Power Words That Sell:

Using the Right Language to Confirm More Sales

by Lorna Riley

Certified Speaking Professional

760-639-4020

A sales rep once gave a dynamic 60-minute presentation to a committee that had the power to award her organization a seven-figure contract. The members were impressed with her engaging presentation style and how her organization would resolve their software issues. The committee agreed that her organization was the best fit, but ultimately awarded the contact to a competing bidder. Why? See if you can spot her fatal faux pas: *After everyone has been trained on our new software, your current issues will be resolved, hopefully once and for all*. One word—*hopefully,* cast enough doubt over her entire presentation to cost her the sale.

As a sales trainer, I've overheard managers aggressively telling their sales reps: *Get out there, make 50 cold calls today, and don't forget to be warm and friendly!* Or, *Go out there and shake the bushes to see how many customers will fall out.* What's wrong with this language? In my first sales position I was taught to "cold call" on strangers (burrrrr), ask for permission to take their time with my "pitch," and then use techniques to "close" them. It was exhausting, stressful, and difficult. The closing techniques even had names--the "Half Nelson," the "Intimidator," the "Negative Switch," the "Take Away," "Kids Against the Parents," the "Three Devil," and the "Sharp Angle" close. It felt like boxing lessons instead of professional sales training.

Today's savvy customers don't tolerate cheap sales "talk." People are more informed, more skilled, and have raised the bar on expectations. With on-line access to the world, prospects may know more about your products and services than you do.

So, what's a sales pro to do? Reinvent yourself by using a new language. The old words no longer apply in a sophisticated, global economy. Today's professional needs to sell out of integrity, fairness, and a genuine interest in the serving best interests of others. The new words start by adjusting *internal language* (words we think), which triggers changes in our *external language* (what we say). Both affect not only the behaviors and attitudes of sales person, but the prospect as well.

In any sale, there two areas of focus: 1) things we do behind-the-scenes called *Self-Management* (inner-directed internal "self-talk" language), and behaviors that we do in front of prospects and customers called *Sales-Cycle Management* (outer-directed external language people can hear). Self-Management includes activities and the language used in time management, stress management, relationship management, product/service knowledge, initiative, utilizing resources, training—anything that's done to maximize readiness and performance when it's "show time." Sales-Cycle Management includes outer-directed activities, behaviors, and language used in prospecting, questioning, listening, recommending, resolving concerns, confirming the sale, building relationships, asking for referrals, and follow-through.

The words in both Self-Management and Sales-Cycle management are relationship based, consultative in approach, and strengthen the bond upon which all sales are ultimately based—trust. As Will Rogers put it, "If you tell the truth, you don't need a memory." If you tell the truth not only to your customers but to yourself, you don't need to remember slick sales techniques or any other old-school style. Telling the truth means if it's not a fit, say so. Give thorough advice when partnering with prospects to solve explicit and implicit problems. This needs-based approach strengthens the sale, enriches the relationship, keeps tension low, builds trust, increases enjoyment levels, and dramatically increases the likelihood of referrals and repeat business.

Let's take a look at some of the new words in Self-Management and Sales-Cycle Management. The left side of the following lists provide more traditional, inner-directed self-talk while the right side lists more supportive, empowering alternatives. Think like a prospect. Which language would you prefer to experience?

Self-Management

Old-School Sales Talk	**New Self-Management Language**
sell to meet quotas	assist to solve problems
be aggressive	be assertive
vendor mind-set	consultant mind-set
contact management	relationship management
numbers game	numbers of solutions
competitive	cooperative
adversarial	partnering

money-motivated	solutions-motivated
follows routines	continuously learns
looks desperate	looks relaxed
stops when quotas are met	continuously improving, stretching

Sales-Cycle Management

Old-School Sales Talk	**New Sales-Cycle Language**
make cold calls	make introductory calls
pitch and persuade	have dialogues and conversations
tell to sell	listen, recommend, offer choices
overcome objections	resolve concerns
close the sale	confirm the sale
burn and churn	build relationships
"I'll try"	"I will" or "I can"
"to tell you the truth/to be perfectly honest with you"	never state your levels of honesty
"We can't do that."	"Here's what we *can* do…"
"Hopefully"	"We will," or "We can."

Here are seven tips on using a few of the power words that sell:

1. Assist buyers; don't sell.

People love to buy, but don't want to be sold. Why fight human nature? Stop "telling" selling and start assisting. Today we facilitate buying decisions by acting as "assistant buyers." Discover prospects' needs by asking questions, finding out their decision-making criteria, learning all the decision-makers, comparing options, making recommendations, giving advice, and guiding decisions. If you believe that you have the best solution, then your enthusiasm will naturally transfer to your prospect. Selling has sometimes been called a "transfer of enthusiasm." Every product or service has the ability to solve someone's problem somewhere. Find out what yours does best and assist the decision towards those strengths. Assisting also recognizes that by solving one problem, you may be creating more problems in other areas. Ask yourself:

What problems am I creating with the solutions I deliver?

Use a “systems” solutions approach by understanding how the impact of one solution will affect other areas—solving one problem may put your client off balance. Offer solutions to problems that may arise once one problem has been resolved. If your company doesn’t offer these solutions, partner with those who do. For example, I offer skills assessments and inventories to help organizations determine areas of strength and opportunities for development with sales, customer service, and leadership/management staff. Uncovering training needs is only a first step though. To offer a systems solution, I also offer high-content instructional coaching guides on each assessment/skill inventory question, e-learning, accountability programs, and modular classroom training to help develop needed skills flagged by the inventories, customizable for the individual or groups. If there’s a need I don’t provide, I partner with those who do.

2. Fill needs, not quotas.

If all we focus on are meeting numbers, prospects sense that desperation in fulfilling your company’s needs, not theirs. By internally changing the word “quota” to “needs,” you can concentrate on those that haven’t yet benefited from your solutions. With the zeal of a Paul Revere, you will enthusiastically want to introduce yourself to increasing numbers of prospects. *Quotas are exceeded because you are needed.* Find more *needs* and fill them.

3. Introduce yourself, don’t cold call.

If someone moves into your neighborhood, a polite gesture would be to introduce yourself. The same is true in sales. Make it a point to introduce yourself to the folks in your neighborhood (territory), whether it's farming in real estate or visiting corporate high rises. My father, a retired executive from IBM, once told me that Thomas Watson Jr., former Chairman of IBM, would sometimes travel from New England to Florida by car. To make good use of his time, he would pick up an IBM plant manager en route and conduct a business meeting on the road. As they motored down the freeway, Mr. Watson would look out the window, point to various buildings and ask the manager, "Have we called on them yet? Are they our customer yet?" If the answer was “No,” he would sometimes instruct the driver to pull into the parking lot. Mr. Watson would walk into the building and introduce himself. He knew that showing up was the first step in building any relationship. He didn’t make a cold call, but merely introduced himself. The sale can’t begin until an introduction has been made.

4. Be assertive, not aggressive.

Aggression is out. It implies negative force, hostility, an attack, or violating rights. Look it up in the dictionary--you'll blush. Today's approach is "assertive." This means having the confidence and courage to ask for what you want. It's direct, and uses "I" or "we" language ("Here's what I'd recommend…") If you want to work with someone, be assertive and ask for the business! With an aggressive approach, someone wins and someone loses. Assertiveness is always a win-win outcome. Which would you prefer?

5. Confer, don't present.

Today we have conversations or "confer" with clients. Conferring means "to consult with." Presentations are a one-way street. Who does all the talking in a presentation? The salesperson! According to Milo Frank in his book, *How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds*, the average attention span is three to four minutes. If you're yammering on for ten minutes in a presentation, your prospect may have mentally bailed out half-way through. Is it any wonder why they may not buy? They probably weren't listening! Listening is hard, active work. It's easier to talk than listen, so why not give the easy role to your prospects? It actively engages their attention and allows you the opportunity to learn about who they are, their interests, and needs. It helps the prospect feel at ease, builds rapport, helps qualify, and pinpoints issues which can be addressed before they become concerns. When the prospect talks, they are literally *teaching* you what you need to know in order to assist the buying decision. Even if you are conferring with a large group, run a dialogue by asking questions and creating interactive participation throughout. Remember, whoever asks questions, controls the conversation. You'll still be in the driver's seat, but a more informed professional who can make the best recommendations.

6. Resolve concerns don't overcome objections.

This is my favorite. We don't have to "overcome objections" anymore. Today we "resolve concerns." Let's say you've had a great conversation with a prospect and he raises a concern. The word "objection" sounds argumentative, so the typical approach has been to get defensive and argue the point. The subtext is, "I'm right, you're wrong." As the struggle for "being right" continues, the atmosphere thickens and tension builds. When tension builds, trust goes down and the sale is reduced to a power struggle. A concern, on the other hand, is really a request for more information. People naturally have concerns. It's our role to help resolve those concerns calmly, working WITH the prospect to mutually arrive at a new level of understanding. When a concern is raised, you might use the "feel, felt, found" technique such as, *I can understand how you feel. Others have felt the same way and here's what we've found*…(explain what the prospect needs to know in order to resolve the concern). The most important part of feel-felt-found is to connect the sentences with the word "and." If you say, "*but* here's what we've found," you're really saying *I'm right and you're wrong.* When "but" is used in the middle of a sentence, it erases the message or intent of the words preceding it.

7. Confirm the sale, don't "close" it.

"Closing" connotes an ending—stopping a process. Do we really want to *end* the sale? Wouldn't we rather *open* something by confirming it? Confirmation is a much more affirmative, positive approach to entering a sale. When we confirm the sale, it potentially opens a long-term, mutually rewarding experience. Psychologists say that word choices teach the subconscious mind what to think. About 90% of our thinking occurs in the subconscious mind, which cannot distinguish between what is real and what is not. If the subconscious mind is fed positive language, i.e. "confirm" instead of "close," it replays those words back to the conscious mind in the form of thoughts and feelings. The mind then helps pull you in a positive direction. Instead of fear we feel connection. Instead of desperation, we feel relaxed. Instead of dread, we feel joy. Every cell of the body has been programmed to make your intention a reality.

The most effective selling today starts by using the right words. Words create thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings produce behavior. If the behavior is positive and non-threatening, the sale *will* take place. Words have the power to transform thinking and pull ineffective behaviors into empowered, positive directions. Choose your words wisely and watch the magic begin!

Contact Lorna Riley for a complete list of training programs and speeches:
Lorna@lornariley.com
Or call 760-639-4020. Please visit our sites at:
www.straightreferrals.com
www.otclearning.com