

Solve Anything with Dr. Mark

Career Advice
for the
Working Class

Accountant finds sales
no easy task

Q: I am an accountant for a medium size firm. I do many sales presentations to groups (it's still difficult to use the "s" word when I think of what I do for a living). I get polite nods and even the occasional smile, but then people vote with their feet and it's not in the direction of hiring me or my company for our services. I have seen other service professionals make similar presentations who generate business. What can I do to turn my presentations into being hired?

A: Your opening statement revealed the conflict you still feel about selling and it seems that you would like to find a way to get your point across that evokes action without jamming things down people's throats.

A new book on making presentations (one of the best I've read) is "Own the Room: Business Presentations that Persuade, Engage, and Get Results" by David Booth, Deborah Shames, and Peter Desberg (McGraw-Hill, \$18.95).

If you are not landing new clients, here's what David and Deborah recommend:

1. Go into any presentation or meeting armed with particulars about the audience/client and their needs. All anyone cares about is themselves. It's the old actor's axiom, "Enough about me, what do you think about me?" So make assumptions, e.g. "If you're like our other real estate clients, business has shifted to short sales and foreclosures over the last year which has really affected your profit margin." Even if you're wrong, you've opened up a dialogue when they correct you.

In a one-on-one, show real interest in your client and ask specific questions that dig down for what is challenging or difficult right now. When you put our full attention on someone else, you exhibit your care and concern ... you demonstrate your knowledge of their industry or company ... and, you receive valuable information to use when tailoring your solution to their needs.

The more you get where people are coming from, the more likely they are to listen to you and let you take them where you'd like them to go.

2. Determine one clear intention before each presentation. Your intention should be simple, brief and active.

Try to stay away from a long menu or explanation



Q&A

of your services. Unless others have asked, going into them will more cause people to tune out than to want to hear more. The next time you structure your presentation, construct the content to address the specific problems facing your audience and the benefits your services will deliver. Then declare in a confident tone vs. explaining that you do WHAT, for WHOM, WHEN. People listen for solutions. By taking this approach, they will quickly see themselves in what you're saying and see you helping them.

3. Focus your enthusiasm on your clients receiving solutions to their problems vs. your landing them. Many professionals were trained to ask for the sale, which tends to make both sides uncomfortable. When you say things like 'We can do this for you ...' or 'What would it take to do business together?' or 'We really look forward to working together' you are distancing yourself from the prospect. Humans like to make up their own minds, and if you've done a great job of differentiating yourself from the competition and addressing their needs, they will ask you for the next step.

Instead say what you like, enjoy or are passionate about when serving your clients. You can include a 'call to action', such as 'No matter who you choose, make sure they ...' and then give three actions that you would take if you were chosen.

4. 'How do you do what you do? And what does it solve?' Another great technique to close a deal is to deliver an example of how you solved a problem for another client in a similar situation. Examples should also make up the bulk of your content in a presentation to a larger audience. This is how to be memorable. In each example, open with the challenge this client faced, then detail how you solved it using active verbs like 'we combed through their tax returns of the last five years ... determined where they had overpaid taxes because of _____ ... and filed new returns with the IRS to receive a refund.' And end your anecdotes with both the expected and unexpected benefit to the client.

5. If you're for real, they'll be for you. No matter what technique you employ, speak in your own voice as if you were having a conversation across the dining room table. Authenticity is the key to credibility. And people do business with people they know, like and trust."

There you go: Preparation. Intention. Service. Competence. Authenticity. Embody those and you won't have to sell anyone because they'll be too busy trying to hire you.

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