

MARCH 1984

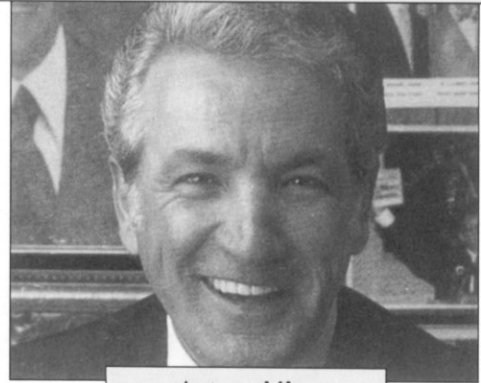
# psychology today®

## SUPER SELLERS

*They Have What It Takes:  
Energy, Confidence and  
the Drive to Succeed*

Compliments of

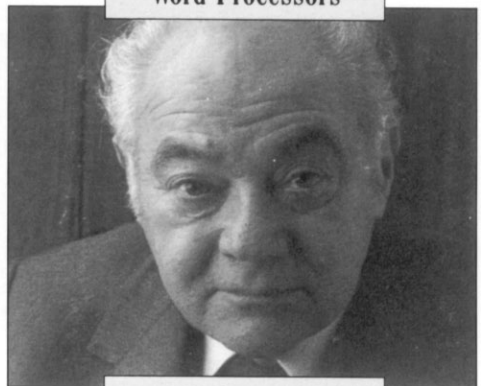
*The H.R.  
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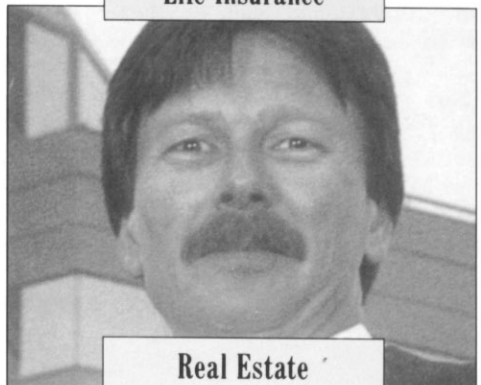
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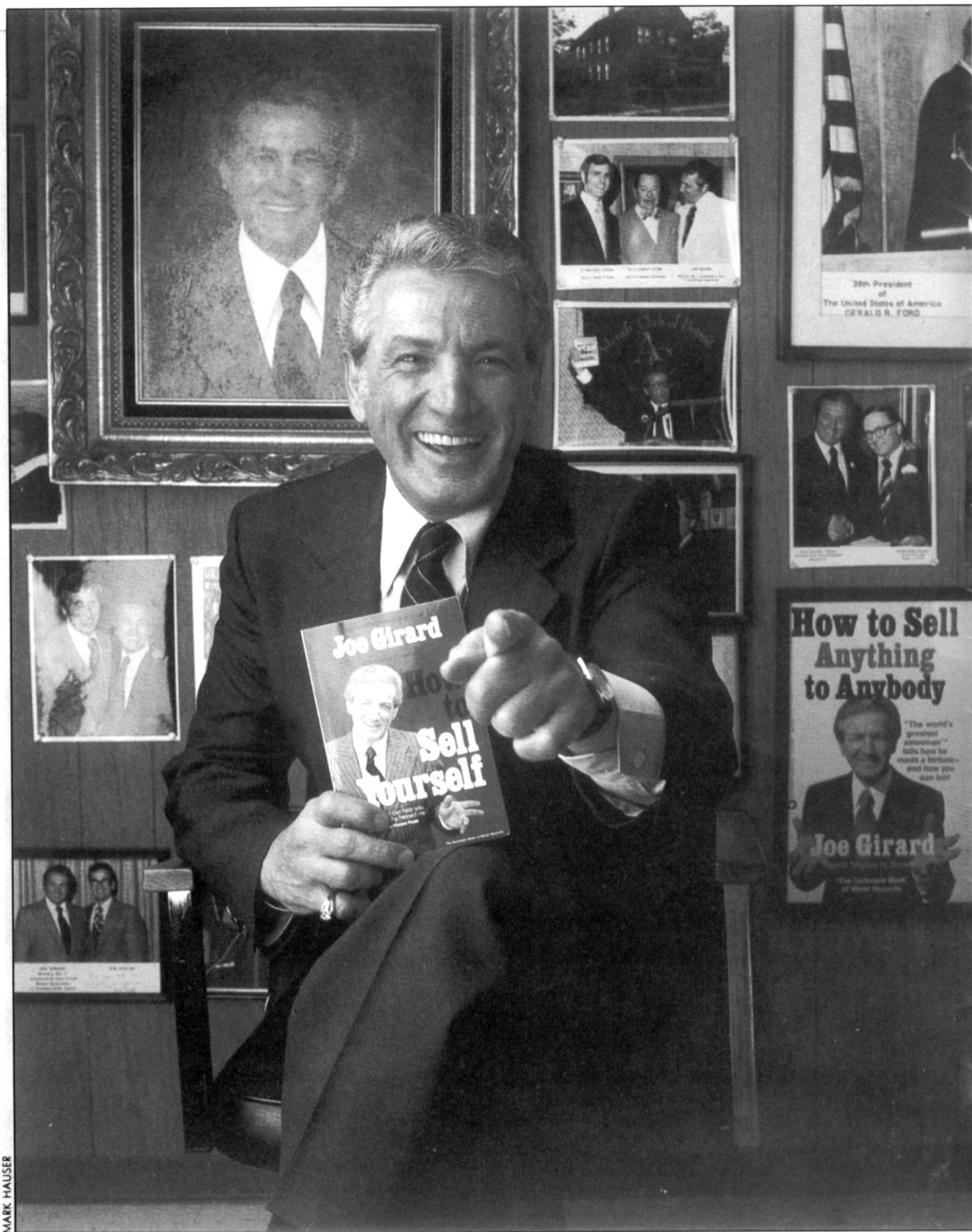
Word Processors



Life Insurance



Real Estate



## JOE GIRARD

*Selling cars one by one (no fleet sales), Girard sold an average of 18 cars a week for 14 years. This is how he handles what he considers one of the most difficult sales to make, a sale to someone with bad credit. "I'll tell him to bring in his best buddy. . . . For cosigning, I appeal on the basis of his friendship with my customer. I remind him of how they fished together,*

went to school together, chased girls together. . . . I have to make it into a favor the man can't refuse without losing his friend and looking bad in front of me. I can do this because I believe that people can change their lives. . . . When I get a cosigner's name on a form, I am expressing my belief people can come back from the bottom just like I did."



# Going for the Gold in the Selling Game

*AT THE TOP,  
IT'S THE CHALLENGE  
THAT COUNTS,  
NOT JUST THE WIN.*

*BY DONALD J. MOINE*  
H.R. Chally Group

**W**e have always been fascinated by excellence. No doubt our ancestors admired and puzzled over those who were able to run fastest, throw farthest and shoot most accurately. In the natural world, we marvel at the towering peaks of Everest and Kilimanjaro, and laud those who conquer them. We gaze longingly at the engineering and design superiority of Ferraris and Maseratis and Rolls-Royces. Our fascination with sports excellence has made multimillionaires of individuals able to slam-dunk a basketball or consistently hit a 90-mile-per-hour fastball.

In the business world, sales superstars attract similar attention. Some companies pay their top salespeople more than they do their presidents. How can some salespeople earn \$400,000, \$700,000 or \$1,000,000 each year? What special skills or motivations explain the high-school dropout who earns more by selling than we pay Ronald Reagan for being president? Sales, perhaps more than any other profession, is a psychological laboratory for testing human intelligence, persistence, persuasiveness

and resilience: the ability to deal with rejection on a daily basis. As Pat Knowles, one of the top oil and gas tax-shelter sales experts in the nation, told me, "Every day, my prospects and customers beat me and scratch me and kick me and claw me, but I persist, and I help them solve their tax problems. And I walk away with big commissions."

More than 60 years ago, psychologist Edward Strong began studying top salespeople and methods of selecting them. He found that even outstanding sales managers differed greatly as to which candidates for sales positions were most likely to succeed, "even when the conditions of interviewing and acquaintanceship with the men were ideal."

Strong devoted much thought and ingenuity to the construction of scales that would measure accurately the traits of sales superstars. "Before there were thermometers," he wrote, "people talked about very hot, hot, warm, cool, cold and very cold, but they could never agree very closely upon the meaning of these terms. Today, temperature is measured very accurately. We need thermometers to measure honesty, perseverance, abili-





## TOM OLDS

*Olds, who is both a C.P.A. and M.B.A., makes between \$50,000 and \$100,000 a month selling wind turbines for ZOND in Southern California. The biggest challenge, he has found, is customer unfamiliarity with technical aspects of the equipment and its reliability. In overcoming this, he says, "I've learned that unless you're right with the Man Upstairs you can't*

*look someone in the eye and sell him something." Olds believes that selling is really just helping people. "I could never sell something I didn't believe in 100 percent. If you don't feel this way, you'll never be able to talk to someone who might be worth \$20 million or \$30 million and not be overwhelmed by the difference between your position in life and his."*

ty to get along with others, etc."

Strong showed that even the "quite inefficient" tests he devised could increase sales-force selection effectiveness by 40 percent. Yet today, when more useful assessment measures have been developed, many companies and even professional "headhunters" make critical hiring decisions without the aid of such tests. The approach most experts recommend is, first, to give a company's top salespeople tests that measure the traits usually found in individuals who do well in selling (see "The Fire Within" on Page 44). Use the results to build a profile of the characteristics most important in that particular sales field. Then measure

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## I KNOW HOW TO SHAKE THE MONEY TREE AND MAKE ALL THE DOLLARS FALL OFF.

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candidates for sales jobs against the profile.

There are always exceptions to any set of standards—individuals who don't fit the mold and still do well—

but the profile helps companies locate the most likely candidates. Discussing the importance of starting with the right people, industrial psychologist Robert McMurry commented that: "Wooing in a sales context is as difficult to teach as wooing in a boudoir. And, if the student is not a wooer by nature, to try to make him one is comparable to trying to make a Don Juan out of a John Calvin."

McMurry expanded on this idea in "The Mystique of Super Salesmanship," published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1965, noting that "the demands of salesmanship generally, and of speciality selling particularly, are intolerable to many. My guess is



## SHARON SNOWDEN

*Snowden was the top salesperson for the biggest distributor of Sharp photocopiers in the United States, often taking home \$7,000 a month. She now sells word-processing systems for Lanier Business Products. After teaching school for several years, she finally decided that, "I wanted more freedom to set my own schedule, to grow and be rewarded based on per-*

*formance rather than seniority." In addition, she told me, "Women spend a lot of time cultivating and nurturing others. I decided I also need to do that for myself." Asked about her sales philosophy, Snowden said, "I never sell price. I sell service, reliability and the fact that our company is honest and sound. . . . I love sales. It is the ultimate challenge."*

that not more than one person in a thousand is so constituted that he will be successful and find challenge and security in direct sales."

The highly successful salesman, McMurry said, "provides logical justifications to his prospect for performing what would often impress others as irrational acts. The procedure is analogous in many respects to the act of falling in love." He also observed that, "More than one salesman has so learned to pitch his voice that he creates an almost hypnotic effect on his listeners. Many persons are by nature highly suggestible." (See "To Trust, Perchance to Buy," *Psychology Today*, August 1982, for more about

## WOOLING IN A SALES CONTEXT IS AS DIFFICULT TO TEACH AS WOOLING IN A BOUDOIR.

modern sales hypnosis.)

Top salespeople, McMurry found:

☐ Use sheer "animal dominance": The salesman is "stronger in character than his prospect."

☐ Are highly persistent. Bill Kirk, now sales manager for Control Data, told me how he closed a sale for more than \$1 million by telling a prospect, "I'll stay here all night to answer your questions and I won't leave until I have the order." He got the order.

☐ Use the prospect's own objections, in a form of "dialectical entrapment," to get a purchase commitment.

☐ Interrogate prospects at length about their needs and then adapt their presentations "so the prospect cannot rationalize a refusal to purchase."

☐ Have a high level of energy, abounding self-confidence, a chronic hunger for money, a well-established habit of industry and "a state of mind



## BEN FELDMAN

*Feldman has sold nearly a billion dollars' worth of life insurance, mostly for New York Life, since 1960. His toughest sale, he says, was to the chief executive officer of a major corporation who insisted he was too busy to see any life-insurance man. Feldman handed the secretary an envelope containing five \$100 bills, and asked for five minutes of the man's time. He got*

*in and eventually sold him more than \$50 million worth of life insurance. The man could have used more, Feldman feels, but "underwriters don't like to have all that money walking around in one pair of shoes. They like it walking around in 100 pairs of shoes." Asked about his greatest sale, Feldman, now 71, insists, "I don't know. I haven't made it yet."*

which regards each objection, resistance or obstacle as a challenge."

Research by McMurtry and other psychologists has disproved the idea that a real salesman can sell anything to anybody. As McMurtry pointed out, "Each type of sales work requires its own unique configuration of traits, attributes and qualities in its practitioner." To build a productive sales force, the first step "is to ascertain the category of sales to be undertaken and decide precisely what qualities the incumbents will need."

Since 1972, my colleagues at The H.R. Chally Group and I have studied more than 200 sales forces across the nation.

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## TOP SALESPeOPLE EARN SO MUCH, MONEY LOSES ITS ABILITY TO INSPIRE THEM.

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From assessment testing and psychological profiling of 40,000 salespeople, we have identified four major types of sales specializations, as well as the traits, skills, motivations and psycho-

logical characteristics of the best in each specialty.

*Closing sales* call for intense, do-it-now selling, like that practiced by door-to-door salespeople and those dealing in tax shelters. Since the seller usually has only one contact with a prospect, the likelihood of failure is high. This type of selling calls for upbeat, highly persuasive techniques that build an emotionally charged environment for a quick sale or turnaround.

Closing superstars are self-starters whose overwhelming self-confidence helps them turn brief encounters into lucrative sales. As Tom Olds (see Page 38) told me, "I know how to shake the





## DON POKORNI

*A successful salesman of commercial and industrial real estate in Southern California, Pokorni earns an annual income in the low six figures. He explains his sales philosophy this way: "Most people in my field concentrate on listing properties or selling them. I work the other side of the street, concentrating on human relationships. I meet executives who might*

*not have a current need; I get to know them, their business and their requirements very well. Then, when they have a need, I am the obvious choice to call, since I am able to fill their needs quickly and to their exact specifications. This approach takes more time, but it leads to the best deals and to the most lasting business relationships."*

money tree and make all the dollars fall off." To good closers like Olds, selling is a game, one they expect to win. Achievement-oriented and status-conscious, they have tight control over their feelings; they use emotions as tools to influence customers, but do not rely on customers for emotional satisfaction.

*Consultive sales* usually involve expensive items, high technology or intangible, "intelligent" services such as law, consulting and advertising. Skill at interpersonal contact, patience and aggressiveness are the key ingredients for success. The salesperson often carries a title such as sales engineer or sales consultant and uses an

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## THE BEST SELLERS SELDOM CARE DEEPLY WHETHER PEOPLE LIKE THEM.

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approach that emphasizes helping their customers with problems.

The superstars here are independent and self-sufficient, like the closers, but they see themselves as highly

skilled technicians rather than flashy, hard-driving extroverts. Although they are skilled socially and enjoy being with people, they have an equally strong need for solitude. When they do socialize, it is with intimate friends, who are usually not involved with selling in any form. They resent the stereotype of salespeople as hucksters and pitchmen; they strive to present an image of "class" rather than "flash."

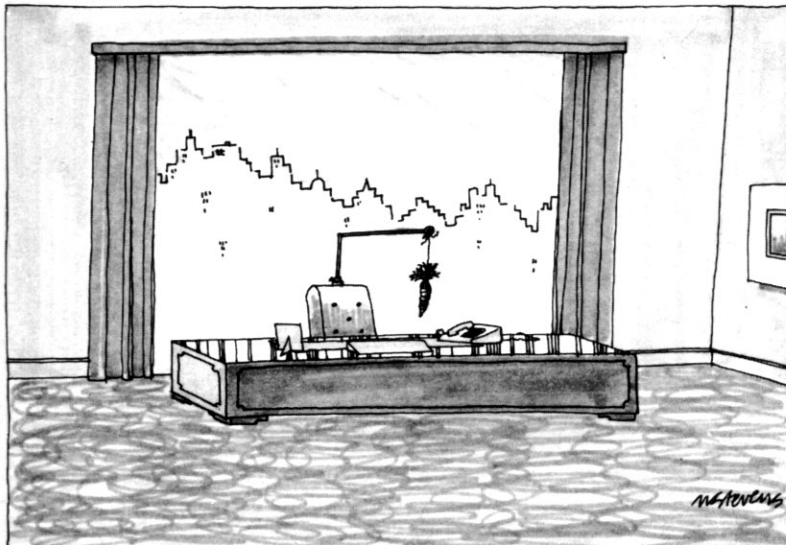
*Relationship sales* sometimes goes by another name: empathy-based selling, the kind practiced by industrial salesmen and route salesmen. They don't face failure on a daily basis because their sales depend chiefly on

building long-term relationships with customers. Because of these relationships, salespeople of this type have the ability to change companies and take

much of the business with them.

The best of these salespeople are hard-driving, conservative individuals who feel guilty if they aren't working.

## THE FIRE WITHIN



**W**hat motivates the best salespeople? There are other ways to make a lot of money. Why do they choose a calling in which rejection is a daily fact of life even for the best? Profiles we've done on several thousand top producers point to seven motives that drive them:

**Need for status:** The best salespeople seek recognition as proof of their ability and importance. They enjoy power and authority, and are strongly aware of image and reputation.

**Need for control:** Successful sellers like people, enjoy being with them and delight in influencing them. But they seldom care deeply whether others like them, a trait which enables them to use emotion without falling prey to it.

**Need for respect:** They want to be seen as experts on what is right, best or appropriate. They regard themselves as well intentioned people, willing to help and advise others.

**Need for routine:** Contrary to the stereotype that top salespeople are impulsive and somewhat undisciplined, most like routine and hate having it interrupted. They prefer positive actions to positive thoughts because, as several have told me,

positive thoughts occur naturally after they've gone through their positive routines.

**Need for accomplishment:** Material comforts—a nice house, expensive clothing, a fancy car—are only the beginning. Money starts as a prime motivator, but the top salespeople earn so much that, as Ben Feldman says, "Money loses its ability to inspire you." The superstars constantly create new challenges, go after the "impossible sales," to maintain their enthusiasm.

**Need for stimulation:** Top producers are normally calm, relaxed people who thrive on challenge. They have more physical energy than most of us and welcome outside stimulation as a way to channel their energy in satisfying ways.

**Need for honesty:** The best salespeople have such a strong need to believe in the product that they will switch jobs if the company's reputation falls or they have serious doubts about a new product line. But they are not rigidly moralistic; experience has taught them to accept the imperfections, in people and products, of the real world.

—D.J.M.

They combine patience and perseverance in a sales technique that can best be characterized as low-pressure or hidden-pressure. They value customer loyalty and return it by making sure that their customers get good service at good prices. They prefer protected territories to open ones and are poor at bringing in new customers if it means taking them away directly from another salesperson.

**Display sales** require little personal involvement, seldom lead to personal rejection and offer rewards that do not depend directly on making sales. Retail clerks, for example, are usually paid a straight salary. Bank tellers, telephone order-takers (not "boiler room," high-pressure sellers) and in-store catalogue people fall into this category.

The best display salespeople know how to approach different types of people in a friendly, low-key manner. They have a high energy level but lack the other salespeople's drive to move up the career ladder; their major goals and pleasures revolve around home and family. The stimulation they get from dealing with people is a prime motivator, although they also enjoy the challenge of "crossover selling," convincing customers to buy items or products they weren't thinking of when they walked in.

The best salespeople, regardless of their field, share another characteristic, something parents, teachers and other authority figures have mentioned to us all on occasion. I recently shared a speaking platform with Ben Feldman, the most successful life-insurance salesman in the world. Someone in the audience asked him, "What is the best shortcut you've discovered for getting to the top?" "Shortcut?" Feldman repeated. "I've never been able to discover any shortcut around hard work." Jim Sweeney, another top salesman, preached the same sermon. "Many people mistake and miss opportunity because it often goes around wearing overalls and disguised as work." □

Donald J. Moine received his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Oregon; his thesis dealt with successful salespeople. He is a principle of the H.R. Chally Group and director of the west coast office in Redondo Beach, California.