

The Alchemy of Closing



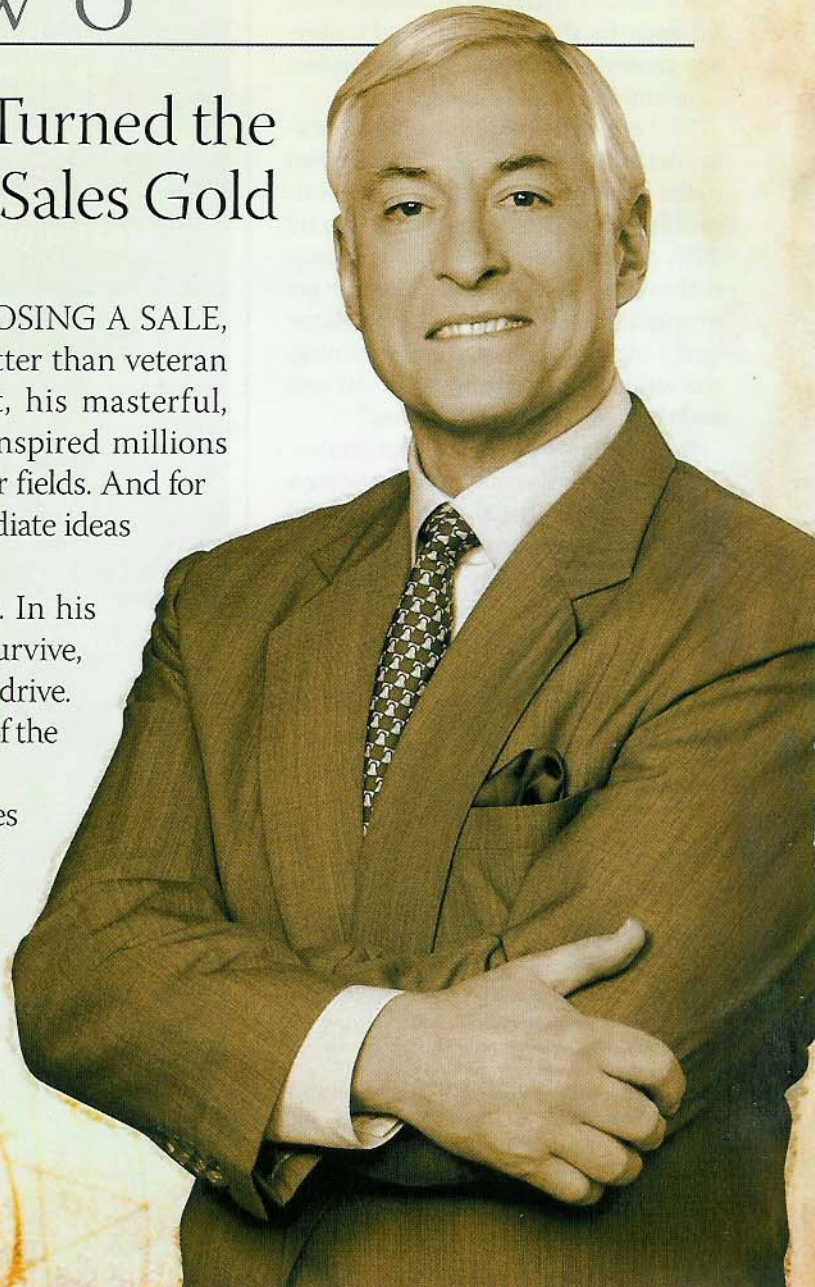
PART TWO

How Guru **Brian Tracy** Turned the Grind of Experience into Sales Gold

WHEN IT COMES TO CLOSING A SALE, few know how to do it better than veteran **Brian Tracy**. Simply put, his masterful, proven techniques have inspired millions of professionals to become more successful in their fields. And for financial services professionals, Tracy offers immediate ideas to boost your business and see results.

For his part, Tracy wasn't always so successful. In his younger years, after struggling to pay his bills and survive, he discovered one of the first keys to success—inner drive. His aggressiveness led him to pursue the expertise of the top salesmen, and he never stopped from there.

He soon built a sales training empire that includes the best-selling audiobook, *The Psychology of Selling*. Over his career, he has written 45 books, consulted for more than 1,000 companies, and spoken to more than 4 million people in 4,000 speeches and seminars. In this interview, Tracy tells *InsuranceNewsNet* Publisher **Paul Feldman** how he learned his craft the hard way.



FELDMAN: According to your book *The Psychology of Selling*, most salespeople fear and loathe the thought of “closing.” Done right, however, closing is a true art form that takes place from the minute your presentation begins. What are your keys to the “Art of Closing” that everyone needs to know?

TRACY: Closing should be low pressure or no pressure at all. You’re just asking the customer to confirm everything you’ve talked about up to that point. So closing could be as simple as saying, “Does this make sense to you so far?” If the prospect says yes, you say, “Well let’s get started right away.” Real simple. It’s not a technique where you twist the customer’s arm up behind their back.

In my seminars, I teach what I call the relationship model of selling, which is an inverse pyramid, upside down, that has four parts. The first part, 40 percent, is building trust. And so the very first thing you do when you meet new people is you take the time to build trust. And the way you build trust is by asking them questions about themselves and their situation, and taking the time and real effort to understand exactly where they’re coming from and what they might need. You never try to sell on the first sale.

The second part, 30 percent of the sales process, is presenting. This means identifying needs accurately. You just ask a lot of questions; you ask them what they’re doing now and how it’s working, plus what their plans are and how they plan to achieve them. And the more you ask questions, the more you build trust. So basically, the first 70 percent of the process is building trust by asking really good questions. You don’t even talk about your products or service, because until you’ve asked enough questions, you don’t even know whether this person is a prospect or a suspect.

The biggest mistake that people make is they start to talk about their services far too fast—long before the customer is even aware that they need them, long before the salesperson is even aware of what the customer needs.

I heard this wonderful line in a book I read by a life insurance expert who makes a fortune. When people ask him what he does, he says, “I work with the small- and medium-sized business owners and I make their work voluntary.” In other words, they can work if they want to, but they’ve reached a point financially where they work—but their work is voluntary.

It just happens to hit the hot button of virtually every single small- or medium-sized business owner you ever talk to. They love their business and their work, but they’d like to take off more time. And they’d like to reach a point where they don’t have to work to support their lifestyle. So he helps them make their work voluntary. And people ask, “How do you do that?” And he begins asking questions and building trust.

FELDMAN: Which reminds me of one the most effective closing techniques that I have come across, and one that you call “The Instant Reverse Close.” It is almost magical, because it instantly changes the state of your prospect’s mind unlike anything I have ever seen. Can you explain it for readers, because I really think it’s important?

TRACY: When a person says “I’m not interested,” you immediately say “That’s exactly why I’m calling on you. I didn’t think you’d be interested. Most of my very best clients were not interested when I first called on them, but now they recommend me to their friends.” What that does is it just simply gets their attention, by taking their best objection and telling them, “That is exactly why you should do...” That’s just one opportunity for an instant reverse close.

Another thing that I used to say when I was selling financial services is, “I want

you to know that I am not here to sell you anything. Please relax. All I want to do is ask you a couple of questions and see if I can’t help you achieve some of your goals in a cost-effective way. Then we’ll do everything possible to help you achieve those goals. Would that be all right?”

Then you take control of the questioning process. The questions start from the general and they go to the particular. The first question is very easy to answer. The second question is fairly easy. The third is still easy. And with the fourth question you start to focus on critical things. The questions are progressively more difficult, so it’s like a narrowing funnel.

Your questions must be thought through in advance. So, if somebody were to wake you out of a sound sleep and say, “What’s question No. 1?” Wham!

You’d be able to answer.

What most salespeople do is they say, “Well, I want to be spontaneous.” They say, “I can hardly wait to hear what I’m about to say because I have no idea.” And they walk in and say whatever falls out of their mouth and they follow that up with whatever falls out of their mouth next.

They’re like a drunk lurching from lamppost to lamppost as opposed to being a professional.

A professional is very well organized, planned and prepared. I design every sales presentation around seven questions. You could have nine or 10, but seven seems to be the ideal, from the most general to the most particular. I call this the “spine and ribs method” of questioning. The spine is the questions and the ribs are the side issues. “Well, how did you start doing that?” And “How is that working for you?” And so on. You keep coming back to your spine of questions. At the end of seven questions, it should be clear to the prospect

“The biggest mistake that people make is they start to talk about their services far too fast...”

that they want and need what you're selling. And it should be clear to you that they need it or don't.

FELDMAN: You started out in financial services, in the investment side of the world. How did that shape your career and what are some lessons that you learned?

TRACY: I started off as a nobody from nowhere on the streets. I started selling mutual funds and investments to businesses, business owners and business executives. But I had to start off cold-calling, knocking on doors and selling investment programs where they would invest a certain amount per month. And I just spun my wheels and spun my wheels. I had no idea what I was doing and got almost no training. One of the interesting challenges in selling any kind of financial services is they give you product training. And they think if they give you enough product training and you get a license, you're now a qualified salesperson.

You're not a qualified anything. Basically, all you have is book learning, but you haven't learned anything about selling. Eighty percent of sales success is sales skills. Only 20 percent is products, service, technology, actuarial tables, returns and so on.

I went to one of the top sales guys in my company, a guy who was making 10 times as much as anybody else. I asked, "What are you doing differently from me?" He said, "Show me your presentation and I'll critique it for you." It turned out I didn't really have a sales presentation. I just had blah, blah, blah. He said no, no, no; there's a logical and orderly sequence from the general to the particular.

So he sat me down and he walked me through his sales presentation. And the sales presentation was beautiful. It was like music. It was like you had been banging on a drum and somebody plays a symphony orchestra. I said, "Geez, that's beautiful." He said, "Yes, this is how we sell." You spoke to him and it was almost irresistible—as he asked you questions, you became more and more

mesmerized with the idea of investing with him or whatever company he recommended.

He never mentioned a product or the company or anything else; he just focused on the end of the game. That was where you wanted to end up—getting the highest return on your money with the greatest degree of safety and the ability to access the money. He said, "Does that make sense to you?" And I said, "Absolutely." "Well," he said, "let's get started." And he took out the order form and began filling it out—the order sheet close. It's a very simple thing to do. They'll have to stop you from filling out the form in order to stop the sale. And usually they don't.

I also began reading books, listening to audio programs and going to seminars. Here's what I found—the most important thing to remember is that all sales skills are learnable. Every single person who's in the top 10 percent today, which should be your goal, started in the bottom 10 percent. Every master was once a disaster.

My friend Tom Hopkins, one of the top sales trainers in the world, in every single seminar talks about how he started off living out of a crummy car, making no money, making no sales, making nothing. He learned how to sell professionally. He studied it and studied it and studied it and studied it. And he memorized higher sales methodologies: how to open sales, answer objections, ask for the order, get resales and referrals. And he practiced and practiced and practiced and practiced and practiced. And he became one of the highest paid people in a field where there's hundreds of thousands of people competing because he paid the price.

FELDMAN: People who are the most successful in sales are always the most prepared and they are the ones who did the most studying and self-learning. For outsiders looking in, it always appears that they just had natural talent and that is why they are successful, but that's just not the case for most.

TRACY: There's lots of research on this. Basically it takes seven years and/or 10,000 hours of hard, dedicated work, both in the field and on yourself, to reach the top 10 percent. There are no overnight successes. Every single person I know who is at the top of their field took years to get there.

The best research on personal success and business success says that 80 percent of the population will work on themselves enough so that they can make a living doing what they're doing. If they work for a company, they'll learn their job enough so they don't get fired. If they're an accountant, they'll learn enough so that they can do the proper accounting at their level. If they're a doctor, lawyer, architect, engineer, salesperson or anyone, they'll learn enough to be able to do their job competently. And it usually takes about a year. A year after school if you're a professional.

Here's the harsh discovery: after that

"Basically it takes seven years or 10,000 hours of hard, dedicated work to reach the top 10 percent."

There are NO overnight successes."



What Cancer Teaches...

Brian Tracy used his tenacity on one of life's biggest foes after he was diagnosed with throat cancer in early 2010. He spoke to InsuranceNewsNet Publisher Paul Feldman about how he strategized against the disease and what he learned from the ordeal:

I'm used to having a medical checkup every year but I got busy and put it off. I realized I hadn't had a checkup for about almost three years. So, when I finally went in to have my throat checked, I thought I had a nasal drip that was caused by an infection and I needed some antibiotics. And the doctor quickly saw that it was far more serious than a nasal drip. So he sent me to a specialist.

The specialist did a biopsy, came back and he gave me the big news: you've got cancer. That was a shock, especially because there's a certain psychological profile that's more susceptible to cancer than others. I tend to be very positive and optimistic and that's just simply not consistent with cancer.

I started to do my research and my doctor put together a team. In cancer, you always have a team. A team is the surgeon, the radiation oncologist and the medical oncologist who gives you chemotherapy. The three of them work together. They discuss what is necessary and then you have an enormous amount of control over the process. You can agree, disagree and go ahead.

Some people just decide not to go ahead with particular parts of the treatment because they don't want to, or they're afraid or don't agree. What I did was—tending to be conservative—I got a second opinion. The second opinion corroborated my team's opinion. So I started through the process.

The process began with chemotherapy to shrink the tumor. It actually disappeared in seven weeks. The second part was surgery to remove the scar

tissue. The third part was radiation. The radiation is where they bombard the area of where the tumor was—in this case for six weeks—to make sure that it does not recur. Each of these processes, as you can imagine, is uncomfortable and has side effects. The back of my throat burned out completely so that swallowing even a little bit of water was extraordinarily painful.

The critical thing is to be positive, optimistic, ask questions and do research. I've bought probably a two-foot-tall stack of books and articles to understand the cancer process. Then I worked my way through it and came out the other end on Aug. 14. I'm almost at 100 percent health again. Most people who've been through this, if they come through it properly, never experience it again the rest of their lives. And I think I'm in that category.

There are a lot of parallels with things that happen in life—completely unexpected reversals. You're going along fine. You have your business goals and your financial goals, then suddenly the economy hits a storm and all your goals have to be downgraded or things that you invested in are worth zero.

The critical thing, especially in sales, is resilience. How quickly and effectively you bounce back from unexpected reversals. That's really the key to success in life.

Somebody wrote a book some years ago called *The Adversity Quotient*. And his conclusion was that the key to your success is basically how well you deal with adversity. The adversity itself is unavoidable. You can't say, oh, maybe I'll have it and maybe I won't. It's unavoidable. The only question is how you deal with it. If you deal with it effectively, then you're going to have a great life; and if you don't, you won't.

year, they never get any better. They flatline in the field. Ten years later, they're no better. They have 10 years of experience, which may enable them to increase their income between 1 and 3 percent per year, but they really never get any better. They don't listen. They don't learn. They don't try new things. They don't take courses. They know it all. "Hey, I'm in this business—I know it all."

I had a gentleman in a seminar in San Diego say he wanted to talk to me because I had a major impact on his life. He said he was the top salesman in his company and had been for six years, out-selling everybody by up to seven times. And the year before, his boss gave him as a Christmas present a copy of my sales program *The Psychology of Selling*. He said he was insulted. He was the top salesman in the company and had been year after year and he was getting a sales program. He felt the implication was that he was not that good. His boss said no, he was implying that he can always be better. His boss said, "All I ask you to do is listen to it."

He said he listened to the program and almost drove off the road. He said he couldn't believe it. There were so many

things in there that he had either never known or had done once and stopped doing or had never seen how they worked together. He listened to it over and over again. He said he increased his income \$100,000 just from that program.

He said his commission was something like 5 percent. So, his boss paid \$70 for that program and got \$2 million in extra business. That's a pretty good investment. And you know something? What drives me crazy is hearing the, "Oh, I can't afford it and I don't want to spend the money. I'm going to wait till I've got lots of money before I spend any money becoming any better than I am today."

The Psychology of Selling is the best-selling audio program on sales in the history of the world. It's in 16 languages and 24 countries.

FELDMAN: I've done a lot of reading and a lot of learning over the years, and *The Psychology of Selling* had a lot of impact on my success in life. As I was preparing for this interview, it really hit me how much of your training has impacted me and others within my sales organization over the years. As a sales trainer or as a

sales manager, it is so important to pass along what you've learned and what's inspired you.

TRACY: I spoke to a top sales professional yesterday who earns \$2 million a year in selling. She said she gets up every morning and she says, "Thank you, God," and takes every opportunity she can to share what she's learned, just like I do. It's what got us to where we are, and we want to share it. We want to spread it around. We don't want to spread the wealth around, what we want to do is spread the knowledge around and enable others to get here.

That's why people like Tom Hopkins and me—people who started with nothing and worked their way up, who were hungry, drove crummy cars, missed meals, ate cheap food, worried about our bills until we broke through—are just so happy that we want to come running back to all the other salespeople and say, "I found a way. Come this way. Do this. This is what works."

And so, ultimately, the smartest thing you can do in the whole world is learn from other people who have already succeeded. Don't try to reinvent the wheel. **INN**