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If you have ever become lost or nervous in the midst of a presentation, you're not alone. Giving presentations is a scary proposition for many people, but with a little practice and preparation, you can confidently

Most salespeople do not have the future of millions of people at stake when they prepare presentations, and as such, they take a cavalier approach to presentation planning, falsely assuming that their social gift of gab

ing the consumer benefits of a window to a new-home builder.

While working as a sales manager for a window company, I was continually frustrated when vendor salespeople would blather on endlessly to builders about product attributes that would only be important to a consumer, such as aesthetics and glass performance. They would talk about these features, expecting that the builder would magically link these product features to his own profitabil-

Polished Delivery

GOOD PRESENTATION SKILLS ARE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF THE SALES PROCESS.

deliver engaging, impactful, and insightful messages. The factors that make a high-impact presentation are not as mysterious as you might believe; however, they are more complex than most salespeople realize. Above all, successful presentations begin with intense preparation.

To effectively plan your presentation, focus on the following key factors:

Key No. 1: Preparation. Two of the most memorable speeches in American history are Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech. Though these speeches were actually only a few minutes in length, they were powerful because the speakers first prepared diligently, perfecting language, message, and delivery.

will naturally lead to outstanding business presentations. Yet a bad presentation can affect the future of you and your company, so you should take the time to refine your pitch.

Key No. 2: The right presentation for the right audience. The construction industry encompasses a multitude of audiences, each with very different motivations, including builders, remodelers, architects, dealers, installers, and consumers. Salespeople commonly fail to recognize the different needs of various audiences and to tailor their messages accordingly. For example, a particularly common mistake occurs when a salesperson aggressively promotes the wrong feature of a product, such as sell-



ity. These features are important to a builder, but only insofar as they make the product more desirable to their own customers, leading to increased profits.

Consider the analogous situation of a paper towel company. A grocery store purchasing agent could hardly care less about absorbency or decorative features of the product. He is more concerned with inventory turns, return on investment, deliveries, and other business-related issues. Obviously, the purchasing agent is concerned with the satisfaction that his customers will reap

from the product, but only as secondary considerations to the business issues.

A salesman who fails to focus his presentation to the specific interests of his audience risks boring them and hindering progress toward a sale. With the windows example, consider the various audiences a

what is needed during construction. During the selection process, a builder is much more interested in prices, installation costs, and product choices. During installation, the builder focuses on delivery, sizing, and installation instructions.

A Sales Leader uses literature and sam-

following exercises:

1. Brainstorm. Take quiet time to brainstorm and discover every possible benefit provided by your products, your company, and you. You should be able to list dozens of them. This exercise alone should illustrate how important it is to choose which benefit you should discuss during the limited time you have to make presentations. Make a list. This could be a great exercise for sales managers to conduct with their salespeople.

2. Analyze. Determine which benefits are important to pros and consumers. Furthermore, don't assume that, just because a feature is important to a consumer, it will automatically make a builder enthusiastic. If he cannot sell an upgrade for a profit, the feature might be meaningless to him. Some sales brochures are more effective for pros, while others are more consumer-driven. Take time to know the difference.

3. Select the right sales tool. Don't be in such a hurry to talk. First learn the real needs of your prospect (using the G.O.A.L. is M.O.R.E. method from the May 2004 issue of PROSALES). If you determine that you don't have the right sales tools (e.g. sample, literature, spec sheet, etc.), it is better to schedule a later meeting that generates higher impact. When you have the right tools for the right audience at the right time, then your presentations will generate high impact.

If you remember that every presentation is important, you have taken a big step toward becoming a seasoned speaker. Brainstorm with associates to discover all the attributes of your product and service. Then take time to prepare presentations, regardless of how short they might be, before you enter the field of battle. During your meetings, focus on the attributes that will be of most interest to your audience at that moment. Follow these guidelines and you'll discover that your presentations accomplish more in less time. ■



A SUCCESSFUL SALES LEADER CATERS HIS OR HER PRESENTATION TO THE VARIOUS AUDIENCES TO OPTIMIZE SUCCESS AND SATISFY EVERYONE IN THE PURCHASING CHAIN.

salesperson will encounter. A builder will be most concerned with his ability to manage total square-foot cost (and profitability) of a project; an architect will be concerned with design features; a consumer will be impacted by long-term maintenance issues. A successful Sales Leader caters his or her presentation to the various audiences to optimize success and satisfy everyone in the purchasing chain.

Key No. 3: Timing. The success of famous historic speeches is as much a matter of timing as content. Slavery was an issue during the American Revolution, but not as important as independence; Lincoln's Gettysburg Address would have fallen on deaf ears four score and seven years earlier. The country was in the midst of a civil rights movement in August 1963, perfect timing for Mr. King.

Timing is an issue of critical importance in the building industry, perhaps more than most industries. Projects go through various stages before construction is complete—e.g. planning, design, engineering, construction, occupancy, remodeling. Thus, information should be provided on a timely basis. For instance, the information a builder needs when selecting a product is much different than

ples very differently during various phases of the sales process. Early in the process, you should use literature and samples to highlight issues related to quality, design, and profitability. Later, you should select sales tools that educate the builder on ways to install the product as efficiently as possible.

Sales Leaders take time before the sales presentation begins to analyze the various sales tools available. They determine how each source can be used for various audiences at different stages of the purchasing process. (One of my favorite exercises to conduct with salespeople is a critical analysis of the various sales tools supplied by marketing departments. We commonly discover that the literature and samples are poorly designed for use in the field because they lack focus on a particular audience or timing issue.) Analyze your sales tools before you use them. For example, a car salesperson provides a glossy color brochure while the customer is taking test drives. The owner's manual is provided only after a decision to buy has been made.

To make your presentations more meaningful and impactful, begin with the