

Three Mindset Mistakes Creatives Make That Hurt Brand Growth

by Maha Mamish

Nearly every creative business owner I've met over the last two decades holds dear at their core the same mantra: I hate doing sales. You are not alone. I happen to belong to the freak minority of super creative people—yes, we exist—who thrive in a sales environment. And as a 'been there, done that' in the sales world, I know for a fact creative brains were built for sales success.

In this booklet, I'll share a few illuminating truths about sales that will help you see growing your business in a totally new way, and if taken to heart, supercharge your innate ability to close business without changing anything about who you are.



FALSE TROPES THAT ARE HOLDING YOU BACK

I've worked with some of the most successful creative entrepreneurs in NYC, and most of them would rather have a root canal without anesthesia than attend a sales meeting. The reason?

Choose from the gallery of options:

- I hate the idea of 'promoting' myself
- Clients are difficult and draining.
- I'm too shy for sales.
- The idea of money attached to my creativity is stomach-churning.
- I just want to focus on being creative.

Sound familiar?

But the real culprit might surprise you.

The hyper-capitalization of the American business landscape over the last 50+ years has fomented an uber corporate definition of sales, and it now predominates our professional and mental landscapes. In that distorted light, sales is about convincing, harassing, tricking, or subtly manipulating someone into buying some 'thing' you want to sell. Good salespeople are slick, money-minded, extroverted, perfectly poised, and have answers and data graphs ready to counter any reason you have for not buying something. They leave their meetings with a signed deal.

Yuck, right? No wonder you'd rather run for the hills than pick up your phone and cold call someone new. Rest assured, though there may be corners of the earth where salespeople in bad suits operate this way, this couldn't be further from the truth of what sales is, nor who was built for selling. Today, I'm highlighting three big mind blocks creatives inadvertently erect that end up inhibiting sales growth.



WHAT YOU THINK YOU'RE SELLING ISN'T WHAT YOUR CLIENTS ARE REALLY BUYING.

I know this sounds counter-intuitive, but you're not actually selling your product. Yes, the client buys some tangible object when money exchanges hands and A LOT of your conversations will seem to be about the product. But sales is rarely about the product. Clients don't buy luxury design based on how stunning it is. You might need to make something gorgeous to get invited to the party in the first place, but beauty alone won't win you actual business. This can be a particularly hard pill to swallow for creatives because of how viscerally and emotionally attached you are to your own sales product, but I guarantee that it's true, even for the talented artisan maker.

So, if it's not the quality of my artistry, you ask, then what's it about?

First, and foremost it's about value. Ask yourself, what value is my product and my organization as a whole offering people? The product's design or quality may indeed be on the list, but it does not comprise the whole of it. Take Hermes. People lust for their product, which is exceptionally crafted no doubt in the finest of materials, but it is neither the design nor the quality alone that drives most people to consider kicking their grandmother down a flight of stairs for a brand-new Birkin.

In Hermes' case, the value may be a combination of product design, heritage quality, exceptional service, historical repute, and global reach; but arguably the biggest draw, is its affiliation with a certain lifestyle concept and the exclusivity it encompasses that is of seemingly priceless value to its clients. If you're intimidated by being compared to Hermes, know that value can come in the humblest of forms.

One of the forms of value I consistently brought to the table in my various sales positions early in my career was staying two steps ahead of my clients' needs, proactively



offering helpful communications or assistance at key moments in the process without even being asked.

Another huge value I offered was always going the extra mile, especially when tough situations emerged. No matter the visible obstacles, or which impossible-to-reach person I'd have to reach, I treated every situation like it was solvable and sought creative, outside-of-the-box solutions. Even the minority of times I wasn't able to pull a rabbit out of a hat, the client was grateful for the effort. We felt like a team, and it made our relationship stronger each time. I happened to sell drop-dead gorgeous products no matter where I sold, but I grew my business and roster of devotees by offering them value.

You might be selling decorative lighting or sustainable countertop materials, but maybe you happen to have an engineering degree and also speak Arabic. This means you could be a huge asset to clients in helping them through all sorts of technical challenges related to installations. Speaking Arabic means you could communicate directly with on-site design and technical teams throughout the Middle East, a huge burgeoning market for hospitality design currently, which is a big asset to western firms that are designing projects in those countries.

Everyone has numerous forms of value that you, your people, your product, and your process lend to the lives of the client purchasing, the design firm they are buying through, and for brands with representation to the showrooms who sell on your behalf. Unlike the world of faceless online shopping, this is a high-touch industry. You do more than just sell something pretty on the outside.

The full value you bring to your clients is the sum total of how your studio works, your process, your passion, your people, your particular skills and history, and yes the beautiful product. Be proud to share it all, not by bragging or "pitching a sale" to someone, just by allowing those things to naturally shine through when meeting with clients. If this is an area where you struggle, it's a great opportunity to do some work around

self-image through wellness routines, regular spiritual practices that are meaningful to you or working professionally with people who have experience helping entrepreneurs build confidence and perspective.

Beyond value, the second thing sales is about is connection. Do you vibe? Can you communicate well? Do you seem to get along? Can you be understanding of the things that are important to them in the process and vice versa? Do similar things excite you creatively? Do they treat you like an equal or like you're there to serve them? It's just a chance to see if how you work, how you are, and what you sell is a good match with how someone else works, or is, and what they need in that moment in time. Nothing more. A moment in time. And when synergy happens, you move closer, agree to meet or talk again, keep talking, and eventually close a sale. When synergy doesn't happen, no one's embarrassed themselves—it just wasn't a good fit! There are billions of people in this world. Many others are out there who will admire and support you. Your job is not to hope or convince people to like you and your stuff. Your job is to speed date as much as possible, chuck the losers, and find the ones who innately like the total package of you. The faster you do that, the faster you'll increase profitability.

YOU'RE THE ONE IN CONTROL.

I see a lot of people looking at sales like it's about convincing others to give you their money, or about being put to the firing squad for creative validation over and over. Don't be a victim! Choose to be powerful instead. Want to know an amazing upshot of being an entrepreneur? You get to decide who you do business with, who works with or for you, and who you keep close versus farther away in the day-to-day. Like life, there will always be people we simply cannot avoid dealing with, but overall there's an incredible amount of agency in entrepreneurship, especially once the business is past the start-up phase. Just like you're in control of the materials you work



with, or where you set up shop, you also get to decide which sales relationships you want to cultivate and which ones are less valuable to you.

I see a lot of supposedly successful creative brands desperately taking in orders from clients over and over who wreak havoc on their business, frazzle their sales staff, drain their resources, and make them less profitable on the backend—all in the name of a cult like devotion to fast, short-term revenue on the front end. Meanwhile, they'd have a lot more time to make new sales income if they weren't so busy putting out all the fires problematic clients keep bringing to the table. When you take in any business at any cost, it stifles your growth in the long run.

Neurologically, highly-creative brains are wired to be more perceptive of human behavior and subtleties in social situations than the average brain. So take stock that you are wired for wisdom and have access to all the data you need, in order to decide if a sales relationship or opportunity is right for you. Does it look good on paper? GREAT. Move towards the projects and people that look good but also make sure they feel right. That way instead of the money controlling you and spinning you out in a way that stunts your growth, it's working for you, compounding and multiplying upon itself.

IT'S NOT PERSONAL WHEN THINGS GO SOUTH.

As if gaining a client wasn't painful enough, now you have to keep them. One of the things people hate most about sales is the people managing, aka the 'problems' part of the process often after money is exchanged. Usually, it's because people take it personally. And it's kind of hard not to, right? This is your business, your product, your creativity, your baby, your soul and now it's under attack! How can they be so entitled?! Don't they understand how a late request can turn an entire production schedule upside-down?! How could they possibly be asking this after it's been explained to them eight times already!!!! Sound familiar?



Deep breath in, deep breath out. Firstly, despite the world telling us for decades that “business decorum” or “professionalism” are codes to live and die by at the office; really they are just an Orwellian behavioral system imposed upon us in which we are asked to be robotic by subjugating and judging every human feeling we have, feeling shame or even putting our jobs into question if we ever fall short. Life is messier than that and to think we can create prosthetic spaces where we cease to experience our humanity is delusional and outright dangerous for society. It is important, yes, to agree to collectively attempt a generally kind and helpful demeanor towards one another to help move the workflow along (and in a larger sense, frankly, because we’re a single collective humanity). However, it is unhelpful to demand “perfect professionalism” from one another because, well, we are after all human—even you. I find this to be especially true in creative businesses, like the high-touch, more intimate, relationship-driven organizations such as interiors which combines the sensitivities of creative neurology with the high-stakes nature of luxury product.

Second, move from conflict resolution mindset to conflict opportunity mindset. That’s right, moments when our or another’s ugly self erupts from the surface are actually incredible moments of opportunity in your business. Each time a problem arises we have the chance to rise to the occasion. Whether it’s establishing a necessary boundary, offering a collaborative solution, or just giving someone a little bit of space for frustration to diffuse itself; all of these are ways we can walk through the dreaded conversations to grow a stronger relationship that will produce more orders and business in the long-term. You just might discover deep down in the weeds that the person on the other end has more in common with you than you think, has their own set of dramas and complexities to navigate, and, like us all, can inadvertently suck at being a good human sometimes.

Lastly, try to keep on the forefront, in these moments, that you asked for this. You decided to be a business owner, not a lofty artist waiting to be discovered by fans. In so doing you gladly signed up for problems to be solved by you and no one else. Artists get paid to feel. Entrepreneurs solve problems and bring novel solutions and ideas

to the world. Don't fall into the trap of victimization. You CHOSE this path, so embrace it. The supposed problems aren't always a sign something is "wrong". Perfection is a delusion. There will always be legitimate problems to address, including humans acting annoyingly. Next time you're facing an ominous sales-related problem, what if instead of saying "I have to call Stephanie-ugh," you instead said, "I get to call Stephanie now." Using the phrase "get to" instead of "have to" is a simple neurological hack for your brain that directs your focus where it's needed. Facing it like an opportunity to grow your business is the kind of approach that will tenfold your profits over time, as you grow new business from new admirers while ensuring existing accounts keep buying and growing internally. Growing sales both from within your client base as well as from the outside is the most efficient way to scale your business, leaving you more time to do what you love: developing your artistry.

So there you have it; just a few things I've observed along the way.

In Summary:

Connect with others through total value to produce business.

Be motivated but also claim you're right to be authentic in your choices.

Evolve towards a network around you over time that feels good, and let the ones you don't vibe with just fall away..

Even the people we like the best are still human, so cultivate an attitude of optimism and humanity in the hard moments.

Learn to feel pumped about conflict opportunity. Helpful and inventive problem-solving is at the root of easy growth.

About Maha Mamish

Maha Mamish has spent the last two decades growing sustainable luxury product brands in the U.S. and Europe enabling her to inspire creative audiences with a holistic approach to business. As an accomplished mentor in creative excellence, Maha uses a 360 approach focused on business growth and personal wellness, in sustainable harmony. At the core, her approach empowers creative audiences to use their brain's innate super powers to excel in all areas of life.

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