

The Stories of Selling

The ultimate selling paradox

I am sure you all have heard the age-old adage, “Facts tell and stories sell.” Well, it’s true. Sales professionals are some of the greatest storytellers in the world, and – like many of the principles we’ve discussed in this column – this creates a paradox. Although storytelling can be an extremely valuable tool in selling, it can also be a roadblock to sales mastery.

This month’s topic – story versus reality – is one that has come to me from many different sources over the course of my life, from Tony Robbins, the Landmark Forum, the Celestine Prophecy and my mother (“now, Jason tell me what *really* happened”), to name a few.

Story versus reality, fact versus opinion, perception versus reality, or “the dramas of life” are at the very root of who we are as human beings. Humans are innately story tellers. We love hearing stories and we love telling stories, and the ironic thing is that the person to whom we most love to tell stories is our self. The challenge, then, is that the stories we tell ourselves are often only loosely based on what is real.

In sub-Saharan Africa, certain tribal elders carry what is called “The Killing Stick”. And if judgment is passed upon tribal members and the stick is pointed at them, they fall over and die. This is a well-documented fact. This really happens. But if you were to take that same tribal elder and his killing stick and put him at the exit of a subway station in New York, pointing it at people as they come out, what would happen? Certainly not the same reaction as in the homeland. It is the story the tribesmen and women tell themselves about the stick and its powers that makes them fall over dead. It is the story they embrace and live within that gives the killing stick the power over them. To everyone else, the stick is merely a piece of wood.

Here are some definitions for clarity:
 Reality: what actually happened.
 Story: what we make that reality mean to us.

People in sales seem to have a real propensity for telling stories, to others and



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themselves. For example, a sales person places a call. The prospect says, “I’ll call you back.” An hour goes by and the sales person thinks... *he must have gotten busy*. Half the day slips away and he thinks... *he must be at lunch*. The following day, still no call, and he thinks... *this guy is a joker*. Three days goes by (meanwhile, he’s telling himself other stories about other prospects) and the sales person is thinking... *what’s the matter with me? Have I lost my touch? Is it my breath? Should I even be in sales? Am I going to be able to make my mortgage? Will my children lose respect for me? Am I developing ED?* And so on and so on... questioning his own abilities, potentially lowering his self image and seriously affecting his mindset.

All of the above scenarios could be true. The prospect may have gotten busy, gone to lunch... He could very well be a “joker”. And it could be that the sales person is putting people off with his message. But what *actually* happened? The sales

Seen in:
 Baltimore
smart CEO

Required Reading for Growing Companies

Reprinted Content from
 Volume 5, Number 1 January 2005

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Publisher: Craig Burris

Editor: David Callahan

person placed a call, and the prospect said, “I’ll call you back.” Period. End of story. Because there is no story to tell, and no story that the sales person should be telling himself. In the 80/20 rule (where 20% of a sales force typically accounts for 80% of your revenue) you’ll find that the 20-percenters rarely tell themselves a negative story like the one I’ve described above. Again what happened is that the prospect said he’d call back and didn’t. The 20-percenter makes the next call. The 80-percenter needs to check his story and get back to what really happened, rather than living in the story he created based on what that event meant to him.

Here’s how to check your story:

1. Don’t assume anything;
2. Ask questions, of yourself and of the person you’re creating the story about;
3. Don’t ask Fred about Barney, because you’ll only get Fred’s story about Barney;
4. De-grape them – say no for them if they can’t or won’t say no, and move on;
5. Live in reality – not in the story.

Next month we’re going to wind up our two-year journey of philosophy and practice together. My story is that it has been as cathartic for you reading as it has been for me writing, and I encourage you to send letters in to *SmartCEO* and tell me what has happened for you over the last two years.

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