



Put Your Best Pitch Forward!

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In New York City, business professionals can go to a different networking event every night of the week. We're all there to "pitch" ourselves, our products and/or our services. It's a terrific way to meet prospective clients, leads and contacts. But how many of us take the time to hone our pitching skills?

My son is a baseball pitcher. He plays baseball for the Ivy League. In addition to his team coaches, he sees a pitching coach regularly to improve his conditioning, develop his muscles, and more importantly, to develop his muscle memory. His pitching coach makes him go through the motions of his delivery over and over again. Once my son masters a particular motion for a particular pitch, he adds a new pitch to his repertoire.

"Sales Pitch", "Elevator Pitch" "30-second Pitch"
It's no coincidence that the word "pitch" is used to describe selling yourself or your product. Sales pitching like baseball pitching, is a talent not to be underestimated.

For those of you who know baseball, you know that there are many pitches to choose from. The pitch you choose to use in a game depends a lot on the batter you're facing. Most pitchers learn to throw a fastball first. It's the easiest to learn, the most effective and the foundation for all other pitches. If you've got a terrific fast ball, you can probably end up striking out a good percentage of the batters you face.

Most of us learn the equivalent of the fast ball when we learn to pitch ourselves or our products. It's direct, quick and usually "gets over the plate". But like good baseball players, our listeners have gotten used to the "fastball" pitch and it often loses some of its effectiveness. That's why it's important to learn to read your (client/listener) and add new pitches to your pitching repertoire. Here is a brief description of three different pitches and how and when you might use them.

FASTBALL - In baseball it is the most common pitch used. It relies on its speed and sometimes its movement to fool the batter into swinging and missing.

- A Fastball sales pitch is your typical straightforward pitch. It's great to use at job interviews and sales meetings.

- It tells your listener - who you are, what you do, why you're great/unique at what you do and asks them to take action.
- Like baseball's fastball pitch, it's very serviceable and everyone should have one under their belt.

CHANGE UP - in baseball this is slower than the fastball and therefore unexpected. The batter thinks it's a fastball and swings either too early, or too late.

- A Changeup sales pitch is a pitch that might take a little more time. The change up is a great choice if you sense your listener is leery of being railroaded.
- To create a Changeup: instead of jumping into a typical, "Hi my name is...." structure, begin with an attention getting technique like a question or interesting fact. This has the effect of slowing down the pace of the pitch. And it's a great way to engage your listener and encourage them to take a swing.

CURVE BALL (a form of Breaking Ball) - The curveball or breaking ball in baseball is a pitch that changes direction on its way to the batter. Instead of going straight like the fast ball, it curves up or down or side to side.

- A lot of times in presenting ourselves we may start with a fastball or a change up and suddenly our listener gives us a visual or verbal cue that they are not engaged. Throw them a curve.
- Change your vocal tone, pitch or volume use humor, tell a story or give an example. Or better yet, start asking about them, their business or their needs. This unexpected turn will bring the listener's attention back and may just help you close the sale.

The pitcher in professional baseball is arguably the most important player in the game. Similarly, skilled sales pitching is one of the most important parts of your business. Like a dedicated baseball pitcher, it's important to learn new pitches and to practice the delivery of all your pitches. Let me know if I can help.