

# Sales secrets you can use

By Roy Bartell

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You don't have to be a salesperson to use techniques of persuasion that work. After all, most of us have to present ideas to committees or Boards of Directors, lobby for a promotion, or even talk someone into trying a new restaurant.

Selling is a science, and you can benefit from its proven methods. You may even be selling without realizing it. Here are some tips to help you deliver the perfect presentation.

Know who you are selling to. If you're doing a presentation before a Board of Directors, research how it has reacted to past proposals. Spend some time collecting details that address any issues that could be raised. What are the Board's values and attitudes? Do the Directors behave consistently, such as always choosing the least expensive option? Do your homework then develop a set of objectives and strategies.

Tailor your behavior. If the people you are presenting to relate best to verbal information, don't come in armed with piles of graphs and other information. If you're speaking to people you don't know much about, watch their reactions. If they sit up straighter when you start citing statistics, modify your presentation to be less emotional and forthright.

Listen. Most people think "selling" is the same as "talking". But the most effective salespeople know that listening is the most important part of their job. Pay attention to what your audience says and the questions they ask. If particular words or phrases keep coming up, use variations of them when you respond.

Welcome worries. Anyone who doesn't have some questions

or concerns about what you're saying probably isn't serious about considering it. Objections are your chance to emphasize the strongest points.

Prepare for anything. This can mean bulbs that burn out on the slide projector, a dozen more people at a meeting than you'd expected, or someone who wants to talk about a completely new subject. Revise your plan as you're met with changes and, above all, stay calm. A sense of humor doesn't hurt either.

Close the sale. When you've made your speech, get to the point. People are expecting it. Conventional wisdom holds that you shouldn't come right out and demand a signature; likewise, in an interview with your boss, you shouldn't demand to be made a manager. But you can ask the same question in more subtle ways, such as "What's the next step?" or "How close am I to reaching my goal of being departmental manager?"

Foremost, the key to selling yourself, your idea, or your company is presenting the subject in a way that's appealing to the prospect. Study the techniques, and you'll find that even if you didn't win the prize for most raffle tickets sold when you were back in school, you can make sales work for you now.

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