

How Robert Collier Turned Six Words Into a Copywriting Goldmine

AWAI student Paul Goehrums suggested the idea for this article, which comes from an excellent piece written by Yanik Silver in Simon Stepsys' newsletter: www.amazing2ndincome.com

Robert Collier was one of the true geniuses of direct mail. He started mailing letters in the 1930s and is acknowledged by many top copywriters as the one man they've learned the most from.

While Collier didn't sell refrigerators to Eskimos, he did sell just about everything else from trainloads of coal to clothing. And he did it the same way you are doing it: with the power of the written word.

Collier is best known for his "Will You Do Me a Favor" letter ... a powerful concept that he repeatedly used to sell millions of dollars' worth of merchandise at a time when a million dollars was LOTS of money!

Following is his first "favor" letter, which sold over 20,000 raincoats. While reading it, look at how he subtly taps into very powerful human emotions. The numbers in brackets refer to our comments about the copy that you'll find at the end of the letter.

Here goes ...

Dear Customer,

Will you do me a favor? [1]

For twelve years now, we have been selling the famous "Keepdry" Coat direct to the consumer, at a savings of many dollars from the usual retail price.

This year I want to vary our line a bit, so I have changed the fabric to one that looks like a smart topcoat – but will still shed rain. And instead of the usual double-breasted raincoat model, I'm using a single-breasted topcoat model that appeals to men because it has style, and yet retains that loose, comfortable look of the well-tailored light overcoat.

I believe that anyone who ever gets out in stormy or wet weather will like this "Any Weather" Coat better than any raincoat or topcoat he can buy. But you know how it is in merchandising – you can never be sure of such things until after you have sunk a lot of money in them.

Which brings me to the favor:

I want to make sure of the demand – or lack of demand – before we sink too much money in this new coat. So I've come to you as a customer of the house:

Will you try out one of these new "Any Weather" Topcoats for me for a week – WEAR IT – see how it feels, how it looks, how it compares with topcoats you have bought at \$25 or \$30? [2] Above all, how it keeps out wind and rain? And then write me? [3]

[At this point, Collier explains the features and benefits of the coat and offers a special introductory price [2] for direct-mail customers.]

Naturally, I am not making offers like this to everyone, so whether you accept it or not, I should feel obliged if you would return the card so as to insure against its falling into other hands. [4]

Naturally, too, your opinion will be of value to me only if I get it NOW – before the Fall season has really opened – before we are definitely committed for any great quantity of these new all-weather coats. [5]

Won't you, therefore, fill in the three simple measurements on the card TONIGHT if you can, and mail it? On second thought, better mail it right away – while you have it in your hand – so there will be no chance of forgetting it. [3, 5]

OK. Now, let's see what we can learn from Collier's letter.

The two most widely known psychological motivators are the old standbys: fear and greed. But, as you've learned from Michael Masterson, real pros know the importance of digging deeper to uncover your prospect's deeper motivators.

Collier understood this too. And in this letter, he tapped into a motivator that's equally as strong as fear and greed: the desire to help. [1]

Most prospects are not used to an appeal with this emotional motivator. It puts them off guard ... in a very positive way that reduces their sales resistance.

After appealing to his prospect's "better nature," Collier entices him with a bargain. [2] "I can help AND get a bargain!" the prospect feels. A classic win/win situation.

Next, Collier subtly uses another strong motivator. Everyone loves to give an opinion. So Collier takes advantage of that by directly asking for it. [3] This makes the prospect feel valued and respected.

He makes the prospect feel special – and reinforces that feeling by saying, "I am not making offers like this to everyone." [4] He then drives it home with the slightly conspiratorial "to insure against its falling into other hands."

Finally, Collier ties all of the strength of the "do me a favor" appeal together with urgency. [5] The urgency ties back into the initial request to do the favor quickly. But the prospect also ends up with a strong sense that he, too, will benefit from a rapid response.

By starting with the request for a favor, Collier makes a very strong sales pitch ... that does not even feel like a sale!

You could probably borrow Robert Collier's words and be somewhat successful. Don't! Several very successful letters have already done so. It is far better for you to understand the underlying psychology of Collier's appeal so you can build on it for long-term, consistent success in your own writing.

[Ed. Note: If you would like to see other million-dollar controls broken down element by element, to uncover the secrets behind the strongest direct-response promotions in the mail, in space advertising, and on the Internet today, I recommend you take a look at AWAI's Monthly Copywriting Genius: www.monthlycopywritinggenius.com]

Published: September 13, 2004

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