

Quotable Quotes

The passenger who sat in Seat 4A before me on this particular United A320 must have been a sales or sales management-type. At least, that's the conclusion I drew from the copy of *Selling Power* magazine that was left in the seatback pocket. This isn't a publication I normally read, but with both a free copy and a five hour coast-to-coast flight in front of me, I decided to see what was new in the world of high-powered selling.

I read several interesting articles about technology in selling, and about selling technology, but the part of the magazine that made the strongest impression on me was the section titled "Power Surge"—and specifically the segment titled "Positively Quotable." (If you're interested, all this can be found on Page 21 of the July/August 2001 issue of *Selling Power*.) This segment consists of a number of quotes from famous people that can be applied to the challenges of selling.

A Tremendous Whack!

The first quote that caught my attention was attributed to Sir Winston Churchill: "If you have an important point to make," he said, "don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time—a tremendous whack!" I think Churchill would have made one hell of a salesman!

Far too many quick/digital/small commercial printing salespeople employ what I think of as the "osmosis approach" to selling. At best, they hit the important points once, and in many cases, they don't even do that! Their hope seems to be that prospects or customers will somehow instinctively understand all of the benefits of buying from them. Believe me, that's unlikely to happen!

In seminars, I deal with this issue by asking attendees if all of their current customers are geniuses. "Do they always get it?" I ask. "Do they but intelligently? Do they ask the right questions? Do they give you everything you need to give them a quality job and the service they expect?"

The answer is usually "NO," so my next question is this: "If your current customers aren't geniuses, how can you expect your prospects to be any different?" The fact of the matter is that you have to tell people what you want them to know, often again and again and again!

This "ground truth" of selling has applications in both new customer development and account penetration. I asked one of my sales coaching clients recently if she could tell me with any real confidence that her best customer was fully aware of all of her capabilities. "I think so," she said. "I know I've mentioned all of our capabilities at least once. In fact, I probably did that in my first meeting with them more than a year ago."

I think Sir Winston would take issue with the word *mentioned*. "Young lady," he might have said, "if you *mention* something in passing, you're putting a great deal of faith in the other person's ability to grasp what's important. I expect that you will find that faith very seldom rewarded. A far better strategy is to tell them what you want them to know. Then tell them again. Then tell them a third time—and then ask them if they understand!"

Neither Sir Winston nor I are recommending that you do all of this in a single conversation, by the way. That could be pretty obnoxious! But we are recommending that this ongoing process of education should be the core of your selling strategy. Think of it this way, if you're not yet getting the results you're hoping for, there are only two possible reasons. One is the possibility that the prospect doesn't want to buy from you. The only other is the possibility that he/she doesn't yet know why he/she should!

Tenacity

Another of the quotes that struck me was attributed to Louis Pasteur: "Let me tell you the secret that has led me to my goal," he said. "My strength lies solely in my tenacity." I remember reading once that Pasteur conducted thousands of experiments while studying and developing both treatment for and preventative techniques against contagious diseases.

I also remember that Pasteur scrapped a lot of those experiments as soon as he realized that he was barking up the wrong tree. His definition of tenacity was to keep moving forward toward his ultimate goal, even if that required him to move backward or sideways every once in a while.

Many quick/digital/small commercial printing salespeople seem to have a different definition of tenacity. They tend to "hang in there" with someone well past the point where it should be obvious that they're not going to succeed. As I've written before, it takes three things to be a truly qualified prospect. First, they must buy exactly the kind of

printing/copying you want to sell. Second, they must buy enough of it to make the pursuit worthwhile. And third, they must show some interest in buying from you.

Yes, there are people who don't show much interest in the beginning and later come around, but that's not the situation I'm talking about. Rather it's the situation where a salesperson calls sporadically over some period of time, often without even being sure that this "prospect" is even qualified in terms of the first two criteria. That's not tenacity, it's a waste of time!

"An experiment is just that," Pasteur might have said. "You begin each one with the hope that it will succeed, but you must pay careful attention to the signs that it will not. When you see those signs, you must try a different approach." In selling terms, that means two things: first that if what you're doing isn't working, you should try something else! Second, the better choice is often to try *someone* else. Pasteur's goal was prevention and cure of infectious diseases. It was not to make any particular experiment work! A printing salesperson's goal is to sell a certain amount of printing—or perhaps better stated, to create a certain amount of profit. As the owner, I don't think you really care *who* buys all that printing, only that *somebody* does!

I teach my sales coaching clients to be aggressive about *disqualifying* prospects, in other words, to take advantage of the breadth of their market opportunity. My definition of tenacity is to evaluate lots of companies and printing buyers, identifying the ones who are truly qualified and giving them a place on my prospect list. It's about working hard to find those good prospects, not about "hanging in there" with bad ones.

I Disagree!

In addition to these two quotes from Churchill and Pasteur, *Selling Power* printed another one in this issue with which I largely disagree. This one was attributed to General George S. Patton: "Never tell people how to do things, he said. "Tell them what you want to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

Maybe some people will, but in my experience, most quick/digital/small commercial printing salespeople won't. Why? Simply because they lack the training and experience that forms the foundation of that potential ingenuity.

Let's face it, most quick/digital/small commercial printing salespeople come from somewhere near the bottom of the barrel. The reason for that is purely economic, because that's all most quick/digital/small commercial printers can afford! As I've written before, when you're offering a \$25,000 - \$30,000 job, you're going to have to hire a person to whom that's enough money. That often means a young person, understandably lacking in training and experience. But it also often means a person who has had to—or is willing to—settle for less money than the top performers make. Either way, these people simply have to be taught how to do the job!

I wrote about this situation a couple of months ago, in my column on "More Formulas For Success"—in this case, though, describing a formula for failure. If you don't train your salespeople effectively and really spell out the job for them, you're really leaving it up to them to guess at what they should be doing. The equation for that situation is $E - T = C + UP$, or Expectations without Training equals Confusion among your employees and Unsatisfactory Performance

FAB For...

While we're back on the subject of formulas for success, here's one that had to be cut from my October column because of space limitations. It's all about the relationship between Features, Advantages and Benefits, which can be expressed by the formula $F + A = B$. This equation states that the Features of your business provide you with a competitive Advantage, which in turn provides a Benefit to the customer.

Let's use computer-to-plate capability as an example. The capability itself would be a Feature of your business. The chief Advantage it provides you with is faster processing, and of course a lower cost base because time is money. The Benefit to the customer is often twofold as well: faster turnaround on their projects and some cost savings too.

I know quite a few quick/digital/small commercial printers who have added computer-to-plate capability, and I've read about the experiences of many others in PrintImage's CTP Study. I think it's fair to say that a significant number of the printers who've moved into CTP are still waiting for it to do something positive for their sales figures.

Why is that? I suspect it's because those printers haven't gotten beyond the Features stage in communicating their new capability to their customers and prospects. "We have computer-to-plate!" they say. And many of the customers and prospects think, "Cool, but I have a computer too, and I have no idea what a plate has to do with anything I might want a printer to do for me." Remember, the vast majority of your customers and prospects are "civilians"—my term for anyone who doesn't actually work in the printing industry! They usually don't understand either the printing process or printing jargon, and if you want to be sure to communicate with them, you better do it in their language, or at least teach them enough of your language to allow them to understand!

"We've just installed a computer-to-plate system," you might say, "which lets us actually remove a couple of steps from the 'traditional' process of preparing your job for the printing press. The benefit to you will be faster

turnaround, and very likely some cost savings as well since our pricing will reflect the efficiencies we've gained through this investment in technology."

And remember what Sir Winston said, don't be satisfied to tell this—or any other FAB story—just once. You'll almost certainly have to tell them again and again to make sure that they get it!

(By the way, while we're talking about famous Brits, if you thought of The Beatles when you first read the sub-heading to this section of today's column, you can award yourself 50 Baby Boomer Bonus Points, redeemable at some later time for unspecified prizes!)

Another Good Idea

The July/August issue of *Selling Power* yielded another pretty good idea that I'd like to pass on to you. This one was attributed to Ron Karr, in a segment written by William F. Kendy. It's a strategy for dealing with voice mail, and the idea is to call your own answering machine every once in a while to see how the messages you're leaving for others actually sound. I tried it myself, and I've made a couple of changes in the way I leave voice mail messages as a result.

Thanks to all the people at *Selling Power* for providing me with something to write about this month. And special thanks to the person who left the magazine in the seatback pocket for me to read!