
DECODING THE BS OF BUSINESS

SELLING TO EXECUTIVES

JERRY VASS
AND
IRIS HERRIN

© 2006 VASS, Inc.

Copyright © 2006 Jerry Vass
All rights reserved under the Pan-American and
International Copyright Conventions. Printed in the United States.

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form or by any
means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or
by any information storage and retrieval system now or hereafter invented,
without written permission from the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9629610-2-1

ISBN-10: 0-9629610-2-7

Cover design: Scott Burrige

Vass, Inc. Publishers
1093 A1A Beach Boulevard Suite 448
Saint Augustine FL 32080
800-424-8277

This book may be ordered from www.amazon.com

“The beginning of wisdom is calling things by their right name.”

—Chinese Proverb

Table of Contents

Foreword	10
Missing the Point	13
Reality Checks	14
Chapter 1—The Ugly Baby	15
Confession of a Slow Thinker	15
A Flawed Delivery	16
The Executive’s Big Five	17
The Story	18
Chapter 2—Three Sins	20
A Business Miracle	20
Mythology	23
Conventional Wisdom	23
Institutional Arrogance	24
Reality Check: Institutional Arrogance	32
Chapter 3—Say What?	37
Feature / Advantage / Benefit	37
Reality Check: Your Business Story	42
Chapter 4—Circles of Confusion	44
Beautiful Parents—Ugly Baby	45
Word Fashion	56
In Truth	59
Reality Check: Puffery	61
Chapter 5—The Inner Circle	62
Loving Features	67
Hidden Money	69
Reality Check: The Important Benefit	71
Chapter 6—Three Levels of Selling	75
Chapter 7—Business Myths	77

Sell yourself first	78
Our Buyers come first	79
The Buyer is always right	80
We want to partner with our Clients	81
We have great relationships with our Clients	82
We are the best in the business	86
We know our business	87
Our business is different.	89
Our business is the same	89
We are great salespeople	91
We use the consultative selling style	94
We create win-win solutions.	97
We are skillful negotiators	99
Bring a deal anywhere near us and we'll make it happen	100
We are always looking for an edge	101
Become an expert and the world is your oyster	102
Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door	104
Chapter 8—Marching to the Humdrum.	106
Chapter 9—Translation	110
The Translations	113
Reality Check	118
Differentiation	119
Universal Business Problems	121
The Easiest Sale—The Reptilian Mind	121
Denial River	126
Reality Check: The Executive's Five Questions	128
The Seller's Predictable Answers	129
The Answers Executives Look and Listen For	131
Chapter 10—Plain Speak	132

Chapter 11—Your Fee	134
The Level Playing Field	138
Chapter 12—Why should I spend my time talking to you?	141
Decode Your Value	145
Chapter 13—Why should I hire you rather than your competitor?	148
Decode Your Benefits	149
Chapter 14—What makes you different from them?	150
Decode Your Uniqueness	151
Chapter 15—Why should I pay you more when they charge less?	152
Decode Your ROI	154
Chapter 16—Why should I switch from the service provider I know?	155
Decode Your Questions	157
Chapter 17—Proof Statements	158
Chapter 18—Prepare the Persuasive Executive Conversation	161
Executives say	164
Decode Your Selling Position	164
Fighting Words	165
Chapter 19—Marketing Magic	167
Business Mysteries	167
The Brand	174
Reality Check: Decode Your Collateral Materials	175
Design Wars	176
Reality Check: Decode Your Client Meetings	178
Keepers of Secrets	180
Chapter 20—Presentations to Boards	181

Chapter 21—The Afternoon Movie	188
Reality Check: Competitive Presentations	189
Chapter 22—High-Tech Face, Low-Tech Idea	190
Reality Check: Web Site	190
The Message	191
The Mechanics	193
Chapter 23—The Wrap	194
Magic Bullet	195
Appreciation	201
Footnotes	203
VASS Study	205

Foreword

Executives and professionals speak different languages, as disparate as Swahili and Greek. Agendas, vocabularies, and cultural conditioning destroy meaningful communication between them.

This book exposes selling myths and profit-killing gaps between illusion and reality.

Executives live in a different world than the rest of us. They think differently, act differently, and buy differently. For the professions—those in our culture who package and sell information for a living—architects, lawyers, engineers, accountants, brokers, MBAs, CPAs, marketers, and consultants of every stripe, persuasion and profession, a shift of thinking is required to design and hold a Persuasive Executive Conversation.

A number of preconceptions and cultural myths need to be bulldozed to clear the way for this thinking shift. Three things are required to answer the Buyer's questions and sell well in the executive suite: the story, the tools, and the delivery. We will explore each and help you prepare a presentation that works from the executive's point of view, that you can take into any boardroom, tell your story, and double your chances of getting hired.

When selling to executives *what* you sell is different from *how* you sell it. While professionals are expert at delivering services to their clients, they are amateurs at telling people what they do for a living. These skills are not taught at Harvard, Yale, or State U.

Our job is to help people make money. For nearly three decades we have intensively trained 12,000 managers, professional salespeople, and consultants to persuade at the executive level. While doing so, we discovered a critical element that managers overlook or ignore that can cost one-quarter of sales revenues or more.

So what is this low-grade infection that limits a firm's potential and costs so much money? What is this counter intuitive malaise that works against the philosophies and strategies of reputable companies managed by bright, educated people? It is this: corporations and consulting firms spend big money to hide what they do from their Buyers.*

It is nearly impossible to get a company much, less a salesperson, to explain what they do for a living stated in Buyer's terms; they cannot tell a selling story that is different from the competitors', makes sense in the Buyer's world, or is even interesting. In many cases, they insult the Buyer's intelligence. It is called

business bullshit, and henceforth we refer to it in less scatological terms. But there are times in life when one must call something by its right name.

What we learned from our Clients will surprise you as it did us: If a firm can cut the BS and answer five logical questions on the mind of every executive-level Buyer, sales successes can double.

*For simplicity, we use “Buyer” throughout this text as the person or group who makes the buying decision and will at some point buy from someone if not you.

We use “Client” as a person or company who has already bought your services.

“Seller” is the person or firm who must gain commitment from a Buyer.

The generic terms “manager” and “management” identify those responsible and accountable for their firm’s direction, including money-making or -losing decisions.

Every anecdote is true but sometimes names have been changed for obvious reasons.

Missing the Point

Words mean different things to the Buyer and Seller. You'll find these missed communications are more than just disagreements or misunderstandings about syntax, idiom, and vernacular but go to the underlying mechanics of persuasive communication. This book is about the translations required to communicate with the executive-level Buyer.

You may be surprised, as we were, to find that common cultural illusions and business myths restrict business growth as surely as shortage of capital, lack of innovation, or outdated ideas.

We have identified sixteen myths that erode profits based on information and observations developed from our ten-year study of 3,424 salespeople, heavily weighted towards those with professional degrees, high skill levels, and street experience. As observers and teachers, we identified some of the problems that hobble sales messages. The VASS® Study (Appendix A) is the result; the statistics we quote are derived from that study. With the help of Reality Checks, a tape recorder, and a two-dollar calculator you may develop your own study of the people responsible for producing your firm's revenues.

Reality Checks

You may enjoy testing your own organization and its people to discover how Buyers view your business and why your people are hard to buy from. You may find that things you thought were important to the Buyer aren't. And that the things you ignored are vital. You may discover how comfortably your people rest in the warm embrace of conventional wisdom and that what your people actually do and say in high-level presentations are not what the executive buyer wants. Once you see the problems, you can avoid them, learn to respect your Buyer's intelligence, and capture revenues that would otherwise go undiscovered. The VASS® Study, along with your own eyes and ears, will confirm your observations.