

In this week's blog, I talk about one of my favourite salespeople Joe Ades.

Sadly Joe passed away a few years ago, but this story is a great lesson for us all. We are all in sales, and Joe, the millionaire Potato Peeler seller, was just one.

A Showman Selling Potato Peelers on the streets of New York.*

"In the early 1990s, a man named Joe Ades began showing up in the bar at the Café Pierre, Manhattan's famously posh hotel on the corner of Fifth Avenue and East 61st Street. Joe liked the crowd at the Café Pierre, but the real draw for him was Kathleen Landis, the dimpled, piano-playing house chanteuse who still entertains there five nights a week.

Joe was also a five-nights-a-week man, always seated at the same round table with a front view of the baby grand and a back view of Landis. He drank only champagne and was never alone. On most nights, he casually ordered a bottle, which always appeared with two champagne glasses—one for himself, the other for Landis.

Even by the standards of café society, Joe cut a noticeably soigné figure in his classic, British-made Chester Barrie suits and bold shirts and ties from Turnbull & Asser. The clothes went well with his English accent and late-period Sean Connery salt-and-pepper beard.

He looked so distinguished and was so free with the bubbly that the Café Pierre crowd, Landis included, had him pegged as one of the "owners"—the tycoons who live at the Pierre in stupendously high-end co-op apartments.

The Café Pierre was way off about Joe, or so it decided after some probing. If no one was brave enough to ask him where he lived, quite a few people asked him what he did for a living.

"Holding his glass of champagne by the stem, " Joe said simply, "I sell potato peelers." The probers had a good chuckle over that. "Right," they all said. "Now pull the other one."

While walking the streets in the months that followed, some of the probers, who may have

still doubted him, came upon Joe in the middle of a spiel with a crowd gathered around him at some busy corner.

He sat on a campstool, peeler in hand, and performed all manner of surgical wonders on carrots, zucchini, and Idaho potatoes. A long slab of Lucite served as his worktable, which rested on storage bins filled with all his produce.

The table and his campstool were so low to the ground that he worked from a perpetual crouch, like a catcher.

Meanwhile, he kept up a constant patter, belted out at the top of his lungs in a scratchy, theatrical Cockney singsong.

After three or four minutes—not before—he announced the price of his “machine,” as he called it, produced a wad of bills from his left coat pocket, and began dealing peelers as fast as he could to the outstretched hands flapping money in his face.

As if all this weren’t astonishing enough, he had on his beautiful café attire, only now bits of potato peel flecked his lapels.

He bowed his head low over an operation; sweat from his brow coursed its way down the bridge of his nose and dripped onto the cuffs of his Turnbull & Asser shirt. Joe is still working the peeler in New York.

This past December, he turned 72, but unless there’s snow on the ground, he’s out pitching. Joe loves the peeler, which he sells for \$5. “I love it for several reasons,” he says.

“It’s portable; it works; I never get a complaint. Never. When people first see it, they don’t believe it. They buy it sceptically and cynically. They can’t believe it will do what I say it’ll do, but they take a chance and buy it.

And during the sale, somebody will walk past—always do—and say, ‘I’ve got one of those. They’re great!’ And it’s true—they’re not shills. You don’t need a shill with something like

this." The Swiss-made article is a gleaming frame of stainless steel that fits in the palm like a carpenter's plane."

Joe is the only one in the city who has it—a true boast he saves for that moment in the pitch when he names his price, and the wad comes out (in the street game, a moment known as "coming to the bat"). In private, Joe says,

"The Company in Switzerland that makes the peeler will only supply people who can demonstrate the product. You have to buy a minimum number, and the minimum quantity is far more peelers than one store could handle in 20 years. If you saw the peeler hanging up in a store—for a dollar—you'd walk right past it. It has to be demonstrated."

His selling locations have no fixed pattern. One never knows where Joe will turn up. "I like to be an event," he says. "Boredom sets in when people expect you."

In part, Joe is making a virtue of necessity. He has no license to do what he does, and he often gets moved by the cops, who all know him. "All of them have nicked me in the past," he says. Joe pushes his gear through the streets on a hand truck, which he calls a trolley in his English way.

He and the trolley are often stopped by strangers, ready with a heartfelt line: "Sir, you're the greatest salesman in New York!" He likes the recognition and is never ungracious, but privately he quibbles over the word "salesman."

"I couldn't sell one-to-one," he explains. "I couldn't sell real estate or cars, for example. What I like to do is a pitch to a crowd, draw a crowd together, and have them give me their money." —Reprinted with permission from

"The Gentleman Grafter" by Howard Kaplan, Vanity Fair, 2009.

This is an inspiring story about being a professional conversationalist. A Salesperson. A potato peeler in New York selling \$5 kitchen tools to a crowd of people on the street. He lives a full and wonderful life, where he dines out on the fruits of his profession with his beloved

every evening.

Joe was not a salesperson but a performer. His stage was the street, and he worked hard. He knew people would buy it if he put on a dazzling show that solved their problems.

Never forget that selling your stuff can also be a show.

Sales take many forms, but we always do it one way or another.

Have a great week, and talk soon.



PLUS, whenever you are ready...here are ways I can help you grow YOUR business.

1. [Join my free Facebook group](#)

My favourite thing is to show you what's working right now. It's not as good as being a client, but it's close.

2. Take advantage of a FREE 45-minute consultation

Need some sales support? Please make [an appointment](#), and let me take you through the past, present, and future templates.

3. Work with me one-on-one.

If you want to take your product or service from face-to-face to virtual selling, then I have a product that may be able to help you. You can get started for as little as \$250 a month. If you're interested, email mike@mikebrunel.com and put 'Virtual Selling' in the subject

line...tell me a little about your business, and I'll get you all the details.