



PERFECTING YOUR PITCH

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HAVE YOU EVER BEEN faced with settling family financial squabbles, asking for a raise, offering tough but constructive criticism, rejecting a friend or relative's request for a loan, selling and holding to a price, making budget denials and requests, dealing with customer objections, or negotiating a contract where you feared the other side had all the leverage?

And have you, like me on occasions, said something to quickly solve the problem and in an instant thought to yourself: "WOW, why did I say that?" How often do we come out of an important discussion or a negotiation and ponder what we could've done or said differently to achieve a better result?

Having been involved in all of these situations—and an array of other business and personal communications challenges throughout my career—I decided to systematize how I managed them. That process culminated in my latest book *Perfecting Your Pitch: How to Succeed in Business and in Life by Finding Words That Work*, in which I articulate for others my system and how it allows us to find and speak the "words that work" so that we're not left thinking "Oh I wish I had done/said that differently."

It is a system that empowers us to convey messages that effectively accomplish our objectives.

But, before I share some of those lessons here, let me ask one more question: Have you ever been in a situation where you had to make a hard ask, let's say asking for an amount of money that you were uncomfortable seeking, and fudged the demand because you feared rejection or a negative reaction by the other side?

I remember early in my career as an agent having a goal of getting \$1million for my client. I understood the general negotiation principle: "aim high," make a demand for \$1.25million to give the other side some negotiating room and hopefully end at \$1 Million. The only problem was, once I got in the room with the other side, I became self-conscious of what I was going to say. Instead of saying "it will take \$1.25million to do that deal," I retreated to "It will take somewhere between \$1.25 and 1million to do that deal." The other side in the negotiation, of course, focused in on the lower \$1million, so in their mind the deal was already down to \$800,000.

After finding myself retreating like that on a few successive occasions, I started scripting out what my demands would be and vetting the script with one of my associates. That process helped me get comfortable with the message, and confidently deliver the higher demand. Drawing on the lessons I learned from "making the ask" in early negotiations led to my laying the foundation of *Perfecting Your Pitch*: script before you engage in crucial conversations of all kinds.

As I sat at my computer contemplating this, and completing the re-writing of a chapter in *Perfecting the Pitch* about the negotiation of one of Major League Baseball's biggest contracts—Joe Mauer's \$184 Million deal with the Minnesota Twins—I got a call from my good friend Steve Mosko, President of Sony Pictures Television. After some small talk he asked what I was doing at the moment, and I told him about the book I was writing and how I crafted the words for Joe's negotiation. After hearing my quick summary, he excitedly asked "Did you see yesterday's *New York Times*?" He explained that there was a story in it about how he successfully sold Jerry Seinfeld on bringing his latest television production, *Comedians In Cars Getting Coffee*, to Sony's digital platform. Steve explained that he was not only competing with other studios, but also with major internet providers for the show, and said:

"I was ready for them. You should've seen the notes and ideas that I scratched out on my pad before my meeting with Jerry. I thought through all aspects of what would be important to him and what was important to us, and I plotted them out like a script. And when I went in to make my presentation, I felt fully prepared and able to confidently address the issues that were important to Jerry. Ever since you and I discussed the principles of preparation and scripting in your programs, I have embraced them in my work."

Steve is a living example of the importance of perfecting your pitch and scripting for success.

But not every CEO instantly sees the benefits of embracing the discipline of the scripting process. Having achieved top executive status, some feel as if they already know how to communicate effectively—or don't have time to learn new ideas. Not long ago a brilliant and visionary leader came to me to help him move a stalled negotiation forward. In order for the negotiation to be accepted by his board he needed, in addition to other considerations, a grant of \$50 Million (“new money”) to be infused into his organization by the other side. I told him that in order to get to that point, he had to make an ask for a grant of \$75 Million, which itself was based upon

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legitimate needs. I then told him that the best way to achieve that goal was to script out and practice what he was going to say so as to deliver the ask with precision and confidence. If he hesitated or hedged, the other side could sense an opening to negotiating a lesser amount than the \$50 million he required. He responded to me that he did not need to script. “I don't even script my speeches ... People just give me input and I know what to do and how to execute it.”

You might be able to imagine the rest of the story. Because he would be breaking new ground with the substantial ask of new money, he hedged his bets: “We would really like \$75 Million and certainly not less than \$50 Million.” The exchanges that followed were somewhat more complicated, but suffice to say that the counter offer from the other side was below \$50 Million and it was offered as a loan and not a grant. The CEO felt defeated and sensed the folly of his qualified ask. To his credit, he had learned a lesson and asked that we script through the rest of the negotiation with him.

We then collaborated on a script to overcome any miscommunication of the demand he needed to make and he agreed to stick to what we practiced during the communications even though he still had some doubts. So in the exchanges that followed he explicitly stated that unless he could get “an outright grant of \$75 Million” the deal could not be done. And he delivered his ask with a level of clarity and confidence that ultimately brought the other side to the \$50 Million dollar mark. I will never forget his email simply stating: “Mission accomplished. \$50 Million in new money now part of the deal. Thank you.”

It is so important to keep an open mind to new approaches and processes—no matter how high someone has risen in the business hierarchy. But that is easier said than done. As Thomas Edison described the process of learning from his mistakes, the CEO, like me early in my career, would ultimately “fail his way to success” by learning from his mistakes and employing scripting.

Steve Mosko and our scripting converted CEO offer convincing evidence that if you take the time to perfect your pitch, you reduce the risk of not saying what you need to, and of regretting what you say.

To easily explain how to do so yourself, I have developed a simple, systematic approach to empower people from all walks of life with the tools to perfect their pitch. Simply called the 3 Ds—Draft, Devil’s Advocate, and Deliver—it is the key process for success in challenging communications. Now if you’re thinking, like that CEO friend of mine, that you don’t need the 3 Ds, remember the words of Harry Truman: “It’s what you learn after you know it all that really counts.” Don’t make excuses. Try something new and see the difference it will make.

So let’s give it a try. When someone comes to me faced with a difficult communication challenge, I always give them the following instruction:

“You know what I want you to do? I want you write down every argument you have, everything you want to say, I want you to write out all your thoughts and feelings.”

In this initial writing, you can safely write out everything you want to say or may have bottled up. You may ultimately modify some of the language as a result of constructive input, but the first step in the scripting process is to DRAFT your thoughts, whatever they may be.

After you have written the initial draft, find a DEVIL'S ADVOCATE to review your argument or statements. Hopefully they will ask questions and offer revision ideas that make it even more effective. John Adams wrote out scripts for his arguments to convince the Second Continental Congress that the disparate colonies of America should mold themselves into the United States of America. He wasn't a charismatic persuader, but he would sit quill in hand, candles around him at night, and write scripts to support positions he would later state. After he wrote them out, and this is key; he had a Devil's Advocate edit them. Who was his devil's advocate? His wife, Abigail Adams. She would raise questions, reposition thoughts and influence ideas so that when John stood up in front of that Congress or any other body he was facing, he was able to deliver his message with confidence and power. Ultimately, that empowered him to help transform those colonies into the states of a new nation. I frequently ask people, "Who is your Abigail Adams?" I am only good and effective in life because I have many "Abigail Adams," including my wife Cathi, and my longtime business partner Michael Maas. They help me think through and revise my scripts to maximum effectiveness.

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Finally, the third D, DELIVER, is all about practice. Practice goes into every crucial conversation. Why? Because when you practice and reach a comfort level communicating a given point to a customer, to an adversary, or to a vendor, you are more likely to make that point with confidence. And the other party is less likely to sense vulnerability in your position. In addition, with the help of your devil's advocate or someone acting as a delivery coach, you can rehearse the script. You will be better equipped to deal with objections and contingencies that may arise if someone else raises them as you practice. Your effectiveness increases and the likelihood you experience any cognitive dissonance decreases when you are able to rehearse as a final step in the 3 D's process.

She may not be a Hollywood CEO or big time corporate leader, but my assistant and niece, Kim, recently demonstrated the power of perfecting your pitch in connection with one of her life's great events.

I had the privilege of officiating at Kim's wedding last June, and she appreciated the effort I put into the ceremony, but she was even more appreciative that as I wrote *Perfecting Your Pitch* I shared its lessons with her. Those lessons came in handy immediately.

Kim had purchased the designer wedding dress of her dreams, only to be disappointed again and again with hassles and mistakes in the production of the dress. She purchased a gown for her wedding at a reputable bridal salon, one of the largest in the U.S., for \$4000—retail price.

After agreeing with the designer on a minor modification to the dress style in the ordering process and getting what she felt was a good deal, she thought that the dress would be perfect.

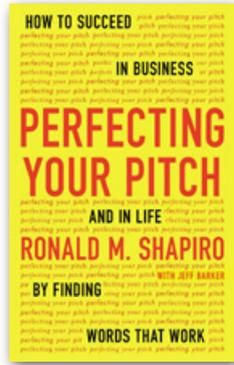
But, although Kim had ordered the dress with plenty of time, nine months prior to the wedding, it arrived very late—a mere 6 weeks before the wedding, and four weeks after the estimated delivery date. Not only did the dress arrive much later than promised, but the modification Kim and the designer agreed to was done wrong. They had chosen a different pattern without her consent or even informing her. In order to fix that problem (as well as the sizing, which was also significantly off) Kim had to make extra trips to the salon in New York, ultimately traveling 800 miles and incurring significant travel and hotel costs. The salon recognized the mistake and completely remade the dress two weeks prior to her wedding. Although the dress was still not fully corrected, she wore the dress on her wedding day because she had no other option.

The wedding was wonderful, but it did not take all of the sting out of the wedding dress fiasco. She had informed the salon about her disappointment but got no satisfaction. She realized that with the wedding behind her, getting reasonable restitution would be very difficult. She wanted to communicate effectively not only the specific costs she incurred because of the mistakes, but also the disappointment she had to endure because her dream wedding gown became something of a nightmare. Hesitant at first to take on the salon, she nevertheless felt emboldened as she began to put the 3 Ds to work.

She practiced what we preached with the 3 Ds. First, she drafted a letter to the designer and bridal salon about her frustrations and desire for compensation. After she drafted the letter, she had me devil's advocate it and suggest revisions. After multiple revisions she was comfortable and confident with the script, in this case in the form of a letter, which made her position less vulnerable to the bridal salon pushing back. She knew that emotional outbursts and hesitation instead of confidence in her demand would weaken the ask. After sending the bridal shop the revised letter asking for a refund for half the cost of the dress and half of the transportation expenses, they responded by agreeing to all of her requests. Right after the salon called and informed Kim of their agreement; she called me and said, "Guess what? Scripting paid off."

Some might think scripting is only for big business deals and contract negotiations. Yet, as Kim's wedding dress fiasco and over 40 business, consumer, and personal life scripts reveal in *Perfecting Your Pitch*, it can be useful in addressing many other of life's communication challenges. **Put the 3 D's in play and you will not only be a better negotiator or business leader, but also have a tool for leading a more effective and fulfilling life.** 📖

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Ron Shapiro is an Expert Negotiator, Sports Agent, Attorney, Educator, Civic Leader, and Best-Selling Author. He is one of the nation's leading authorities on negotiation and the founder and chairman of the Shapiro Negotiations Institute. Shapiro has negotiated the contracts of more Hall of Famers than any other agent/attorney, including Brooks Robinson, Jim Palmer, Cal Ripken, Jr., Kirby Puckett and Eddie Murray. In addition to his latest book, *Perfecting Your Pitch*, he has written numerous bestsellers, including *The Power of Nice*, *Bullies*, *Tyrants & Impossible People*, and *Dare to Prepare*.

Ron thanks his assistant Rebekah Martindale for her assistance in preparing this manifesto.

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