
CAST OF CHARACTERS

When I came to America in the early 1990s I was, twenty-three, homeless, lived in the back of my van, and slept on top of boxes of mops. The only thing I had to keep me going was my pitch. Learning how to pitch has changed my life, and when I started working on this book, I looked for a way to talk about pitching that made it more than just selling or talking fast, which is how so many people think of it. It didn't take long to hit on what pitching really is.

Pitching is a superpower. Do it right and you'll change minds, open doors, get opportunities, turn adversaries into allies, make more money, and gain the kind of confidence that makes other people want to know you. Pitching is the power to persuade people, get them on your side, and get them to give you what you want, even when the odds are stacked against you. How could that be anything but super?

With that in mind, we've organized this book around the idea of superheroes and superpowers. As you learn the Pitch Powers, the superpowers that all great pitchmen (and pitch-women) have, you'll run across all manner of fun, tongue-in-cheek superhero and comic book clichés, from origin stories to training montages to bumbling sidekicks. Just imagine the book as a colorful graphic novel—except that at the end, you'll be ready to get the job, the date, and the deal of a lifetime—and you'll be fine.

Before we get started, let's highlight a few of the characters you'll meet.

THE PERSUADER!

Pitching's greatest hero, the Persuader, shows up when things look hopeless (for example, when a job interview is about to go tits-up) to demonstrate how to use the Pitch Powers to save the day. He's square jawed, charismatic, and looks damned good in a tux . . . like someone I know.

INCOMPETENT SIDEKICK

Batman has Robin. Captain America has Bucky. Superman has . . . well, Superman doesn't have a sidekick, which makes him smart. Sidekicks exist mainly to get taken hostage and generally muck things up. They'll show up from time to time as reminders of traps you might find in a pitching situation, but that I'll tell you how to avoid.

WHAT WOULD BILLY DO?

Billy Mays (the original OxiClean pitchman) was my partner, my closest friend, and the most insanely great pitching superhero I ever saw. From time to time, Billy will pop up to share some pitching secrets that could help you turn a loss into a win.

INTRODUCTION

From Welsh Street Markets to Selling to Millions as the Face of OxiClean

As we begin, let me clear up a common misconception right off the bat.

Pitching is not about selling.

Pitching can be *used* to sell, but that's not the same thing. Pitching is more. Pitching is about *connecting* with another human being. It's about being authentic about your ability to meet somebody's need or solve his or her problem. It's about filling up the room with positive energy until the other person—a recruiter or judge or credit card service rep or whoever—is *delighted* to give you what you want. Become a master at pitching and you become a boss at three skills that can change your life:

1. Connecting with other people instantly.
2. Taking command of every environment.
3. Getting people to see you as the solution to their problems.

Pitching and the ability to persuade people to give you what you want—even if they started out regarding you with suspicion or even hostility—is *power*. It's figuring out what someone cares about and then caring about it yourself so you can give them what they need. It's engaging a person face to

face and eye to eye so they feel like you're speaking directly to them, even if there are fifty other people in the room. It's turning a crowd of glowering strangers with their arms folded into a legion of fans ready to say yes enthusiastically to whatever you propose, what I call *fierce agreement*. It's the power to get the job, get the girl (or guy), get the part, make and save money, get better service, advance your career—do just about anything you want to do. Unless you live on an island or spend your days playing video games in your parents' basement, happiness and success in life depend on persuading someone else to give you something you want. You're constantly pitching, even if you don't realize it. If you walk into a Jeep dealership, you're pitching the salesman and sales manager, trying to persuade them to give you the best deal on a shiny new Grand Cherokee and the best price on your trade-in.

If you see someone interesting and attractive at a bar or nightclub and want to get their phone number, you're pitching them. You're trying to engage their sense of humor, get past their natural skepticism at being hit on, pique their interest, and build some trust so they'll take a chance on meeting you for coffee.

When you walk into your boss's office for your annual performance review, you're pitching her on how you gave the company amazing work during the past year and convincing her that you should receive a gold-plated review, a fat raise, and maybe that corner office that's been standing empty since last quarter.

If you're a server or bartender, you're pitching customers every time you clock in. You're talking with them, paying attention to small cues and body language, listening to their terrible jokes, finding ways to make them feel taken care of, and

possibly acting as their therapist, confessor, partner in crime, or wingman for the evening. Why? So you can get a big tip, pay your bills, and afford a vacation to Mexico where somebody can wait on *you* for a change.

I'm pitching *you* in this introduction. It's true. I'm trying to connect and get you excited so you'll keep reading, and I'm using all my enthusiasm and boyish charm to do it. (It's a shame you can't hear my English accent, because it's dazzling.) If you've read this far without even realizing it, then it worked. That's the power of the pitch. The better your pitch, the better your outcome. But becoming a pitching superhero doesn't just happen.

OXICLEAN, BILLY MAYS, AND ME

Convincing people to give you what you want is an art form that takes charisma and confidence, but no great pitchman becomes great based just on those qualities. The good ones make themselves great with practice and discipline, mastering a series of skills that have proven themselves from the street markets of coastal England and the home shows of America all the way to the election stump. Those are what I call the Pitch Powers.

Think of the Pitch Powers as your version of Batman's utility belt: an arsenal of precision tools you can use to craft a winning pitch, rescue a situation that's going sideways, or get a conference room full of people cheering for you. They're the essential techniques I've learned in more than twenty-five years "on the joint" (pitchman-speak for the area where you're selling, where you try to attract customers), and they've taken me from selling £10 car washers in rainy Welsh street markets to selling to audiences of millions as the face of OxiClean.

If you know me at all, you probably know me because of OxiClean. After all, I've done countless commercials for the product and I wouldn't be here without OxiClean. That also means I wouldn't be here without Billy Mays, and while Billy is a book all by himself, a little backstory is in order.

The first time I saw OxiClean, it wasn't called OxiClean. I actually don't remember what it was called. It was 1995 and I was working a corner booth at the Miami home show, a twenty-five-year-old kid selling my Super Shammy Mop. Not far from me was this lady at her joint with this giant mound of white laundry powder that looked like a prop from the movie *Scarface*. While I was busy pitching mops, business was slow for her. Around the corner was an older pitchman named Max Appel, sitting with his wife, Elaine, selling rubber brooms. I liked Max. He was a genuine guy who always had interesting ideas and would always come over and say hi.

Max must have noticed this new oxygen-powered stain remover and seen something that I didn't, because before I knew it Max was sitting at the joint with the white powder, and now it was called OxiClean. It wasn't long before Billy Mays was on the Home Shopping Network (HSN) selling OxiClean, and then a few months later Billy and Max had produced the first thirty-minute infomercial for OxiClean—with Billy as the pitchman! I vaguely knew Billy, but he was the right guy for OxiClean; he just nailed that pitch. It was trademark Billy: loud, positive, going a mile a minute with his classic catch-phrases. If there was ever a match made in heaven, it was Billy Mays and OxiClean.

Part of being a pitchman is finding the hook, message, or "wow" factor that makes your pitch stick. Billy found out that OxiClean wouldn't just take stains out, but that certain things

would turn white instantly the minute it touched them. At HSN, where he was already pitching Orange Glo furniture polish, Billy was able to hone his pitch for OxiClean. He would take a wedding dress, sneakers—anything that was normally white—make them pitch black, and then do these live demos and blow people away.

The lines he would come up with! “Powered by the air you breathe, activated by the water you and I drink!” “The power of bleach without the damaging effects of chlorine!” “It’s like a white knight in shining armor!” “The Stain Specialist!” They were perfect, pitch perfect. In very few words he was able to clearly communicate what this amazing new stain remover was doing. “It’s not clean unless it’s OxiClean!” he would bellow.

Billy would go from a relaxed demeanor to soaring bird of prey in full flight, right there on live TV, firing off these great lines one after another. He’d put a scoop of OxiClean in a fish tank and the water would go from black to white. It was amazing. OxiClean sales at HSN went through the roof; it became their biggest cleaning product ever. The hosts would get excited and Billy would get louder and louder. But the magic was the method. Billy was a master at setting everything up so that OxiClean looked miraculous.

It wasn’t long before HSN was ordering forty or fifty thousand units of OxiClean at a time. Max Appel and his family had found their man in Billy, and Max decided the next step for OxiClean was to get it on store shelves everywhere. For that, he needed a two-minute commercial as a promotional tool. That’s when he called me. I had just started my production company, Sullivan Productions, and Max knew me for a very successful commercial I’d done for a product called the Tap Light. A meeting was arranged at the Venetian Resort Hotel in Las Vegas in

1998 and Max said, “I want you and Billy to work together and do a two-minute commercial.” Billy and I looked at each other. At this point, we were not the best of buddies; we were rivals who didn’t really have time for each other. I couldn’t see Billy taking direction from me.

Finally, we agreed. One commercial. *One*.

Then, flying home from Vegas in first class, guess who was sitting next to me? I pulled out my laptop and asked Billy what part of his HSN pitches would fit into a 120-second commercial. We ordered a bottle of wine and he started pitching me, loudly, right there in first class, annoying the hell out of everyone. By the time we landed (after a second bottle of wine) we were half crocked, but I had this piece of paper with the best-of OxiClean lines written on it. I turned it into a shootable script, and a few days later Billy pulled up to my office in his Rolls-Royce. With a shoestring crew and budget, we set up a table and shot our first OxiClean commercial in three hours.

I was a rookie director and not sure how to direct Billy, who wasn’t going to take any crap from me. He would glare at me as if to say, “Do *not* tell me what to do,” but I knew what I was doing and he could tell I had our best interests at heart. To Billy’s credit, he was a pro and he brought his “A” game; he was great at what he did. Me, I loved being behind the scenes, running the show, and giving him shit. He hated it, and he was constantly telling me to zip it and giving me the evil eye. That was the beginning of our back-and-forth relationship. The bottom line is that we both wanted it to work.

I edited the commercial in a day and sent it to Max for approval. He made one edit and it was done. We sent the commercial to the dub house for distribution to stations everywhere, and then it happened! You couldn’t turn on the TV without seeing it. Suddenly, Billy and OxiClean were everywhere.

In a few weeks, we heard that the CEO of Wal-Mart, Lee Scott, was so excited about the spot that he made OxiClean a global VPI, a volume-producing item. Almost overnight, every Wal-Mart in the world had huge stacks of OxiClean by every cash register. In no time at all, OxiClean had gone from a small no-name brand to an HSN staple to the biggest thing to happen to laundry since bleach. I was walking down Madison Avenue in New York City a little while later, saw an issue of *Advertising Age*, and on the cover was our commercial! The best part, though, was that the guys from Procter & Gamble, who make Tide, had no comment.

After that, it was up and to the right. Billy and I shot more and more commercials—for Kaboom!, Orange Glo, you name it. We also became fierce friends. I loved it. I didn’t have to be on camera. I could write and direct and Billy would go on camera and dominate. We shared in everything. He pitched, I produced, and it was perfect.

Of course, nothing that good could last. In 2005 I received a call from Joel Appel, Max’s son: they had sold the company to Church & Dwight for \$325 million. The next day I was in Denver and sitting down with the CMO, Bruce Fleming, who looked shocked when he said, “You’re the marketing department for OxiClean?”

I told them that the marketing department was actually me and Billy. To their credit, they understood Billy’s value immediately. They cut a deal with him, welcomed him warmly, stayed true to the pitch, and Billy and I were a team once more. For four years, we worked with the new OxiClean team and a super talented TV reporter and consumer advocate named Paul Moriarty to create many OxiClean and Kaboom! commercials. Then, out of nowhere, Billy died tragically in 2009, and after a very challenging few months, I ended up becoming the

on-camera pitchman for OxiClean. I knew the pitch and knew the lines, and I've been privileged ever since to walk in Billy's very large footsteps. It's 2017, and my commitment to OxiClean and Church & Dwight is rock solid. So you'll be seeing my mug telling you how to get rid of stubborn stains for years to come.

I wasn't thinking in terms of Pitch Powers back in those days. We really didn't know what we were doing when we made that fateful commercial, but it's my favorite spot of those I've ever produced. The cadence, the offer, it's all perfect. In looking back, I realize that the key to pitching is to keep it simple. The Pitch Powers are really just good sense and knowing how to make people smile.

PITCH POWERS—ACTIVATE!

What are the Pitch Powers? I'm glad you asked.

- 1. Know Your Acceptable Outcomes.** Before you set a toe in that office or walk on stage to give your speech, know your goals. What's the best outcome? What can you live with?
- 2. Understand Their Pain (and Be the Cure).** Learn how your audience is hurting and why, and how you can help.
- 3. Obsessive Preparation.** Know your pitch blindfolded. Practice until friends think you've lost your marbles. No stammering, no hesitation, just smooth, clean, and confident.
- 4. Make an Entrance and Take Control.** Finally, you're ready to go into the room. When you do, make sure everyone notices. Use power words and gestures to

grab attention. Control the pace and rhythm. Stand out from everybody else.

5. **Breach the Force Field.** Most of us distance ourselves from other people for our protection. I call it the *force field*. If you can breach it with humor, compassion, or anything else, you can really connect.
6. **Facts Tell, Stories Sell.** Nobody wants to sit around a campfire listening to someone recite facts and figures about the stars and planets. But everybody loves a good story about the night sky. Tell a story and you'll have your audience in the palm of your hand.
7. **Love Your Mistakes.** You're going to forget details, get nervous, and otherwise step in it. You know it; so does your audience. Don't pretend. Use your flubs to get a laugh, break the ice, and make you more relatable.
8. **Push Back.** A pitch won't always go your way. The listener will dislike you, throw you a curve, or say no. Don't slink away; turn the twist to your advantage.
9. **Never Be Closing.** When you pitch, trying to make things happen can undo all the trust you've built and the spell you've cast. Don't force it. Don't close anybody. Trust the process, allow silence, listen, and let things happen.
10. **Finish with Confidence.** A great pitch ends with the listener wishing you weren't done. Accomplish that by making a confident exit or an impossible-to-refuse offer, until the listener can't wait to spend more time with you.

Since most encounters proceed according to a more or less predictable pattern, the Pitch Powers are meant to be used in

a rough sequence: prepare, learn about your audience, make your commanding entrance, and so on. But as your skills improve, you'll find that you can improvise and mix them up to fit the situation.

Where to Use Pitch Powers

What situation? Any situation where you're across the table from another person or group of people trying to persuade them to do things your way, give you something you want, or agree with your idea—basically, almost every situation! People associate pitching with selling, and if you're in that line of work, you can absolutely use them to crush your sales goals, but the Pitch Powers are superpowers for a lot more.

Pitch Powers can become your secret weapon in areas of life where you wouldn't think knowing how to pitch would make a difference . . . but it does. What I'm going to teach you will help you:

- Land the dream job that seventy-five other people have interviewed for.
- Get the number of that attractive person who's shot down everyone else at the bar.
- Earn more tips than everyone else at your job put together.
- Destroy your sales benchmarks and earn bigger commissions than ever before while creating customers for life.
- Win a disagreement about anything, from where to eat to a child custody battle, without ill feelings on either side.
- Bring the house down with that big keynote speech or critical presentation.
- Get discounts and credit card rates that nobody else can seem to get.
- Talk your way out of a traffic ticket.

- Successfully make your case for that raise in pay or year-end bonus.
- Make an unbeatable case before a judge or mediator.
- Convince investors or crowdfunding to give their money to launch your start-up company or hot new idea.
- Convince your kids to do what you want without shouting.
- Become Teacher of the Year.
- Own the room at your next audition.
- Lead your team to the playoffs.
- Successfully run for office.

A few of the situations on that list probably apply to you. Maybe a lot of them. Either way, it's easy to see that being persuasive, charismatic, and confident can get you money and romance, open doors, get you out of trouble, and make life a lot easier. Pitching has brought me opportunities and gotten me out of a few scrapes, such as the time when, newly arrived in America and driving from California to the East Coast, I got pulled over and successfully pitched a highway patrolman a Smart Mop in lieu of a speeding citation that could have gotten me deported. Thank God that cop had dirty floors.

Pitching is powerful. But it's just as important to know what the pitch isn't:

- It's not a way to get people to buy things they don't want or need.
- It's not a con artist's trick. If you think that, you've probably been watching too much *Glengarry Glen Ross*.
- It's not a "say anything" weapon for getting someone into bed.
- It's not a secret tool for winning arguments with your significant other when you're the one at fault.

I'm going to teach you not to sell but to *share*. I'll show you why you can't persuade anyone until you love yourself. I'll impart trade secrets and explain the role that showmanship plays in a winning pitch. You'll learn to read your audience, control the tempo, win them over with total authenticity, and stop pitching at the perfect time to leave them craving more.

This takes resilience, repetition, and being best friends with risk. You'll get comfortable with rejection because no matter how skilled you are, no pitch works every time. But each time you go back to the drawing board and reassess what didn't work, you'll fine-tune it. Eventually, it will feel effortless. The perfect pitch is like beautiful music that you don't ever want to stop listening to.

I'm going to teach you how to be successful at whatever you want to do. You don't need a rich daddy. You don't need a degree. You don't need to rely on government handouts. You will need:

To work.

Take risks.

To smile more than you frown.

A strong heart.

Grit.

Determination.

Resilience.

To believe.

To get up early.

Balls.

To be able to withstand extreme conditions.

To be able to laugh.

To be able to pick yourself up when you're down.

Can you do that? Then you can pitch. Forget about a magic word or getting bitten by a radioactive spider. Let's get you some Pitch Powers.

POWER NUMBER ONE

KNOW YOUR ACCEPTABLE OUTCOMES

Good for saving the day in every pitching situation.

ORIGIN STORY

It was Tuesday, June 22, 2009. I was sharing a limo ride to the NBC studios in Burbank, California, with Billy Mays and thinking, *Do not fuck this up* over and over again. I had been preparing myself for weeks for what was about to come, but I was nervous. After spending thousands of hours and most of my adult life pitching products on television, as well as making hundreds of guest appearances on every type of talk and news show you can imagine, I was going to make my first appearance on *The Tonight Show with Conan O'Brien*. I had been training, mentally and physically, as if I were getting ready for a big race. When the moment came for Billy and me to walk toward that famous curtain for our entrance onto the set, I wanted to feel ready. I had a few goals in my head:

1. Don't fuck it up.
2. Promote Billy's and my reality show, *Pitchmen*.
3. Increase my fame a little bit.

2 KNOW YOUR ACCEPTABLE OUTCOMES

4. Look like I know what I'm doing.
5. Again, don't fuck it up.

One of my favorite lines from *Gladiator* reverberated in my head: *Win the crowd, win your freedom.* Right. It became a calming mantra.

You have to be a guest on *The Tonight Show* to fully understand what it feels like. You spend hours in the bowels of NBC, first in makeup chairs and then in the green room, before finally walking on stage in front of a live audience of millions. The show clock counts down to showtime: *tick-tock, tick-tock.* Can't back out now. Is this cold sweat normal?

Billy was already the most famous pitchman in the world, a booming-voiced icon in blue shirt and khakis, with jet-black hair and a jet-black beard, who had appeared on TV more often than Oprah herself. He had already been on with Leno twice, but this was my maiden voyage, and I went for a morning run in Runyon Canyon in the Hollywood Hills to unwind. Nearly twenty years earlier, I had come to America a nobody from England with less than \$200 to my name. Yet somehow, I was a multimillionaire, about to appear on *The Tonight Show* with my friend and partner. I felt great and confident about our journey together.

We met back at the hotel. Billy had arrived late, but he was already in his blue-and-khakis uniform, and we ribbed each other as was customary.

"How many shows you gonna do today, Billy? Aren't we just doing the one?"

"I just want to give them options, Sul."

"What options? You always wear the same thing!"

"It's my suit of armor, Sul. How many times have I been on *The Tonight Show*?"

“Twice.”

“How many times have *you* been on *The Tonight Show*? Oh, that’s right, zero.”

This was our normal routine, taking the piss out of each other. We’d had a lot of practice.

Ego Bomb

Soon after we arrived at NBC and were tucked into the green room, Conan’s producer, Rachel, came into the room and greeted us. Then she said, “Okay, so here’s the plan: Sully’s sitting next to Conan.”

If this had been a reality show, it would’ve been the moment when the camera zoomed in on Billy’s face just as a thudding bass note played. It was like a bomb had gone off. Billy had a healthy ego and loved being a star, and he could go from teddy bear to super-pissed-off grizzly bear in the blink of an eye. Grizzly Billy was out. He glared at Rachel. Then at me. A grumbling “urgh-urgh-urgh” came from deep within the pipes of the loudest pitchman on earth, a baritone assertion that meant, *That ain’t gonna happen*. You could’ve cut the tension with a knife.

Rachel began laying out the plan for our segment, but Billy interrupted her, pointing at his chest with his right thumb and saying, “I’m sitting next to Conan.”

Without hesitation, Rachel fired back, “No, Sully’s sitting next to Conan.” So began the test of wills. I watched with amusement as the two of them battled like that, back and forth, for the next few minutes. Rachel wasn’t giving any ground, so Billy finally played his trump card: he started putting his stuff back in his satchel like he was packing up, taking his ball, and going home. It was a bluff and I knew it. There was *no way* that Billy, who adored the limelight, was going to let me, his second banana, go on with Conan alone.

I understood why the producers chose to seat us this way, even if Billy didn't. They worried that with our healthy egos and Billy's louder-than-a-747 voice, we would shout over each other and turn the interview into chaos. If Billy sat next to Conan, they figured I would disappear entirely. They thought that if they put me between Billy and Conan, I'd have a fighting chance. What the producers didn't realize was that Billy and I were professionals. Over our two decades together we had become a well-oiled interview machine. We had our shtick down, and once cameras were rolling we knew how to handle each other.

When I realized that I was going to get the top seat, I turned my head to keep Billy from seeing my smile. Billy was pissed, and I wanted to stay out of the shit storm. But I was thinking, *I got him . . . for once!* My goals—my acceptable outcomes—for the evening, shifted instantly:

1. Don't fuck it up.
2. Get my brand and notoriety more on a par with Billy's.
3. Don't let Billy murder me.
4. Be charming and celebrity-like.

Then came the second blow to the man who built the house of OxiClean: Rachel told us that I would walk out first. Billy stared at her for several long beats and then just shook his head. After she left, I said, "Billy, you told me you wanted this for me. Well, here's my moment, and I'm taking it." That, I'm certain, is when Billy hatched his plan.

Billy did want me to have everything he had—money, fame, opportunity—with one exception: he absolutely did *not* want me or anyone else to overshadow him, ever. We settled into an awkward silence in the green room as he started doing his

makeup. Billy did his own makeup, ironed his own clothes, did everything himself. It was part of his process. We watched Lisa Kudrow's interview and we knew Conan's team had us up next because, as the executive producer of *Pitchmen* told us, we had become a "world-class comedy team." We had the patter, the insults, and the laugh lines down to perfection. We would be doing a mock infomercial with a hundred products lined up on a table, and we didn't know ahead of time which ones Conan would ask us about. We had to be ready with our key lines and one-liners, and we were. We knew how to win over even the toughest audience and we weren't about to bomb on *The Tonight Show*.

Stealing the Seat?

Then Conan was done with Lisa and he threw to commercial. That's when the usher came to escort us to the curtained entrance that led to the stage. We got there and Billy gave me his big, warm Billy smile, a huge grin that seemed to stretch from one side of his big bearded face to the other. We fist-bumped. Then we were ready to go on and I could feel my heart beating out of my chest.

Once you're standing behind that curtain, you're in the belly of the beast. You're alone in the dark and can hear only the band. You see the images of bright lights through the curtain and feel the energy of the live audience. It's enough to take your breath away. Just the people who had appeared before us took my breath away. Barack Obama had appeared three nights after Billy's last appearance. We would share the stage with Elvis Costello, a rock legend in my house growing up. I couldn't help but think, *Holy shit, I've made it! I'm a lowly mop salesman from the boondocks of western England and I'm about to be on The Tonight Show with Elvis Costello.*

THE PERSUADER!

It's important to know your number-one goal before you go into any pitching situation so you can plan your initial strategy. That way, if you're met with obstacles, you can either adapt or go around them.

The Persuader says: "Let's say I'm taking my date to one of the most popular restaurants in the city. Even though I'm a famous superhero, I can't always get a table because I'm in my secret identity. So I go in with a plan: if the host tells me there's a two-hour wait, I'm going to inform him that a table near the kitchen will be fine. If he tells me that's not available, I'm going to tip him \$20, which usually does the trick. In case even that doesn't work, I'm going to have a backup reservation and an Uber ride already lined up. Boo-yah."

The band wound down and we could hear Conan take over. Billy and I exchanged one more look. And that's when it happened. Just as I heard "Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome"—I felt a tremendous shove from behind and immediately thought, *You asshole!*—"Anthony Sullivan and Billy Mays!" All 250-pounds-plus of Pittsburgh brawler Billy had pushed me aside and stormed onto the stage in front of me. I couldn't believe I hadn't seen it coming, but it was no shock that Billy had done it. There was simply no way he was going to let me steal his thunder. I had to hand it to him. He knew exactly when to strike so that no one, including Conan, his staff, or me, could do anything about it. It was masterful timing.

The move actually put me in flight-or-fight mode. Being body-checked by a former football player just as you're about to go on national TV will do that. All my pre-show jitters

evaporated. I smiled at Billy's back and thought, *Good one* as we made our way across the stage to meet Conan. Then I saw Billy eye the seat next to Conan: the hot seat!

Oh no, I thought, he's going for it. Billy wanted that seat. I saw him hesitate for half a beat, and I was sure he was going to keep up his silverback gorilla act. *He is going to hijack the seat next to Conan and there's nothing anyone can do to stop him!* My heart sank a bit but it also felt inevitable. But then at the last second, he veered left. Maybe he felt taking that seat would've been one bridge too far, or he was just messing with my head all along. I don't know.

All I do know is that Billy took his seat next to Lisa Kudrow, I sat down next to Conan, and we all settled in for the segment. Things went smoothly, we were our usual funny, horseplaying selves, and it was brilliant.

THE REVEAL

The thing is, even if Billy had taken the hot seat and I'd been stuck in the role of sidekick again, it would've been okay, because I had more than one outcome in mind for the day. The best outcome was what happened: I wound up in the star's chair next to Conan and got a boost for my brand and career. But if Billy had in fact pirated the right-hand seat and pushed me to the side man's spot, I still would've been on *The Tonight Show* and *Pitchmen* still would've received fantastic press. Even if the appearance hadn't gone well, I had a third outcome in mind: *don't fuck up.* As long as I kept my cool and sense of humor, I would still have benefitted from the national exposure.

That kind of thinking is reflected in this Pitch Power.

KNOW YOUR ACCEPTABLE OUTCOMES

What are your goals for the situation where you're bringing your superpowers to bear? Do you know what you want to accomplish before you step into the office for the job interview? Before you sidle over to the bar to charm the attractive stranger? Before you walk to the podium to deliver a speech to your shareholders? And do you know how you'll react if one or more of those options is taken off the table?

Experience from English markets to US national TV has taught me that few things go according to plan. It's also taught me that the people who come out on top when things go sideways are the ones who don't have to get everything they want, just some of it. In other words, pitching stars don't let perfect get in the way of good.

Here's how.

Anatomy of a Superpower

I've started the book with this Pitch Power because it should be the first thing you look at when you're thinking about how to persuade someone to give you what you want. Before you research and prepare and learn about what the other guy wants, know what you want. Know everything that can come of the opportunity that you can consider a win. Each of those is an *acceptable outcome*.

True, some outcomes are more acceptable than others. You want to land the job, not get the cold comfort of being a finalist. But sometimes you won't get your first-tier outcome, and a lot of times it won't be because of anything you did or didn't do. If you're focused only on your first-choice goal, you could blow a solid secondary opportunity while you're busy being disappointed and pissed off. I've learned that there are

few situations where you can't extract something of value—as long as you're prepared to do it ahead of time.

Using this Pitch Power involves a simple three-step process:

Step 1: Ask “What are my acceptable outcomes?” You saw that one coming, I know. But it's essential. What do you want to get from this encounter, date, speech, or sales meeting? What's the best outcome? Second best? Third best? Is there a second or third? Now and then, it's win or go home.

Let's take an easy example. Say you're knocking back a helping of Dutch courage before going over to speak to the lovely young woman seated alone at a corner table in a nightclub. She's already sent three stallions packing tonight, so you're nervous. But before you walk over, you sort through acceptable outcomes (or AOs):

- a. Getting her number? Definitely. This is AO #1. We call this the *jackpot* outcome.
- b. Getting your face slapped? No (unless you're into that sort of thing).
- c. Having her agree to meet you here again later in the week? Sure. This is AO #2, the *runner-up* outcome.
- d. Having a nice conversation and working on your game even though she's not interested? Yeah, that's not the worst thing that could happen. This is AO #3, the *honorable mention* outcome.
- e. Getting your face punched by her boyfriend? That *is* the worst thing that could happen. Let's not go there.

So now you know what you're after, and having these outcomes in mind leads right to the next step:

Step 2: What do you need to do to reach each outcome? This is where locking in your AOs is such a smart move. If the object of your affection says, “I never give my number to guys in bars,” most guys will wilt and slink away like kicked dogs. *Not you.* You have AO #2, and you say something like “That’s all right, how about if we chat for a few minutes?” Odds are decent that you’ll get a yes.

This step is about mapping out your responses should something come between you and each goal. It’s a really simple formula:

- a. Go for AO #1.
- b. If blocked, ask, “Is AO #1 salvageable?”
- c. If yes, switch tactics and keep trying.
- d. If not, go to AO #2.
- e. Et cetera.

If I take my date into a popular restaurant and they say they don’t have a table, maybe I’ll say that it’s my girlfriend’s birthday and I was planning on treating her to a \$200 bottle of wine, or pull out an American Express Black Card. There’s always a table somewhere, maybe reserved in case someone important shows up. Well, that’s me. I just need to refuse to take no for an answer. If there really isn’t a table to be had, what about a seat in the bar? Is that an acceptable outcome? Can I get a rain check and a voucher for a free bottle of wine when I come back? That’s acceptable to me.

Step 3: How will I make the most of each outcome? Let’s say my date and I end up in the bar, eating at a hightop table. Okay, I’m going to make that bar the spot to be in that restaurant, so

that every guest hears how much fun we're having and wants to be where we are. I'll buy a round for the house, tip the bartender to let me go behind the bar and mix drinks, and maybe start doing a fake pitch of a Magic Martini Shaker or something. I have fun, make some friends, and let the restaurant manager know that next time, he needs to find me a table.

How will you turn each acceptable outcome into the best possible result for you? If the girl in the club won't give you her number but says she hopes she'll see you the next time she's in, have snazzy business cards and a pen in your pocket, take out a card, write "Friday, 9 p.m., corner seat" on the back, and hand it to her with a smile. You'll look suave as hell. But you'll only do that if you've thought the whole scenario through.

Every so often, there won't be a second acceptable outcome. Skydiving, for instance. *I'm kidding.* But seriously, when you're going after your dream job, not getting it but knowing that you made some great contacts is like being told "Great game"

INCOMPETENT SIDEKICK: THE WHITE FLAG

You just went after your jackpot goal and hit a dead end. Shit. Okay, you regroup. But just as you're about to go back in after your runner-up, this asshole jumps in to surrender to the bad guys. That's what this loser does: tries to get you to turn tail and run as soon as you get some pushback. Don't pay him any attention, because you don't get anything you want if you give up. If you see something you want, go right at it. Plus, he's wearing a white flag as a loincloth . . . and nothing else. Yuck.

after you just struck out with the bases loaded in the last inning of the World Series. Sometimes the classic line is true: second place really means the first loser.

It's okay if you don't always have a backup outcome. Sometimes you're in a "go big or go home" situation, and that's cool. Give it everything you have and don't be ashamed of feeling angry or hurt if things don't work out. That happens to everyone. Sometimes it's enough to know you bled for what you wanted and left everything on the field.

WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

This Pitch Power helps you extract the most value from any situation where you're trying to persuade someone, but it has another benefit that might be even bigger. When you're not completely attached to your jackpot outcome, you're less worried about results, so you're more relaxed. Being relaxed makes everything, from sports to sex, easier. When it's not life or death that you get the client, you're free to focus on doing your best and just "grip it and rip it."

I can't think of a better example of this than Donald Trump. I can't read his mind and know what he was thinking when he decided to run for president, but I'd guess his thought process went something like this: *I probably won't win, but the worst thing that could happen is that I gain huge national publicity for my brand and my companies, so I make more money. If I win, even better!*

Of course, he did win, and I think he won in large part because of that "screw the outcome" attitude. In the beginning, he obviously didn't care. He was out to say what he wanted and have fun, outcome be damned, and that made his campaign

fun to watch even when he was imploding and saying stupid shit. Trump was never boring, unlike every other Republican candidate. When he called Elizabeth Warren “Pocahontas” and infuriated her, that was funny.

At the time, I thought, *There's no way the Donald is going to get away with this*. But he did, because he didn't care about what anybody thought and he didn't care about the outcome. That freed him to be the opposite of politically correct at a time when conservative voters were furious about political correctness. You felt like at any time, Trump could've said, “You know, I've decided I don't want to continue my campaign. I'm going to focus on making America great again by building golf courses. Thank you.” He would have stepped back after getting about a billion dollars in free publicity and gone back to his empire.

If you've spent your life white-knuckling outcomes in job interviews, sales meetings, or the dating scene, you've probably been limiting yourself and your results. It's human nature: when you obsess over an outcome, you act out of the fear that you won't get it. You don't act like a superhero. You're not aggressive or confident. You don't take smart risks. You play not to lose, and that's a great way to lose. Nobody punches above their weight in the dating scene, commission sales, or employment by going in afraid of failing.

Now, imagine if you had three or even four possible outcomes of a situation that were positive. Sure, you'd still love to hit the jackpot, but the world won't end if you don't. You can loosen up and play to win: gamble with bold statements or big promises, walk in super confident, tell jokes, or drop an f-bomb—whatever you need to do to own the room and control the tempo. Who knows? You might become president.

Not About Failure

When I talk about this Pitch Power, one of the objections I hear is that I'm teaching people to plan on failing when they pitch. Totally not true. Like I just said, knowing your acceptable outcomes is an *antidote* for failure because it expands your definition of success and takes away your fear. However, in some people's minds, the only legitimate version of success is one where you're crushing the world under the heel of your boot. They feel like admitting the possibility of failure is the same as failing.

It's not. That's self-help, motivational speaker propaganda. In the grown-up world, things don't always go your way. You don't always get the account. A wise pitching hero admits that sometimes, despite all your hard work, preparation, and ability, the decision does not come down in your favor. If you stick with an inflexible "win it all or take my ball and go home" approach, you're going to miss out on a lot of opportunities.

In a way, this is the old "expect the best but prepare for the worst" strategy:

- Do the work and bring your "A" game every time.
- Have additional AOs in mind in case you don't get what you want.
- Treat them as insurance. Even if things don't go perfectly, you have alternate means to extract value from the situation.
- You're protected, so go all out, be yourself, and don't worry about the result.

This is an odd example, but it works. Last year, I went to Burning Man for the first time. It was something I'd always wanted to do. But when I got dropped off at my camp in Black Rock in this sick, Mad Max-esque car called the Valyrian Steel

(google it; it's insane), I was intimidated. Yeah, me. Mr. Pitchman, the Persuader. The camp had been going for three days and there were forty or fifty people there. I felt pretty out of place, but going in I had several acceptable outcomes:

1. Make lifelong friends and have an incredible time. This was my jackpot AO.
2. Meet some cool people and have an incredible time.
3. Not really meet anyone but have some awesome downtime from work.

None of those outcomes are bad, and the last was totally in my control. Even if I didn't hit it off with the people in camp and fellow Burners, I could still chill, relax, and have experiences. So I had nothing to lose. I walked into the camp and everyone was looking at me, so I went, "Hey everyone, I'm Sully!" and just stood there like an idiot. Everyone shouted, "Hi, Sully!" because that's the etiquette. Then someone came up and hugged me and said, "Welcome home," because everyone does that. Then (because I didn't already feel like a tool), I said, "Does anyone know where my RV is?"

Well, within five minutes I had two new friends, Niko and Ursula, and we were making drinks and meeting people and telling stories. I had an incredible time, in part because I went into the encounter with no fear about the outcome. No matter what happened, it would be good.

You don't need to go to Burning Man for this Pitch Power to save the day.

- **Negotiation.** This is the perfect match of Pitch Power and scenario. Whether you're negotiating for a car, a sales contract, or a book deal, having multiple AOs means you

can be flexible, think on your feet, and outmaneuver the other party.

- **Any service situation.** Whether you’re after a hotel room upgrade or a first-class airline seat, sometimes you won’t get your first choice. So have a backup. Can’t get moved to a suite? Fine. What about a free breakfast or massage instead? No first-class seats available? All right. What about a bulkhead seat in economy so you have more legroom, or, if you have time, a first-class bump on a later flight? Don’t walk away without getting *something*.
- **Selling.** The only thing people despise more than being sold to is a salesperson who won’t take no for an answer. The solution is to play the long game. If you can’t get the sale today, what can you get? If you’re building a relationship (which, if you’re a sales superhero, is what you should be doing), then maybe a second meeting would be an acceptable outcome. What about the prospect agreeing to let you send a written report on how you can solve his problems? What about a game of golf, no strings attached? You both know your long-term goal is to get the signature, so don’t be clever. Go for the AO and build trust.

Story-Furthering Interlude

Scott Fairchild’s living depends on having a lot of acceptable outcomes. He’s a sports agent, representing world-class endurance athletes like triathlon legend and two-time Ironman world champion Chris “Macca” McCormack. And when he goes in to make a deal, he’s been known to have as many as ten possible scenarios in his back pocket.

“My client might be the athlete, the event or the sponsor,” he says. “I have to have multiple objectives in mind. First, you have to know what your goals are, what you’ll accept. I’m the

middleman, so I have to ask Macca or whoever, ‘What will you take?’ Then I have my scenarios. It can get complicated, because if I’m negotiating a sponsorship deal, there are a lot of ways my client can be compensated: salary, product, bonuses, years in the deal, exposure. I have to weigh all of that, plus the status of the athlete. Is he up and coming, in his prime, or heading for retirement?”

Scott cut his teeth working for Callaway golf, and he has a piece of advice that I really like. “Always say yes,” he continues. “I might come in and say, ‘We want four years for \$1 million each,’ and they might come back with, ‘One year for \$500,000,’ but if I just say no and walk away, it’s over. Always start with yes. I might say, ‘Yes, we’ll do that, but . . .’ And then I’ll propose that if my athlete wins X races, we get a \$2 million bonus. I’ve got the if-then options memorized and we go back and forth until we get the deal done.”

Scott has one more tip: aim high. “Always start higher in what you’re asking for so you have room to come down,” he says. “I always shoot high, and the people on the other side know my first number isn’t what I expect to get. That’s the game—and it *is* a game.”

Plot Twist!

Naturally, no matter what you do, there will be times when every acceptable outcome falls off the table and you’re left with nothing. Technically, these are called *shit storms*. In all seriousness, this kind of thing doesn’t happen very often, but when it does, it’s enough to shake the confidence of even a seasoned pitching champion. How do you handle it when you can’t see a path to getting anything you want?

First, don’t panic. Desperation never plays, and freaking out in an attempt to walk away with something—anything—will

just lead you to make reckless offers and bad decisions. Look at the failure of all your AOs as a clear indicator that the opportunity, whatever it is, was a poor fit from the start.

Second, you can always salvage your dignity and professionalism no matter what happens. Even if the other party was uncooperative or hostile, you take the high road. Keep your cool, be gracious and polite, decline any offers that you find demeaning, and make your exit. Don't help the other party save face or avoid feeling guilty; that's not your problem.

Finally, if the situation is such a poor fit that you can't salvage anything, then maybe not hitting any of your goals is a blessing in disguise. If you really want a job, but at your interview you find out that your personality is a terrible fit for the company's culture, why would you want to work there? You'd be miserable.

It's rare to find a pitching scenario where you can't walk away with something worthwhile, like a key contact, a second appointment, or a referral. But it happens and it'll happen to you. When it does, don't be afraid to pull the ripcord. Remember, the opportunities that don't work out just clear space for the ones that will.

Training Montage

Learning to consider your AOs is relatively easy, because you just need to take some time before you enter the pitching arena and think about what you want. What's your ideal outcome? What would be okay if that didn't work out? If that runner-up fell through, is there a third option that could make the time pay off?

It's also smart to think about (a) possible obstacles and (b) your responses to those obstacles. For example, let's say you're shopping for a car and getting ready to pitch the salesman.

WHAT WOULD BILLY DO?

Billy Mays here! I was always a confident go-getter when I pitched; it was just part of my Type A, steel-town football player nature! I always assumed I would come out on top—but that's no excuse for not having backup plans, and that's what acceptable outcomes are. Back when Sully and I did *The Tonight Show*, I wanted the seat next to Conan, but if I'd had a "I've got to have his or the whole thing is ruined" mentality, I would've grabbed the seat, pissed off the producers so much they wouldn't ever have had us back, and maybe damaged my friendship with my best pal and partner. It's awesome to be confident, aggressive, and positive, but don't let those qualities keep you from being smart, too!

- **Possible obstacle:** the salesman trots out the old “What kind of payment are you looking for?” line.
- **Response:** “I’m not looking for a payment. I’m looking for a 3-Series at this price. Can we do that?”
- **Possible obstacle:** The salesman makes it clear the dealership *cannot* sell you the car according to the terms you want.
- **Response:** AO #3. You say thank you and go somewhere else. Don’t waste any more time dickering.
- **Possible obstacle:** You agree to let the dealer’s internal finance company compete for your loan but their terms stink.
- **Response:** You’ve already got approval from another lender and have the info on your phone. You say, “Give me the price I want and your finance company is not an issue.”

Plan on what you will do under pressure. There's nothing more powerful than standing firm on your price or terms in any situation, whether it's a price on a car or a salary. What's your floor and are you ready to defend it? Have everything planned out, including the point at which you walk away. And forget memorization; put notes on your phone. Everybody looks at their phone constantly these days, so no one will think twice if you glance at your cheat sheet. That way, you'll be ready to pitch for the best possible outcome.

SCENARIOS FOR USING THE "KNOW YOUR ACCEPTABLE OUTCOMES" PITCH POWER

Q: Your refusal to budge from a price or terms provokes the other party to become hostile. Do you react, sit silently, or leave?

A: You wait, stay cool, and be the ball. That's a reaction to not being the one with the power, and if you wait, he or she will cool off and you can get back to business. Now you're in a position to say, "Okay, I really want to do this deal, so what if we did this . . . ?" And you turn to your next acceptable outcome.

Q: You're negotiating in a field where you have little or no experience. Time to call on a good sidekick, like an attorney or agent?

A: Definitely. Even if you can't have an expert with you in your meeting, you can get some information about the law,

the politics, the money, or the players. And if you can invite your sidekick to the meeting, do it.

Q: You've been thrown into a pitching opportunity with no time to plan or determine acceptable outcomes. Wing it and trust your X-ray vision to perceive the AOs, or just swing for the fences (and mix some metaphors)?

A: This is a time to follow Scott Fairchild's advice about always saying, "Yes, but . . ." Be affirmative about wanting to do a deal, but aim high. Hesitation or appearing not to know your own value in situations like sales or salary negotiations will kill you. So do both: swing for the homer (aim high with your first request) but be ready to improvise a "yes, but" counteroffer when they push back, which they will.