

The most amazing pitch in history

 By [Sid Peimer](#)

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There are only two ways to grow your business organically. The first is to sell more to existing clients; the second is to get more clients. And the key to this organic growth is pitching.

I'd like to share a remarkable pitch story that happened way back in 1970 when the British Rail advertising account was up for grabs. An agency called ABM was short-listed and allowed to present to the railway executives. There are a number of versions of this story. This is mine.

British derailed

The big day came and the management of British Rail arrived at the appointed time, only to be met with a deserted reception room that was filthy.

They checked their watches and diaries - no, they were there at the right time.

Now, to make matters worse, when the receptionist did arrive, she treated them with some disdain. Actually she ignored them totally. The chairman of British Rail made his presence known by coughing a few times - but that didn't work. He then tried the direct approach: he said "Excuse me, we're here to see...."

The receptionist said "Be with you in a minute love."

"But we have an appointment..."

"Can't you see I'm busy love?"

"This is outrageous. We've been waiting fifteen minutes."

"Can't help that love."

"Right that's it, we're leaving." And as the management of British Rail started to depart, a door opened and out stepped the head of ABM who said "Gentlemen, now can you see what it's like for your clients."

The presentation that followed simply showed how bright the future would be if ABM was chosen, but I think you'd agree with me, irrespective of what was in the presentation, they were already on a winning foot before they started. And win the account they did indeed.

It's not about information

The trap that so many people fall into is that they think the key to persuasion is to present information, and then that

information should convince the other party.

So we present our credentials, examples of the work we do, our impressive list of clients and our experienced team - and we expect that to do the job.

Well, if you're doing that, you're in the wrong place. As Donald Galne, the neurologist reminds us: reason leads to conclusions, while emotion leads to action. Presenting the facts means that you're in the library of the mind. Where we want to be is in the theatre of the heart - that's where yes or no decisions are made - the theatre of the heart. Pitching is not about widening people's knowledge base - it's about upping the voltage of their emotional electricity. We don't want conclusions, we want action.

This is one of the few times you can get it wrong

I have sat in pitches where the company presenting got it wrong - what they suggested would clearly not work for the client. But the client hired them! And when I asked why they had made that choice, when clearly other companies pitching for the account were more accurate, the answer was simply "they're the people I'd like to work with". Surely that decision - and many more like that - were made not purely on the facts, but on how people felt. We tend to feel something for people we are prepared to make a commitment to - whether it's to buy their product or to marry them. There are facts and cues that do matter depending on the situation, but the final decision will be based on feelings of trust, confidence, hope, ambition and desire. Feelings.

So it's important that you understand this simple fact: you don't get employed because you get it right in the pitch - they employ you because you could get it right.

Clients aren't looking for great work; they're looking for great people.

ABOUT SID PEIMER

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