



# Pointers

## Presentation

A Publication of Dag Knudsen, Inc.

## DON'T TALK TO STRANGERS. YOUR MOTHER SAID SO.

I'll repeat her wise council. **"Don't talk to strangers."** But in sales efforts it is for slightly different reasons.

### It is because:

1. You don't know their biases
2. You don't know their perspectives
3. You don't know what drives their decisions.
4. You don't know what you need to offer in order to win.
5. All this leads to low win rates

**Talking to strangers** in the business world leads to winning by chance. **Talking to people** in the business world with whom you are acquainted leads to winning by design. Don't win by chance. Win by design. How do you do that?

With "talking" we mean giving a presentation or sending a proposal to a client. If at this time a relationship has not been developed, in other words, the client has not moved from stranger to a known contact, you are hoping to win purely by chance because you know very little if anything about his or her business and emotional needs, wants and concerns. Win rates governed by chance are discouragingly low.

On the other hand, people who have win and capture rates above 55% don't send proposals and give presentations to "strangers." Long before these actions take place they have developed a relationship with the targeted client. Their presentations and proposals therefore reflect a deep knowledge of the decision makers and their needs. This insight is gained only through contacts over a period of time, just like moving from stranger to friend takes time: time to listen, to explore, to ask questions, to get a good understanding of what makes the company and person tick.

Every business with a viable service will have some luck, some winning by chance. This luck is reflected in win rates of possibly up to 25-30%. A good example of chance selling is display selling. You see this along the highways where people place cars they want to sell. Out of thousands of people who drive by, hopefully one will have a need for that particular car. The likelihood of a match is chance.

This scenario is similar to interview presentations. If you present the same story often enough, you are bound to win some. The win comes when your story, by chance, matches the clients' buying criteria. It is a hard way to make a living. And clients talk to one another. Here is a typical conversation.

"Did you shortlist the ABC Engineers?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did you select them?"

"Nope. Lousy proposal and presentation. It was boiler plate. They didn't know a thing about us and missed the target by a mile."

Winners never talk to strangers. They win by design because their message represents a close match to decision makers' criteria and strategies. Decisions are made on the basis of satisfying business needs, wants and concerns. They are also—and this is very important—based on emotional needs which are not readily talked about, and certainly not with strangers. Needs, for example such as power and control, recognition, security, safety, fears of criticism. A director of a business may fear loss

of board support if a business plan goes awry. A PM may fear losing his position if a critical deadline is missed. An operations or maintenance manager may fear criticism from higher ups if the fee is overshot.

And so, they make decisions on the basis that their fears will not materialize. When you understand these strong emotional driving forces you are ready to design a proposal and presentation message that proves their fears will not materialize when you are hired.

When you give a presentation to strangers, it is a hit or miss proposition. You don't know a thing about them and they will know that. They'll spread the word, "They never even walked the sites or wanted to find out what our needs are." When you know your client, you can design the appropriate message, as for a friend, and your client will know that, too, and the word will spread.

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## Work Smart, Not Hard.

### Don't be like the Fuller Brush Man.

The Fuller Brush Men made their living by going from door to door. They were not selective on whom they called. To them, every door that opened was an opportunity. They operated on the basis of volume. Talk to enough people and some would be bound to buy! Their hit-rate was usually a discouraging 5%.

Technical professionals who respond to every CBD advertisement and RFQ that comes across their desk operate very much like the Fuller Brush men. They too, feel that every RFQ and CBD ad is an opportunity. Yet these opportunities are nothing but gambles. Hit rates are predictably low. Rejection rates are high. What is needed to turn this demoralizing business activity around is a guaranteed match between the seller and the buyer. This comes through selective positioning.

Informed technical professionals don't approach the market place gambling on volume. They know they cannot be everything to everybody. They have learned:

1. How to position themselves in a selected market place with a guaranteed interest between them and their client.
2. How to apply simple "go, no-go" decision criteria.
3. How to persuasively communicate the value of their approach, their service and their fee.

**Selective Positioning.** Selective positioning involves two sets of tactics. First, you position your firm in your targeted market by the skills you offer. You communicate this position with your direct mail periodicals and brochures. This is called marketing. Second, to increase your win-rate, you must also position yourself in the minds

of the decision makers. You do this through face-to-face, value producing contacts over a period of time before the RFQ/RFP is issued. This is called selling (or helping the client select you).

**The Go, No-Go Decision Criteria.** Informed professionals use a set of simple, highly effective criteria they ask themselves.

1. Is this client and project in our target market?
2. Are we positioned to win?
3. Is this client (not only the project) going to be profitable client in the future.
4. Do we know what we have to do to produce results in excess of the client's expectations?

If these questions cannot be answered with a yes, it becomes a no-go. Those who live by this approach see dramatic results because they have weeded out non-productive pursuits.

**Persuasive Communication.** You must help your client select you by communicating the value you bring. Your qualification statements will not do. The world is full of qualified professionals. Your experience is not enough. The world is full of experienced design professionals. Your low fee is not enough. High fees also win. You must therefore persuasively communicate that you, 1) clearly understand what your client wants to accomplish, 2) can satisfy all critical technical requirements, 3) can satisfy all critical service expectations, and 4) produce the benefits of importance to the client.

Apply these principles and you will end up with a fuller plate than the Fuller Brush Men.

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