



SECRETS TO SUCCESS

How I Went from Making 0 to 6 Figures in Under Two Years

It's April, 2003 and I find myself with a wife, a daughter, a mortgage, two car payments, oh, yes, and without a job. No prospects and no experience in building a business from nothing didn't help either. I have long desired to speak to audiences and have decided several months earlier to look into a career as a professional speaker. My background is in Youth and Education Ministry in various churches. I have led conferences for the denomination for almost 20 years in team building and leadership. Sure I have the background to speak in front of people, but I don't have a clue as to how to start this career on my own. What am I to do?

I call on my friend, Joe Bonura, a well-known professional speaker for suggestions. What Joe tells me scares me to death. I don't want to hear his advice. He says that if I want to start a successful speaking business I need to get on the phone and call prospects. Cold-calling! The last thing I or anyone I know wants to do. I hate cold-calling and will do anything to avoid the practice. "Is there any other easier way to do this?" I ask him. "Not if you want to be truly successful," he replied. What follows is how I responded to what Joe and others told me to do. It is how I built a successful business with less than \$5,000 in the bank. These are simple steps you, too can accomplish if you set your mind to the task and really want to succeed. They are so easy, but you would be surprised how many people want to avoid them to become a productive member of society. They do require some hard work, but the rewards are exponentially so beneficial, they are more than worth the effort. So let's get started.

1. Do the hard thing first. If there are two choices of how to complete a job I always do the hardest one first. I find that this gets the worst part out of the way. Calling people on the phone was the last thing I wanted to do but Joe showed me how easy I could make it and that the results were worth the effort. I hated cold-calling and dreaded the task. So many people try to build a career the easy way – pay someone else to do it, set up a cheap web site, do mass mailings that produce little results. But I chose the tough route. Within three months I was being hired by top groups in the country for the fee I requested.

I remember winning a school-wide student government office in high school by calling all the under classmen on the phone. Believe it or not I had set my future course in the 11th grade.

2. Create something that doesn't exist. Find ways to stand out from the crowd by branding your business. The best inventions are those that meet needs in a way that no one else is meeting them. I began marketing myself as a speaker in the usual way: sending out a single sheet (called a one-sheet) with your name, picture and topics on it to prospective clients. The only problem is every speaker has one of these and if you take the name and picture off of them they all look alike. I had to find a way to make people remember me.

At a conference several months after I began my speaking career I got the idea of putting together a piece I call a "magalogue" – a magazine/catalogue advertising myself. I researched magazines and materials the best speakers were putting out and titled it "Leader's Team Journal." To this day it is a quality piece of material that I update frequently with information about myself. I can hand it out for free, mail it and send copies via the internet.

3. Only good things happen. I have lived long enough to realize that there are no coincidences in life. Everything happens for a reason. The wise people are the ones who can discover purpose and make it work for their benefit. I sat next to a young lady on a flight to Milwaukee last year who argued that life was a series of coincidences. It turns out she had to write a speech for her first Toastmasters meeting and was having trouble putting it together. Was it a coincidence that she sat next to a professional speaker for three hours on that flight? I don't think so.

I meet people frequently who contribute to my life and I in turn add value to theirs. If you live your life with purpose and learn to associate every occurrence with that purpose, then you will realize that life is a journey, not a series of coincidences. Look for opportunities to discover the reason events happened to you and you will be amazed how few times they appear to be mere coincidences.

4. Listen to your heart, then your head. You will know what to do when the time comes. Shortly after starting to speak nationwide, I had a client who treated me with extreme rudeness. They were one of my biggest accounts, so I couldn't afford to offend them. After much consideration, though, I realized I was having a good year and I was too valuable a human being to be treated poorly. I tried reasoning but to no avail. Finally I informed the person that my business was going too good to take this type of treatment. Within two weeks I signed enough business that it more than made up for the loss of this one troublesome company. I actually began to feel that they were holding me back from achieving my full potential. Looking back now, I know they were!

5. Have a reason to get up every morning. I set daily goals in my business and personal life. Whether it is to make a certain number of calls, add a given number of names to my mailing list, or make so many contacts. My newsletter list has grown from 20 people in January, 2003 to over 12,000 today. Going through troubled times I have learned that the best way to defeat depression is to have a reason to motivate yourself. Even if the goals are small and simple they can motivate you.

One speaker said to me several years ago, “If you can’t motivate yourself, who is going to hire you to motivate them or their people?” During my weight losing period last year, I began working out at my local Gold’s Gym. Exercise became one of my personal goals along with building my business. Increasing the weights or the number of repetitions became incentive to lose more and gain muscle. As a result I lost 37lbs in a year and gained a healthier lifestyle.

6. Help people. Have an attitude of gratitude and give things away. I am a member of the National Speakers Association. Our Motto is “The Spirit of Cavett Robert” – the founder of NSA, who practiced a lifestyle of helping others succeed. He passed this legacy along to his successors and today the association is led by caring people who help others succeed.

I have never turned down anyone who wanted help to become a speaker or coach. While some consultants charge for everything they produce, I give my newsletter away to anyone who wants to read it. You will find that the more you give to others, the more you will get back exponentially. You will be a richer person for the experience and you will succeed beyond any degree you think you would have by being greedy and selfish.

7. Stick to your plan, even when it isn’t working at first. I began my business cold-calling people on the phone. After two months I called my friend Joe, who taught me how to do the calling in the first place and told him this just wasn’t producing any results. Joe worked on my technique, but did not allow me to give up my method. He was sure it would pay off. It did. Within a month I started seeing results. Slow at first, but it began to mushroom. A year later I signed one of my biggest clients and was making a 6-figure income. Since then there have been “dry spells“ and I have been tempted to quit and try something different (paying someone to do my marketing, advertising with services, etc.) but each time I go back to my original plan, I begin succeeding again. You will, too.

8. Turn anger into action. I remember in my first few months of contacting prospects, I would be told, “You are the person for us; we are going to hire you,” only to find out later they had someone else in mind; they were using my bid to round out a predestined plan; or the person left the organization with no referral of me. I would get so angry that I got back on the phone and started calling new people with new determination. Believe it or not, it gave me the confidence in my voice that people would hire me!

There is something about anger turned into action that adds vitality to your spirit and voice. I remember the first time a prospect hung up on me (something every telemarketer either fears or detests if they have feeling at all), I thought: “Now I could call her back and let her have it.” But then I thought, “Hey, I could be calling three people who might hire me while I am thinking of ways to get back at someone who won’t hire me at all.” It paid off. Today, I don’t believe I am a “telemarketer;” I am a “tele-master.” See the difference?

9. Build relationships with creative people. There is an old saying that goes, "If you want to fly with eagles, don't hang around with turkeys." I network wherever I go. A friend told me the other night that she thinks I never meet a stranger. I spend time though with people who are successful and creative. Being creative myself I attract creative people. When I find another kindred soul I spend time sharing ideas and exchanging creativity. I find both of us are enriched for the experience.

I pride myself on my ability to creatively take a concept and make it my own. Almost every idea I have used to grow my business originated with someone else who I shared expertise with. I took their suggestions and experience and ran it through my personal filter. When it came out it became part of my plan, customized just for me. I never took anyone's idea and copied it word-for-word, or claimed I originated it. Network with creative people and start exchanging ideas and the world will be a better place.

10. Don't take short cuts. John Maxwell, Leadership Guru says, "Short cuts don't pay off in the long run." He is right. This article began with the admonition to do the hardest thing first. I can't begin to tell you how many times I've been tempted to take the easy route to success. I stuck to my guns, though and it really did pay off.

How many times have you seen infomercials on how with just a little money down you can be rich and successful in just a month or two? Unfortunately the only people getting rich are the people selling the program and air time on television. We are gullible about getting rich quick. Remember Jackie Gleason and "The Honeymooners?" He was always into some plan to quit his job and make a fortune with some scheme. It never paid off. It won't for you either. If you are willing to put in the hours, to do the hard things first, to stay with your plan no matter how tough it gets, you will be a success. It just takes time.

If you read these ten tips and apply them starting now you will be successful with time. They aren't real mysteries. I call them secrets because although everyone knows them they don't practice them. You probably have said at least twice while going through this material, "Yeah, I knew that already." My question then is why aren't you doing them? What is holding you back? I've never really looked up to anyone who says, "I just can't do it," without even trying. I've always respected people who know what to do... and do it.

So what is holding you back? Think of how successful you could be by taking these ideas and applying them TODAY. You will be. And when you are, pass it along to someone else...Tell them Jim sent you.

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