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Stunningly Awful Demo Team Practices – Where $1 + 1 = 0$

Here's a collection of torturous team tactics, awful errors and faulty communications you can follow to increase the likelihood that your team's demos will *fail*. We recommend that you avoid doing these things!

If your team's demos are not as successful as you might wish, consider using this list as an assessment tool. If these items are occurring in your day-to-day demos then you may want to contemplate making some changes...

Some quick definitions:

Salesperson = Salesperson, Account Manager, Sales Rep, etc.

SC = Sales Consultant, Sales Engineer, Presales Person, etc.

Part 1 – Salesperson Strategies for Failure

No pre-call, no set-up, no info, no intro – (no order, no wonder)!

“And now, here's Bob, my SC technical guy, who will tell you all about our product...”

Scenario: Set up a demo meeting with a prospect and be sure *not* to provide any qualification or discovery information on the prospect's needs or situation to your SC. This will ensure that he presents a “Harbor Tour¹” demo, showing all possible features, functions, applications and tasks that can fit in the allowed time.

This also ensures that the prospect will be bored and annoyed, with the high-ranking people leaving early in the demo...

Rescue: Pick up your phone and *call* your SC well before the scheduled date. Review what you know about the prospect – and what you don't know. Agree on what capabilities will be presented and what shouldn't be shown. Contemplate scheduling a conference call with your SC and the prospect together to discuss the prospect's specific situation and interests.

[¹Harbor Tour Demo – aka: Show-up-and-throw-up, Spray-and-pray, Deluge-and-drown, Educate-edify-and-exhaust, Death-by-demo, Oh-my-God-when-will-this-be-over? etc.]

Now I can get some other work done...

“I’ll be in the back with my Blackberry...”

Scenario: Kick things off and then retire to the rear of the room, where you tap away at your Blackberry. After all, you’ve seen the demo dozens of times! No need to be an active participant... Even better, go out into the hall way and make a few calls – might as well make good use of the time...

Your prospect will certainly appreciate the *low* level of importance you give to their meeting. Your absence will let them know what to expect for the balance of the sales process and (if they were to purchase) implementation steps.

Rescue: Be an *active* participant in the meeting. Be prepared to rescue your SC in the case of serious bugs or crashes; be ready to help “park” questions that will take him off-track. Watch audience body language and listen for comments. Step in to summarize, when necessary or appropriate.

A demo should be perceived, by the prospect, as a two-way *conversation* between the vendor and the prospect, rather than a one-way “fire-hose” delivery. The salesperson needs to serve as a facilitator and as an active listener.

Death by Corporate Overview

“Let me tell you about our company...”

Scenario: Start the meeting with a twenty minute corporate overview presentation. Regale your audience with your company’s formation and history (yawn), your revenues over time (yawn), office locations, markets, products, your mission statement (ick) and that smorgasbord of customer logos (yawn, yawn, yawn, snooze...). Add a few analysts’ statements and quotes to achieve a total disconnect.

This strategy will ensure that (1) the most important people leave *before* they even see the product and (2) everyone is already bored before your SC starts the demo.

Rescue: Reduce your corporate overview to a single slide – or, even better, to three simple verbal statements:

1. How long you’ve been in business
2. How many customers you’ve served and where they are located
3. Your general marketplace, as is relevant to the current prospect

Example: “Hi, we’re ACME Software. We’ve been in business since 1985 helping over 3000 customers in the U.S., Europe and Asia-Pacific address their sales and marketing effectiveness and productivity challenges. But enough about us, let’s talk about your situation...”

Surprise...!

“Hey Bob, show them the new Biframulator feature...”

Scenario: In the midst of the demo, tell your SC to show capabilities that you did not discuss previously. For the greatest effect, ask him to show the newest features or those not yet formally released – to maximize the probability that they won’t work properly. Nothing generates confidence in the prospect like running into bugs or crashes!

For more confusion, instruct your SC to show these capabilities in the midst of his flow to take him off path.

Rescue: Discuss and reach agreement on what you’d like to show the prospect (and what *not* to show) *before* the demo. (“Before” doesn’t mean in the lobby at the prospect’s site or in the car on the way there...!)

Alternative: verbally introduce the capability you’d like your SC to show – via a biased question – and “park” it *yourself* on a whiteboard, initially. This will let your SC know that you feel it is important to show the capability, yet lets him work it into his flow as appropriate (or to defer it until a later time, if necessary). Very elegant!

Crash...!

“Wow – Bob sure can sweat...!”

Scenario: Your SC’s computer just crashed. Add to his torment by focusing attention on him rebooting – make sure everyone is watching while he struggles to restart his machine and the applications needed for the demo. Be sure to blame the crash on someone *else’s* software. Tell a bad joke. Talk about sports. Tap dance...

Rescue: Be matter-of-fact and say, “Looks like Bob’s machine just suffered a crash.” Disconnect the LCD projector cable from his laptop – or turn off the projector. Draw the audience’s attention *away* from the scene of the disaster by addressing “parked” questions or similar topics. When your SC indicates he is ready, professionally pass control of the meeting back to him.

Alternative: if rebooting will take 10-15 minutes, call a break.

Part 2 –Presales Pathways to Pain

Show as much as possible...

“Wait – don’t go – we haven’t gotten to the *really* cool stuff yet...!”

Scenario: Demonstrate all the wonderful things your offering can do. Pack as much demo into your 1-hour slot as you possibly can. Delay showing your best material until the end

so that people are glassy-eyed when you finally do get to it – and so that the high-ranking people have already left the meeting.

Since you have a range of job titles in the audience, spin a long, complicated story that attempts to integrate all of their needs and interests into one convoluted, tortured pathway. Make sure to add loops, flashbacks, flash forwards, and detailed digressions. Mix fictional names with real names and pronouns compound the confusion. This will ensure that their memory of your demo will consist of “Hi, my name is Bob...” and “In conclusion...”

Rescue: Do the Last Thing First. Start with the payoff screens that are most compelling. Show how to get to those in the *fewest* number of steps. Peel back the layers in accord with your audience’s depth and level of interest.

For groups with multiple job titles and interests, organize your demo into consumable components – chunks – that can be introduced, explored as deeply as desired (by the prospect audience members) and then exited via a verbal summary.

For extra credit: if you are done before the end of the allotted time, stop! Give that time back to your audience (they’ll love you for it...!).

Answer all questions immediately and in depth...

“You asked what time is it? First, let me tell you how this watch was made...”

Scenario: Someone asks about database support – you begin to discuss which databases, which versions, how much file space is needed, how they will grow over time, the impact of patches, etc. Meanwhile, the audience has checked-out – even the person who asked, “Do you support SQL Server?” (A simple “Yes” would have been sufficient...)

Rescue: Parse questions: Is it a Great Question, which you should answer crisply and right away? Or is it a Good Question, which you should capture on a “Parking Lot” and queue up to be addressed later.

You are *not* obligated to know all of the answers to all of the questions in the universe, even though you *are* the technical person on the team...!

Alternative: your salesperson can also step in to rescue you, by gently suggesting that you “park” the question if she senses that you are going too deep into the answer.

Hit a bug? Try it again...

“Insanity is doing something over and over again and expecting a different result...”

Scenario: You say, “Let me show you this really cool new capability they put into the last release and **wham**! That was weird, I’ve never seen it crash there before. Hmmm... Let me try that again...” and **wham**! again.

You've now proven that (1) your software *really* doesn't work and (2) you, the technical player, don't even know it. For added pain, your salesperson counterpart starts to tell you to "try clicking on xxx..."

Rescue: Announce, calmly, that you hit a bug. Don't try it again, simply explain what the audience *should* have seen. Either you or your salesperson can do this. Use other visuals (screenshots captured in PowerPoint, for example) to illustrate, if available. Then, jump over the bug and go on, if possible, into another portion of your demo.

Later on, if the capability is important for the audience to see, you can test and find a path to show it. Setting this up in a break is a good strategy...

Part 3 – Team Tactics for Torture

Dry Run? We don't have time to practice...

"Why'd you show them *that*?"

Scenario: An important portion of the quarter's quota depends on the outcome of the upcoming demo. Bias towards failure by:

- Don't do a dry run or practice session with the sales team.
- Don't discuss or provide updates or changes to the prospect's situation or needs.
- Don't review the infrastructure plan.
- Don't capture key screenshots or reports into PowerPoint as backups.
- *Definitely* don't dry run the demo with your customer *champion* – to make sure that you've really addressed all of the key capabilities his team needs to see...

This tactic helps to ensure that surprises (really bad ones) will be certain to take place during the demo, leaving you embarrassed, your quota at risk – and your champion's credibility damaged for supporting you.

Rescue: Many people say that they don't have *time* to practice. Other people say that *because* they practice, they find they have *more time*!

Dry runs help reduce surprises, uncover bugs, and establish the best demo pathways for specific capabilities. Practice sessions also enable you choreograph your meeting – who should introduce, who should review the customer's situation, when to hand-off to one another, what topics to plan to "park" for later, opportunities for biased questions, etc.

Remote Demos – Make sure nobody from your team is at the customer site...

"They didn't say a thing the whole time – just the sound of crickets in an empty room!"

Scenario: Both of you stay in your office for a Remote Demo to a prospect. For an even worse effect, go into a conference room and use (yell into) a speaker-phone.

For added pain, don't use the annotation tools in the collaboration software, point at your own screen repeatedly with your finger, and never pause when speaking into the speaker-phone so that your audience has no chance to break in with a question or comment.

Rescue: Split your forces and have *one* of you travel to the customer's site (Salesperson, most typically). That way your audience's attention is compelled (by you being present).

The role of the person at the customer's site is to be an *active conduit* of information and status back to the person operating remotely: new people arriving, questions on people's faces (but not yet verbalized), the lag time being seen on the audience computer, etc.

Part 4 – A True Story

Using Email (or IM) to communicate during a demo...

“Ignore that guy – he's an idiot!”

Scenario – True Story: A vendor was presenting a demo to us, with the SC in the front of the room working from his laptop via our LCD projector and screen. His salesperson counterpart was in the back of the room, seated near the door.

One person on our team asked a question (granted, it *wasn't* the most insightful question, but it was well-meaning and earnest). I noted the salesperson typing briefly on his Blackberry and then – suddenly, on the bottom-right corner of the projector screen we saw the email message that read, “Pay no attention to that guy – he's an idiot.”

Rescue: There *was* no rescue! The vendor (1) didn't get the business and (2) was never invited back. (“Parking” the question would have been a good strategy, instead...!)

Following the Scenarios described above will certainly increase the probability that your team's demos will not help you achieve your goals. The Rescues, on the other hand, may help you secure the business you want – and make your quarterly and annual numbers!

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