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Books

How to Make Them Want to Buy

By DAVID DORSEY

If you're in sales and you quote from "the little red book," you probably won't be mistaken for a communist these days. Jeffrey Gitomer's "The Little Red Book of Selling" is itself selling: more than a half-million copies world-wide since it was published in September 2004. Chairman Mao's own red book may be having a hard time keeping up, even in China. Mr. Gitomer's volume has appeared on the Journal's weekly nonfiction and business best-seller lists a total of 71 times.

It's not hard to see why. This isn't just a red book; it's a Red Bull of high-energy sales tips and counsel. The author's personality comes through with blunt wit -- he's part personal trainer, part standup comic. (If his advice doesn't work, Mr. Gitomer says, "don't be blaming me. Not only do these principles work, they work



Jeffrey Gitomer

in the Northeast, where people eat their young.") The pages have plenty of white space, color-coded tips and Dilbertesque cartoons offering instruction on tackling complaints that keep you from making sales FOREVER! (This sort of type treatment looms large in more ways than one.) You could read the entire book on a coast-to-coast flight, with time to spare, but it's probably better approached like a box of chocolates: Consume a few bullet points a day, because more than that is going to feel excessive.

When Mr. Gitomer gets into details, his thinking is fresh and amusing. He offers five pages on crafting a good voice

mail greeting. My favorite, though its facetiousness could wear thin after a few hearings: "Hi, this is Jeffrey Gitomer. I wish I could talk to you but I can't. Please leave your American Express number with expiration date, and I'll get right-back to you." He claims three people a day dutifully recite the information into the phone and then hang up.

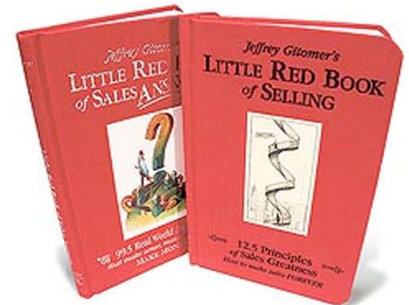
Now Mr. Gitomer has followed up "Selling" with "The Little Red Book of Sales Answers." Subtitle: "99.5 Real World Answers That Make Sense, Make Sales, and Make Money." The sequel, too, is a best seller, having spent the past two weeks on the Journal's business-books list. There's less bite-sized philosophizing, though, and more practical tips. Mr. Gitomer goes straight to tactics: How do you control a phone conversation? Ask questions. In doing so, you set the direction and begin to learn what you need to know in order to offer something of value. "If you ask enough of the right questions, you don't have to make many statements," he writes. Easier said than done, but you can put the book down, pick up the phone and see if it works.

His answers are gleaned from years of experience. "Should I sign a non-compete?" If you're a new hire, have a lawyer look at the agreement to make sure it's fair. If you're an established employee and your employer suddenly springs a non-compete on you, he writes, "then something is drastically wrong."

Mr. Gitomer is at his most engaging when drawing on his own history for advice. What's the best way to make an appointment? Face to face. Of course. But then the author elaborates, showing one way he has succeeded in getting customers to want the appointment from the salesperson, not the other way around: Start an electronic newsletter, or e-zine, and produce material that is useful to prospective customers. Now notify the person whom you would otherwise be cold-calling that you want to do an interview for your e-zine and that you will be bringing a photographer. Then conduct the interview (without bringing up your

product or service), publish the prospect's comments and photo, and send the e-zine to him. Not only will you get that face-to-face appointment, you've probably already made your sale.

This is where Mr. Gitomer is best: taking a problem and setting it within a startling -- and often uncomfortably assertive -- context. How do you get better



Patrick Conlon

leads than your competition? Network, of course. But don't just show up at an event, down a few drinks and collect a few businesscards. Wrangle an invitation to be the featured speaker. Offer so much value in your talk that prospective customers will be cold-calling you.

What's especially solid about Mr. Gitomer's books is their grounding in ethics (his e-zine suggestion isn't devious; it's just smart). Success, for him, comes from the heart. He concludes his new book with the idea that you must love what you do and do it honestly. If you don't love it, you'll just be in it for the money, and that leads to short-cuts and pressure selling -- not to long-term friendships based on an actual exchange of value. He reminds us that top sales reps don't peddle; they solve problems and make customers laugh while offering them something they genuinely need. The highest-achieving sales folks work harder than everyone else because their job is their passion. In the end, it's hard to argue with a consultant whose guiding principle is: "If you want to be the best salesperson, first you must be the best person."

Mr. Dorsey is the author of "The Force" (1994), about a year in the lives of a top Xerox sales manager and his team.