

## 8.5: Prepare Your Presentation

### Learning Objectives

- Discuss key elements of presentation preparation.

Once you've done your research, brainstormed your solution, and set your SMART objectives, you've got a good foundation to move forward. The only homework left to do is planning your sales presentation. Even if you have a stellar solution to offer, and even though your objectives may be clearly defined, you can't make your sales pitch hoping to just "wing it." A well-planned presentation can often be the thing that makes or breaks a sale. If your customer sees you as well prepared (i.e., if you have thoughtfully tailored your style, presentation materials, and agenda to match what you know about your contact and his company culture), you will go far in establishing a strong rapport with your customer and earning his trust and respect.

### Four Ps of Presentation Preparation

Preparing your sales presentation can seem like an overwhelming task. How long should you speak, and how much time should you allow for questions? Should you use demonstrations or examples? How formal should you be? What points should you address first? Here are four general guidelines to keep in mind as you begin the planning process.

#### Prioritize Your Agenda

Your presentation should be well organized. Think about how you want to lead in, when you will introduce key information in your presentation, and when you will use product demonstrations. When Tom Szaky, CEO of the garden products company TerraCycle, gives a sales presentation, he prepares by drawing up an agenda that prioritizes the information he wants to convey and arranging it in a strategic order. For example, Szaky knows that if he presents his product near the beginning of the presentation, his customers will make their buying decision before they know what makes TerraCycle unique, so he starts off all of his presentations by talking about the features that set his company apart. Stephanie Clifford, "Practice, Practice" Inc., February 2007, [www.inc.com/magazine/20070201/features-sales-performance-szaky.html](http://www.inc.com/magazine/20070201/features-sales-performance-szaky.html) (accessed July 15, 2009). Not only will prioritizing your agenda give you a strategic edge, but it will also help your customer to see that you are organized. Bring copies of your agenda to distribute at the beginning of the meeting so that your customers can follow along with you as you give your presentation.

#### Personalize It

At this phase in the preapproach you should have some knowledge about your contacts in the company, and you should understand the company's particular culture and priorities. As you plan your presentation, you can use this knowledge to tailor your approach to your prospect. What tone will you set for the presentation? Is your prospect a "fun" company that would respond well to humor or interactive opportunities during the presentation? Are you presenting to a group of busy executives who would value an efficient, no-nonsense approach? Think about the level of formality your customers will expect. This will dictate how you dress, how you speak, and how you design your visual aids and demonstrations. When Tom Szaky gives a presentation to buyers from Wal-Mart (one of his biggest customers), he dresses casually, perhaps wearing a corduroy jacket, a John Deere cap, and frayed shoes. Stephanie Clifford, "Practice, Practice" Inc., February 2007, [www.inc.com/magazine/20070201/features-sales-performance-szaky.html](http://www.inc.com/magazine/20070201/features-sales-performance-szaky.html) (accessed July 15, 2009). Wal-Mart presents itself as a no-frills company, and this attitude carries over into its corporate culture. Understanding this aspect of the company and the contacts with whom he's working—representatives from the garden department—Szaky adapts his approach to match.

### Power Player: Lessons in Selling from Successful Salespeople

#### Do Your Homework...Even When You Know Your Customer

Cris Cavanaugh, now a CustomerCentric selling affiliate, learned the hard way that assuming in selling is not a good thing. He was asked by a customer to do a presentation at a conference. Cavanaugh accepted and gave a confident presentation. He failed miserably because the audience was not as well educated on the topic, so the audience was left confused. Cavanaugh now asks questions and gets input before every presentation because he realizes that every audience, just like every customer, is not the same. "Approach Every Presentation as If It Were Your First," Selling Power Presentations eNewsletter, February 20, 2006, <http://www.sellingpower.com/content/newsletter/issue.php?pc=569> (accessed March 16, 2010).

## Prepare Illustrations

People respond best to things they can see and experience for themselves. Your sales presentation won't be complete without product demonstrations and visual aids to inspire your customers and help them see the value of your product firsthand. As you develop this aspect of your presentation, consider slides or handouts that will reinforce key points. Consider the things that will best help this particular customer visualize your solution as a winning one. For example, in one presentation to Wal-Mart buyers, Szaky displayed a binder full of newspaper clippings in which TerraCycle had helped Wal-Mart generate positive publicity. He also used a short video and brought in a live plant grown with his potting mix. In addition, because his contact at the company had asked to see what the product might look like on the sales floor, Szaky brought in a merchandizing mockup to help his buyers visualize TerraCycle's potting mix in their stores. Stephanie Clifford, "Practice, Practice" *Inc.*, February 2007, [www.inc.com/magazine/20070201/features-sales-performance-szaky.html](http://www.inc.com/magazine/20070201/features-sales-performance-szaky.html) (accessed July 15, 2009).

## Practice

Finally, once you've created your presentation, practice it. Practice in front of a mirror, deliver the presentation to family members and colleagues (if you can get a willing audience!), and run over your agenda until you know it inside and out. Lahle Wolfe, "How Do You Practice Your Sales Presentation?" online discussion board, About.com, June 11, 2008, <http://sales.about.com/b/2008/06/11/how-do-you-practice-your-sales-presentation.htm#gB3> (accessed July 15, 2009). You want the presentation to come off smoothly, but you also want it to seem natural. Even experienced salespeople like Tom Szaky practice a presentation—perfecting their pacing and delivery and making sure they know their stuff—before going into a sales call. Stephanie Clifford, "Practice, Practice" *Inc.*, February 2007, [www.inc.com/magazine/20070201/features-sales-performance-szaky.html](http://www.inc.com/magazine/20070201/features-sales-performance-szaky.html) (accessed July 15, 2009).

### ✓ KEY TAKEAWAY

As you plan your sales presentation, keep four things in mind:

1. Prioritize and organize your agenda.
2. Personalize the presentation to match your customer's needs and preferences.
3. Prepare visual aids and product demonstrations to illustrate your point and engage your audience.
4. Practice your delivery.

### ? Exercise 8.5.1

1. Think of ways you might personalize a sales presentation for the following situations:
  - You are a public relations manager pitching a story about your company's new chic waterproof boots to the editorial staff of a fashion magazine.
  - You are a commercial real estate agent making a presentation to top-level managers at an accounting firm for the new location of their downtown office.
  - You are a video game developer presenting your newest game concept to a small start-up company that makes video games.
2. Assume you are the director of development for Jessica's Haven, a nonprofit organization that provides support to children with terminal illnesses and their families. You have identified Gymboree as a prospective corporate donor. Develop an agenda for a sales call to learn about how Gymboree might support Jessica's Haven and share information with the company about who the nonprofit serves and how it operates.
3. If you were the salesperson for Red Bull and you were calling on a major grocery store chain, identify three potential illustrations that you could use during your presentation.
4. Describe how your preapproach would differ (in dress, tone, conversation) for each of these situations:
  - Selling pharmaceuticals to a doctor
  - Meeting with the dairy farmers of Wisconsin to sell cheese packaging
  - Calling on a professor to sell textbooks
  - Selling computer software to a start-up liquor manufacturer

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