

5.1: Preparation

The Presentation: The Power of Solving Problems

Learning Objectives

- Utilize FAB to communicate value.
- Learn how to prepare for a sales presentation.

As discussed in chapter 1, the FAB model enables us to appeal to a customer's rational and emotion buying behavior by first providing the most compelling features/facts and then showing how those features provide an advantage that delivers a benefit. This is how salespeople help customers establish an emotional connection with a product. If you want to be able to use FAB in conversation, simply think in terms of the following:

- **Feature:** what the product *has*
- **Advantage:** what the features *do*
- **Benefit:** what the features *mean for the customer*

How to Use FAB

Now that you know what FAB is, you probably want to know how to use it most effectively in selling. Here are three easy steps to put FAB to work for you:

1. **Know your customer.** Benefits speak emotionally to customers in a way that rational facts can't. But you need to know what is important to each customer. The health club that's open twenty-four hours might be attractive to a young professional because he can work out late in the evening after a long day, whereas the club's day care center might be appealing to a young mother. Similarly, in a B2B selling situation in which a buyer is evaluating warehouse space, one customer might be interested in the warehouse because of its state-of-the-art systems, while another might be focused on location. Know what motivates your customer, and then you can craft an effective FAB statement.
2. **Think outside your box.** If you want your FAB to work for your customer, you will need to deliver value in the form of benefits that she can't get from anyone else. Think about your product or service in a different way; talk to people, watch the trends, see what else you can bring when you look at your product or service in a different way. Baking soda had traditionally been used as a leavening agent for baking. Arm & Hammer reinvented baking soda as a way to remove odors from refrigerators. Can you be as creative with the application for your product or service?
3. **Get in touch with your customer's motivation.** Listen, learn, and craft an FAB message that will resonate with your customer. Although that might be an overly romantic notion of how selling works, your goal is to have your customer fall in love with your product or service so much that it's something he can't live without. Imagine living without iTunes, your cell phone, or your favorite pair of jeans. That's how your customer should feel about the product or service you are selling. If you understand his motivation, you can deliver features, advantages, and benefits that not only tell him why he should buy, but why he can't afford not to.

Ready to Sell

You've made it! After all your hard work you have reached the point in the selling process where the qualifying, researching, and planning stages pay off. Finally, your story and the customer's story are about to connect in an exciting way. Most salespeople think of the presentation as the best part of the selling process. It's the opportunity to show the prospect that you know your stuff—and the chance to deliver value by putting your problem solving skills to work. So get ready, visualize the best possible outcome to your sales presentation, and take the necessary steps to make this outcome a reality.

Keep Your Eye on the Prize

As excited as you might be about your product, or as eager as you are to demonstrate your solution, keep in mind that your sales presentation is primarily about building a relationship and beginning a partnership, especially in the business-to-business (B2B) arena. When Selena Lo, CEO of Ruckus Wireless, is gearing up for a sales presentation, she focuses her final preparations on making it personal. Lo's company specializes in wireless routers that handle video, voice, and data capabilities for businesses. When she identifies a prospect, Lo's first priority is finding the person she refers to as "the fox": her ally in the prospect company

who wants to see technological changes take place in his organization. Lo gives this relationship special attention, often inviting this individual out to dinner before the presentation to win his loyalty and get any additional details about his company.

Several days before the presentation, Lo researches everyone who will be in the meeting. She reads their bios and googles them to find out their employment histories. “You don’t want someone to think you checked out their entire past,” says Lo, but “you try to strike up more links between you and that person.” She prepares the seating arrangement for the sales meeting strategically, making sure that she will be sitting directly across from the highest-ranking person there so that she can make eye contact. On the day of the presentation, she asks a member of her sales team to write down each person’s name when they walk in the door—and to make a point of using the names during the presentation. Stephanie Clifford, “Find the Fox,” *Inc.*, February 1, 2007, www.inc.com/magazine/20070201/features-sales-performance-lo.html (accessed May 22, 2024). Lo’s efforts to give the sales presentation a personal touch are a reminder that in relationship selling, you can never lose sight of the most important thing: your customer. Coach yourself on this on the day of your presentation and keep it in mind in the days leading up to it. What can you do to personalize this presentation and show your customers that it’s all about their organization?

Taking a customer-centric approach lies at the heart of delivering value. In these terms, value isn’t about offering a good price. It’s not just about solving the customer’s problems either. Delivering value means that you define value in customer terms, ask questions, listen to customers, and put the spotlight on customer-centric solutions. This might mean that it takes more than one meeting to close your sale; you might need several visits to adequately respond to your customer’s needs. Mark Roberts, “High-Performing Reps Talk Less, Speak Slower and Listen More”, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/high-performing-reps-talk-less-speak-slower-listen-more-roberts/>, November 6, 2019 (accessed May 22, 2024). Make it your goal to see that you *and* your prospect get what you want out of the meeting.

It’s a good idea to visualize this outcome before going into the meeting. Review your pre-call objectives. What will it look like to achieve these objectives? What steps will you and your prospect have to take? How will it feel when you both have achieved your goals? This isn’t just about calming your nerves; visualizing the outcome you want is actually a powerful tool to help you achieve that outcome. For one thing, it’s another form of planning. If you mentally run through a “movie” of the sales presentation, allowing yourself to picture your reactions and the steps you will take to close in on your objective, you will be better prepared when the meeting takes place. Each step of the presentation will come naturally to you because you have already mentally rehearsed, and you will be better positioned to sell adaptively because you have already imagined a number of possible scenarios and customer responses.

For another thing, **mental rehearsal** fools your subconscious mind into believing you have already achieved your goals. Sales trainer and CEO Brian Tracy says, “Your subconscious mind cannot tell the difference between a real experience and one that you vividly imagine,” so if you imagine a successful presentation and its outcome several times before your *actual* presentation, you will be as calm and confident as if you had already closed the sale. You will smile more easily, you will speak more slowly and clearly, and you will command attention. In addition, if your subconscious mind believes you have already been in this situation before, it will direct you to say and do the things you need to achieve your objective. Brian Tracy, *Advanced Selling Strategies* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 80.

The Power to Adapt

The sales presentation is where adaptive selling makes all the difference. Up until this point, you have researched and prepared and developed a solution that you think will meet your prospect’s needs, but walking into the presentation and delivering on that preparation requires a different set of skills. Among other things, it requires flexibility and the ability to think on your feet. The best salespeople adapt their presentations to their prospect’s reactions, and they go in knowing they may have to adapt to surprises for which they were unable to prepare (maybe the building has a power outage during the slideshow, for instance, or maybe one of the people from the customer organization decides to send another employee in his place at the last minute). These top-performing salespeople know that keeping a customer-centric focus, visualizing a successful outcome, and mentally rehearsing your presentation before you deliver it will give you the power to adapt with confidence and ease.

Adapting is all about listening. Your sales presentation is really a compilation of all the listening you have done to this point. And listening doesn’t stop there. It’s impossible to adapt if you’re not listening. When you are creating your presentation, keep in mind that it is not a one-way communication. **Presentations are for listening, adapting, and solving problems.**

Logistics Matter

There's nothing worse than putting hours into preparing a killer sales presentation, only to blow your chances because you forgot to bring an important part of your demonstration or because you got lost on your way to the meeting. Don't let disorganization hold you back: take charge of the details so that your only concern on the day of the presentation is the delivery.

The Night Before

The evening before your meeting, read over your pre-call objectives; practice your presentation a number of times out loud; and walk through your mental rehearsal, visualizing success. You can't practice too many times. The content of your presentation should be second nature by the time you get up in front of your audience so that you can focus your energy on your prospect. Rehearsal is one of the best ways to calm your nerves so that you can focus on delivering your presentation naturally and connecting with your prospect.

The night before, you should also get together all the materials you'll need for your presentation—handouts, files, product samples, and contracts—and have them ready to go for the following morning. This will save you time tracking down loose supplies at the last minute, when you're trying to get out the door to make it to your meeting. It's also a good idea to set out your clothes the night before for the same reason.

If you are planning to use multimedia equipment in your presentation, make sure in advance that your prospect will have everything you'll need to make it run. If you aren't sure, bring everything (e.g., cables, adapters, flash drives, remotes) with you. And of course, make sure you know how to use all your equipment. Then, be sure you are ready to go "no tech" should the situation call for it.

Getting There

It might surprise you to know how often salespeople show up late to their own presentations because they get lost on the way to the meeting. When you are traveling to an unfamiliar place for your appointment, get directions in advance, and allow extra travel time in case of traffic delays or wrong turns. Make sure you also research the parking situation beforehand. If your prospect is a large corporation with its own complex, are there reserved employee lots and visitor lots? Will you have to walk a considerable distance from your car to the meeting room? If you'll be meeting in an urban area, is street parking available, or will you have to find a parking garage? You don't want to arrive on time only to get delayed because you spent twenty minutes driving around in search of a parking spot. It's a good idea to make a "test" trip in advance of your meeting. That will help avoid surprises with traffic, parking, security, or other areas that might cause a delay. If something unavoidable *does* come up to set you back, make sure you call ahead to let your customer know you will be arriving late.

Besides the extra time you allow for travel, plan to arrive at the meeting a little early. Not only does this convey professionalism, but it also gives you the time to mentally prepare once you arrive and to set up any equipment you'll be using. It's a good idea to allow time to stop in the restroom and take one last look to be sure you're at your best (and it's a good time to use a breath mint). Finally, bring something to read in case you have to wait.

Key Takeaways

- **Features, Advantage, Benefit** is a powerful way to communicate value in the selling process. When preparing for your sales presentation, stay focused on the essentials: your relationship with the prospect and your pre-call objectives.
- Practice **mental rehearsal** by visualizing the best possible outcome to the sales presentation.
- Delivering value to the customer means practicing adaptive selling and listening to the customer to understand her needs. Keep this in mind before and during the presentation.
- The night before your presentation, make sure you have all the logistics worked out: your equipment, your wardrobe, directions to the location, and parking information.

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