

## Closing the Sale with a Crisp Autumn Morning

It is frustrating and certainly not profitable to invest energy and money into making a sale only to have it fall apart just before the deal is sealed. Success is so close you are mentally earmarking how you are going to use the money. A welcome vision flashes in your head of dinner at a favorite restaurant celebrating your prowess in winning this particular piece of business. But now; the client raises a critical question and the whole deal teeters on the brink of zero-point-zero.

Rather than a cold blast of dread, how great it would be to confidently move forward and in a few moments watch the client nodding in agreement as she happily signs the contract.

Here is a proven technique to bring home the true value of what you provide and have the client looking forward to the end result rather than be sidetracked by concerns.

For many years I owned a company that specialized in the repair and restoration of fine English and European shotguns. Projects were shipped to us from all corners of the United States as well as from overseas. The nature of the work was labor intensive, typically requiring one-of-a-kind machine operations and hours of painstaking hand work by some of the finest artisans in the world. Stockmakers, engravers, barrelsmiths, actioners were all available. In the plant were craftsmen from Germany, Switzerland and Spain; as well some of the most talented people in the U.S. of A. A half acre of specialized metalworking machinery collected from all over the world was at the ready. Anything in wood, steel or gold that a fine sporting arm could possibly want or need could be accomplished.

Translate that investment, skill, overhead and effort into dollars and the bill for the work could easily run into thousands of dollars.

Not wishing to spend \$10,000 to restore a \$5000 firearm, a client often asked the question "Is it worth it?" before consenting to a project. At this point I would initiate a conversation that won us the business nearly every time. So high was the confidence level in this conversation that one day when the shop supervisor overheard me on the telephone in the middle of this dialog, he went and told the appropriate people to get ready to do the job. By the end of the call we did, as expected, have the business.

**I share with you that golden conversation** so that you can take the essence of it and apply it to your own product or service. Take note of the pattern of the inquiry. You will see at several points' opportunities to go in different directions depending on the

responses. I was prepared to go in any of those directions. I was also prepared to answer “No, you shouldn’t do this” if that was the truth of the matter. (Convincing clients that a bad deal is good is how you earn a deserved reputation as a B.S. Artist and why used car salespeople have long been associated with unflattering stereotypes.)

Keep in mind that this conversation was used when money was the only thing left on the table. The fact that we could deliver the goods was already a given for the client.

While there is inquiry on the front end, we don’t want to tear into the client like a hostile witness in a courtroom trial. We aren’t attempting to box the client into a corner where he submits in a blubbing mess after being devastated by our incredibly well thought out and well orchestrated argument. Relax...we are just two people having a conversation.

Patience is a key factor, you can’t push this. Pace is everything; this dialog took about 10 minutes. My feet usually ended up on the corner of my desk at some point during the call.

(Note: A low, purposeful yet unhurried voice puts people at ease. Pitch tends to rise as stress rises. Subconsciously we interpret this higher voice as being untrustworthy.)

### **The conversation went like this:**

“Mr. Heckman this is Roger Smith calling from Chicago. I received your estimate for work on my 1922 Purdey sidelock.”

“You’ve got a fine shotgun here Mr. Smith and it’s a good candidate for restoration. It basically needs to catch up on 75 years of maintenance that it didn’t get.”

“I know that you are capable of doing the work and all that, my question is; is this gun worth putting that kind of money into?”

“Mr. Smith I can tell you absolutely without question that it depends.”

[Say this with good humor and you will hear a low chuckle at the other end. You have built some rapport and put the client at ease. This is a good time to mention former U.S. President Harry Truman’s famed longing for a one-armed advisor.]

“Roger do you have any sentimental attachment to this piece, has it been in your family a long time or anything like that?”

“No, it’s just a gun I like that I bought last year at the Las Vegas Gun Show for \$17,000. I liked it and it seemed like a fair deal.”

“It was a fair deal. There is a lot to like about this gun. The engraving is outstanding work and it’s very lively in the hands. Do you want to use this shotgun or hang it on the wall?”

“Oh I want to use it. I plan on using it to hunt pheasants, grouse and maybe some quail.”

“Where do you go?”

“We have some property in South Dakota that we hunt on; and every now and then we get down to my brothers place in North Carolina. I take a quail trip to Arizona every February.”

“Sounds like a great time. Do you have a grandson or nephew that you take with you?”

“Yes, my grandson is nine and he loves to tag along and watch my two English Setters work.”

“Do I recall that you run your own business?”

“Yes, I have a property management company in downtown Chicago.”

“That must keep you busy. How often do you get out into the field with your grandson and your dogs and this fine shotgun all at the same time?”

“Not nearly as much as I would like. Probably a total of 15 days a year, sometimes less. Last year I only got out five days, I want to change that this coming year.”

“So the question as I understand it is this; you’re into this gun for seventeen thousand and are looking to put at least another five thousand into it. You’re asking if you sold it right after we do all this work, will you be able to get your twenty two thousand back. Is that the gist of it?”

“That’s it exactly.”

“I’m not an expert on valuations, but I do see a lot of nice guns come through here every day and have a good feel for what they are selling for. Do I think your chances are good to turn this around next year and sell it for \$22,000 or more? No. It’s a great buy at \$17,000; it’s not a great buy at \$22,000. There are plenty of nice pieces on the market in this price range. However... as I understand what you’ve told me, you aren’t really interested in this for a short term financial gain, instead you want to spend some nice days in the field with this gun and have it work right every time. Is that fair to say?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Mr. Smith, if you would indulge me for just a minute; let me paint a picture for you. It’s this coming hunting season. You have managed to arrange a few precious days away from work and the city, driven 1000 miles to South Dakota. You are in the field at first light. You can see your breath. That early morning autumn air is crisp and the sky is the color it is supposed to be; deep, clear blue. The leaves are crunching under your boots. Your grandson is walking right beside you watching your Setters work out in front of you. He is having the time of his life with his grandpa. Your Setters lock onto a pheasant and as you walk up on it, a rooster blasts into the air. This lovely little gun comes smoothly to your shoulder, you slap the trigger at just the right moment and you hear a thundering CLICK instead of BOOM; and the bird flies off unscathed.

Your grandson turns to you in amazed disappointment, ‘Grandpa! Why didn’t you shoot?’”

“Now Mr. Smith...do you really want your nine year old grandson to hear those four letter words you are going to call me because I let you to cut critical corners to save a few dollars?

How happy are you going to be with yourself in that moment if you took this project to someone who said they could do it cheaper and it doesn’t work perfectly when they are done with it? The check you’ll write to put this gun right may sting a little; you will get over that pretty quick. But you will be mad for a long, long time if this thing doesn’t work right no matter how much or how little you paid to have it repaired. You’ll be mad at me, mad at yourself and mad at this gun. The crystal ball says that you would not be able to look at this gun ever again without getting mad.

You don’t want that load of unhappiness in your life and neither do I. When you get your gun back from us, it will work perfectly and all repairs will be virtually undetectable. I personally guarantee it. That’s why my name is on the door and that’s why I’m the one you’re talking to this morning.”

Time for me to shut up. After a moment there was usually a quiet chuckle on the far end of the line as the realization of the possible unpleasant ramifications of a poor decision today settled in the clients mind.

“I see what you mean. I do want the job done right. Go ahead with the work.”

### **What happened in this conversation and why does it work?**

The client’s point of view was shifted from a distraction that seemed urgently important (an initial negative reaction to the cost) to the positive outcome he wanted (a great day in the field with everything working perfectly).

He was justifiably concerned about the monetary value of the gun and the proposed work. This concern was addressed honestly and thoroughly without attempt to discredit the concern or the client.

Only then was his attention was gently directed to what was most important to him, the value of the benefit he would experience once the work was completed properly, as well as the risk of spoiling that experience with work done improperly. This was done by verbally painting a picture of what the client really wanted and then posing how that scene could work out disastrously depending on his decision about the proposed work.

So long as the product or service you are offering will give that imagined picture a solid chance at becoming reality; you'll have a done deal.

*Karl Heckman coaches executives; managers and supervisors; business owners and boards; in a wide range of industries.*

*His focus is on developing people to be effective leaders at every level in an organization; building efficient teams that accomplish; creating business relationships that work; and permanently resolving conflict in the workplace.*

*He assists in succession planning and leadership talent development.*

*He is retained as a speaker, trainer and coach.*

*Karl has held executive positions in manufacturing, service and high-tech industries, as well as in the U.S. Navy's Submarine Development Group One and Naval Nuclear Power Program.*