

SALES STAR



Steve McCann: A Master Salesman

[By Akbar Ali]

As one of the industry's premier salespeople, Steve McCann is out to take charge of the new revolution in sales. His mission: letting others know that the old formula of a one-size-fits-all sales approach is no longer viable and that the generic methods of old are in need of serious retooling to meet the needs of individual clients.

McCann is also head of the McCann Research Corporation, a research-based organization which specializes in what he calls "the development of human potential." And in addition to his extensive work in understanding human psychology and its effects on individual motivation, McCann is an in-demand speaker and accomplished author whose latest published work, *The Snap Back Effect*, hits store shelves this month.

McCann readily attests to the fact that his initial goal was not necessarily a career in sales but to overcome a common fear which threatened to deter his future success as a working professional.

"Growing up, my greatest fear was public speaking. It consumed me in a way that caused my heart to race at the thought of it. I was spellbound by fright. I vividly remember that I didn't want to live with such a debilitating fear.

"When I was 19, I was sitting in a college class when a 25-year-old man came in and gave a motivational speech to our class. He inspired all of us and made an impact on me that still continues to this day, more than 20 years later.

"I knew in that experience that I desired to possess such a skill. While building this skill,

it became clear to me that it was more of a calling than a chance happening."

McCann attended the University of South Florida in Tampa, where he received his bachelor's degree in business administration. In addition to being part of a traditional college fraternity, he participated in a sales and marketing business fraternity.

As an undergrad, he also worked for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers as a sky box host.

Upon graduating, McCann moved on to a sales position in the corporate sector, an experience he describes as having helped shape his understanding of what was possible for him in the industry.

"Being a salesperson, I sought as much training as possible that I thought might help me to succeed in the selling profession. It is there where I was exposed to some of the top speakers in the profession. Speakers such as Zig Ziglar, Brian Tracy, Tom Hopkins, Jim Rohn, and Tony Robbins came through our town on the speaking circuit. I attended their seminars on multiple occasions, bought their products (audiotapes) and wore them out in my cassette deck while out prospecting each day. I enjoyed being around the wisdom and experience that they offered."

Having decided that the best use of his talents would be working as a sales trainer who developed others' strengths, McCann took the time to hone his own abilities to inspire and encourage other sales professionals in search of success. But the impetus to change would arrive in an unlikely figure, one who would not only demonstrate to McCann the best way to realize his dreams but who would also give him an abiding love for the written word.

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Golfing, swimming, and walking on the beach in cold weather.

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

A. An upbeat Christian rock CD, a Buddhist relaxation CD, and three speaking-industry-related CDs.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Golf Digest*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *NFL Total Access*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. John Travolta's character in *Phenomenon*.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. My son Shane when he dances. He moves his left shoulder up and down and then spins, then shakes his butt. It's hilarious to me.

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"In 1993 I was working as a sales manager/sales rep/personal trainer (the position required lots of duties) at a hotel fitness center. I met a client who shared some wisdom with me that slowly but surely changed the course of my life. His name was Alan, and he was in his late 60s. He graduated Harvard with a master's in business and stayed on as a professor in the business school for a few years. After that he sought success in land development and found it in a big way.

"Without going into the specifics, he had an estimated net worth of more than \$100 million at the time when I met him. That information came from the young Paine Weber and Merrill Lynch reps that were also clients of ours and who all relished the possibility of landing his financial accounts — sort of a Gordon Gekko story if you remember the movie *Wall Street*.

"He took a liking to me, and before I left my position at the health club, he invited me to his home to dine with him and his wife. It was the last time I saw him, and I will forever be grateful for what he shared with me.

"He said, 'Steve, knowledge is currency. A man with knowledge can have every possession taken away from him and in a few short years will have it back again. The man can do this because he has the knowledge to do so.'

"He said he read a minimum of two to four books per week and had done so for the past 35 years. And then he paused as if to make sure I was listening. (You could have put a dog chasing a cat, a fireworks show, and the Tasmanian devil in his dining room with us, and I wouldn't have noticed them, as I was hanging on his every word).

"He proceeded to say the following: 'The key to making a difference in your life and the

lives of others is "specialized knowledge." If you want success in this world and to contribute something that outlives you, then gain specialized knowledge. Choose something that fascinates you or something that you deeply fear. The bottom line is to find something that consumes your interest and make a life's study of it. Learn everything you can about it. Do this, and you will be paid an uncommon wage and will be sought for your knowledge. You will bring a large value to the marketplace.'

"He said that his fascination was land and real estate and still is today. His companies gain thorough knowledge of every property they consider investing in, and he only winds up purchasing less than 1% of the properties they consider. His home and Bentley in the driveway certainly supported the fact that this man walked his talk.

"I left his house that night incredibly appreciative of the time he spent with me. I drove to an all-night diner and transcribed his wisdom onto a notebook I bought for this very reason. I didn't want to miss anything. For four and a half hours I recorded every word I could remember."

Deeply inspired, McCann took his mentor's advice to heart and revolutionized not only the way he approached his career but also the very framework with which he envisioned his life. The first task, of course, was to build his own reservoir of knowledge, one that would protect him from any unexpected turn in the future and earn him a unique place within the industry.

"I took his wisdom and put it into my life in two ways. First, I became a reader. His personal library had an estimated 8,000 books and covered 10 walls in his house. The proof was there.

"I attended a speed/dynamic reading workshop the next year and a few years later became a seminar leader teaching speed and comprehension reading to corporate sales teams. His habit was two to four books a week, which I find difficult to do and nothing short of amazing. Since 1994 I've averaged reading one book per week.

"The second thing I've done (and this took a while to finally decide on what to commit to) is to gain specialized knowledge. In my sales career I was fascinated by the idea of what separated the top producers from the average salesperson. I was also frustrated by my sales production because my pattern was 'good month, bad month.' I would have good months, but I couldn't sustain it.

"This subject is what I made a study of for the past seven years. I found that the reason for a salesperson's inability to sustain strong production is due to the 'snap back effect.' It's the most frustrating obstacle to success in professional selling. I took Alan's wisdom and parlayed this knowledge into *The Snap Back Effect*. This is also the platform for my speaking and training programs. I specialize in teaching commissioned salespeople how to break through the 'snap back effect' and achieve increased and sustained production levels."

For the aspiring sales professional or manager looking to revitalize his or her performance, McCann has a three-step process which he believes can serve as the successful launching pad for a new direction toward success:

"One, become a reader. Two, gain specialized knowledge — you'll be paid an uncommon wage. And three, [understand that] sales/speaking is a service profession. I think we are here to serve, and as we serve others we tend to get the things we most want. If



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we have a philosophy of 'producing,' then it becomes a bit of a struggle. If it's service, everybody wins.

"The premise of sales is service. Find out

what that really means as it pertains to the selling profession. This can only be done by direct experience. No person, myself included, can tell you this in a way that would have a better impact than your direct

experience with how this premise works. If this is not clear, then I have succeeded. It's not meant to be clear. Get after it."

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