

PERSONAL SELLING: A PRESENTATIONAL SPEAKING APPROACH

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Having taught various oral communication courses from public speaking to interpersonal communication for ten years I felt confident teaching my first sales management course last semester. After all, good sales managers use effective communication techniques. One of my course requirements is an individual ten minute sales presentation to the class. Rather than role playing sellers and buyers, student pretend that the entire class is a group of buyers. For example, if one is selling chocolate greeting cards, they are to imagine they are at a trade show addressing a group of gift shop owners. This has a lot of advantages since it renders itself to careful preparation and delivery.

A problem with role playing buyer and seller is that the situation and surroundings are not real and the participants often feel contrived. In addition, the buyer may be uncooperative or absent on the due date. Doing individual presentations alleviates this problem.

Students are graded 100 points for their oral presentation (see Appendix A) and 50 points for the written portion which is a complete sentence outline of the presentation. In addition, the class members also provide written and oral feedback immediately following the talk. (see appendix B).

The following five-step plan ensures maximum participation for everyone.

STEP ONE - SELECT A PRODUCT OR SERVICE

Students should select a product or service that they find interesting. It may be something that they use like a consumer good such as a magazine subscription or a service like professional resume writing. This first step is important because if students are not enthused, their delivery will suffer. Enthusiasm also works as a motivator during the preparation phase.

STEP TWO - GATHER MATERIALS

Once the product or service has been selected, the next step is to do research. Printed material such as books, newspapers, magazines and journals are available at libraries. In addition, interviews with sales representatives which focus on the background and benefits of the product or service make another valuable source of information. Most products offer consumers a toll-free hot line. Students can call Information at 800-555-1212 to obtain the telephone number. Usually sales representatives are eager to help. For example, one Proctor and Gamble representative sent toothpaste samples for the entire class as a promotion.

STEP THREE - ORGANIZE

Once materials are gathered the next step is to organize the presentation. Beginning with the main part is best because it is difficult to introduce or conclude a speech if the main points have not been established. Most sales presentations follow a topical sequence. Items which should be covered in the body include: Background (brief history) of the product or service, facts, buying motives, and objections with one or two answers to each.

Some possible ways of beginning the presentation include the following approaches: The introductory approach, the product approach, consumer-benefit approach, curiosity, shock, the showmanship approach, the question approach, the statements approach, the survey approach, and the compliment approach.

The closing should re-direct the audience's attention to the benefits of the product or service and leave a favorable impression. Some ways of effectively achieving this are summarizing the main features, closing on a minor point, narrowing the options, asking for the order, "standing room only" close, and closing on an objection.

The following serves as an example presentation:

How many times have you felt left out of a conversation because you lacked knowledge of current events? Are you often at a loss for something significant to say at a social gathering? If so, I am Jane Doe of Newsweek magazine to help you.

According to Sharon Williams, Customer Service Representative (1987) Newsweek is owned by the Washington Post, and has been in publication since 1933. The current annual subscription stands at 3.5 million in the United States and Canada. A considerable number is purchased by international readers.

Facts

The major fact about Newsweek is education - keeping readers informed in the following areas: National affairs, business, lifestyles, society, and the arts (1987).

National Affairs: All the daily political and social issues in the United States are covered extensively by the Magazine. A sizeable section of international affairs is also presented.

Business: Newsweek provides in-depth coverage of the goings-on in Wall Street, Tokyo Stock Exchange, Chicago Board of Trade, London Stock Exchange and the entire international economics scene. To the business student, Newsweek stands as a substitute to the Wall Street Journal and Businessweek which are dedicated to business. You have to be informed as much as possible on your

area of interest. To be a Donald Trump, you gave to arm yourself with basic everyday facts. A lot of the things you read elsewhere are not picked up in the classroom. This magazine is one of those sources.

Lifestyle: The magazine also goes into such areas as entertainment and sports, Winners, losers, who the hottest stars are, and what makes them tick are displayed here weekly.

Society: Man's latest advancement in medicine, science and technology are not left out. There was a carefully worked out story as to how the Siamese twins (joined in the head) were separated by the most complex surgical procedure performed in history.

What they stand for and some controversies surrounding the Vatican, the PTL and Oral Roberts are discussed under "Religion."

The place of media itself and education in society and the prospects for improvement are dealt with now and then.

Arts: Newsweek also covers the latest on movies, books reviews, photography and music. Rich magazine, isn't it?

Buying Motives

Education: Life, it is said, is a learning process. Man never stops the quest for learning. There is always something we don't know and unless you make the commitment to know, you end up being ignorant which is an enormous price to pay.

Americans in general have little interest in what is going on around them and much less around the world. Newsweek provides the answer to education of events. Obtain a copy, complete it cover to cover and see what you have been missing.

On-campus: Newsweek is one of the very few magazines that has publications for college students. "On-campus" is designed especially for you. In this edition, the Weekly details life after graduation. Some of the features include: How to know prospective employers; how to pass a job interview, when to change jobs, working with someone you don't like, financial careers, job prospects, resume service, succeeding ex-students.

Advertisements: Magazines are good and cost-effective media for advertisement. About half the volume of the magazine is covered by commercials. The companies responsible for these products basically cover the cost of the production of Newsweek. They make your subscription less expensive.

Writing Skills: Newsweek is a good source for becoming a good writer. Engineers are perceived to freeze up when it gets to writing. Some of you probably fall into this category too. If everyone were to be a regular reader, the fear of writing will be minimized. The reporters, columnists and editors are known professional journalists and writers who pass on their good writing skills to the readers.

Business: Again, the magazine covers business as

extensively as possible so that it will be to your advantage to subscribe and read.

Objections

I understand you have objections so let us take them one at a time--

Cost: The cost is relatively inexpensive, the lowest there is. For a regular reader who picks up the magazine in a newstand, the cost for a one-year period is \$104.00. On the other hand, a regular subscriber pays \$41.00 for the same period which is still a bargain. But your student subscription will get it at \$21.00, and equivalent of 40 cents per copy against a \$2.00 cover price. How does that strike you?

Time Consuming: Time consuming? Not at all. I have been reading this magazine since 1975--twelve years last summer. I never had any time problem. The topics are arranged and written in such a way as to take a minimum of time. During exam period when time is critical, one can always browse through the most important subjects while having lunch or dinner. Who knows, you might be able to pick up information for an examination!

Brief Business Section: Obviously the business section is brief but as detailed as possible based on the size and variety of topics in the magazine. Major points are mentioned and that makes it ideal when there is shortage of time.

Delivery: In the past twelve years I have been a subscriber, I have missed not more than three copies. The Postal Service has been very efficient in delivery. Should you happen to miss an issue, call the toll-free number or write Newsweek and they will replace the missing issue within five days.

Alternatives: Time has been around ten years longer than Newsweek and U.S. News is relatively young. Newsweek has two columns--"Periscope" and "Perspectives" which are brief news update and humorous quotations respectively. The other magazines do not have such columns.

Immediate Need: Newsweek is a very handy magazine. Everyone needs it. I have needed it for years. People in Africa, Asia, Europe, all over the world need it. Why not you? Subscribe now because the low cost will not be available for long.

Product: Television network evening news operates 22 minutes for each half hour of broadcast time. That amount of time is hardly enough to get the details of important subjects. Magazines, especially Newsweek, probe deeper and print the same stories in full. Successful personalities from business to politics are profiled--exposing their methods and formulas for success. Furthermore, Newsweek has "My Turn" column where citizens voice their opinions. There is also the "Newsmaker" column.

Closing: All aspects of life revolve around business. You can only be a part of it if you choose to know by reading Newsweek. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Now, would you like to pay by

check or do we bill you later?

STEP FOUR: DELIVERING THE PRESENTATION

Speaking extemporaneously from an outline has several advantages. It gives more precise control over thought and language than impromptu speaking, it offers greater spontaneity and directness than speaking from memory or from a full manuscript, and it is adaptable to a wide variety of situations. It encourages conversational quality which means that no matter how many times the presentation has been rehearsed, it still sounds spontaneous to the audience. Students should allow a minimum of three days to gain command of the presentation. No matter how brilliant the preparation outline, what counts is how well the speech comes across when delivering it.

Many students suffer from speech anxiety. The best way they can overcome this is to practice, practice, practice, preferably in front of a full-length mirror. By using the mirror in rehearsing the presentation students create a picture of themselves, their words and the sound of their voice. The mirror technique can strengthen their belief in their ability to communicate and thus intensify the power of their enthusiasm.

Delivering the presentation into a tape recorder and then playing it back is an excellent way of ensuring variance of pitch, intensity and rate as well.

Suggest trying the presentation out on roommates, friends, family members--anyone who will listen. Most people love to give their opinion about something. That way they will find out ahead of time how successful they are.

Most students will incorporate visual aids in their speech. They may include: The actual product, models, pictures, drawings, sketches, charts, graphs, maps, and handouts. Students are cautioned about distributing the handout before or after they speak because paper is noisy, distracting, and a loss of eye contact results. Handouts are most useful in helping the audience understand a highly detailed or technical presentation. In that case, they should be distributed during the speech.

Visual aids must be clear, concise, and purposeful. They must not be too small, too crowded, inappropriate, rushed or inadequately explained.

STEP FIVE: DEVELOP CONFIDENCE

Students sometimes have unrealistic attitudes about their presentations. For example, if they believe that they have failed because some members of the audience remain unconvinced then they may be setting themselves up for frustration and disappointment. Such a self-defeating belief will inhibit communication and increase anxiety. The following attitudes should be replaced.

1) My sales proposition should be approved by everyone. Not true. To expect approval by all members of an audience--even a small one--is

unrealistic. Communication is a two way process and the listener is equally responsible for the outcome of the speech. Some members of the audience may have beliefs and attitudes that run counter to yours and you cannot expect to change them with a single speech. Moreover, bad listening habits as well as pressing internal and external distractions may cause a breakdown in communication.

2) My presentation has to be perfect to be worthwhile. Not true. There is no such thing as a perfect speech. Even excellent speeches can be improved. Communication happens in the here and now, and in retrospect it is easy to think of many ways that the speech could have been better. Perhaps an idea could have been more fully developed or the interaction with the audience could have been improved. What matters, however, is not what might have been but your intention, preparation, and attitude. If your goal was clear, your preparation extensive, and you were willing to learn through your experience, then you met your responsibilities. Striving for perfection can be self-defeating.

3) Making a mistake will spoil my presentation. Not true. Everyone makes mistakes. A close examination of the delivery and content of even very good speeches will reveal many mistakes. Of course you should try to avoid making mistakes, but what is important is how you handle making them. If you have lost your place or omitted a major point, share your oversight with the audience and correct it as best you can. (Many times oversights are not damaging to a speech and go unnoticed by an audience.) Your honesty will add to the message, not detract from it, because the audience will appreciate your candor.

4) My presentation must always turn out the way I planned it. Not true. Rarely do speeches turn out exactly the way they are planned. You may limit or change a point in the middle of the speech if audience feedback indicates they are not grasping the material. It is possible to omit information you planned to include without compromising the goal of the message. Thus, speeches do not always turn out the way we plan them.

On the actual day of the presentation, it is only natural for students to feel nervous because most people tend to be anxious about doing anything important in public. How can nervousness be controlled?

Barbara Byers, a stress management consultant recommends using the following "circuit breakers" to relieve stress.

- * Deep breathing--which relaxes and calms the mind, and allows one to focus on the task at hand,
- * Stretching--which should include moving the large muscles groups of the legs,
- * Shaking out all over hokey-pokey style--which stimulates circulation and moves the muscles,
- * Writing with your nose--which relaxes the neck.

To do this, pretend that you have a pencil attached to the end of your nose. Use this pencil to write in the air the letters of the alphabet or the numbers from 1-10. Make them as big as you can.

For most, the biggest part of stage fright is fear of the unknown. That is why preparation and practice are so critical for success. In addition, having a positive attitude is a big confidence booster. If students visualize themselves selling successfully they usually can do it.

Butterflies in the stomach can be lessened by taking a few breaths before speaking, yawning, having a strong approach, establishing eye contact with the audience, and smiling. The best part of developing confidence in presentations is becoming more confident in other areas of life as well.

By following the five steps discussed, selecting a product or service, gathering materials, organizing, delivering the presentation, and developing confidence, your sales management classes will be off to a great sales-making start!

APPENDIX A

Evaluation Form

Name: _____ Course and Section: _____

Product/Service: _____ Date: _____

Rating Code: 1-poor; 2-inadequate; 3-adequate;
4-good; 5-excellent

A. Audience Analysis and Adaptation

1. Gained and maintained attention. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Appealed to audience needs 1 2 3 4 5

3. Comments: _____

B. Research and Data

1. Sources significant 1 2 3 4 5
2. Representative 1 2 3 4 5

3. Comments: _____

C. Support and Evidence

1. Quantity 1 2 3 4 5
2. Clear-accurate documentation 1 2 3 4 5

3. Comments: _____

D. Organization

1. Clear statement of purpose 1 2 3 4 5
2. Met Objections 1 2 3 4 5
3. Clear pattern 1 2 3 4 5
4. Introduction 1 2 3 4 5
5. Close 1 2 3 4 5
6. Transitions 1 2 3 4 5

7. Comments: _____

E. Delivery

1. Acceptable pronunciation 1 2 3 4 5
2. Rate 1 2 3 4 5
3. Intensity 1 2 3 4 5
4. Posture 1 2 3 4 5
5. Gesture 1 2 3 4 5
6. Demonstration--Visual Aids 1 2 3 4 5
7. Interest and energy 1 2 3 4 5

8. Comments: _____

F. Language

1. Appropriate to purpose, audience 1 2 3 4 5

2. Comments: _____

Grade _____

APPENDIX B

Listener's Rating Form

Salesperson _____

DIRECTIONS: Please rate the salesperson on the following factors by circling the appropriate number in each case. Written comments are also welcomed.

HIGH LOW

5 4 3 2 1 ORGANIZATION
(Effectiveness of pre-approach and closing, sequencing of ideas and general sense of strategy.)

5 4 3 2 1 CONTENT
(Approach, clarity of demonstration, completeness, treatment of issues, objections)

5 4 3 2 1 DELIVERY
(Directness, sensitivity to feedback, poise, appearance, and enthusiasm)

5 4 3 2 1 General Effect

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