "I'm not much of a salesperson, but I'm really good at what I do. Can we have a conversation about what you need and see if I'm the right person for the job?"

If you've been working from a cold-calling script that makes you flush and get a tight throat every time you read it, throw it out. Come up with one really good opening line that feels authentic and gets directly to the point. Then decide how you will answer -- honestly -- some of the typical questions prospects ask you. My bet is that your calls will immediately get easier.

In fact, the more you become honest, direct, and authentic in all of your marketing, the more appealing selling will be to you, the more effortless it will become, and the more success you will ultimately achieve. Because most business results from building relationships, and how can you develop a relationship with someone when you never reveal who you really are?