

## **Selling Safety by Selling Yourself**

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### **Introduction**

For over 28 years the author has worked in areas of increasing responsibility leading to the management of global environmental, health, and safety programs ranging in the billions of dollars in domestic and international contracts.

While this paper focuses on the topic of selling safety, the underlying foundation of selling yourself applies to any level position within any organization. Additionally, this paper predominately focuses on simplifying the common terms used in one of the three most recognized motivators for safety program buy-in, specifically, financial impact. The other two motivators for safety program buy-in not discussed here are legal and social responsibility.

Are the answers to the following elusive questions potentially simple? In short, yes!

- Why is it that your ideas are not implemented?
- Why is it that the organization is willing to take a risk on regulatory compliance issues?
- Why is it that you are not invited to the “important” meetings”?
- Why is it that others are achieving the promotions, yet you are not?

The author focuses on the business acumen required to pierce barriers that are in-place when attempting to develop, sell, and implement effective safety programs. The most effective way to sell safety in an organization is to achieve management buy-in. This level of commitment can only materialize through a purposeful process of reputation building. Reputation building begins through the understanding of the inner workings of the business in the eyes of the organization and by applying the four “B’s” in your approaches: Be Brief, Be Prepared, Be Inspiring, Be Gone. The author focuses on the second “B”, “Be Prepared”, through a discussion of several of the most utilized financial terms and how safety programs are linked to the bottom line. The goal is to show you how to sell yourself so that the organization will buy what you are selling through:

- Positioning yourself with the right business mindset;
- Learning how to look through the business lens and develop strategies that are effective;
- Understanding the value and art of perspective discovery;
- Understanding the value and art of perception management;
- Understanding and applying the four “B’s” to your approaches;
- “Being Prepared”: Understanding some of the most frequently utilized financial terms and how they are directly related to your safety program;

- Learning how to develop and implement an effective reputation building plan and, ultimately, how to sell yourself.

## **Positioning Yourself with the Right Business Mindset**

The process of selling yourself fundamentally commences with the establishment of a proper business mindset. What does this mean? It means that your thought processes are driven by a business engine designed to power improvements in safety performance. How do you know if you have the right business mindset? Start with your thought processes.

The right business mindset focuses on driving safety performance by selling your idea the same way any other entity sells the organization on any product or concept. Understand that you are selling an initiative that is competing with many other great initiatives. You are bringing to the table a request that, at first glance, appears to be a bottom-line degrader.

Understand that, at the end of the day, most publically traded and privately held companies are in business to turn a profit for their stakeholders. Establish this mindset and you will be well under way to selling a great safety program.

## **Learning How to Look through the Business Lens and Develop Strategies That Are Effective**

Now that the right business mindset is in place, it is time to look through the business lens and develop strategies that are effective for your organization. Understandably, no one solution is a problem solver for all situations in all organizations, but viewing the scenery from a different lens can focus your efforts to achieve your desired results.

Perspective is often the culprit holding back great safety programs from blossoming. Often, the safety professional simply is packaging the product in a way that the organization views as an acceptable risk. This translates into no management buy-in, no funding, and no sale for you.

So, which lens is the “right” one? While there are significant variations in organizations that drive perspective, such as type of business, customer/client expectations, personalities, size of the organization, sales figures, etc., there is a common thread that flows through most corporate flags: the health of the bottom line.

Effective strategies that partner with the organization’s bottom line achieve support, buy-in, and ultimately, funding. Imagine yourself in your management’s office chairs and develop strategies that are consistent with what is driving their decisions. Look through their business lens and you will have the information to close any gaps that are preventing full alignment with your views.

## **Understanding the Value and Art of Perspective Discovery**

What is the value of understanding what the organization expects from you as a safety professional is immense and you need to approach its discovery artfully.

Most of us safety professionals are focused on the technical- and compliance-related elements of our work. Our performance drivers originate from the deep roots that sustain the concept of protecting people in the workplace. While at the end of the day, that is what we do, we must also learn and apply the art of perception discovery.

Perception discovery is a term that describes the process of determining what is expected of you and when it is expected. There is typically no right way or wrong way to approach this art. It must simply be learned and exercised.

A simple way to start is to just ask for your organization's perception of you, your approach, and your effectiveness. This strategy will typically only produce limited visibility to the organization's "real" perceptions. The next step is for you to evaluate the organization's reactions to your ideas and proposals. By doing so, you will start opening up the aperture and begin to see the "true" organizational perceptions of your work. Are you invited to important meetings? Are you included in major decisions? Is your name one of the first to come up for promotional opportunities? Is your professional opinion sought-after to solve complex issues? The answers to these questions will start you on the right path to data gathering; a very important step in the art of perception management.

## **Understanding the Value and Art of Perception Management**

There are many books and references written on approaches to perception management. Many focus on managing the perceptions of other people; some focus on managing your own perceptions, some focus on managing organizational perspectives. The important take-away is this: understand that you must drive the bus or the bus will drive you.

Work with your organization so that there is complete understanding of your deliverables, your approaches, your goals, your actions, your re-actions, your sensitivity to the protection of the bottom line while eliminating or mitigating the risks, and finally, your willingness to offer the best professional safety service at the best value.

The perception of the organization, relative to your work, is in your hands. Make it happen.

## **Understanding and Applying the Four "B's" to Your Approaches**

What are the four "B's"? They are the mantra to live by in the professional work environment. Learn them and the likelihood of your success will be higher: Be Brief, Be Prepared, Be Inspiring, Be Gone.

**Be Brief.** Get to the point. Management looks at time as a resource. If you do not utilize your time and their time effectively, you are viewed as a resource that ineffectively utilizes resources, and this is not good. Being brief yet effective demonstrates to your management that your business acumen is astute, that you value the bottom line, that your focus is results driven and to the point, that your organizational skills are exemplary, and last but not least, that you understand time is a critical part of the business model.

**Be Prepared.** Do the research. Assure that you have the right facts at the right time from the right resources. Consider your proposals from the eyes of the organization including finance, human resources, performance excellence, legal, environmental, health, safety, export compliance, engineering, operations, manufacturing, business development, internal and external communications, etc., etc. Be prepared to answer the tough questions related to the bottom line and the overall benefits to the organization.

**Be Inspiring.** An inspired organization spends money. They view your proposals as an investment in the future financial health of the company. If presented correctly, an inspired organization views your proposals as the right thing to do regardless of cost or return on investment. Your passion is contagious. Talk about what the future holds, the milestones to

celebrate, and how the entire organization can be part of the journey. Publicize the safety achievements and always credit your management and the organization for the success. Inspire them to act through your passion.

**Be Gone.** Sell your idea, proposal, improvement plan, corrective action plan or any other concept and immediately get to work. Go, deliver on your promises. Work with the organization and together break down obstacles. Being gone means being visible and effortlessly working toward achieving the organization's mission through the realization of your concepts for the sustainment of effective safety programs.

## **“Being Prepared”: Understanding Some of the Most Frequently Utilized Financial Terms and How They Are Directly Related to Your Safety Program**

This section focuses on a small yet very important element of the second “B”. Understanding some of the most frequently utilized financial terms and how they are directly related to your safety program is essential in the preparation process.

The number of financial books are seemingly countless. The purpose of this publication is not to restate their content, but rather to place some of the most frequently used financial terms into snippets that make sense to those of us who are not of the finance persuasion. The goal is to provide you with enough knowledge to understand the concepts when you hear them in meetings or when you are asked to provide financial input on a project. As we are well aware, financial terminology can be, at times, intimidating to say the least. The following definitions are simplified to bring out the merits of their meaning in the business environment we all live in:

- Bookings
  - Value of new orders (e.g., contracts) awarded to a company by outside customers and is used to calculate backlog
  - The greater the number of orders, the higher the bookings, the greater the backlog, the brighter the future looks for the company
  - Backlog represents the value of work remaining that is currently under contract to perform
- Net Sales
  - Generated when the company performs on its backlog
  - Equals gross revenue minus discounts, rebates, returns, promotions, advertising, etc.
- Operating Profit
  - Gross profit minus all operating expenses, such as labor, material, research and development, as well as administrative and selling expenses (profit before interest and taxes)
  - In other words, sales less cost of goods sold, less operating expenses
  - Operating Profit generates cash

- Free Cash Flow

- The change in net debt from period to period plus any profit realized.

- Return on Invested Capital (ROIC)

- A measure of how effectively the company uses money invested in its operation
- Calculated by dividing return by invested capital. A business can influence ROIC through sales and corresponding profit, working capital and any other changes to assets
- Bookings, Net Sales, Operating Profit, & Free Cash Flow feed ROIC

Okay, so what does this all mean? Let's take the lemonade stand scenario as an example. Imagine you as a one employee venture that sells lemonade on a corner stand. You work standard hours, Monday through Friday, in the rain, in the heat, in the cold, and on a loud and busy street. You have customers that stop by and purchase your product for one dollar per cup. Some customers are repeat customers; others are new to your business. Some customers love your product; some do not. Some customers pre-order gallons of your lemonade for their events at fifteen dollars per gallon.

Lemonade Stand Bookings – This is the monetary value of the number of gallons that your customers ordered but you have not produced. If you have hundreds of gallons on order, you have thousands of dollars in backlog and your business is doing well. Conversely, if you have zero orders left to deliver on, your business may not have a bright future if your day to day lemonade cup sales drop.

Net Sales – This is the money you receive when your customers pay you for the lemonade they ordered, minus expenses such as discounts, returns, the cost for the lemonade flyers and radio commercials, the cost of any returned unusable product, etc. etc. If you do not watch your costs and pricing strategy, it is easy to see how your Net Sales figure can go south. If you have money left over, and depending how much is left over, you can consider your business as possibly doing well. Net Sales is not your profit.

Operating Profit – This is the monetary value of your sales, minus the costs associated with making those sales, minus operating expenses. If you subtract the costs associated with everything you purchased to make the lemonade and the cost of your labor, and the costs associated with the lemonade stand and the costs associated transportation and the costs associated with any permits from the money you received in that given period, you have just calculated your Operating Profit. If you have cash left, you are on the right path. If not, you are paying out of your pocket to provide the lemonade service to your customers.

Free Cash Flow – This is the change in debt from period to period plus any profit realized. Let's say you owed one hundred dollars to lemonade stand creditors last month and this month you owed fifty dollars and you earned two hundred in profit. The Free Cash Flow for your lemonade business is two hundred and fifty dollars ( $\$100 - \$50 + \$200$ ). Life is good. If, conversely, your debt goes up this month over last month, then your Free Cash Flow is negatively impacted.

Return on Invested Capital (ROIC) – This is a ratio of how much the lemonade stand is monetarily returning against how much money you have invested in it. A high ROIC is good. A low ROIC means your business is probably not headed for a good place.

While the above scenario is highly simplified and it may not exactly match how every organization defines these financial terms, it does provide you with a good feel for what the terms generally mean. These financial terms and their meaning have a one to one relationship to your safety program because there is a cost associated with anything in business and this cost eventually degrades from the bottom line if there is no apparent return. The question is: how much does your initiative degrade your bottom line, how much does it place back on the bottom line and when?

Understand this financial terminology and separate yourself from the pack by a long shot.

## **Learning How to Develop and Implement an Effective Reputation Building Plan and, Ultimately, How to Sell Yourself**

When it is all said and done, one of the most important assets you have to offer is your reputation. Understand that organizations are built on trust, unsurpassed, and predictable performance.

Purposefully engage in the process of building an effective reputation building plan. The following six steps can be tailored to virtually any individual in any situation and will help you focus your efforts:

1. Determine what is important to your boss and to the organization
2. Determine how you can contribute
3. Develop a plan of approach and implementation
4. Make promises and keep them
5. Measure and share your results with the organization
6. Continuously run a self check to assure the professional safety service you are delivering actually benefits the organization in the eyes of the organization

Reputations are real-life entities that are created and defined by actions and perceptions. Align your actions with your organization's expectations (the ones you helped shape) and the organization's perceptions of your work will reward your efforts.

## **Conclusion**

Focus on the business acumen required to pierce barriers that are in-place when attempting to develop, sell, and implement your safety programs.

The most effective way to sell safety in an organization is to achieve your management's buy-in. This level of commitment can only materialize through a purposeful process of reputation building. Reputation building begins through the understanding of the inner workings of the business in the eyes of the organization and by applying the four "B's" in your approaches.

Focus on being prepared. Position yourself with the right business mindset. Learn how to look through the business lens and develop strategies that are effective. Understand the value and art of perspective discovery and of perception management. Understand some of the most frequently utilized financial terms and how they are directly related to your safety program. Learn how to develop and implement an effective reputation building plan and, ultimately, how to sell yourself.

The process of selling yourself is not intuitively obvious. You must work at it. Most of us safety professionals focus on only two of the three most recognized motivators for safety program buy-in, namely, legal and social responsibility. We tend to forgo the third, financial impact. Learn

the language of business through the familiarization of its financial terms. Finance is the universal language of any organization.

The safety professional that can tie in all three motivators in a compelling fashion will sell safety by selling themselves to an organization eager and willing to buy their offerings.

Be Brief, Be Prepared, Be Inspiring, Be Gone.

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