

PRECISE Selling: Interview with Brian Sullivan

Alan Rigg: Good afternoon! My name is Alan Rigg. I've been a student of selling and sales management for 23 years, and I own and manage the 80/20 Sales Leader website.

Today I have the privilege of interviewing Brian Sullivan. Brian is a member of The National Speaker's Association and an internationally known expert on sales and leadership. He is one of less than 7% of speakers worldwide to have earned The Certified Speaking Professional Designation awarded by The National Speaker's Association and The International Federation for Professional Speakers.

Brian delivers high energy, no nonsense, interactive seminars on his PRECISE selling formula to companies looking to become famous in their industries. He's been quoted in magazines such as "Selling Power" and "Business Week," and is the author of the book "20 Days To The Top: How The Precise Selling Formula Will Make You Your Companies Top Sales Performer In 20 Days Or Less."

Brian also hosts a radio talk show on Hot Talk 1510 called "Entrepreneurial Moments." This is a show dedicated to helping business people of all types.

Brian lives in Kansas City with his wife Leanne, and children Jake, Shea and Maggie. Brian, welcome to the call!

Brian Sullivan: Hey, thanks for having me. I really appreciate it!

Alan: Well, I appreciate you taking the time. We had a bit of a challenge getting together because of a trip that I had planned that sort of mucked up the works. It's a lot of fun that we now have been able to get together to record this call and make this recording available to all of my subscribers. I'm sure they'll appreciate it.

Brian: That's perfect! We'll make it fun, but it won't be nearly as fun as your vacation I'm sure.

Alan: [laughs] Let's start the fun by having you tell us about your business.

Brian: Sure, sure. My business is called "Precise Selling." We work with companies of all sizes. Everything from your small businesses to your larger corporations. Companies, once again of all sizes, adapt the "Precise Selling" or "Precise Leadership" process as a common language in their business to help create top performers. So, that's the gist of it.

What we do a lot of is we work with the sales teams on their strategic and tactical selling skills, everything from your basic communication skills like questioning and listening, all the way to how to sell to the C suites to higher level negotiation skills. So, we certainly keep busy even in this down economy, when people more than ever need to sharpen their skills instead of pull back.

Alan: Isn't that the truth. When I see the word "PRECISE" and the way that you capitalize it, is that an acronym for something?

Brian: It is! In fact, if your listeners have their handy notepad and pen, I will go through it very briefly. But, it is an acronym, and this acronym is a measurable, sustainable, repeatable sales process that I think can be used in any call.

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The "**P**" in precise stands for, how do you **prepare** for every call? If you think about most salespeople, Alan, a lot of times they study their product, but they show up at an appointment and they often don't have a very specific objective or reason to be there. Often they think, "Well, if I can just learn a little bit about that customer, then that's a good objective."

Really, the "P" of precise, one thing we really focus on is every time we meet with somebody, be it for coffee, for lunch, or in that high level C suite, that our objective is based on getting that customer or prospect to DO something as a result of your visit.

So, if we can remember one thing you have to think, "When I show up today for my sales call, what do I want the other person to do as a result of me being here?" Absolutely vital. So, there's your "P" in preparation.

Now, when you walk in that door, Alan, and you've got your objective, and you've got three decision makers sitting across that room looking at you, staring you in the eye, the "**R**" stands for first you have to built **respect and trust**.

No one is going to buy from you unless first the walls are down. So, we teach in our program, "20 Days to the Top," that there are some very specific things you need to open up every presentation with that seem very logical and remedial, but are often forgotten by the average salesperson.

And those are simple things like, "Hey, thank you for having me." It's amazing how many presentations don't start off with the, "Hey, thanks for allowing me to be here." Of course, I always like to set up the atmosphere to be one of very low pressure, and I think that's very important.

So, we teach our salespeople to remind that client that hopefully you can come to some terms, hopefully they like what they hear from you today, but if they don't it's OK, you're going to make sure that you still make it worth their time. So, building respect and trust is key.

Stop me any time my friend, because when I get on a roll I'm tough to stop.

Alan: You keep on rolling. That's what this is all about.

Brian: All right. So, hopefully they still have their pens. Get them out because this stuff is worth \$10,000 to them. All right, so now the walls are down. Those decision makers say, "Hey, no problem Brian. We set aside an hour for this presentation. It's very important to us.

We say, "Great." And then, the "**E**" is now it's time to **engage** them with questions. I think all sales performers of any level understand that we're supposed to be questioners and listeners, but what we have noticed is that all too often the average salesperson does not prepare their questions beforehand.

So, they might ask one question, maybe two questions, but because their questions are not prepared, they spend so much time thinking of their next question, that they cannot do what do you think?

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Alan: Listen to what the prospects have to say.

Brian: Exactly! And so isn't that the most important thing? So, we have a formula. It's an acronym within an acronym! We call it "**CLEAR**" questions. If I can get salespeople to ask these **five questions** in every call, they're going to be in the top 10% of every salesperson they compete against.

The "**C**" stands for, "Who are you **currently** using." We have to start there.

The "**L**" stands for, "Who are you currently **looking** at" or "What have you looked at in the marketplace," which is a great indication. We want to know if anyone else has been in that door yesterday, or if maybe they've kicked the tires in the past.

The "**E**" stands for, "What do you **enjoy** or find **effective** about the way you do things now?"

The "**A**" is, "What would you **alter** if you could." So, what's not working?

The "**R**," which I think is absolutely key is, "Who as well as yourself is **responsible** for making decisions on a product, or a service, or a solution like this?"

If I can get salespeople at every level, I'm talking rookie to that highest level VP of sales negotiator, if we can get them to ask those five questions and then dig deeper within those five questions, they don't have to think about what's coming next.

All they do is they have that pen and paper, they're taking great notes and the bullets that are on that notepad in front of them will become the foundation of their presentation. If they stay right on those, they're going to be better than most everyone that they compete against.

This is what it means to be PRECISE. It means saying only what the customer needs to hear and no more.

Alan: Bravo!

Brian: So, we got the "E." We're moving on to the "**C**"! Now, you open that customer up, you've got five bullets on that sheet of paper, you know what they like, what they don't like, you know what they've looked at, you know who makes the calls in that office or that corporation. Now it's time to "C" of precise, which is **conveying** your solution. This is where it's very important to base your presentation around what you learned when you were engaging. Too often, salespeople walk in with their PowerPoint presentation, or their canned corporate bullet points and their elevator pitch. They're going to deliver everyone a one-size-fits-all presentation.

We don't teach that. We say, "You convey a solution that's heavy in benefits based on what you learned in your questioning." If you plan on giving everyone the one-size-fits-all presentation, then don't bother asking any questions. Just get to the point. Blow the heck out of it, work quickly and get the heck out of there, right?

Alan: Yep!

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Brian: So, there's your convey the solution. Then, of course unfortunately sometimes there's **"I,"** and that's **indecision**. That's when the customer comes back and says, "I like what you're telling me, but..."

The only thing we teach in this indecision is that, and it's certainly not a new revolutionary technique, this dates back. Dale Carnegie was teaching this stuff back in the 1930's, but it's a simple premise. If you know you're going to hear the same objections over and over again, why on earth is it that most salespeople stall and pause, and they cannot come back with a good, repeatable response based on what they think might work?

So, the "I want to think it over" and "I can get it cheaper somewhere else" or "I've always used your competition." If we know we're going to hear those things, those are indecision causing objections here; take the time in your office this week. Write down your top five objections, and then write down the perfect script that you would say the next time you hear it.

Now will it sound scripted? You know it might if you stink at it. But the only way you get over that is by practicing, and drilling, and rehearsing. And if you do this, I tell you, as we talk about in the book, I tell stories in the book about how I first started doing this and how strange it sounded and how silly it was.

But once you get it, I don't want to say you look forward to someone saying, "Hey I can get it cheaper somewhere else." But you perk up and you come back with confidence. And so, a very important routine. And then the essence of **securing** an agreement, which is the **"S"**.

Well, Alan I have a lot of companies call me and say "OK Sullivan, we want you to come and doing a closing skills session at our national sales meetings." And I say "I can't do that." Because there is no sales closing skill technique that you read in any blog or text book that is going to help you overcome you not being prepared, not building respect and trust.

So you need to do all these things leading up to closing.

And I think if you are having a nice dialog with that customer, because you've done the steps that I've just laid out, it will have been a conversation. You will know, because they will be nodding their head or they would have told you, no, no, no. So to me closing is not like putting your peddle to the metal. It's really just a natural progression.

But you better be able and willing to say, "Based on what we've talked about today, it seems like things make sense. Am I feeling this correctly?" And you could be very casual based on your situation. And when they say "Yes, I like what I hear," don't say "Where do we go next?"

Assume the momentum of the sale is taking you where you want to go and you might say something like, "Great! Then based on what I'm hearing, what I'd like to do from here is (blank)."

And I usually give two choices. I'll say, "I can set up a time when we come back; we can do it either next week or the following week." And it's your classic two choice close in which I still think is timeless. It's still not pushy. And it's still effective.

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Don't make the other mistake a lot of salespeople will use, and they'll say "Well, do you have any other questions or concerns?" That says to me that you as a salesperson don't know where this thing is going, so you're deferring control. Keep control of the sale.

And lastly the "**E**" is hey, the best time to **explore for more business** is when someone just said yes. And when you're walking out that door you explore by asking for referrals or you might ask for an additional sale.

So for instance, maybe I sell TVs, and so someone just buys that beautiful 36 inch LCD TV. After I ink that deal I say "Oh, by the way, would you be interested in hearing about a new stereo receiver that would work with this? It would make your living room feel like you're in a movie theater." So it's finding a way to add on and create another sales opportunity once somebody says yes. So...

Alan: But to your point, AFTER you ink that deal. [laughs]

Brian: Exactly. Yes, exactly. Well, don't be afraid....well, Alan, as you know, you've been selling for a long time. My biggest challenge these days with corporations is I think we've become soft. Right? Now everything I've talked to you about is not a pushy sales process. However, it's amazing how many folks in the past three years I've collected business cards and how difficult it has become for me to find a business card that says: Salesperson.

You know, there are "relationship managers" and "solutions consultants" and all these things. People call me and say, "I want to create consultants" and I say, "Why do you want consultants?"

And they can't articulate what this is and I say, "Listen, if consulting means you get to the heart of what they need and you provide the solution and then you ask for an order that turns into a purchase order, I don't care what you call yourself. Ultimately you are salespeople."

I think we need to get back to being proud of what we are because the only way this economy is going to come back is with the people who are listening to this teleconference right now. It's be proud to be a salesperson which means, we need to start asking for more orders, more quickly. Be more proud of our product than we ever were, and move on to the next customer and get it all done again.

We need to stop visiting and start selling, in my opinion.

Alan: That makes perfect sense. Let's look at it from the other side of the equation, too. When somebody calls your company because they have an interest, who do they ask to talk to? They don't ask to talk to a consultant or a relationship manager or any of these other fancy titles; they want to talk to a salesperson. So they know that sales is involved in getting what they want! [laughs]

Brian: Yes.

Alan: So why are we dancing around it?

Brian: Exactly.

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Alan: You know Brian, I love having these conversations with people because so often I hear common threads in terms of some of the key things that hold organizations back from accomplishing sales. And I just love your “PRECISE” acronym and the things it covers. It's so consistent with some of the core things that I talk about, some of the core things that other experts talk about.

I guess when you look at it, sales isn't a new game, it's been around for a long time. Yes, it's evolved over the years. But the basics still pertain. And in an economy like this it's real important to focus on these fundamentals. Just like you said, we've gotten soft. We've gotten away from what makes us successful. You can do that when there's so much business that all you have to do is take orders.

Brian: Absolutely and I think, to your point, three or four years ago you could be pretty average as a salesperson and your sales numbers would convince you that you're pretty darned good.

Alan: Right.

Brian: Right? And those days are over. I mean those apathetic salespeople who sit in those chairs because they are forced to sit in the sales training class and they are typing on their Blackberries. Those days are over, man. Right? I mean it's time to engage more than ever in learning. And I don't care if the acronym is PRECISE. It doesn't matter what it is. But there needs to be a hunger back in the bellies of salespeople, businesspeople at all levels that says "You know what? Every week I am going to learn something new."

It might be a new audio seminar from a speaker like yourself. It might be a new sales book like mine. It doesn't matter right? We talk a lot these days about the stock market and how volatile and it's jeez, it's at 9000, but it used to be at 14000. Well the only stock I think we have control over is ourself. Right? The old stock symbol: Y-O-U.

Alan: [laughs]

Brian: And the only way you can increase that asset is invest in yourself and you watch, one year from now when things do start perking up and everyone starts falling back, your value to your company, your territory, your region, your industry, is going to be so much greater. And that's the ultimate objective right? It's not to make people a little bit better. You know, when people come to my seminars and they say, "Well if I can take one or two things away." I say "listen, if I only give you one or two things today, then I blew it."

Man, you got to walk away from this room saying my objective is to blow the doors out, right? Because to me if you try to excel so far beyond what you ever did, and beyond everyone else. I mean you are in sales because it is competitive. It's a game. Then I tell you what, you can be famous in your industry. But if you're just dabbling and trying to get a little bit better, people are going to sneak up on you. And they probably all ready have.

Alan: And when you look at going out and getting education, getting information, there are so many different messages out there, there's so much information. So what I also encourage people to do is, “Let's make sure your fundamentals are solid before you look at other things.” And your

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acronym, PRECISE, is perfect because it deals with the most important issues. You and I are in complete agreement around the idea of having a predictable and repeatable sales process. I agree 100 percent with the importance of asking the right questions.

I have a little segment that I do called "the secret to closing more sales." It's all about opportunity qualification. Because just like you say, if you don't ask the right questions on the front end, how on earth are you going to close a sale on the back end?

Brian: Right.

Alan: And if you are going to take the time, to your point, to ask these questions, and get information from the prospect, and understand what's significant to them, why are you talking about 45 other things when it comes time to talk about your solution? I love telling people that look, if you've got 100 features in what you sell and only five of them matter to a prospect, those five are what are going to drive the decision. Let them learn about the other 95 **after** they buy.

Brian: Right, right. Of course.

Alan: So just, foundational stuff.

Brian: Well, and you mentioned it earlier. This is not a new concept, right? I mean this concept of building respect and trust by asking great questions and being the greatest listener. It's been around forever; yet, it is still the most difficult thing to do.

Here's an exercise I do in my seminars that is very revealing. I call it the "thinking on your feet" exercise. I have the folks in my seminars team up. So you have two people. I say I want to start a conversation. I want to see what you do.

Of course, it's a noisy room, everyone's talking. I say I want the conversation to go like this. I want one person to start off and I want you to make a statement. I don't care what the statement is. It could be "Hey, I've got three kids, they're great, I love them, I miss them, I'm on the road."

But then I want you to follow it up with a **question**. And that question in this case might be: "So tell me, do **you** have a family, do you have children, do you travel?" Whatever it might be. And then the other person should answer the question but then come back and ask their own question.

It's amazing how in these conversations how often the question is asked of the salesperson and they forget that they are now supposed to come back and ask the other person a question. About 70 percent of the room would say, "Oh, now I'm supposed to ask you a question." I'd say, "What have we learned here?"

Isn't it funny as salespeople, maybe not even sales just businesspeople of all types, we are so concerned about delivering our content, which in this case is "my family" or "my kids," and we are so uninterested. Too often we are uninterested in the content of other people.

So, to me, hey blow up that PRECISE. Forget my acronym because, you know what, if you don't ask great questions and make this a habit with every person you touch, you don't have an interest in learning more about them, there is no acronym in the world that will save you.

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Another analogy I talk about is I say, "I want you to think of the last party you went to, the last social gathering you went to, and you think about a new person you met." We always seem to meet people new at a church event or a social event and if you're like my family, my wife and I, we always recap the night.

We come back. We're brushing our teeth. We say, "What do you think, honey?" And she always says, "You know what, I met someone new tonight and she was so nice. I just think we're really going to hit it off.

And I ask my audience, "What do you think that person did? How do you think that person communicated with my wife?"

Alan: They asked her a whole bunch of questions and let her talk.

Brian: What a simple formula! So, the easiest formula in life and in sales is if you want people to love you, simply go up and ask them a question and sincerely listen. Don't fake it. Don't interrupt them. Sincerely listen. You will never hear them say, "You know what? I didn't like that person because all they did was care about me." It's never going to happen.

Now, I want you to think conversely about the new people we meet who kind of rub us the wrong way, the party jerk, the loud mouth. Well, how do they communicate?

Alan: It's all about them.

Brian: It's all about them. They make a lot of statements. "Oh, Jim is the best on the soccer team. Hey, I just got promoted." They talk and they talk and they talk, and they are selling. What they are selling is themselves.

So what we know is in a social environment when we do not like people who all they do is make statements and talk about themselves. Now, why do we forget this as salespeople when we get into those customers' offices? Why do we forget the simple principle that "Boy, people like us better when we show interest and ask questions and sincerely listen!" That formula works.

"I know you only have 10 minutes, Bill, so let me bore you for the next 15 minutes. Just keep your mouth shut. Let me talk and talk and talk." We forget. And so, I just think we have to remind people, salespeople, that it's all about control.

We are so afraid of giving up control, and I say, "Stop! Slow down. Humble yourself. You will not look stupid. You will look amazing if you just say, Help me better understand. Tell me why that would help you. Tell me in what situation this product would work because you know better than I."

So, it's this attitude of curiosity and humility that creates the greatest salespeople. When you combine curiosity with humility and repeatability throughout a process, no one can touch you.

Alan: I want to applaud, but nobody would hear me. [laughs] As someone that works with sales teams, how many times have you worked with managers that talk about somebody that came on board as a new salesperson? Initially, they didn't know very much, but they asked a lot of good

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questions and they sold a lot. Then over time as they started to learn more, their sales declined. Because another aspect of human nature is we like to show off how smart we are.

Brian: True.

Alan: And we like to show off all these cool things that we've learned, and I've been as guilty of this as anybody else. And I find myself constantly, because I've been very aware of it for years, I'm constantly biting my tongue and forcing myself to shut up because what I have to say isn't what is important.

Brian: Yeah, right. Well, eventually it would be, right? The thing about all of this is eventually we will have to deliver our features and benefits.

Alan: For sure.

Brian: There's a right time and a wrong time. I quote George Marshall, a great American military leader, he said, "The formula of communicating with people is three things." I think it works perfectly with sales. It's "Listen to the other person's story. Listen to the other person's **full** story, and listen to the other person's full story **first**."

If you think about how most salespeople communicate in relation to that formula, what do they do? Well, they tell **their** story. They tell their full story, and then they tell the full story first, and then they say, "Do you have any questions or concerns?"

And then that's when we typically hear, "Why don't you send me some information and I'll look it over?" It just doesn't work, right? And so, I think you're dead on with that point.

Alan: And to your point, yes, there is a time when we have to talk about our features and benefits, but even when that time comes we've got to be **selective** because, once again, the only features that actually matter are the ones that relate to that customer's **specific** problems. The rest of the features are just going to bore them or confuse them.

Brian: Exactly, exactly. Of course, I think the key point that we're making here is that a lot of sales calls, the flow goes like this: We might ask a question, and then we'll get some feedback from the customer. And then, the salesperson feels like now is the time to address that feedback.

Let me give an example. Maybe, we start a sales call. The customer comes right out of the gate and says, "Hey, you know, this is a big issue for me. I want to make sure I do business with a company that ships quickly." So, we write on our note pad, shipping. This is where the average salesperson begins going into a diatribe about their shipping times, et cetera.

What the pro does is they understand that they want to get all the information out first because what I've found is average salespeople, once you start that engine and you start presenting, it's tough to stop and go back to asking questions.

As much as every bone in your body is saying, let me present and tell them about our great shipping policies, stop and ask more questions. "What else is important to you? Let's talk about your current supplier. What has worked with them? What's not working?"

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Get it all out because if you have a note pad with five, six, seven, eight bullets, watch. If you do this well, often you'll never get to number five because after three they are going to be saying, "Wow, this is great!" And you're going to move it from there, right? And you will have done your presentation in half the time of your competitor.

Alan: I agree with you 100 percent. I'll even add a little more, which I know you would have gotten to had we gone deeper into this, which is when the time does come to talk about that shipping issue, you first want to ask, "Why is fast shipping important to you?"

Brian: Exactly!

Alan: Because maybe it's actually a symptom of something else.

Brian: Right. And if you think of the beauty of that question, Alan. We talk a lot in our seminars about them, and a lot of our sales programs talk about the importance of asking questions. But, we're really digging too deep. Your question right there would get the customer to sell themselves, which is an art of the greatest salespeople. Rather than them delivering the presentation, they get the customer to deliver it.

For instance, Alan, you just asked me, "Hey, tell me, Sullivan, why would fast shipping, how would that help you? Why is that important to you?"

And now, the customer might come back and say, "Well, let me tell you something, Alan. Here's the deal. If I don't get my shipping within 48 hours, I have to walk upstairs to the C suite and every time we're late I've got to sit down with the boss. The boss will yell at me, and the boss will scream at me. My job will be on the line. It will be absolutely horrible".

What's happening here is that customers are delivering a better presentation than you ever could because you couldn't say to them, "You know what, Bill, the great thing about our shipping policy is it's 48 hours, and if we ship on time you're not going to have to go upstairs in that C suite because I know that boss is going to yell at you and I know how miserable that makes you".

You can't say that, right? So, they can get away with so much more than you by doing exactly what you just said. It's, don't just be satisfied with the answer or shipping is important. It's following up with that "tell me why, tell me when, tell me how," and once again let's get back to that emotion of curiosity. If your mind is curious, it will fuel those great questions like the one you just mentioned.

Alan: It also engages the **emotions** of that prospect when they have to talk about what it's like to go up there and get chewed out. They feel it.

Brian: Yes!

Alan: They feel it. They are more inclined to do something about it, which is just an awesome thing.

Brian: Exactly. And we've dubbed this type of question, the one that you had just mentioned. Of course, you have your classic open-ended questions: the who, what, why, when, where, how,

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or otherwise known as thought provoking questions. In my book we call them **Barbara Walters questions** because if you think of the great interviewers, what do they do? It's who, what, when, why. They don't ask close-ended questions. Most salespeople ask questions, but they are close-ended.

We take it a step further and we call them BW, Barbara Walters, affect questions and these are questions that are, "Tell me what affect will that have, when will this affect you, how will it affect you," so it's exactly the type of question you just brought up.

It's almost like they're cut and you're putting a little salt on the wound and letting them expand on the pain because they can do it better than you.

Alan: Brian, I think that the folks on the call are starting to get a real good understanding of what makes top sales performers different from average folks. Are there any other things that you want to include in this part of the discussion?

Brian: Well, you know what; I do a two day boot camp Alan. I can stay here forever my friend. [laughing] So, don't ask me that question. You won't be able to stop me.

Alan: OK, fair enough. Now, obviously we're going to tell people later on where they can go if they do want to get into more detail, but I'll save that to a little bit later in the call.

Brian: Sure.

Alan: Right now what I want to look at is in your book, "Twenty Days to the Top." You talk about being "stupid in business" and that it's a good thing. Could you explain that please?

Brian: Absolutely, absolutely. Let me start by explaining how I came to this conclusion. It was three years ago and I was in Washington DC and I was brought in by a group of medical CEOs, medical manufacturer CEOs. I do another presentation on presentation skills where I teach executives and presenters of all types how to stand up in front of a group and engage an audience.

So, they brought me in, but I got in a day early, so I figured I'd go for a little jog. I was traveling a lot that week, so I was feeling a little chunky. So off I go. I start jogging and I'm on Pennsylvania Avenue and of course I pull up to the White House.

I didn't plan on touring, but I looked through the gates to this White House and Alan, I'm like you, I have a radio program and I write a lot of magazine articles, blogs, et cetera, so I'm always looking for content, which means you have to find learning lessons in every place, right?

So, I'm staring at the White House and I'm saying, "What can I pull out of this thing?" And then I started thinking of the number of salespeople who have lived in that building, right? And, of course, aren't they're all salespeople, right?

Alan: The ultimate salespeople.

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Brian: I started thinking of who some of the greatest salespeople and I'll engage you on this one Alan; let's give some examples of some of the greatest salespeople who've lived in that building.

Alan: I'd have a hard time picking one from another, but some of them really did some things that were amazing, like FDR in terms of people that sold both Congress and the American people on making really substantial changes.

Brian: Yes, yes.

Alan: I mean, obviously, you've got to be a great salesperson to get in the White House in the first place, but then to be able to actually move your agenda forward is a whole other issue.

Brian: Exactly. And so that's what I'm thinking. I started thinking about all these great salespeople, because here is my intention. I wanted to get to, I wanted to think of the great salespeople there and it doesn't matter if you're a Democrat, Republican, there are great salespeople from all sides of the aisle here. And I started thinking of folks like Ronald Reagan was known as a great salesperson. He was dubbed "the great communicator." What is it about this guy that made him so effective? You can even, Barak Obama, here, right? You look at this guy. The guy can sell. It doesn't matter if you're a Democrat or a Republican, the man commands an audience, right?

So, I'm always enamored by these folks and so I started thinking of some of the folks maybe who haven't been great communicators and then I continued my little tour. I said I better get out of here and I jog over to Washington Monument, boy that guy was a great salesman. He had to sell a nation on getting away from England and how we can do this on our own. What made him so good?

And then I jogged around and I looked across and I saw this big, beautiful white building with a man sitting in a chair in there and of course I jog up and I'm walking up those stairs and I just stare at this guy and it's Abraham Lincoln. I said what a salesman he was, right? Think about what he was selling, and I'll ask you what do you think he was selling?

Alan: Unity.

Brian: Yeah.

Alan: And also getting rid of slavery. It was a whole way of life.

Brian: It was. Think about it. Was that a tough sell? And I ask my audiences, "Do you think he had overcome any objections?" Of course it was huge, but so I'm thinking, how did he do it? How did he do it? Then I walk down these steps and I thought of one of the greatest sales presentations ever delivered and it was, of course, by Martin Luther King and right on those steps. Talk about a sales presentation, right?

And then I thought of one last guy and I thought of JFK and I thought of what was he selling and of course he was selling to America that we could put a man on the moon. And he was selling

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America on this concept when the materials didn't even exist at that time to land a man on the moon.

So, here's the point. Back to being stupid. What I have noticed is that the people who become famous in the world have the same attitude as the people who become famous in their companies and their sales territories and their regions, or in their small business, right. They don't think like the average. Average people in fact look to them as being stupid. Right?

In other words, Ronald Reagan, it was a stupid idea to think that the Berlin Wall would come down, but you know what it started with was his stupid idea that communism should end and can.

It was a stupid idea for Washington to think, "Hey we can do this on our own. We don't need the Queen." It was stupid, but he did it.

It was a stupid idea to think you shouldn't have slaves, a stupid idea to think little black children and little white children should go to school hand-in-hand together, and it was a stupid idea to think we should put a man on the moon.

So, I encourage folks, when everyone else is, especially in this down economy, is pulling back and thinking, "Jeez let's play it safe, let's not take a risk."

All you have to do is look back in history. Whoever became famous playing it safe? In fact, when you are being called stupid at your company because you've just come up with a creative, innovative way to serve a customer, you thank your stars right there.

When someone, when that grumpy person at the water cooler is mocking you because they think you're brown nosing too much. "You're trying to get ahead rookie. Slow down. You're being a little stupid." You say "Thank you very much, I appreciate the help," but you move on and you do not let them slow you down.

So, to me it's an attitude. It's innovation. It's creativity. It's the posture that fuels champions, but it starts with the ability to take a risk. And in the book I talk about, Alan, a few different ways.

You don't have to be on Fox News Channel or CNN or MSNBC, but we can be stupid in our companies. Little ways of being creative and innovative, things like, I'll ask my audience.

Let's say we're going to start with being mildly stupid. I might have a thousand people in the audience. I'll say, "Raise your hand if you write a handwritten thank you note after an important customer visit."

What percentage do you think raise their hand?

Alan: One or two percent?

Brian: Yeah, I'd say it's typically about five percent that will raise their hand. I say, "OK, right now you stupid five percent, look what you just did. You separated yourself." And of course the other 95 percent will say, "I don't have time and it's kind of a stupid idea. I need to move on."

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And I say, "No, no, no. You've just separated yourself from the competition." Now the other thing I say is, "Let's think about the handwritten thank you note. What does it say?"

Let's say you meet with a high level prospect, this is a big time customer and they're looking at you and your biggest competitor and the next day on their desk shows up a handwritten thank you note that says, "Thank you Sue. It was great to meet with you. I hope you like what you heard. If not, thanks anyway for having me."

I say, "What does that say about your ability to serve that customer?" And I'll ask you Alan, what do you think it says about them?

Alan: It certainly shows that you did something different than the other person.

Brian: Yes, yes. Which means what though?

Alan: It means you're reliable.

Brian: Yes, there it is. The key word there is you're reliable and your follow up skills are impeccable. What I used to do when I was a medical salesperson, I kept a stack and I recommend your users, your students do this. If you're in outside sales, today, go grab a stack of envelopes, a stack of thank you notes, and a book of stamps and make it a habit before you turn the ignition of your car after you make a visit with an important prospect or a current customer you haven't told you loved them in a long time and you write that little note.

You grab your business card and write thank you on it and find the first blue mailbox you can find and when they get that note tomorrow you will shock them.

Now, they won't all tell you they're shocked, but I will tell you all things being equal in this economy when we're competing on price. If I got my pile and my pile's got a thank you note on it and my competitor's pile, all it is, is a catalogue and a cheap price. My objective is to make my pile and my whole experience totally different and a thank you note is just one way to do it.

Alan: You know Brian, there's another way to be stupid in a small way, which is refusing to participate in the recession.

Brian: Yes!

Alan: Because you and I both know from the kinds of companies we work with that there are companies in this economy that are growing gangbusters.

Brian: Yes.

Alan: So, if somebody's sitting out there listening to this recording and saying, "Oh, jeez, there's no business to be had," I'm sorry, but chances are very, very good that you're completely wrong."

Brian: Yes.

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Alan: If you only sell to one niche, even within that niche there are probably companies that are succeeding because, what? They're being stupid in some aspect of their business. They're taking a risk, they're doing things differently. As a result, they're selling and growing.

Brian: Exactly. Amen to that. I'm with you.

Alan: So we may have to be more effective and efficient in how we do what we do to find them. But folks, have faith that they are there. So one great way to be stupid is don't buy into the recession.

Brian: Yes, I agree. I agree with that. And there are some other things along that line. If we're not going to participate in this recession, we say you know what, first of all, my attitude is going to be... think of Lincoln. Think of Washington. Think of all those. Those folks were able to overcome this. So history has told us that the challenges you and I are facing every day, meaning someone slammed the door in our face or won't talk to us any more, it's nothing compared to what other people have overcome. And so we have to remind ourselves of that.

Mentally that's great. Strategically we're going to go at it. We're going to attack. We're not going to let this thing keep us down. But now there's some tactical things you can do, like the handwritten thank-you note. Even other little things, Alan. This is sort of a funny thing, it stands out.

Salespeople say to me, "It's getting very difficult for me to differentiate myself from the competitor. We sell a similar product." Here's what I'll do. I'll pick up the phone and I'll call their voice mail. Most often it sound like this, "Hi, you've reached the voice mail of Brian Sullivan. I can't take your call right now, but if you'd like to leave your name, number, and a brief message I'll be sure to return your call as soon as I can. Have a great day."

Now I'll ask my audience, "Who in this room has an outgoing voice mail that sounds something like that?" What percentage do you think raise their hand?

Alan: 95.

Brian: Exactly, 95. And they laugh, right? And then I say "OK, what percentage in this room sounds exactly like that word for word?" And of course now they all laugh. About 75% raise their hand. I said, "OK so look at this. We are all expecting different results, yet we are all acting and sounding exactly the same." You see, you first have to get noticed. And if a customer is calling you with a problem and they're going into your voice mail, or a new prospect is calling you and they're going into your voice mail, you've got a chance right there to catch their attention.

And there's two things you can do. Either create curiosity about a current product. It might be, "I can't take your call right now because I'm out showing somebody how we can save them 15% on this new product."

Alan: Bingo.

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Brian: Or, “I can't take your call right now because I'm out showing someone how I can give them back four hours in their work week. If you'd like to have four hours, just leave a message and I'll get back to you sometime in the next hour.”

Isn't that something different than, “Leave a name number and I'll call you back with my quote that's going to be 15% less than it was last year, and I'll probably sound miserable.”

[laughter]

We've got to start living, right? Which means adding fun to your life, which will then add fun to their life, which will create these relationships that, you know what? Right now, Alan, as you know as speakers, because that's what we do. Of course we have other businesses as well. The speaking business is doing poorly, and like you said, some speakers are participating in the recession, some aren't. I've never had a better year in my life.

Alan: I agree completely.

Brian: Because everyone is pulling back and I'm saying, you know what? Now maybe it's just I'm starting to drink my own Kool Aid, Alan, but I do think, this stuff just works.

Alan: Yes. And it's even more important to do it right if things aren't as easy as they used to be. It doesn't mean things are hard, it just means once again, getting back to basics.

Brian: Yes, true.

Alan: Now we talked earlier, when we talked about the PRECISE acronym, about the importance of preparation. And I noticed you've got PREPARATION in all capitals, too. Is there another acronym related to that, or did you just have some more thoughts about preparation that you wanted to share?

Brian: Well, of course there's an acronym that has to do with preparation. But the key thing once again that I focus on is the objective, right? It's that making sure that every time we meet, you think beforehand, “What do I want this person to do?” And it's as simple as that.

What I try to do in my seminars also is keep things very simple. Today on this call, I want that to be the lesson of preparation. Think about networking meetings. I'll have people call me, and I'm sure it happens to you, Alan, and they'll say, “You know, I'd like to meet up with you, I'd like to have coffee.”

Alan: Why?

Brian: My first question is, “What's the point?” Right? I'm all for coffee, but we have to get something out this because there is a difference between activity and progress.

So if it is, “Brian, I'd like to meet with coffee because I think I have a way where I can save you three hours a week.” Well you know what, I'm buying. It's that simple.

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So remember, so you have to have an objective. I think this also leads us to prospecting. Every time you're looking to get a new customer, create the question that is going to make them amazingly curious.

So once again, examples. Someone calls me and says, "I want to meet for coffee so I can get a better understanding of your business." You know what? I don't care if they understand my business!

Alan: Right.

Brian: It doesn't do anything for me, then understanding my business. But if you want to give me something that's going to add value to my day, then I'm going to do it.

Having said this, I'm a firm believer in relationships, and I'm not into take, take, take. Right? When I meet for coffee I'm going to want to think about what I can give to you as well. I know it's going to come back to me.

Alan: Brian, your examples here are excellent from another perspective. You're doing something naturally that is probably one of the biggest things I see salespeople struggle with, which is **quantifying the impact** of what they do. You've talked about saving hours, you've talked about saving money, you've talked about different things, and you've always had a **number** involved. I mean, Anthony Parinello wrote a whole book about that in his "Selling to VITO."

Brian: Yes.

Alan: It's a huge issue. If somebody says, "I don't know how to differentiate myself from my competition," well my goodness, if you look at what you and your organization have done for some of your customers, and if you're able to get them to put specific percentages or dollar values on it, now you have something to hang your hat on. And to your point, that's what's going to get people's attention. They don't want to sit down and talk just so you can understand their business. But if you can help them reduce their operating expenses by 23% in six months, chances are a whole lot better they're going to take the time to meet with you.

Brian: Amen. And so a great place to get these percentages are go back to current customers who you have served. The testimonials that you will get will become the meat of your curiosity-building questions.

So for instance, the person or office where we increased efficiency by 23%, however we quantify it. First of all, if we did that well, I want that on a testimonial letter that I will use either on a website, certainly in a presentation binder, so I think there's a few thing that I'm getting out of what you just said, Alan.

If we have happy customers, go back and ask them if they would put a testimonial together or some words together that you can use to help grow your business. If you serve them well they will do it in a heartbeat, right?

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And you take the very beefy, meaty, numbers-based specifics of what they told you, and you use that in your next question to a similar company. So if I see this company of similar size and I've helped someone similar to increase their efficiency by 23%, that becomes my engagement question.

It might be, "Hey, Bill, thank you so much for your time. The reason why I was referred to you is, your friend in the other office, in the other corporate department, thought that you might be interested in increasing your efficiency. I'm curious, is there any interest in possibly coming up with a process that can increase your efficiency by 23%?"

And it's done in the form of a question. And you see it's done in the form of a question. Now who's going to say, "Nope, I'm perfectly happy being inefficient, thank you very much."

Alan: Exactly.

Brian: They're not going to do it. But without the beefy specifics that you mentioned it just sounds cheesy and salesy, right? Think of the difference between "increase your efficiency by 23%" and, "would you be interested in us meeting and discussing how we can increase your efficiency?" To me it's, no thanks.

Alan: Bland, boring, snore. Exactly!

Brian: Absolutely. So I love that point you just made.

Alan: I also like the fact that you presented a creative way to use that on the back end, which I had never considered, which is, why not use that kind of information in our voice mail messages? Instead of just using it in our outbound messages to people and when we're asking questions in discovery conversations, why not include it in our voice mail message to help set us apart? I think that's brilliant.

Brian: Well, I think another department, if any of your folks are small business owners or entrepreneurs or maybe manage customer service departments, you think about how often people call customer service or tech service and these are customers, these are prospects, and what we do is say "Thank you, did I solve your problem?" and hang up the phone. Then we have a salesperson two hours later trying to get that same person on the phone and say "What are you doing?"

So, if I can get customer service departments, or internal sales departments, whatever we call them to throw out that one question, "Hey, did I answer your question? Great. Hey, by the way, we're currently running a promotion that is allowing users to (blank)." And, of course there's the specifics "Would you be interested in hearing if you might qualify?"

It's keeping our eyes and ears open for customer contacts. What used to be sales, or customer service calls, let's turn everything into a sales call. Remember, if we do this well, it won't feel salesy. We've got a nice warm smile on our face, but, boy, we're casting that line out more than ever. It is a numbers game, whether you like it or not.

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Alan: Yes it is. Now, we've talked a lot about different kinds of questions, and you talked earlier about doing things that are sort of, in my terminology (I apologize for not using yours) but more predictable and repeatable. What kinds of repeatable questions should we be asking prospects?

Brian: Once again, grab that pen and paper. Here's what we teach.

Let's say I work for a medical company and I sell blood pressure equipment, though this applies for anything. Pull out blood pressure equipment and put your own product in. If a customer calls me and they want me to visit with them, I'll show up. Now, of course after building respect and trust and thanking them I tell them I'm going to save them time by asking a few quick questions.

The first thing I would ask that person is "Hey, what got you interested in wanting to learn more about my product?" So, think about it. How often, when we show up in an office, or once again, the C Suite or the basement of that decision maker, do we just start with "Well, hey, who are you currently using?" or "What are you using now?" It's a very specific question.

I say, open it up, wide open, just say "Hey, what got you interested? Why am I here? How did you hear about me?" Something like that, to get them to talk. Because you might get the mother lode on that. They might say "Well, you know what, here's the deal. We've always used this competitor, we hate this, we love this, this is how our decisions are made." And all you're doing is taking notes.

The next question we ask... By the way, let me throw this out there for those who aren't taking notes, but still want access to this.

You can go to my website. It's <http://www.preciseselling.com>, or drop me an email at bsullivan@preciseselling.com. And what I'll do is, all these questions that I have, I'll email them to you. You can get them for free, so don't worry about taking notes if you don't have a notepad and paper.

Alright, so "What got you interested?" Then it's "Have you already decided you're in need of a product like this?" or "Have you already decided that you will be changing suppliers?" You see, we ask this question, it's a qualifying question, to find out just how serious they are. It will also tell us whether they've already determined they need a product like this.

The answer may be, "Yes, we're definitely buying something, it's just between you and a competitor." Or, you may need to sell them on the need for a product like this. Those are two different sales. One is you're selling your product, the other is "Hey, let's first just talk about the bigger picture issues." If you don't ask that question, you may be attempting to sell your product when they don't even know why they need something like it.

Then, once again, we go to the C-L-E-A-R. Who are you **Currently using**? What have you **Looked at**? What do you find **Effective**? What would you **Alter**? (For instance, quicker, faster, easier.) and The "R" is, "Who, as well as yourself, is **Responsible for making the decision**?"

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If you ask those five questions, and then dig a little bit deeper, peel back that onion within those five questions, you will be right there in the top three percent of all sales performers. And, the great thing is, you don't have to think about your next question. But, you'd better write down what they've told you because what's on that sheet of paper is the foundation of your upcoming presentation.

Alan: That's great. Now, we've talked a lot about questions once again. Can leaders or managers use similar techniques for their internal customers?

Brian: Great question. In fact I'm writing a book right now called "Precise Leadership." I'm writing this with Colonel Kevin Benson. He was the planner of operation "Iraqi Freedom." It was his plan, in fact, that took us up to Baghdad in the early part of the war. He used to report to Donald Rumsfeld. Stay tuned for this one, because it's going to be really cool.

The premise is exactly the same. So, think of P-R-E-C-I-S-E. How often do managers go into a coaching session with an internal customer and they don't have a repeatable plan? It really is exactly the same, Alan, it's "P." What is the objective of me meeting with that person?

Let's use an example. We have someone who's maybe been a little negative, or down. Maybe they're not performing, or they're showing up late for work. So, "P," what is my objective? My objective is to get them to agree to show up on time and understand the consequences if they don't. Great, now I know why I'm going in that door.

Now I walk in that door, alright, I have to build Respect and trust. Don't let them feel like I'm going to breathe down their neck and kill them. Walls have to come down because it's the only way I'm going to get them to open up and tell me some of the challenges they're facing, or the reasons. So, build a little respect and trust before you hammer him with why they need to show up on time.

And then the "E" is engage with questions. This is really the same concept. What's happening?" Prepare those questions up front. Get them to talk, open up. You're taking good notes, just as a salesperson would.

And then, of course, "C" it's time to convey your leadership solution. In this case it is "You better show up on time, my friend, or else," right? But you thought this out beforehand and, in fact, you wrote it down.

Then the "I" is indecision. They come back and say "Yeah, boss. But the problem is, is I'm taking work home with me. I'm up 'til 12 midnight, so if I show up 15 minutes late, what's the big deal?" So, if you think about, before you ever walked in that door, what might they come back with, you can then prepare your answers.

So when they fire with that response, or that indecision or that objection, you've already planned it. You don't sound defensive, you don't breathe down their neck, you're not getting emotional.

Then, of course, the "S" is secure agreement. "So Bill, based on what we've talked about, can we come to terms that you will show up on time." "Absolutely" so I get a big fat "yes."

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Then the "E" is, before Bill leaves, Explore for other ways to help him love his job and be successful. "Bill, I'm glad you're going to show up on time. By the way, what can I do to help you **want** to be here, not only on time, what would it take to make this a place that you want to show up 20 minutes early, you're that excited to be here?"

"Well, to be honest with you, I never thought about it, but this might help..." And now you're getting feedback that may help you be a better leader. You might find out some things that you didn't know.

You see how the process in selling a vision, a mission, an idea are absolutely identical to selling a product or service?

Alan: Wonderful. Now, Brian, earlier you gave folks your website and email address so they could get the list of questions, the repeatable questions. What other kinds of resources are available out there for them?

Brian: We have a really cool new one for iPhone users. You can download a free iPhone application of a summary of "Twenty Days to the Top." It's an awesome deal. All you have to do is just do a search on iPhone app, put in "Twenty Days to the Top." You can download the free app, and it's essentially the "Cliff Notes" for my book. Everything is there including everything we talked about today. If you don't have an iPhone it's no problem. You can, once again, go to my home page at <http://www.preciseselling.com> and you just put in your name and email address and we'll send you a PDF version of the entire book. So, it's a really neat app.

The other thing is, we have a weekly radio program, as you mentioned earlier. It's at <http://www.fifteenten.com>. We're on at nine a.m. Central Time every Monday morning. We have some of the greatest business minds in the nation. Everyone from, you name it, from David Orreck to a lot of the greatest speakers, just great entrepreneurs we have on. They can download that for free, on any iTunes. Just search "entrepreneurial moment" and you get a free seminar just like what you're doing today, with some of the best business minds.

And so it all starts at Precise Selling. We give a ton of free stuff. We give free weekly sales tips. There's so much more we can give them, Alan. We gave them a ton today, but there's a ton there for free, and if they like it, then there's a lot more we can offer.

Alan: That's excellent. I'm sure they will appreciate having access to those resources. Brian, it looks like it's about time for us to wrap up. Do you have any closing comments you'd like to share with the folks?

Brian: No, I just want to thank you for putting these teleseminars on. We talked a bit earlier about the importance of helping, constantly growing and learning and I think it's neat that people will look to you as the resource to find some of the minds throughout the country to help make them smarter. So I think people who are teaming up with you and your company are well on their way to increasing the value of their own stock. Just keep up the good work and keep making people smarter.

Alan: Brian, I sure appreciate that, and I really appreciate your time. Thank you so much!

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Brian: My pleasure!

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