

Proving You're an Expert is a Bad Idea

January 7, 2020

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Communicating your expertise in solving your prospect's problems seems like an important step in gaining their trust. But if you communicate in the wrong way, you're much more likely to destroy trust than create it.

I'm working hard to put the finishing touches on my next book, *Ask: Be Liked. Be Better*. A collateral benefit has been how the extensive research I've done has heightened my sensitivity to my own interactions. I wanted to share a recent experience that showed how expertise in problem solving was the downfall in an important client relationship.



A lawyer talks... and talks

I've been both a lawyer and a financial advisor, so I have some perspective on this story. In both professions, I was compensated for providing advice. It was understandable for me to believe those who came to me were interested in what I had to say.

A friend who is a CEO of a private company called to complain about his lawyer, who was negotiating an important commercial lease. He told me he, "just couldn't communicate" with the lawyer, and asked if I could act as the liaison. I agreed to call the lawyer. My friend sent him an e-mail introducing us as friends, and noting that I was previously an

attorney.

When I called, it didn't take long to understand the problem. The lawyer launched into a lengthy explanation of leases, his familiarity with them and his experience in negotiating them. He then discussed the issues he was confronting in this particular lease and how he was dealing with them, "as best he could."

After at least 15 minutes of a non-stop soliloquy, I couldn't resist interrupting him. I asked if he would be willing to listen to concerns I had about two provisions in the lease. He said he would and I briefly summarized my issues.

He treated my concerns as an opportunity to engage in a repetitive discussion about legal issues relating to these clauses. I was struck by the fact that he spoke to me like I wasn't a lawyer, explaining technical aspects of the lease in very basic terms.

As we neared the 30-minute mark, I cut off the conversation and thanked him for his time. I then called my friend and suggested he find a new lawyer.

He later told me the lawyer I spoke to was dumbfounded when he was fired. He related that he had a, "wonderful, productive" conversation with me.

From his perspective, I'm sure it was.

New criteria

I told my friend to apply different criteria in the selection of a replacement. Of course, the new lawyer should be an expert in commercial leases. In addition, I suggested he ask this question:

Are you willing to really listen to my concerns, not talk over me, not interrupt me and not lecture me?

He implemented this suggestion. Here's what he told me: "Just asking that question changed the conversation. Of course, everyone agreed, but I could tell it was the first time anyone ever raised these issues."

He hired a new attorney and reported that he could not be happier.

For more information about marketing and branding opportunities with Dan's upcoming book, Ask: Be Liked. Be Better, [click here](#).