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# THE ART OF SILENCE

How Keeping Quiet Can Bring More Power

EDITORIAL | LIZ TAHIR

As Sarah wound her way past the tables and toward the stage to get her “Top Salesperson Award” at the company’s annual dinner, her colleagues were mumbling about how it was possible that someone who’s been with the firm for only a year could have sold more than anyone else. Sarah was pleasant enough, but hardly the gregarious salesman type. When asked how, Sarah wasn’t talking. What her colleagues didn’t know was that her silence was the real key to her success. Sarah was making sales by practicing the art of *silence* — not the art of *talking*.

Silence is the secret tool of power negotiators. Knowing when to listen and not talk. Using facial expressions rather than your voice to make a point. Here are five tips on how perfecting the art of silence can make you a better negotiator.



**LIZ TAHIR**

Liz Tahir, a former corporate executive, has headed **Liz Tahir & Associates** for the past 17 years, as a marketing consultant, conference speaker, and business writer. She has delivered seminars and workshops from Japan to Brazil on improving negotiating skills for better success in today's international marketplace. For more information about her services, visit [liztahir.com](http://liztahir.com), or call her at 504-569-1670.

**Listen More**

Listening is not passive. One can control the negotiation process by simply listening well. When we listen well, we gain the trust and confidence of others. When people are encouraged to speak, they tell us their needs, their wants, their dreams, and their plan of action. In short, they give us information. When we truly listen to people, we make them feel important, particularly if we are making effective eye contact while listening. The problem is that most of us don't truly listen when others talk. We just can't remain silent long enough to really hear them. Chances are we are just marking time until we can jump in and start talking. We should be aware that every time we do talk, we open ourselves to being vulnerable.

**The 10-Second Strategy**

Silence makes most of us uncomfortable. In today's world, there is noise all around us, from the cell phones ringing, to the iPod in our ear, to chats around the water cooler. We are conditioned to noise — not being silent. Try this test: the next time you are negotiating with the other party, and they say something like "well, that's my offer," don't utter a word for 10 seconds. It's practically guaranteed they will jump in with another offer or more information, anything to break the silence. When you get comfortable with 10 seconds, bump it up to 20 seconds. The silence will hang like lead and drive 'em crazy!

**Ask Questions**

A good way to learn silence is to ask questions, another secret weapon of successful negotiators. The person asking the questions controls the conversation. While you can get information from the person answering the question, generally if you have done your homework, you should already know the answer before you ask. Lawyers are taught to never ask a question without already knowing the answer; good advice. What you are really doing here is getting the other person to talk, perhaps to verify your information, but really to feel more comfortable working with you, and therefore to trust you.


Let's turn that around. Realize that when someone asks you a question, there is no law that says you have to answer. Try remaining silent. The questioner will likely start talking again. A good negotiator who really does not want to answer a question might, after awhile, say something like "before I answer that, tell me why you ask." Throw it back. Remember, there is no law that states you have to answer questions asked of you.

**Pause More Between Sentences**

In a recent study, a team of scientists showed that in listening to a musical symphony, just a one-to-two-second break between movements triggers a flurry of mental activity. So could a one-to-two-second pause between sentences be just as powerful in helping others comprehend our information? Any comedian will tell you that it is the timing of pauses in their delivery that determines their success. Those of us who are fast talkers have to learn to be more deliberate and practice this art of pausing between sentences for more emphasis.

**The Flinch, the Shrug, the Smile**

These actions are all guaranteed to carry a powerful message, as you remain totally silent! The flinch is the quick, jerky movement of the shoulders, with a pained look on your face, as if you have just been stricken. It sends an immediate message you did not like what you heard. Once you flinch, then what? Why, remain silent. Wait for the other party to speak, and they quickly will, chances are while scrambling to sweeten the deal. The *shrug* of the shoulders sends the message that you just don't care; you're not interested. Again, remain silent. And the *smile*. A silent smile is powerfully enigmatic (ask Mona Lisa), and the other party is left to guess what you are thinking. And, yes, again, don't let the first person who speaks be you.

Power negotiators, whether sellers or buyers, know that what you *don't* say is sometimes more powerful than what you do say. Use these tips the next time you negotiate and enjoy the power that silence brings. 





# tips+tools

## how a small agency can land the big fish

**Frank J. Meyer**, director of marketing & business development, RSW US, offers some valuable strategies to make small agencies more relevant in the eyes of large prospects.

“The first step to land that large, agency-elevating client is always the toughest. Devising the plan to land that signature client that will forever transform the face of an agency is no easy task, and executing it effectively is more difficult.

“Overcoming the status quo to secure that big fish is more than simply a change of prospect list, it often requires a shift in an agency’s fundamental approach. The days of relying on cold calls and referrals to secure those low-hanging opportunities must pass and be replaced with a more strategic, comprehensive, marketing-centric business development program. Though it may seem a daunting task, it is a necessary one. Running in circles with the same approach will simply not make a small agency more relevant or allow them the opportunity to successfully land that keystone customer or principal.

“This shift in approach begins with taking an objective look at the entire agency. The foundation for success is secured by first defining who the agency is. Often an assessment from an outside, experienced business development partner can be invaluable. These partners have the ability to first look at an agency with a critical eye, then leverage their expertise to impartially place their findings in the context of the industry and competition. Additionally, outside firms can quickly unearth the reasons to believe why a small agency can not only compete, but exceed the services of their larger counterparts. This outside perspective could provide the needed edge to make an agency’s messaging resonate with that large multi-national.

“Knowing what to say is as important as knowing how to say it. Though consistently placed on the back burner, the utilization of a market-proven approach and sound methodology to acquire new business can quickly increase the potential for small agencies to acquire large clients.

“Equally important to uncovering the opportunity with a large prospect is how an agency approaches the pitch. The sound, detail-oriented approach that got your foot in the door and into the pitch must be carried throughout. Researching and understanding

the prospect and their business and addressing current and potential needs as well as providing prospects with the best solutions for their needs (not the best solutions your agency can offer) will make a strong and credible argument for any size agency, every time.

“Small agencies must also keep the following in mind when they are in the pitch or providing insights to reel in that large prospect:

**Be bold.** Don’t be afraid to lay out what you really think. With so much competition, many agency pitches start sounding alike. A growing number of large companies are looking for smaller, more nimble agencies to offer innovative solutions to their needs.

**Be truthful.** Offering valuable strategic insights that add value to the prospects goes a long way. If a prospect’s strategic direction is off, agencies need to let them know instead of giving them what they believe the prospect wants to hear.

**Be compelling.** Agencies must believe what they are selling. Buying into the message internally, believing it, and communicating it along with sound strategic insights will keep small agencies competitive regardless of category, geography, or expertise.

“In any scenario, the ability to harness, streamline and direct efforts toward a common goal is a benefit. Additionally, partners that have the skill and expertise to accurately audit an agency, develop a custom business development plan based on a proven methodology, and the ability to execute that plan is invaluable. Oftentimes, agencies do not look outside for assistance to establish their agency or reposition their brand, but this may be a far more costly investment when looking at the opportunity cost of an internal program. While hard costs are associated with stepping outside, the ceiling is much higher for an agency as a result. Rather than looking solely at the numbers in a vacuum, they must be placed relative to the opportunities and the potential return as well as the long-term benefits of the insights.

“With trends in the industry pointing to so many cases where smaller agencies are landing the big fish, the opportunity is ripe for small agencies to get more serious about business development. A solid plan and the ability to execute it will poise any small agency to transform their business and potentially catch their Moby Dick.” +