

The Importance of Good Salesmanship

Alan Gresch

During the course of my career I have heard many biomedes say, “I could never be a salesperson!” But the fact of the matter is you can’t lead your department to a higher level of value within your organization without some basic sales skills, and when you are trying to move your department or an initiative forward, particularly when it involves an up-front investment of money or trust from your organization, your sales skills had better be well honed.

Being a good “salesman” for most of us started when we were first interviewing and selling ourselves for our past and current positions. Zig Ziglar, a world-renowned motivator and leader in sales training, refers to sales people as professional persuaders. At various points in time, you will need to be persuasive to your boss, your staff, your co-workers, your customers, your administration, your finance officers, etc., so learning these skills will serve you well in any position. Having had the opportunity and the privilege to get to know many excellent “persuaders,” I have learned many of the attributes that have made them successful and can also help you reach new heights.

1. **Have a product worth selling.** Selling is a lot easier if you have a good product. Getting back to selling yourself, no amount of salesmanship is going to work if you don’t meet the minimum qualifications. Likewise, if an idea or program you’re trying to promote doesn’t bring significant value to your organization, it’s not going to go far. In the case of promoting your department, make sure that you are doing everything you can to make it better than the competition. Then you won’t be able to contain your enthusiasm and pride, and promoting yourself and your department will be a snap.
2. **Be committed.** Any salesperson I’ve ever met who enjoyed long-term success has worked his or her tail off to do whatever was necessary to meet the needs of his or her customers—and often those needs extended beyond normal working hours. Hard work is part of the equation for any formula for success.

Check Points

Everyone who wants to see his or her business or department achieve or be recognized should develop the following attributes of good salesmanship:

- ✓ Have a product worth selling.
- ✓ Be committed.
- ✓ Be polished.
- ✓ Do your homework.
- ✓ Know your audience and what is important to them.
- ✓ Tap into available sales training resources.
- ✓ Familiarize yourself with presentation tools.
- ✓ Be persistent.
- ✓ Deliver what you sell.
- ✓ Follow up.

You also need to believe in what you are selling—to the point where you will put yourself out there and take some risks to make your idea a reality.

3. **Be polished.** This involves a number of different facets: looking the part, being well spoken and articulate, and being able to write well.
 - First and foremost, it is important to look the part. Fair or not, most people do indeed judge a book by its cover. I’ve often told my leadership staff that it is much easier to walk into a situation looking like you are competent and professional and have to work your way down from there, than to give a first impression that you are not competent and professional and have to work your way up. In some cases you may not even be given the opportunity to work your way up, so why take the chance?
 - Another component is being well spoken and articulate. For many people this is the most difficult thing to master since they’d rather get a root canal without anesthetic than engage in public speaking of any kind. Many organizations offer classes on presentation skills. Take them! Look for opportunities to speak, and take advantage of

them. Practice the skill, and you will get better at it. Eventually you may even reach the point where you don't sweat! The May/June 2008 issue of *BI&T* includes an article by David Braeutigam entitled "Speak Up: A Guide to Improving Your Public Speaking Skills" that includes tips on how to enhance your public speaking skills. I can't emphasize enough how important this is to your long-term success and upward mobility.

- Pay attention to the development of your written presentation skills as well. In many cases, an executive summary may be your only opportunity to get an idea in front of someone, and you want to make the most of that opportunity.

I highly recommend books such as *Real World 101* by James Calano and Jeff Salzman, *Speak and Get Results* by Sandy Linver, and *Writing with Precision* by Jefferson Bates as good resources to help you develop in all of these areas.

4. **Do your homework.** Know your product/proposal inside and out. Know the potential pitfalls and plan how to deal with them. Like developing a good business plan, you need to identify strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. Anticipate potential questions and opposition, and have the answers ready and rehearsed. Bounce your proposal off other trusted professionals, and ask for feedback to identify as many of those potential questions or pitfalls as possible. This is also a great way to develop relationships within and outside the organization and get other leaders to know you as someone who makes things happen. Jeffrey Gitomer, another well-known sales trainer and author, said, "It's not who you know, it's who knows you."

5. **Know your audience and what is important to them.** Don't try to sell a program to a clinical department based on cost savings or productivity gains. Because they are focused on patient care, you won't strike a chord with them on that basis. Instead, focus on the positive impacts on patient care and/or patient safety. (And oh, by the way, as a side benefit, we'll save a million dollars and increase productivity by 30%.) Likewise, don't try to sell a program to finance departments based on clinical enhancements because they will want to know what the impact is to the bottom line. (And oh, by the way, as a side benefit, the program will also have all these positive impacts on patient care.) With either

group, have data handy that will support your case.

Remember, with some projects you may need to make your proposal with several different groups before you can move forward, so tailor your presentations for each specific group. I strongly recommend that even after getting support from the top, you identify all potential parties who might be affected, including your own staff, and "make your sale" to get their support as well. It will make buy-in much easier, and they may have some good ideas to enhance your initiative. Everyone wants to know, "What's in it for me?" Figure out what that is for each group, and make sure they understand the benefits that affect them.

6. **Tap into available sales training resources.** It's what Stephen Covey calls "sharpening the saw." There are many excellent books, videos, and CDs available that can help you hone your sales skills. Some of the best are

- *Sales 101: What Every Successful Sales Professional Needs to Know* and *Secrets of Closing the Sale* by Zig Ziglar, who has also written great books on goals and motivation
- *The Little Green Book of Getting Your Way: How to Speak, Write, Present, Persuade, Influence, and Sell Your Point of View to Others* by Jeffrey Gitomer
- *High Trust Selling* by Todd Duncan
- *The 25 Sales Habits of Highly Successful Salespeople* by Stephen Schiffman

7. **Familiarize yourself with presentation tools.** Getting a presentation or proposal in the right format to present is sometimes as important as the content itself. Knowing how to use PowerPoint, Excel graphs, Visio®, or other flowchart software are keys to creating a professional-looking presentation that can really enhance the impact of your proposals. A couple of years ago we were putting together a major presentation for the finance and human resources departments and senior administration in our organization to try to get support for a significant initiative we were undertaking. One of my staff was a wizard at using Adobe Photoshop®, and the resulting map slides that he created made the point of what we were trying to accomplish so clear that the impact of those slides on our overall presentation cannot be overstated. Another upside is that these programs are also fun to experiment with. Most organizations offer basic and advanced classes on these programs to help you get started,

and all offer great tutorials if you prefer to learn on your own. One caution: Be careful not to get too caught up with using animation and sounds. They tend to be distracting rather than add any real value to the point you are trying to make. As always, the “KISS” (Keep It Simple Stupid) principle applies. Two good references in this area are *How to Prepare, Stage, and Deliver Winning Presentations* by Thomas Leech and *Effective Presentation: How to Create and Deliver a Winning Presentation* by Ros Jay and Antony Jay.

8. **Be persistent.** Sometimes an idea falls on deaf ears because the timing isn't right. Sometimes it is because the idea wasn't directed at the right set of ears. Sometimes it is because there was something lacking in the presentation. Do not give up. Figure out why it didn't sell, and go back at it again. Calvin Coolidge supposedly said, “Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is

full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

9. **Deliver what you sell.** If you ever hope to make a second sale or get support for another opportunity within your organization, this is every bit as important as the sale. You've all likely dealt with a salesperson who vanishes after the sale or dealt with a product that failed to deliver what you thought you were promised. Did you give that guy another opportunity? How does that saying go? “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.” It all starts with not overselling. Do not make promises you aren't 100% sure you can keep. Be relatively conservative in your projections, and do not—under any circumstances—fail to deliver on your commitments. Your long-term success depends on it. Don't make excuses; just do whatever it takes to live up to your commitments. Every time you do, it builds credibility, and it makes the next sale easier. Over time, your promises will be like money in the bank to the leaders in your organization, and that is exactly where you want to be. This idea might cause some to not take a chance at all. Don't be one of those people. The rewards are worth the risk.


10. **Follow up.** The really good salespeople always follow up with a card or an e-mail message, thanking the person or people they met with for the opportunity and outlining in writing what was agreed on with specific time lines. This works well for both sides in that you clarify what you committed to deliver by when, as well as what you need from the other party in order to meet your commitments.

Adopt these practices, and very quickly you and your team will find yourselves more valued in your organization. As a result, you'll be more engaged, motivated, and will be establishing goals based on what is most important to making your organization successful, thus further ensuring your own success. Now go out and sell! ■

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Certification in Clinical Engineering (CCE) Exam



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