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Meet the Jerry Maguire of sales, whose ideas might just inspire you to change how you do business

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THE MAN WHO THINKS HE CAN CHANGE SALES

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HELP ME \$ HELP YOU

Meet the Jerry Maguire of sales. With a relentless urge to legitimize his profession, he teaches undergraduates how to relate to customers and, yes, the art of cold calling.

Story by Kevin Sheh + Photography by Mark W. Lipczynski

When Jim Kaiser embarked on his sales career in 1992, he knew he was ready.

After all, the Arizona State University graduate had an organizational communications degree. He had a plan—to dive into the telecommunications business, burgeoning after deregulation. He had a job, thanks to Bernie Ebbers, then CEO of LDDS Communications in Milwaukee.

"My first day of training, the director of sales drove up from Chicago and said, 'I want you to go out and make some cold calls,'" says the Racine, Wis., native. "I looked up at the sky—it was a warm, beautiful June day, and said, 'It's 72 degrees out. What do you mean, *cold* calls?'"

"The director said, 'What the bleep did Bernie do to me? This kid doesn't even know what a cold call is.'"

The director patiently explained cold calling—among the most basic concepts in sales. Kaiser rebounded from that beginning, surpassing 500 percent of his first month's quota and becoming the company's top salesperson.

The 37-year-old has since launched J-Curve Technologies, which offers outsourcing services to small and mid-sized technology companies. Kaiser has experienced several successes as J-Curve's CEO and through involvement in other enterprises. Between his family—he and wife Tanya have a 3-year-old son, Cameron and a newborn girl—and business ventures, Kaiser >>

"I want to bring legitimacy to the art and science of sales."—Jim Kaiser, CEO, J-Curve Technologies.

seemingly would have little time to toss another ball in the air.

But the lack of academic sales training gnawed at him for years.

"I realized that after years of classes at a top business school, I was not at all prepared for a career in sales. I had a great education at ASU, but I didn't even know what a cold call was," says Kaiser, who has returned to Arizona State University's Tempe campus to launch what he hopes will be the nation's first dedicated, university-accredited School of Sales. "I want to bring legitimacy to the art and science of sales."

SHOW ME THE MONEY

Few professions are as important—and less-respected—than sales. "In business," he says, "nothing starts without a sale." According to the Direct Selling Association, 13.6 million people in the United States work in direct sales, representing nearly 5 percent of the population.

However, salespeople often suffer the same ignominious reputation as lawyers. "People tend to fall into sales. It's not regarded as legitimate," says Kaiser. "That has a lot to do with the lack of legitimate training."

Kaiser approached several ASU departments with his vision, and the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication was the first to accommodate the class. With the help of longtime friends and colleagues William Bruyey and Aaron Detzer, Kaiser crafted the curriculum of COM394, Advanced Sales Strategies.

Launched in August, the course is the first step in legitimizing sales, says Bud Goodall, director of ASU's Hugh Downs School of Human Communication. The first class did not appear in the course catalogs; university counselors handpicked 20 students from more than 500 applicants to fill the class.

Buoyed by the interest, Goodall

hopes to expand the course into certification by August 2007—and eventually evolve Kaiser's program into a bona-fide major. Talks are under way to opening up Kaiser's sales classes to all ASU students. "We're looking to improve the art, to bring a

which routinely offer courses and certifications in sales. Within the academic community, however, sales programs are relatively rare. Only a handful of universities or colleges offer any sort of in-depth dedicated sales curriculum.

"We have not been able to locate a single academic university offering sales as a major," he says. "It's a good opportunity for ASU to be a pioneer."

—Bud Goodall, director of ASU's Hugh Downs School of Human Communication.

sophistication and ethical consideration that has been lacking in sales," Goodall says.

Goodall and Kaiser authorized a School of Communication research team to learn whether a comprehensive school of sales had been launched anywhere else. "We have not been able to locate a single academic university offering sales as a major," he says. "It's a good opportunity for ASU to be a pioneer."

WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

Teaching about sales isn't entirely new—not even to Arizona. ASU's W.P. Carey School of Business has taught sales as part of its marketing curriculum for decades, says Robert Mittelstaedt, the business school's director.

However, Kaiser maintains that sales is markedly different than marketing—and qualifies as an independent discipline. Marketing develops relationships with products and demographics, Kaiser says, while salespeople develop relationships with people.

"This is a niche that is not being filled today," Kaiser says. "And arguably, this is the most important niche in business today."

Nationally, sales schools are common only within corporations,

The University of Akron, for instance, trumpets its sales education program—which includes a sales major, minor and certification—as among the top six in the country.

Akron is one of 11 universities that make up the University Sales Center Alliance, which was formed in 2002 to advance the sales profession through education and research.

"What's new is that universities have started offering sales as emphases," says Jon Hawes, director of the University of Akron's Fisher Institute for Professional Selling. Hawes says the first significant academic sales program surfaced in 1988 at Baylor University.

At ASU, Kaiser says the research team was familiar with the USCS and Akron's program. However, programs like Akron's are offered through institutes affiliated with the university—not through accredited schools or colleges within the university.

"An accredited university program is much different than an institute," Kaiser says. "That's what I'm looking to do."

YOU HAD ME AT 'HELLO'

Meet Jim Kaiser, and he's seemingly been a friend for life. Friends and colleagues say he's assertive and genuine—a rare combination. >>



“
The best
salesmen
can be very
insecure
people but
understand
social
mirrors.”
”



Soon after he meets them, Kaiser may perform an informal “behavioral profile,” based on the personality tendencies of new acquaintances.

“And he’s usually right on,” says Bruyea, J-Curve’s chief financial officer and associate professor for the class. Kaiser’s own behavioral profile leaves colleagues little doubt he’ll succeed.

“He’s a very driven, high-energy, high-assertiveness kind of guy,” Bruyea says. “It’s sometimes a challenge because not everybody has the same energy level, the same passion. He’ll take you out of your comfort zone, but that’s why he’s such a great leader. He’ll drive you to success.”

By week five of the fledgling class, Kaiser already had covered the history of sales, the difference between sales and marketing, and goal-setting. He already knew the goals of each of his 25 students—and knew all of his students by sight.

The week five topic: Behavioral profiling.

“The best salesmen can be very insecure people but understand social mirrors,” Kaiser told his students. “You don’t approach a high-detailed person and bombard them with a flowery vision. You provide them only the facts. You must understand the client.”

Salespeople are expected to understand people but are not usually shown how, Kaiser says. The detailed, 15-week curriculum delves into the specific skill sets Kaiser says salespeople need to succeed.

“The great thing about this curriculum is that it can be duplicated and expanded,” Kaiser says. “I could easily devote an entire three-credit course on each of these topics—that’s the direction I’d like to go.”

In the classroom, Kaiser asks the students a seemingly innocuous question: “Do you treat people how you want to be treated? True or false?” he asks.

“False—how *they* want to be treated,” several students quickly responded in unison.

“You’re catching on,” Kaiser says, laughing.

THE SECRETS TO LIFE

Farzuna Hussain and Jo Anne Booth—both aspiring salespeople enrolled in the School of Human Communication—say they’ve learned more practical knowledge during the five weeks of Kaiser’s class than during their previous four years at ASU.


“I was able to use this stuff last week during a job interview, and I

received a callback (from a prospective employer),” Booth says. “We’re learning *how* to talk to clients, *how* to do specific techniques we otherwise would’ve never known. We’re learning how the real world works.”

This “real world” experience is exhilarating and challenging for students, who still are adjusting to Kaiser’s energetic personality, says Detzer, Kaiser’s longtime friend.

“Jim’s a driver. Students like it because his personality is so different than what you’d find in the academic world,” Detzer says. “Students realize that we’re about to step into the business world. The fast pace and demands are real and practical, very different than what you’d find in the typical academic life.”

Students are taught how to create sales organizations, define target markets, handle and close sales, forge contacts through networking and begin sales careers. All learn the seven steps of sales, relationship management and customer service. At the end of the semester, students submit a “brag book” used to lure potential employers.

“And, yes, one entire week is devoted to cold calling,” Kaiser says. “That wasn’t something I was going to leave out.” 

With the help of longtime friends and colleagues William Bruyeya (left) and Aaron Detzel, Kaiser crafted the curriculum of COM394, Advanced Sales Strategies.



YOU COMPLETE ME

Kaiser's manifesto wouldn't be what it is without help from a few friends...

Succeeding in business isn't new for Jim Kaiser, Aaron Detzel and William Bruyeya, the brain trust behind what they hope will be the nation's first university-certified School of Sales.

"But succeeding in the academic world ... the stakes have never been higher," says Detzel, senior account executive for Logicalis Integration Solutions, a global information technology strategy and consulting company. "Working together as a team

is the only way we could possibly make this work."

Detzel, 30, is the youngest of the three men responsible for the creation of COM394, the first sales class offered by Arizona State University's Hugh Downs School of Human Communication. Kaiser, 37, is CEO of J-Curve Technologies; Bruyeya, 53, is Kaiser's right-hand man and CFO.

Individually, teaching and maintaining even one class would have

been a challenge. Together, however, the team believes it can make academic history.

Each brings his unique "superpower" to the course. "All three of us share ownership of the course, but we've broken up the tasks," Detzel says. Kaiser, with his driven, assertive personality, is the "front man." Bruyeya, the organizer, develops many of the presentations. Detzel develops the exams and helps students create resumes, cover letters and personal pitch books.

"We pick each other up. We lean on each other," says Bruyeya. "We make a good team."

Their collective business background will help ensure success. Like a business, customer satisfaction will be paramount. "We're treating this class like a small business," Detzel says. "First, we're going to look at our students as customers—if they're not happy, we're not happy."

Like a business, the trio is looking to expand. Each element of the inaugural 15-week course can be expanded into its own course; eventually leading to a dedicated program of study.

However, if this class fails, the three businessmen agree that the consequences would be more catastrophic than any previous venture. "The stakes are so much higher. We're affecting 30 kids' lives each semester—and that will grow exponentially," Detzel says. "We cannot fail." **bitz**