

DBJ September 2011

Elevate Your Sales Presentation to the Next Level

Have you ever blown a presentation? Most sales professionals have at one time or another, and it may not be possible to bullet proof every one. Here are some points to put on your check list before attempting to persuade that next prospect.

First, resist presenting prematurely before you qualify your prospect for need, decision process and budget. Remember that a presentation should be to prove how your offering meets the needs of a qualified prospect, and demonstrate how it is the best solution.

A presentation should not be used to gain interest unless it is specifically designed to uncover and develop needs. For example an initial software demo may develop needs and identify problems. Follow-up demonstrations then provide sound proof that your solution is the best one. Presenting too soon reduces your chances of drawing out answers to your qualifying questions.

When planning your presentation keep your end-objective in mind. At a minimum have a discussion about what next steps would be, assuming the recipient likes what they see and hear. You can even ask for a future date, of the prospects choosing, when they would feel comfortable giving you a thumbs up or thumbs down on moving ahead.

'Involve and resolve' by keeping your presentations interactive when at all possible. Engage your prospects. Invite them to run the demo or become part of it. Have them assist with presentation equipment set-up. Allow them to touch and feel product and props.

Consider the following presentation structure:

- Review your goal of mutual self-interest and win-win for both by stating the presentation objective. An example would be "Our objective today is to find out if this is a solution that meets your needs and if not, what you would like to change."
- Present your understanding of the client's needs and pains, any evidence you gained in your qualifying discussions, and determine if anything has changed.
- Establish a mutually agreed upon time you can expect a decision.
- Generally, the best rule to follow is to 'divide and conquer'. Ask your potential buyer to prioritize the needs or issues they would like you to address first. For example, if warranty is the most important concern, lead and stay with that topic until your audience is completely comfortable with your solution before moving to the next point. By not addressing the most important points first you endanger your chance to capture the bottom line, get-to-the-point decision makers. Often, they are not listening closely anyway because their mind is focused on what is most important to them, not on what you are saying.
- If pricing is the last issue, (shame on you if you have not had a discussion about budget before now) then make certain there are no other issues to address before you present pricing.

Providing a compelling, content-rich presentation is a given, but you must deliver with conviction, authority, and authenticity. Many speech coaches say you gain or lose an audience in the first thirty seconds. Make a memorable initial impact by beginning with impact.

Consider opening with a startling fact. One service provider uses the statement 'There are over one-hundred and fifty-thousand deaths each year due to hospital acquired infections.' Such a statement should be validated, but it gets attention.

Another option is to use a third party reference as a lead-in to gain attention, such as 'Studies (or research) indicate that safety increases when...' Both stories and analogies are great openers and can be easily recalled by your audience.

Pay attention to personal presence, delivery style and tonality. Personal presence means conveying a confident posture, maintaining good eye contact, and intelligently stopping to look and listen. Remember, they are buying you as well as your offering.

Pause when making key points. People need time to digest what you are saying and a pause announces 'this is important.' Maintain audience attention with inflection, alternating softness and loudness to make points or move from one issue to another. Vary your tempo by speeding up and slowing down occasionally.

Research indicates that many unresolved concerns remaining at the end of presentations are often due to a lack of information. Enable your prospect to voice those concerns in a comfortable non-threatening way by asking gain questions, such as, "How do you see yourself using...?" or "How do you see this fitting in your environment?" or "Is the ease of operation of any benefit in your perspective?"

Practice is essential and will pay handsomely. You want to be able to focus on your prospect and how you are saying things, not on what you are going to say.

Present strategically, not prematurely, establish your knowledge and authority, engage, encourage and address, leave no critical stones unturned, and your presentation will generate greater results.