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A photograph of three white lambs standing on a grassy hill under a clear blue sky. The lamb in the foreground is the largest and most prominent, looking directly at the camera. Two other lambs are visible behind it, one to the left and one to the right, also looking towards the camera. The text is overlaid on the middle of the image.

# HOW TO AVOID THE BLANK STARE OF DISENGAGEMENT

[ IN A BUYER'S EYE ]

EDITORIAL | DIANNA BOOHER



## DIANNA BOOHER

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Prospects size you up personally while making their buying decision. “Are you credible?” “Competent?” “Interested in their situation?” **The following tips will help you avoid the blank stare of disengagement when faced with similar scenarios.**

### Consider Your Demeanor — Don’t Confuse Boring for Sincere

Create flair and drama as you present a new idea, product, or service. Wanting to shed the huckster image of 40 or 50 years ago, some sales professionals have gone to the other extreme, and removed all animation, inflection, and energy from their delivery style in an effort to come across as more “sincere.”

Instead of sincere, the result is lackluster and boring.

If you’re not passionate about your proposal, your buyers won’t be, either. Never confuse genuine enthusiasm for lack of professionalism. If you want to see the passion and power to move a world to action, watch the delivery styles of world leaders. Don’t let a passionless demeanor destroy your prospect’s confidence in your offering.

### Distinguish Between Agreeing and Understanding

Agreeing and understanding have similar “symptoms” — smiling, nodding head, supportive statements. Make sure your buyer knows that you’re communicating that you *understand* as opposed to *agree* with a viewpoint or issue. Not recognizing this difference can lead to opposite conclusions — and big disappointments and misunderstandings.

### Use a Positioning Structure Rather Than a Pitch

Canned and formula presentations primarily make a product pitch. That is, they “tell all” about your organization and summarize one or a few key products or services (or product or service lines).

A positioning presentation, on the other hand, focuses on how your organization and your product or service *differs* from others — how it uniquely meets the buyer’s needs or situation. It focuses on targeted areas of interest where your unique core strength meets the buyer’s criteria, and then compares that strength to what the competitor offers.

Unless you present the same product or service to the same prospect base with the same needs, it’s best to use the positioning structure for your presentations.

### Never Just “Walk Through” Your Proposal — Give a Guided Tour

Your buyers will beat you to the end every time. While you’re still on page two, your buyers will be on page eight, checking out the pricing section. In fact, your proposal will compete with you for attention. Instead, carefully select which parts of your proposal to present orally. Then refer buyers to a specific page only *after* you make your key point about that page.

### Ask What Your Buyer Knows — Rather Than Tell What You Know

“What do you know about my organization?” allows your buyers to give their perceptions. You then can fill in the gaps, clarifying and correcting, if necessary. When you lead with, “Let me tell you a little about our organization,” you’re at a distinct disadvantage for several reasons: You’re doing all the talking and setting yourself up in lecture mode as the person with all the answers. You may be providing information already known, or you may be elaborating on what the buyer doesn’t care about knowing. And you have no way of knowing if the customer really understands what you’ve said — and most important — what your organization offers.

### Tell Failure Stories

There is power in telling case histories about clients who didn’t have stellar success with your product or service — if the reason for their lack of success was due to their own decision-making, not your product or service. It underscores what other customers did wrong (for example, waiting too long to buy, not using your design team to install and customize their product, not buying a warranty) and helps the current prospect not to repeat the mistake. Telling about failures of other product users adds credibility to your success stories.

One caution: Don’t use names with failure stories, because prospects may fear you’ll tell others of their own mistakes later if they buy.

### Make Statistics and Facts Experiential

People digest numbers with great difficulty. Yes, pie charts and bar graphs help. But if you can go beyond that, do so. For example, randomly survey your committee of buyers

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by asking them to raise their hands in response to a few questions; then equate those findings to the random survey you did previously of their entire organization. Are they typical of the rest of the employee population? How so?

Supporting statistics lend credibility to what you say. Be sure, however, to do all you can to help your buyers digest them.

### Prefer Understatement to Overstatement

After a teenager came home from his first summer job interview as a grocery stocker, his mom asked how it went. “I don’t know,” he said. “They gave me one of those honesty tests, where they asked if I’d ever cheated on an exam, if I’d ever stolen money from my parents, if I’d ever shoplifted — things like that.” He paused, looked a little concerned, then added, “I was answering no to all those things and then I got a little worried that maybe I wouldn’t get the job — that I sounded too good to be true.”

He did get the job, but it was an astute observation about human nature.

It’s always more effective to let your prospect “add to” what you’ve promised rather than “discount it” because it seems too good to be believable. Present the range of results you have achieved and can document. Generally, it is better to promise only the minimum gains. Otherwise, you set up your client to be disappointed. If the minimum gains are worthwhile to them, maximum gains will be the “extra” that makes them long-term fans.

So to avoid that same blank look of disengagement in a buyer’s eye, keep these communication keys in mind. You’ll be clicking with your customers in no time. <sup>as</sup> <sub>in</sub>