

SALES JOB STAR



The Selling Underdog Who Changed the World of Sales: Tom Hopkins

[By Mary Waldron]

A young real estate agent and his client walk around to the back of a house the client desperately wants to see. Despite the fact that the owner is not home, the client says, "I'm getting in. Help me," and she proceeds to squeeze through a bathroom window.

As the agent reluctantly and nervously pushes the 400-pound woman through the window, there is a crash. *Boom!* She's in. The only problem is she's knocked out cold in the bathtub.

Can this sales experience get any worse? Yup. Now the owner of the house is standing in the doorway of the bathroom with a confused and shocked look on her face.

Not exactly a typical day in the life of a real estate superstar, huh?

Well, the real estate agent in that story is Tom Hopkins, who, after breaking a series of records in real estate, including selling 365 homes in one year, went on to become one of the nation's most well-known and respected real estate agents and sales trainers.

When Hopkins quit college after only 90 days, he, like a typical 18-year-old, did not know what he wanted to do with his life. He started working in construction as an iron worker and continued doing so until his father had an idea.

Seeing that Hopkins possessed a good work ethic and got along well with others, Hopkins's dad suggested that he look into a career in sales and real estate. And since Hopkins's father had always seemed to be his biggest critic and had suggested he would never go anywhere because he dropped out of college, he decided to give real estate a shot to prove him wrong.

Real estate was not exactly a walk in the park when Hopkins started out. He failed his real estate exam three times and had trouble getting hired because he looked so young. "Back in the 1960s, residential real estate was a middle-aged man's business with very few women and teenagers," he said.

But despite his obstacles, Hopkins kept pushing. "I think I had more of a fear of failing than a desire to succeed," he said. "Because of that fear of failing, I worked my butt off."

Finally, Hopkins passed his exam and landed a job. Although his work ethic was in place and he was eager to embark on a career in

sales and real estate, Hopkins was still having difficulty achieving success. In his first six months as an agent, he only made one sale.

Looking back, Hopkins admitted that his early career in sales did not go so smoothly. Throughout the years, he has come to realize a handful of things that he would have done differently in his early sales career.



"Being a young man who had never bought a home, I didn't understand financing, mortgages, or trustees—so financing was my biggest handicap, and the mistakes I made were many," he recalled. Also, Hopkins's sense of direction did not help. "I would usually get lost when I would drive people in the car to go see a home—they'd know it, too. I would hear them in the back saying, 'He's lost.'"

"People liked me, but I didn't know how to show a home, close a sale, or get a check," he said. "Fortunately, I invested the last \$150 I had in the bank and went to a three-day training program by J. Douglas Edwards, the father of American selling." And the rest is history.

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I love golf; I play as often as I can. I love collecting humor and jokes.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. *13 Effective Methods for Closing the Sale* by J. Douglas Edwards

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *People*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

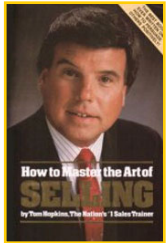
A. *Seinfeld*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Rudy Giuliani. He is just a wonderful, devoted man to his family and his business. I'd also like him to, of course, lead our country.

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Hopkins left the seminar broke, but little did he know that the 62 different closing questions he learned there would be the jumpstart his career needed. The next year was much better for Hopkins, and things got even better during the following seven years he spent in real estate setting various records for the most homes sold.



When the National Association of Realtors heard that Hopkins had sold 365 homes in one year—something that, according to Hopkins, had not happened before and probably will not happen again—they asked him to give a short opening speech at one of their conventions to a group of approximately 100 people, and he agreed to do so.

“What’s so funny is how fate handles life for you,” Hopkins said.

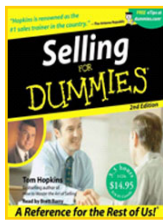
Fate was on Hopkins’s side the day of the convention. The event’s main speaker, writer and business-management expert Thomas Peters, was set to give the kick-off speech for the convention in front of 5,500 delegates but was caught in traffic, which forced him to cancel at the last minute.

“The president of the association saw me standing there, and I happened to have my suit on, and he said, ‘Would you like to start the convention because no one else is here?’ and I said, ‘Yeah, I’d love to,’” he explained.

His charming 15-minute speech was just enough to get the ball rolling in his sales-training career. “When I got back to Phoenix, my phone started ringing off the hook,” he said.

After approximately eight years in real estate, Hopkins was able to retire and conduct sales training and write full-time.

Hopkins’s sales philosophy is simple: “Ignorance is so much more expensive than education.” Like many other entrepreneurs and sales trainers have said, spending time, money, and energy on enhancing your knowledge of your business or product is a priceless investment. Hopkins suggests that young sellers start building libraries of books, tapes, and other reference material.



“Every millionaire will show you his or her library, and every pro I know goes back and studies the basics of that material once a year,” he said. “Selling is a fun business when you learn it. It’s an awful business until you break through and have your knowledge.”

Investing the hard work and time to build a strong career foundation has been a huge component of Hopkins’s success, as well. “In my first three years, I only took one day off a year, and that was Christmas Day,” he said. “The sad truth is most people won’t make a commitment of time and effort for a period of time. All of the sudden, in my fourth year, my business was almost all referrals. I was able to take one day a week off. My fifth year, I took a three-day weekend and a day off. By my sixth year, I was putting in half the time and making twice the money.”

Hopkins set the goals for what he wanted to accomplish and how much he wanted to earn in his sales career at a young age, and he went at them at full force. This is what he teaches his audiences to do. Developing the self-discipline to get the work done and to invest what money you make can and will pay off.



At least one fourth of Hopkins’s seminar is devoted to improving individuals as people rather than just as salespeople. “They need to realize that failure and rejection are the two staples of selling,” he said.

Handling rejection, attitude, and goal setting are some of the key themes that Hopkins discusses. It is also important to take time to laugh sometimes and not take everything so seriously. “I also discuss learning how to laugh when you fall down and to pick yourself up and keep going.”

Hopkins and his team are known for teaching seven fundamentals of selling, which are:

1. **Prospecting** on the phone and in person. This involves developing a strategy to get past the gatekeeper and make it to the decision maker.
2. **Original Contact.** People judge a person physically and verbally in the first 10 seconds.
3. **Qualifying.** This is evaluating the decision maker to find out if he or she has the financial capacity and meets the qualifications.
4. **Presentation.** This is how you present the product to the buyer, whether it is showing a home or demonstrating a car.
5. **Handling Objections.** People usually do not say “yes” to spending money until they have first said some kind of “no.” Buyers will usually say phrases like “that’s too expensive” and “we’re going to shop for a better price.”

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- 6. Closing the Sale.** This is the most important step. If you do not get the check, you have wasted your and your company's time.
- 7. Getting Qualified Referrals** from people who have purchased your product.

Hopkins teaches these seven points in depth in his six-hour training seminar. He also teaches a three-day boot camp that coaches salespeople in a more hands-on way. Each participant is required to come with a mastered, memorized presentation.

"The average salesperson wings it. They kind of say whatever they feel like saying," he said. "The pro has mastered their presentation—from making the call to the original contact to presentation to closing the sale."

He has also applied his philosophies and fundamentals to writing 12 books, including the popular *How to Master the Art of Selling* and *Selling for Dummies*. When Hopkins wrote *How to Master the Art of Selling*, which has sold millions of copies, he wanted to give salespeople a manual that covered all the aspects of selling. He brilliantly broke the book down into an index that allows

salespeople to search for specific statements buyers have made and find what they should say in reply.

Hopkins also wrote *Selling for Dummies*, *Prospecting for Dummies*, and *Closing the Sale for Dummies* for the *Dummies* book collection. These books cover Hopkins's many approaches but in a lighter, more fun manner.

His latest book, *Laugh Your Way to Wealth and Health*, is a book of jokes that Hopkins has acquired over the years. The book is broken down by joke type so readers can search for jokes that apply to medicine, law, and sales, among other topics.

"I think laughter, especially in a real stressed-out world that we're in today, is so important," he said. "I try to interject a lot of humor into my seminars. People call me an 'entertrainer' because I train while I entertain."

Hopkins, on his path to sales success, has found a variety of helpful mentors whom he has not forgotten. One of Hopkins's sales heroes is Earl Nightingale, who released a motivational book on record (there were no tapes or CDs at the time) called *The Strangest Secret*, which became a bestseller. Author

of *The Greatest Salesman in the World* Og Mandino, who wrote 19 books on sales and whose writing Hopkins refers to as "the most prolific," is another. J. Douglas Edwards, who originally helped him get on the right sales track, has also had a huge influence on his outlook and technique in the business.

So what is the secret to success in selling? "Develop the ability to have people like and trust you and want to listen to you. Come across as an expert advisor rather than a sales expert because the average American is turned off by salespeople because they are too pushy and talkative. They aren't great questioners or listeners," Hopkins said. "Questioning and listening is more important than talking and telling."

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