

Selling Your Sizzle

You've anticipated the future, you've read the Hard Trends that are shaping the future, and you've developed a product that you're positive is the next big thing. But how do you convince others that it is?

In an era of budget, time, and labor constraints, is it possible to sell your ideas and concepts (which often require money, time, and labor to implement) to the CEO, CFO, Board of Directors, or whoever is in charge of the final decision? The answer is yes! You can sell your ideas up; it simply depends on how you frame the opportunity.

The key is simple yet counterintuitive: don't talk about your idea. While that may sound strange, it's the primary sales rule that most people break. Yes, you love your ideas and think they're great, but not everyone loves the same things as you. And there is no shortage of good ideas. So when you're selling your ideas to others, instead of focusing on your ideas, focus on the other person and the challenges they face. Here's how you do that.

Put yourself in their shoes

Everyone has his or her own problems. At the sales pitch, zone in on what the CEO, manager, or whoever you are selling to is going through. For example, maybe they're dealing with an upset board or stockholders who don't like last quarter's results. Or perhaps they have to reorganize. Or maybe sales are down or they just lost the head of marketing to a competitor. Do your research and uncover the main challenge they're dealing with right now. Once you do so, position your idea as the solution.

At the meeting, show them that you understand the challenges they are facing and have some actionable insights that you feel will help. For example, you could say "I know you're dealing with... [lagging sales, poor internal communications, customer complaints, etc.]. I've come across some things that I think can help you overcome those challenges. Obviously I want to help the company succeed and grow, so let me tell you about what I've found."

Then, you could talk about the new idea or concept in terms of solving the current problem only. Don't go into all the benefits, functions, features, or costs. That's an entirely different conversation you have later. Right now, you're simply getting the decision maker on board with the idea or concept and in agreement that it will solve his or her problem.

Anticipate objections

Even as you frame your idea as the solution, objections will arise. Don't let these catch you off guard. Get into the decision maker's head and anticipate what their response will be before the

meeting. The goal is to overcome the potential blocks before they arise. So solve the predictable problems before they happen, and you'll eliminate objections before they're presented. Please, don't skip this step, because the objections will come. You need to be prepared and have your homework done in advance.

Leverage the Power of Certainty

When you're selling your idea, the people you're talking to are thinking risk: personal risk, financial risk, and reputational risk. You have to alleviate their fear of risk. How?

Remember this: Strategies based on uncertainty have high risk, while strategies based on certainty have low risk. Before talking with the other person, ask yourself, "What are the things I'm absolutely certain about regarding this idea or concept? What are the current Hard Trends—the trends that will definitely happen? Where is the industry, company, economy, etc. going, based on what we are certain about with this solution as well as without this solution? Will this accelerate their current business plan? If so, how?"

This is not a time for "if," "maybe," or "might." Only address the things you know for sure. It's about what will happen versus what might happen. In a world filled with uncertainty, what are you certain about?

Define the Cost of a No

Before you get a "yes" or a "no" to your request, explain the true cost of a "no". In the old days, a "no" response meant that you didn't have to spend any money. Today, a "no" can cost you competitive advantage, even your business. Often, a "no" will be more expensive than a "yes" when you consider all of the implications of the "no".

An Anticipatory Approach to Selling

This approach to selling your ideas up is a switch for many people because even after all these steps and all these discussion points, their passion for their ideas often over-rules, and they neglect to focus on what the proposed idea or concept will do for the listener. It's important to remind yourself well before the meeting that if you haven't done the groundwork to get the other party excited or onboard, you'll likely go nowhere. As you're busy talking about features and benefits, the other person is thinking about costs, risks, ifs, and maybes. That's why you need to solve all those things ahead of time. This is really an anticipatory approach to selling — you're anticipating the problems, the rejections, the objections, and the concerns so you can overcome them easily and turn them around.



About the Author:

DANIEL BURRUS is considered one of the world's leading technology forecasters and innovation experts, and is the founder and CEO of Burrus Research, a research and consulting firm that monitors global advancements in technology driven trends to help clients understand how technological, social and business forces are converging to create enormous untapped opportunities. He is the author of six books including The New York Times best seller Flash Foresight. This article is reprinted with permission. Reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited. For reprint permission, contact Burrus Research, Inc. at office@burrus.com.



INOVA
BUSINESS SCHOOL



INOVA
CONSULTING