

Let's Agree To Agree

BY IVEN FRANGI



Sun Tsu and the Art of War, Sales Dogs, Guerrilla Sales. Just what do all of these convey? They shout out and reinforce the long held notion that selling is a war and that sales people must battle with potential customers to get business.

As sales people we have been taught the skills of confrontation and disagreement. The means and methods of being on top in a negotiation. The lines to

handle objections. The philosophy of being a winner (which pre-supposes that there is a loser). The techniques to manipulate the prospect by ensuring that a "good presentation" has, as the only outcome, after a series of well crafted questions and statements, only one possible answer for a prospect, which is naturally, a yes.

What utter rubbish! I am offended, disappointed and dismayed by this type of information still being taught and promoted in sales training and just released popular sales oriented literature. Have you got the feeling that I am steamed up? Ticked off? Upset? Or just plain angry?

I have offended myself that in the past I have been one of the peddlers of this tripe. I am angry with myself, that I have promoted some of these ideas that I now see as not only unnecessary, but also potentially harmful.

OK so what happened? It may appear that I am acting like the apostle Paul when he was knocked off his donkey by a revelation and got up with the zeal and passion peculiar to the recently converted. Well in a way that is what's happened. I had an experience recently that has fundamentally shifted the way that I look at selling. I have field-tested the concepts and am now ready to report to you the almost miraculous results. Enough preamble what on earth happened?

The idea came from Allan Parker. A man who has taken the study of negotiation and human

communication and turned it into an art form. I recently attended his "Negotiator's Toolkit" workshop. Allan has turned negotiation around the full 180 degrees from an essentially adversarial process into one that sees negotiation as a way to search for "reasonable, mutually beneficial outcomes". The program is as brilliant as this new perspective Allan brings.

How does the new concept work?

If I was to get a fresh sheet of flip chart paper and in the centre put a solid dot with a black pen, and then ask people what they saw, what do you think the answer would be?

I have done it in workshops and 97% say they see a black spot. In other words they see, and then focus on, the blemish on the white paper. This in spite of the fact that there is an enormous amount of white space compared to the one solid dot. In selling there is a parallel. Many salespeople (notice I didn't say all) spend much of their energy worrying about, preparing for, and time in a sale, handling objections. Simply put—they manage disagreement.

The key practice, that toppled me off my ass, is this. When selling manage agreement, focus on the great expanse of white space and not the dot.

I recently had the following experience that cemented my resolve on this. I was selling an investment property. The difference was that I was offering vendor finance. Two women (potential purchasers) arrived to talk to me. The elder of the two was conservative and rather stern faced. The younger was not saying much at all, but I knew she was the potential purchaser. So I addressed my conversation to her.

After the normal greeting and pleasantries I started to explain the terms of the vendor finance contract. The older lady sat cross-legged, cross armed and only opened her mouth to object to something I had said or tell me that I was wrong in my explanation of the contract. In a very short time we had an argument, that was in fact, going nowhere! The tension level was high and something had to be done. I needed some extra information. I asked two questions. (Yes, earlier would have been better!) What was the relationship between the two of them and how did the older one know so much about the contract.

The older lady explained that she was the mother of the younger and also a lawyer. Did I think good thought at this stage? No. What I did do was remember Professor Parker*'s training. Manage agreement.

So I pause and said "Disagreement makes me uncomfortable. Could we try a different way? Let's see what we actually agree on. We agree that this house suits your daughter. Let's agree that she can afford it, that it is close to a school for her children, that it's near her work..." When you do this nod your head. I think we had nine agreements. I then said as the final agreement whilst looking at the lawyer " Let's also agree that there will probably be some parts of the contract that you will want to change." She nodded, unfolded her arms, uncrossed her legs and visibly relaxed. We had found common ground, even in the midst of a strong disagreement. How? We agreed that there were things that we would not agree on. Note. We didn't agree to disagree. We agreed that there would be things that may need to be changed. The rest of the discussion was amicable and yes, we did discuss what changes were needed. We moved from acrimony to agreement.

Manage agreement. It will fundamentally alter the way that you sell

* Allan Parker is an Adjunct Professor of Negotiation. Contact him at Peak Performance on phone (02) 9280 0555. Brilliant programme.

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is booked and re-booked by his clients because of his ability to create results. Presentations are researched, customised and use humour to weave in relevant day-to-day examples.

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