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**Interview with Rich Schefren**  
**Turning Words Into Wealth**  
**PART ONE**

**Rich:** Just for everyone's benefit, let me just say a quick few words about you and then you can actually just also explain a little bit more about why you're so awesome, but everyone can hear at least why I think you're awesome, although I won't have a complete bio to give.

For everybody, we have a very special guest today and it's Clayton Makepeace. Clayton is actually someone who I met I guess almost a year ago, but it's been somebody who actually I've been following for a lot, lot longer than that. Actually, when I first got into direct response, I came across some ads that Clayton had written for magalogs that had just completely blown me away.

I didn't know at the time that they were written by Clayton, but as I was finding great magalogs and putting them aside, a lot of them happened to have been written by Clayton. When I found out that some of them had been written by Clayton, I actually started following Clayton quite closely and just trying to stay on top of everything that he had written.

He took a different approach to copywriting, and it's actually an approach that I'm a big fan of, and actually I'm a big fan of it because I think it actually works about 100 times better than traditional copywriting in the sense of he uses a lot more emotionally-driven copywriting.

His headlines might not scream like a benefit in it, but nonetheless it screams like some great emotion, and because of that it actually works on someone like me, who is more easily pulled into copy when



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it's emotionally driven. So I've been a huge fan of Clayton's for a long time.

Then I got the chance to actually talk to Clayton about a year ago, and when I did, I happened to have been working on the Attention Age Doctrine 2. I sent him a copy of what I was working on and he actually helped me tremendously get it in order, because I had no idea how I was going to say certain things up front and how to make sense of all this research that I had put together in this document.

I think it all can be kind of summed up with how good Clayton is and how much he helped me by what was said on the blog for the download of the Attention Age Doctrine 2. At least two people, and I think there were actually more, but I remember two specifically that said, "I knew everything that you said in your report, yet I still couldn't put it down."

I think that that shows you just how good Clayton is, that the little tweaks and the changes that he made in the Doctrine made it so that people read it all the way through, even when they knew what was in there. That goes to just show what a master copywriter Clayton is.

Clayton has become high on the rolodex as the go-to guy for me when I have a question about marketing in general and copywriting specifically. With that said, Clayton has a lot of other incredible accomplishments. I think the one that stands out to me is you gave birth basically to the whole health newsletter field. Is that correct?

**Clayton:** That is correct, yeah.

**Rich:** Yeah. So now it's like a billion dollar business and here's the guy that basically got it all started and wrote the magalogs and wrote the sales pieces that basically gave birth to this whole industry. That's kind of a feather in his cap. That's something's that a lot bigger than



just helping me with the Doctrine, but nonetheless I'm sure there's a lot more that you've done, Clayton.

Maybe you could give people just a quick bio on you so that they really understand the scope, the depth, and the skill that you bring to the table.

**Clayton:** Sure. Thanks for that introduction, Rich. I'll keep it short. I've been writing copy for direct response promotions for 37 years now. I've done television and direct mail. Now I'm almost exclusively internet marketing.

We sat down the other day and tallied up the total sales that we could attribute to campaigns that I've done over the years and it came to just short of \$1.5 billion, which blew my mind.

**Rich:** Wow!

**Clayton:** With the clients we work with, we're doing probably \$100 million average per year in sales, so that number is continuing to mount. Just a couple weeks ago we put 20,000 investors on a conference call, an online event actually, and sold \$2.5 million worth of product in the following seven days. That kind of sums it up. That's where we're at.

I'm still a working copywriter. I'm not just teaching, but I do teach through my site, [www.MakepeaceTotalPackage.com](http://www.MakepeaceTotalPackage.com). We have thousands of marketers in 67 countries who come to our blog every day to read articles on how to sharpen their marketing.

**Rich:** It's not only actually marketers, but it's also a lot of small business owners, copywriters, etc. that follow your work, isn't it?

**Clayton:** That's right. We had a hilarious entry yesterday. This guy from Malaysia writes in and says he just wanted to warn everybody that if you can't handle success, don't read Clayton, because he's been



reading me for a couple of years now and he's over there in Malaysia with a home on a mountain overlooking the South China Sea.

He's got a Porsche and two BMWs in the front yard and an old friend of his came by and said, "How in the world do you have all this money?"

He told him, "Well, I'm reading *The Total Package* and the archives are like a diamond mine," and all that kind of stuff, so his friend started reading us about a year ago. He didn't know how to handle success and immediately went out and got himself a couple of young girlfriends, whereupon his wife divorced him, he got fired, his children aren't allowed to see him anymore, his whole life went to crap ...

**Rich:** It's all your fault.

**Clayton:** ... and it's my fault, right.

**Rich:** One other thing I think people should know is that is when it comes to the biggest mailers in the world, Clayton is the AAA level copywriter and there's only a handful of those people. Clayton is one of them. A lot of the other ones are actually people that trained under Clayton or at least worked under Clayton – guys like Bencivenga, right?

**Clayton:** No. No. No. No.

**Rich:** We're you his copy chief at one point?

**Clayton:** No. Well, I did hire him on one occasion, but Gary got his chops from Ogilvy and Dan Rosenthal.

**Rich:** Oh, okay.



**Clayton:** But Carline Anglade-Cole, Parris Lampropoulos, Kent Komae, Brad Peterson and others ...

**Rich:** Yeah, a lot of big names.

**Clayton:** ... that I mentored, and Bob Hutchinson, are now earning over a million a year in royalties for the sales copy they're writing.

**Rich:** Yeah. These are the people that like Boardroom would call or Agora would call and when Phillips was around, Phillips would call. That says a lot about your skills, Clayton. Not only would they call you, but they would call people that were trained by you who have risen to the very, very top of the field.

**Clayton:** Yeah. It's a kick for me to see them get ahead.

**Rich:** All right, should be dive into these questions?

**Clayton:** Absolutely.

**Rich:** All right. Cool. Before we even dive into the questions, we'll say it again at the end, but why don't you give people your URL so that they know where they can go to just get a lot more of you and always be able to stay in touch with you, even after this call?

**Clayton:** Sure. It's [www.MakepeaceTotalPackage.com](http://www.MakepeaceTotalPackage.com).

**Rich:** You said you have new blog posts every day there?

**Clayton:** Yeah. We have over 400 articles in our archives on marketing, copywriting, web strategy, PPC, SEO, just every aspect of marketing, and it's absolutely free – the archive and the blog itself.

**Rich:** There's very few people that I go to for marketing advice. Clayton is one of them. Therefore, everyone listening should make sure that



they actually opt-in and stay abreast of what Clayton's thinking and what he's doing and new insights and ways of doing things that maybe you haven't come across before.

With that said, we've gotten lots of really good questions and so we'll just dive in and do our best to get them all answered.

With that said, question number one is, Clayton your headlines seem different. Actually that's kind of what I was talking about. They appear to be more emotionally driven than benefit driven. Why and which do you think is better?

**Clayton:** Well, there are two reasons why I tend to go that direction.

**Rich:** And do you always go that direction or no?

**Clayton:** Not always, no.

**Rich:** Okay. So maybe you could also talk about when you decide to go one way or the other.

**Clayton:** Sure. The first reason that I tend to have a bias for emotionally-driven headlines is that it makes my promotions very different from what everybody else is seeing out there. We get something between 600 and 2,000 advertising messages a day. The horrible ones are entertainment as advertising – you know, bull frogs croaking out Budweiser and Chihuahua's eating tacos – those are the bad ones.

The ones that tend to work fairly well are the ones that offer a product benefit. Of course, some of those that we all see all the time offer benefits that are unrealistic, not believable, not credible, and Rich, a lot of what you write about in terms of attention deficit disorder on the web and elsewhere really ties into that, because we've been taught not to believe a lot of those claims.



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A long time ago, actually right at the beginning of my career, I was working in fundraising where you don't have a product to sell. If you give \$10 to a fundraising organization, you don't get hair on your head, you don't lose weight, you don't pick up more women, you don't make more money. All that happens is you're \$10 poorer. They don't have a benefit to sell.

They became past masters, even when I was getting started in 1971, they became past masters at recognizing the feelings, the strong resonant emotions that people had about particular issues, and they were able to leverage those feelings into \$100 million fundraising organizations.

I actually got started running a folding machine for one of those companies, up to the wee hours of the morning when I was in college and I had the time to read all of those fundraising letters. So, I thought I'd give it a try and it was really how I got started in copywriting.

The second reason ties in with the fact that the more emotional lead stands head and shoulders apart and above, I think, the standard benefit lead. That is that people don't buy for rational reasons. If we did, there wouldn't be any Rolls Royces or Rolex or Porsches or 5,000 square foot houses or most investments, anything other than mutual funds.

If we were rational, we would save every penny that we earn for a rainy day, so that we won't get hamstrung when things turn against us, or so that we'd have money to send our kids through school or retire one day. Instead, we buy all of this other stuff. There's no rational reason for it.

We have reasons. They're really excuses. One of the things I like to say to my copywriters when we're selling products is I ask them,



“Give me the excuse our prospect is going to give his wife for making this purchase. That’s the benefit.”

The real reason he’s buying it is because it either fulfills an emotional desire or it assuages a fear that he has or it will eliminate a frustration that he has.

What I tell people is that if 99% of the purchases we make are made for emotional reasons - a great quote is, “All you really need is a cave, a fire and a piece of meat. Everything else that you buy is bought for some other reason than a rational reason.”

That may be a little bit of an overstatement, but it’s basically true. The concept is true. I tell my people, “If 99% of what we buy is bought for emotional reasons, then writing a headline or a promotion piece that focuses only on the rational reasons to buy is like going to a gun fight and leaving 99% of your bullets in the car.”

**Rich:** All right. Just so that the people have a clear understanding, an example of an emotionally-driven or emotionally-charged headline would be – one that comes to mind is one that you wrote for Weiss on the front of a magalog like, “Those lying, two-faced SOB!”

**Clayton:** Right.

**Rich:** Versus like, “Read this and you’ll have a way of making lots of money in the stock market.”

**Clayton:** Yeah. There were two things happening there actually on that particular one. The first was that we had found that a lot of CEOs of top technology companies were going around the country doing dog and pony shows and showing investors why they should be buying their company stock.



Those same people behind the scenes were dumping their company stock like crazy. So there was a deep well of resentment against CEOs who were making \$100 million a year in compensation anyway.

We figured that approach would really get people's attention. We were able to name, right on the cover, some of the stocks that are the most widely held stocks in America – Microsoft and so forth.

The first thing happening there was that tapping into a deep well of resentment against these fat cat CEOs who were getting paid huge dollars and producing lousy results for shareholders. The other one was that it was topical. It touched on news that the prospect was reading and therefore thinking about and therefore having feelings about. We were able to leverage that into a big winner for Weiss.

**Rich:** Is there ever a time when you think a benefit-written headline is actually better than that emotional style?

**Clayton:** Well, I think in shorter copy. If you're doing a fairly small print ad, for example, you may or may not have time to develop a theme that kind of overlays the benefits that you're offering. Of course, the beauty of online is that no promotion stands alone. It's really playing out against the tableau of many emails and sales pages and events and other things that are happening online.

The texture and the concept, the strategy behind each piece of copy can be quite different. You can have emails that bang on benefits and give your prospect the excuse he needs to give his wife. Then others that just really appeal to him on an emotional level.

I found, for example, that fireside chat emails done in very rudimentary Outlook format with Courier type are very effective in lowering the tone, creating kind of an emotional texture in an email campaign, lowering the tone and bonding and being very credible and warm with your prospect, and then following that with



something that's more exciting, more upbeat.

I'm kind of getting into tone here, but the key really is to allow your message to dictate your tone. That way it never feels false.

There's an old saw, you know, if you look out the window and your neighbor's roof is on fire and you go over to his house and you knock on the door and you wait for him to come to the door and you say, "Excuse me, sir, it appears that your roof is oxidating rather rapidly," he's just going to look at you like you're crazy, right?

If you run over there and burst through the front door and scream, "Run like hell, your roof's on fire!" you're going to get a very different reaction. The emotional texture's important and keeping the emotion appropriate to the message you're delivering is also important.

**Rich:** Gotcha. That makes a lot of sense. Okay, then let's go to the next question, which is, "What do you think is the best way to actually get good at writing copy (versus knowing about it after you've read all the courses and books out there)?"

**Clayton:** Do it. Go out and get spanked. Learn your lesson. Do it again. Go out and get spanked again and learn your lesson. There's nothing that replaces real life experience. When you see somebody who's teaching copy and who's not doing it, you're looking at somebody who's not in touch with what's really working today and what has ceased to work today.

You're also not listening to somebody who is emotionally engaged with the success or failure of what he's doing today. When I first got started, I had nothing but failures for the first year. That first year was the year I learned more about copywriting than any other time in my life.



So you've got to get out there, do it, take your lumps, learn your lessons, and every single promotion will get better. It will get easier to write, faster to write, and stronger in terms of response and conversions than the one before. Absolutely nothing can replace that experience.

**Rich:** That makes a lot of sense. Two things that have worked well for me, and I wonder if there's anything like this that you would recommend. One is actually taking a sales letter that I really liked, maybe in another completely different market, and trying to rewrite it for my product.

Take one that an A level copywriter did do for a different one, and see if I can just change it so that it actually is now an ad for a product that I have. The idea of just kind of walking through it and trying to rephrase sentences that now are geared towards that product was very educational, at least, in trying to get the pace, the tone and the rhythm of copy.

The other one that I've done – and I don't know that this will be easy for people to do, but it is something that was very worthwhile. It might make a lot of sense for people to actually think about – when I've written copy, to then send it to somebody who knows a lot more than I do, ask them to change it, but when they change it to leave track changes on, like in a Word document, so when I get it back I can see where I could have done it a lot better.

Is there anything like that, Clayton, that you would recommend?

**Clayton:** I think that's really great advice. Frankly, I don't think anything can possibly come close to the actual experience of doing it in the real world, but these two techniques are great. I'd also suggest that you show copy that you're writing to people who don't know anything at all about copy – anybody who will agree to look at it and tell you what they think, and to ask them to do the same thing, because in



the end result, those are the kinds of people that you're going to be ultimately sending the copy to, right?

**Rich:** Right.

**Clayton:** Dan Rosenthal, who's one of the grand old men of our industry, and as I said earlier was Gary Bencivenga's mentor, does that all the time. Dan's a buddy of mine. In fact, he would rather show his copy to people who don't know beans about copywriting, because he's going to get a visceral gut level reaction to that copy from somebody who could very well be a prospect.

**Rich:** Right.

**Clayton:** I have a friend who writes a lot of health copy that just grabs his coffee, gets in a car, and goes to an old folks home and reads the copy aloud to the people there and gauges their reaction. He doesn't know anyone with arthritis or heart disease or heart failure or cancer or anything like that. He just goes to a place where you find those people and he reads the copy to them.

**Rich:** And he knows he's got a winner when they say they'll buy it.

**Clayton:** Yeah. Well, not only that, he identifies objections. He identifies the spots of the copy where they doze off. He identifies the spots of the copy where they appear to be skeptical. He swears by it. This is Parris Lampropoulos. He swears by it. He says it works like gangbusters. I think Kent Komae has done it at least once too.

**Rich:** I'll have to try and scope out the old age homes around here. All right, let's move onto the next question, which is, "It seems refund rates are increasing online," - and actually just a parenthetical statement, I just got back from Las Vegas yesterday and that was something that came up in a couple of the discussions, that people are experiencing higher refund rates now than they did in the past. It's not just a



quality of product thing.

Back to the question, “How do I make a strong guarantee without losing money from returns? How can I give them a longer time to ask for a refund but not get burned?”

**Clayton:** I run into the guarantee question all the time and clients that I work with for the first time tend to be people who are very chintzy with their refund policies. Some of them are that way because their accountants told them they had to be, because of the type of accounting they do.

For example, in the newsletter industry every new subscription is actually a liability because you have to fulfill it, so that impacts refund policies to some degree. Some of them are just cheap and they’re afraid that people will, a year from now, demand a refund.

We’ve tested it. One of my clients, Martin Weiss, Weiss Research – this is several years ago now, but he had a 90 day guarantee on his \$99 investment newsletter that we were selling. I asked to see a graph showing month by month in a subscriber’s lifetime when the cancellations and refund requests were happening. Surprise, surprise, we had this huge spike right at 90 days.

So I said, “Well, why don’t we do a heads up test, an A/B test split, where we offer a one year guarantee versus a 90 day guarantee, and then track it for a year?”

We did that and we found that with the longer guarantee, at the end of the year our refund rates were like a 10<sup>th</sup> of what they were when we set the deadline sooner.

It’s really intuitive. If I gave you a two week guarantee on a product I sold you, everyone has a calendar on their refrigerator and there’d



be a big red circle around a date two weeks from now where you get to send the product back and get a refund.

**Rich:** Right.

**Clayton:** But if the refund date is farther out, then that's not going to happen. I've got to say with Ed Rodale, and this was my idea, but I certainly wrote up many packages promoting their books and magazines. Their books primarily use this guarantee, but it was an heirloom guarantee.

"Even after you're dead, if your heirs decide this book isn't any good, just send it back. Not only that, here's the return label. Just cut it out, put it in your files, and if you or your heirs decide ever, until a comet hits earth and wipes us all out, you can slap that label on the book, send it back to Rodale and they'll give you a full refund."

**Rich:** Is there anything though in particular, or is it just basically because there is this growing concern I hear from people, it must be accurate that more people are refunding. Just look at it from a standpoint that the people that are buying and then refunding, they wouldn't have bought if you didn't have it, so it's not really like money lost.

**Clayton:** Well, I don't think it's money lost, but I think if you're seeing refund rates increase there's several things that you can do. You can look at your messaging and see if you over promised or inadvertently created false expectations of the product.

**Rich:** Right.

**Clayton:** You can look at the list that you went to or the websites that you advertised on or the affiliates that you worked with and try to get a sense of why, and see where the refunds are coming from. Are they coming from your established customers or are they coming more from one outside source than another?



Take a look at that source and see what the customer experiences with the product that that source is offering them. There are a lot of things that you can do post mortem to kind of tear that apart and really analyze it. I think that over promising and under delivering is a big one.

I did a Power Marketing Summit a couple of years ago and we sell the DVDs for \$7,500 a copy. We don't get refund requests. We just don't get them. This guy emails us and says, "Look, fair is fair, you know, I bought this thing. I opened the package, I watched the videos, but frankly they're not for me. They're just a little too advanced. I need something more basic. I just wanted to give you that input. I don't want a refund."

So we refunded his \$7,500 and then sent him an email saying, "You know, I'm really sorry and I refuse to keep your money. We've already refunded it and plus here's a discount coupon to buy anything else you want in our online store. We have other more basic products."

Whereupon the guy sends me an email back and says, "Well, I've just gone to your shopping cart and re-bought the videos, because I'm not accepting the \$7,500 back."

We literally went back and forth like that several times until I finally had to call the guy and tell him, "Look, I'll make you a deal. Why don't we do this? We'll split the difference," and I've got a customer for life now with this guy. He's one of my biggest advocates on the web.

That refund policy is absolutely crucial, but to look at how the people that you're acquiring have been treated by the source company, the affiliate or the joint venture partner where you found them I think is always worth doing.



**Rich:** I would agree. I think that pretty much sums that question up, so let's move on to the next one, which I think is a really good question, because I see really conflicting advice out there about this.

It says, "I've always heard don't use clichés. I've read in The Total Package to use clichés. What should I believe here?"

Then based on that answer, if you want to give people some guidance as to when they should use it and when they shouldn't, I think that would probably be a good thing.

**Clayton:** All right, where to start. David Ogilvy made a huge point in his direct marketing agency, Ogilvy Direct, which was run by my friend, Drayton Bird, its claim to fame was really their marketing for Sears and for Rolls Royce.

If you're known for marketing Rolls Royce, the manner in which you market the cars is important. Ogilvy is famous for saying that your ads need to speak to people in the vernacular that they use in their own daily lives.

David's example of that was a Burma Shave sign that got rejected that his agency suggested. The series of signs for Burma Shave, you'd be driving down the road and the first part of the poem would show up and then another one and then another one.

Well, this one was great. It said, "Carnation milk is the best in the land. Here I sit with a can in my hand. No tits to pull, no hay to pitch. You just punch a hole in the son-of-a-bitch."

That's in Ogilvy's book, and his point is if that's the way your market talks, you'll get more credibility, more retention, and more readership by speaking to them in the way that they're the most comfortable with.



How do we all talk? We all talk in clichés. Why? Because a cliché is like a word picture, it's worth a thousand words. If I tell you it's raining like cats and dogs, I don't have to tell you how many inches it's rained in how many hours or anything else. You just know I'm in the middle of a downpour, right?

**Rich:** Right.

**Clayton:** We speak in clichés, and for most of our markets, that's what we're comfortable with. I reject out of hand the notion that clichés should not be used in sales copy. I think they're efficient. They communicate in a few words what would otherwise take a paragraph or more to communicate. They give your copy momentum. They give it color. They give it life.

The only caution that I would give is know when enough is enough. I have a client that loves to mix metaphors. It drives me crazy. The first thing in his opening copy, the stock market is a hurricane, and the next thing you know it's a firestorm and then the next thing you know it's an earthquake. He's all over the place. That drives me crazy.

You can overdo the cliché thing, but I think clichés are like pictures. A good cliché in the right spot is worth a thousand words.

**Rich:** I think that makes a lot of sense, and I think the advice when people are talking about clichés and saying not to use it, it really is more accurately to say don't overuse them.

**Clayton:** Yeah, if you get to the point where the copy is just one cliché after another. A lot of what we do, you kind of have to feel your way through. It's just kind of a feeling you'll get as you're reading it, "Oh, my God, another cliché!"

Sometimes too many of them actually confuse the message, so just kind of feel it through, but rules are like pie crusts, made to be



broken. That one definitely was made to be broken. Just think your way through it and feel your way through it.

**Rich:** I think that's very good advice, Clayton. Let's go to the next one, which is, "What's the first thing to test in one of my sales letters?" Then it says, "What's the best thing to test?" We should start with the second part of that, "What's the best thing to test?" and then what would you normally test first?

**Clayton:** The answer to both is the same, a headline. The second thing is the offer. In terms of the headline, I've routinely seen a new headline lift response by 30%, and by response I mean sales by 30%. There's no other part of the copy, unless your response device is totally screwed up, there's no other part of the copy that can produce that kind of multiple.

The offer is more a strategy than it is the actual copy for the offer, but if your price is too high or too low, that can give you almost the same kind of multiple.

The rule is don't test whispers, test things that really matter. And by the way, this whole Taguchi thing online has just gotten totally out of control. People are testing stuff that just doesn't matter and their test results quite often are unreliable anyway for a lot of reasons.

If you test major and majors, the headline – and when I say headline, the eyebrow above the headline, the deck copy, and if it affects how you should open your sales copy, also the first couple of paragraphs of your opening sales copy. That to me is your headline test.

**Rich:** Your lead, basically?

**Clayton:** Yeah. Like when I do a direct mail piece, the client doesn't get a direct mail piece with one headline on it. He gets three or four headlines and then we choose the two or three that we want to test



and we go out with three panels on our very first mailing. Then every re-mailing that we do, talking about direct mail here, the control goes to 90% of the list.

Then we have a certain number of lists that are test lists that we hadn't tested before that we want to see how they're going to work. They get the control headline. Then there's always a panel of many thousand names where we can test two or three other headlines.

The beauty of it is that when you direct mail a piece for an investment product, for example, you're going to be lucky if that promotion works for three months or four months, before the response drops to the point where you can't mail it anymore.

And by the way, also a format test, where you test a bookalog versus a 6x9 versus a magalog versus a tabloid or whatever, now you have this constant stream of self-renewing direct mail pieces and you can extend the life of the guts of the copy to a year or two.

**Rich:** Gotcha. When should they go test headlines versus test changing the offer? Do you have any guidance about that?

**Clayton:** Well, it varies widely from company to company. A lot of companies, their offers are fairly set in stone or at least can only vary within a fairly narrow margin, so you're going to find more opportunities to test headlines than offers. To me the price of a product, especially in the mail, is never set, because the market constantly changes.

I have a client now that we're just getting ready to begin working with and they have an online product. They think that the ideal price point for their product is \$4.95 per month. Now they have a huge market, 138 million prospects worldwide.

**Rich:** Wow!



**Clayton:** They're looking at a pretty nice monthly income from that lousy \$5 a month, but I looked at it and I couldn't see any rational reason why the product couldn't sell equally well at \$29 or even \$49 a month. Typically there's a curve, the higher the price the lower the response and vice versa. We've tested price plenty of times and seen a higher price increase response, actually. When it does that and increases average sale, I mean, what could be sweeter, right?

**Rich:** Right.

**Clayton:** That's a key to test, but it really does vary company to company.

**Rich:** Gotcha. Okay. Let's move on to the next question, which is, "When I sit down to write it's really hard. Has this ever happened to you? If so, what do you do?"

**Clayton:** No.

**Rich:** This is the story of my life.

**Clayton:** I know. Was this your question?

**Rich:** My kindred spirit.

**Clayton:** No, it's not hard for me. I have a process that I use that could, I think, help people with this problem, and we all learn it in one of our little reports called, *Beat the Blank Page Blues*, but I can tell you what it is so you don't have to buy the report.

Think about the process. What do you have to do? Well, first of all, before I start writing, I have to research my product. I have to determine what the key benefits are and what the key emotions are that are satisfied by this product. I have to start thinking about the order in which I want to present those things, my reasons why you buy. As I'm doing that, I'm essentially building an outline, right?



**Rich:** Right.

**Clayton:** Now I have the outline and I know what I need to say first. I know each sales point that I want to make and the order I want to make them in. I know the proof elements that I need to include in order to establish and raise my credibility.

I know that I'm going to be presenting my offer at a certain point and my guarantee, my risk relief, my discount, my premiums, and so I have all that laid out in the order in which I'm going to do it. Then it's a matter of dumping the actual information that fits in each of those buckets into that outline.

**Rich:** Right. Let me ask you another question that you don't have to answer until the end, but let me just throw it out at you. This assumes that you already know the key emotional drivers of the marketplace.

**Clayton:** Yeah. Again, we have some great articles on that in our archives. *How to Crawl Inside Your Prospect's Skin* is one of them. For most of us, I think realistically if you talk to someone that graduated from Harvard Business School he's going to tell you you've got to do focus groups and you've got to do polls and surveys and all kinds of other bullshit that doesn't ever work.

The fact of the matter is, Rich, when you're selling a product you know instinctively how your prospects are feeling. You have a real good idea what their experience is with other products like yours, other companies like yours, how they feel about the lack of the benefits that your product delivers in their life, and how they feel about the prospect of having those benefits in their lives. You already know those things.

If you had to sell a product on arthritis, you know that people who



have arthritis are pissed off because they can't play with their grandkids and they feel guilty about that, and they feel desperate that their lives are slipping away and they're not having this experience.

We call it the Stanislavski method. It's like method acting. If I was this person and I had arthritis, or I was this person who was trying to get a business off the ground and it just wasn't working, how would I feel? I think it's pretty easy to figure out what those feelings are.

Of course, another way to do it is to look at your competitors, what's working for them, and try to identify the emotional touch points in their promotions.

Anyway, if that's an issue for you, look for that article.

**Rich:** *How to Crawl Inside Your Prospect's Skin?*

**Clayton:** Yeah. I think it'll really help.

**Rich:** All right. Cool. Now back to this. You have a structured approach and you try and line up your key points in each of those before you even sit down to write?

**Clayton:** Yep. Then I dump any research material that I have. You know, I need to know how much the Dow fell last month or I need to know how much gold prices have risen or I need to know the immunological effects of mushrooms on the human system, whatever it is, and those are facts that have to be documented anyway in the copy, in my substantiation file, especially in regulated industries like health or finance.

I'm dumping those articles with attribution into my outline. Then when I sit down to write I never have to face a blank page. The material is there. I can just basically close my eyes, visualize myself



talking to my prospect, and just let the copy flow out the end of my fingers.

**Rich:** That's nice. I wish it would flow out of my fingers.

**Clayton:** You just have to think of it. If my best prospect was sitting in the room with me right now, what would I say? What would I say to him? How would I address his resonant emotions, his desires, his fears, his frustrations? How would I start the conversation? What would I say next? That's all you're doing. You're just having a conversation with somebody.

**Rich:** I agree. Very good. All right, the next question is, "Should I have a product before I write my ad or can I write the ad before the product is done?"

**Clayton:** Well, obviously you're talking about an information product here, something you can craft, right?

**Rich:** Right.

**Clayton:** Both ways work. Probably the ideal way is to write the ad first, because ultimately the ad isn't about the product, it's about the prospect.

If you write an ad that touches on every one of his fears, frustrations, and desires and fulfills them, you know, addresses them in every way that you can think of, you've just designed the ultimate product. That's probably the best way to go.

Having said that, in my life, in career, I've almost never been presented with that opportunity. The one time I was, by the way, was what you mentioned earlier that my wife, Wendy, and I started the entire health newsletter industry, and we really kind of did.



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Phillips publishing called me up and asked me to write a promotion for a new newsletter they were starting called *Health and Healing*, an alternative health newsletter. It was a launch promotion for it, so it didn't exist. There were no premiums. The newsletter didn't exist.

I jumped on a plane, flew out to Irvine, and met with the doctor who was going to edit it. On the plane I read a couple of things that he had written. I spent literally one hour with him talking, and I went back to my hotel and wrote the promotion in one afternoon, actually, the guts of it, and did a little fine tuning when I got home, but that promotion and the two that followed mailed 90 million pieces.

**Rich:** 90 million pieces!

**Clayton:** 90 million pieces, yeah. Figure that royalty out.

**Rich:** The post office has got to love you.

**Clayton:** Yeah, but not the tree huggers. We killed a lot of trees on that one. The point was we were able to create the newsletter from scratch. We were able to create the premiums from scratch. We were able to position it. We were able to establish the doctor's identity and personality. We were able to do all of that. It was wonderful.

Ninety percent of the time, I'm pretty much presented with a fait accompli when it comes to product.

**Rich:** Yeah. I would imagine most of the times that's the way it is. In general for newsletters, you can always write a different promotion before anything is happening, because you can kind of give birth to new premiums. So often it seems like newsletter promotions, at least, often are focused more on the premium than they are on the product.



**Clayton:** Yeah, that's true. There's a good reason for that. I don't know if you want to go into it, but most newsletter promotions really are selling the premium and not the actual product. Also, on many occasions I've been able to go to the publisher and say, "You know what? This product needs to be improved a little bit. Why don't you add this box on page 3 of every issue so I can say XYZ about it in the promotion?"

Probably half the time, the publisher will say, "Hey, that's a great idea. Let's do it." You may have some input in that regard.

**Rich:** It's never a bad idea to do that if you have the opportunity.

**Clayton:** Right. It's a wonderful way to do it. An absolutely wonderful way to do it. You're essentially designing the product as you're writing your promotion.

**Rich:** Right. My experience is the best sales letter I ever wrote that made the most money was a project that I was doing with Jay Abraham, and the product didn't exist yet. So because I was such a loyal customer of Jay's before I was actually a partner, I got to write it from the standpoint of what would be the ideal product?

**Clayton:** What is absolutely irresistible to me?

**Rich:** Yeah, exactly.

**Clayton:** Yeah. It's a great way to go. It's wonderful if you can do it.

**Rich:** I think this question is a little bit different than what we touched on earlier, so maybe you can without talking about what you talked about before, just kind of sandwich it with a little bit more of what the process is.

It's "Can you walk me through your copywriting process from idea to finished sales letter?" You already talked about the actual writing of



it, so maybe just spend a minute or two on both sides of it – from what do you do before you even write that draft to after you’ve written the draft, then what?

**Clayton:** Right. Well, we talked about research and outlining and that kind of stuff. Essentially what I do is whenever I receive a start kit or a research package, I read it immediately. Even if the copy isn’t due for six weeks or eight weeks, I’ll read it immediately.

I’m a big believer in the Thomas Edison school of Psycho-Cybernetics, which is how your brain works, which is that you really do more creative work when you’re asleep than when you’re awake.

We all have an adult inside us and a child. The child is creative and the adult is the one that’s always telling the child to shut the hell up and to sit down. The adult is our conscious brain and the child is our subconscious.

When the conscious brain goes to sleep, the subconscious is still working. It’s making connections, and making connections is what creativity is. I believe that the more nights of sleep you get between the time that you input the data into your subconscious and the time that you have to output it in terms of copy, the better off you are. I do that right away.

Then the next thing I do is when I sit down to actually begin writing, like I said earlier, I literally will sit down, lean my head back, close my eyes, put my fingers on the keyboard and just start talking. Every single thought that comes into my mind goes onto the page.

If the adult stands up and says, “Wait that’s stupid,” I just tell him to shut up and I keep writing. I’m not looking to get even a draft at this point. I’m just looking to get every thought, every creative idea, every connection I can out onto the page in an order that makes sense.



Then I go through a series of editing drafts, and in some cases they can be quite painful and lengthy in terms of completely reorganizing a copy and so forth, but this is where you get to face the Sophie's choice, you know, which children you're going to off.

Your copy is your children, so you're going through it and you're saying, "You know what, this is a damn good argument, but it's not good enough to make the cut given the amount of space available or the amount of time that I have available to present this message."

Do as many drafts as it takes to get this thing to the point where it's just really great. I'd say it's all over the ball park depending on what kind of mood I'm in, what kind of product it is, what else is going on in my life.

I've done as many as 26 drafts on a direct mail piece that ultimately mailed 40 million pieces, so we invested \$20 million in that package. So it was worth 26 drafts, right?

**Rich:** Right.

**Clayton:** In other cases, like with the *Health and Healing* thing, it just flowed. Everything fit. Everything worked. I was done in like two or three drafts. It just depends on the assignment.

**Rich:** The importance of it.

**Clayton:** Yeah, the importance, where you are, how creative you are, whether or not the ideas are coming quickly, whether or not you have all the research you need available at your fingertips, just a lot of things. I think it's important to allow your creative process to change project to project. Let the project tell you how it wants to get done.

Parris Lampropoulos is very rigid and very left-brained in how he approaches copy. Now Parris is one of the top copywriters for



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Boardroom. He's a genius. He makes millions. He makes them tens of millions, but he's very rigid.

The first thing he'll do is he'll sit down and he'll write 350 fascinations, bullets about the product, and he does that every single time.

**Rich:** 350?

**Clayton:** It's got to be 350. Don't ask me why. Then Carline Anglade-Cole, who's another one of my former cubs, who also makes millions writing copy today, you give her a scrap of research, put her in a room, and her head explodes. She goes six different directions at once.

She has thousands of creative ideas, most of them totally obscene and completely unusable. She just did a headline, "When you poop, do you ...?" That was her headline on a promotion for a health product, a colon cleanser. She's just totally right-brained. Her process is very different.

I find my process varies from project to project, just depending on what kind of product it is. You need to give yourself that kind of freedom.