

WORTH EVERY PENNY

It saddens me how much guilt, shame, and anxiety photographers have over selling their photography. You might be that person. I don't know, paralyzed by the fear of being rejected or heck, even the thought of someone thinking you're pushy or salesy. Instead of creating a business that serves your clients as well as you, you want to keep everyone happy, and you end up giving it all away or competing with the cheapest photographer out there. Is that you? I know it is.

But instead of feeling good about keeping everyone happy, you start to resent your clients and your business because you burned your most valuable asset, which is your time. And the worst part, you have little or no money in the bank to show for it. I want to break down for you how S-E-L-L does not have to be a four letter word if you come from a place of service. Stick with me, because you're going to get really actionable steps to follow. By the end of this episode, you'll see that not only are you helping your clients by selling to them, you actually have a moral obligation to do it.

The real question is: how are portrait photographers like us able to run a profitable business and still put our families first without selling digital files for cheap, living on social media, or working all the time for little profit? Follow along in this Joycast as I show you how to find and serve boutique portrait photography clients in a world where we compete with free now that everyone has a digital camera in their pocket. My name is Sarah Petty, and welcome to this Worth Every Penny Joycast.

If you're a photographer who hates to sell, stay with me. My relationship with sales is sort of love-hate. It was mostly hate-hate growing up. I hated selling. I remember being a Girl Scout. Maybe some of you were a Girl Scout, and what do you have to sell every year? You have to sell Girl Scout cookies. I was in sports my whole life and I was competitive, and so I wanted to win the prize. They'd bring you in and they'd say, "Go sell this and you get prizes, or badges, or stickers," or whatever. I remember selling chocolates and ugly plastic tumblers. I remember doing Jump Rope for Heart specifically, because you're asking for donations. You're not even selling anything.

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They come in, and they give you just enough training to be annoying, and they say, "Oh, don't take no for an answer." I was like, "All right. I can do this. I can be the pushy annoying kid." I remember specifically going with my best friend and my parents to an auto convention, Auto Parts. It was this huge warehouse with all these auto car people. Everybody's in jeans. It's nothing fancy. My dad had a car business fixing cars and eventually selling cars, and he taught automotives in business at the college level. But we went to this convention, and we had our form. We both wanted that satin jacket that you win by getting the most donations.

It was great because we didn't have any fulfillment. We didn't have to bring them cookies or anything. It was in another town, and we're just asking strangers to make donations. To this day, I remember the looks on people's faces. They were like, "You are the most annoying kid." Because they said, "Don't take no for an answer," I would just keep asking for their money. Over the years, I could see myself ... each fundraiser I would jump in less. I'd be less involved. I would do fewer calls. Finally by late high school, I would just tell my mom, "Can you buy something for \$20 so I can just turn it in, and I don't have to ask anybody for money?" And she's like, "Yeah. We don't want to go to all our friends and bug them for money." That was bad.

So, I started to create this sort of relationship with selling that selling is bad. Then I went to college and people would say, "What are you majoring in?" I'd say marketing, and they'd say, "Oh, sales! Not sales." I was so offended. I'm not in sales. I'm in marketing. It's the fancy word for sales. And now, of course, I love sales. I know that marketing is selling, and selling is marketing. They're the same thing. But back then, I was just thinking I didn't want to be associated with that. Because I was a jerk when I had to sell, and I'm a good person. Jerks sell, and good people do marketing. That was the lie that I told myself, and I hope you've figured the lie out that you're telling yourself.

But I wanted that job at the advertising agency, and all the ad agency jobs require direct sales experience. I thought, "Okay, I'm going to go sell something so I can get the job I really want." I got a job working for a newspaper out of town, and I was selling the ads in my city. It

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was a cold list. It was outer market. It was cold call sales. It was hard. It was really hard, but I got good training. I even got some good training when I was at Coca-Cola even though I wasn't in sales. But at this job selling advertising, I had a great manager who taught me a ton.

Then when I went to the advertising agency, I loved creating these campaigns and selling them to my clients. It didn't even feel like I was selling, because I was listening to their needs. We were coming up with an awesome creative, and then I would just present to them, and I would give them options. I would say, "Well, you could do this, or you could do this. Yes. If you want to cut that, let's do this." It was such a fun time. I started to sort of heal those wounds from my childhood where I built this terrible relationship with sales.

Then I opened my photography business and I was having to sell. When I started, that's why I was giving all the proofs away because I don't want to be salesy or pushy. I thought I was serving my clients by doing that. For years, I'd run into them and they'd say, "Oh yeah. I'm going to come back and order that." And I think they meant that they did plan to. They liked it. They're like, "Oh, I want one on my wall." And they never did. I could tell you their names, because I listened to the lie that they were telling that they were going to come back. But really, my system wasn't set up to help them get what they want, which was photography.

That's when I realized I actually have a moral obligation to sell. I have a moral obligation to sell. Think about it with a veterinarian. We got a dog ... long story there. We ended up with a dog and a cat, and I know nothing about pets. I wasn't raised with pets. We got a veterinarian, and they reach out and they tell me, "Hey, your pet needs shots." They're selling me shots. They're making money on these things that they're telling me my pet needs. But don't you see that they have a moral obligation to do that? Are they jerks for selling me the shots that my pet needs, or the checkups, and the different things that my pet needs? No, they're not jerks. They have a moral obligation to do it, because they have the education and training of how to take care of those pets that I don't have. I don't eat, sleep, and breathe pet care. I don't know how to take care of my pets, but I love them and I want to take care of them. So, I look to them to help me.

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That's what we're doing for our clients. They're looking to us as the experts to make a system that helps them get what they want, which is artwork. We have a moral obligation to help broken families who are healing. Maybe they're blended families, mom's married, dad's married, and then they had new kids together, and the older kids are feeling displaced. And we put a beautiful family portrait over their mantle and we help heal them. We have a moral obligation to do that.

I have a student in my coaching program who had three children and then adopted two more. They had a bunch of pictures everywhere of these kids, and they love them greatly. But she did a photo of the five kids. The little one, Gracie, looked up at it with tears streaming down her face and she said, "That's my family." And the mom was like, "Oh my gosh. Of course that's your family!" But it was what made that little girl actually feel like she was a part of that family, even though the rest of the family knew it and loved her.

I have clients who have special needs children who say: "This makes my child felt seen. Instead of everyone just seeing the disability, they see his personality." Look at the class of 2020 who has had their senior year ripped right out from under their feet like a rug pulled right out from under them. Think about them. We have a moral obligation to serve them and to help them. That doesn't mean we have to do it all for free. We have a moral obligation to help feed our family too, right? Why should other people go to their job and work all day and get paid, but we feel this need to give everything away? No.

We have to love to buy. We have to love to sell. We have to start healing this relationship with sales. Treating great salespeople great, and being a great salesperson. I sat down and I said, "Okay. Clients are coming to me and they're loving what I do. They're gushing on me, but they're not buying anything." I didn't sit down and say, "I'm going to make all this money. I'm going to make big money." I sat down and said, "Okay. Why are they not ordering, and how can I serve them better? How can I serve my clients better?"

I knew if I focused on over-serving them, I knew the money would come. People weren't ordering because I was scared to serve them. I pulled seven of my favorite ways that I serve my

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clients, and I'm going to share them with you right now. I hope it serves you, because this is going to be a longer process for some of you than others to get you seeing that you're taking really good care of your clients when you hold their hand, and when you help them invest in this artwork that's only going to make them happier as time goes on.

Number one, stop putting those orders online for people to order their images on their own. It only creates paralysis by analysis. You become an order-taker. They start getting overwhelmed. Think if you are going into a furniture store. You go into a furniture store because you know what you want to purchase. You need a sofa, or you need a living room set, or whatever you need. But you get there and it's overwhelming. Why is this one \$700, and this one's \$1,200, and this one's \$5,000? You just don't even know, because maybe there's a reason that the one's more. Maybe it has a bed in it. You don't know. You want someone to take your hand, walk you around the store and help you. That furniture salesperson is serving you by helping you. You could go online yourself and pick things out, but you're not doing that because you want someone to help you. It's overwhelming.

Number two, take your prices off your website. Remember, your marketing's job is to make the phone ring and your selling's job is to book them. You have to talk to people. Even for you introverts, you can be taught to talk to people. I think that's why people are scared to answer the phone, are scared to talk to people, because they don't know what to say. Once you learn what to say, it's so comfortable. You say hello. It's not scary anymore.

Selling and talking to people is a skill that can be learned. It's not a talent. It's not a 40 inch vertical jump that you're either sort of born with. You grew it a little. But you're sort of born being able to jump, or you can't jump. Talking to people is a total skill. You can learn it.

The thing with boutique ... think about it. You have to talk to people. Because if you're shoot and burn ... You're like a fast food restaurant, right? You're like McDonald's. People drive up, they get the CD, they take it to go. It's quick. It's easy. They give you a little money, and you move on. When you're boutique, you have to explain what makes you different.

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Here's the thing: think of in your city. People had only ever gone to a fast food restaurant. That's all they knew. Drive-thru, McDonald's, Hardee's, Arby's, Wendy's, Burger King, all of those. And you came into your town with a sit-down restaurant. People go to your website. They're like, "Oh, McDonald's has got a happy meal for \$5. This other restaurant is \$35. We won't go there." They only know fast food. You have to be able to talk to them and explain to them. "No, no, no, no, no. At our restaurant, you come in and you get to pick different things, and we figure out what you want, and we cook it to order. You can have an experience, and we have a fireplace. It's going to be so much fun. You're going to love it." So, when you're boutique you have to talk to people.

Number three, I believe so strongly that you must always have an in person meeting with your client before the session. This is when you do a needs analysis so you know what to shoot. You have to ask questions. You have to see what they're needing. And usually they can't just tell you what they need, or you could do it over the phone call. You have to show them things. You have to walk around. Look at spaces in their home if you go to their home. That's all the better.

My last studio was in this little shopping area. My landlord had an interior decorating business and a retail store right there. When I bought my last house, I needed a lot of things. I thought he was so nice, and he had some things that were affordable. It wasn't super duper, duper high end. I met with him and I said, "Hey, I'd like to buy a few pieces from you. I'm not going to buy everything, but I'd like to buy a few main pieces," because literally everything I had fit in one small room of the house.

He came out to my house, and I showed him what I liked. I told him about my style and what I thought I wanted. He sent a van full of things. I think it might've even been a semi truck. It was a ton of furniture. And he said, "Sarah, don't worry about it. If you don't want all of it, I'll take it back. But I wanted to just over thrill you. I wanted you to see what it would look like in your space." And it was amazing. I was thrilled. I bought so many things that I really shouldn't have. Probably couldn't have afforded, but I did because he made it so easy for me.

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What if he wouldn't have met with me ahead of time? What if he wouldn't have come out, and he would have just picked things that he thought would be cool, and brought them to my house? Would I have been as thrilled? No. But he held my hand through the entire process. He wasn't pushy or salesy. He didn't make me buy anything that I didn't love. But because he did such a good job in the process of serving me, I saw these things in my house and I found a way to justify it. Because I have three little kids, and I'm probably not going to have time to shop or do this. I can have my house done, be done with it. Now I'm good. I can move on to doing other things. People will do the same with you. They will find ways to justify that you've got to serve them by having that in person meeting before the session.

Number four, make sure you narrow the images to a manageable number. If you can't narrow, how can your client narrow? I try to show 20 to 25 images all for a normal session. Large families or high school seniors, I will show more based on what they're wanting ... which, of course, I've found out in the consultation. But most photographers are overwhelming their clients and they're shutting them down. They're going into lockdown.

There was a famous jam study by Columbia University years ago where this professor took her students into this gourmet grocery store out in California, and they were testing jams. Every few hours they would vary their tests between having out 24 jams for people to sample or six jams. It was interesting, because people got to try them. In both of the displays, people would test two jams. Having more jams didn't make them test more than two jams. They just would sample two jams. While 60% of the people came and tested jams when there were more, and only 40% came when there were fewer jams ... get this. When there were six jams to choose from, 30% of the people bought. When there were 24 jams, only 3% bought. And they were all given the same dollar off coupon. 10 times more bought when there were fewer jams to choose from, which is my point. More is not better. More is not better. If you can't pick, they can't pick.

Number five, hold their hands and sit with them in an in person ordering appointment where you can help them like you would help your very best friend. One of my very best friends

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lives out in Salt Lake City, Utah. And she went to a really great photographer who put these images online ... which I already told you not to do, but gave them to my friend, and there were like 80 of them. She sent them to me and she said, "Can you help me?" I said, "Oh my gosh, I am so overwhelmed. There are so many things here good. I don't even know what to tell you. And I do this for a living." I told her to ask that photographer if she would sit down with her, and hold her hand, and make recommendations. Like, what would you do? How should I display these? Because there were just so many and it was overwhelming.

Number six, during that presentation, help your clients narrow their images down and make those tough choices. They need your help making the choice. And if you don't have a plan and you don't help them, how are they supposed to make the decision? They don't do this every day. You do. When I'm with them, I'll say, "Here's what I would do." I'd say, "You know, I would put this on my wall. I would frame this one this way." And I'd say, "This one ... I think there are better ones. What if we sacrifice this one?" Literally, I help them cut, because they're trusting me to help them make a great decision. If I think that they've made a better decision somewhere else, the way to get them to the decision is not by adding more. It's by helping them pair down.

Number seven ... and this is so huge. I know that many of you have a fear over what if I'm too pushy, or what if they order more and they call to cancel? Look, if they start picking more than what they're comfortable in investing when you get to the total, it's not a big deal. Help them cut it back and tweak their order until they are thrilled. We don't serve them by sending them home confused, overwhelmed, upset that they ordered too much. Because if I see someone looking nervous or saying, "Oh, my husband's going to kill me." I say, "Hey, let's cut back. Because I want you coming back here. I don't want your husband deleting me from your GPS. Let's cut. Where do you need to be? Give me a number. Give me some thoughts."

We work together to do it. People want to avoid making decisions, so don't let them go home to think about it. Don't let them go home to fix if they're unhappy with what they've picked. Help them make it even if they're cutting back. I always go to the golden rule when I'm

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in this state of, "What do I do? I'm upset. They're going to cut their order back." You know what? It's going to happen. But if you take care of people, they're going to come back. They're going to continue to order from you, and you're going to be able to stay in business.

If I was in a furniture store, and I picked all this stuff, and then I realized, "Oh my gosh. This would be crazy for me to invest this. My husband's going to kill me," and I tell that to my salesperson, a good sales person should say, "Well, hey. Let's work together. Let's get you to where you're feeling really happy and let's prioritize." I want his help prioritizing, maybe I should buy them in this order and save for the sofa next year. Should I buy this sofa now and get the chairs later? He does this every day. I look to him as the expert just like people will look to you because you're the expert.

Here's the bottom line. Your client's orders will continue to rise if you do these things. If you hold your client's hand, and help them discover what they're actually wanting ... If you serve them at a super high level, and you come from a place of service. My goal wasn't to be salesy, and pushy, and create giant orders because I push, push, push. I simply wanted my clients to have a well-oiled system that held their hand throughout the entire process, so at the end they could easily make a decision that they loved. And they were happy to invest in artwork that they really wanted. Also, I was able to get the revenue I needed to stay in business so I could serve clients for years and also be the mom I wanted to be.

As the years have gone on, my orders have consistently increased because my system is set up to serve at such a high level. I hope this has helped you see that selling is really coming from a place of service to help people get what they came to you for. Gorgeous memories that are printed that they can touch, and feel, and look at on their walls for them to enjoy every single day.

Hey, photographer. You may be wondering why I'm doing this podcast. Well, I have one goal: to change the landscape of our industry for one that has been so devalued that photographers feel like they have to be cheap to get clients to one where we can feel great about what we do and make a living doing it. If you want to be part of this movement and help

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lift our industry, here's how you can help. Go over to Apple Podcast, or wherever you're listening to this, and leave a rating and a review. This is how we'll get the word out that photographers like you are worth every penny.