

The story of trust and the 3 Cs

Dr David Lazenby | ScenarioNow Inc | 08 February 2016

Once upon a time while in the St. Louis International Airport, I ran into a highly successful salesperson I'd known at Boeing. "I've moved on," he told me. "Now I'm selling emergency recovery support services, and I'm having a tough time." "What's wrong?" I asked, surprised that any selling challenge could slow down someone who had consistently been the top salesperson. "It's the product," he told me. "The great thing about plane parts is you can see, touch and wear them out. With recovery support systems, there's nothing to hold in your hand – it all depends on trust. And in this day and age, trust seems hard to come by."

His case is not unique. A lot of good people who make the career shift from selling products to selling services face this very issue. Trust is weighted differently when selling intangibles because there is no real product to demonstrate, nothing for your buyer to grasp. There is no product to be trusted. So what can be done to create trust in a person?

Several years ago, a study was conducted on professional services clients with the express purpose of defining trust from their perspective. Almost 1,000 people were interviewed. It was found that trust has three essential components:

- **Candor** – Clients value honesty when dealing with a service provider. They want a salesperson to be straight about what will work and what won't. "Come clean," they say. "If you don't know, don't pretend." Most importantly, they value your willingness to say that you may not have the right answer right now, but you'll find it for them.
- **Competence** – Clients want to believe that you know exactly what you are doing. They need to feel a low level of risk in working with you. Because they can't see and touch your product, your ability to solve their problem becomes the focal point. In a real sense, your competence is the product.
- **Concern** – Clients want to know that you feel their pain and that you are concerned about them and their business issues beyond the lip service it takes to land a sale. Central banks have flooded the streets with money. As economies recover and financial systems mend, this torrent could turn into a trickle.

These three Cs – candor, competence and concern – are all essential to developing trust. The absence of any one of the three can lose you a major sale. But people are not equally good at demonstrating each of these three Cs.

In both the professional services study and in parallel studies conducted with product sales forces, the element of trust that was most frequently deemed missing was Concern. Clients

felt that while most sales people were Competent and Candid, when it came to Concern, they were sorely lacking. As a result, clients didn't trust them.

When product sales are compared with service sales, an interesting surprise appeared in the data. As professionals, we are used to thinking of ourselves as deeply concerned about our clients. We are offended if anyone suggests that we don't put our clients' interests first. Yet, that's not how we come across to clients.

Remember it is not our perception that matters... but the clients.

Not only do clients give us the lowest ratings on concern, they judge professional services people to be significantly less concerned about them than are product sales people.

So why do clients see us as 'unconcerned'? There are several reasons:

- We listen for what we can solve rather than what is important to our clients.
- We're often too anxious to get to the solutions, so we don't listen to the problem.
- We don't get on the client's side of the table and see their issues from their point of view.

If there's one dimension of trust where you want to score an "A", it is Concern – not only because it is the most important to clients but because it is the one dimension in which we can make valid judgments. Consider, for example, a story all of us parents can relate to.

A friend told me recently about taking his child with a high fever and infection to a new doctor. Like most parents in an emergency, he was a bundle of nerves. And after waiting and worrying for what seemed like hours, they were placed in an exam room. When the doctor entered the room, he demonstrated no concern for either child or parent.

He simply performed an interview looking at his clipboard, a clinical examination, and a few remarks to himself and then wrote out a prescription while saying this should take care of the problem.

My friend said, "I just didn't trust him and I thought he was either incompetent or a beginner resident practicing on my child. I later learned that he was "the man" and a top professional in his field, but that's not what came across. His lack of concern made me suspicious of his competence. I did not trust his prescription until I found out from my doctor that I was lucky to get in to see that physician.

I wonder how often clients draw the same conclusions about us in a selling or servicing role. How long have they been waiting, worrying, or wondering about their problem? Trust is not

concrete or substantive. It is something that develops through our interactions with our clients.

Our interactions with clients cannot be left to chance. You must have a scientific process to find, attract, get, and keep customers. My experience is that many firms have more documented observable, feedback and measurement systems for ordering office supplies, than for sales and service for “soft skills” professional development. After all, what matters most is what goes on in the real world – what is said and done in front of real clients. Clients want someone with people skills (human technologies) to identify and solve their problem.

Psychologists have more professional training and practical experience in human technologies than any other profession. They are experts in demonstration and communication of genuine concern for clients. It is their business. Your business may be in the business of measuring the ROE and ROI of your firms' products or services. However, psychologists are measured on their ability to demonstrate ROE (return on empathy) and ROI (return on intimacy) because their business depends on both definitions.

In psychology, Empathy is considered a core condition for creating change and a willingness to be influenced. Felt Empathy is the perception the sales person really knows what it is like to be in the client's shoes at a particular moment. Demonstrating Empathy results in someone feeling understood. A prospect feeling understood results in effective interviewing and permission to continue the sales process. Empathy is an open invitation to “come on in”, get knee deep in my problems so that we can discuss solutions.

In psychology, Intimacy is about creating an environment to take safe risks. It is about validation, managing discomfort, and accelerating trust. These skills are essential for servicing well and establishing long-term trust and loyalty.

In summary, ROE (empathy) is about perceived understanding and ROI (intimacy) is about permission to go deeper into the relationship. Both skills generate significant revenue. How you decide to generate more profit may be more of decision to act, rather than wait for good fortune, which might be thought of as seizing the day... but doing so profitably is better described by a variation on that advice – *carpe argentum*, or “seize the revenue”.

Bottom line

If you want to sell intangible products or services, you must master the three Cs of trust building – Concern, Competence, and Candor. They may come naturally to some people, but they are learned skills. The Cs can be developed by training for ROE (empathy) and ROI (intimacy). Mastering the three Cs will help you build confidence and comfort in clients for decision-making. And this, in turn, will help you create greater value and revenue. Revenue is what keeps all of us in business.



Dr David Lazenby is a US-based licensed psychologist with a PhD in counselling and performance psychology. He is a leading expert in financial planning experience design, taking psychology from academic theory to the real world to help wealth professionals develop their “bedside manner” and develop their human relations skills, systems thinking and scenario planning techniques and tools. For over 30 years, he has guided Fortune 100 executives, global financial services firms, financial planning startups, professional athletes and US Navy SEALs and pilots. He has consulted to the US Federal Reserve and sits on three family firms' investment committees that oversee US\$8bn in investments. He is the co-author of [Scenario Selling: Technology and the Future of Professional Selling](#).

In 2015, Dr David Lazenby joined PortfolioConstruction Forum as Chief Finology Officer, with the brief of overseeing PortfolioConstruction Forum's finology curriculum.
