

**ROBERT COLLIER**



# **THE LETTER BOOK**

**Robert Collier**

# **The Letter Book**

**Enriched edition. The Ultimate Guide for Copywriting**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Colin Everett*

Published by

**MUSAICUM**

Books

- Advanced Digital Solutions & High-Quality eBook  
Formatting -

[musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info](mailto:musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info)

Edited and published by Musaicum Press, 2021  
EAN 4066338115485

# Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Historical Context](#)

## **[The Letter Book](#)**

[Analysis](#)

[Reflection](#)

[Memorable Quotes](#)

[Notes](#)

# Introduction

## Table of Contents

At its core, *The Letter Book* confronts the enduring challenge of how a carefully chosen sequence of words can bridge the distance between writer and reader, transmuting attention into conviction and conviction into action, by aligning message, motive, and human desire within the disciplined form of a letter, balancing empathy with exactness, psychology with proof, and the writer's objective with the reader's interest so that the invisible mechanics of persuasion become a transparent service to the needs, hopes, and urgencies people bring to the page, and insisting that effective correspondence is not ornament but engineered clarity, built from research, relevance, and a respectful call to act.

Robert Collier's *The Letter Book* stands within the pragmatic genre of business writing and advertising instruction, developed when direct-response letters powered much of commerce and reached customers at a distance. Often published as *The Robert Collier Letter Book*, it consolidates a working philosophy of persuasive correspondence grounded in results. First appearing in the early 1930s, it reflects a marketplace where carefully crafted envelopes, offers, and narratives traveled farther and faster than personal salespeople. While its examples arise from that mail-order environment, the book frames transferable principles rather than trade gossip, positioning itself as a durable reference for anyone who must persuade through print and, by extension, through later media.

Without leaning on jargon or abstract theory, the book introduces a practice: study your prospect, choose a motivating idea, build a letter that opens attention,

develops interest with proof, and closes with a clear next step. The reading experience is brisk and concrete, marked by a confident but unpretentious voice that prefers demonstration to declaration. Collier alternates explanation with model letters and analytical commentary, so readers see both the finished piece and the reasoning behind it. The tone is practical, occasionally urgent, and consistently reader-centered, inviting you to test, adapt, and reuse patterns rather than memorize slogans or depend on inspiration.

Its themes remain consistent and human: persuasion begins with understanding, specificity outperforms generalities, benefits matter more than features, and credibility grows when promises are supported by reasons, evidence, and clarity. Collier treats the letter as a conversation started by the reader's needs, not the seller's agenda, and he urges writers to respect attention by speaking plainly, selecting pertinent detail, and anticipating objections without condescension. The book's ethics are implied through method: serve first, sell by solving a problem, and ask for action only after earning the right to do so. These ideas ground persuasion in empathy rather than pressure.

Technically, the instruction reaches from discovery to delivery. You learn to define the audience and the single strongest appeal; to structure openings that enter the reader's situation; to develop the body with proofs, stories, and demonstrations that turn claims into likelihoods; and to close with simplicity and immediacy. Throughout, Collier stresses unity of idea, progression of argument, and the disciplined use of concrete language. He examines how sequence, rhythm, and visual arrangement help a letter carry momentum. Rather than prescribing a formula, he supplies patterns and diagnostics, showing how to revise until the letter matches its purpose and reader.

For contemporary readers facing email inboxes, online sales pages, donation appeals, and countless screens, the book matters because mediums change while motives do not. The channels may be digital and the data faster, but the task is identical: identify what the reader values, make a credible promise, prove it, and make acting easy. Collier's insistence on research, relevance, and reader-first framing complements modern analytics and personalization without being dependent on them. It helps marketers, fundraisers, entrepreneurs, and advocates avoid noise, design stronger messages, and measure success by outcomes rather than aesthetics or novelty, keeping persuasion accountable to results.

Approached today, *The Letter Book* offers both a historical lens and a working toolkit: it shows how compelling messages were built when space was scarce and attention precious, and it equips you to build your own with greater focus. You will find an organized sequence of practices, examples that invite adaptation, and a mindset that treats persuasion as a craft to be learned, not a talent to be envied. Read it for clarity about what to say, how to say it, and why the reader should care—and for the reminder that good writing, at its best, is useful.

# Synopsis

## Table of Contents

The Letter Book by Robert Collier is a practical manual on persuasive correspondence, rooted in the author's long experience in mail-order selling and advertising. It presents a step-by-step approach to crafting letters that generate inquiries and orders, while emphasizing the importance of serving the reader's interests. Collier organizes his guidance around concrete examples, showing how specific wording, offers, and sequencing affect response. Rather than proposing abstract theory, he illustrates techniques through model letters and analyses, aiming to equip businesspeople and copywriters with a replicable method for conceiving, composing, and improving messages sent to prospects and customers.

Early chapters establish the central premise that effective letters begin with an exact picture of the reader. Collier urges careful study of the market's circumstances, desires, and frustrations so that an offer aligns with felt needs rather than the seller's conveniences. He emphasizes tangible benefits over technical features and recommends language that treats the recipient as a single person with a specific problem to solve. By mapping the customer's point of view and adapting tone and content accordingly, the writer creates relevance, earns attention, and prepares the ground for a proposal that appears timely, useful, and worth the effort to consider.

The book then lays out the mechanics of a persuasive letter from opening to close. An effective beginning secures attention by connecting instantly with the reader's situation. Subsequent paragraphs develop interest through clear explanations of value, concrete specifics, and illustrations

that reduce abstraction. Collier shows how to substantiate claims with evidence appropriate to the product, and how to remove friction by simplifying terms and instructions. The close concentrates attention on the action sought, stating precisely what to do and why to do it now. Each element, he argues, should earn its place by advancing the reader from curiosity to commitment.

To make these principles concrete, Collier presents numerous model letters and campaigns, dissecting how openings, transitions, offers, and order mechanisms work together. Examples span products and services common to mail-order, demonstrating how the same framework adapts to different price points and audiences. He highlights frequent mistakes—vagueness, boastful tone, and complicated ordering—and contrasts them with clearer alternatives. Throughout, he insists on accuracy and fairness in claims, arguing that persuasive power depends on credibility and on delivering value after the sale. The aim is durable customer goodwill as much as immediate response, a standard that guides wording, presentation, and fulfillment practices.

A substantial portion addresses sequences and follow-ups, since many sales occur after the first contact. Collier explains how reminder letters, enclosures, and supporting pieces can renew attention, add proof, and answer likely objections without repeating earlier points mechanically. He discusses pacing and spacing—when to write again, how to vary appeals, and how to increase clarity of the offer—while keeping the tone courteous and the message relevant. Practical details include reply aids, risk-reduction devices, and appropriate incentives. The cumulative objective is momentum toward action, maintained by consistent reassurance and usefulness and by anticipating questions that might otherwise stall a willing buyer.

Collier also turns to the operational side of mail persuasion: who receives the letter and how success is



judged. He underscores the value of well-chosen mailing lists and the necessity of writing differently to prospects and customers. Attention to appearance—readability, simple layout, and clear order mechanisms—reduces obstacles to response. He recommends trying ideas in limited quantities and measuring results so revisions can be guided by performance rather than opinion. By pairing disciplined selection with iterative improvement, the book portrays letter writing as a managed process, where creative effort and arithmetic meet to protect budgets and amplify gains over time.

Across its chapters, *The Letter Book* advances a consistent vision: results come from understanding the reader, stating value plainly, proving it, and asking for action with courtesy and precision. Collier's examples and procedures form a toolkit rather than a formula, inviting adaptation to product, season, and audience. The conflicts he explores—between enthusiasm and credibility, persistence and pressure, creativity and control—remain recognizable wherever persuasive messages are sent. Without relying on secrets or gimmicks, the book's enduring contribution is its disciplined empathy, a framework that continues to guide direct-response work and informs later media while preserving the primacy of clear, truthful communication.

# Historical Context

## Table of Contents

The Letter Book by Robert Collier emerged in the United States in the early 1930s, when New York’s advertising agencies and mail-order houses coordinated nationwide campaigns. The American Association of Advertising Agencies (founded 1917) and the Direct Mail Advertising Association (also 1917) helped standardize practices, while the U.S. Post Office Department provided the infrastructure for mass solicitation. Key postal reforms—Rural Free Delivery earlier in the century and Parcel Post in 1913—had turned the mailbox into a reliable storefront for remote buyers. Within this institutional setting, letter writing became a frontline sales medium, demanding techniques distinct from newspapers, magazines, or face-to-face sales.

During the interwar years, American consumer culture expanded through national brands, catalog retailing, and book clubs. Firms like Sears, Roebuck and Co. and Montgomery Ward refined mail-order systems, while Book-of-the-Month Club (founded 1926) normalized purchasing by subscription. Direct-response advertising matured alongside, favoring trackable offers, keyed order forms, and customer lists built by brokers and publishers. Claude C. Hopkins’s *Scientific Advertising* (1923) popularized testing and “reason-why” appeals, themes echoed throughout professional copywriting. Radio’s rise added competition for attention, but letters offered privacy, detail, and immediate ordering. This environment rewarded persuasive prose that could trigger measurable action from distant prospects.

Robert Collier (1885–1950) wrote as a practitioner steeped in mail-order publishing and correspondence sales.

Before *The Letter Book*, he authored *The Secret of the Ages* (1926), a widely read self-help volume that was itself promoted through direct response. Collier's day-to-day work involved crafting letters that sold books and related offers by promising concrete benefits, clear terms, and credible guarantees. He used tests to compare headlines, offers, and enclosures, adapting copy to audiences segmented by interest. *The Letter Book* distills those field experiences into models and annotated examples, expressing a distinctly American synthesis of entrepreneurial salesmanship and pragmatic instruction.

The Great Depression, beginning with the 1929 stock market crash, reshaped the economics of persuasion. As unemployment and uncertainty mounted, buyers demanded value, proof, and risk-reduction. Direct mail remained attractive to businesses because it produced accountable results—responses could be counted, costs allocated, and campaigns iterated. Regulators also exerted pressure. The Federal Trade Commission, established in 1914, pursued deceptive practices, while Better Business Bureaus expanded truth-in-advertising efforts throughout the 1910s and 1920s. In this climate, effective letters emphasized guarantees, installment payments, and practical benefits. Collier's guidance reflects that sobriety, urging claims that could be demonstrated and fulfilled.

Technological and logistical tools made large-scale letter campaigns feasible. Typewriters, duplicators, and letterpress printing produced personalized-looking form letters; Addressograph systems sped addressing; and specialized lettershops assembled enclosures, premiums, and return envelopes. Parcel Post (1913) and improved rail and truck networks eased fulfillment to remote customers. List brokers and compilers provided names sorted by past purchases or interests, enabling targeted appeals and "house list" cultivation. Response mechanisms—including coded coupons, preaddressed return envelopes, and time-limited

trials—created closed loops for measuring performance. The Letter Book codifies how each element supports the others, from headline and story to offer, guarantee, and call to action.

Contemporary ideas about psychology and persuasion influenced Collier's framing. Earlier work by Walter Dill Scott and the broader "scientific" turn in advertising encouraged systematic attention to attention, interest, desire, and decision. Claude Hopkins and John E. Kennedy advanced "reason-why" copy that explained benefits in concrete terms. Edward Bernays's writings on public opinion (notably 1928's *Propaganda*) highlighted the social dynamics of influence. Self-improvement literature, including Napoleon Hill's *The Law of Success* (1928), fed aspirations that marketers addressed in offers promising skills, savings, or status. Collier's letters inhabit that intersection: empathetic to desires, but anchored in testable claims and specific outcomes.

Mail-order promotion had long navigated legal limits particular to the post. Postal inspectors wielded fraud-order powers against schemes that used the mails to deceive, a tradition stretching back to nineteenth-century statutes and reinforced in early twentieth-century practice. The Comstock laws also shaped standards for what could be sent. In response, reputable advertisers refined documentation, testimonials, and refund policies to avoid sanction. The Letter Book mirrors this compliance mindset: it stresses clarity in prices, premiums, and guarantees, and favors straightforward, verifiable assertions over vague puffery. The result is copy tuned to withstand scrutiny while still moving readers to purchase.

Seen against this backdrop, *The Letter Book* functions as both manual and mirror of its time. It systematizes direct-response methods that American business had proven in the 1910s–1930s, emphasizing measurable results, segmented audiences, and ethical restraint under

regulatory oversight. Its examples channel Depression-era caution—foregrounding safety, service, and value—while retaining the optimism of interwar enterprise and self-improvement. By turning correspondence into reproducible technique, the book captures a pivotal moment when mass marketing shifted from broad persuasion to accountable dialogue, offering a clear window onto how companies communicated with customers through the nation's most ubiquitous commercial channel: the mail.

# **The Letter Book**

## **Main Table of Contents**

Preface

Chapter 1. What is it that Makes Some Letters Pay?

Chapter 2. How to Arouse that Acquisitive Feeling

Chapter 3. Getting News Interest Into Your Letter

Chapter 4. Word Pictures that Make People Want Your Product

Chapter 5. Motives that Make People Buy

Chapter 6. The Proof of the Pudding

Chapter 7. Supplying that Impulse

Chapter 8. How to Put a Hook Into Your Letters

Chapter 9. The Six Essentials

Chapter 10. How It All Began

Chapter 11. The First Olive

Chapter 12. Selling \$2,000,000 Worth of O. Henry Stories

Chapter 13. A War History that Sold

Chapter 14. Books that Many People Know

Chapter 15. How Wells' "Outline" was Sold

Chapter 16. How the Bookbuyers Saved a Campaign

Chapter 17. A Giant of the Mails

Chapter 18. The Third Fifty Thousand

Chapter 19. Will You Accept This Little Gift?

Chapter 20. One Million Dollars' Worth of Orders in the First Six Months

Chapter 21. How Closely Can You Follow Up Leads?

Chapter 22. We Help to Start a Store

Chapter 23. How to Reach the Leaders

Chapter 24. Collecting with a Smile

Chapter 25. The Ideal Sales Letter

Chapter 26. How to Raise Money by Mail



# PREFACE

## [Table of Contents](#)

This is not a textbook, calculated to show the beginner how to take his pen or typewriter in hand and indite a masterly epistle to some fancied customer.

It is for the business man who already knows the theory of letter writing but is looking for more effective ways of putting it into practice.

It covers all the necessary rules, of course, but it does this informally. Primarily, it is the log book of a long and varied experience.

It shows successful ways of selling all manner of products, from coal and coke right on down to socks and dresses. But through all the differences in products and appeals, runs this one connecting thread—that while products and reasons for buying may vary, human nature remains much the same; that familiarity with the thing you are selling is an advantage, but the one essential without which success is impossible in selling, by mail or selling in person, is a thorough understanding of human reactions.

Study your reader first—your product second. If you understand his reactions, and present those phases of your product that relate to his needs, then you cannot help but write a good letter.

It may be said of this book that it does not give enough examples of unsuccessful letters. But most of us can find plenty of these in our own files. And isn't it true that we are far less concerned with why a letter failed than in finding out what it is that makes a letter successful?

The first book on business letter writing I ever read was the "Business Correspondence Library" published by *System* a good many years ago. To it, and to "Applied Business Correspondence" and other books by Herbert Watson, I owe

most of my theoretical knowledge of letter writing. Those familiar with Watson's writings will recognize many of his theories in the early chapters of this book. I gladly give acknowledgment to him as the one on whose writings the groundwork of my own education in direct mail was laid.

To John Blair, President of the New Process Company of Warren, Pennsylvania, I am indebted for numberless opportunities to test my pet ideas in the only crucible that gives dependable results—actual letters sent to prospective buyers—and for the perfect records that enabled me to see which theories were workable, which better forgotten.

For many of the short paragraphs used as examples of good starters, graphic descriptions, or proper closers, I am indebted to writers like Ad-Man Davison and Ben Sweetland and to such magazines as *Printers' Ink* and *System*.

To all of these I give acknowledgment and express sincere appreciation.

THE AUTHOR

NEW YORK, N. Y. May, 1931.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES SOME LETTERS PAY?**

[Table of Contents](#)

What is there about some letters that makes them so much more effective than others?

A letter may have perfect diction, a finished style; it may bristle with attention-getters and interest-arousers; it may follow every known rule; yet when it reaches the Hall of Judgment where the reader sits and decides its fate, it may find itself cast into the hell of wastebasketdom, while some screed lacking any pretense of polish or the finer arts of correspondence, blandly picks up the bacon and walks home with it. Why?

Because getting the results you set out to accomplish with a letter is no more a matter of rule of thumb than is landing a fish with a rod and hook. You know how often you have seen some ragged urchin pull in fish after fish with the crudest of lines, when a "sportsman" near by, though armed with every piscatorial lure known to man, could not raise even a bite!

It's a matter of bait, that's all. The youngster knew what the fish would bite on, and he gave it to them. Result? A mess of fine fish for dinner. The "sportsman" offered them what he had been led to believe fish ought to have—and they turned up their fishy noses at it.

Hundreds of books have doubtless been written about the fine art of fishing, but the whole idea is contained in that one sentence: "What bait will they bite on?" Thousands of articles have been written about the way to use letters to bring you what you want, but the meat of them all can be compressed into two sentences: "What is the bait that will

tempt your reader? How can you tie up the thing you have to offer with that bait?"

For the ultimate purpose of every business letter simmers down to this:

*The reader of this letter wants certain things. The desire for them is, consciously or unconsciously, the dominant idea in his mind all the time.*

*You want him to do a certain definite thing for you. How can you tie this up to the thing he wants, in such a way that the doing of it will bring him a step nearer to his goal?*

It matters not whether you are trying to sell him a rain-coat, making him a proposal of marriage, or asking him to pay a bill. In each case, you want him to do something for you. Why should he? Only because of the hope that the doing of it will bring him nearer his heart's desire, or the fear that his failure to do it will remove that heart's desire farther from him.

Put yourself in his place. If you were deep in discussion with a friend over some matter that meant a great deal to both of you, and a stranger came up, slapped you on the back and said: "See here, Mister, I have a fine coat I want to sell you!" What would you do? Examine the coat with interest, and thank him for the privilege, or kick him and the coat down the nearest stairs, and blister both with a few choice adjectives in the process?

Well, much the same thing happens when you approach a man by mail. He is deep in a discussion with himself over ways and means of getting certain things that mean a great deal to him. You butt in (that is the only term that describes it) and blandly tell him to forget those things that so deeply concern him and consider your proposition instead. Is it any wonder he promptly tells you where to head in, and lacking the ability to reach you, takes it out on your letter instead?

Then what is the right way to approach him? How would you do it if you were approaching him in person? If he were talking to someone, you'd listen for a while, wouldn't you,

and get the trend of the conversation? Then when you chimed in, it would be with a remark on some related subject, and from that you would bring the talk around logically to the point you wanted to discuss. It should not be much more difficult in a letter. There are certain prime human emotions with which the thoughts of all of us are occupied a goodly part of the time. Tune in on them, and you have your reader's attention. Tie it up to the thing you have to offer, and you are sure of his interest.

You see, your reader glancing over his mail is much like a man in a speeding train. Something catches his eye and he turns for a better look. You have his attention. But attention alone gets you nowhere. The something must stand closer inspection, it must win his interest, otherwise his attention is lost— and once lost, it is twice as hard to win the second time. Again it's a matter of bait—you may attract a fish's attention with a gaudily painted bauble, but if he once nibbles it and finds it made of tin, you will have a hard time reaching him again with anything else of the same kind.

Every mail brings your reader letters urging him to buy this or that, to pay a bill, to get behind some movement or to try a new device. Time was when the mere fact that an envelope looked like a personal letter addressed to him would have intrigued his interest. But that time has long since passed. Letters as letters are no longer objects of intense interest. They are bait neither more nor less—and to tempt him, they must look a bit different from bait he has nibbled at and been fooled by before. They must have something about them that stands out from the mass—that catches his eye and arouses his interest—or away they go into the wastebasket.

Your problem, then, is to find a point of contact with his interests, his desires, some feature that will flag his attention and make your letter stand out from all others the moment he reads the first line.

But it won't do to yell "Fire!" That will get you attention, yes of a kind but as far as your prospects of doing business are concerned, it will be of the kind a drunken miner got in the days when the West wore guns and used them on the slightest provocation. He stuck his head in the window of a crowded saloon and yelled "Fire!"—*and everybody did!*

Study your reader. Find out what interests him. Then study your proposition to see how it can be made to tie in with that interest. Take as an instance, the mother of a month-old baby. What is most in her thoughts? Imagine, then, how a letter starting like this would appeal to her:

After baby's food and baby's clothes, the most important thing you have to decide upon is the little cart baby is going to ride in—is going to be seen in is going to be admired in. Never a child came into the world but was worthy as good a cart, etc.

Or if you were the father of a six or eight-year-old boy, wouldn't this get under your skin?

Your boy is a little shaver now. He thinks you are the most wonderful man in the world. You can fix his boat, mend his velocipede, tell him wonderful stories.

But it will be only ten or twelve years until he goes to College. The fathers of the other boys—his chums—will go to see them. There will be a Railroad President, perhaps; a great Banker; a Governor.

And you will go; and your boy will say, "This is my father, boys."

How will he feel when he says it? Will he be proud of you?

Or take any one of the following starts. Can't you just see your reader nodding in interested agreement, can't you picture the way they would carry him along into a description of the thing offered, how they would make him want it, how they would lead him on to the final action?

*To a Druggist*

After you have run up front half a dozen times to sell a couple of stogies, a package of court plaster and a postage stamp; to change a five dollar bill for the barber, to answer the phone and inform Mrs. Smith that Castoria<sup>[1]</sup> is 250 a bottle, and assure Mrs. Jones that you will have the doctor call her up as soon as he comes in, then take a minute for yourself and look over this proposition. It's worthwhile.

### *To a Householder*

Doesn't it beat the Dutch the way thieves, pick-pockets, hold-up men and burglars are getting away with it these days?

There were over 1500 house burglaries last month in our dear old city; 92 business burglaries; 122 street hold-ups; 11 offices held up; 309 automobiles stolen, and the Lord only knows how many watches and purses taken on the streets. A good insurance policy against burglary and theft is a pretty cheap investment these days. Call me on the phone now, and I can have your valuables covered by noon.

### *To a Farmer*

Any man who owns a cow loses a calf once in a while. If you own a herd of a dozen or more, you are probably losing one or two calves a year. We know of breeders who were losing every calf—some sixteen—some over thirty a year.

And these breeders stopped their losses short—just like that—through the information given by us.

### *To a Merchant*

"She didn't buy anything."

How often is this little tragedy repeated in your store?

Your time is valuable your overhead expense runs on—and it costs you real money when a prospective customer walks out of your store without making a purchase.

### *To a Mother*

About that boy of yours—

He is arriving at the age when his spirit of manliness asserts itself. You find him imitating his father's manners—he is using your embroidery scissors to shave with—he is no longer ambitious to be a policeman, but has his eye on the Presidency. Among the serious problems with him today is this: He is beginning to want manly, square-cut, "growing-up" clothes. He is no longer satisfied with ordinary boys' clothes, He wants something "like father's."

### *To a Motorist*

If you have ever driven your car in a rainstorm, you know how annoying it is—dangerous, too—to have your wind shield clouded with water. How many times have you narrowly avoided accidents under these conditions? With the—Cleaner attached to your car, all you need to do is turn a button in front of you, and instantly every drop of water in your field of vision is swept from your wind shield. The glass is left clear and clean.

### *To a Doctor*

What a clutter of books a doctor can get around him, and what a fearful outlay of money they will come to represent if he doesn't use great discrimination in their purchase. I don't suppose there is any class of people—and I have customers among every class you can think of—who appreciate more than my medical friends the marvelous savings I am able to make them on all standard sets, reference books, etc.

### *To a Housewife*

After you have your breakfast dishes washed, your floors swept, and your beds made up, I should like to have a



moment of your time. You are an excellent judge of what is good to eat, and know when you are getting what you should from your grocer to be saving and yet to set your table with healthful and dainty dishes for your family...

### *To Any Man*

Are you like Mr. Fuller in that you dislike to shave with cold or lukewarm water?

Mr. Fuller always grumbled when the water was cold. Usually it was cold. You know how the ordinary hot water system works early in the morning.

But the Fullers found a way out of their troubles. Now—nowadays, no matter how early they may arise, there's always steaming hot water the instant a faucet is turned.

### *To Insurance Agents*

Did you ever, as a kid, sneak up alongside an old mill pond and heave what Penrod might call a "good old rock" far out into the middle of its placid surface—just for the fun of seeing all the mud turtles on all their sunny legs drop off into the water with one loud, individual PLUNK?

If the humble mud turtle formed no part of the backyard fauna of your youth, I reckon there was something mighty similar to engage your budding talents. Just as you find now, in your grown-up days, that the pursuit of your business aims often involve the same emotions that lent interest to your activities in the eyes of your early neighbors. For example: We want to point out to you a few of the prospects that are basking along the banks of the . . .

Bait—all of them. Find the thing your prospect is interested in and make it your point of contact, rather than rush in and try to tell him something about your proposition, *your* goods, *your* interests.

## CHAPTER 2

# HOW TO AROUSE THAT ACQUISITIVE FEELING

### [Table of Contents](#)

To go back to the very beginning, what is the first thing to do in writing any business letter?

Before you put pen to paper, before you ring for your stenographer, decide in your own mind what effect you want to produce on your reader—what feeling you must arouse in him.

If you want your readers to say, as the crowds did of Demosthenes' famous rival[2]: "What a clever speaker!"—then it is quite all right to start with catch-phrases and the like. But if you want to emulate Demosthenes, whose hearers forgot all about him in their interest in his message, then your whole effort must be centered on arousing the feeling in them: "*Let's go!*"

For back of every successful letter, as back of every sale, is a created feeling that impels the reader to act as you want him. It is the whole purpose of every business letter, whether it be sales, collection, adjustment or complaint, to make your reader *want* to do the thing you are urging upon him.

How are you to arouse that feeling in him? How would you have to feel yourself before you would place such an order as you have in mind, before you would grant such an extension, before you would send a payment to this man in preference to all others, at a time when it was an effort to send a dollar to anyone?

What would you want first to know? What about the proposition would interest you most? What would you feel

**46** Parcel Post was the postal service facility for shipping packages (separate from letter mail); in the U.S. it became a major distribution channel for mail-order firms after its establishment in the early 20th century, allowing companies to prepay and ship goods by mail.

**47** The HandiBag is the smaller, lower-priced traveling/doctor's bag the company tested and sold by mail-order in this chapter; it was offered for a trial week and promoted at a special introductory price of \$7.95 in the text.

**48** The "Statler" Bag is the firm's established, larger traveling-bag product mentioned as their well-known model; the HandiBag is described as a smaller bag made along the same lines as this popular "Statler" Bag.

**49** William James (1842–1910) was a Harvard philosopher and psychologist often called the founder of American pragmatism and an early investigator of consciousness and the subconscious, whose lectures and writings influenced popular ideas about mental capacity.

**50** Refers to Thomas Troward, a late 19th/early 20th-century British judge who became known for writings on mental science and New Thought, often cited in self-help and metaphysical literature.

**51** Likely Alexis Carrel, a French surgeon and researcher (late 19th/early 20th century) known for pioneering vascular surgery and tissue-culture techniques; some long-duration tissue experiments he reported became famous but were later questioned by other researchers.

**52** A short story by Richard Harding Davis (an American journalist and fiction writer active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) used here as a premium to encourage orders and trial readership.

**53** An older U.S. legal term appearing in the text that refers to the official (often called a 'referee in bankruptcy') who presided over bankruptcy hearings and proceedings before modern bankruptcy court reorganizations.

**54** A recurring title in the chapter referring to a mail-order self-improvement course or publication being sold in installments; in the text it is presented as a twelve-lesson program offered by the authors.

**55** A book title repeatedly mentioned in the chapter, presented here as a multi-volume work associated with the same publisher; Robert Collier is the author of a well-known self-help work by this name first published in the early 20th century.

**56** Refers to the initial printed runs of a book, which collectors often value more highly than later printings because they are earlier and sometimes scarcer.

**57** A coastal landing point used by prospectors during the Klondike Gold Rush of the late 1890s; Dyea (in present-day Alaska) was one of the common starting locations for overland routes to the Yukon.

**58** A mountain pass (also spelled Chilkoot) into the Yukon used by stampeders during the Klondike Gold Rush; authorities at the time controlled and inspected prospectors' supplies at the pass.

**59** A term used in the New Testament that derives from the Vale of Hinnom near Jerusalem; in Christian texts it is commonly used as a metaphor for Hell or a place of disposal (a dump heap) in the ancient city's outskirts.

**60** An American clergyman and lecturer (1843–1925) cited in the text; Conwell is best known for his popular

lecture/essay 'Acres of Diamonds' and for founding Temple University.

**61** A retail industry role: a buyer employed to purchase merchandise for one or more stores, often stationed near manufacturers to select samples and closeouts on behalf of out-of-town stores.

**62** A historical U.S. Postal Service classification for bulk printed matter and advertising circulars, offering lower postage rates but with restrictions and usually slower delivery than first-class mail.

**63** A type of worsted wool cloth or yarn produced in England, known for a smooth finish and durable weave; "worsted" denotes yarn spun from long wool fibers and woven into a closely woven fabric.

**64** An American writer referenced here as the author of 'Seven Minutes in Eternity'; he was active as an author and public figure in the early 20th century and later became involved in controversial political activism.

**65** The theater and entertainment district in Midtown Manhattan centered on Times Square, historically the concentration of Broadway theatres and first-run movie houses and a major commercial attraction in New York City.

**66** An American publishing firm formed from the merger of businesses founded by James H. McGraw and John A. Hill; by the early 20th century it specialized in trade, technical and business periodicals and textbooks and operated numerous industry-focused magazines.

**67** A time reference to the months in 1929 when the U.S. stock market peaked and then collapsed, culminating in the October 1929 crash that marked the start of the Great

Depression; 'Fall of 1929' usually refers to roughly September–November of that year.

**68** A named productivity 'yardstick' described in the text as measuring output per 1,000 working hours and used to compare plants and workers; the acronym is presented in the book but its full derivation is not explained here and may have been a proprietary or contemporary metric.

**69** A prominent U.S. banker and industrialist who served as Secretary of the Treasury in the 1920s and early 1930s; he was widely known at the time for his influence on fiscal policy and major business interests.

**70** Bud Fisher was an American cartoonist best known for creating the long-running comic strip "Mutt and Jeff" in the early 20th century; his work and gags were widely syndicated in newspapers of that period.

**71** The Business Week was a U.S. weekly magazine for business executives, originally published by McGraw-Hill (founded 1929) and later known as BusinessWeek (now Bloomberg Businessweek); it provided news and analysis aimed at managers and advertisers.

**72** Refers to high-quality linen produced in and around Belfast, a major center of linen manufacture in Ireland (now Northern Ireland) throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th century, prized for its smooth sheen and strength.

**73** Stamp-like labels sold to raise funds for charitable causes—most famously tuberculosis control—beginning in the early 20th century; purchasers affixed them to holiday mail or kept them as tokens while proceeds supported public-health campaigns.