

You CAN Get There From Here



To win sales, understand where your customer is going and where your business interests intersect. Otherwise, your directions won't do any good. By Rick Davis



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Making a good presentation is a lot like giving good directions. You probably have been on the receiving end of bad directions and experienced the frustration that can result. When you are lost, you need someone who understands your situation and can provide precise information. It is no different for your customers.

I felt this frustration acutely on a recent business trip after realizing I had printed out computer directions for the wrong hotel. I called my hotel for driving directions and the desk clerk told me to take the interstate out toward the property. When I asked which interstate, she responded (and you really cannot make up this type of story), "Well, there is only one interstate that runs by our hotel."

The communication problem resulted from our different perspectives. From my perspective, the map of the area showed three interstates. From the perspective of the hotel clerk, she could see only one interstate—the one just outside her window. The clerk was either incapable of or uninterested in explaining the directions from my perspective.

Fortunately, another person was available and, prior to issuing instructions, asked me where I was and what direction I was heading. In other words, she did not even try to give me directions before understanding my position and perspective. When she finally provided directions, they were concise and factual and included exit

numbers, street names, and the distances I would need to drive on roads that she listed by name. She understood my needs.

No doubt you have received instructions from both good "direction givers" and not-so-hot "tour guides." Direction givers are givers of energy and are able to help you reach your destination efficiently; they are the type of people you want to be around. Tour guides are takers of energy that focus on their own perspectives by pointing out buildings and landmarks with which they are familiar but do nothing to convey a message that you readily understand. When it comes down to business, you would rather work with the direction giver. Your customers also want good directions.

I recently witnessed a sales call in which an overly chatty salesman was boasting about his company's service and delivery capabilities. The builder was

noticeably bored by the presentation and had tuned out; the sale was almost lost. Fortunately the salesman's manager was present and asked the builder what was going on in his world. The builder stated bluntly that bragging about delivery service meant nothing to him unless he could be the "first delivery of the day."

The salesman interrupted his manager's effort at a response by defending the builder's position, explaining to the manager that this was a common problem being faced in the field. In other words, not only did the salesman fail to listen carefully, he failed to see how the perspective of the customer and supplier could be linked.

The manager calmly and simply asked the builder when he needed the goods and learned that his installation crew showed up at 6:30 every day for work. The manager made one phone call to his branch office and then stated to the builder that a 6:30 delivery could be guaranteed. He could do this because the sales manager discovered that the "first" delivery of the day usually was made by 5 a.m. The builder could receive the third shipment of the day and still have his goods by 6:30.

The next time you make a presentation, stop to consider the facts and perspective of your customers. You will discover you are able to communicate more in less time and feel your credibility grow. ■