

ON Preparation AND Presentations

BY DAVE KAHLE

In my first professional, full-time sales position, the company brought all the new salespeople to a six-week training class in Mill Valley, California. There, we memorized three, four-page, single-spaced sales presentations. Most days consisted of practicing those presentations in role-playing scenarios, having them video recorded, playing them back, and then having the group critique them. We would do it again the next day, only better than the day before. Believe me, when we were finished, we knew how to present those products.



But perhaps the main reason why so many salespeople don't prepare their presentation is that they have never been taught to value meticulous preparation.

While that kind of meticulous preparation is overkill for many selling situations today, it was based upon a principle that is all too often disregarded by salespeople today. The principle is this: If you are going to present effectively, you must prepare thoroughly.

Unfortunately, far too many salespeople fail to thoroughly prepare their presentations. There are a variety of reasons. Some salespeople think of themselves as "great relationship builders." This leads them to the position where they believe that they don't need to be able to execute proven sales practices because their relationships will trump everything else. "The customer will buy it because he likes me," they think.

While there may have been a time when that was true for some customers, it certainly is a prescription for failure today. Customers today are generally far too pressured to wring value out of every minute of their day to make buying decisions solely on the basis of a relationship. In many cases, the relationship provides access and preference, but the product or service offered must stand up under increasing scrutiny. And that means that the salesperson must be able to present it intelligently and persuasively.

Other salespeople think of themselves as "quick on their feet." They don't need to prepare, they think, because their superior ability to ad-lib will see them through. Because there is little substance to their "ad-libbing," they end up wasting both the customer's time as well as their own.

I never will forget going to hear a well-known, celebrity speaker. He hadn't prepared a bit for this presentation, he announced to the 200 to 300 people in the audience, because he believed in "being in the moment." I got up and left, feeling insulted.

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We certainly see the principle of "preparation for presentation" at work all around us. Can you imagine your favorite NFL football team entering the game without any preparation for it? Ludicrous!

Or the attorney trying a big case without any preparation? Or the teacher entering the classroom with no

idea of what he is going to do? Or the politician giving a speech without knowing what he is going to say?


The examples are all around us. Whenever there is anything important to be communicated, the best communicators spend time preparing that communication.

Salespeople who don't take the time to prepare, then, either don't think it is important, or have no interest in doing it well. In either case, they are disrespecting the customer by showing little concern for his time, and showing themselves to be something less than professional salespeople.

There are, in my view of selling, those practices that are requirements of the job, and those practices that mark the best performers. This one falls into the former category, not the latter. In other words, this isn't a best practice, it is a required practice. A salesperson who doesn't prepare, shouldn't be in sales. It's a requirement of the job.

To not do so devalues the role of the salesperson, and disrespects the customer's time.

Memorizing four-page presentations, repetitively practicing them and then critiquing the video recording may seem like overkill to us today, but it did teach me the value of preparation for presentations. The night before every presentation, I mentally rehearsed the presentation, checked the demo equipment and thoroughly prepared once more. In that industry, my product line was 35% more expensive than the competition. But, in head-to-head competition, I got 28 of 29 major deals.

Maybe it was the preparation. 



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