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It's Showtime

“Life is a movie, write your own ending
Keep believing keep pretending”

Jim Henson

Many years ago I hired an entry level sales rep because I was intrigued by her resume. She was a theater major and had performed in numerous college and community performances. My hunch proved to be right and she became one of my best reps. She saw sales as “performance art” and each call as a chance to be the star in a mini drama. I loved going on calls with her and her customers actually looked forward to her presentations. Someone once said that a great salesperson combines communication and psychology; this also could be used to describe a great actor. Salespeople can learn a lot from the actor’s craft. Here are a few points to consider to make your sales show a “hit.”

- **Start with a good story** – When you watch a movie or a play everyone seems to say the right thing at the right time. No one ever seems to get tongue tied and every word seems to be on point. This is because every word was carefully considered by the writer and scripted for the actors. It is not practical to completely follow a script on a sales call – “Mr. Customer, here is our script for today’s calls, I’ve taken the liberty to highlight your lines for you!” – but the practice of writing out a sales script is well worth the effort. A sales call is much too fluid to stick to a script but the process of writing out your presentation forces you to think about how to best position your product. This process helps you to craft language that effectively communicates the value of your paper. The writing process helps you to develop the story you want to share with the prospect. All good stories contain certain elements. The opening of a good story quickly engages the audience. Think about Indiana Jones dodging traps in a jungle temple, this scene draws the audience into the movie by promising two hours of non stop action. You should script a number of good call openings which promise your audience (Your prospects) an exciting opportunity to gain a competitive advantage. All good stories promise a positive outcome, so your opener should give the prospect some good reasons why they should stay for the “show”,

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like the chance to get more customers. A script will give you ready-made phrases to use during a sales interview. Whenever I am asked to sell or train on a new product I always write out a sales script which helps me to thoroughly learn the product. As I make sales calls, think of new verbiage or hear new objections from prospects, I continually revise my scripts.

- **Rehearse-Rehearse-Rehearse** – Most people have heard the old show business joke about the tourist who approaches a street musician and asks “Can you tell me how to get to Carnegie Hall?” and is told “Practice man, practice!” This is a very bad joke but it is very good advice. Actors often rehearse for weeks before the opening of a show. This practice goes far beyond memorizing their lines. Rehearsal helps an actor to learn how to deliver their lines smoothly and to get their timing right. Rehearsal allows the writers and producers to change portions of the show which may have looked good on paper but simply didn’t work on the stage. Every call we make is “opening night” for us and we usually have one chance to WOW our audience into buying our products. Practicing your presentation will build your confidence, and improve your delivery. Prospects often perceive a stumbling delivery as a lack of confidence in the product being presented or even as a sign that the salesperson is trying to deceive them. Delivering your pitch to a mirror (or even better a video camera) helps to polish your presentation. If possible recruit someone to role-play the call with you so you get your timing down. Rehearsal is especially important in handling objections. Write down the objections you receive and practice countering them confidently and effectively.
- **Use the props** – Actors know how to use props to communicate with the audience. Psychologists have found that 50 to 75% of communication is non-verbal yet most sales people try to get 100% of their message across verbally. Educators have found that most people remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear and 50% of what they both see and hear. This makes a strong case for using “Props” on a sales call. These props include samples of your product. It is much easier to communicate the power of color in an ad by showing a customer a well designed color ad than by quoting statistics. Spec ads are powerful tools. When presenting a spec ad to a customer I always paste a copy of the ad into my paper to help the customer to visualize how it would look. I also always keep a “like ad” file in my car. This is a file box full of published ads arranged



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by type of business. When calling on a plumber I show the customer samples of other plumbing ads from my paper. This not only helps the client get ideas for his ad but also reassures him that this is something other people in his situation found valuable. If your company provides you with sales materials make sure you use them as part of your sales presentation. The more graphic you can make your selling points the better. My paper reaches 5 times as many homes as the daily newspaper we compete against. To drive this point home I printed out a page filled with clipart houses, I printed every fifth house in blue and the rest in red. At the bottom of the page I placed a key (Red = Daily Competitor circulation, Red & Blue = Weekly Shopper Circulation). This simple graphic demonstrated our competitive advantage and won me a lot of business. Using these materials during your presentation and as leave behinds will help to leave a lasting impression on your prospects.

- **Play to your audience** – The best actors can do any kind of role. They can do dramatic roles for serious audiences and they can make them laugh when they are in the mood for a comedy. To be a success you need to play to the audience in front of you. Look for visual clues in the person's workspace, observe their body language and listen to their verbal rhythms and tone as well as their words. If you are facing a high energy fast talking business person, pick up the pace and get to the point as quickly as possible. If you are sitting with a prospect who is relaxed and wants to chat, slow down and build the relationship before getting to the meat of the call. The best way to get as much information from a client is to give them your undivided attention and use active listening skills. Research indicates that your client will retain much more of the information you share with them if you adjust your presentation style to match the customer's style.
- **Be a method actor** – 50 years ago young actors like Marlon Brando and James Dean shook up the theatre world with their passionate performances. As "method" actors they didn't do a role, they became the role. Method actors use their imagination to get inside the character they are portraying. Acting is less about speaking words than it is about communicating emotions. Great actors make us feel their passion. This technique makes them totally believable. As sales reps we need to be 100% credible to our clients and prospects. We need to picture ourselves as successful and we need to passionately believe in what we are selling (If you can't manage this, you are in the



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wrong career). When you visualize yourself in this way, others will also see you as successful. This image will be reflected in your body language and in the tone of your voice. As much as we like to think of ourselves as rational beings, as people who base our decisions on cold hard facts, we are actually much more driven by our “gut” feelings. There is a large emotional component in every decision. If you exude positive feelings and confidence, people will feel your passion. Passion is the key to motivating prospects to buy from you.

Developing your acting skills may not win you a Tony or an Oscar but they may help you to win a lot of sales. Remember your prospects see a lot of sales people, both good and bad, in the course of a day. If you set yourself apart by engaging and maybe entertaining your customers a bit they will reward you with their business. If you work hard, learn your craft and have fun with your customers, you will finish in classic Hollywood style with a “Happy Ending.”

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