



The Sell: The Secrets of Selling Anything to Anyone

By Fredrik Eklund, Bruce Littlefield

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The nation's #1 real estate broker and charismatic costar of Bravo's *Million Dollar Listing New York* shares his secrets on how to be successful.

In the ten years since moving from Sweden to New York City, with no experience in real estate and no contacts, Fredrik Eklund has transformed himself into the best seller in the most competitive real estate market on the planet. In *The Sell*, Eklund leverages his years of experience to create the go-to manual for self-promotion and sales. At the core of the book are chapters tied to Eklund's 10-step program for "selling anything to everyone," and he shares his secrets on everything from personal authenticity and looking your very best to crafting the perfect sales pitch, negotiating with savvy, and closing deals promptly and efficiently . . . lest they slip away.

Whether you're just starting a job as a sales rep at Verizon, navigating your career as an executive or entrepreneur, or hitting your stride closing big transactions as a banker at Goldman Sachs, *The Sell* will show you how to improve your game and radically increase the money you're bringing home. *The Sell* is a vital resource for anyone who wants to have an impact in his or her personal and professional life, with a razor-sharp focus on selling: selling yourself—or your brand—no matter your background.

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Editorial Review

Review

Advance Praise for *The Sell*

“After moving from Sweden to New York, Eklund became a megastar in that city's hyperkinetic real estate market; now he wows 'em at Bravo's *Million Dollar Listing New York*, which airs in 113 countries and is the No. 1 TV show on iTunes. This primer on how to sell 'anything to everyone' will be big; there were already several thousand preorders seven months before publication date.”

—*Library Journal*

“Fredrik is one of the most fun and talented people in real estate sales today. He always delivers with undeniable charisma and this book is no exception.”

—**Ivanka Trump**, VP of Real Estate Development and Acquisitions at The Trump Organization and author of *The Trump Card*

“Fredrik could sell ice to an Eskimo. I can't do a high kick, but I'm excited to learn his other tricks!”

—**Andy Cohen**, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Andy Cohen Diaries*, television host and producer

“The number one trait I always looked for when I was hiring someone for my company and what I look for now when I'm investing in entrepreneurs on *Shark Tank* is passion, a need to succeed. Someone who'd rather die than not be the best. That's Fredrik, and after reading this book, that will be you, too.”

—**Barbara Corcoran**, founder of The Corcoran Group, ABC's *Shark Tank* investor, and author of *Shark Tales*

“With *The Sell*, Fredrik Eklund has created the modern day *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. If you're looking for how to achieve success in the 21st Century, the answer is in your hands.”

—**Tom Doctoroff**, CEO, J. Walter Thompson, and Bestselling Author of *Twitter is Not a Strategy*

From the Hardcover edition.

About the Author

Fredrik Eklund leads the #1 real estate team in the nation and is a member of Douglas Elliman's senior management team in Manhattan. Originally from Stockholm, Sweden, he is active in the Real Estate Board of New York and is involved with several charities. He is one of the stars of Bravo TV's *Million Dollar Listing New York* and co-hosts *Buying and Selling* on SiriusXM radio with his brother, Sigge Eklund.

Bruce Littlefield is a TV lifestyle contributor and *New York Times* bestselling author. His books include *Airstream Living*, *Garage Sale America*, and *Moving In: Tales of an Unlicensed Marriage*. He is also the coauthor of many bestsellers, including Zach Wahls's *My Two Moms* and Barbara Corcoran's *Shark Tales*. Visit him at www.brucelittlefield.com.

From the Hardcover edition.

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AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM YOUR AUTHOR

My journey from small-town Sweden to the very top of the most competitive sales market in the world inspired me to write the book you’re holding, and doing so has been an incredible experience. Within these pages I’ve included my tricks, gimmicks, aces up my sleeves, and sales secrets, but I feel it’s important to underline something before you get started. Success takes hard work, research, knowledge, and commitment, but the real victory comes through honesty, transparency, and being true to your word. That’s what makes a *truly* successful person.

The subtitle of this book is *The Secrets of Selling Anything to Anyone*, but I want to point out that some things in life are not for sale: your loved ones, your children, your pets, your values, your integrity, your beliefs, your spirituality. It’s not only that they are priceless. They are *sacred*. As a super salesman, it’s important to remind myself that not even I can sell certain things, especially my soul. Everything else is negotiable.

—Fredrik

FOREWORD

The first time I met Fredrik Eklund was poolside atop the SLS Hotel in Beverly Hills. I was in Hollywood shooting an episode of ABC’s *Shark Tank*, and Fredrik was on the roof attracting attention. I can spot a great salesperson from across the street and certainly from across the pool. Fredrik has magnetism that’s impossible to miss. At the time, I didn’t know who he was (it was before *Million Dollar Listing New York*), but I did know one thing: He was a success. Fredrik Eklund has that killer instinct.

When I started my NYC real estate firm in 1973 with a \$1,000 loan from a boyfriend, I had no experience in sales and no doubt that I’d be successful. Back then there weren’t any female-owned real estate firms in the city. It was a business worked by women and *owned* by men. I wasn’t welcome, but I certainly got noticed. From wearing my short skirts and bright colors to calling my sales team the “Power Brokers,” I created my reality—that I was *the best seller in the city*. And what happened? In 1999, the Corcoran Group became the number one residential real estate company in New York City.

Fredrik, a Swede with no contacts and no real estate license, came to America, and, in less than a dozen years, leads the number one real estate sales team in the nation. Now that’s the American dream. How’d he do it? He knew that perception creates reality, and he had the courage to spot and seize opportunity.

The number one trait I always looked for when I was hiring someone for my company and what I look for now when I’m investing in entrepreneurs on *Shark Tank* is passion, a *need* to succeed. Someone who’d rather die than not be the best. That’s Fredrik, and after reading this book, that will be you, too.

Like any great salesperson, Fredrik is very persuasive. For example, bragging about him in this foreword wasn’t enough. He even talked me into giving you my five personal beliefs about becoming a success, all of which are included in his secrets to selling anything:

1. People want to do business with someone they like. Don't ever be fooled into thinking that a job is only about the product. It's not. Business is all about the people. If people like you, they're going to want to work with you. And if they don't, you're going to have an almost insurmountable obstacle to overcome. Your job is to make them like you.

2. Selling is nothing more than playing up the good and playing down the bad. If knowing how to do this comes naturally to you, you've got a head start. If you don't, you can learn. When I worked in a diner, I was up against another waitress to attract customers. All the men wanted to sit with her because she had big breasts. And, well, I *don't*. It was my mom who gave me my best sales (and life) advice. She told me to forget about what I didn't have, and use what I did have—a nice personality, a great smile, and the gift of gab—to get customers to want to sit in my section. I packed them in! Maximize the positive; minimize the negative.

3. Every successful person knows how to fail well. Successful people get knocked down like everyone else, but they take less time getting back up and back out there. Did you know the lowest rate of suicide is among commission salespeople? Why? Because they deal with so many rejections on a daily basis, they are more adept at handling life's hard knocks.

4. Everybody wants what everybody wants. This is the basic psychology of sales. Your task is to figure out how to make people think that what you've got to offer is the best thing since hot dogs and baseball. Two things to remember: More than one buyer creates urgency, and when people are told they can't have something, they want it all the more.

5. The most successful people believe their success is only temporary. Top producers end each year convinced they'll never have another year as good. Their own track record becomes their biggest competition. In great successes, fear breeds accomplishment.

For twenty-five years I managed New York's top sellers, and I know how hard successful people work to keep their trade secrets. So, why would you give it all away when you're number one? Why would you create thousands of new successful high-kickers? Let it be known: I think Fredrik is nuts for sharing his secrets, but I suppose a real success isn't afraid of competition. He thrives on it.

I leave you in good hands . . . and on the road to making millions.

—Barbara Corcoran

Bestselling author of *Shark Tales: How I Turned \$1,000 into a Billion Dollar Business*

Make 'Em Want What You've Got

I became a salesman when I was seven years old. I was living in Stockholm, where I was born, and I signed up with a company I heard about through school to sell Christmas calendars and books. Those who sold the most each week would win a waterproof, yellow Sony Walkman. (Remember those?) I decided I didn't just want to sell a lot; I wanted to be the number one seller among the thousands of kids selling Christmas calendars in Sweden. I was going to sell more than *anyone*!

My goal made me obsessed. I went to bed every night, and, like a prisoner counting the days on his jail-cell wall, I charted on the wallpaper of my room a matrix-like plan to world-calendar-sales domination. When my dad came across my scribbles, he was *arg!* (That's Swedish for *angry!*) But it was too late! The writing

was literally on the wall: I was on my way to becoming the biggest seller.

Every morning, I put on my favorite sweater my grandmother had hand-knitted for me, with two reindeers on the front, loaded all the catalogs on a sled, and went knocking door-to-door, schlepping my wares through the snow into Akalla, a suburb north of Stockholm. I knew the market because it was my neighborhood. A million homes were built there during the 1970s, and many retired people had moved in. The old ladies were my favorite targets, a captive audience for a friendly kid with a selling smile. I'd knock on their doors and take a step back so that when they answered, I'd be perfectly positioned to look up at them so they could notice my cute sweater. I'd say, "Hi. It's me, Fredrik. It's nice to see you again." Almost always, they'd invite me in. I became the grandson who was finally visiting. I sat with them and talked, talked, talked and sold, sold, sold. I made them *want* to buy a calendar from me.

The result? I drank a lot of green tea that winter, listened to more than my fair share of World War II stories, and broke all records for the calendar company. And I really mean *all* records. I even got a letter from the president of the company asking what my secret was. (But I kept the secrets for this book and am sending him a signed copy as my answer, exactly thirty years later!) I also won so many Walkmans that I sold them, too—to my classmates at school!

Today I use the same technique I used on the Swedish grannies when I'm showing million-dollar properties to Jennifer Lopez, Cameron Diaz, Leonardo DiCaprio, Justin Timberlake, Daniel Craig, or a family from the Upper West Side, and convincing them the time to buy is *now*—from *me*.

But you don't have to work on commission to benefit from my selling strategies. Because let me tell you something: You've been in sales your whole life, even if you haven't realized it. Have you been on a date where you dressed your best and turned on the charm? You were selling. Have you asked someone to take out the trash because you were tired and didn't want to? You were selling. Have you interviewed for a job? You were selling. That's why *The Sell* is for everyone. It describes all of the sales each of us make every day, even if our job title isn't "salesperson." Regardless of the industry you're in—Christmas calendars, Internet, real estate, baking, motherhood—understand this right here, right now: It's *all the same*. *If you know how to sell you, you know how to sell anything.* Whether you're selling medical equipment to a doctor or an early bedtime to your third grader, *The Sell* is a daily event in everyone's life.

What do sellers do? They persuade, influence, and convince someone to give them something in exchange for what they've got. How is that different from trying to convince your boss to support your idea? Or trying to talk your husband into going on a vacation to Tahiti when he'd rather go to Tokyo? Anytime we want someone to do something, we are putting *The Sell* into action. We sell a smile to get the better table in a restaurant, a kind remark to get our way with customer service, and sincerity to form long-lasting friendships. That is selling. Whether it is a car buyer's money, a coworker's help, your teenager's attention, or a best friend's guidance, realizing how to motivate someone into taking action is *The Sell*.

Are people buying what you're selling?

Are they buying *you*?

• • •

A decade ago, I moved to New York City from Sweden with a pair of sneakers and a dream: to make it to the top in the city that never sleeps. I didn't have a clue then as to how I'd actually make that happen or even what my career path would be, but I absolutely believed I would be the best. I believed in the only product I had: *me*. In my fairy tale, I knew that one day, regardless of the industry I chose, I'd be the king of New York. I visualized headlines, glamour, and a wallet stuffed with hundred-dollar bills. I knew it wasn't going

to be easy in the most cutthroat city in the world, but I was ready for the battle.

My story began in the suburbs of Stockholm, Sweden. That's Sveeden, wedged between Norway and Finland in Northern Europe and far away from big and glitzy Manhattan. Yes, it's very cold and dark in the winters, and, no, it is not Switzerland. (I've discovered a lot of Americans confuse the two.) And there are no ice bears (I'm told you call them polar bears) roaming around the streets, just a bunch of tall, blond people with blue eyes who love vodka, dancing the frog dance on Midsummer's Eve (intoxicated by the former), building safe cars, designing low-cost furniture that you put together yourself, rolling out stores with inexpensive clothes all over the world, and writing catchy pop music you love to hate (or hate to love).

We didn't have a lot of money when I was young, but my parents always made sure we got to travel. When I was ten years old, my father, Klas Eklund, a Swedish economist, unknowingly changed the course of my life. He had been invited to give a speech in New York City and exchanged the first-class ticket he had received for three economy tickets and brought my older brother, Sigge, and me with him.

Even as I am writing this, I still remember the yellow cab picking us up outside JFK Airport, the reggae music on the radio, the almost tropical heat as I rolled the window down in the backseat and dropped my head outside to see the approaching skyline.

I am sitting there again now, ten years old, and you are sitting next to me. Are you with me?

Feel the hot vinyl seat; roll down the window; smell that humid, sweet, and hopeful autumn air of 1987 New York. We are on this journey together, you and me.

The city's energy, excitement, and vertical living instantly hooked me. There was also a dark side to Gotham that I loved. I could smell the danger. At dusk, the cab took us through Times Square with its neon fireworks, and my jaw dropped. I could see the poor, the rich, and the gaps in between. The thousands of tourists with cameras signaled that *this* was the center of the universe. I believe there are certain impressions in life that are so strong they are etched into the neurons of your brain forever and actually change that chemical soup permanently. This was one of those moments. The second was my first commission check. The third was falling in love, and I hope seeing the face of my newborn daughter will someday be one, too.

My father, Sigge, and I climbed to the top of the Statue of Liberty, and I got to see her perspective of the glimmering city across the water, a beehive of excitement. There is a photo of me up in her crown, looking out, and you can see in my eyes how awestruck I was. I had the vision of my liberation. I decided right then and there that I would become one with the city. I would become very successful, but more important, someone who was following his dreams.

I often think that until this moment, our family had been my little solar system. My brother and I were the planets orbiting the sun, our family home back in Stockholm. But suddenly the laws of gravitation were bent, perhaps because I saw another sun through the windows of the Statue of Liberty: New York. This sun symbolized a new goal: freedom, success, and the ultimate sell.

As we ferried back to shore, the rain came down hard and we had to run without cover from the boat in the Financial District just south of the Twin Towers to hide in a steakhouse with red leather seats and cigarette smoke. *Just like the movies, I thought. I will come back here. I will live here one day! I will create my own life.*

Fifteen years later, when I realized that dream and moved to Manhattan, I instantly felt at home and that anything was possible. New York was magical to me, and it still is. Just walking down Fifth Avenue in the heat of the summer makes my heart race with excitement. It is empowering to look up at the skyscrapers,

watching them defy gravity and reaching—like all the dreamers in this city—higher and higher.

I moved with a few Swedish friends into a one-bedroom rental apartment on Thirty-Seventh Street in midtown across from Macy's. I didn't know anyone in New York, but we Swedes felt a certain companionship in our proud but naive attempt to leave Sweden and not look back. I did miss my family, but my drive to make it in my new hometown was stronger. I kept thinking that the only time to create my future self was now. Not tomorrow. Not next month or next year. *Now*.

I got a job selling panini outside the *Late Show with David Letterman* for forty dollars a day (plus one dry, but free, leftover panino for lunch), and I worked as a bartender for a grand total of three nights. I was pretty good at selling sandwiches, but it was hardly why I came to New York, and I hated bartending because I was lousy at it. That's when I started looking for a book like the one you have in your hand, an instruction manual for becoming successful, a book that could tell me how to recognize and cultivate my true talents. The books I found felt old or were written by someone I couldn't relate to. I wanted a modern handbook about reinventing myself and selling all I have to offer to the world.

I didn't find that book, but a friend did suggest my personality might be a good fit for selling residential real estate. So I took an accelerated real-estate-salesperson course at New York University and got my license in two weeks. I had no business contacts or a Rolodex of any New Yorkers' names. I didn't know Chinatown from Tribeca or Lexington Avenue from Madison, but I did know one thing: I had an insatiable hunger for success. I browsed the Internet and clicked on the city's most expensive apartments and read the bios of the salespeople that controlled them. I fantasized that one day I'd be one of them and find myself on top of the world—literally.

Today I am the number one real estate agent in New York City, the most competitive real estate market on the planet. I currently have \$1 billion worth of residential property for sale on the market split between New York and Scandinavia, which is more than any other agent in the country. Last year, my teams in New York and Sweden earned a total of \$20 million in commissions, and my New York team made \$4 million last month alone (which I believe is a record in the history of the city).

In my ten years, I've closed on more than \$3.5 billion in real estate—\$1 billion in the first five years of business, another \$1 billion in the following three, another \$1 billion in the following two, and a bit more than \$500 million in the last year alone. Several times this year I've sold more than \$100 million in property in a single month. I compete with more than thirty thousand licensed real estate professionals on an island two miles wide and thirteen miles long, with more wealth concentrated in a small area than any other place in the world with the exception of London and Tokyo. I have sold out more than twenty-five buildings in new development and have a team of eleven people in NYC working for the largest real estate brokerage on the East Coast, Douglas Elliman, where my team is number one in the nation.

Out of one million real estate salespeople in the United States, and more than twenty million worldwide, I lead one of the top teams in the world, and I'm certainly the youngest among the top ten team leaders. I also have offices in Sweden and Norway with more than fifty employees working for my own brands there, Eklund Stockholm New York and Eklund Oslo New York, and have plans to open in Finland, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. Oh, and then there is the Emmy-nominated hit show on Bravo you might have heard of called *Million Dollar Listing New York*, which airs in more than 110 countries and follows me (and Ryan Serhant and Luis Ortiz) as we represent multimillion-dollar sellers in New York City, the real estate capital of the world. Movie site IMDb describes our show's premise as "follows some of Manhattan's most relentless Realtors as they close multimillion dollar deals faster than a yellow cab runs a red light." I couldn't have said it better myself.

I'm not telling you all this to brag. That will come later. This is to help you understand that if a kid off the shrimp boat from Sweden can make it big, you can, too. You, too, can be the best at what you do, whatever it is. *You are no different.* You probably even understand the language and know a few more people than I did. You have a leg up! Plus, you have this book in your hand. So, high-kick!

• • •

My story is evidence that anyone can sell what they've got, against all odds, and reach the very top. Whether you're offering the world terrific shoes; software; books; homes; legal, financial, or insurance services; massages; dentistry; airline tickets; tuna; or tamales—you name it—if you want to be successful, *The Sell* is essential reading. Yes, even if you are not going to work to sell every day, you still need this book. Any dreamer, anyone with a desire to excel in life, will find this book helpful.

I designed this book to make *you* the best you can be and to take you to the very top of whatever you can dream. I share everything I have learned and experienced in my life to become number one, all the ups and downs, my secret techniques, my failures, my many successes, and my unique way of looking at the world. I hope to make you laugh out loud, cry, take notes, and tell your friends about it. I want you to mark the pages, circle paragraphs, and underline sentences so that one day, when you run into me, we can discuss it.

But in the end, this book isn't about me. *The Sell* is about *you*.

You have the gift of *The Sell* inside you, and I am just here to activate it. It's like pushing a little button. Everyone's button is different, so finding that button within you is the first step. Once your engine is ignited, it cannot be stopped. Are you ready to locate that button? Are you scared of pushing it? Well, I'm not, and I cannot wait to get started. With you.

Let's make you a huge success.

• • •

There's a gold rush on—to your best selling self—and this book is your pickax. If you're not selling what you've got to offer every day, you're not making a better life for yourself and those you love. Young or old, *The Sell* never stops. Believe me, I may be selling multimillion-dollar penthouses now, but later I'll be selling those nurses in the old-age home on giving me that extra chocolate chip cookie.

But this isn't your granddad's sales book. This book won't tell you how to be slimy, pushy, or insincere. In the twenty-first century that old hunk of cheese won't work. The techniques of yesteryear are as antiquated as a cassette tape. The world has changed drastically in the last five years alone, so it's time to throw out all those old ideas and get with the program.

In the coming pages, I'm going to spill my secrets and share with you the tricks I've figured out to finding the real you and then making people love you and want what you've got. I say "secrets," because up to this day I have never shared them with anyone. Many have asked, and every time I have smiled and looked down in silence. I say "tricks" because in countless media interviews, reporters always want to know the "key" to my success, and my standard answer to all of them has been the same as it was to *The New York Times* a few years back: "to work harder than anyone else." There is some truth in that, but I was saving the real secrets for this book.

Each chapter of *The Sell* will help you be more effective in coming into your own, building relationships, establishing trust, and mastering the art of persuasion. I've broken down the book into three parts.

In part 1, you're going to learn how to

- embrace who you really are and share yourself with the world;
- identify your personal motivations and drive;
- get in the game;
- make yourself attractive;
- work out, eat right, and get your beauty sleep; and
- develop a sense of humor and charm.

Part 2 will provide you with step-by-step instructions on how to

- find people who want your services;
- craft the perfect message;
- negotiate the best deal; and
- make the sell and claim your reward.

Then, in part 3 I'm going to tell you how to

- get people to want to work with you;
- grab attention;
- grow your business;
- turn failures into victories; and
- enjoy your success!

For now, all you have to do is ask yourself, *Do I want to have more personal and professional success and lead a rich and fulfilling life?*

If your answer is yes, let's get started by making an important pact together: Someone has to be the best and living large, so why not you? Why not me? I think we both can agree: We deserve it!

PART ONE

Whether you're selling cars or writing a blog, working in advertising or hawking hot dogs, *you* are your brand and your product. Never forget that. In order to be successful, you must learn to cultivate your brand and sell your wares through your personal strengths. When you know yourself and show people just who you are, you can accomplish absolutely anything. Being unaware of your strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, abilities and inabilities is like trying to drive a car without gas. You can push the pedal, flash the lights, and spin the wheel all you want, but you're not going to get anywhere.

Each chapter of part 1 is designed to help you find *you*—the real you—and then help you figure out your biggest motivator, perfect your personal style, and make yourself more confident, enthusiastic, charming, and better prepared. The result is that we're going to get everyone to love you.

Now turn the page!

CHAPTER 1

Forget Selling—Begin by Finding Yourself

We’re off! But first, I think an introduction is needed. I’m Fredrik. Nice to meet you! It’s such a pleasure shaking your hand. Let’s celebrate this moment. Look around. We are here, we are alive, and we are on our way to realizing our destiny. I congratulate you for being you. You are beautiful and are going to be everything you are meant to be. And if no one told you they love you today, I will—and I do.

How you connect with other people using your charm, intelligence, authenticity, humor (and looks) is a barometer for how well you persuade, inspire, and gain confidence. (And how much money you make.) It is also critical to how effective you’ll be in promoting yourself whether you’re pitching Donald Trump on a \$2 billion development, or a fashion editor on your new design, or yourself via your profile on Match.com.

Every day—no matter what your station in life or your line of work—you *are selling yourself*. You. Are. Your. Brand. And. Your. Product. In business, it’s important to know your product, but it’s more important to know yourself and what you bring to the table. People trust what’s genuine. You’re not out to pull the wool over anyone’s eyes. No amount of money or success is worth losing your good name.

SHOW PEOPLE JUST WHO YOU ARE

Let me tell you how being true to myself not only saved me, but made me, too.

After high school I applied to the Stockholm School of Economics, one of the premier business schools in Europe. Each year thousands of people apply and only three hundred are accepted—I was one of them. I knew I was one of the privileged, but it honestly didn’t make me feel accomplished or right.

The Stockholm School of Economics was filled with young men and women, most from good families, all competitive, who dressed up for dinner parties and were destined to be bankers. At orientation on the first day, J. P. Morgan and Goldman Sachs brought sandwiches into the auditorium and presented a future I really wasn’t interested in. The school was an institution, and as I walked down the marble-clad halls with cathedral ceilings, I felt I didn’t have another four and a half years to give until graduation. I wanted to live right then and there, to get out in the sunshine and build something.

The final death to me was in statistics class my first semester, with its auditorium full of formulas and graphs. Everyone had to sit still for hours, taking notes, and all I could do was show up and tune out. I had a hard time sitting still, and to this day I still can’t sit still for too long. I looked out the windows and imagined, *What if I could see the Empire State Building outside instead of the summer gardens dying in the crisp fall winds? How would that make me feel?*

As I was realizing the Stockholm School of Economics wasn’t my thing, a friend introduced me to a girl named Maria who had an idea to build an Internet start-up offering customer-relationship-management software. Internet shopping was still in its infancy and hadn’t really caught on with most consumers. Maria wanted to solve the missing human touch by giving online shoppers a virtual assistant, or avatar, to answer questions and help at checkout—Siri before Siri.

Maria needed a go-getter to help her find seed money. And she didn’t have to ask me twice. That summer, Maria and I wrote the business plan in the computer room at my business school and went looking for investors willing to provide financial backing for a start-up, a.k.a. “angel investors.” We bought student-discounted airline tickets for fifty dollars and flew to Paris to meet with potential venture capitalist types. We slept on the sofa of Maria’s high school friend and came home with \$1 million, successfully selling 50

percent of the company before it really existed. And that's when I decided I wasn't going back to school.

I dropped out and (then) told my parents I was done with studying. My dad asked me to stay, telling me that an education is for *life*, something that no one could take away from me, ever. I said my *life* is my life, and no statistics professor can take it away from me, ever. My classmates thought I was crazy and told me I was making the biggest mistake of my life. I told them they would see, that I was going to prove them wrong. I hugged them good-bye and wished them well on their own journeys.

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Big start-ups were hot, and Sweden was ahead of the curve. Mature, successful guys from the old business world were trying to find ways to climb aboard the new, faster economy. They knew they needed to get a horse in the tech race or be left behind, and they wanted to pair with young, smart tech types on the cutting edge. My father, a former speechwriter with the Swedish government, gave me the e-mail address of former Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt and several powerful, high-profile, and wealthy businessmen.

I sent an e-mail to Mr. Bildt and four or five other major names. I didn't worry if I was important enough. I took action before doubt could rear its ugly head. The e-mail simply said to show up at this address, at this time; we have an interesting Internet start-up, and we know you'll want to be a part of it. Maria and I set up a PowerPoint in a boardroom we'd rented for the day, complete with graphs of how much the company was going to be worth. They all came. Each saw the other familiar faces in the room and realized they couldn't (or shouldn't) say no. We offered each of them a small piece of the company in exchange for their names, experience, and faces. Attaching these power players, with their fifty or so years of political and business savvy, gave me—the twenty-year-old entrepreneur—huge street cred.

Two years later, we had more than forty employees and everything felt possible. According to the business plan, we were going to become the number one customer-relationship-management software company in the world. Our new company, *Humany.com*, was going to take on Oracle. I was the CEO and the youngest person in the company, and with Carl Bildt on the board, we landed on the front page of many Swedish magazines and even got a write-up in the *Financial Times*. The Internet was now on everyone's agenda. The new economy was on fire, and the Swedish media made me the IT whiz kid and placed me on the cover of our most popular magazine wearing a big smile and a Hawaiian shirt while standing in front of the former prime minister.

Working that hard, day and night, kept me sharply focused, and my outrageous dream to move to New York tamed. People said I was the perfect entrepreneur. The press called me a "risk taker," an "aggressive salesman," and a "tough negotiator" with a "strong sense of intuition." At first, I had to sell only an idea, then a company that didn't exist, and finally software that was still being programmed. By the time our software was finished (and didn't actually work), the Internet bubble was beginning to burst and so was my head. I was tired and confused. Most of these new start-ups were falling apart. Ours was, too, and our working relationship unraveled along with it. Maria and I began arguing about everything.

It was the turn of the new millennium, I was twenty-three years old, and it was still many years before Facebook and Twitter were founded. Things in the Internet bubble had to happen so quickly; the pressure to grow *and* be profitable at the same time was contradictory, and the investors and media pushed us to chase more money—or go bankrupt. I remember taking a cab home to the apartment Maria and I had bought together, going into my half of it, and crying by myself. I cried because I was exhausted, and I could see the inevitability of our business's collapse. I started to feel like a failure. It was too much at once. I had all these peoples' (and their families') futures in my hands, and I had no real experience in a world that was crumbling.

Failure was new to me, and I hadn't yet come to understand that failure is inevitable if you want to be wildly successful (more on that later). I briefly thought, as many do in similar situations, that there would never be another opportunity for me, that I'd never climb out of the mess I was in. I've now realized that we are all a combination of failure and success. Like experiencing joy and pain, without one, we'd never know the other.

As they say, I pulled myself up by my bootstraps, sold my shares in the company I had started just two years earlier, and got out. I made the very complicated decision to be true to my dreams and to leave the company, my family, and Sweden for New York . . . by myself.

Before I left, I decided there was one more thing I needed to do. I needed to tell my friends and family about the real me, to "come out." I broke up with my beautiful girlfriend, Simone, who was devastated, and I finally gathered the courage to tell my brother, my mother, and my friends that I was attracted to boys. A few months later, after I had fallen in love again, it was time to tell my father. My dad and I had a nice dinner at the new summer house he'd just bought, and before bed, he asked if I'd help him take the garbage up to the bin by the road. I was incredibly nervous, but it was pitch black out, and I couldn't see him, so that (and the wine at dinner) made it a little easier. I said, "Dad, I'm in love with someone." He asked me what her name was, and I said, "his name." He stopped. He was quiet. Then he said, "Fredrik, you are my son, and I will always love you. You can love whomever you want." My family and friends all proved supportive and assured me they loved me regardless.

Without being the true me—both personally and professionally—I'd never be writing this line right now. I acknowledge that as difficult as that six-month period was for me—quitting my company, coming out to my loved ones, and finally moving from Sweden—I had it easier than many others out there. But here's what occurs to me. Often the things we think are going to be hard are just hard to start. Once it's set in motion, it's liberating. I suppose it's sort of like jumping out of an airplane. The only real resistance is ourselves, our fear of the unknown. Whatever we need to do to live honestly and whatever transition we need to make in order to follow our dreams and be true to ourselves is the path we should take.

As excited as I was boarding my flight to New York, I was torn, and my head was a swirl of emotions. Had I made the right decision? Would I ever recover? How could I make it starting all over in a city where I didn't know a soul? I shook off my doubts and buckled up for the ride. I had no choice but to make it work. I wasn't going to come back with a broken tail between my legs. I was going to make everyone (and myself) proud. Because I had to.

YOU BEING YOU

I've learned the hard way that to be successful *and* happy in life we have to really be ourselves and showcase our true personalities. It's such a simple thing to say, but what a difficult thing to discover and carry out. Take note: The number one mistake you can make is watering down your true self because you're afraid others can't handle the 100-proof you. Don't fall for this. Failing to speak your truth and share yourself with the world in an open, honest way is a costly miscalculation. Many people go to great lengths to hide their true selves because they fear who they are is not the person they're supposed to be. Erase all that. *You are supposed to be you.*

Rather than reaching for the stars with everything they've got, many people let self-doubt and insecurity take over. Maybe you *are* inexperienced, but you can still be unique. Stop comparing yourself to others and realize that while you may not have the same things others have to offer, what you do have to offer—you—is enough. You just need to figure out who you are and play to your strengths.

Whether you're an actress from Springfield on her first Hollywood audition, an entrepreneur pitching his first start-up company to a venture capital firm, or, as I was just over a decade ago, an enthusiastic and

ambitious (but also terrified!) young Swede trying to sell real estate in a foreign land with little relevant prior experience and no local contacts, your fundamental challenge is to establish other peoples' trust in you. And trust, after all, begins with one thing and one thing only: the truth.

If you want people to believe in you and in what you have to offer, you have to believe in yourself. So I say this: Step out into the world as boldly and confidently as you can. Be yourself and let people see exactly who you are. And, as people get to know you, share your personal story and allow your full personality to shine.

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Now, let's hear about that story!

Look at yourself in the mirror. Take a good, long look. What makes you *you*? I need to know. The world needs to know. You *must* know. Why? That's your secret-power source.

What makes me *me*? *I have a European background, an impish sense of humor, deft social skills, and fun hobbies including cooking, photography, and taking care of my dogs.* Whatever your unique qualities and passions may be, they are your ammunition when you're with a customer, a client, your boss, a love interest, or whomever it is you're trying to sell your products, services, or self to. In the beginning of your career, as my story proves, sometimes personality is the only thing you've got.

We all make the same mistakes. We run scared of ourselves.

When I started, I was so nervous working in my first office that I often pretended to be somebody I wasn't. I thought making jokes would be inappropriate and that my signature, attention-getting high-kick—in which I raise one leg and scream, “Weeee!”—would get me fired. I thought I should hide my Swedish heritage and work on toning down my accent because I feared clients would think I had just gotten off the boat from Europe and knew nothing about New York real estate.

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