Winning Team Presentations

By Judith Filek —President, Impact Communications, Inc.

High level customer presentations often involve several people. While teams vary in makeup, typically, they include people who are subject matter experts, as well as the sales executive and the sales manager. The most senior person assumes the role of the team leader. Customers often prefer presentations from multiple people because they allow the opportunity not only to meet and question the appropriate individual, but also to note how well the group works together. For teams to be perceived as effective, all members must look and sound polished. It should never look as if they met for the first time in the client's lobby. The following communication tips will insure winning team presentations.

First, the leader should clearly explain the game plan to all team members well in advance of the presentation. The game plan should outline what the core message of the team will be, who will be assigned what topics, the order of the presentations and how members will be introduced. Everyone should concur on the core message-what the group's point of view will be on the problem, the action they will recommend and the benefits for the client. This core message should be repeated by all speakers regardless of the topic they are addressing to increase the likelihood that clients will remember it after the fact. The core message should set the organization apart from the competition.

Harry Beckwith in his book, "Selling the Invisible,"says that prospects have one basic question,""What makes your company so different that we should do business with you?"He says it's a simple question that begs a simple answer. If the team can give a consistent answer, they stand a good chance of winning the business. A critical mistake that many teams make is to present multiple messages with varying points of view and action steps. Clients are only interested in what ails them. Multiple messages can be confusing and even annoying since customers have to figure out if all of these messages impact them.

Beckwith also encourages speakers to be as brief as possible. He warns that giving too much information about a product or service may actually communicate nothing. Simple messages are easier for clients to digest. In addition, clients have short attention spans. Regardless of the time allotted, the team should plan to finish early. All members should also be prepared to edit content on the fly should customers suddenly have time issues.

If possible, the team should arrive early and position themselves in the room so that they can be attentive, not only to the speaker, but also to the visual cues of the members of the audience. Reading the body language of the listeners can help subsequent speakers adjust their explanations ,accordingly.

People make snap decisions so the first impression the team makes will be a lasting one.

A team who knows each other well and who demonstrate affection and respect for each other immediately impresses the client. On the other hand, one weak communicator can sabotage the effectiveness of the entire team. Ideally, the team should rehearse out loud as a group and give feedback on each individual's content and delivery. Customers resent dull presentations or inaccurate information. If group members are honest in their feedback on the front end, costly mistakes can be avoided.

Clients assess whether a speaker is effective based on whether the speaker seems composed and enthusiastic and whether they are bored by the content. To be perceived as composed, speakers must stand up straight, look people in the eye and

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pause often to make their points stand out. To be compelling, they must engage their body and their voice and create content that is interesting and personalized. While this may seem simplistic, many teams read from their slides or notes, have very little eye contact with their audience and deliver dry, technical content in a monotone voice, causing clients to daydream or squirm in their seats.

Since the last impression people have of the team is how they well they handled questions, the team should brainstorm any possible difficult questions and practice responding to them out loud. The team leader should also designate who will answer what questions. As often as possible, team members should link their answers to the core message or to their main ideas.

Finally, the team leader should summarize any key points and outline the action steps the group recommends in detail, as well as their benefits. The individual should also handle any remaining questions or issues.

When clients are investing large sums of money, they expect to see well-oiled team. How well the team performs does make a difference. With preparation, practice and presentation, your team can score high marks and close more business.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. To reach us, phone (847) 438-4480 or contact our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.