

Three V's for Victory

Most sales training focuses on what to say to a customer. Obviously words are a salesperson's tools but what you say is only part of the total package. In spite of the old proverb "Don't judge a book by its cover" millions of years of human experience have conditioned us to make snap decisions about the people we meet. Malcolm Gladwell's recent book ***BLINK*** examines the science of "rapid cognition" in great detail and in it he cites studies where subjects were shown photos of strangers for a few seconds and then asked questions about how they felt concerning them. Everyone in the study formed a positive or negative opinion within the short time allowed. Looking at photos is quite different than dealing with other people on a one to one basis but there is a lesson to be learned for all sales people.

There are three major factors that others will use to form an opinion about you. For the purpose of this piece let's label them the "**Three V's**":

Visual – What prospects see when they look at you

Vocal – The tone of your voice

Verbal – Your choice of words

We'll take a look at these three areas and what you can do to make them work to your advantage.

Visual: Some years ago John T Molloy author of the classic ***Dress for Success*** series of books enlisted the aid of some professional purchasing agents for a study. He gave them two buttons, one positive and one negative. They were instructed to push the appropriate button as soon as they received a positive or negative message from the sales people sent to call on them. In 94% of the cases when they pressed the negative button, they did so before the sales person had said a word. This is why understanding the importance of Visual component of a sales call is vital to your success. Remember people are judging "your book by its cover" and if that cover doesn't send the right message your prospect will never give you a chance to show them what is inside. What can you do? Unfortunately we are not all blessed with movie star good looks but we can control the message we transmit to our prospects. Here are a few thoughts on making a good first impression:

- **Your clothes** – Over the past decade or so business dress has become increasingly casual. While styles may change people do not. This is why when a business or government leader is trying to communicate something of great importance, they will always be dressed in "business formal" attire. Close your eyes and think of a banker, a stock broker, a college dean. . .how do you see them dressed in your mind's eye? People who don't even remember the last time they wore a tie or stockings still picture persons in authority, people they trust and respect, as dressed in business attire. The trend to casual days has even enhanced this effect, with people in business attire standing out from the crowd.

- Your body language – Prospects are very aware of your slightest movements. An upright posture and a confident stride as you approach a customer communicates, “This person is here for a reason, they’re confident and full of energy.” Be sure to make eye contact with the customer to establish trust. Be conscious of any nervous habits, fidgeting says you are nervous and may have something to hide. Work on developing a good handshake.
- Your smile – nothing has a bigger effect on other’s impression of you than your smile. A sincere smile exudes confidence and friendliness. You will usually find that a smile is answered in kind, which puts the prospect in a receptive mood.

An interesting side effect of focusing on the visual image you project is that by mimicking confident behaviors you will become more confident. It is very hard indeed to remain unhappy with a big smile on your face.

Verbal: Many years ago I had a sales manager who was somewhat less than ethical. He had the ability to tell clients the most outlandish things and be absolutely convincing. The only true thing he ever told me was “How you say it is as important as what you say!” Learning to control your voice can lend credibility to your statement and make it much easier to engage your prospects. Of course we all have to deal with the voice we were given at birth but like anything else in life we can work to make the most of what we have. (James Earl Jones had a terrible stutter as a young man and took up acting to correct it) Here are a few things you can do to work on your voice:

- Record yourself – recording yourself while practicing or giving a presentation allows you to hear your voice as others do. Do you vary your voice or do you speak in a monotone? Do you use too many “ahs” and “ums”? Compare your speech with top performers in your organization. You don’t have to be a speech expert to recognize areas for improvement. Most of us don’t pay attention to our own voice, we are too focused on the content, by actively listening to your own speech patterns you will quickly recognize what adjustments can improve the sound of your voice.
- Pacing – pay attention to the pace of your speech. Many people talk too fast if they are tense or nervous. Others speak too slowly if they are focused on getting the content right. You should carefully listen to your prospect and try to match their vocal pace. There is a great deal of research to indicate that matching your vocal pace to the pace of the person you are speaking with enhances the communication and retention of information.
- Sit up and have a drink – Another reason to have good posture is that it affects the quality of your voice. Hunching over compresses the diaphragm and weakens your voice. Sitting up straight allows you to use the full vocal range. Drinking lots of water keeps the voice well hydrated and prevents raspiness by the days end. Note that caffeinated drinks tend to dehydrate the body so if you are a coffee drinker this is all the more important.

Your voice is the tool you use to convince people to buy your products. Like all tools when kept sharp and used with skill it can accomplish much. Spending time listening to great speakers and listening not only to their message but also to the techniques they use can be invaluable to your personal development. Listening to speaking tapes or joining groups like Toastmasters International can help you get the best out of your most important tool

Verbal: Many psychologists believe that the verbiage used on a sales call is the least import of the three “V’s”. They believe that clients make the decision to buy based on emotion and use fact to justify the decision. This is why telephone sales is so challenging. I believe that to be successful, a salesperson has to master all three “V’s”. Entire libraries full of books have been written on the right words to use on a sales call. I will cover just a few points on this subject:

- **Jargon** – Remember you eat/drink/sleep/live advertising, it’s a minor part of your prospects life. Terms that you know as well as your own name may be completely foreign to your prospect. Use simple language that you are sure your customer understands if you want to get your point across.
- **Storytelling** – “Research indicates that repeated exposure to advertising enhances consumer data retention” is not nearly as effective as “My neighbor needed a plumber, when I asked who he was going to call he told me that guy I see in the paper all the time” Telling stories makes your message easier to understand and much more memorable.
- **Grammar and usage** – recently I was out with a sales rep and the call was going very well until the rep said “I seen a business like yours in one of our papers.” When the rep heard this his entire attitude changed and the sale was lost. The customer wasn’t a snob, he simply would not trust someone who couldn’t get the English language right, to get his ad right.

Since using words is how you make your living, you should spend some time thinking about how you use them. Think about how your prospects reacted when you said this or said that. Build the effective phrasings into your regular repertoire and eliminate the ones which confused or alienated clients. “Borrow” phrases you hear other reps use to add to your verbal toolbox.

Mastering the “**Three V’s**”

Just like learning a new sport or other physical skill, constantly practicing and refining your presentation skills is the key to sales greatness. Role-playing with your boss or your co-workers can help you hone your presentation. Being an honest critic of your own performance, thinking about what you do right and what you do wrong and making the necessary adjustments will lead to continual improvement.

Mastery of anything can give you a great sense of accomplishment. Mastery of the “Three V’s” can also give you a big paycheck. It’s just a matter of asking these simple questions:

Do I look my best?

Do I sound my best?

Am I saying the best words?

Do this and you will be Very Very Very successful