

HOW TO SELL ANYTHING!

by Nancy Zwiers

Sales is not just for salespeople. Whether you're a marketer, a graphic designer, or anyone else in business, you too are selling. In fact, odds are that you make an effort to persuade someone to do something you want them to do each and every day.

I learned the Persuasive Selling format years ago when I began my career at Procter & Gamble, a com-

pany renowned for best practices in many areas of business. This empathetic selling approach is so powerful that I am still using it (more than 25 years later) in all of my presentations.

Persuasive Selling is the art of influencing people to do what you want them to do. The approach is simple, yet profound and extremely powerful. It involves just five steps:

1. SUMMARIZE THE SITUATION—You need to bring your listener up to speed on the scenario, prompting the conversation so that they are likely to arrive at your conclusion even before you share it with them. To use an analogy, before you make your sales pitch, you must prepare the soil for the seed of your idea.

Your situation summary could include facts about the environment surrounding their situation; information about a new issue, opportunity, trend, or competitive situation; recent research; or whatever else prompted you to reach out to them. A few bullet points are plenty.

3. EXPLAIN HOW IT WORKS—Once you've clearly stated your proposition, you can share the details of your recommendation. This might include product information, pricing, sales program details, timing considerations, or any other specifics that will help your listener understand your complete proposal. This is an opportunity to highlight the impressive points in your proposal and to preempt any questions, objections, or concerns you foresee.

One of the keys to selling is to put yourself in your listener's shoes and evaluate your proposition from their point of view. When you're explaining your proposition, start from the perspective of their needs and wants and think about how you can fulfill them and how you can assuage any concerns.

5. SUGGEST AN EASY NEXT STEP—This may or may not mean closing the sale, depending on the outcome of your conversation, but no matter what you're asking for, don't leave the encounter "hanging." If it went well, ask for their decision. If there is more convincing to be done, get your listener to agree to another meeting, a phone call, or a review of adjusted details. Ask them clearly and explicitly to do what you need them to do in order for you to move forward. This is often called "asking for the order."

2. STATE YOUR IDEA—In very clear and simple terms, put forth your recommendation or proposal. This is not the time for lots of trappings and razzle-dazzle; just headline your idea clearly so your listener understands what you are proposing.

4. REINFORCE KEY BENEFITS—This is your opportunity to circle back and reinforce the reasons that this idea is good for your listener. Also, you may think about other alternatives they may consider and state why yours is the best option.

The Persuasive Selling approach dictates that there are usually only three good reasons to do anything. Sit down and list the reasons you think this is the best plan for your listener. If you end up with more than three reasons, evaluate your list and cut the less persuasive reasons out. Presenting more than three key benefits not only confuses your listener, but also usually means you are including weaker reasons that will give your listener room to argue with you and your proposal. If you find that you just can't whittle your list, try to group your reasons into three main categories. It's easier for your listener to remember three strong points than seven or eight average ones.

This selling approach works. When you need someone to do something your way, just put yourself in their shoes, present the facts, reinforce the benefits, and be clear about what you are asking for. You're sure to close the deal.

Nancy Zwiers is CEO of Funosophy, Inc., a kids' marketing and design firm.