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The Salesperson’s Toolkit for Selling Success

Charles Fifield, MBA

A salesperson’s or agent’s toolkit is a set of tools designed to be used together for the purpose of earning a win-win value-adding purchase decision. During an interactive professional sales exchange, several tools are needed to shape and achieve this desired outcome. Using a recommended storytelling process allows the agent to skillfully guide the buyer through a pre-determined set of activities. These activities produce a powerful story about how your client will benefit from your jointly determined recommendations. The main character in the story is either directly or indirectly your client, and the story resembles the making of a short movie skillfully employing both words and non-verbal communication techniques.

The recommended story to be shared with the client has seven key sequential components:

1. Opening
2. Relevant theme
3. Developed cast of characters
4. Stimulus that leads a qualified buyer toward a resolution or transformation
5. Climax or necessary tension, discomfort or emotional pain
6. Opportunities for mutual gain and value-adding validation
7. Closing/crossroad as buyer initiates or confirms his/her decision/purchase

Each component calls for specific tools to successfully guide your buyer through this transforming experience. The story must be artfully produced to achieve the end in mind, i.e., the buyer is willing to begin the process of making a decision (worst case), or the buyer asks for necessary paperwork to implement the mutually developed solution as a result of the stimulus (best case).
Regardless of an agent’s experience level, your selling “tools” must be regularly sharpened as part of a commitment to continuous improvement to enhance your long-term productivity.

Component #1: The Opening

As the seller, you should always commence the engagement in an energetic and confident manner, and the opening has two key tools to effect this – the introduction or first impression and rapport building. You are opening the story with your buyer so you must create an initial level of energy for launching the story.

In Carol Kinsey Goman’s article, “Seven Seconds to Make a First Impression,” the author notes how first impressions are crucial in business interactions. Furthermore, she emphasizes how first impressions are more heavily influenced by nonverbal cues than verbal cues – over four times the impact! She offers seven nonverbal ways to make a positive first impression:

1. **Adjust your attitude.** You must make a conscious choice about the attitude you wish to represent to the listener.

2. **Straighten your posture.** You convey your authority and position through your nonverbal behaviors. To project confidence and convey your competence, you should stand tall, pull your shoulders back, and hold your head in alignment with your spine.

3. **Smile.** A smile is an open and warm invitation to the story about to begin.

4. **Make positive eye contact.** Looking, but not starring, at the buyer’s eyes communicates positive energy as well as indicates your interest and openness to her ideas. Eye contact is an important ingredient to your likeability.

5. **Raise your eyebrows.** As you open your eyes a little wider than normal, you signal to the buyer that you recognize and acknowledge her presence.

6. **Offer to shake hands.** Your handshake establishes rapport, and breaks the social distance barrier often present in an initial encounter with a buyer.

7. **Lean in slightly.** When you lean forward slightly, you signal your interest in the other person.

Verbally, you create the first impression by clearly stating the following elements:

1. A warm greeting (e.g., in a western business context, **hello**)

2. Stating the buyer’s name

3. Stating your name and the organization that you represent

4. Expressing appreciation for the opportunity to visit with the buyer
The correlation between the first impression and the ultimate buy or no-buy decision is significant, and you only get one chance to make a first impression.

The opening of your story includes rapport building, which is all about connecting with the buyer. Mike Schultz and John Doerr in “7 Ways to Build Rapport in Sales and Connect with People,” note that good rapport requires the agent to:

1. Be genuine
2. Be warm and friendly
3. Show interest
4. Don’t seem too needy (to be liked)
5. Give genuine (and sincere) compliments
6. Calibrate the rapport to just right
7. Read the culture that you are entering and adjust or adapt your approach to the other person and company (Schultz and Doerr, 2016).

These authors also emphasize the need to offer questions for successful rapport building in a sales exchange. To most positively impact your rapport value, you can use an open-ended question demonstrating thoughtfulness about the listener. Using an open-ended question enables agents or salespeople an opportunity to collect themselves and organize their thoughts as buyers are responding to the question. The question offered may also serve as a bridge into your story’s theme or attention getter. For example, a question about a business owner’s past success may be a door opener to today’s discussion about your future success together.

**Summary**

The opening is a critical component to your story involving your client. The right opening is more about what you look like and your actions than what you actually say. The sales call actually begins before you even open the door to the prospective client. That is, much of the
outcome of your sales call is determined by your attitude, how well you mentally and emotionally prepared for the engagement with the client.

The introduction is your opportunity to gain a positive first impression, and a significant element of your presentation is the fact that your non-verbal behaviors speak so loudly that your client oftentimes don’t need to hear your words.

Rapport building is all about likeability and beginning to build a relationship by focusing on the other person’s interests. When in doubt, a sincere compliment is a failsafe rapport builder. Your body language signals your willingness to nurture and serve the buyer and should be “stage center” during this opening phase of your story with the client.

References


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Chuck Fifield is a Senior Lecturer for Baylor University’s Hankamer School of Business, Marketing Department and serves as the faculty coach to Baylor’s Sales Team. He joined the faculty at Baylor University in 2001, teaching in the Graduate Business School (Operations Management), the Management Department (Negotiations and Conflict Resolution) and the Economics Department (Principles of Macroeconomics). Chuck has taught or guest lectured at other Texas-based Universities in the fields of sales, international business, money and banking and finance/investments. Professor Fifield has conducted sales research and training for several organizations, including most recently State Farm Insurance. Prior to joining Baylor, Chuck was a financial consultant for nearly thirty years to businesses located throughout the U.S. He owned and operated several financial service businesses in the fields of securities, real estate, oil and gas and insurance.