

Movies Sell

**Advanced
Selling Skills
I Picked Up From
Tommy Boy
and Other
Classic Films**

**by Tom Stanfill
Founder and CEO
ASLAN Training
and Development**

Installment 1

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1000 Parkwood Circle
Suite 810
Atlanta, Georgia 30339
www.aslantraining.com



Enhancing The Relationship

Tommy Boy First Impressions

Scene Setup

At this point in the movie, Tommy Boy's (Chris Farley) dad has just passed away. Now Tommy Boy must save the company from financial ruin by selling their new line of brake pads. In this scene, we see Tommy Boy's initial approach to selling.

Description

The main point to draw from the movie clip is that the reason the customer did not buy from Tommy Boy was not because of the product (i.e., brake pads), but because of Tommy Boy. In other words, this scene illustrates the principle that the customer buys the sales rep before they ever buy the product.

Key Competencies

- Enhancing the relationship – establishing Trust, credibility, and rapport
- Pre-call planning

Chapter

9 – Start of Chapter 9 - 00:36:39

Length

3 Minutes, 36 Seconds

Q&A

1. When Tommy Boy was preparing for the call, where was his focus? Was he focused on the customer's problems or his product? Which is more important?

- We obviously need to understand our products and solutions. However, our ability to understand the customer's business/challenges/needs has a much greater impact on our effectiveness in establishing trust and credibility than does our knowledge of what we sell. The customer needs to know that you understand your solution. More importantly though, they care that you have the expertise to understand and solve their problem. Every sales rep understands their products, but very few understand what is on the decision-maker's white board.

2. Prior to the meeting, Tommy Boy reviewed his objective for the meeting. What was his objective? Was it customer-focused?

- "Never take no for an answer." Is that the best objective for the call? In the final analysis, does our motive determine whether or not we establish trust? Motive is ultimately transparent and our objective on every sales call, whether conscious or subconscious, will determine our behavior. If we believe that in the long run we will be more successful if we put the customer's needs first, our behavior will follow and we will build trust. If on the other hand, we are focused only on our win, eventually our filter will break down and we will reveal a self-centered motive – destroying trust. When we break trust with the customer, we lose the relationship and undermine our ability to influence.

Tommy Boy First Impressions

3. Why didn't the customer buy from Tommy Boy? Did he even know what kind of brakes Tommy Boy sold? Was his decision based on the value of the brakes or price?

- No. He was going to buy brake pads from someone. They never even talked about price or the real features and benefits of Tommy Boy's brake pads over the competitions. He threw them out of his office because of who they were as sales people. In other words, he didn't buy Tommy Boy. This illustrates the principle that the customer first buys you before they ever buy your solution.

4. As we have discussed, our relationship with the customer determines our ability to influence. And our relationship is determined by our ability to establish trust, credibility, and rapport. How well did Tommy Boy and Richard establish rapport?

- We have rapport (that natural connection) with people who either are like us or people that like us. In this sales situation, you can see that Richard (David Spade) didn't speak the customer's language. Why? He was too technical. What are the keys to adjusting to your customer's communication style?
- Tommy Boy's casual and informal approach to selling didn't seem to fit very well with the initially quiet and reserved customer. The customer also seemed to really care and take pride in his model cars. Did Tommy Boy demonstrate that he valued what the customer valued and in doing so communicated that he cared about him? No, he set the model cars on fire – obviously greatly damaging rapport and ending the relationship.

The King's Speech Who's Leading?

Scene Setup

In this scene, the speech therapist (Geoffrey Rush) has his first meeting with a new patient, the Prince of England (Colin Firth). Rush's character is faced with the difficult task of winning over the second most powerful man in England and persuading him to embrace some unorthodox methods for treating his lifelong speech disorder

Description

This true story provides a positive example of how to challenge and lead a powerful decision-maker. It also demonstrates the role a Trusted Partner plays when a different solution is required.

Key Competencies

- Leading the customer
- Establishing trust and credibility
- Engaging an Executive

Chapter

5 – 19:35-28:50

Length

9 minutes, 15 seconds

Q&A

(Note: It's helpful to point out that the Prince eventually listens to the recording, absent the stammering, and subsequently hires the speech therapist. In the end, an incredible bond is forged between the two characters – one in which the Prince feels a tremendous amount of trust and respect for the speech therapist.)

1. How is this scene similar to a sales meeting?

- Our focus should be to solve the customer's problem. Our role is not to relay information, but to lead the customer to the best solution.

2. Who's leading? Is the speech therapist intimidated by the Prince of England? Should we adopt the philosophy of "my game, my rules"?

Why or why not?

- We often meet with people who have more power than we do. When that is the case, it is tempting to allow the more powerful person to lead. Who should have the expertise – the customer or the rep? The rep. What would have happened if the customer in this situation would have led? If you met with Bill Gates about your solution, would you have the same approach as the speech therapist? Regardless of a person's title or power, you should embrace your role as THE expert related to the problem you are 100% focused on solving.
- If you feel that you are lacking the expertise to lead, what are some steps you could take to be considered an expert in your field? (Lead a discussion on ideas to shore up any knowledge gaps.)

The King's Speech Who's Leading?

3. How did the speech therapist demonstrate his expertise?

- He demonstrated that he understood the principles related to solving the customer's problems (e.g., "a child never starts to speak with a stammer?"... "Mechanics will not cure the problem"... "We must be equals").
- Have you determined your principles, your beliefs/philosophies about the problems you solve? Are you an expert or do you see your role as simply that of relaying information about the solutions you offer?

4. Should we be willing to potentially lose a customer by pointing out a serious flaw in their strategy to address a problem? Why was the speech therapist willing to lose a patient due to his radical approach to a cure?

- If you want to establish trust and credibility with the customer and ultimately achieve Trusted Partner status, you must be willing to challenge and shape their strategy. Decisions are now being made much higher in organizations – at levels where individuals don't interact with the typical sales rep. If you want to succeed, you must be willing to challenge a flawed strategy – even if it means ruffling a few feathers.
- Your passion for making sure the customer makes the best decision also demonstrates your motive. If the doctor was just in it for the money, he would have adjusted his methods to please the patient. His willingness to lose "a sale" demonstrated his heart. If we are focused on what is best for the customer, we will fight for the best solution – regardless of the cost.

5. How would you assess the way the speech therapist delivered the tough messages - his tone and voice inflections?

- How we deliver the message has more impact than the actual message. Even though the Prince lost his temper and was at times condescending, the speech therapist always maintained his cool. He spoke with warmth, respect, and patience. There was never an edge to his delivery. How do you think that impacted the Prince?
- What is the only way to get a true assessment of the tone with which you deliver messages to your customers? That tone and the implied messages we send when speaking are always blind spots. The key to an objective perspective on your own delivery is to ask for input from a trusted mentor who has observed you in multiple customer interactions.



Engage

American President Meeting With Chief Of Staff

Scene Setup

Sidney Allen Wade (Annette Bening), the new political strategist for an environmental lobbyist firm (the GDC) is in her first meeting with the President's Chief of Staff, A.J. Macilerny (Martin Sheen). Sidney was hired for one simple reason, to make sure the President follows the GDC's recommendation of reducing fossil fuel by 20%. In this scene, we see how she uncovers the bad news about the President's environmental plan. As you watch the scene, ask yourself if you would have explored the truth like Sidney did.

Description

A common mistake for sales reps is to assume that barriers don't exist unless the customer reveals them. In reality, customers would rather avoid conflict than create conflict, so in order to be successful reps often have to proactively dig up any concerns the customer might have. This scene is a great example of how someone can surface a previously unstated barrier to their recommendation.

Key Competencies

- Identifying barriers
- Handling objections
- Executive demeanor

Chapter

6 – 15:05-17:45

Length

2 minutes, 40 seconds

Q&A

1. Why had the Chief of Staff (A.J.) delayed or avoided telling the environmental lobbyist that they were not going to follow their recommendation of a 20% reduction?

- Apparently the Chief of Staff is not very different from everyone else; most of us simply don't like conflict. Whether due to the time commitment or the emotional energy required to address the issue, decision-makers often avoid telling sales reps their barriers or concerns for adopting the rep's recommendation/solution. Therefore, should we trust that the customer will always communicate their concerns? Absolutely not. Even if the customer voices some concerns or challenges concerning our recommendation, we should always assume they do not believe we have the perfect solution at the best possible price.

2. What was effective about how Sidney handled the meeting?

- She asked the tough question to determine where the President actually stood regarding the current environmental plan. She knew that she couldn't influence the President's strategy unless she had a real conversation about what the President was planning to do. This is a great example of how an effective sales-consultant will approach a meeting – boldly, but politely, ask the tough questions to ensure reality is known. If we just have a pleasant, safe conversation (avoiding questions about the competition, negative beliefs about your product or recommendation), there is no possibility of influencing the strategy.

American President Meeting With Chief Of Staff

- Even though she had little knowledge of the environmental world, Sidney knew her customer's business. She understood what was important to the customer, the President, and that's what mattered most – not the ins-and-outs of environmental policy (“It's a re-election year and you've got to nail down Michigan and California where they make airplanes and automobiles”). What do you think has more impact on our ability to influence the decision-maker's strategy, knowledge about our solution or knowledge about the decision-maker's world – their industry, challenges, what has worked in the past? Unless you are working with a technical buyer, the decision-maker is only interested in how to ensure the success of their strategy. Developing expertise about their world allows you to communicate the relevance of your recommendation and ensures you will have credibility with your audience.

3. What could she have done to improve her meeting with A.J. – did she get a little too zealous? Would you recommend her approach to handling an objection?

- Once she uncovered the barrier, she began to create an adversarial relationship by strongly stating her opposing view. If this situation occurred in real life, most likely A.J. would have defended his position and a point-counter-point dance would begin with the customer always winning. How should we respond to the customer's concerns

or objections? We should first seek to understand – seeing it from their perspective. If we truly are focused on helping the customer come up with the best solution, there will be a natural desire to understand of all the facts. Any other approach sends one clear signal to the decision-maker – we are not to be trusted.

4. How would you describe Sidney's demeanor? Was she intimidated by the rank and power of the person she was meeting with?

- When meeting with A.J., one of the most powerful people in the world, she didn't seem the least bit intimidated. She acted as a peer rather than a lowly political lobbyist. Is this critical to building credibility when we meet with an executive? If we fail to demonstrate confidence in our expertise by using weak language or being unwilling to challenge their strategy, the executive doesn't need us. There is only one reason an executive will work with a sales consultant – they believe the sales consultant has expertise to help them execute their plan. If you don't speak and act confidently it communicates that you don't really believe in your recommendation. And if you don't believe in your expertise, I promise you the executive won't either.



Discovery

Teen Wolf Meeting With The Coach

Scene Setup

In this scene, a high school basketball player (Michael J. Fox) is meeting with his trusted coach to talk about a little problem. He is getting an outbreak (“hair patches”) forming on his body and is getting a little worried. Unbeknownst to him, he is in the process of turning into a wolf and doesn’t know where else to turn for advice.

Description

This is great example of how our preconceived notions of what others are trying to communicate can shut down our ability to listen.

Key Competencies

- Empathetic listening

Chapter

2 – 00:06:20-00:08:40

Length

2 minutes, 20 seconds

Q&A

1. What assumptions did the coach make about his player?

- When Scott, the player, told the coach he had a “problem,” he assumed the player was asking for money – maybe related to a problem with girls or drugs. After the player clarified that “... I’m going through changes...it’s complicated..” the coach assumed it was related to puberty and immediately minimized the problem, telling a story about a boy from a poor family who had to quit the team to get a job. The coach was selectively listening, thinking he’s heard it all before, and not empathetically listening (removing assumptions and focusing on understanding what the person is really trying to communicate).
- Assumptions are the number one barrier to listening. If we assume we know what the customer is trying to say, that assumption being based on our knowledge of the person or their particular choice of words, we have no ability to listen. Listening requires that we remove our assumptions and focus on the other person, as if we have no idea what they are trying to communicate.

2. Why is it so difficult to eliminate assumptions?

- Why is this difficult in sales? The longer you have been in your role, the harder it is resist the temptation to associate what the customer is saying with all the other customer responses you have heard in the past. Even if you’re correct, it erodes the relationship when the customer doesn’t feel heard.
- Listening is not a skill, it is a choice. It is a choice as to whether or not you are going to remove your assumptions and focus on what the customer is

Teen Wolf Meeting With The Coach

trying to say or take the easy route and just assume that you know exactly what they are trying to say. If you do, you will have many meetings that to the customer feels much like how this meeting felt to the basketball player.

3. What would have been the appropriate response to the player's first mention of concern?

- Ask questions to clarify. Unless you can read minds, the only way to truly understand what the customer is saying is to ask follow-up questions. Remember the customer does not always articulate exactly what they feel when they begin to open up. They may be guarded or they may simply struggle to initially verbalize what they really mean. It may take several clarifying questions (e.g., "What do you mean by ____?") to get to the root of the meaning.

4. How did the coach's response affect the relationship?

- It obviously harmed the relationship. I can't imagine the player ever trusting the coach again with his real concerns or desires. And isn't that what we want the customer to do – to talk to us openly and honestly about what they really need and what they are really concerned about, rather than just sticking to formal company jargon?
- What is the opposite of listening? Ignoring someone. Listening is a statement of value. If you value someone, you will listen to them. So, whether or not the customer consciously

understands that, if they feel like you aren't listening, they are left with the feeling that they are unimportant and have been ignored – not a great way to establish a relationship with the customer.

5. How does the other person know you are listening?

- Sales reps who empathetically listen to the customer will do one of two things: 1) their follow-up questions will reveal a deeper understanding of what the customer has communicated and will reflect knowledge gained by answers to previous questions; and 2) they will acknowledge what was implied by the customer, but not implicitly communicated. Yes, eye contact and body language can communicate that you are listening to the customer, but until you demonstrate you are not just listening, but hearing, the customer will always have doubts.

What About Bob? Meeting With Dr. Leo Marvin

Scene Setup

Bob (Bill Murray) has a problem. He is afraid of everything. He has seen countless psychiatrists, but nothing seems to work. His last counselor just quit the profession and has recommended that he start working with Dr. Leo Marvin (Richard Dreyfuss). In this scene, we see their introductory meeting in which Dr. Marvin attempts to get at the root of Bob's problems. As you watch the scene, compare Dr. Marvin's counseling process with your sales process.

Description

To show how the discovery process is used in everyday life. The key is to focus on the conversational way Dr. Marvin asked Bob questions. We should be asking open questions to get the member talking, and expand their comfort zone.

Key Competencies

- Questioning skills
- Listening
- Sales process
- Enhancing the relationship

Chapter

3 – 00:06:00-00:13:30

Length

2 minutes, 20 seconds

Q&A

1. What was Dr. Marvin's first step in determining how to help Bob?

- His first step was to get to know Bob. What are Bob's needs? Why does he need help? What kind of help does he need? Is this how we should start the process with the customer? It seems silly to try and solve the customer's problems or meet their needs if we don't first go through the discovery process.
- Why is this sometimes difficult for sales reps? We often think we know what the need is. We've seen it a million times or we have picked up a few facts about the problem. Regardless of the reason, if we don't first discover or confirm what is important to the customer, our percentage rate in selling our solution will dramatically drop.

2. What types of questions did Dr. Marvin ask ("talk about...")? What percentage of his questions were open-ended?

- Almost every question he asked was open-ended and only two questions were closed-ended – "Are you married?... So you are saying you left your wife because she liked Neil Diamond?". All the other questions were open-ended – "Talk about..." What happens when we only ask closed-ended questions? It feels like an interrogation and we end up talking more than the customer. We also get much more information out of one open-ended question than we would if we asked several closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions usually end with one word answers whereas an open-ended question can lead to a wide open topic of conversation. Open-ended questions allow the customer the freedom to talk about what is important to them and share what they really care about. You could easily miss it if you continue to drill down to a one-word answer.

What About Bob? Meeting With Dr. Leo Marvin

- When is it appropriate to ask closed-ended questions? When we want to drill down on important qualifying information (budget, scope, decision-makers, relationship with you or the competitor). This information is often withheld by the customer and will only be revealed through sensitively asking several closed-ended questions.

3. How did the questions Dr. Marvin asked (closed-ended or open) affect the meeting? What percentage of the time did Bob talk? Who was carrying the burden of the conversation – Bob or Dr. Marvin?

- Because a high percentage of questions were open-ended, Bob talked most of the time – revealing important information. Are we more successful when we are talking or when the decision-maker is talking? Obviously when the decision-maker is talking. And the key to ensuring the decision-maker is talking is to ask open-ended questions: “Tell me about... Talk more about...How are you...?”.
- It was also evident that Bob was responsible for revealing information, not Dr. Marvin. Often when we are meeting with a customer for the first time, it may be difficult to get the conversation flowing. We may feel the burden to carry the conversation. If we give into that pressure, we will talk most of the meeting. How do we shift this burden and ensure the customer opens up? Ask open-ended questions.
- It’s also important to note what Dr. Marvin did after he asked the questions. He just waited for Bob to respond – as if he had all

day. This is critical to not only ensuring the decision-maker will pick up the ball and invest in the conversation – but it also enhances your credibility. When you just jump in to fill the silence, you appear less grounded and confident.

4. How did Bob feel about Dr. Marvin? Why?

- His response to Dr. Marvin will be the same response your customers will have to you if you invest the time to really get to know them and listen, really listen, to what is important to them. Listening and really letting go of your agenda is not a skill – it is a statement of value. You either value what the other person has to say or you are just waiting for your turn to talk – to push your agenda. When you really listen you greatly enhance the relationship and the likelihood that you will uncover honest, unrestricted needs and decision-drivers.

5. When did Dr. Marvin try to sell Bob the book, why was he effective? How did he know what to say about the book and ultimately his services as a psychiatrist?

- There is only one reason he knew what to say – he asked questions. “Not everything in the book applies to you...don’ t just think about getting out of the building, but just getting into the hall...” Simply stated, we will never be effective at selling our solution until we are effective at discovering what is most important to the customer.



Building Value

Cinderella Man Selling the Commissioner

Scene Setup

James Braddock (Russell Crowe) at one time was a very successful fighter but after a string of injuries and poor performances, the commissioner pulls his license. James tries to make a living during the Great Depression, but just can't make ends meet and begins fighting again to earn a few bucks. He experiences some success, but doesn't have a license to compete in the big leagues. Both Joe (Paul Giamatti), James Braddock's manager, and James have everything riding on his ability to compete again at the professional level.

Description

In this scene Joe Braddock's manager, meets with the Commissioner (Bruce McGill) to try to persuade him to allow Braddock to fight again – a daunting task given the Commissioner's past relationship with Braddock.

Key Competencies

- Building value in recommendation
- Handling objections

Chapter

11 – 1:10:39-1:12:15

Length

1 minute, 36 seconds

Q&A

1. What question does the Commission ask – a question that all customers ask?

- Every time we attempt to build value with the customer, we must answer one simple question – “Why is it in their best interest to change?”

2. How does Braddock's manager sell the Commissioner on letting Braddock fight again? Does he communicate features or benefits?

- Instead of providing a long list of reasons why the Commissioner should allow Braddock to fight, he simply netted out the payoff – you will make more money.
- Why did he focus on that particular benefit? Because it's what the Commissioner cares about most. To effectively build value, we must zero in on the personal payoff for the customer. How do we gain that knowledge? By first discovering needs, before we build value.

3. How does he remove his potential objection – “You're still sore over how Braddock took down Griffin...”?

- By bringing up the potential objection first, it reduced the resistance of the Commissioner.

4. What did the manager do after he communicated his point? Did he fill the silence by saying more or did he patiently wait for the Commissioner to talk? Was that more effective? Why?

- Most sales reps feel awkward with silence so they jump in and say too much and lose credibility with the customer.