

Pause for Reaction: New Generation of Hospitality Sales Professionals Lesson #9

(ninth in a series)

By David M. Brudney, ISHC, November 2007

The new generation of hospitality Sales professionals can become so focused on their “Sales pitch”, e.g., FABs (features, advantages and benefits), that they overlook all too often the importance of pausing in order to seek the prospects’ reactions and buy-in.

Keep in mind that with any prospect encounter the goal should be to close the business.

Chances of doing so increase significantly when the Sales pro can determine as quickly as possible whether or not the prospect is favorably impressed or if the interest level is sustained. Today’s decision makers don’t have time for lengthy selling monologues.

The really good Sales pros today determine quickly if the prospect is familiar or not with the product; has visited the product’s website, conferred with a fellow planner on a recently held event or read a recent user generated property review posted on any one of the new social media network.

Pausing to gauge reaction

If the Sales pro is not asking probing, stimulating and intelligent questions, the risk of losing the decision maker’s interest, receptiveness and involvement becomes greater.

Therefore, a critical part of any Sales pro and prospect encounter is to gauge reaction and buy-in as quickly and as often as necessary.

Let’s assume the Sales pro has just spent 20 seconds extolling one of the product’s features for a planner in need of booking a meeting for 35 people using 20 guestrooms:

Sales pro: “We can put all of your 20 guestrooms on our club floor levels”

Sales pro pause (option #1): “So, what do you think? Sound good?”

Sales pro pause (option #2): “Would that help make your meeting experience better?”

If the planner responds positively, now the Sales pro can continue with the selling process from a position of strength; there's now a real likelihood the prospect will be receptive to the next feature, advantage or benefit. The Sales pro has established a building block now that could lead to successful closure.

And later on, should negotiation become part of the process, the Sales pro can refer back to the planner's receptiveness to his/her group being roomed on club floor levels.

Sales pro: "Yes, there is a \$35 premium charge for the club level guestrooms, but haven't we already agreed that putting your entire group up there would enhance the overall meeting experience?"

And should the club level rooming issue surface again, with the planner struggling to "justify" the \$35 premium charge, the Sales pro can add quickly that the attendees would likely be spending \$35 or more per day on breakfasts, F&B outlets and mini-bars.

Again, the advantage here is with the Sales pro who has already determined that the planner *prefers* to have all attendees placed on club level floors.

Simple reminders can be very helpful

Pausing to gauge prospects' reaction seems so simple to understand, yet is so easy to overlook. One of the best "pause reminders" I can recall was one used effectively by Los Angeles Dodger broadcaster Vin Scully's partner, the late Jerry Doggett.

Doggett used to do play-by-play for two or three innings to give Scully a break and when he did he placed a 3-minute egg timer next to his scorebook. He did so to remind himself to make certain he gave his radio listeners the score - - especially important for those baseball fans just tuning in. When the sand filled the bottom, he'd give the score and then turn it over again, to be repeated every three minutes. A great reminder tool.

Talking points and sound bites

Another good reminder for new Sales pros is the importance of creating and then practicing what we call "talking points" and/or "sound bites". Turn your FABs or potential objections to be overcome into brief, 10 to 15 second selling points:

"We enjoy 50 percent repeat group bookings"

"Our conference service staff is rated number one in our market"

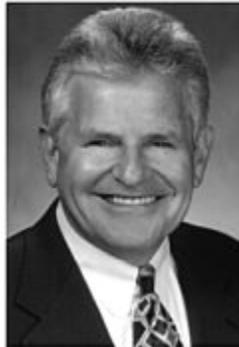
"I can put you in touch with three very satisfied planner clients who booked meetings with us with concerns and demands very similar to yours today"

These and other talking points or sound bites must be practiced - - alone and especially with fellow Sales team members - - on a daily basis until they become second nature. Thought should be given as to when the points should be used, which point will help reinforce a piece of the overall Sales presentation and which would be best used in response to a prospect's objection.

There are many more good reminders and tips for all of us who make our livings selling products and services. Look for them as this series on today's new generation of Sales professionals continues. And I am interested always in hearing good selling reminders and tips from all of you - - those that continue to do me the honor and pleasure of reading my articles.

To access all previous eight "Lessons" in this series visit www.DavidBrudney.com

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