



**UNSOLD: A MINDSET FOR SUCCESS  
IN SALES AND IN LIFE**

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& Garrett Brown**

# There isn't one right way to succeed. In life, or in sales.

That is a lesson we try to impart to every student in our “Sales Mindset for Entrepreneurs” course at the University of Southern California’s Marshall School of Business. It is important because the makeup of our class reflects an even greater diversity, with students from many majors and backgrounds, each with unique aspirations. A third of our class is there to learn how to sell ideas; they’re future founders, marketers, engineers, and creatives. A third are trying to learn how to sell themselves; they want to get hired or promoted, build meaningful relationships, and lead people. The last third are the future sales professionals. They want to learn how to sell products and services; normally they’ve got a job lined up after graduation or know someone making a lot of money in sales, and they want to do that, too.

If any of them thought they were signing up for a typical sales class that would teach them how to “build rapport,” “handle objections,” or “ask for the close,” they find out very quickly that that is not what we teach. Instead, our class is about to spend sixteen weeks finding out that the greatest salespeople aren’t successful because of what they *do*, they’re successful because of what they *think*.



Our own journey to understanding the mindset of great sellers started with two questions. The first is similar to what Daniel Pink asks in chapter three of his book *To Sell Is Human*: **“What’s the first thing you think of when you hear the word ‘salesperson’?”** We’ve asked this more times than we can remember, not just to our students, but to salespeople and non-salespeople alike, and almost everyone answers without a heartbeat of hesitation. Pushy, manipulative, sleazy, dishonest, and annoying are among the most common responses. If we’re talking to someone more magnanimous, they might say persistent, extroverted, relentless, or smooth-talking, but the subtext is the same: We. Don’t. Like. Salespeople.

Or so it seemed. Answers to a second question we ask just as frequently paint a different picture: **“Who is the greatest salesperson you know?”** For years, we’ve asked this at the end of every conversation we’ve had with some of the greatest sellers, leaders, and change agents on the planet. Some answer with a person they literally know, others call to mind a public figure. Some point to visionaries who sell ideas on a global scale, others to hometown heroes who sold their way out of challenging situations. Some name bona fide influencers with millions of followers, others name people with private accounts and no desire to chase “blue check” status. In every case, however, the answer was someone the person respected and admired.

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The more we thought about it, the more these responses failed to add up. How could all these people look up to the greatest salesperson they know and simultaneously offer cringeworthy stereotypes of the “salespeople” we all hate? We couldn’t leave it alone—we needed to understand the discrepancy. We wanted to know how some people could be put on a pedestal for something for which others are stigmatized.

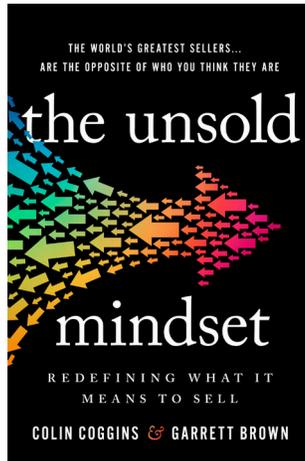
We started reaching out to some of these much-admired sellers to ask them about their approaches to selling and, of course, find out the greatest salespeople they knew. As we followed the thread, we found ourselves speaking to CEOs, trial lawyers, doctors, world-renowned artists, Insta-famous bartenders, decorated army generals, professional athletes, business school deans, news anchors, musicians, actors, and entrepreneurs of so many different stripes we lost count.

As different as all the incredible people we spoke with were, when we asked them about their own approaches to selling, we were struck by how remarkably similar they sounded to one another. What could chef and TV personality Roy Choi, NBA superagent Alex Saratsis, and CEO of MasterClass David Rogier have in common besides American Express Black cards? Only their entire approach to selling! The more people we interviewed, the more we found their answers echoing. They were saying the same things, but in their own words. What’s even more interesting is that they had no idea. With each new person we interviewed, whenever we’d tell them that their views and approaches mirrored those we’d heard from other incredible sellers, they would have moments of epiphany. Even though they hadn’t always been doing these things with a specific intention, they suddenly understood why they’re so successful at selling, and why they love it so much. It was as if these exceptional sellers belonged to the same secret society, abided by the same core principles, but their secret was so well kept they didn’t even know their society existed.

We call these people “The Unsold,” and they exhibit a distinct mindset. They are unsold on who they are supposed to be, how they are supposed to act, and what they are supposed to think. They’re unsold on who the world expects a salesperson to be. They are unsold on the stereotypes around selling and people who sell. They’re unsold on the idea that selling can’t be an engaging, creative, fulfilling pursuit. And, most importantly, they’re unsold on the belief that being a good person and a good salesperson are mutually exclusive.

The Unsold Mindset empowers people to show up as the opposite of a stereotypical salesperson, and it’s not because of the conversations they have with their customers, it’s because of the conversations they have with themselves. **The mindset of a great seller mirrors the mindset of a great person—the lessons we can learn from the Unsold Mindset aren’t just lessons about how to sell better, they are lessons about how to live better lives.** 📖

# Info



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Colin Coggins and Garrett Brown are longtime sales leaders, practitioners, teachers, and theorists. They met at enterprise software startup, Bitium, which they helped lead to an acquisition by Google. They are Adjunct Professors of Entrepreneurship at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business, where the course they created, "Sales Mindset for Entrepreneurs," has become one of the school's most popular classes. They are also investors, advisors, and co-founders of Agency18, a firm that helps mission-driven companies adopt the Unsold Mindset. Sought-after as keynote speakers and guest lecturers, they love connecting with audiences from diverse industries, professions, and backgrounds.

Colin and Garrett live in Southern California.

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