

## Tape 15 – Gary North

Gary North: Now the job, the direct mail, the techniques, the profits, the money, all the stuff that's going to roll in if you're successful, that's to help you with your calling because probably your calling won't make you a dime, probably, unless you're able to do this full-time. Halbert has an advantage over me and over a lot of the people in this room. His calling is his job and that's a great thing, and he's very good at his job. That's a great advantage.

When I started, I started a newsletter. I didn't know how to do direct mail, but I knew the newsletter was not my calling, it was my job and I got the job about one year after I started my calling, and my calling was, as I've said, writing my Bible commentary, economic Bible commentary. I knew it'd take the rest of my life. That's my calling. One year later, I began, almost as a fluke, the newsletter business, less than a year later. No, no exactly one year later to the month, one year later. I started because I had been writing for another newsletter so I'd created name identification. This is very important if you're going to try to sell yourself is to be in some other magazine creating name identification or have some other way that people have learned your name. If you're going to be in this business, even if it's free, even if you have to write free of charge, which I have been willing to do on many occasions, to position your name and your skills, do it free if that's what you have to do for a time.

What I did, I was in a particular newsletter every month and then after about 11 months, I mailed an ad for my newsletter and I got 600 responses of inquires, and of those I converted enough of the inquires to make it in the black, and I have been in the black pretty much ever since. The next thing I did and it can still be used, although it's evolved along the ways. I had a telephone number and I gave weekly updates once a week. I'd give a three-minute analysis of gold and silver and Federal Reserve policy. This was in the mid-'70s so it wasn't so widely done back then. I was in Los Angeles. I could run an ad in the *LA Times*, one column inch ad. This is a very good way to do it. One column inch ad that said, in this case, "Gold Hotline, 24 Hours a Day, 3-minute Message," and the number, and for most of LA, it was a toll-free call. 213 covered a lot of area, wide range in those days.

Now, I would have two minutes and 45 seconds of real information, 15 seconds of sales pitch to send in some money for *The Remnant Review*. That's my newsletter, and I always got enough response on *The Remnant Review* on the ad to pay last week's or that week's ad in the *LA Times*. In fact, I got more. I had an ROI. I didn't even know what an ROI was, return on investment. Never heard of ROI, but I knew that I got two bucks back for every buck I spent. I did it for about a year and with that technique, I built the newsletter up to about 500 full-paying subscribers. That was my first big break, but I still didn't know anything about copywriting and this would've been about 1976. I was completely ignorant of what to do, which was pathetic, and the great advantage you have, you're not in this situation.

I didn't know how to write an ad, and frankly I didn't learn over the next year, and I began to fade. Newsletter began to shrink. Very depressing. I was writing some articles on price control and I thought maybe I could write a little book on price controls, kind of piece together my newsletter articles, so I did. I called it *How You Can Profit from the Coming Price Controls*, which was kind of a takeoff on the old Harry Brown book. Then I said I got to write a book for this. Well, how do I write an ad?

Well, fortunately, down through the system came a copy of a JS&A Joel Sugarman catalog, and I said this, "I ain't buying, I'm stealing." I took one of his one page ads with the three columns and broke it up with the old boldfaced headlines, kind of keep your reading in the little coupon, and I just said, "I'm going to write an ad like that." I had heard years ago about a successful mail order ad in the 1920s. How I heard about this I don't know, but I did hear about an ad about – maybe I'd seen it. It was a little

ad that had run that said, “You are making five grammatical errors that you shouldn't be making. Write for information.” So I said in my ad, “There are six deadly assumptions that could wipe you out and you're already making four of them,” and then I explained it in the text. With that ad, which my wife did not think would work and very fortunately, she did not tell me she did not think it would work, I began running full-page display ads, and all I had learned – Mark Scalzon, who was getting in the business the same time I was. Mark loaned me a book by Carbo, Joe Carbo, and I didn't trust Joe Carbo because I had followed Joe Carbo's career for 20 years and he was known in Los Angeles as one of the all-time shysters on television, but the book was good. The book was good, and it had one of the greatest headlines in the history of our business, *The Lazy Man's Way to Riches*. What a magnificent headline that was.

Mark loaned me the book and in that book was a tip that if you set up your own advertising agency, you can save 15%, and I did. That book more than paid for itself, especially since I didn't buy it. I was borrowing Mark's. I started. Over the next year, I sold – I don't remember how many I sold, somewhere between 25 and 40,000 copies of the book at \$10 a piece, and then I would mail out the ad for the newsletter and get a certain percentage, maybe 10 or 15%, who would go on full ticket for the newsletter and so I began building it back up. I had really no idea what I was doing. I was just copying Joe Sugarman's ads and it worked, and it worked for the next I guess about two years after that.

Then in the late '70s, we had the Carter government working for me almost full time. Day and night, they were doing some disastrous experiment with the economy that was (unclear) through the roof and I was uniquely positioned. I wrote one ad. Had no idea what I was doing. Went into the mail with the ad and in approximately 60 days had pulled \$500,000 into our mailbox. One day, the mail didn't come. They'd had a new mail carrier who had delivered my letters to another address. Approximately 140 envelopes containing \$60 per envelope. That's a very discouraging thing, and we had an honest person who got this pile of stuff into his mailbox who came running back up and delivered the mail to us, so we did get it. Accidents can happen.

That was my big hit. I've never had another success like that because my life is not copywriting. Now the great master copywriter, the guy who stuck to it the longest, you've already heard from. That's Ted Nicholas. He had one product and he wrote 100 ads, variations of that product every conceivable way to keep that product going. Tremendous success story. Wasn't market affected. The market changed, the ad changed, the product stayed the same. That's copywriting. That's where you know what's selling the book. The copy is selling the book. It's not the market, it's not luck, it's one guy with one product for 15 years who adjusts to the market without changing the product. You're not product-driven. You're market-driven. That's a great secret if you can do that. It's a great thing if you can do it and I would say that's a goal. If any of you want to become successful copywriters, that model, to me, is the best model in the industry. Dedication, total dedication, to keep one product selling, no matter what happened to that market. Now that's being product-driven but he had a very good product and so you don't dump it. It's a great product, still a great product. It's legitimate to be product-driven if you've got a really great product, and then come market change or any other change, you adjust your ad to keep the product moving.

What did I learn? All right, now I'm going to tell you what I learned. It, too, is very simple. I'm going to introduce it in a rather complex and academic way. I shall now put on my PhD gown and go into kind of what may appear to be high-falutin talk but it isn't because it's so important I want you to understand it but I've got to tell you the background. In 1961, I read an article. That article appeared in *National Review*, been written by a woman I think by then dead. She wrote it in 1947. Dorothy Sayers, who is a very successful writer of mystery novels, British lady, was a classicist, very fine scholar of both

classics and history. She wrote a little article called “The Lost Tools of Learning.” That article was one of the most brilliant ads in the history of education because 30 years later, I can quote you the whole structure of what she argued, how she argued it, what her points were. That's a brilliant ad, and she said we needed to change the way we educate our children and she had a thesis. I want to give you the thesis. It may sound nutty. Bear with me because you're going to learn what I learned and what has really helped me in my advertising.

She said in the medieval world, the core curriculum for the training of literate men for the service of both church and state was called the trivium. If I wrote down, if I had you write down what is the medieval trivium, probably most of you wouldn't know what that was. I'll tell you what it is. Very simple. Grammar, logic, rhetoric. Those are the three fundamental skills that were imparted to every educated person in the middle ages, and of course, there were very few. It was a tiny, tiny percentage of the population, way under 1%. Grammar, logic, rhetoric.

Now here is Sayer's thesis and this caught me. She said the reason it worked is that the human mind matures in that exact order as it develops educationally. The child learns grammar. The child learns an extraordinary skill of being able to speak and communicate with vocabulary and a grammatical structure, and he learns it really early. You work with the child with his grammar and his linguistic skills until he's about, she believed, 11 years old, maybe 10, maybe 12, depending on the child. Then about age 11, the child has what might be called a gestalt, a breakthrough, and he begins to see the world around him and begins to ask the question how does it work? Cause and effect. In other words, what's the structure of the world around me? How does this world work? That's logic, and she said at that point, you've got to begin to work with the child's ability to make logical deductions, to see cause and effect, to see that there's a structure to the universe and a structure to his own rationality.

Then she said about the time the kid hits maybe 13 or 14, the kid basically has another jump and begins to say, “Hey, I know how this works. I see how things operate, and now I'm going to tell you how it operates.” At that point, the child moves to rhetoric -- persuasion communication. She said the breakdown of modern education came because we began teaching Latin and Greek when they were 13 instead of teaching it to them when they're 3, 4, 5 years old because they didn't have the skills. They're great memorizers when they're little, and you begin to lose the ability to memorize. You get to my age, you can't remember where your car keys are. It's no good anymore. You're useless learning a foreign language when you're my age. Really, you're almost useless by the time you're 15 or 16 unless you just have the gift for language, and certainly not many Americans have it.

So she said our education system – we never teach them rhetoric. By the '40s, rhetoric was gone. It's completely gone today, but we don't teach them logic and if you looked at their SAT scores, we barely teach them grammar today. They're getting out of school without grammar, logic, or rhetoric. All right that sounds very sophisticated. What's that got to do with writing copy?

After 10 years of writing copy, 20 years, at least, maybe longer – no, probably 25 years after I read that article, 10 years after I seriously began writing copy, I realized the structure of an ad, and when I realized that, my ads started being coherent. You got three things in an ad; grammar, logic, rhetoric. Take any one of them out of that ad, it's not going to be a good ad. Grammar – what is the grammar of the ad? The 17 or fewer words in that headline. That's the grammar of the ad. That's the structure of the ad. That is the heart, mind, and soul of the ad. That is what deserves 80% of your work, although we'd never believe that. That's the heart of it. Without grammar, you don't communicate. You don't get the idea across to the guy if the grammar's no good. The promise, the offer, I mean, the promise that's conveyed in that headline, what it is that you're offering that individual has got to be rigorously crafted

perfect, not a word extra, not one word too few. You've got to have it exactly right, and you got to work with the testing. If you're going to test anywhere in the ad, test the headline because the grammar of the ad, if you don't have that right, it's like a child who cannot speak. That is to say it's like MTV.

Now the logic of the ad is the offer, the proof of the offer. Now we've already had a very fine presentation. The public doesn't believe anymore, as well it shouldn't. The logic of the ad proves that the final step that you're going to have them make, which is call this toll-free 800-number and have your VISA or MasterCard ready, that between the headline of the ad and the final conclusion, there is consistency. There is a structure that is proven from the beginning to the end. If you make a formal step, you can cover it. You can cover it, but it's much better if the thing is logical, if it makes sense. If it doesn't make sense, you better be very, very good on the rhetoric, which I'll get to in a moment.

It is my belief that the heart of our industry's failure, the advertising industry as a whole, is that it has forsaken the logic of the whole offer. People are asked to spend their money without understanding why. Then you get to rhetoric. What is rhetoric? The art of persuasion, the mastery to persuade that individual to pick up that telephone and dial that number I believe it's done more than anything else by imagery I think the heart of rhetoric is imagery, to draw the picture, not just list the features, but the benefits and to paint a verbal picture of the benefits which persuade him that yes, this is not only logical but this is a great thing. I can visualize it. I can see it, and then you've got to move him to the close.

Now our problem, I believe with modern advertising, especially with television advertising, is that, friends, it is all rhetoric. It is no substance. Ten-second ads, 15-second ads because of the clickers, they got 10 seconds to sell it and they can't have any scene in it longer than three seconds. Flip, flip, flip, flip. I mean, there's nothing logical to it. Oldsmobile, "This is not your father's car." Of course it's not my father's car. My father drove a terrible Studebaker, for one thing, that's been out of business for years. What does it mean, it's not my father's car? It's ridiculous, and the trouble is we've had a few great successes. The clever ads of Volkswagen in the early '60s, gas pains. That was clever. That was clever, and they did get good mileage and it was a good product, but clever doesn't sell very often, and you can tattoo that on your six-day tattoo. Clever doesn't sell very often, so avoid being clever.

What you got to have, you got to have that motivation. You've got to have – I hate to use the word visualization because it's used in a different sense. You've got to be careful. I'm not telling it. It ain't mind over matter. It isn't. What I'm saying is what you've got to do, the secret of my ads today, the test on my ads as I go back over them, is there total consistency between the grammar of the ad, the headline, the logic of the offer, and this is the word, the legitimacy of my rhetoric. Don't hype them. Don't song and dance them. Don't paint visual images that you can't deliver. That's what I would tell you. That's where ethics comes into play. It's ethics. It is ethics. Circle it, underline it, get it into your heart, and then move it from your heart to your head. Ethics. There's got to be consistency from the grammar, the logic, and the rhetoric of the ad, and if you are deficient in any of them, it's a weak ad.

Now I do believe Ted is right. The heart of the ad is the grammar. You've got to have the offer clear. You don't have that long to catch them. Direct mail, the usual estimate is you have eight seconds after they've opened the envelope. You've got to have a very powerful grammatical presentation. The heart of the ad has got to be up front quickly, and then you have X number of pages to persuade them, and it's a mixture of logic and rhetoric.

Let me give you an example of rhetoric. I think most people in the room remember the story of God's granting of the Ten Commandments in the Bible. Moses goes up on the hill. He's gone 40 days. God

writes the law on the tablets. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, we got some problems, little golden cap action. So he comes back down He hears the crowd and he thinks it's the roar of battle and then God says, "It is not the roar of battle They got up to play." That's also an interesting way of putting almost exactly the opposite of what they were doing. It wasn't the getting up that was the problem of the people at that point. There was open rebellion. How many of you now, you know the story, know what did – don't answer it. I want a hand up. What did Moses do? Who knows? Hand up if you remember the story. What did Moses do? Okay, a few of you know He smashed the tablets. Pure rhetoric. No grammar, no logic. Did anyone who saw him not get the message? It's clear. You've broken the law. Smash, but see the other half of it was but before I went up, you promised to keep it and you made an oath, and if you didn't keep the oath, there was going to be judgment The smashing has only begun. He never said a word. No grammar, no logic, pure rhetoric, incredibly powerful scene.

There is a time and a place for rhetoric. I'm not opposed to it, but the power of Moses's act was it was consistent with everything that had gone on. It was the culmination of the rebellion and the announcement of judgment That's what your ad should be if you sell fear. You can sell greed, you can sell fear. That's the fear side, and it's perfectly legitimate to paint the picture of – well, I mean, we've already had an example of it today with Carlton. I mean, it's going to get terrible. It's going to be an absolute collapse. It's going to be a horrifying disaster, and I know what that means. That means increased renewal rates. That's what that means, at least for most of us in the hard money newsletter business. Things have been good for ten years and it's been disastrous The point is the rhetoric, ethically, must be consistent. If you don't think it's true, don't put it in. If you don't think the visualization is true, don't put it in the ad, not for money. Don't sell your soul by the installment plan. Don't cut corners a little bit as you get better at this skill.

Now, what I would do as an exercise, I'm not going to tell anybody to do it. I'll give you a suggestion. I want you to think of the best ads, and I want you to watch the ads as you get them across your desk, get your filing cabinets, save your ads. Start making analysis of the ads in terms of grammar, logic, rhetoric. Watch the headline, the promise. See if it's proven. See the visual imagery See what gets mailed ten, twelve times. See those ads that keep coming back.

I'll tell you my two favorite headlines. One, I've already said. Carbo's *Lazy Man's Way to Riches*. The other one was Mark Heraldson's, and it was a double. It's the only absolute double that I've ever seen in our industry. First one said, "How to wake up the financial genius inside you." Brilliant I mean, you can see this guy. He has gotten his fourth six-pack for the day. He is picked this thing up and he's going, "Wake up! Wake up! I mean, I know you're in there! I know you're in there! I've known you've been in there all my life. Get up! Get moving!" As if the financial genius had not been there for all the years, that this guy's going to read the one ad and the one book and genius is going to leap forth, and for a tiny handful of people it probably did. It's true ad for probably under 1% of users.

The other one was, the second one, though, was almost as good. "The millionaires don't work 100 times harder than you do. They just work smarter," and with that double action, he's sold I don't know how many books on real estate, of all things. Now I don't see Mark's ads anymore. Haven't seen them in a long time. Haven't seen his newsletter. Occasionally I pick up a copy of his book in a used book sale for two bits or so. You don't hear much about it because I don't think it was consistent with the total offer. The product didn't match the offer. It was a brilliant, brilliant ad. Collect them. Write them down. Read them. Think about them. Dream them. Sweat them out.

Now here's my challenge to you. Here's my challenge. I'm going to leave you with this. Let's see if we believe all this. I'm going to give you a challenge. I'm really serious about this one, and I was taught

this technique by the man I regard as my mentor, the man I regard is the guy if I learned anything from anybody first. He's not here and you'll never see him at one of the conferences because he doesn't go to the conferences. I'm not going to mention his name because he doesn't go to the conferences and you can't get a hold of him. You can't buy his services and he's kind of a curmudgeon but he's a very bright guy. He taught me in the early stages what little I know before I found out about guys like Gary and some others. Here's what he said. He went to his wife. His wife's a very talented artist, extremely talented. He said, "Dear, you really ought to be making more money with your art. You really ought to be either selling directly or you ought to be in the galleries or something. I want you to write an ad for your art." She said, "I can't do that." He said all right, and they got this little boy. He said, "We've had the boy. Assume I've died. I'm dead. I'm gone. You have got to make your income by selling your skills. I want you to go write that letter," and she wrote a letter. He said it was okay, a little wishy-washy. "I'm kind of okay and I've had a little bit of experience and you'd probably like the picture but maybe you wouldn't." Classic dynamic ad. ROI of about .12 kind of ad. She couldn't do it. She absolutely couldn't do it.

Okay, here's my challenge. I call it the quadriplegic challenge. Your neck is broken. You are lying in the hospital. You now want to support yourself by the sale of your advertising copy. You want to put it into action. Here's what I want you to do, not necessarily before this conference is over, but I want you to do this on the day you get back because if you go over about 36 hours, you won't do much of anything. Here's your homework assignment. I want you to write what you regard as a display ad or if you're really a junk mail freak, do a junk mail ad, in which you are going to sell your skills through direct mail as a direct mail copywriter, advertiser, editor, whatever it is you learned from this seminar. Can you sell yourself? Can you create an ad for your skills that somebody would believe and send you money as you're sitting there, lying there flat, for the rest of your days in that hospital bed? Can you do that?

If you can't do that, then you need some more seminars. You need to reread all the old newsletters. You better buy the video tapes to review them, and you better practice and practice and practice because if you can't sell yourself and your skills, that means you don't believe you've got them, and if you don't believe you've got them, you can't be in this business as a success. You've got to believe in your ability to do this. If you can't sell yourself, what can you sell? Now, it's a tough job. It's not easy, but it's a wonderful challenge, and I'll tell you why. You're going to find out where you have self-doubts about your capacities. Then after you have written this thing, give the copy to your spouse to see if any of it is believable.

One more technique: Before you send out a piece of copy, before it gets its first test, here's what you do. Have somebody read it to you. Just read it. That's what I call the stick it in your ear copywriting technique. Do it. If it doesn't sound clear, if it doesn't flow verbally, if the commas aren't in the right places, if it doesn't move, if each sentence doesn't compel you to read the next sentence and to listen to it, rewrite the ad.

I believe these techniques are oral. I know we read them, but you've got to have it so that a blind man would believe your ad. If somebody read the ad to a blind man, he would call the 800-number. If you can't do it, rewrite the ad. It's a simple technique, painful technique, but it will help you a great deal to make certain that that ad flows in a logical and a grammatical logical and rhetorically consistent way. Let me say a phrase that'll come out of your mouth. If this phrase comes out of your mouth, rewrite the ad. By that, I meant. If you even hint of by that, I really meant, rewrite that ad. Rewrite that portion, and it's got to be heard. You've got to hear it. Have somebody else sit, read it to you.

Simple. Haven't given you anything too difficult here. Very simple kind of techniques. The old keep it

simple, stupid Army rule. KISS is correct. Keep it simple, stupid. On Bill Clinton's walls, in the walls of his campaigns, he's got a sign. Have you read what the sign is? The economy, dummy. What are they supposed to talk about when somebody calls out? What are they supposed to mail? What are they supposed to hammer on? The economy, dummy. That's his grammar. I believe that Clinton, if he is elected, is going to be elected to the extent that it's a positive vote for him, to the extent that he is not governor, not Bush. It is going to be the economy, dummy, that does it. That's the grammar of his campaign. He's not deviating from it. His handlers understand grammar. He doesn't need rhetoric. He's lousy at rhetoric. He's really terrible. He's matched against a guy who is perhaps a bit worse. This is a campaign devoid of rhetoric. I mean, there's rhetoric in the sense of lots of stupid – it doesn't follow non sequitur all over the place on both sides. What poorly constructed rhetoric there is, is not consistent with the logic. There's no logic to the campaigns There really isn't except the economy, stupid. You do the same. Go out and do likewise. If you can get the equivalent on your ad of the economy, dummy, you're going to make money if the economy really is the problem. If the economy is the problem, you're going to make money, the equivalent of that grammar.

That's about all I've got to say. Oh, if you really want to – let me – I'll give you my address. I don't have a piece of paper. I don't have any sheets, forms, anything. If you want to buy something, contact me. It's real simple. Box 8000, Tyler, Texas, and I've also got the Jewish brother-in-law. I've also got Box 7999 if 8000 is too much, so either one. I got both. You can mail to either of those PO boxes.

Audience: Zip code?

Gary North: I hate zip codes, but it's a pretty good one; 75711. Pretty good zip code, 75711. Thanks for inviting me. Thanks to everybody for coming.