

Professional Service Providers

Upgrade Our Terms, Upgrade Our Image

by Don McNamara CMC

Professional speaker Brian Tracy has an expression that is timeless. It is "everything counts." And in the world of professional selling, everything does count, including our use of terms and language.

Curb Thy Tongue, Nave

How many of us in the past have heard ourselves say "Here's my sales pitch" or "Mr. Customer is it time to make a deal?" or "Is it time to sign the contract?"

Horseshoes or Handshakes?

When ever we hear the word "pitch", what comes to mind? Are we pitching horseshoes or making a sales presentation? If it's selling, doesn't it make more sense to call it what it is, namely a presentation? Even better, if the situation presents itself, we can substitute the words sales dialogue or sales conversation. Don't these substitutions sound a whole lot more appealing than the overused word "pitch"?

What if we say "deal", what's the first thing that comes to mind? Are we playing cards? Or are we trial closing? In my mind when we hear that word we are entering a phase in the sales dialogue that invites a long and painful experience called negotiation. Why? Using the word "deal" conjures up all kinds of images that suggest we are setting ourselves up for a bargaining session on pricing and terms. And this does not even need to happen. As Pogo states, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." We can be our own worst enemy.

Doesn't it make sense then to eliminate the word "deal" from our vocabulary? By doing so we will probably delay or totally avoid a negotiation session. And these are never fun because we need to be very well schooled in the entire science and art of negotiation. Think about it. Just for starters, a good negotiation assumes both parties have stated their position as an initiation point to the bargaining process. Unless, we already know what the ranked priority of decision criteria are to the customer we end up groping around trying to make the situation fit. There is always that fuzziness in our tummy after leaving one of these because we wonder if we gave away something that we did not need to. What's worse due to the lack of facts, we were not able to distinguish our value proposition in the buyers mind.

Rather than the word "deal", hereafter let's substitute the words business transaction.

Contracts and Conundrums

What's the reaction of our customer when they hear the word "contract"? Having observed it over and over again in Customerland, I can validate we invite our customer to engage in a séance with Legalman. This courts disaster since Legalman's purpose in life is to protect his client and to find problems in contracts. He needs to justify his fee by rewording the structure and content of the contract to be advantageous to the client. Now we are really in a pickle. The sales process slows down, the forecast is no longer accurate and our nerves get tested. Don't overlook that the "clean" sale we told the sales manager will have some modifications that none of us expected. Then our executive management gets involved since they will be called upon to approve the "custom" arrangement. How's this image working so far? It can get really ugly when attention is brought on our sales opportunity. All sorts of questions get asked about our ability to sell, negotiate and close. We inflict this on ourselves.

Let's substitute some better language. Try using the word "agreement" next time.

Compare and Combine

Let's compare what we used to say with new and improved terminology. Here are a few ways to make us be seen by the customer as more professional. Try these.

"Mr. Customer I'd like the opportunity to make a presentation to you about the benefits of my products. By all means this should be an open dialogue between us."

"Mr. Customer, if all is OK with you, may we conclude this business transaction by approving this agreement." There are four things to like about this closing technique. First is the word "may". There is something magical, softer and subtler in this word. We put the customer in a relaxed, non-confrontational frame of mind. We make it easier, comfortable and natural to go forward with the order.

Secondly, by using the words business transaction we side step, if not altogether eliminate, the probability of a negotiation. At the very minimum we psychologically positioned ourselves in the customers mind that there is nothing else to talk about, much less negotiate over.

We sound polished, sincere and businesslike without sounding stuffy, strong-armed or solicitous.

Finally, using the word agreement instead of contract avoids costly, extensive and time-consuming delays in the completion of our order. As we all know, the longer the sales opportunity is left unclosed, the greater the chance the order will not be placed. Then the door is open for the competition to hear of the opportunity. And if that happens we will need to answer a whole new round of questions; some of which we or our company may not be able to answer. Now our strategy is disrupted, and ultimately our order may get unhooked.

Benefits When Everything Counts

When everything counts upgrading our terms ends up upgrading our image. And in the competitive world of professional selling where everything counts, smooth terms and phrases go a long way toward building in the buyers mind we are a cut above the competition. Upgrading our language to professional terms demonstrates a professional style that enhances our professional image. Besides, by using smoother language we sound assured, easy to work with and naturally conversational.

Add it all up. We will begin seeing the dramatic effect this has on our customers and prospects because they see us differently in a more professional way. And we just put another club in our bag of Unique Value Propositions.

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