

FEATURE | INFORM, INVOLVE, INSPIRE

Ideas on a Blackberry

Mark Stevens, author of God is a Salesman, asks: If everyone is a salesperson how can you raise the bar on your performance, and, in turn, the rewards you reap?

a conversation with **Mark Stevens**

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Mark Stevens, TheNetworkMarketingMagazine.com is very glad to speak with you today, thank you for your time. There are several things we want to talk with you about and one of the most exciting things is your new book coming out in January 2008, *God is a Salesman*. Could you share a bit with us about how the book came about?

Sure! *God is a Salesman* with the subtitle *Learn from The Master* is a very respectful book of God and religion and it actually uses God and religion as it applies in actual life. I heard and read once, years ago, the biblical passage when Jesus says to Thomas, "*You see me and you believe in me. Blessed are those who never see me and believe in me.*"

Whatever God you worship and whatever religion you may be in, six billion people believe in a God they've never seen. They've never had an elevator speech from him or her. There is no product catalog. You believe in God through the most powerful force in the world. Nothing comes close to the power of God. As proof you see six billion people believing in God

and they have no physical evidence of the kind we want for everything else in our lives that we believe in. I think that's a great thing because it gives people faith.

They wouldn't have faith if they didn't have the ability to believe in a force greater than the human force.

So a thought came to my mind when I was hiking. I hike every weekend, by myself, with a friend or just with my dog, and I use it as thinking time. As soon as the thought of that passage came to mind I said to myself, "You know what? God is a salesman!" There's great power and usefulness in that in how we work our business and our life. Selling products, selling services, selling our children on the idea that they should study rather than play, selling our friends when we encourage them to break a bad habit, etc. How do we do that?

Instead of looking to the motivational speakers or the cookie-cutter sales programs why don't we look at the most powerful force there is in the world, which is the belief in God, and utilize that?

Wait a moment, you just made a jump. What do you mean "God is a salesman?"

What I mean is that all the great religions of the world have prompted six billion of us to believe in a god. And they've done it without the Willie Loman, cookie-cutter, elevator speech, PowerPoint junk that people use to sell other things. Now I mean this in a very respectful way and I think it's a great thing. I also think we can learn from it.

It really leads to the fact that the best selling of any kind is invisible selling.

Great sales people, and now we're going back to the human kind, never look like they're selling. They really don't sell, they educate, they mentor, they inform and they guide. When somebody comes at us as a sales person we run the other way. When somebody comes at us as a guide, mentor or educator we embrace them.

Most sales people do it the wrong way. They stick a product in your face and say, "I want to sell this thing to you." But the smarter way to do that is to say I want to help you achieve something. I want to help you feel better. I want to help you look better. I want to help you be smarter. I want to help you have a better life and I want to show you how I can do that. It never looks like you're selling. It's invisible selling!

I agree with you. A great sales person is an educator.

And an honest one! You know, when I had that thought I wrote it into my Blackberry. I always write my books on a Blackberry, not a computer. And I sat down under a tree that I now call the God Tree at this wilderness reserve where I go hiking and started writing the book. I went under the tree and wrote every day for a year.

There are a lot of experiences I've had where I've learned the power of faith. The power of faith is not recognized enough in business. People believe that faith belongs in a house of worship and not in business. That is so wrong!

The great way to do business is to utilize the power of faith.

Let me give you an example. The typical customer satisfaction questions that companies ask are, "Are you happy with our product? Would you buy it again? Would you recommend it to a friend?" On the surface that seems like the right way to approach learning about customer satisfaction. But I say no!

Instead, ask your customers, whether you're a sales person or a business,

"Do you have faith in us?"

If somebody has faith in you as a business they are going to buy from you! They are going to have a relationship with you! It's going to be more than a transaction! And that is the thing that is so often lost when it comes to customer interaction. One of the things I talk about in the book is that your customers/clients should be treated like family members.

That brings up a question for me. I have a friend who swears she can't sell anything. And yet she has a very wide circle of influence, to the tune of more than a thousand people, who will take action on almost anything she mentions. I realize that this comes from her genuine passion and her authenticity in wanting to serve and share with others. She's doing that thing you speak of, invisible selling. It's even invisible to her! And as you were speaking I realized that there are a lot of people who simply have faith in her. So my question is, when you talk about the value of asking this question, do you recommend asking the question directly or asking questions that will reveal whether or not people have faith in you.

Why beat around the bush? I say asked them directly if they have faith in you. You have faith or you don't. It's a surprising question. Let's say a *friend* asked you that question. "Do you have faith in me?"

You would have to think for a second. Having a rock solid relationship with people is a hard thing to achieve. A lot of quasi-friendships, superficial friendships don't have that. And it's a great measure of a business relationship because it morphs into something so much more than a business relationship.

One of the examples I use is you're out with a realtor to buy a home. All realtors have the same homes to sell.

I say in the book it's the provider that counts not the product.

So the great realtors are the ones who realize that they are more important than the homes. Now, let's say I like a house and you're my realtor. I've told you I want to buy that house and you as my realtor say, "Mark, don't buy that house, it's not right for you" I'll look at you and ask why you just talked yourself out of a commission. But you will sell me a different house because you've shown me that you really know and care about my interests. And that's why you're going to tell me about why I shouldn't buy that house.

Almost no realtor, and this is real and metaphorical, says *don't buy that house*. And you gain so much credibility by reminding me why that house would not be the best deal for me.

That's the way to live. It's the way to do business.

One of my sons just called me from London where he is working. He's 27 years old and I talk to him almost every single day of his life because I realize that he had to have faith in me as his father. He didn't have to only 'obey' me; he had to have *faith* in me. I certainly wanted him to listen to me but I recognized that it was *my* responsibility that my children have faith in me and to know that I would always be there for them. There's a little bit of selling in parenting.

I work a lot! I don't know the difference between work and not because it's all one thing to me. That's why when I'm hiking and I get an idea I sit under a tree and write a book. I don't really know what it means to have balance. I like joyful imbalance. And when I got married and we started having children my wife came to me and said she needed a break. She told me that on weekends I need to not work. Well, I knew I couldn't not work and I didn't want to hide the fact from her so I had to talk with her about what we all needed, my needs, her needs and the kid's needs. And we worked it out. I got up early, before the family, and did my work and then spent the day with my children. I made a pact to spend every Saturday with them for the first 14 years of their lives, with a willingness to show them something they hadn't seen before. Whether it was the

Concord taking off or the Museum of Natural History or a local arboretum, every single Saturday we did that. When we came back home they were tired and I went to work and my wife had the day off.

So, it's selling! People think selling is cheap and crass but it's really influencing. And the great religions recognize that. The problem is it's locked into houses of worship. Bring it out!

I know so many people who look forward to the experience of being in church, temple or synagogue and they see that as part of their personal life and family experience. That's great and how it should be but then they go outside and the wonderful things they learned there are not lived.

A life well-lived, for business and financial success as well as spiritual and emotional success, *requires* that you live that way always. And that's really what I talk about in the book.

I'll tell you a story from the book. I was selling Christmas trees when I was in high school. It's the first time I had a business. I borrowed \$100 from my father, which was my first challenge, and I got a truckload of Christmas Trees. I negotiated space at a Texaco service station and I was in business. People were coming by and I was doing ok. I noticed though that there were people coming by and loving a tree but not buying it.

I said to my Dad, who was a natural born sales person, *"What's going on? Why aren't they buying, Dad? The people come by, they love a tree, the kids love it but they don't buy it."*

My Dad said, *"They can't afford it. So do this, Mark. When you see somebody who wants a tree but really can't afford it, and here you'll just have to make a judgment call, tell them something like this. 'Look, I know you probably left your wallet at home. Take the tree. Here's my contact*

information and just send it to me when you can." So I did that for about ten people. It's was great, everybody was happy, the kids were cheering and it just felt good.

I forget exactly what happened but it was about eight out of ten who sent me back the money. Often with a card thanking me and often with an extra bonus over and above the cost of the tree.

My father died quite young, about three years later. Right after he died we were destitute as a family. One of the people I sold a tree to happened to call me and he said, *"I remember you and I'm contacting you now for the first time since we met. I was an alcoholic and you made my Christmas that year. I've never forgotten you and I'm wondering, do you need a job?"* My Dad had just died and he left my Mother, my sister and I with \$84, we didn't have any assets and I needed a job! That's a true story... and that's what I'm talking about.

That was a great lesson that my Dad taught me about faith and generosity and the 'right' way to sell.

That's a powerful story. I know exactly what you're talking about. My wife and I have been married for 30 years. She suffered for decades from injuries received in a car accident early in our marriage, until she finally received a miracle that alleviated her pain. This fall she was again in an accident and injured a different spot on her back. She had an MRI done and surgery was being recommended for four areas that were herniated. I don't have a lot of faith in surgeons and we sought another opinion. We went to visit an orthopedic surgeon who came highly recommended and after looking at her tests results he came back and told us that he felt her MRI had been over-read. Meaning, he wasn't seeing four herniated areas, he

was seeing a couple of spots that were slightly herniated and he wouldn't talk about surgery for at least a year if at all. You better believe his credibility with me just went from the sewer to the ceiling because I'm under the impression these guys only get paid when they put you under the knife. It was clear he wasn't just out to make money from our misery.

The wonderful thing about that story is first of all, that's exactly the way to live. That doctor goes to sleep at night knowing he's doing the right thing. Secondly, at the same time, he's making himself more successful business wise.

Because A. If and when you do have surgery it will be him that you pick and B. even more importantly, along the road, both before and after her surgery, anytime you hear someone needs orthopedic surgery you're going to recommend him! You're going to recommend the guy who said, "No!" not the guy who tried to talk you into surgery. It's such an unbelievably powerful lesson and people don't see it.

One of the things a good salesman makes as a guarantee and God makes this guarantee, is that if you believe in me I will be with you forever! People want to know that you will stand behind them! That's what people want to know, "Will you be there for me?"

When you prove that you will be there for them they will have faith in you.

Doctors for instance don't usually think of themselves as a salesman but every time they tell you what they are going to do and what the likely result is along with reassuring you that they will be there, they are selling you.

Changing gears for a moment, I like the idea of you writing on your BlackBerry. There are so many people who spend time with a yellow legal pad or at their computer but I really admire you, especially as a person who does a fair amount of writing himself, using this wonderful approach of writing on the go.

The reason I carry it in my pocket at all times is because if I have an idea, and I love ideas, I can immediately send the idea out to the world. Now, obviously I don't mean the whole world but I write a blog called *Unconventional Thinking* which is available on my firm's website and it's one of the most popular blogs in the world. I love this blog and I don't know where the stuff comes from. I feel like I can't take any credit for it because I truly don't know where it comes from. Just like I don't know where *God is a Salesman* comes from.

I was reading *God is a Salesman* yesterday. The books just came in, though it's not even for sale yet. I found myself reading it as if somebody else wrote it. I don't remember those words coming. It's a fascinating thing to me to be an instrument.

I actually write four blogs; I'm the blogger for PRNewsOnline, I'm now the blogger for Brandweek, I write *Unconventional Thinking* for my company and right now I have a *God is a Salesman* blog. It takes me fifteen minutes to write a blog. Inspiration comes and BOOM! I don't know where it comes from, don't know where the title's come from and I do know I'd better write it down while it's there. That's where the BlackBerry comes in.

I can immediately get the idea sent out to the world. I don't care about the idea staying with me.

I want the people who share a common philosophy with me, or who want to move toward discussing philosophy or business success or personal success with me to get the message right now. That's unbelievably powerful to me. If it's on a pad, it's on a pad. If it's on a BlackBerry it goes right to my readers.

I heard from an old client today that I had not heard from for eight years. He just dropped me an email that simply said, "Mark, I love your blogs! They're oh...uh...er...unconventional" That's all he said. Of course, he's an unconventional guy. We used to work quite a bit together. Hearing that he reads the blog and enjoys it? That's just amazing to me!

One of the things I appreciate about your blog, along with my appreciation of your gift for words, your blogs gets me out of my mind-chatter. I have to admit that I'm personally delighted to be having this conversation with you because you've confirmed my guess that you simply follow your inspiration and launch your thought out into the world without second guessing yourself.

You can not second guess yourself! I had dinner last night with a young associate of my firm. She told me that sometimes she worries that other people in the firm don't think she's smart enough or on top of things the way they would like. I told her, "First of all, it doesn't matter. Once you start worrying about what other people think they should start paying you rent for taking up space in your brain. You can not spend your life worrying about what other people will think!"

Obviously, if we do this thing wrong and we're hurting people that not ok but I'm talking about other people's opinion of what you should do. Why would you go there? There's no originality there. Who are you going to please? Who does it right? Who exactly is the model?

If God gives us a brain, a heart and a gut, shouldn't we use those things the way we believe as

opposed to the way somebody else thinks we should? Just do not second guess yourself!

Of course, any intelligent person will think over the opinions of people we trust and respect but once you decide what you're going to do you do it.

I got a question today from a newspaper that interviewed me. They wanted to know how women in particular, can show decisiveness when they say no. It really has nothing to do with women. It happens to both men and women. They say no in business and then the people they are talking to try to talk them out of the no to get to the yes. If the business woman or man decides 'No, we're not going to spend that money on new software because we can't afford it right now' you have to be able to do what I call the 'walk out of the room' process. Know when to leave the room.

If you engage in a long debate with people because you said no and they want yes, you're playing a game. When you say no, you need to be clear and firm and know when to leave the room.

Tell the person you are talking with that you hear what they're saying, you understand the sense of it and right now the answer is "No, I'll see you later." That sends a clear message that I feel very strongly about.

This again goes back to that sensitive spot in me about second guessing. When I meet young intelligent people that are interested in working here with us I tell them that if they are going to work here they are going to work hard and with intensity. I always tell them that if they're just looking for a job this is not the place. But if they have the intensity and the passion then they are welcome. Then their friends talk to them and say,

"why are you working so hard?" Suddenly they buckle to that because they feel that their friends think they're putting too much emphasis on their work.

Well, the stars don't care! They know they're working because they love it, because they want to be successful and want to achieve something in their life.

That's what *God is a Salesman* is all about. It's about *achieving* something.

I don't want mere transactions with clients, I want to build relationships, and I want to take people where they haven't gone. And I want them to take me where I haven't gone.

I don't want to simply go through the motions for the rest of my life.

That has so much application to our industry of Network Marketing. It's a big issue and it's not really being addressed like you address it.

What are people saying to themselves?

There is just so much uncertainty. So much self-talk that goes on about not wanting to 'sell' to friends or relatives. Yet so many people have joined the business because of great product results. You can't rip the product out of their hands but when it comes

to the business side they react like it's something akin to purse snatching.

Well that is patently ridiculous! So if you find a product and you believe in the product the *first* people you should sell are the people that are close to you. You know, my wife got me to start taking Vitamin C. She believed in it passionately. I didn't feel that strongly but she insists that I take it so I started taking it about a year ago. I take it every day. Now, I don't know if it's a coincidence or not and I always feel good but I feel extra good. I'm glad she insisted I start taking Vitamin C.

If you believe that something is good don't listen to anyone tell you otherwise. Don't you dare listen to that! Sell that product like crazy! The more people you sell it to the more people that get to experience it.

Another thing I say in the book is that God makes an offer you can't refuse. You look back at Henry Ford, one of my business hero's, and you have to know he wasn't selling cars... the offer he was making that you couldn't refuse was freedom from the farm, he was letting you go visit the relatives, he's letting you go visit a neighbor at night and sit down and have a cup of coffee together, he was letting you go get a job some place else, he was selling you freedom.

So you make an offer people can't refuse because you believe in it. You don't just say, "Here's a product." I asked my wife why I should take Vitamin C. She said, "Because you'll feel better, And you'll have a stronger immune system." Now, I'm sort of a kamikaze at times and I told her I'd take the risk with colds. She replied, "Isn't that stupid, Mark?" And she was right!

Yes! In Network Marketing I believe we are problem solvers. Begging is not part of the deal and it's not

necessary. What is necessary is speaking from the heart and sharing what it is that makes you excited about your product or service and sharing it with those you love.

I saw an ad for a summer job when I was in high school. The ad was offering what amounted to about three times what the average summer job was paying high school kids. I lived in New York City so I had to get on two buses to go see this company. It was a small company. I walk up to the second or third floor; there were two guys there in this little company and I asked them if this was for real. If I could really earn the money they were claiming. They said 'absolutely' so I asked what I had to do. It was selling magazine subscriptions. I told them I had never really sold anything but I was willing to try. I asked if the figures stated were commissions and they said no, you're guaranteed that salary you can even earn more if you sell more magazines. It seemed too good to be true so I asked them what the 'catch' was.

They looked at each other, hemmed and hawed and finally said I had to sell in Harlem and East New York. That was not a safe place for a white guy at that time in New York. There was a lot of racial strife in the city and to go into that neighborhood and knock on doors might be dangerous and explains why they were willing to pay three times the going rate. So they told me, *"Look, kid, you're not really selling magazine subscriptions. We created a sweepstakes for you."* Now, these guys were quite demeaning and said, *"When you go to these people, and they are not the sharpest tacks in the box, just tell them that there is a sweepstake and the more magazines that they order the more entries they have in the sweepstakes."*

So I went into Harlem and East New York, I knocked on doors and went into people's apartments. The people were actually very nice to me. I tried the sweepstakes thing and I was selling nothing! After a week of mostly failing I said to myself, "You know, these are mostly women, very lovely and with pictures of family on the credenzas in their home. They are offering to make me a cup of tea. What am I really selling? What do they really need? What they really need is education." I continued on and even went back to those I talked with and said, *"I'm not really selling a sweepstakes. What I'm offering is education. You're living in a dangerous*

neighborhood; you have aspirations for yourself and your children. If you have them read these magazines they will get an education. They will learn and you will learn. That's what I'm offering you."

I sold like crazy that summer. I made friends I never would have met otherwise. I felt great about myself. I got bonuses and the guys I was working for couldn't figure out how I did it. It was a wonderful experience and I truly believe I brought them something they valued.

Everybody needs to ask themselves those questions.

What are you really selling? You need to give it some thought. When you're clear about that then you advise not sell. Nobody wants a sales person.

The best selling is invisible. That's the power of the great religions. It's invisible and yet it happens and it's so powerful its forever.

I just spoke last week in Berlin for a very large German company that has a conference for CEO's. Here I am, the evening speaker for a business group, talking about God in Germany, which is *not* common practice. And they embraced it! One of the Vice Presidents, who's testimonial is on my website said, "*You showed us how to reach our customers and our people. This is the way to do it. Not memos from headquarters.*"

What I was pointing out is that you have to have faith first. Once companies or sales people lose that they can't sell a thing. And

when you do have it, people want to be close to you, they want to buy from you, they want to learn from you, they want to get advice from you, they want to be in your life.

So let me go back to your surgeon again. You said he's the most successful surgeon in your area and he said 'no'. People come to my company looking for a website and what we *really* do is build businesses. If they just want a website we say 'no'. We are unwilling to compromise who we are and what we offer.

Network marketers need not care what anybody thinks. You get up in the morning and you go to work! And you go to work hopefully doing something that you believe in. That's it!

I'm not saying you don't consider the needs of the important people in your life. But why work against ourselves? When I wake up at 4 am excited about an idea that comes to mind I sometimes try to talk myself out of getting up and following through, thinking I'll be over tired the next day. But why should I try to force sleep when I'm really excited about something? So I get up and write. Some people think I'm nuts! I don't care. Whose model should I be living after? God gave me a brain, a gut and a heart and that's what I'm going to use. That's what it says in *God is a Salesman*.

I think the whole idea of an elevator speech is insulting. Why would I want to plan something to say to someone while going up an elevator when I don't even know them yet? Why don't we just talk from the heart?

In a parting word, what would be one thing you want to share with our readers who are in network marketing? What is it that Mark Stevens would like to leave us with?

Don't think of it as Network Marketing think of it as Network Improvement. You're building a network of people whose lives are improved.

I ran Success Magazine for a while; while I was working where I currently work, one of our clients bought Success Magazine and asked for help turning it around. While I was there I got a more intimate look at Network Marketing and I certainly became aware of the issues involving the problems with Attorney Generals of various states and those sorts of things. You know, every industry has people who take things to excess and jeopardize the reputation of the industry for the honorable people. We can't be held back by those few. So don't second guess and redefine exactly what it is that you do.

Thank you Mark Stevens! We look forward to the release of your book, *God is a Salesman*, in January '08!

Mark Stevens says, when asked who he is, "A person who believes that most of the rules of life and business presented to us as truths are actually myths that need to be challenged, I am challenger and the thinker who reveals a truer, more productive path."

Go here to read Mark Stevens blogs [God is a Salesman](#) and [Unconventional Thinking!](#)