



Mastering Technical Sales

2037 Trowbridge Drive

Newtown, PA 18940

Phone +1-215-431-1552

John@masteringtechnicalsales.com

www.masteringtechnicalsales.com

John Care, Managing Director

The Stress Free Demo

More Than A Dream?

Stress can destroy a product demonstration. Stress can destroy your health and the health of your pipeline. Stress sets in motion many automatic changes within the human body which are designed to provide us with a quick burst of energy. This autonomic reaction is popularly known as the "fight or flight" reflex dating back to prehistoric days. Although we are no longer threatened by saber-tooth tigers there is no question that the adrenaline floods through our bodies before any critical demonstration or presentation.

It is tough to trick Mother Nature, so how can you diminish the stress before a key customer-facing meeting, and then utilize that stress to positively impact the outcome?

Here are ten ideas to plan for, reduce and then leverage stress:

1. **Declare a cut-off time.** Last minute changes and CYJ's (Can You Just) from the sales person are usually a contributing factor to stress and have a higher probability of leading to errors. I used to enforce a 24 hour cut-off for changes. If a demo was scheduled for 10am, then I would allow no more revisions to the presentation or script after 10am the day before - unless of course **I** needed them. Note to presales management that this should be Standard Operating Procedure for any customized demonstration.
2. **The Night Before.** As a football (soccer) coach I was always telling my players and their parents about the value of eating the correct foods the day before a big game. Pasta is a great choice, with fish or a lightweight white meat such as chicken. An enormous steak is about the worst possible meal to eat as too much of your body's energy will be redirected towards digestion instead of a relaxing night's sleep. You don't sell with your stomach.

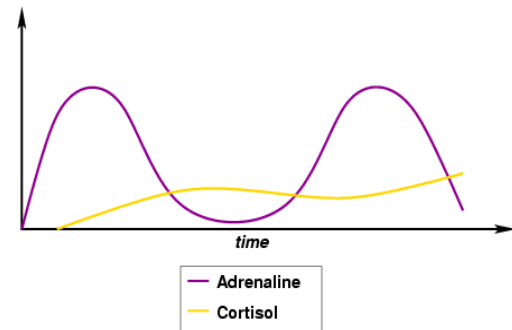
3. **Set The Objectives.** After 25 years of being in the Pre-Sales Engineering business I firmly believe that over 75% of all demos happen too soon in the sales cycle. A quantitative measure of that is how many objectives you are asked to meet. One vague objective of "*just show them the product to give them idea of what we do*" is as bad as a laundry list of 8-10 "*they need to be convinced that we can..*". If you can prioritize with the sales representative and narrow down the objectives to 2-3 targets to hit you will have far more control of your demonstration. More control equates to less stress. This is a difficult conversation to have with most salespeople, but is worth the investment to get a targeted demonstration.
4. **Understand Your Enemy.** Understand what happens to your body when you are under stress. Your liver releases blood sugar, your heart beat increases, you sweat, and more blood (and oxygen) is routed to the brain and muscles, and less to the digestive system and the extremities. Why is this important? Because you need to avoid doing anything that amplifies these effects. Smoking, consuming alcohol or caffeine, eating chocolate, sweets (or sugar in the coffee) all make stress more difficult to handle. The same goes for wearing tight clothes. My "big presentation" shirts always had a larger neck size and more room around the sleeves.
5. **Visualization.** Mentally run through the first 2-3 minutes of your demonstration. Visualize your actions and rehearse the words you will use to start your session off. Then extend that to any difficult transitions or potential trouble spots in your pitch. Subconsciously your body will relax as it will feel that it has been through these situations before and has more control over the situation. This technique has been successfully used by professional athletes, actors and politicians for years.
6. **Establish Plan "B".** One standard rule of thumb is always have a Plan "B" - which is what to do if you only have half the time you originally planned for. A more sophisticated Plan "C" is what to show if the key decision maker is only in the room for 30 minutes instead of 2 hours. More often the key exec will be there for the first 30 minutes instead of the last 30 minutes - so bias your demo that way.
7. **Alternate Visuals.** Having the entire fate of the meeting depending upon you and the stability of the system you are demonstrating adds to the stress. So provide some alternate visuals in the forms of handouts, whiteboard diagrams, a video or even a large poster to get your message across. Unless of course you really want your prospect to think that the product demo is 100% of the sale!

8. **The Disaster Script.** Ask yourself why you are nervous and feeling stressed. The two most likely answers are "*fear of failure*" and "*blowing the sale*" - there; you actually said it. Mentally writing a disaster script for yourself can cause you to act it out. It's positive visualization in reverse. Prepare for what happens if the laptop dies or you are asked to show that one piece of the product which doesn't work. That is successful contingency planning - just don't take it any further.

9. **Speed Kills.** The impact of all that adrenaline rushing through your system will make you rush through your demonstration. Consciously slowing your pace will slow down your breathing and mitigate the effect of the stress. I am a big fan of visual cues to remind me to slow down. I will write "*pause*" at strategic points in a demo script, or place a small red dot in the bottom right of a PowerPoint slide to remind me to take a breath. This is also a case where your sales partner can help you out by giving you the slow down signal or by re-emphasizing a key point you went through at breakneck speed.

10. **The Adrenaline Rush.** We all know about Adrenaline and the short-term effects it have. However the body also releases Cortisol - which has a longer-term duration, plus your Adrenaline level cycles. If you are faced with the salesperson doing a 15 minute intro and then you are on stage for the next 3 hours you are going to experience ups and downs in energy levels. For most people the downslope occurs about 50-65 minutes into the cycle. That is obviously the best point for a break and for another member of the sales team to take the main stage for 10-15 minutes. Drink some water and have a banana as a snack and you'll come fully charged and ready to be a rock star.

11. **Bonus Blatantly Obvious Idea:** Just because you have three hours for a demo doesn't mean you have to use all three hours. Some of the best demos I have ever seen have been 30 minutes or less. Ask yourself "why are we showing this?" and if you do not have a good answer then take that feature out. The three other major rules of demo also apply - #1-make sure you tell a story ; #2-start with a compelling strength and #3-rehearse your demo.



Summary

Stress is part of any big complex demonstration. Plan for it by reducing the number of variables over which you have no control and then leverage the stress to help you give The Perfect Pitch. Like almost everything in Pre-Sales Engineering, practice and preparation are the keys to success.

“Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths”

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, or to subscribe to the newsletter, visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.