



Pointers

Presentation

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UNDERSTANDING WHY CLIENTS MAKE THE SELECTIONS THEY DO

Understanding "WHY" Provides Valuable Insight

From Presentation Pointers Vol. 11, No. 2.

Fulfilling the WHAT people want without also understanding WHY, is like operating in the dark. When you understand the WHY behind a client's request—you will know how to satisfy that client's needs. This knowledge leads to more wins!

Once, after discussing a concept with a client, I was asked at the end of the interview, "Could you present me with a proposal on the concepts we just talked about?"

I got excited, assured that this woman was very much interested in my concept. I immediately had the vision of at least one hundred pages of a carefully detailed written document, smartly bound with our company's logo staring on the cover. But before I ran off to my office to begin work on this tome, I decided to ask her what it is she was looking for in the proposal. "I'll be happy to present you with a proposal but tell me, what do you want the proposal to do for you?" (Indirectly: WHY do you want a proposal?)

I hit pay dirt with that simple question. The answer was, "I like your concept. I want to budget it for next year. We are in the midst of a budgeting cycle and I want budget numbers from you." A light went on in my head. This client didn't want my 100 page impressive document detailing the proposal. She had already decided she liked our approach. She simply wanted a budget. My 100 page proposal just became a one pager. I saved myself a lot of time, and because I asked WHY, I received val-

uable insight and was able to satisfy this client's needs: a budget proposal for her financial planning.

Two research studies show that addressing both the WHAT and the WHY enhances understanding. Yet, RFPs state only WHAT the client wants. So why don't people tell you WHY they want something? WHAT represents an objective requirement. WHY deals with subjective requirements. It is far easier to make a request than having to explain why. It also seems that many people feel that using the word WHY is too aggressive. They fear that asking, "Why do you want that?" may come across as impolite or harsh. Others don't think about discovering why. It is far easier to provide answers to a "WHAT" question than having to spend time and energy delving into hidden agendas. And yet it need not be a difficult task finding out the reason behind a request—just ask.

An RFP stated that firms producing plans and specifications in less than twelve months would receive up to five bonus points in the evaluation of their proposal. Most firms got excited and went for the bonus points. The winner didn't. He asked the client, "What is important about the twelve months?" (Indirectly: WHY do you want it in 12 months?) The answer he received gave him the knowledge needed to formulate a proposed approach that won them the job despite quoting eighteen months delivery and a significantly higher fee! It turned out the client had a short term and a long term need and both could be satisfied with an approach different and better than that requested in the RFP.

Another RFP requested a description of the firm's project management approach. Instead of sending the generic discussion of meetings, reports, schedules, etc., the consultant asked, "What is important to you about the management plan?" (Indirectly: WHY do you want the management plan?) The client told him of a previous job where a partnering workshop was used. He liked that. With this valuable insight, the consultant focused his management plan detailing their own partnering process. Having learned the WHY, he could present that which was important to the client. He won the job. Get out of the dark. Ask the client WHY they want what they ask for and learn the real needs. With that knowledge, you can differentiate yourself from your competition—and win.

Why should your client hire you?

From Presentation Pointers Vol. 11, No. 3.

Because you are qualified? No—the world is full of qualified firms.

Because you offer the lowest price? No—the world is full of firms that win with a higher fee.

Because you have good relationships? No—your clients have good relationships with several firms.

Because you are currently doing good work for them? No—there are lots of examples where the client picked someone else.

When in strategy sessions I ask the question "Why should your client hire you?" it is rare that people know really WHY the client should hire them—except they say: "We are best qualified, we know them best, we are working with them now, etc."

If your win-rate is less than 30 to 35 percent, you are not as effective as you can be because you probably don't know WHY the client would hire you. You are operating in a world of chance. The Fuller Brush man was told that if he knocked on enough doors—he would make sales. Yes, at a five percent rate. This is demoralizing. This is costly. And—think about it—if you operate in the world of chance you create a negative image in the market place. You see, your clients talk to each other—about you:

"Did you short list the XYZ firm?"

"Yes."

"Did you hire them?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Lousy proposal."

Your clients hear this from a few of their peers and your image is tarnished.

Your goal is to learn in depth WHY the client would hire you—or anyone else for that matter. The only way to learn is to ask them: "Tell me—why would you hire us?" And then listen and make sure you understand the answer. The closer your relationship with your client—the more likely it is that they will tell you the truth.

Upon winning a strategic assignment the client told the winning firm: "You demonstrated that you listened to us, that you understood what we wanted to accomplish. That's why we selected you."

Increase your wins by seeking the real answer to the question:
WHY should your client hire you?

"Persuade" don't "Sell," and Double Your Sales

From Presentation pointers Vol. 10, No. 4.

To "sell" is to unilaterally determine benefits used as reasons why clients should buy your service. The client is not involved. Example: You emphasize reduced costs. What if client has a critical dead line to meet?

To "persuade" is to ask the clients what is important to them and then show/prove how your offering clearly meets their needs. Ex.: The client tells you schedule. You prove that you will meet their tight schedule.

Research by the Forum Corporation established that highly successful sales reps consistently applied "persuasion" principles as defined above. On the average, they outsold the "sellers" by 201%!

Let's see how this applies to professional services:

SITUATION # 1:

The client is using the qualification based method of selection (QBS). No proposal or price is involved.

If you only present your qualifications you are leaving it up to the client to conclude that you, for ex. will be able to meet their tight schedule.

If you present the benefits of your qualifications without input from the client then you are "selling" and stand to miss what is important to the client. Ex.: You might emphasize reduced costs while the client has a critical dead line.

If you ask the client what is important to them and then prove to the client that your team and staff offer the best chance of satisfying these needs, then you are practicing professional "persuasionmanship." You are helping the client select you over your competition because s/he has proof positive that you can meet their, for ex., critical dead lines.

SITUATION # 2:

Your client is using the RFP process of selection. No price is involved in the decision.

If you only present your approach with work flow and Gantt charts—then you are leaving it up to the client to determine what is best for them. You may be adding arguments of why your approach is good—but you are "selling" if these arguments are not derived from the client.

If your customized approach reflects issues that are critical to the client—and you overtly point this out and prove that their desired outcome will materialize by selecting you, then you will experience significant improvements in hit-rates because you are using persuasion principles.

SITUATION # 3:

Your client is asking for a price proposal—a bid.

If you present a price—a bid—without helping the client understand the value of your price, then you are leaving it up to your client to discover your value.

If you present a price and *add your own* reasons why this is the right price, then you are "selling."

If you prove to the client that your price and the underlying approach represents the highest value in terms of their needs—then you are using "persuasionmanship." You are helping the client select your bid (high or middle or low) over the other bids.

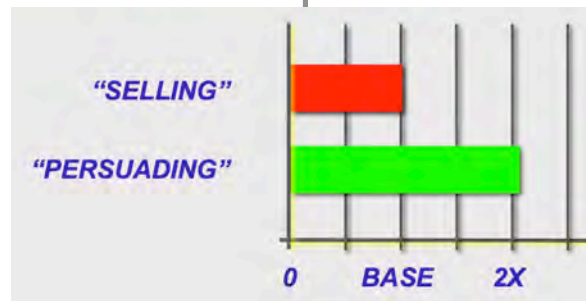


Fig. 1: Persuasion approach outsells the "tell 'em sell 'em" approach by 101%

Your careful review of the above will show a trend: Identify that which is important to your client and persuade them to the value of your offering. Value meaning that their needs are met.

- If schedule is critically important, prove that you can meet the tight schedule. Don't say you can meet it, prove it!
- If staying within a tight budget is critically important, prove that you can meet their tight budget.
- If public acceptance is critically important, prove that you can produce public acceptance.
- If enhanced public image is important, prove that you can help enhance their public image.

CONCLUSION:

Be singlemindedly focused on the factor(s) that drive your clients' decisions as you prepare your persuasive presentations and proposals.