

SALES STAR



## Mark Stevens: Master of Sales, Marketing, and Telling It Like It Is

[By Akbar Ali]

Mark Stevens is one of the best-known marketers in the world today, dispensing advice on everything from business and sales strategies to the media and pop culture. He is renowned for offering unique insights into the ways businesses present themselves in the market and implementing traditional, innovative, and creative methods for meeting the demands of clients through his company, MSCO, where he serves as both business expert and CEO.

Stevens has always found motivation in being an independent learner and thinker, two skills he developed by engaging in philosophical discussions with classmates and professors while in college. He was driven to pursue his career by his ambition to be a dynamic and transformative force in the business world.

“My entrepreneurial passion is what has afforded me the opportunity to become a driving force in the growth of large and small companies and turn capitalistic dreams into reality,” he says.

Stevens believed from the very beginning that in order to realize his goals, it would be important not only to dream but to dream *big*:

“One of the critical elements to making my business and our clients’ businesses flourish is freedom from self-imposed limitations on dreams.”

Stevens reveals that the two best experiences of his early sales career involved selling traditionally seasonal goods: Christmas trees in the winter and magazine subscriptions in the summer. He also drew inspiration from his salesman father:

“My father was a seamless salesman, and he taught me through anecdotes that having customers fall in love with a product or service was the way to success and that

transactions were for cash registers, not people.”

Once he graduated from college, Stevens was confronted with the anxiety of not having a clear career path he wanted to follow. What he did know was that, regardless of whatever he ended up doing, he did *not* want to be ordinary—just another body in the barracks.

He says, “Such a lack of direction probably would have driven a classic business major crazy, but I wasn’t a ‘classic’ anything. I was a romantic, a dreamer, a Calvinist, [and] a writer all rolled up in one.”

**Q. What do you do for fun?**

**A.** Think 24/7, dream, hike, appreciate fine wine, work, ski, watch smart people create.

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

**A.** The soundtrack from *Raging Bull*.

**Q. What is the last magazine you read?**

**A.** *Forbes*, *Portfolio*.

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

**A.** *Entourage* (HBO).

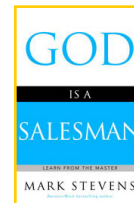
**Q. Who is your role model?**

**A.** I have several heroes: Sir Isaac Newton, FDR, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

**A.** The questions most often asked at corporate meetings.

Stevens started out working for a multinational corporation and in short order discovered the career path he would make for himself. It wasn’t long before he established himself as a man of diverse talents: he began writing a nationally syndicated newspaper column called *Small Business*, completed his first book for publisher Prentice Hall (more books would follow), began working as a consultant, and shortly thereafter founded his own startup, heading a few dozen employees. And lest you think that’s the end of his ingenuity, think again.



“I’m not done yet,” Stevens proclaims. “In fact, that’s my tagline: ‘not even started yet.’”

One of the most memorable moments in Stevens’ career has been the day he spent with a then little-known entrepreneur named Bill Gates in the early days of Microsoft:

“I learned a great deal from the day I spent with [him] when Microsoft was just another hotshot startup. Bill would talk about only one thing: his vision of making computing so easy, so intuitive, everyone would have a computer at home and in the office. Seems

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like the natural order of things now, but it was an audacious goal then, and Gates wouldn't talk about anything else. I saw that vision and passion must be linked."

With so much experience and career diversification, Stevens has expectedly had several professional milestones and learned some important lessons along the way. One value that is certainly displayed in his own candid and straightforward style is the importance of challenging conventional wisdom.

"You'll see it's not that wise," he says.

He also encourages others to look for inspiration in unusual places:

"Look to unexpected sources for guidance. I have looked to God's teachings for sales and business expertise."

Another valuable (and perhaps overlooked) factor is the importance of unwavering self-regard.

"It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of you as long as you are true to yourself," Stevens explains.

In a similar vein, he upholds the notion of developing one's own personal and professional philosophy:

"It's a fine thing to read the great

philosophers but a far better thing to develop and live one of your own."

Stevens' most notable accomplishment over the years is what he refers to as "making the impossible possible for clients." He is also a very prolific writer, having written several bestselling books which have had an industry-wide effect on entrepreneurs, managers, and C-suite executives.

Stevens' most popular works include *The Big Eight* (1981), *King Icahn: The Biography of a Renegade Capitalist* (1993), *Sudden Death: The Rise and Fall of E.F. Hutton* (1989), and the much-acclaimed *Your Marketing Sucks* (Crown Business, 2003) and *Your Management Sucks* (Crown Business, 2006). His next book, *God is a Salesman: Learn from the Master* (Hachette Book Group USA), is due to hit shelves in January of next year and includes many of Stevens' own experiences in sales as well as the lessons in power, success, and relationships he has learned through his own spirituality.

Stevens also writes a very influential blog, *Unconventional Thinking*, which is currently ranked in the top 1% of blogs and has been referred to as "the perfect blend of Harvard Business School and *Us Magazine*."

Stevens is a sought-after public speaker, having addressed a diverse array of major companies, among them Nike, Oracle, and the Culinary Institute of America. He also

has several major media credits to his name, having appeared as a guest commentator on the *Today Show*, NPR, and *Forbes.com* as well as in *The New York Times*, among others.

For those embarking toward their own goals, Stevens parts with these words on creating one's own definition of success:

"Forget about taking advice from anyone. It's just a glorified distraction. You can seek out input from the few people you think really have something to add, but 99% must come from within you. And then, remember that the only rules are the rules *they* make."

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