

The Six "Success Forces" that Helped Turn Joe Sugarman into a Marketing Legend

By John Wood

If copywriting is how you choose or hope to make your living, chances are you're familiar with the name "Joe Sugarman."

Sugarman, born in Chicago's West Side on April 25, 1938, has an impressive marketing resume ...

The New York Times once called him the "Mail Order Maverick."

He earned that title through his skill at marketing the pocket calculator, the cordless phone, and the digital watch to the masses when they first came onto the scene back in the late 1960s and 1970s.

The product he's probably most associated with, though, is BluBlocker sunglasses. His skills at direct marketing led to the sale of an incredible 20 million pairs.

One of his lasting marketing innovations sprung from his BluBlocker campaign. Sugarman set up "man on the street" interviews where people passing by on the street would be asked for their reaction after trying on a pair of BluBlockers. He was also the first marketer to use toll-free numbers to take customer credit card numbers over the phone.

In 1980, Sugarman wrote a book called *Success Forces*. In explaining the title, Sugarman says, "I am convinced that for every action you take, a force is created – and that force will either steer or force you towards success or toward failure."

He goes on to document what he calls "six very important Success Forces that, if understood, will bring you success – often despite yourself."

If you're always looking for new ideas and new ways to boost your success, I invite you to read on. What follows is a breakdown of the six success forces that have helped Joe Sugarman become a marketing legend:

1.

Always Be Honest

Sugarman says that telling the truth is the *strongest and most powerful* success force. He adds that while some people think that to come out on top you have to lie, cheat, and bribe – honesty is really the only way to put you on top.

Sugarman says the more honest you are in your business, the more successful you will be.

Now, of course, we've all been in situations where it's easier to tell a white lie than it is to tell the truth to save embarrassment.

Sugarman talks about such an incident in his book. He asked one of his good acquaintances for advice on how to give a better speech. Which his friend did and Sugarman said he learned a great deal from their discussion. The end result was that Sugarman decided to deliver his speech along the same lines as one of his successful advertisements. Because of that, he says, his next two speeches were sensational. He sent a tape recording of the speech to his friend, and one week later, asked him what he thought.

His friend said, "Joe, I think you were too vain in your talk; you should be more modest. Your accomplishments are nice to hear about, but I think you're better off not highlighting them yourself."

This shocked Joe, so he asked, "Are you sure you heard the tape?"

"Of course, I did," was the reply. His friend told him he would listen to the tape again to be sure.

Joe called him back in a few days and his friend told him, "Joe, you were sensational. I've never heard a more interesting, inspiring speech in my life. You have a really bright future in front of you if you want to be a public speaker."

It was obvious to Joe that his friend had not listened to the tape the first time. Instead of saying he hadn't time to listen to it, his friend decided to pretend that he did. His friend's one little lie put a huge dent in his credibility with Joe from that day forward. Sugarman said from that point on, he knew he'd have to weigh all his friend's future advice and comments.

Have you ever told a small lie to avoid embarrassment? I know I have.

Sugarman says the more difficult and painful it is for you to tell the truth, the greater the success force you will create for yourself.

He says to make honesty your guiding philosophy. It's a powerful and effective force in advertising. He always brings up negative features and avoids exaggerating the positive features of the products he sells.

He acknowledges that always being honest can be a "rough road to take and embarrassing at times, but if you use it as the cornerstone of your success philosophy, you'll never go wrong."

2.

Cherish Your Failures

Sugarman tells us about a theory the Chinese have about failure. Simply stated, it says that "no matter what course of action you take, whether you succeed or fail, it is more important that you at least *take action* in an attempt to succeed or fail."

The Chinese view is that not taking action is a much bigger disgrace than failing. They believe that if you at least take action, in the long run you will succeed – regardless of how many times you have failed up to that point.

Sugarman says he's so convinced of the power of failing and that it's such a powerful success force, it gives him the confidence and reassurance to try almost anything. Because he knows that even if he fails, it will create a force for success later on.

Whenever he gives a speech, he reminds his audience that he's here speaking to them today, not because he's a huge success, but "because I have probably failed more times than anybody in the room. But from all of the failures, I have learned things and from the things that I've learned, I have been able to succeed."

He says that while people know him as someone who is good at picking winning products to market through his company, he says the truth is that most every product he thought was going to be a huge success turned out to be average at best – and the ones he thought were going to be average or below, turned out to be his winners. He concludes that if he only went with what he thought were sure winners, he most likely would have only achieved average success as a marketer.

He stresses, though, that the key is to *bounce back* from your failures. To learn from them and put them "in your back pocket" for future reference and move on to your next project.

"Once you realize how powerful failure can be as a success force, it will give you the courage you need to attempt new and different things," he says. The key, he says, is "persistence," which is really saying, "I've failed, but I know why I failed; I've learned something new and I must continue until I succeed."

He adds that he knows that failure isn't always easy to swallow – it can be embarrassing and ego-deflating – but if you do fail, consider it a blessing and then pick yourself up and try again.

3.

Relish Your Problems

Problems, like failures, are negative things, but Sugarman stresses "each problem has a hidden opportunity in it that literally dwarfs the problem." Every great success story in history involves people who, when confronted by a problem, turned it into an opportunity.

A personal example Sugarman cites is back when digital watches came out (which he marketed through his company JS & A). They had a very high defective rate. But he says he didn't look at it as a problem, but more of an opportunity to show their customers what a good company they were. They gave their clients loaner watches while their watches were being repaired. Plus, they paid their postage for them to mail their watches in.

Sugarman cautions that often you can't see the opportunity right way. But, without exception, the opportunity will appear if you work at it long enough.

He draws a parallel to when a diamond is first found, it often resembles a piece of coal – not so pretty and full of black carbon. But if you polish it up, cut it, and place it in a nice setting, it turns into the most beautiful gem in the world.

Today, of course, with the immediacy and [power of social media](#), it's more important than ever to turn problems into opportunities.

In summary, Sugarman tells us not to look at problems as just problems. Instead, look at problems as opportunities.

4.

Concentrate Your Powers

Here, Sugarman is *not* talking about working your to-do list and not diverging from it as you make your way through your day.

He's talking about bigger picture stuff.

Concentrating on your business so as to create "tremendous forces that act to accelerate success."

He says that by concentrating solidly in one area, "you eventually learn from your mistakes, and as you learn, your productivity increases."

He cautions if you "go off on a tangent," you enter a whole new learning curve and "make an entirely new set of mistakes and experience a whole new series of failures."

An example he gives concerns his father who had a business where he manufactured the cameras that printers used to produce plates. He thought he could build his empire faster if he imported products from overseas and then later by owning manufacturing facilities overseas.

He ended up overextending himself and going broke. Meanwhile, all of his father's competitors in his original business prospered and grew.

5.

Do It Differently

Sugarman says that "every time you copy, it's a failure force. Every time you innovate and do something different, you create a very powerful Success Force. The secret is 'don't copy.' "

He writes that some of his biggest failures occurred when he tried to copy someone else's success instead of trying to innovate on his own.

He says a great reason against copying is that every success is comprised of several obvious elements and many not so obvious ones. And that in order to come near duplicating a success, you've got to duplicate its elements, the majority of which you are not aware of. He adds that the most difficult element to copy is *timing*.

Plus, he says that "trying to copy somebody's success does not force you to look at those unique circumstances that may demand an entirely different approach."

He stresses that there is nothing wrong with innovating while doing a bit of copying. An example he gives is Mark O. Haroldson. Haroldson had read Joe Karbo's book entitled *A Lazy Man's Way to Riches* that explained how to use mail order to make yourself rich. Haroldson earned himself millions of dollars by adapting Karbo's ad and using Karbo's suggestions to promote his blueprint for getting wealthy from real estate.

Sugarman says when he sees someone copying him, he never worries. But if he saw somebody innovating while selling the same products he does, then he would be concerned. He'd know he was facing a formidable opponent.

Wondering how you can innovate? There's no exact formula, but for starters, *avoid copying*.

Then realize that an innovator is someone who does things others think can't be done or who has done things few people have done before. He adds that it might be difficult to innovate because it seems like everything has already been done. But he says to remember that innovating might just be putting together the same things in unique and different ways.

To sum up: copying = failure; innovating or doing it differently = a powerful success force.

6.

Clear Your Desk

Here, Joe is *not* talking about working day in and day out with a clean desk. Joe himself frequently works with a desk filled with papers.

He explains how it all came about. He was working for his father during summer vacation one year. He was in charge of publishing a newspaper to potential clients. So he decided to interview ten people who had purchased his father's equipment and feature the interviews in the paper. Each man he interviewed was president of their respective company.

He says he learned two things ...

That at some point in their business careers, each president had been told that an idea they had could not be done. Yet they were convinced it could be done – and they all took up the challenge to prove the naysayers wrong.

Which told him that if someone tells you something can't be done and you think it can, it's a great opportunity for you to prove that you're right.

The second thing they had in common was that all of them had a clean desk.

Their desks were so clean that Joe wondered if they even did any work. He also noticed their facilities were very clean and well organized.

So when Joe's company grew from a basement operation to a full-scale operation, he wanted his business to convey a clean-looking image to everyone who saw it. But even so, the place still looked messy – at night, there were papers left in piles on desks – labels, empty boxes, calculators, and a variety of other clutter that didn't fit the clean image of the building that he was trying to portray.

So he decided to implement a clean desk policy. He insisted that every employee clear off their desk before they left for home each night. He even insisted that their "in" and "out" boxes be put away.

He received some complaints. The most valid one was that there was no place to store all their papers. So he bought some filing cabinets and additional desks to remedy the situation. He received a few other complaints, which he quickly provided solutions for.

He says if you walked through the office at night, you would have thought it was an office furniture showroom. The floors were polished. The desks were clear – everything was dusted and ready for the next day. His operation became super efficient.

Was it the clean desk policy that did the trick? Or was it the employees' feeling of organization that caused their efficiency to improve?

Joe says that the clean desks were really a manifestation of discipline – and they were a direct reflection of how efficiently the company was being run.

As mentioned, Joe himself works with a large cluttered desk during the day. But at the end of the day, he puts everything away in its place.

He says he's well aware that it might appear to be a waste of time, but he says it's not. Because it forces you to organize your work, to organize your workload, and to help you put things into the proper perspective.

He often talks about the power of cleaning your desk at the end of each day in his speeches, and relates that he gets letters all the time from people telling him how doing so has literally changed their lives and brought them more success

in life.

While his other success forces are more conceptual in nature, clearing your desk is something you can start immediately.

If you don't have a desk, clean up your kitchen, your workbench, your garage, your bookshelf, your clothing drawers, etc. How you leave them are all reflections of your cleanliness and discipline.

Use your willpower to clean your desk at the end of every day and, Sugarman says, you'll be on your way to experiencing one of the most effective Success Forces there is.

You don't experience the kind of success Joe Sugarman has in his life by accident. Keep these six powerful "success forces" close at hand, and chance are you'll be more successful at everything you do.

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