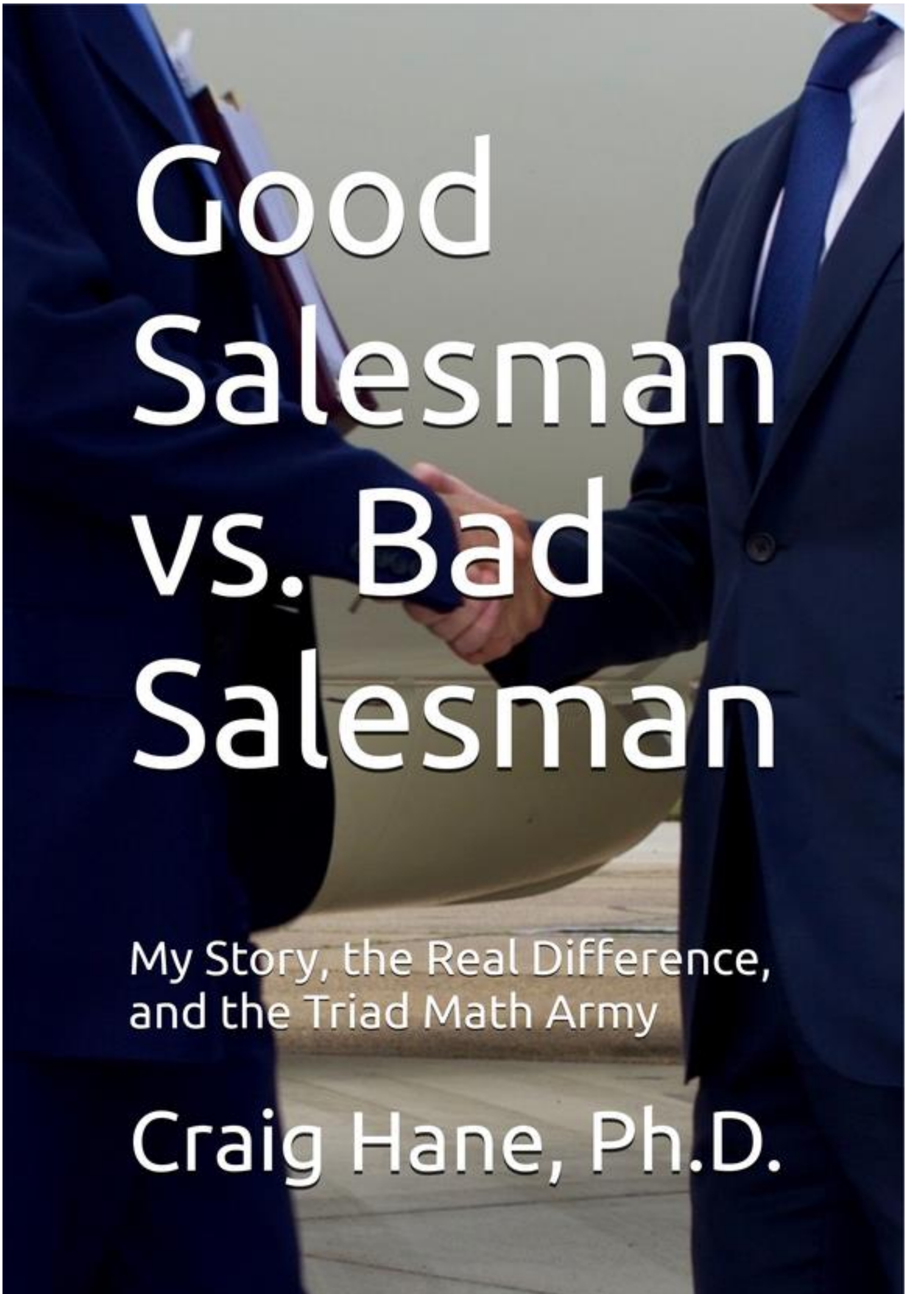

# Good Salesman vs. Bad Salesman

## My Story, the Real Difference, and the Triad Math Army

Craig Hane, Ph.D.

# GOOD SALESMAN vs. BAD SALESMAN

**My Story, the Real Difference, and the Triad Math Army**

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# Chapter 1: The Question I Had to Answer

My name is Craig Hane, and I've spent a good part of my life as a salesman.

For most of that time, one question has followed me around: *am I a good salesman, or a bad one?*

That question only means something once you define your terms, so let me define mine.

A good salesman sells a product or service to a customer while genuinely believing it will benefit that customer — and the customer ends up glad they bought it.

A bad salesman sells a product or service without caring whether it helps the customer or not, as long as the customer likes the pitch enough to buy.

Every salesman, good or bad, is motivated by the same basic fact: we're all on straight commission. Make the sale, make some money. Don't make the sale, make nothing. That incentive is the same for everyone.

What separates a good salesman from a bad one isn't the incentive — it's what he does with it.

It's been my experience that a lot of salesmen are bad salesmen. I didn't learn that from a textbook. I learned it by becoming one myself, twice, early in my life, and then walking away both times. Here are those stories.

# Chapter 2: Cookware in Cleveland

I wanted a car on campus at Oberlin College, and back then students weren't allowed to have one unless their job required it. I also needed money to put myself through school. A sales job solved both problems at once, so I went looking.

I found a job selling aluminum cookware — this was back in the 1950s. The company would take almost anyone, as long as you bought a set of their cookware first, which I did. It was good, solid cookware, and I liked it.

Then they put me through their sales training program.

The training was genuinely impressive. It walked you through everything, start to finish: how to identify a prospect, how to find out where she lived, how to knock on her door uninvited and get yourself let in, and how to run a full cooking demonstration once you were inside. The prospects, almost always, were young single women still living at home.

The sales pitch itself ran an hour to ninety minutes. You'd actually cook food for the prospect in the cookware, build her excitement, and then close — and the close, frankly, had a deceptive edge to it. It worked. A high enough percentage of the young women who sat through it ended up buying and, thus, making the salesman plenty of money for his or her work.

But I kept asking myself the same question while I watched it happen: would this young woman, months down the road, actually be glad she'd bought this? I had my doubts.

I went through the full sales training program — memorizing the script, rehearsing it, then shadowing a successful salesman two or three times before I was allowed to go out on my own. My recruiter was very good at it. I remember watching him close a sale and thinking the same thing: will she really be glad about this later?

Then I ran my own first pitch, on a young woman in Elyria, Ohio who fit the profile. I delivered the script exactly as trained, cooked the food, built the excitement — and she agreed to buy. I was about to earn my commission.

Then I looked around her house. I understood a little about her family and her situation, and I thought: maybe she's going to regret this.

So I went off script. I started asking her real questions about herself and about the product, instead of running the close.

After a few honest questions, she said, "You know, I think you're right. I really shouldn't buy this right now." She was right. It wasn't going to be good for her. I told her okay, packed up my demonstration kit, and left without the sale.

I remember thinking that if I hadn't stopped to talk with her, she'd have bought it, and I'd have made my commission — and I'd bet ninety percent of the women who bought that cookware ended up regretting it. I couldn't keep doing that to people, so I quit making pitches.

**I concluded, at the time, that I simply wasn't a salesman. At least I got the car out of it.**

# Chapter 3: Encyclopedias and a Policeman's Living Room

A couple of years later, back in Indiana after graduating from Oberlin and needing to make money, I decided to try selling again — this time, encyclopedias.

Once again, the company ran me through a structured, persuasive training program: how to pick a prospect likely to buy, how to make the presentation, how to close. The prospects had to be parents with a teenage child at home, since the whole pitch was built around how the encyclopedias would benefit that child's education.

My first pitch was to a policeman, in his own home. Nothing illegal about any of it — it was all persuasion, and a well-built kind of persuasion at that, almost hypnotic in how smoothly it moved a person toward yes.

By the end of the pitch, he was ready to buy. But as I looked around his house and thought about his situation and his finances, I realized his son could simply go to the library if he ever needed an encyclopedia. He didn't need a set sitting in his living room.

So again, I dropped the script. I started asking him real questions instead of closing.

After ten or fifteen minutes of honest conversation, he said, "You know, Craig, now that we've talked about it, I don't think I should buy these. It's not the right thing to do — not a good investment." I agreed with him. No sale, No commission.

That was my last sales pitch in that job too.

**I told myself I was just a lousy salesman — that I'd never make a living at it, because both times, when I actually paid attention to the person in front of me, the sale fell apart. I failed to make a sale or a commission.**

# Chapter 4: What I Actually Learned

*Looking back, I hadn't proven I was a bad salesman at all.*

I'd proven something else: that I couldn't sell a product to someone if I honestly believed, once I looked closer, that they'd regret buying it.

It eventually occurred to me that selling isn't limited to commissioned jobs. Everyone is selling something, all the time. Asking someone on a date is a pitch about yourself. Persuading a colleague to help you is a sale. In that sense, we're all salesmen, whether we think of ourselves that way or not — we're all trying to get people to say yes to something.

**And in business, if you have a product or service and you want customers, you have to make a sales pitch. There's no way around that part. The only real question is what you do once the person in front of you is ready to say yes.**

# Chapter 5: Good Salesman, Bad Salesman — The Real Difference

Here's how I've come to define it, after a lifetime in and around sales.

- A good salesman sells only to people who will end up glad they bought — a happy customer, in the long run, not just in the excitement of the moment.
- A bad salesman sells to anyone who'll say yes, whether or not they'll be happy with it later, because the commission clears either way.

Nothing about the bad salesman's approach is illegal. That's what makes it so common. He makes a persuasive pitch, the customer buys, the transaction is completely legal, and the salesman collects his commission and moves on. Months later, the customer regrets the purchase — but by then, the salesman is long gone, his commission long since spent.

*That may be why so many people don't like salesmen. How do You feel about them?*

Most of us have been sold something by a bad salesman at least once, gotten excited in the moment and bought, and regretted it later. After an experience like that, you don't want anything to do with that salesman again — and pretty soon you assume all salesmen are the same, what I call "bad".

*It's a completely reasonable assumption to form, even though it isn't universally true.*

I don't know the real ratio of good salesmen to bad ones. My honest guess, purely from my own anecdotal experience, is something like one good salesman for every ten or twenty bad ones. I have no hard data behind that number — it's just what decades of dealing with salesmen, and training salesmen myself, has suggested to me.

Real estate and insurance are good examples of industries where this plays out constantly. Not every real estate agent or insurance agent is a bad salesman — far from it — but a lot of them are.

In the run-up to the 2008 financial crisis, plenty of houses were sold to people on financing plans everyone involved knew they couldn't really afford. The salespeople involved made their commissions. Many of the buyers ended up in real trouble. That pattern, repeated across enough transactions, was one of the causes of the crisis. It's worth studying if you want to see the bad-salesman model play out at a massive scale.

My own father was a car salesman, at King Morrison Ford in Greencastle, and he was a good one. He'd often tell a customer, flatly, "No, you don't want this car — here's why. But maybe you'd like this one instead, or I don’t have a good car for you."

Because of that, he built real repeat customers — people who would only ever buy a car from him, year after year. I've since found a few salespeople like that in my own life, people I trust completely and go back to again and again, because I know they'll only sell me what's actually good for me. Good salespeople!

**Finding salespeople like that takes real effort, but it's worth the effort every time.**

# Chapter 6: Building a Business Where Nobody Gets Burned

In 1980, I started a training company. The product was a hands-on technical training program, priced at $7,000, delivered on-site to companies for groups of up to twelve technicians at a time. My direct cost to deliver it was about $4,000, which left roughly $3,000 for overhead — and whatever I made beyond that, I reinvested straight back into developing more products.

I already knew the training worked for some companies, because I'd delivered it myself and watched it improve the right technicians facing the right challenges. But knowing my product worked for some companies wasn't enough for me. I also knew that it would not work for some companies too.  Thus, . . .

Before I'd let a company buy it, I wanted to be sure it would actually work for them.

So instead of running straight through a pitch to a close, I'd describe the product, share testimonials from other companies where it had worked, and then start asking real questions about the prospect's specific situation.

Sometimes, after enough of those questions, I'd conclude that this company wasn't going to be a happy customer — and I'd tell them so, and walk away without the sale.

I no doubt lost some sales that way.

**But I never ended up with an unhappy customer, either. That trade-off, to me, is the whole definition of good salesmanship: you want to make money, you have to make your commission, but you only want happy customers on the other end of it.**

**Oh yes, in today’s world an Unhappy Customer can also be a severe Liability for your reputation, and future success as a bad salesman.**

# Chapter 7: The Blank Invoice Close

New prospects were often skeptical, and understandably so — most people have been burned by a bad salesman before, sometimes more than once, so a healthy dose of doubt is the sane default. I also had a way of dealing with that doubt directly.

Once I'd genuinely convinced myself a company would be a happy customer, I'd make them an offer: "This is a $7,000 product. I'm going to deliver it and then send you two invoices. One will be for the full $7,000. The other invoice will be blank."

> "If it was everything I told you it would be, pay the $7,000. If you don't think it was worth that, fill in whatever number you think is fair on the blank invoice — and that's your payment in full. That number can be zero.  But, if you don’t pay the full $7,000 I will not sell you any more of our products"

I called it the blank invoice close. I've never come across another company that did exactly that, with a product this expensive to deliver. If a customer sent back a zero, I was out the full $4,000 it cost me to deliver the training — instructors, equipment, travel, all of it.

My first year running the company, I did $30,000 in sales. Not one customer ever sent back a blank invoice with a reduced number, let alone a zero.

**Because a happy customer doesn't just pay in full — a happy customer often buys more.**

# Chapter 8: From $30,000 to $3 Million

Sales grew fast, and they grew because happy customers kept coming back for more: $30,000 the first year, $60,000 the second, then $120,000, then $240,000. Twenty years in, the business was doing $3 million a year — and in all that time, I never had an unhappy customer.

My first major client was a naval training station in Louisville, Kentucky. I trained twelve of their people over a two-day program, ran it twice for twenty-four total, and they came back wanting more — eventually training around 250 of their people.

From there, my biggest clients became General Motors and Chrysler. I did literally millions of dollars of training work with both. I handled all the training at the GM truck and bus plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana when it opened, all the conveyor-system training for the new Saturn plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee, and about sixty percent of Chrysler's technical training when they built their new training center.

None of that happens without a product that customers genuinely love and want more of. If you don't have that, you don't really have a product — you just have a pitch, and a pitch alone doesn't build a business that lasts twenty years.

The other side of that lesson is what happens when a salesman doesn't have a product enough customers actually love. When I later hired salesmen with traditional sales backgrounds to sell my training program, I had to specifically train them out of their old habit of chasing every sale regardless of fit.  They had to become a good salesperson.

**Once they saw the blank invoice approach work, and saw how it turned into repeat business instead of one-off commissions, most of them told me they'd never worked that way before.**

# Chapter 9: Finding Good Salesmen in Your Own Life

The lesson runs both directions. Just as I tried to be a good salesman in my own business, I've spent real effort finding good salesmen to buy from — for insurance, cars, home repair, auto repair, whatever it happens to be. It isn't easy. Good salesmen are the minority. But once you find one — someone who knows you well enough to tell you no when the answer should be no — you stay with them, the same way my father's customers stayed with him for years.

**That's the practical advice underneath all of this: don't just try to be a good salesman yourself. Go looking for good salesmen to do business with, and once you find them, hold onto them.**

# Chapter 10: A New Chapter — The Triad Math Army

Today I run an online program called the Triad Math Army, built for any adult who wants to improve their own life, and the lives of their family or friends along with it. It combines two things: a Six Tier Online Math Program that starts with practical mathematics, and a set of what I call Wisdom Tools.

The math side speaks for itself: for a lot of people, learning practical math opens the door to technical jobs they couldn't otherwise qualify for. I originally sold the math program on its own, across six tiers, at $97 each — $597 for all six. I never sold the Wisdom Tools separately.

The Wisdom Tools came about differently. People who bought the math program got to know me, and eventually they'd ask the obvious question: here's this old guy who doesn't take medicine, who's healthy and active — what's the deal?

The answer was the Wisdom Tools — principles I gathered over decades, some from other wise people, some from my own experience, now more than thirty of them and still growing.

A few examples of what a Wisdom Tool actually looks like in practice: whether a young adult graduating high school should go to college at all — my answer, for most young adults today, is not immediately, if ever — and for those who do go, how to get through a four-year degree without debt.

Doing it debt-free the way I teach usually takes six to eight years instead of four, but you come out with a better education, more maturity, and no loan hanging over you. A high percentage of college educations today leave students with a mountain of debt and not much real learning to show for it, and that debt can't even be discharged in bankruptcy — which strikes me as one of the more unfair features of the whole system.

**Today, thanks to some amazing 21st Century technologies used to build this program, I can offer all Six math tiers plus every Wisdom Tool, for the Triad Math Army Member and their whole family or friends, for $27 a month, $297 a year, or a $999 lifetime membership.**

# Chapter 11: Selling the Army the Way I've Always Sold

Delivering the Triad Math Army costs real money — I have millions invested in the technology, including the cloud infrastructure it runs on. I can't personally interview every $27-a-month member the way I once interviewed every $7,000 corporate client.

So I built the same “good salesman” principle into the offer in a different way.

The website lays out exactly what the math program and the wisdom tools are, so a prospective member can study it before ever paying anything.

***And then comes my version of the blank invoice close***: Join for $27, use the full program for a month, and if you don't see real value in it by the end of that month, tell me, and I will refund the $27 — *meaning you had the entire month for free.*

Very few people ask for that refund. Compared to hiring private tutors and mentors — which is exactly what wealthier families already do, and at real expense — $27 a month for the same kind of guidance is an easy value case to make, once someone actually experiences it.

I also point to the state of math education itself as part of the case: it isn't the teachers' fault, they're dealing with the same broken system as everyone else, but a large majority of high school students today aren't learning much real math, and what they do learn often isn't the math that matters most later on.

**In the Triad Math Army any teenage student will Succeed with Math, and learn the Math that will help them have a wonderful future career. Practical Math for entry into a Technical Career that provides a good living, Preparation for College, and then Amazing 21st Century Math for any student who wishes to study STEM subjects.**

## Chapter 12: Actions and Consequences

The Wisdom Tools all come back to one underlying idea: every action has consequences, and those consequences can be short-term or long-term, good or bad. The tools are there to help you think through, honestly, what the short-term and long-term consequences of an action are likely to be — and then decide, with open eyes, whether you actually want those consequences.

A lot of appealing actions look great in the short term and terrible in the long term. If you want a long, healthy life, you have to consistently choose the actions with good long-term consequences, even when a worse-for-you option looks more tempting today.

I'm in my 88th year as I write this. I take no medication. I have no aches or pains, I sleep well, and I stay active. Most of my friends from my own generation are gone, and most of the ones still around are dealing with serious health problems.

I haven't been in a hospital since I was six years old, having my tonsils out. I've had my own bad habits and addictions to overcome along the way — that part of my story is its own subject — but the short version is that living this way, at this age, isn't an accident. It's the compounded result of consistently choosing actions for their long-term consequences rather than their short-term appeal.

Math may help you or some family or friends, but the Wisdom Tools should help everyone.

**That's the whole promise behind the Triad Math Army: if you're willing to learn and to act on what you learn, there are literally hundreds of specific actions available to you that will improve your life. The Wisdom Tools exist to help you find them and actually take them.**

# Chapter 13: Writing This Book

This book itself is part of the same story.

I've been using AI tools — I prefer to call AI augmented intelligence — to turn a spoken video like the one behind this book into a finished written document, something that used to take me far longer with a word processor. You may watch the video that I created and then used to create this book: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMpAisx0Fvk

I've watched these tools evolve across my own working life: from pencil and paper, to a simple typewriter I won in a contest my father won as a Ford salesman, to an IBM Selectric, to early word processors, and now to AI. Each step let me get more of what was actually in my head onto the page, faster and more clearly than the tool before it. This book is simply the newest version of that same process.

If your organization has young adults as members, or knows young adults you'd like to help, I'm glad to work with you: a free copy of the companion Triad Math Army book, access to the website explaining the program in full, and the same thirty-day, no-risk trial I've built the rest of my business on. Read it, try it, and decide for yourself — the same way I've always believed a good salesman should let you decide. Get your free PDF copy of my book at: craighane.com/tma or Join the Triad Math Army at: triadmathinc.com/tma

## Chapter 14: Closing Thought

There are good salesmen and bad salesmen, and I don't know the exact ratio between them — only that in my own experience, the good ones are rarer than they should be. A good salesman sells only what will leave you glad you bought it. A bad salesman sells whatever you'll say yes to, and moves on before the regret sets in.

I've tried, across a cookware kit I walked away from, an encyclopedia set I talked myself out of selling, a training company that grew from $30,000 to $3 million without a single unhappy customer, and now the Triad Math Army, to stay on one side of that line.

That's the whole of what I have to offer here — as a salesman, and as a man in his 88th year still trying to get it right.

— *Craig Hane* Visit: craighane.com for many other free gifts.