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Ari Galper Trusts You

How exactly can exhibitors effect trust in the precious few minutes they have with attendees? To answer that, sales expert Ari Galper busts common myths about creating trust with your prospects, warns exhibitors against giving away useful information too freely, teaches how to transform talk into sales, and recommends which “F” word to avoid and which one to use. *By Charles Pappas*

According to the most recent Edelman Trust Barometer, an annual survey on the credibility of the world’s four main institutions (government, business, media, and nongovernment organizations) that received 33,000 responses, trust in all information sources has deteriorated to record lows. Ari Galper thinks he knows at least one partial solution to this thorny problem.

Galper, a noted author and sales consultant, has staked a claim to an unusual territory in the world of sales strategies. Contemporary approaches range from the Socratic method, which uses a series of easily answered questions to lead customers to the conclusion you want, to shock therapy that exposes prospects to an upsetting statistic or image implying what will happen to their companies without the benefit of your product or service. Galper’s stance is dramatically different, arguing that we should favor creating trust first and foremost. Here, EXHIBITOR asks Galper to walk us through the process of creating and cultivating trust in the proverbial snap

Ari Galper

For 20 years, expert sales consultant and speaker Ari Galper has cultivated a who’s who of clients ranging from Telstra Corp. and Citibank N.A. to General Electric Co. Featured in CEO, Forbes, and Inc. magazines, Galper gained a high profile for his trust-based approach to sales that turns the conventional wisdom of pursuing and pushing for sales on its head. His book, “Unlock the Sales Game: New Trust-Based Selling Strategies to Finally Create Your Sales Breakthrough,” delves into the power of establishing trust as a precursor to any deal.

of a finger — and why using the “F” word is sometimes recommended.

EXHIBITOR Magazine: You’ve advised many businesses on trust. What are their biggest misconceptions about establishing trust, especially in a professional relationship?

Ari Galper: One prevalent misconception is that you are required to have developed a relationship with someone prior to doing business with them. That’s an old myth.

EM: So how exactly should exhibitors, who only have a few minutes to build trust, greet and talk to attendees who enter their booths?

AG: They shouldn’t talk about themselves, their offers, or their solutions. Instead, they should engage the visitor on the issues that their solution solves. Start the conversation with something like “Just curious, are you having issues or challenges related to X?” If they put you off, it’s possible they’re crunched for time. But it’s also possible that staffers didn’t focus enough on learning their problems. Instead, staffers push. For example, when salespeople are talking to potential new clients in the booth with the mindset of making a sale, they would say some version of “Why don’t we move forward and take the next step?” to speed up the possibility of a deal. With a trust-based mindset, they would instead say “Where do you think we should go from here?” That empowers prospects instead of pressuring them, which builds trust because you’re ceding control of the relationship and the process to them.

EM: What happens if booth reps stay concentrated on the sale in the way you just described?

AG: They'll get pushback, or what I call a kind of pressure/tension from attendees. This might present itself in the form of being challenged by prospects when they object to reps or their approach, which is really just prospects' way to get control of or disrupt the sales process. It takes the form of boilerplate objections such as "Sounds good" or "I need to think about it." If you don't consciously remove the pressure from the sales process, they'll never feel comfortable telling you the truth up front about what they need — and thereby begin the process of creating trust without the usual lengthy preamble.

AG: You shouldn't make any assumptions at the beginning of the process. In fact, it's best if you enter the conversation with the mindset of "They're probably not a fit for my product or service." That way you automatically view them as someone you might be able to sincerely assist rather than just sell to. This builds trust in them and paradoxically can end up creating more sales.

There's a subtlety here that many people miss, and it's a total shift in mindset. You have to understand that your attendees or potential clients are not in your exhibit to judge how Service X or Product Z might solve their problems. They're trying to decide if you are the one to solve their problems. Can they trust you enough?

deeper into your prospects' issues. And until the moment they say some version of the magic phrase "Can you help me?," you do not have permission to talk about how you can solve their problems. This is the trust-based mindset, one in which you completely let go of your goals and do a deep dive into your potential client's world. Think of it as being much like a doctor/patient relationship where you're not concerned with selling your medicine but in curing an ailment. If you do this, you won't accidentally maneuver yourself into chasing a prospect, which is something you want to avoid.

EM: Why would chasing a client be inherently bad? Isn't that just part of any sales cycle?

AG: This relates to another popular misconception about trust: that you have to chase a prospect to make the sale. If you are forced to pursue your leads, that means you didn't create enough trust from the beginning for them to feel comfortable telling you what their needs really are, forcing you into the awkward position of having to run after them. That means so-called follow-ups via email, phone calls, or even in-person sales calls. Chasing is a degrading experience, and it dehumanizes the process of trust because it says that you only view the other person as a sale.

That's why another rule I have for creating trust is to avoid a particular "F" word: follow-up. Most sales focus on moving a project forward by pushing the other person toward that sale. My approach is to never invoke the language of the typical sales spiel with prospects, which includes saying you're "following up" or "checking in." When you contact them after a show, you have to remove all the language that attaches you to the stereotype of the salesperson.

"My approach is to never invoke the language of the typical sales spiel with prospects, which includes saying you're 'following up' or 'checking in.'"

Next, to defuse that tension, get to their truth. Essentially, this means abandoning the sales-focused talk and digging deep into your potential clients' issues, deeper than they might have thought for themselves, which creates in them a moment of "Wow, he really gets me." You'll know you struck gold and got to their truth when they express some version of "How can you help me?" That's how you know you've established some level of trust because they're willing to open up to you.

EM: But why skirt around the issue of a sale when prospects are probably talking to you because your service or product might solve their problems, and at some level they're willing to buy?

Here's a classic example: You encounter someone at a trade show who might end up becoming a client. They describe their problems to you, so what do you typically say at that point? Likely it's something along the lines of, "My product/service can help you with that." And then you do what I call "free consulting." You start explaining what you can do and listing your product's features. Even more, you give them free ideas.

EM: Isn't giving away information, ideas, etc., a trustworthy act in itself?

AG: No. My No. 1 rule is this: Do not give away anything because that information, by implication, is pitching what you have to offer. Rather than give stuff away, focus on going

What you say instead is, "I'm giving you a call to see if you have any feedback on our previous conversation." Because feedback — an "F" word I do approve of — is going backward, not forward, and asking them to look over whatever topics you have already covered. My approach is 180-degrees different from what most sales coaches teach about creating constant forward momentum. I go backward and establish trust further by giving them the power to move at their pace, voice their concerns, and frame things from their point of view.

EM: Is time an unavoidable element of building trust?

AG: No, definitely not. People think trust is a byproduct of the relationship. They think that the relationship should be built painstakingly before the sale instead of after. The reality is you don't have to have coffee with someone or play golf with them or become their buddy. Trust can be established quickly and genuinely without all that by using the strategy I've outlined here.

EM: Is offering social proof effective at building trust? For instance, should exhibitors share recommendations from current or past clients?

AG: Testimonials and social proof have become commoditized. Almost everyone uses them, and most potential clients will breeze right through them because they feel scripted. I'm not saying you shouldn't have them, but if anything, they are entry-level basics. What ultimately matters is using them to create trust from a distance and positioning yourself where your message matches your clients' exact problem, something they can look at as being objectively true and of value.

EM: Should social proofs contain specific points, or is it enough that someone is offering a recommendation?

AG: There are many types of social proof. They should all tell an authentic story and have evidence to back them up. If it's a user testimonial, it should ideally include a client who describes their situation before they encountered you, how you understood their problem, and the difference your product or service made to them. In other words, you step out of the way and let the client speak.

Now, another objective social proof you can provide is one you generate yourself. For example, if you or your company has written a book, white paper, or some other piece of research targeting a specific audience with particular problems, that publication will position you as an authority. Potential clients would automatically know by virtue of the material and not some sales pitch that you are likely to understand their needs or problems. Therefore, trust starts establishing itself.

EM: Can trust be measured, and is a sale proof of trust? Let's say a customer needs and therefore buys a widget that XYZ company sells at the lowest price. How is the sale — the result — the same as trust? I mean, I buy from Amazon and use Facebook, but I don't necessarily trust Bezos or Zuckerberg.

AG: The sale can be seen as an indirect metric. Now, those examples you list may all be true. But I'm not advocating a system when you buy from those you don't trust, even if maybe you sometimes can't avoid doing so. My strategy narrows it down to creating genuine trust and reaping the benefits. And wouldn't you rather trust those you deal with than reluctantly buy from others you don't? Trust is the goal, not the sale — though it can be inferred from the sale. The sale is a by-product of trust. **E**

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Trust Me

Kasia and Patryk Wezowski, co-founders of the Center for Body Language and authors of "Master the Science of Body Language and Maximize Your Success," believe trust can be established, if not in subsecond time, at least before a visitor to your booth departs. To help that process along, here are five of their tried-and-true techniques for winning the confidence of others that will last longer than the blink of an eye.

Tilt Your Head

Tilting your head demonstrates a readiness to be vulnerable. The reason may be buried deep in our evolutionary history — an animal's most vulnerable spot is typically its neck, so exposing it to others is risky business, unless you're demonstrating a willingness to be open with them. "Tilting your head puts the other person's guard down," says Patryk Wezowski. "It says you are open to being convinced by the other person of their point of view."

Keep Your Palms Open

Opening your palms and wrists makes you seem more sincere and reliable, and exposing them to others suggests truth and directness. "Open palms show that you have nothing to hide and are credible," Kasia Wezowski says. "In contrast, liars and those who are generally dishonest tend to conceal their hands."

Make — and Hold — Eye Contact

Maintaining eye contact not only radiates confidence but also builds trust. People who avert their gaze are generally seen as two-faced and even deceiving. "We're more likely to believe someone who looks at us directly," says Patryk Wezowski. "However, note that that in Western etiquette, eye contact should not be held more than 70 percent of an interaction."

Be a Copy Cat

Mirroring attendees' body language quickly builds a strong sense of familiarity and understanding. This could include copying others' gestures and stances, such as leaning forward, putting your hands on your hips, and steepling your fingers. "Reflecting what the other person does implies sympathy and acceptance," says Patryk Wezowski, "and is a powerful method for connecting quickly."