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I used to think that being able to sell was something you either have. Or don't have. It's a talent. I couldn't articulate as to what it exactly entailed. But there was something I thought I knew for sure. I didn't have that gift. When I was in high school, in order to earn some extra pocket money, I tried peddling festive greeting cards with my friends during one of my school vacations. We would carry up to 20 packets of such cards in our backpacks and scour through the residential estates, going from household to household, repeating that same sales pitch to every person we saw over and over again. It was really hard work. I would consider myself lucky if I manage to sell anything at all. Even though I was really lucky once, selling more than 10 packets on one day, I never repeated that feat. Since that vacation, I told myself not to get a sales job, as I didn't seem to have the talent for it. Oh well, I couldn't find a suitable vacation job in University and a friend asked me to go into telemarketing. For a few dollars an hour, I worked as a telemarketer in a financial planning firm. We were given a list of prospects and for every lead we generate from the list, an extra commission would be given. And if that lead converted to a sale, we would get an additional bonus. For the 2 months I worked there, I didn't earn any commission or bonus at all. It certainly didn't feel good. But it worsened when I knew another friend got a commission on the first day she worked! I started to see

these past incidents as an indication that I didn't have the talent for sales. It was probably that same underlying negative belief why I didn't want to go into networking marketing or other brick and mortar businesses when I was researching on a new career. I hated the rejection in the face. Imagine my dilemma when my sister and brother-in-law asked me to help out at his neckties pushcart? On one hand, I really wanted to help him as he was facing a resource crunch. On the other, I was worried about affecting his sales. Even though I was still an implementation consultant then and giving software product sales presentations wasn't new to me, selling neckties was a bit of a challenge. Not just because I knew nothing about neckties. Or because my previous experiences convinced me that I sucked in sales. But also for the fact that I had pretty bad fashion sense. "What if the customers want me to give fashion advice?" I remembered asking my sister. Her answer was simple and straight to the point. "Use your instincts". Yeah right. If my instincts were that sensitive, I wouldn't have been such a bad dresser myself! But guess what? What she said really worked. Using my instincts, I managed to persuade a couple of customers to leave their name and telephone number so that we can keep a customer database to encourage repeated sales. Using my instincts, I followed up on a request from a regular customer who ended up purchasing more neckties when my sister tended to him. Using my instincts, I accidentally broke the highest sales record for the pushcart, which till now, is still unbeaten! But where was that instinct when I first started selling festive greeting cards and doing telemarketing? That was almost a year ago. But the

memory is still so fresh that whenever I thought about it, it brings a cheer to my face. I didn't break a multi-million dollar sales record but the lessons I brought home from the small selling success was much more valuable than that! Here's what I've learned : Past Failures Hone Your Sales Instinct While working at the pushcart, I realize that my past failures as a lacklustre festive greeting cards peddler or an under performing telemarketer actually helped in improving my sales instinct! Coupled with my then working experience as an implementation consultant, I was able use that instinct to take the right judgment call based on the customer's feedback, voice tone and body language. Ironically, without those failed brushes to do sales in my life, I wouldn't have become a better sales person! Many people have rejected opportunities in their lives because they couldn't do something right for the first or even the second time. Myself included. I admit I took up the stint only to bail a relative out. But what did it end up? A sweet selling success that would likely to give me confidence that I can do it again. As long as I put my heart and soul to it! Don't Just Sell. Presell Too My brother-in-law did a great job with the pushcart design. He covered the showcase area with expensive looking black velvet and laid out all the different neckties on it so that anyone walking past would be able to view all the available, beautiful designs at once. Even though there were more than 5 to 6 carts vying for attention at that time, his really stood out. The style and design of the cart, coupled with the wide range of selection, immediately augmented the perceived value of the neckties. Some people were so impressed when they were told

the very competitive prices that they bought 10 pieces at one go!

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