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Avoiding the Sales Talk Sledgehammers

By Dr. Joseph Sommerville

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There is a saying that when all you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail. The underlying idea is that given the choice of only one tool, you'll probably try to use it in inappropriate situations. On the surface of many sales pitches is an appeal that at first sounds persuasive, but may actually be counter-productive for the intended prospect. Many of these appeals have become clichés, phrases repeated so often, that we don't look at the logic behind them. In fact, an accepted premise of much sales training is that "people buy emotionally and justify logically." However, this really doesn't describe the purchasing habits of the sophisticated buyer.

Sophisticated buyers are well-informed consumers, accustomed to reaching a decision only after research and deliberation. They are much less likely to succumb to the pseudo-logic found in many scripted sales pitches. Sophisticated buyers look behind the logic of these claims and what they find amounts to sales sledgehammers—blunt, heavy instruments not well-suited to the job at hand. Their first impulse is to get away from them by disengaging. If you want to be successful with this type of buyer, you'll need to avoid swinging the following sledgehammers.

"We have over 100 years combined experience in this area." The "combined experience" phrase is a dead giveaway you're stretching your credibility. Here are some ways the sophisticated buyer interprets combined experience. "We have 20 people in the firm, each with about 5 year's experience. So we are spread extremely thin and not very deep." "The reason we don't have any one person with 20 year's experience is that no one wants to stay here that long."

Using this phrase in a relatively young field, such as technology, is downright silly. Besides, most people don't care about experience nearly as much as results.

Sales people often tell prospects "That's a great question!" It's a decidedly clumsy attempt to compliment the prospect. Sophisticated buyers see through it immediately. Granted, some can use it with more finesse than others, but like most techniques, it is ineffective once recognized. If you insist on keeping it in your sales repertoire, here are three guidelines to use it more effectively. First, use it only once. By the third or fourth time people hear they've asked a great question, they become suspect. Second, don't use it in a group of people. When everyone is asking great questions, no one

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feels special. Third, don't plug it in automatically as part of a script. I've seen salespeople look for the opportunity to use this phrase, no matter how mundane the question.

"If you break the price of this down, it comes to the equivalent of one cup of café latte (or substitute your own) a day." Many think café latte is overpriced in the first place and in the second place, some never drink it. This is a completely ineffective appeal to most. There is always the risk, that you will choose an example that someone is unfamiliar with. An even more important reason to avoid this tactic lies in the different nature of the sophisticated buyer. They tend to be long-term thinkers. They want to know if they are receiving value for the price. They don't follow the monthly payment mentality of the credit card buyer. Amortizing cost on a daily basis simply isn't the way they think.

When I was shopping for a new vehicle, a phrase I heard repeatedly was "What will it take to get your

business today?" Again, some people used it with more finesse than others. Some people used it after 5 minutes, some used it after 20 minutes and others only used it after I had demonstrated interest in a particular vehicle, but everyone except the person I bought from used this phrase. This one-size fits all approach to sales doesn't take into account the fact that individuals approach decisions differently. Some may be impulse buyers, others rely on peer information and still others like to spend time analysing sales literature. Sophisticated buyers tend to be deliberative in their approach, and such a question usually makes them feel as if they're being rushed into a decision.

"Here's lots of information on this product." This approach says to give the prospect as much information as possible and the facts will speak for themselves. There is a big difference however, between information and knowledge. You don't know which information the prospect may find persuasive. It could be third party validation, testimonials, or safety ratings. Rather than dumping everything you have on them, ask what they'd like to know. Another problem with the infodump is that the salesperson talks too much. A key part of any sale is building the relationship with the prospect. The salesperson who substitutes telling for asking is missing an opportunity to discover points of interest to the buyer.

Selling the sophisticated buyer is more difficult. First, you must get away from sales scripts and focus more on adapting to the needs of the individual. This takes a great deal of interpersonal skill. Second, you have to rid yourself of sales cliché's. If buyers hear the same phrase two or three times, they know they're being sold and no one likes to be sold. Third, and perhaps most difficult, it requires a shift from telling to listening. The right questions allow you to discover selling points and build rapport. These changes are well worth the extra effort. Once you win this type of buyer, you are well rewarded with fuller customer engagement and a higher referral rate.

Dr. Joseph Sommerville helps professionals create more persuasive messages. He is the President of Peak Communication Performance (www.peakcp.com), a Houston-based firm working worldwide to help professionals develop skills in strategic communication. Contact him at Sommerville@Peakcp.Com

Business Writing Skills Part III: Avoiding Sexist Language

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

Business Writing Skills Part III: Avoiding Sexist Language by Linda Elizabeth Alexander

Many businesspeople are unfamiliar with business writing. Concise writing will build your business because you will better connect with customers and prospects. In this four-part series, I will teach you how to make your writing and other business correspondence clearer, understandable, and more direct.

Avoiding Sexist Language in Writing By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

Why avoid sexist language in your business writing? Biased language can alienate any potential reader. If you alienate your readers, you lose credibility. Without their faith in your words, you have lost your audience and cannot make your argument. Therefore, avoiding sexism in your writing benefits everyone.

Here are some tips for avoiding common mistakes regarding sexist language.

He/She

The use of a masculine pronoun to refer to both genders is offensive to many people. Also, using terms such as "man" to define people can often be confusing – are you referring only to "men" or to "all people"? The easiest and best way to get around this is to rewrite the sentence in the plural, or avoid using a pronoun altogether.

Example: The executive cannot do his job properly until he understands how. Correct to: Executives cannot do their jobs properly until they understand how.

You could also say "The executive cannot do his or her job properly until he or she understands how." However, this tends to be clumsy, especially after being used repeatedly.

Ms./Miss/Mrs. Miss refers to an unmarried woman. Mrs. Refers to a married woman. Ms. is a universally accepted form of addressing a woman regardless of her marital status. This should be adopted whenever possible.

However, there are women who indicate a preference for either

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Miss or Mrs., and that preference should be honored if known. When addressing general audiences, or if you are not sure of the woman's marital status, always use Ms.

Other ways to avoid sexism in your writing:

Don't assume that a particular job is filled by a particular gender: there are many female construction workers and doctors; there are also many nurses and office assistants that are male.

Instead, talk about "mail carriers" instead of mailmen, "flight attendants" instead of stewardesses, and "police officers" instead of policemen. Certain job titles refer to both men and women; "lineman" is one such example.

Try not to be confusing by going overboard with terms such as "saleswoman" or "salesman" or "salesperson." Instead, use simple words like "sales associate" or "chair" instead of "chairman/woman/person."

Linda Elizabeth Alexander is a business writer and marketing consultant based in Longmont, Colorado, USA. Improve your writing skills at work! Subscribe to her FREE ezine. Write to the Point at lalexander@write2thepointcom.com or visit <http://www.write2thepointcom.com/articles.html>.



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