



Mastering Technical Sales

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Improving With Improvisation

Increase Your Adaptability During Sales Calls

Ever watched one of your colleagues, or a corporate executive, or a motivational speaker adjust their "pitch" on the fly, throw in some ad-libs and then move off in a totally different direction?

Much as we presales engineers like to plan ahead, conduct days of discovery and validate our needs analysis dozens of times - sometimes it doesn't work out that way! We miss the mark, customer requirements change, the sales person misunderstood the client or the demo crashes. Sure, sometimes you have to cut your losses and reschedule, especially if you are not prepared. Yet all these situations require adaptability - so how can [improvisation \(improv\)](#) help you out?

Improv Exercises for the Sales Engineer

Improv provides you with the experience, the words and the confidence to deal with a rapidly changing sales situation. Being known as the SE who never loses his/her cool is a major career advantage. Here are some exercises you can practice either by yourself or with a colleague - and have some fun in the process. I should also note that as a bonus these are great icebreakers for team meetings and an interesting way of keeping young children occupied.

1. **Randomness.** Take your standard demo/presentation/speech. Have someone pick a random spot partway through it. Imagine the decision maker has just walked through the door and gives you five minutes to recap your story. Do it!
2. **Let Go Of Perfection.** You need to get into an open (i.e. playful) frame of mind. Expecting perfection makes you focus on all the things that go wrong. So plan for all those before you start the sales call. Make a list of all the things that can go wrong. Plan. Now rip up the list and burn it.

3. **The Question Game.** Pair up and have a conversation using only questions. Any topic. You'll get the idea and avoid circular questions.

A: Do you have any apples?

B: Are you looking for any particular kind of apple?

A: Which ones do you think are fresher?

B: Do you prefer red or green apples?

4. **The Imaginary Object.** Pick up an imaginary object from a table - play with it, interact with it - and then pass it onto the next person. Make sure they know what it is. Back to apples, pick it up, shine it on your pants and then take a crunchy bite out of it etc.



5. **Disaster Recovery.** Write down a dozen sales call disasters (make them up or collect them from the team) - or else don't burn the list from idea #2! Randomly pick one, explain the scenario and then have 2-3 SE's act it out to a successful conclusion. You may want to take a few minutes to plan first, just to be fair.
6. **Tell A Story.** Two people go to the front of the room while the rest of the team takes turns to tell a story, step-by-step, which the presenters then have to act out. *"Johnny picks up an apple. It is a very heavy apple. He gives it to Suzy. She takes a big bite of it. But it's a poisonous apple."* Have some fun.
7. **The Best Questions Ever.** Make a list of top twenty or thirty objections and questions you typically receive. Stuff them in a jar, and randomly pick out one of the questions and assign it to a "presenter". Let the presenter respond as best as they can, and then allow the team to assist and refine the answer. Record the answer for future use.

CALL TO ACTION: These exercises are fun, they teach you to be adaptable and give you experience in dealing with the worst that a customer (or a salesperson) can throw at you. So have fun - and remember the #1 rule in improv is never to say "no"!

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

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