

SALES STAR


Rod McKinnis: “Sales is Simple”

[By Akbar Ali]

Rod McKinnis’s approach to a master sales strategy is easy to understand: keep it simple. But knowing this and applying it are two very different things, and this no one understands better than McKinnis himself, who, as head of the McKinnis Consulting Group, counsels businesses and sales professionals on both the art and science of selling. His breakthrough methods have helped turn some very low-performing businesses into industry leaders, garnering him the reputation of a proven results-producer who refreshingly places professional integrity above all else.

McKinnis traces the beginnings of his interest in sales back to his childhood, when he took up a common youthful entrepreneurial endeavor. What he hadn’t bargained for was the inevitable rude awakening he would receive when he officially entered the industry.

“I’ve been in sales all of my life, since my first lemonade stand on the South Side of Chicago at the age of seven. I’ll never forget after graduate school, the first day on the job as a stockbroker, I remember one of the most experienced brokers in the office telling me, ‘Congratulations, kid, you finished all of that schooling. Now flush it because you’re in sales now.’

“Subsequently, I made an effort to learn from the top producers in the office. However, I quickly discovered their practices were not ethical, and I knew there had to be a better way to build relationships and generate sales, and so my quest began.”

McKinnis’s academic diligence and athletic skills took him to Eastern Illinois University, where he would complete both his undergraduate and graduate degrees. His success as a basketball player taught him much more than physical prowess: it laid the foundation of integrity and ethics which would shape his future career.

“Being a student athlete was one of the best experiences in my life because it taught me universal life skills that help me succeed in sales: leadership, how to compete, how to deal with adversity, teamwork, focus, etc., many of which are not taught from a textbook. I can see why many sales organizations like hiring student athletes.”

Learning the non-technical skills needed

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Coach my sons’ basketball teams, golf, and travel.

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

A. Alicia Keys, Kanye West, Jill Scott.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Fortune*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Law & Order*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. My wife of 13 years. Her strength, focus, and ability to execute is unbelievable.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. When telemarketers realize who I am and what I do; there’s an awkward pause, then they want immediate feedback.

to succeed in a competitive business like sales provided McKinnis with a framework in which he could fashion his career path. What it didn’t give him was his innate inclination toward counseling others which proved to be the greatest motivator in helping him succeed in the sales industry.

“I enjoy helping others, so the sales industry is a natural fit for me. My other passions are teaching, developing people, and strategy. This combination allows me to effectively serve as a strategic consultant for sales organizations and develop high-performance sales professionals.”

McKinnis’s successes have been both numerous and pioneering, allowing him to counsel and guide companies of all sizes in every conceivable industry. By the time he was 30 years old, he had reached the impressive milestone of becoming the youngest officer of the Fortune 500 financial conglomerate Toronto Dominion, North America’s fifth-largest bank.

He has also demonstrated a very lucid grasp on the delicate and complex relationship between business and personnel, something he learned early on in his career.

“In the late 1990s I led a team that pioneered the conversion of a reactive [customer

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service) organization into a proactive sales force with over 150 offices across the country. The industry at the time was so dynamic, and we were losing market share rapidly; in order for us to survive, we had to completely change the business model. The experience really helped me realize the importance of having the right people in the right roles at the right time. The experience inspired the sales system we use today.”

His noted leadership ability opened the door for him to lead the western division of brokerage firm TD Waterhouse U.S., where he was charged with overseeing the sales and development of 65 offices across 30 states. His team ultimately outperformed their competition in meeting a variety of company goals, including securing \$60 billion of assets under its management, productivity, and employee and customer satisfaction.

He describes his work at TD Waterhouse as his most memorable career accomplishment,

affirming, “I converted a poor-performing \$40 billion business unit into a thriving \$60 billion business unit in 18 months. Learning from my experience in the 90s, we refined our sales system to enable us to execute more efficiently and effectively.”

By the time he was 35, McKinnis had launched two profitable sales and financial services companies, including the McKinnis Consulting Group, which offers sales solutions and assessments in line with the fundamental idea that “sales is simple.”

Getting to his current point of success has not been a singularly achieved feat for McKinnis, who acknowledges the significant influence of various colleagues and professional leaders who have guided him over the years.

“I have had many mentors and colleagues that were influential on my career. Like most leaders, I pulled different things from different people and crafted my own style.

However, there were two people that helped me the most. Dr. Dave Barnett, founder of Barnett Consulting, is a sales mastermind with over 30 years of sales behavior research; he taught me the proven sales behaviors that impact sales productivity. I met him through another mentor of mine, John Bunch, president of retail sales for TD Ameritrade. John taught me the true nuts and bolts of running a large sales organization.”

For the professional struggling to find his or her footing in the industry or to secure that elusive sense of professional security and success, McKinnis offers advice which is both pragmatic and characteristically straightforward and simple:

“The best advice I can give young professionals starting out is to build your process for success so success can be duplicated. If desired results are not being achieved, evaluate and adjust the process.”

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