

## Learning to Win a Pitch from a Shoe Salesman

By Joey Asher

When going gets tough, the tough learn how to sell shoes.

Let me explain. New business is hard to come by these days. And if you get a chance to pitch for a piece of new business, the pressure will be high to win. But if you want to maximize your chances, then you need to do everything you can to “rig the game” before you pitch.

And to do that you need to learn a lesson in relationship building that the best shoe salesmen have always known. The lesson is this: the more time you spend with a customer before the pitch, the greater your chance of making a sale. It’s a lesson that the best sellers all understand. And it can help you win your next new business pitch.

I first learned this idea from a friend who is a star salesman for a major consulting firm in Atlanta. When he makes a sale these days, it’s worth millions. But he learned to sell working as a teenager in the shoe department at Parisian in Birmingham, Alabama.

“When someone would come in to the shoe department, it would be my goal to have them try on as many shoes as possible,” he said. “If they asked for a certain style, I’d bring out that style in two sizes. I’d also bring out some similar styles. I’d also bring out some outrageous styles.”

“More than anything else,” he explained, “I wanted them sitting there trying on lots of shoes for a long period of time.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because the more time they spent with me, the more they got to like me,” he said. “Also, the more time they spent trying on shoes, the more invested they got in the process. All of that time made them more likely to buy shoes. It worked every time.”

Selling legal services is a lot like selling shoes. Like the shoe salesman that wants you to try on lots of shoes, the best sellers want to spend a lot of time with the prospect before the pitch.

Let’s say that you’re going to compete for a chance to represent an architecture firm in a building collapse case. You’re invited to give a “beauty contest” presentation and compete for the work.

Now you could use the standard approach. You show up and give a presentation, detailing your firm’s capabilities and hope for the best. We call this approach, “What Losers Do!”

Or you could use the shoe salesman approach. You could seek to spend as much time as possible with the prospect prior to the final presentation. You might say, “We’d love to give you a presentation that will be as helpful as possible. Can we chat with some of your team members before the presentation to get a sense of the challenges?”

Many times the prospect will say yes. Why? Because they don't want to waste their time. They want the best solution possible. They understand that the best presentations are those that are based on good information.

Of course by spending time interviewing the prospect prior to the presentation, you learn where to focus your presentation. Just as importantly, like the shoe salesman, those pre-pitch interviews allow you to build a relationship with the key players. Those relationships increase your chance of winning the business.

So in these challenging times, take a tip from the best shoe salesmen. Spend as much time as possible with your prospect before you deliver the final pitch.

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