

8. I'm great at warming up my prospect—I can small talk with anyone.

At times, this can be a great skill, one that can win us friends. However, we live in a different society today than we did just decades ago. Now, time is of the essence. Because your prospects are so pressed for time, you have to be prepared to get right to the point. Nowadays, most people don't appreciate useless dribble drabble. Here is what the research is telling us.... The majority of prospects do not appreciate unsolicited small talk, and many find it offensive. People buy from others who understand their wants and needs.

When it comes to effective persuasion, the skill of communication can be a great asset or a great liability. You need to read your prospects and understand when small talk is appropriate. For many, personal chatter is appropriate only after the relationship has been established and they know you care and are sincere. If you don't know your prospect well, you could be going down the wrong road by asking about her/his family and personal interests before s/he knows who you are and what you represent. With some of your prospects, you can mix business with chitchat after you get to the main point. You have heard it all before with telemarketers.... The first thing they say is, "Hi, how are you this evening?" Meanwhile, you are thinking, *What do you care?* Or, *You don't really mean it.* It's important to keep in mind that if the prospect wants to engage in small talk, s/he will initiate it. The best rule of advice then is to follow her/his lead.

Many persuaders don't know how to maintain rapport throughout the entire persuasive situation. They may be good at the opening pitch, but they lose control sealing the deal. You see people in sales break the ice, build rapport for the first five minutes and then launch headlong into their presentation. All of a sudden, they get serious and their demeanor changes. When this happens, what is the prospect supposed to think? The person s/he had been talking to for the past five minutes has now completely morphed into someone else. Which one is the real person? The two were getting along, having fun and then all of a sudden, without warning, the salesperson became serious and dove into a sales pitch. This breaks the rapport that has been built and seems incongruent to the

prospect. You both know why you are there and what the ultimate goal will be, so continue to build rapport and a long-term relationship.

The call to action is the most important part of your influential presentation. This is the point where your audience understands exactly what you want them to do. It is where you define yourself as a persuader instead of a presenter. The conclusion you draw should not come as a shock to your audience. Throughout your presentation, you should gently lead your prospects to the same conclusion you are going to present in the end. Along the way, prompt them so they end up wanting what you are going to propose anyway. You should feel their permission to sell.

In other words, you should prepare your audience for your conclusion before you even start in on the rest of the presentation. Your entire presentation should be built around your call to action. As you make your preparation, ensure that your conclusion is explicit and that the audience is not left on their own to make sense of your message. You need to tell them what to believe; in other words, you draw the conclusion for them. Make the call to action easy for them to follow and simple for them to do. By your presentation's conclusion, no doubt should remain in your prospects' minds about exactly what you want them to do. When planning and preparing your call to action, remember that it should not be long and painful. Be short, be brief and get to the point.