



Article 59

November 17, 2008

Selling Your Product Means Selling Yourself

By Leslie Hoffman, Director of Lending, ACCION New Mexico

Remember your favorite first date? Think about what made it special for you. Maybe it was the way your date listened and took an active interest in you and the things you care about. It could have been the extra care your date put into looking just right for the occasion or the bouquet of flowers that greeted you at the door.

Making a good and lasting first impression in business is a lot like a memorable first date. In a competitive marketplace where consumers, companies and government institutions have multiple choices about where and how to spend money, it's vital for small-business owners to remember that selling yourself can help you sell your product or service.

A common mistake of business owners is failure to make a positive and lasting first impression, but it's a mistake that's simple to correct by following a few simple steps.

Be prepared. Begin building a lasting first impression even before your meeting starts. Know everything you can about your product or service. This might include having a portfolio of work or product samples or other promotional or marketing materials. Be prepared to answer commonly asked questions. Remember the adage: Failure to prepare is preparation for failure.

Know your audience. Research the client or the organization whose representative you will be meeting. Informed observations go a long way toward creating a memorable encounter. Research will also allow you to tailor your presentation to the specific needs of the organization or individual whose business you're courting.

Choose appropriate clothing. If you want to convey professionalism, wear clothing that reinforces the image you want to project. Remember that first impressions set the stage, and clothing is one of the first things noticed by potential customers.

Arrive early. Chances are your favorite date didn't leave you waiting. If he or she was early, it probably boosted your ego and made you feel like your date was really interested and excited about spending time with you. The same is true in business.

Extend a good handshake. While it might seem inconsequential, a firm handshake can project confidence and competence. When shaking someone's hand, lock the soft, "webby" part of your hand between the thumb and forefinger with the same part of the other person's hand. That way you avoid the dreaded "wet fish" handshake and are also less likely to clamp down too hard and

hurt the other person. (The only caveat here is a cultural one: Not all cultures view a strong handshake as a positive gesture. So remember step No. 2: Know your potential client.)

Listen. A common mistake is to talk too much during an introductory meeting. Part of selling yourself is to understand the needs of the person or team you're meeting with, which recalls tip No. 1 about preparation: If you did your homework and have some basic knowledge about the business representative or individual you're meeting with, you will understand his or her concerns and be prepared to address them.

Thank your clients for their time. Everyone is busy these days, and time is a precious commodity. Thank your client — or potential client — for spending some of that valuable and finite resource with you.

Finance New Mexico is an initiative of the New Mexico Small Business Investment Corporation (NMSBIC), New Mexico Small Business Development Center (NMSBDC), Empowering Business Spirit (EBS), the New Mexico Venture Capital Association (NMVCA) and other partners to assist individuals and businesses in obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more about resources available to New Mexicans, go to www.FinanceNewMexico.org.

