

WE'RE ALL SELLING



PREPARATION H

No one cares about your
product, service, or story.

Tom Schwab

Founder and Chief Evangelist Officer, Interview Valet

We're All Selling Preparation H: No One Cares About Your Product, Service, or Story

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Published by Interview Valet

InterviewValet.com · IAmTomSchwab.com

This is the fourth in a monthly series of mini-books on how trust is built, earned, and compounded in the age of AI. The first three, *From Megaphone to Magnet*, *You Are Not One Funnel Away*, and *From Soloist to Choir*, are available at IAmTomSchwab.com/books.

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INTRODUCTION

THE TUBE AND THE RELIEF

One day, covering the phones during a lunch break, I took a call from a client. He was happy. Very happy. And he said, "You guys are just like Preparation H."

I honestly didn't know if I had been complimented or insulted.

Then he said, "You came recommended, you gave me relief fast, and I'll recommend you to everyone I know."

It clicked.

*Nobody wants to buy hemorrhoid cream.
People buy relief. Fast, trusted relief.*

And that's the uncomfortable truth most founders don't want to hear. People don't wake up caring about your product or your service, much less your story. They wake up thinking about their problem. Their pain, their frustration, their "I wish this was different" moment.

Yet most businesses market exactly backwards. They fill their websites talking about themselves. They open podcast interviews with their biography. They tell the founder's story because someone told them, "That's marketing."

I firmly reject that premise.

Stories matter, yes. But they matter later. People become interested in your story only after they believe you understand theirs.

This book is about flipping the order. Start with their problem. Then bring a clear, specific point of view. And only then use your story as evidence, not as a performance.

That's when marketing stops being a megaphone. A megaphone just makes noise. More content, more posts, more shouting into the void. A magnet works differently. It magically attracts the right people and repels the wrong ones. That repelling isn't failure. It's focus.

You're not trying to be for everyone. You're not chasing more eyeballs, more bad leads, or more buzz (what is that, anyway?). You're trying to be the only obvious choice for the people who value the problem you solve.

Let the influencers optimize for fame and impressions. As a business owner, you are optimizing for profits. That's a very different kind of confidence. It's not built on attention. It's built on clarity.

In the chapters that follow, we'll talk about why the founder story myth is so seductive, how to uncover your point of view, how to tell your story in a way that supports rather than overshadows, and why saying no might be one of the kindest business decisions you make.

For now, just hold that one line.

We're all selling Preparation H. Make sure you're talking about the relief, not the tube.

"If you haven't changed your mind lately, how do you know you still have one?"

BIX BICKSON

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUNDER STORY MYTH

If you've spent any time around entrepreneurs, you've probably heard the advice.

"Just tell your story."

People say it on stages. Marketing agencies repeat it. Branding consultants build entire businesses around it. Social media influencers insist that authenticity means talking about yourself.

It sounds like good advice. It just isn't. At least not if your goal is to grow a business.

WHY THE MYTH SURVIVES

I think this advice survives because it appeals to our ego. Nobody knows your story better than you do. It's comfortable to tell. It feels authentic because it happened to you. Better yet, every time you tell it, you get to relive your victories, your struggles, and the obstacles you've overcome.

The problem is that your audience isn't thinking about your life. They're thinking about theirs.

Every person you meet is carrying around a list of problems they wish would disappear. They're thinking about growing their business, finding more customers, reducing stress, making payroll, losing weight, sleeping better, finding more time, or simply getting through the week. Their

attention naturally goes toward anything that promises relief. Everything else becomes background noise.

That's not selfishness. That's human nature.

THE BOOK TEST

Think about your own life. When was the last time you bought a book because you couldn't wait to hear someone else's life story? Probably not very often. You bought it because you hoped it would solve a problem, answer a question, or help you become someone different.

Even biographies work this way. People don't read about Winston Churchill because they're curious about every detail of his childhood. They read because they want insight into leadership, courage, decision making, or history. The story is simply the vehicle. The insight is what they came for.

Storytelling is incredibly powerful. Founder storytelling is too often self-indulgent.

That's why I believe we've confused storytelling with founder storytelling. There is a huge difference.

THE ORDER THAT WORKS

The best speakers in the world understand this. Yes, you eventually learn pieces of their personal story. But that's not how they begin. They begin by talking about a problem the audience recognizes immediately. Only after the audience says, "Yes, that's exactly what I'm struggling with," does the speaker earn the right to explain how they arrived at their point of view.

Notice the order.

- Problem first.
- Point of view second.
- Story third.

Too many entrepreneurs reverse it.

- Story first.
- Hope someone cares.
- Then wonder why nobody remembers.

The irony is that when you stop trying to make people interested in your story, that's often when they become most interested. Not because you've become more fascinating. Because you've become more useful.

*"Your customers don't care about you, your products,
or your services. They care about themselves."*

JOE PULIZZI, EPIC CONTENT MARKETING

CHAPTER TWO

START WITH THE PROBLEM

If your story isn't where you start, what do you start with?

The problem. Always the problem.

Every buying decision begins with someone trying to improve their future. Nobody buys a drill because they love drills. They buy it because they need a hole. Nobody buys Preparation H because they admire the ingredients. They buy relief.

Your clients are no different. They aren't looking for another marketing agency. Another consultant. Another coach. Another podcast interview. Those are simply vehicles. What they're really buying is the destination.

THE QUESTION THAT CHANGED OUR BUSINESS

Years ago, our team changed the first question we asked prospective clients. Instead of asking about their company, their founder story, or what podcasts they wanted to be on, we asked a much simpler question.

"What problem are you trying to solve?"

That single question changed everything.

- Some people wanted more leads.
- Some wanted to become the recognized authority in their industry.
- Others wanted to shorten the sales cycle.

- Some wanted to recruit better employees.
- Others wanted to increase the value of their company before an exit.

None of them actually wanted podcast interviews. Podcast interviews were simply one possible path to the outcome they wanted.

That realization changed our business. It also changed who we chose to work with. If someone couldn't clearly explain what success looked like six months from now, they probably weren't ready for podcast interview marketing. Not because they weren't smart. Because they didn't yet have a strategy. They wanted activity. Not direction.

STRATEGY BEFORE ACTIVITY

Simon Sinek famously encouraged leaders to start with why. I agree. Without a clear why, you're just working hard, expending valuable resources with no goal. I view it as the person in the rowboat with one oar. The harder they row, the faster they go around in circles.

Marketing without strategy is just expensive activity.

The same is true for content. The same is true for podcast interviews. The same is true for storytelling.

Before you say anything publicly, ask yourself a better question. What problem am I helping someone solve?

When you become crystal clear on that answer, something remarkable happens. Your marketing stops sounding like everyone else's. Your conversations become easier. Prospects begin explaining their goals

before you explain your services. They start seeing themselves in your message.

That's because you're no longer talking about yourself. You're talking about them. That's where trust begins. And trust is what every sale is built on.

"Customers don't buy products or services; they hire them to do jobs."

CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN, HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

CHAPTER THREE

YOUR POINT OF VIEW IS YOUR PRODUCT

Once you're clear on the problem you solve, the next question is obvious.

Why should anyone listen to you?

The answer isn't because you've been in business longer. It isn't because you've served more clients. It isn't because you've accumulated more certifications.

It's because you see the problem differently.

That's what a point of view is. It isn't an opinion for the sake of being controversial. It isn't picking a fight. It's having the courage to articulate something you believe to be true, even when it runs against conventional wisdom.

TWO SENTENCES THAT FORCE CLARITY

One of the simplest frameworks I've found comes from category design. Complete these two sentences.

I REJECT...
I BELIEVE...

That's it. Those two statements force clarity. They force you to decide what game you're playing.

For this book, mine would be simple. I reject the idea that founders should lead with their story. I believe buyers care far more about solving their own problem. Everything else in this book flows from those two beliefs.

Without a point of view, you're just another option. A voice drowning in the seas of sameness. With a strong and clear point of view, you become the only option. Memorable, thought provoking, and referable.

GOD HATES A COWARD

Too many businesses try to be agreeable and cast the widest net. They don't want to deter anyone. So they say nothing that anyone remembers.

Rick Bennett wrote legendary copy for companies like Oracle. On the Podcast Interview Marketing Show, he said something that has haunted me ever since.

"God hates a coward. The market ignores them."

RICK BENNETT

He's not encouraging people to be offensive. He's encouraging them to be clear. There is a difference.

Notice I didn't say you should tell people they're wrong. In fact, I try to avoid the phrase "you should." Nobody likes being told what to do. Not kids, teenagers, clients, or founders. Instead, say what you believe. Explain

what you've observed. Share what you've experienced. Invite people to think differently.

That's leadership.

CLARITY IS CONFIDENCE

There's another reason this matters. When you're clear about what you believe, you become a magnet. The right people move toward you because they recognize themselves in your thinking. The wrong people move away because your perspective doesn't fit what they're looking for. Both outcomes are good.

Generalists see that as losing opportunities. Specialists understand it's creating focus and differentiation.

The irony is that the clearer your point of view becomes, the larger your business often grows. Not because everyone agrees with you. Because the right people know exactly why they should choose you.

Clarity is not confrontation. Clarity is confidence. And confidence attracts.

"Most of the world wants you to be happy. Those who really care about you want you to be better."

GARY DUNCAN, LCDR USN, MY BOSS ON USS LINCOLN (CVN
72)

CHAPTER FOUR

YOUR STORY IS PROOF, NOT THE PRODUCT

By now you may think I'm against telling your story.

I'm not. I'm against leading with it. There's a huge difference.

Stories are powerful. Stories help us remember. Stories build trust. Stories create emotion. Stories connect us. But only after they have a purpose.

Your story is not your product. Your story is proof that your point of view was earned and is owned by you.

THE COURTROOM

Think about a courtroom. The attorney doesn't begin by presenting evidence. First, they explain the case. They establish what happened. They describe why it matters. Only then do they introduce evidence that supports their argument.

Your story plays the same role. It isn't the argument. It's the evidence.

When I tell the Preparation H story, I'm not telling it because I think it's entertaining. I'm telling it because it explains why I believe people don't buy products. They buy relief. Without that insight, it's simply an amusing story about a customer saying something unexpected.

The value isn't the story. The value is the insight.

REFLECTION TURNS EXPERIENCE INTO WISDOM

That insight didn't appear the moment I hung up the phone. It came later, after I reflected on the conversation. That's an important distinction.

We don't learn from our experiences. We learn from reflecting on our experiences.

If experience alone taught me lessons, I would have had only one hangover in my life.

Experience gives us raw material. Reflection turns that raw material into wisdom. Wisdom creates insight. Insight creates a point of view. Only then does your story become valuable to someone else.

This is why two people can live through the exact same experience and come away with completely different lessons. One simply remembers what happened. The other discovers what it means. That's the person people listen to. Not because they've had extraordinary experiences. Because they've extracted extraordinary insights from ordinary experiences.

Everyone has experiences. Few people extract insights from them.

THREE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU TELL IT

The next time you're tempted to tell your story, stop for a moment. Ask yourself three questions.

1. What problem does this story relate to?
2. What insight did I gain from it?

3. How does it support my point of view?

If you can't answer those questions, you're probably telling the story for yourself, not for your audience.

The goal is never to make people admire your journey. The goal is to help them navigate theirs. That's the difference between telling stories and creating impact.

"The unexamined life is not worth living."

S O C R A T E S

CHAPTER FIVE

BECOME A MAGNET, NOT A MEGAPHONE

Most marketing advice can be summarized in two words: be louder.

- Post more.
- Create more content.
- Show up on more platforms.
- Run more ads.
- Get more followers.
- Grow your audience.
- Buy a bigger megaphone.

I reject that idea. A megaphone isn't what most businesses need. They need a magnet.

A megaphone broadcasts to everyone. A magnet attracts the right people and repels the wrong ones.

THE FEAR OF REPELLING

Most business owners are terrified of repelling anyone. They think every prospect is an opportunity. Every inquiry is revenue. Every "no" is a loss.

I see it differently.

- Every wrong client steals time from the right client.
- Every wrong opportunity delays the right opportunity.

- Every wrong message attracts more of the wrong people.

The goal isn't to get everyone's attention. The goal is to earn the attention of the people you can help the most. That shift changes everything.

THE CATEGORY WE ALMOST DIDN'T OWN

Years ago, Christopher Lochhead challenged me with a simple question. He said, "It sounds like you've created a new category."

I pushed back. I told him we did a little marketing, a little public relations, a little podcasting.

His response caught me off guard. "Why won't you own your new category?"

My answer was honest. Because I felt it was easier to compete for a tiny piece of the huge existing marketing market than it was to educate people and create a new category.

He smiled and challenged me to grow a pair and own it before someone else did.

He was right.

The moment we stopped describing ourselves as another marketing agency or podcast bookers and started evangelizing Podcast Interview Marketing, everything became clearer. Not everyone understood it. That was the point. The people who needed it understood it immediately. The people who didn't were never our clients anyway.

That is how magnets work. They don't attract everyone. They attract the right people.

NOBODY REPEATS GENERIC

The irony is that clarity often feels risky. General language feels safe.

- "We help businesses grow."
- "We help entrepreneurs succeed."
- "We offer customized solutions."

Those statements are impossible to disagree with. They're also impossible to remember.

Nobody repeats generic. People repeat clarity.

People prefer certainty. People remember a point of view.

The businesses with the strongest brands aren't trying to be liked by everyone. They're trying to be indispensable to the right people. That requires the courage to leave people behind. Not because they're bad people. Because they're not your people.

This is one of the hardest lessons in business. Especially early on. When cash is tight, every opportunity looks like a good opportunity. Eventually you learn something different.

Focus creates value. Clarity creates demand. Differentiation creates referrals.

You don't become the obvious choice by speaking to everyone. You become the obvious choice by speaking clearly to the people whose problems you're uniquely equipped to solve. That isn't limiting your business. It's defining it. And defined businesses grow faster than undefined ones because people know exactly when to recommend them.

Become the magnet. Let everyone else fight over the megaphone.

Experience gives us raw material.

Reflection turns raw material into wisdom.

Wisdom creates insight.

Insight creates a point of view.

Point of view creates differentiation.

Differentiation attracts the right people.

CHAPTER SIX

HECK YES OR NO

One of the core values at our company, Interview Valet, is simple.

Heck yes or no. (Shout out to Derek Sivers.)

There is no middle ground.

At first glance, it sounds like a decision-making framework. It's actually a focus framework.

Every business has limited resources.

- Limited time.
- Limited attention.
- Limited money.
- Limited energy.

Every "yes" comes at the expense of another opportunity. The question isn't whether you'll make sacrifices. The question is whether you'll make them intentionally.

THE WIDER NET

Early in my career, I wanted to help everyone. Like most entrepreneurs, I believed a wider net meant a bigger business.

Wrong.

A wider net may catch more fish. It also caught more boots, tires, and trash. The more general we became, the harder it was for people to

understand what we actually did.

THREE FILTERS

Eventually we developed three simple filters. Every prospective client has to pass all three.

1. Do we know the audience they want to reach?
2. Have we helped similar clients achieve the results they're looking for?
3. Would we be proud to amplify their message?

If the answer to any one of those questions is no, the answer is NO.

Not because they're bad people. Not because their business isn't important. Because we aren't the right partner.

That clarity has become one of our greatest competitive advantages. Ironically, people often trust us more after we tell them no.

Why? Because they know we're thinking about their success, not our revenue.

Sometimes we'll refer them to someone else. Sometimes we'll tell them what needs to change before we're the right fit. Sometimes we'll simply wish them well. But we won't take their money if we don't believe we can deliver the outcome they're looking for.

That isn't just good marketing. It's good stewardship.

MISSIONARIES AND MERCENARIES

Eddie Yoon taught me the difference between missionaries and mercenaries.

- Missionaries are obsessed with solving a problem.
- Mercenaries are obsessed with finding the next opportunity.

One builds trust. The other chases transactions.

The more I've reflected on that distinction, the more convinced I've become that customers can tell the difference. They may not have the words for it. But they can feel it.

When you're passionate about solving a problem, your message has conviction. When you're simply selling a service, your message sounds like everyone else's.

Every "no" protects your ability to deliver an even bigger "yes."

You don't become the obvious choice by accepting everyone. You become the obvious choice by being relentlessly clear about who you serve, what problem you solve, and why you are uniquely equipped to solve it.

That means saying no. Because every "no" protects your ability to deliver an even bigger "yes" to the people you're here to help.

That's what focus looks like. That's what trust looks like. And ultimately, that's what becoming the obvious choice looks like.

"Hell yes, or no."

DEREK SIVERS

CONCLUSION

RELIEF IS THE PRODUCT

When I first heard a customer tell me, "You guys are just like Preparation H," I honestly didn't know whether to laugh or be offended.

Today, I think it may have been one of the greatest business lessons I've ever received.

He wasn't complimenting our company. He wasn't complimenting our process. He wasn't complimenting our service. He was complimenting the relief we created.

That changed how I think about business. It changed how I think about marketing. It changed how I think about communication. And it completely changed how I think about storytelling.

People don't buy products. People don't buy services. People don't buy stories.

They buy a better future. They buy confidence. They buy certainty. They buy hope. They buy relief.

Everything else is simply the vehicle.

Throughout this book, I've challenged a lot of conventional wisdom.

- I reject the idea that your founder story is your greatest marketing asset.
- I reject the idea that getting more attention is the goal.

- I reject the idea that saying yes to everyone is good for business.

Instead, I believe something much simpler.

- Start with the problem.
- Reflect on your experience solving it.
- Extract an insight.
- Develop a point of view.
- Use your story as proof.
- Become the obvious choice.

That is how trust is earned. That is how referrals happen. That is how businesses grow. Not because they shouted the loudest. Because they understood the deepest.

When someone finishes a conversation with you, they shouldn't be thinking about how interesting you are. They should be thinking about how well you understood them.

That's what people remember. That's what they tell their friends. That's what gets repeated. Not your biography. Not your credentials. Not your elevator speech.

Your insight. That's what makes you memorable.

As you leave this book, I have one challenge for you. Look at your website. Look at your LinkedIn profile. Listen to your next sales call. Pay attention to your next podcast interview or keynote.

How much of it is about you? And how much of it is about the problem you solve?

If you're like most of us, you'll discover you've been selling the tube.

Start selling the relief.

The world doesn't need another founder telling a story. It needs more leaders who have reflected deeply enough to offer an insight that helps other people solve meaningful problems.

Become one of those leaders.

Because in the end, we're all selling Preparation H.

The obvious choice isn't the company with the best story. It's the one that delivers relief to the pain in their client's rear.

Stay strong. Sell the relief.

Tom Schwab

YOUR NEXT STEP

SELL THE RELIEF

If this flipped the order for you, do not let it end as a nice idea you read once. Here is the on-ramp.

MORE MINI-BOOKS & INTERVIEWS

Each month, I share my latest thinking, and you can hear me discuss these ideas across a range of interviews. New every month.

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LISTEN TO THE PODCAST

Each week, I host an amazing guest on the Podcast Interview Marketing Show, thought leaders who challenge how I see the world.

PodcastInterviewMarketing.com



SCAN TO LISTEN

BOOK A DISCOVERY CALL

Ready to stop selling the tube and start selling the relief? Let's talk, human to human.

interviewvalet.com/dccal



SCAN TO BOOK

A B O U T

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Schwab has been called the Godfather of Podcast Interview Marketing. As the founder and Chief Evangelist Officer of Interview Valet, the first and longest-running podcast interview marketing agency, he has helped hundreds of entrepreneurs, authors, and thought leaders build trust and grow their businesses through real conversations on the right shows.

Before building Interview Valet, Tom ran nuclear power plants on U.S. Navy aircraft carriers. That experience, where precision, preparation, and clear communication were not optional, shaped everything he built afterward.

Tom is the author of *Podcast Guest Profits* and a sought-after speaker on category design, trust-based selling, and modern go-to-market strategy. He is a member of Entrepreneurs' Organization and coaches early-stage entrepreneurs through EO Accelerator.

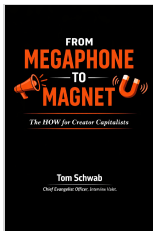
In September 2024, Tom and his wife Karen walked the Camino de Santiago. He describes it as one of the most clarifying experiences of his life. Five hundred miles that proved the lesson of this book: nobody cares about your story until they believe you understand theirs.

He lives in Lawton, Michigan.

THE SERIES

Keep the Conversation Going

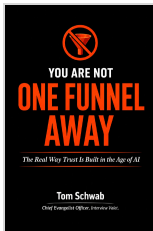
Each month, a new mini-book on how trust is built, earned, and compounded in the age of AI.



BOOK ONE

From Megaphone to Magnet

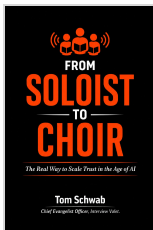
The HOW for Creator Capitalists. Why broadcasting to everyone gets you ignored, and how to become a magnet that attracts the right people through strategic podcast interviews.



BOOK TWO

You Are Not One Funnel Away

The Real Way Trust Is Built in the Age of AI. The funnel was a phase, not the future. Why the best things in business have always come through conversation, not automation.



BOOK THREE

From Soloist to Choir

The Real Way to Scale Trust in the Age of AI. Why one voice caps your growth, and how to build a choir of trusted voices that carries the brand beyond the founder.

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Read every mini-book in the series, free, and see what's new this month.

interviewvalet.com/minibooks



SCAN FOR ALL