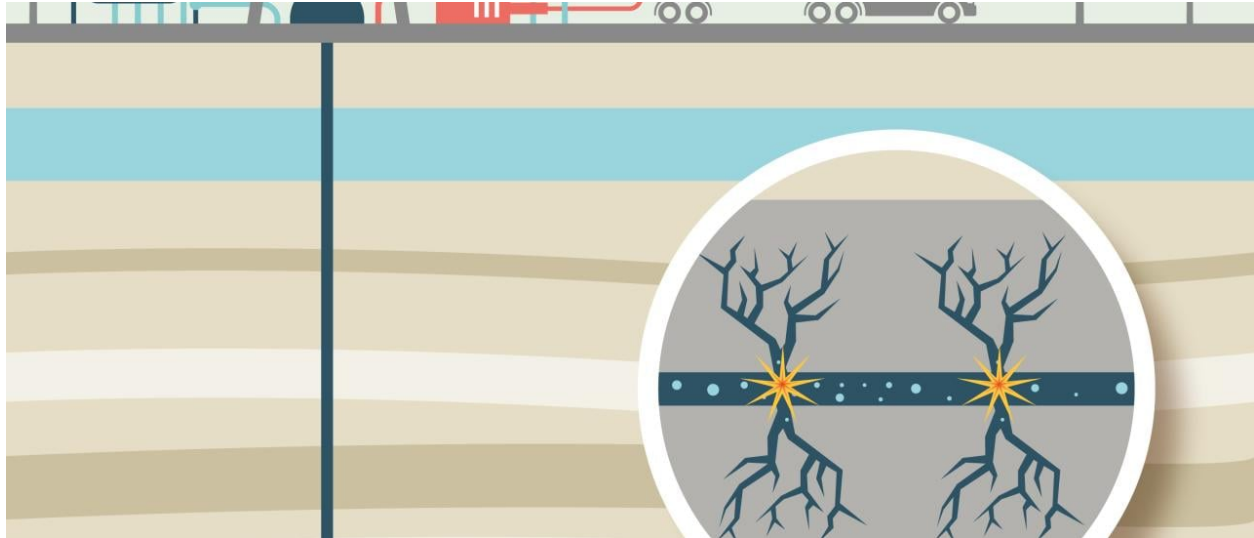

When I Found the Salesperson's Script



By Filip Hron , INSEAD Lecturer

Many companies and individuals put too much faith in the magic of tactics, and apply them indiscriminately without fully understanding the balance of risks and rewards.

“1. Open enthusiastically”

“2. Use the customer’s name as often as possible”

“3. Ask three questions that all have a YES response”

“4. Create urgency”

“5. Test-close”

“6. ...”

Sales person: *“What are you reading there?”*

I was half way through the document when the sales person interrupted me with her question. She had been busy completing my booking, but now appeared finished and directed her attention away from the computer and towards me.

Negotiator: "I'm reading this document labelled *sales tactics for use with our customers*. I have to say that you did indeed open very enthusiastically."

Her complexion turned fluorescent red as it dawned on her what I had found. Right there, next to her computer, in full view of the customer (i.e. me) was her deepest secret - the list of tactics she was using to "sell" me.

Over the next few seconds she gave me a very creative explanation for how the document had, in fact, nothing to do with sales, tactics or manipulation. She managed to explain all this while simultaneously laughing nervously, and awkwardly moving the document into her desk drawer.

It was too late. She knew it and I knew it. And now it became very hard for her to follow her script.

Sales person: "*You better lock in these prices before they increase!*"

Negotiator: "*Are you creating urgency now?*"

Sales person: "*Um... yes...*"

Many people consider tactics that can give you an invisible and unfair advantage over the other party strangely alluring. Just as with magic tricks, the uninitiated victim will predictably fall for the same tactic over and over again. That is, until the victim learns how the trick works. From that point, the tactic has been rendered ineffective. The magic is gone. And in the place of a great illusionist now stands a simple con man.

The likelihood of these tactics working is diminishing by the day. Not only is the average customer today more educated about tactics as a result of their blanket use by sales people, real estate agents, health fund consultants, and advertisers (to name just a few). But the professional negotiators you will deal with are likely to have intentionally studied many or all of the tactics that you plan to throw their way. These tactics are so common that hundreds of them already have established names; *anchoring, bait and switch, nibble, bogey, foot in the door, defer to higher authority...*

No one likes a manipulator

Using a tactic only to discover that it is ineffective is not the real problem here. Let's for a second look instead at the impact of the other party *realising* that you are using a tactic on them.

"How many of you enjoy being manipulated?", I ask the participants in a negotiation workshop.

No one puts a hand up. In fact, to this day I have yet to see even a single person put a hand up in response to me asking this question in a workshop!

When someone catches you using a tactic, then they also catch you trying to manipulate and take advantage of them. What does that do for trust? One definition of trust is: *my expectation that you have my best in mind*. What happens to that expectation when he or she spots your tactic? That's right, trust gets obliterated. Gone. Nowhere to be seen.

Don't get me wrong. There can indeed be **rewards** associated with tactics when these are used *carefully* at *strategic* points in *selected* negotiations. However, the problem with tactics today is the indiscriminate over-use by people and organisations who expect magic results but who don't fully

understand the associated **risks** with tactics.

Unfortunately there is nothing magic about tactics. Well, apart from how quickly they can make trust vanish into thin air.

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