

IDEAS

Inside**IDEAS** > Ask Alan Page 38 > Lessons Learned Page 40 > Next Gen Retailing Page 42

THE TECH BEAT | BY JAMES HARDING

SELLING WITH SUBTLETY

I'll never forget Director Jim Hoover standing at the head of Steinway's conference table, looking me dead in the eye and reminding me that, no matter how long I've been in sales or how good I think I am, I can always improve. I can always learn more — and I can always make more money. It was a valuable lesson, one that has driven me to challenge myself and my methods every day since.

In my career, I have had the pleasure of meeting and working with a number of talented salespeople from all over the U.S. Each taught me something valuable, but there is one thing they all had in common: a mastery of body language.

MAKING THE MOVES

The best salespeople exude a calm confidence simply by standing straight with their shoulders relaxed and shifted slightly to the back, their heads held high and their smiles reaching all the way into their eyes. They warmly look their clients in the eyes and adjust their speech patterns to match the folks they are working with. They keep their arms relaxed at their sides when they aren't using their hands. Some even



Find room to improve your sales approach with body language

position themselves to the side of their clients instead of having a head-on conversation to present themselves as allies rather than adversaries. Everything they do is practiced, deliberate and professional. It's harder than it looks — I still spend time in front of a mirror trying not to cross my arms or put my hands in my pockets.

Clearly, these sales professionals have mastered their own body language, but they haven't

stopped there. They spend extra time asking questions, making jokes and sharing short personal stories designed to build a connection with their clients. With each comment, they examine their client's body language, looking for subtle hints that the client is relaxed and engaged in the conversation. If they see any tightness in their client's face or jaw, pursed lips or furrowed eyebrows, they back up and try something new. Everything they say or do is designed to maintain a confident yet comfortable conversation, and their clients love them for it.

I have also seen salespeople fail miserably at this. One spent all of her time sharing intimate personal stories about her marriage that left her clients shocked, uncomfortable and embarrassed for her. Another one droned on, reciting all of his vast knowledge and experience, unaware that his exhausted clients were looking for an exit. Another was such a great player that he treated every sales demo like a concert (while his understandably intimidated customers politely thanked him and left). One was so timid that her clients guided her around the store, learned nothing of

value and walked out leaving an oblivious salesperson with no recourse. Each interaction was painful to watch.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Sales is a difficult job, especially for people with the necessary egos. Being good requires years of practice, a keen and active awareness, a thick — yet pliable — skin and a calm sense of control. We can never let our knowledge, insecurities, experiences or skills get in the way of a true (and profitable) relationship with our clients. They depend on us to be professionals, and we can't afford to disappoint them.

Are you ready to make more money? Why not practice your sales demo in front of a mirror or roleplay with your co-workers and share feedback? It's hard to listen to people criticize our technique or offer us suggestions, especially when their experience doesn't match our own. But if we can learn to master subtle selling, we'll close more sales and make more money. Isn't that our primary goal? **MI**

James Harding is the new director of sales and marketing for the Riverton Piano Company, a social media expert, web designer, pianist and avid blogger. Email him at jamesh@pianoshowroom.com.