FREE TRAINING BOOK

Selling Dresses Well

Presenting, photographing and pricing your work honestly

Standing on the Training Centre of Isabella Ngum

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About this book

Selling Dresses Well is a **free training book** — free to download, free to read, free to share. No charge stands on it, today or later.

A free training book from **48-Hour RFP Rescue** — standing on **Isabella Ngum's Training Centre**. It was written by the house as free teaching for everyone learning the dress trade; it is **not Isabella's own work**, and nothing in it claims to be. Where her boutique grows, her own lessons may one day stand beside these.

The teaching is general dress-trade knowledge, written plainly so a beginner can start and a working seller can check herself. Work through it in order, keep a notebook beside you, and do the small exercises at the end of each chapter — the trade is learned by the hands as much as by the eyes.

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Chapter 1 — Selling is a service before it is a sale

A dress is not bread. Nobody needs a new dress the way she needs food — she buys one because she wants to feel beautiful, ready, respected, joyful. The seller who understands this sells differently: she is not pushing cloth, she is helping a woman meet an occasion in her life — a wedding, a job, a church service, a photograph her grandchildren will keep. Sell to the occasion and you will never need to pressure anyone.

This book teaches the three crafts of selling dresses well: **presenting** the dress so its truth shows, **photographing** it so a woman far away can trust what she sees, and **pricing** it so your work is honoured without your customer being cheated. It stands on the first book of this shelf, *Knowing Dresses*: you cannot present well what you do not know.

Chapter 2 — Presenting the dress

Clean, pressed, mended

Before any presentation: the dress must be clean, pressed, and whole. A wrinkled dress looks cheaper than it is; a missing button whispers 'neglect' louder than any price tag can shout 'value'. Keep a small kit where you sell: needle and threads in common colours, spare buttons, a clothes brush, a steamer or iron access. Ten minutes of preparation routinely adds more to a sale than an hour of talking.

On the hanger, on the body, in the hand

A dress shows three ways. On the hanger it shows its colour and print. On a body — yours, a helper's, a dress form if you have one — it shows its cut and fall; this is where A-lines flare and wraps reveal their kindness. In the hand it shows its cloth: invite touch. 'Feel the weight of this cotton' is a sentence that sells honestly, because the hand cannot be fooled. Let customers hold, lift and turn your dresses. Sellers who fear touch usually fear what touch will reveal.

Grouping and the tidy stall or page

Group dresses the way a customer thinks: by occasion (church, office, ceremony, everyday), or by colour family, or by size — but never as one undifferentiated heap. A heap says 'search and luck'; a grouping says 'I have thought about you'. Keep the space swept, the light good, and your best dress where eyes land first. Online, the same law holds: your page's first photographs are your stall's front table.

Chapter 3 — Helping her choose: the fitting conversation

Ask about the occasion before you show a single dress. 'Where will you wear it?' is the most valuable question in the trade. Then ask about her comforts: sleeves or none, length she prefers, colours she loves or avoids. Listen more than you talk. Then bring **three** dresses — not ten. Three says you understood her; ten says you are guessing.

Honesty at the mirror

When a dress does not suit her, say so — gently, and with the alternative already in your hand. 'The colour loves you, but the cut

fights your shoulders; this one keeps the colour and frees the shoulder.' A woman whose seller once saved her from a wrong dress will refuse to buy dresses from anyone else. Flattery sells one dress; honesty sells a wardrobe, over years.

The try-on rules

- Give privacy and time; never rush a fitting.
- Keep a tape ready and offer measurements instead of opinions about her body.
- Speak of the dress, never of her figure's faults: 'this cut sits high' — never 'your stomach'.
- If she loves a dress that needs a small alteration, say what can be done and what it involves — plainly, before she pays.

Chapter 4 — Photographing dresses with a phone

Most dress selling now passes through a photograph. A true photograph is your honest description made visible (Book One, Chapter 5); a false one is a lie with good lighting. These rules need no equipment beyond the phone in your hand.

Light first

Photograph in daylight, near a window or in open shade — never under a yellow bulb, which eats colours, and never with the flash, which flattens cloth into glare. Morning and late afternoon light are kindest. The colour in your photograph must be the colour of the dress: if the photo lies about colour, retake it, because she will judge you by the difference when the dress arrives.

The five photographs of every dress

- **Front, full length** — on a body or dress form if possible; on a hanger against a clean wall if not.
- **Back, full length** — zips, ties and surprises live at the back; show them.
- **Cloth close-up** — one photograph near enough to show weave, print and texture truly.
- **Detail** — the neckline, sleeve, embroidery or button work that makes this dress itself.
- **Any fault** — if there is a mend, a fade, a mark: photograph it. The fault shown by you is small; the fault discovered by her is the end of trust.

Background and truth

A clean, plain background — a wall, a sheet, a swept floor — keeps the dress the subject. Do not use filters that change colour or smooth the cloth; do not borrow photographs from the internet to represent your dress (that is selling a picture, not a dress — and it is another woman's work besides). One honest photograph of your real dress outsells ten borrowed beauties, because only the honest one can be delivered.

Chapter 5 — Pricing your work honestly

Pricing is where many good sellers stumble — too low from fear, too high from hope, changing from day to day so no customer knows where she stands. An honest price is built, not guessed, and it is built from the same four stones every time.

The four stones of a price

- **What the dress cost you** — purchase or cloth and making, every franc counted, including transport.
- **What your work costs** — your time in choosing, cleaning, pressing, mending, photographing, presenting. Your hours are real; price them modestly but truly — a seller who prices her own time at zero is training herself to quit.
- **What selling costs** — stall or shop costs, data, packaging, delivery help, market dues — the small leaks that sink small businesses.
- **A fair gain** — the margin that lets the business live and grow. Fair means: you could explain this price aloud, stone by stone, to the customer's face, without shame.

One price, spoken plainly

Hold one price for all customers for the same dress in the same week. Where bargaining is the custom of your market, set your price with a small, known room to move — and move the same way for everyone, so no woman learns later that her neighbour paid less for the same dress and feels cheated. Feeling cheated, not paying much, is what loses customers. A price can be high and respected; it cannot be crooked and respected.

Never these

- Never invent a 'former price' to make a discount look big.
- Never price by the customer's clothes, car or phone — price the dress.
- Never hide costs that will appear later (delivery, alteration) — name them before she pays.

- Never sell below your four stones out of fear and call it kindness; a closed business helps no customer.

Chapter 6 — After the sale, and your exercises

Fold the dress with care, wrap it cleanly, and give the care line aloud as you hand it over: 'Wash her cold, dry her in shade, and she will serve you long.' That sentence — the whole of Book Three in one breath — turns a sale into a relationship. Keep a simple record of what sold, to whom (with her permission), and when; when a dress arrives that suits a past customer, you may write to her — a seller who remembers is a seller who is remembered.

Exercises

- Prepare one dress fully — clean, press, mend — and time yourself. That time belongs in your pricing.
- Take the five photographs of one dress by the rules above. Compare colours with the dress in your hand.
- Build one price from the four stones, written down. Say it aloud as if to the customer.
- Practise the fitting conversation with a friend: occasion first, three dresses, honesty at the mirror.

Chapter 7 — The workbench: hard days and returning customers

Every seller meets the hard cases, and how she meets them is her reputation in its working clothes. This chapter names the common ones and the honest road through each.

The customer who says 'it is cheaper elsewhere'

She may be right — and if she is, no argument will make your dress cheaper. Answer from your knowledge, not from fear: 'It may be. Mine is cotton, measured here — bust 96, waist 78 — and mended and pressed by my own hands; if the other is the same, take it with my blessing.' A seller who can bless a customer toward another stall is a seller the whole market trusts, and trust returns carrying money. What you must never do is invent faults in the other seller's dress — the market hears that too.

The dress that comes back

A returned dress is information wearing a disguise. Ask, without defence: what failed — the fit, the colour at home, the occasion changed? If the fault is yours — a seam you missed, a measure you mistook — own it at once and make it right; the speed of your honesty decides whether she tells the story as your shame or your honour. If the dress was worn and the wish simply changed, your own stated rule governs — which is why you state your returns rule before sales, calmly, to everyone: what you accept, within what time, in what condition. A rule spoken in advance is fairness; the same rule invented in an argument is a wall.

Slow days and stock that will not move

Slow days are for the work that busy days forbid: re-pressing, re-photographing, re-grouping the stall, writing the stock book up to date, learning one new thing about one fabric. And stock that will not move is a lesson asking to be read: was it the cut, the colour, the size run, the price built wrong? Change one thing at a time — a new grouping, a better photograph, an honest reduction you can explain — and watch. A dress reduced because its season passed is honest

trading; a dress whose 'reduction' was invented from a price it never carried is the lie Chapter 5 forbids.

Keeping customers across the years

The mathematics of this trade is simple: a woman who buys one dress is a sale; a woman who returns for five years is a livelihood. Returning is built from the small currencies — her name remembered, her sizes in your book with her permission, a message when a dress in her colour arrives, a mending done gladly for a dress she bought from you two rains ago. None of this costs money. All of it costs attention, which is why so few sellers pay it — and why the ones who do are never short of customers.

Workbench exercise: write your returns rule in three sentences, in words you could say to a friend's face. If you cannot say it to a friend, rewrite it until you can.

You now know dresses (Book One) and how to sell them (this book). Book Three, *Fabric Care*, teaches you to keep them alive — the knowledge your customers will thank you for longest.