

Sales Wisdom From Ari Gold (And Seth Godin)

My wife and I are binge-watching *Entourage*. We didn't watch when it was running on HBO between 2004-2011, but we got interested when the movie came out last summer. It took us a while to actually get started, but for the last few weeks, we've been watching 2-3 episodes most nights.

What does that have to do with printing sales? Well, in one of the episodes we watched last night, Ari Gold had this to say about following up on a movie proposal: "That's what I do. I sell. If you don't sell it, (a proposal is) just a bunch of chopped up trees with words on them!"

The same thing is true of a printing proposal. If you're not winning as many quotes as you'd like to, part of the reason is probably that you're not selling hard enough or well enough.

Not Selling

Let's get this straight from the start, quoting is not selling. A quote is an offer, and an offer is usually more reactive than proactive. The buyer says: *How much would you charge me for this?* The quote is your answer.

But wait, you say, you asked for the opportunity to quote. I have news for you, that's not selling either. I heard Seth Godin speak a few years ago. It wasn't a printing industry conference, but Godin mentioned the printing industry specifically. "I buy a lot of printing," he said, "and the printing industry is trying to convince me that I should always buy from whoever offers me the lowest price."

I waited for him after his presentation, told him that I was a printing industry guy, and asked him to elaborate. He told me that most of what he heard from printing salespeople was (1) What do you print? (2) Can I give you a quote on your next project? and (3) How does my pricing look?

He also told me that any new company's pricing is usually more than what he's been paying, and when he tells the salespeople that, they usually ask if they can try again and "sharpen their pencil."

Again, that's not selling. It's begging, then quoting, then begging again. And while I don't share Godin's perspective that the whole printing industry is all about price, I know that far too many salespeople operate just the way he described it, and they think they're selling hard and selling well.

Real Selling

Real selling has more to do with questions than quotes. Questions about the purpose of the printing. Questions about the performance of the printing. (In other words, when you've printed stuff like this in the past, what did you want it to do and how well did it do it? Were you dissatisfied in any way with the performance of the printing?)

Questions about the performance of the printer. (Were you dissatisfied in any way with the quality, or the service, or anything else?)

Questions about the risk involved. (What could go wrong with this project, and how bad would that hurt you and your company?)

When you ask and learn the answers to these questions, you have a lot more to sell than a price. If the buyer says your price is higher than what he's been paying, you may be able to point out that he hasn't been happy with what he's been getting. If the buyer tells you that she has a lot on the line with a particular project, you may be able to point out that you understand, and that you built insurance against that risk into your price.

I think we all know that no one wants to pay more than that have to for anything, but here's an observation: I think most people will pay what they have to pay to get what they want or need. The complicating factor is that they usually don't know how much that is. Which means that a salesperson may have to tell them. Which is what Ari Gold was talking about, I think.

Bottom line: It's not enough to tell them how much. Selling hard and selling well means also telling them why buying from you is a very good decision!

I'll leave it up to you to decide how hard you're willing to push. The lesson for today is simply this. The opposite of yes is not always no. Sometimes it's "you haven't convinced me yet."