



chapter one

Selling Ideas: How Woo Works

You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across,
your ideas won't get you anywhere . . .

—Former Chrysler Chairman and CEO Lee Iacocca

To just invent something and have a great idea is a lot of
work, but it is not enough. [You need to know] how to get
people excited.

—Larry Page, Cofounder of Google Inc.

We once met a thirty-one-year-old technology manager on the West Coast named Kumar Chandra. He moved to the United States from India several years ago to work for a major pharmaceutical firm. With an advanced degree in computer science, he was an expert on improving the information systems at his company. But he could not get support for his initiatives. After telling us a sad story about how a coworker had stolen his best proposal and gotten it adopted, Kumar summed up his problem with stunning simplicity: “I just can't seem to sell my ideas.”

Kumar is not alone.

Companies sell their products and services. People in organizations sell their ideas.

Your success depends on how well you sell.

The president and chairman of the board of a large bank in the Northeast once was asked how he thought about his job. “I am a salesman,” he replied. “I have to sell policy changes and new ideas. I

sell to the board of directors, the stockholders, the branch managers, the tellers, the cleaning crew, and the customers all at the same time.”

But selling ideas—especially the kind of ideas that make organizations work—is a skill shrouded in mystery. Classical geniuses from Aristotle to Cicero considered idea selling (they called it “rhetoric”) to be one of the most critical subjects an educated person could learn. Yet two thousand years later, most schools have stopped teaching it. Rhetoric is seen as a dark art practiced by the wizards of political spin, and selling is viewed as something people can learn once they start work.

Yet out in the real world, there are few sales classes teaching the type of selling that would help Kumar. Sales training focuses on buyers and customers—parting people from their money—not pushing initiatives through a dense network of relationships.

Result? This critical part of life’s curriculum, for students at the best business schools as well as for everyone else, is left to the individual. It’s up to you to learn on the fly.

“It’s Only Seven Letters”

Let’s start with a simple example of what selling an idea looks like.

When the young Sam Walton was trying to figure out what to call his first large discount store in Rogers, Arkansas, one of his key employees, store manager Bob Bogle, had a great idea for a name—“Walmart” (the hyphen in Wal-Mart came later in the company’s history). Walton had started out running a Ben Franklin variety store in Bentonville and eventually turned it into “Walton’s Five and Dime.” Now it was time to come up with a name for Sam’s new big-store concept. Most of the names Walton was considering, like the old Walton’s Five and Dime, had three or four words.

Bob came up with his “Walmart” idea by combining the first syllable from Sam’s last name with a shorthand word for “market.” It was a pretty good idea, but pitching his boss on it was tricky.

Bob figured Sam would be flattered to have a store that alluded, however indirectly, to his name. But Sam Walton did not like to parade his ego. So Bogle decided to sell his idea by appealing to one

of Sam Walton's most fundamental core values: saving money. Listen as Bob Bogle tells his simple story (as recounted in Sam Walton's autobiography *Made in America*):

I scribbled W-A-L-M-A-R-T on the bottom of [a] card, and said [to Sam] "To begin with, there's not as many letters to buy." I had bought the letters that said "Ben Franklin," and I knew how much it cost to put them up and to light them and repair the neon, so I said, "This is just seven letters." He didn't say anything, and I dropped the subject. A few days later I went by to see when we could start setting the fixtures in the building, and I saw that our sign maker . . . already had the W-A-L up there and was headed up the ladder with an M. . . . I just smiled and went on.

Bob Bogle's sale of the name "Walmart" to his boss is as straightforward as idea selling gets. But even this simple example illustrates some basic principles of effective persuasion.

First, Bob had a specific goal: persuade his boss to adopt the "Walmart" name for the new store.

Second, Bob identified the decision maker—Sam Walton—and presented his idea directly to this person.

Third, Bogle drew on his credibility as one of Walton's key employees. You don't need to be a key employee to sell an idea. But you do need to have credibility.

Fourth, Bob Bogle appealed to one of Sam's core interests—a single-minded focus on cost. Low cost was a value that Sam Walton saluted every day, so pitching the "Walmart" idea in terms of cost was exactly the right way to get Sam's attention.

Fifth, Bogle used his knowledge of Walton as a person. Sam solved problems as they came up, so Bob picked his moment to pitch his idea. That moment came during a trip the two men were taking together just days before a sign would be needed to go on the front of the new store. And because the sign was something the public would see, Bob wrote it out for Sam to visualize.

Walton also liked to mull things over. So Bogle resisted the temptation to oversell. He put his justification out there and then stopped talking.

Finally, all of this took place as part of a relationship. Bogle and Walton were working together to solve problems. They trusted each other. So Bob “just smiled and went on” when Sam decided to use the Walmart name. And Walton put Bogle’s story in his autobiography after he became a billionaire. Both men, in short, did very, very well in this relationship. We will be emphasizing the importance of relationships, communication channels, and presentation strategies throughout the book.

With this example in mind, it may be easier to understand what makes selling ideas different. It’s not about tricking people into buying things they do not need. It’s about helping people see things your way—engaging their minds and imaginations, then getting them to take action on the idea you recommend.

How Woo Works: The Four Steps

As the book progresses, you will discover that relationship-based persuasion follows a distinctive, repeatable four-step process that you can master to achieve your influence goals.

- Step 1—*Survey Your Situation*
- Step 2—*Confront the Five Barriers*
- Step 3—*Make Your Pitch*, and
- Step 4—*Secure Your Commitments*.

Below, we trace each of these steps in detail, forecasting what is to come in the chapters ahead.

Step 1: Survey Your Situation (Chapters 2 and 3)

Step 1 requires you to see yourself, your idea, your goals, and your organizational challenges with crystal clarity. What is distinctive about the idea you are trying to sell? What is your idea-selling strategy—whom should you speak with and in what order? What communication preferences and biases will you bring to each persuasion encounter? What level of commitment and purpose can you summon for your idea?

Later in the book we will tell the story of how Charles Lindbergh planned and executed one of the most compelling idea sales of the twentieth century—the first nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927. As you will see, Lindbergh—who had few assets, no plane, and no backers—took particular care with his initial steps in this campaign. The inspiration for the flight came to him one evening while he was flying his mail route between St. Louis and Chicago. He quickly seized on its distinctive quality—he wanted to make the flight alone in a single-engine plane—and became passionately committed to his plan. He then set in motion a careful strategy for turning his idea into reality. Lindbergh studied the social environment in his hometown of St. Louis to determine exactly whom he should approach for support and in what order. And as he approached each person, Lindbergh assessed his own strengths and weaknesses as a persuader and adjusted his style to maximize his chances for making a successful pitch. We will review exactly how and why he succeeded in this historic quest—which illustrates the vital importance of each step in the Woo process.

Step 2: Confront the Five Barriers (Chapters 4, 5, and 6)

Step 2 forces you to consider the obstacles that pose the greatest risks to a successful influence encounter. These are: negative or ambiguous relationships, poor credibility, communication mismatches, hostile belief systems, and conflicting interests. The first two of these barriers relate to how people see you personally. The final three make it harder for people to hear your idea clearly.

Each of the five barriers has the potential to become a valuable asset in your idea pitch if you do your homework well. But, at a minimum, your goal should always be to clear as many of these obstacles as possible out of your path so you give the other person a chance to objectively evaluate the merits of your proposal.

Potential Barrier #1: Relationships. The first potential barrier is often the one that colors all the rest: How will the other person view your relationship to him or her? Will they know you? Like you? Best of all, trust you?

As Bogle's sale of the Walmart name shows, persuasion at work always takes place within a network of relationships. A relationship

with someone, somewhere will be the starting point for putting your idea “in play,” and relationships with and between people you may not even know will often be the end point for getting it adopted. You need a circle of influence, a network of people who know people who know people. And it may be too late to form such a circle when you are ready to make your sale. The relationships must already be in place. The biggest barriers, of course, arise when you face negative or hostile relationships in the pathway of your idea.

Potential Barrier #2: Credibility. Next, you need to think about whether the other person will see you as a credible advocate for your idea. Will they view you as competent? Reliable? Someone with special expertise? This factor explains why trying to manipulate other people does not work when you are selling important ideas.

We have a friend who is the regional sales manager for a large franchise organization. He is fascinated by books that explore the “hidden psychology” of persuasion—the kind of books that promise to make you an expert in “instant influence” so you can close deals “in ninety seconds.”

Our friend learned about the importance of credibility when he tried the “Door in the Face” technique on his boss at raise time. The gambit works (when it does) by making a request that the other party is sure to reject (he slams “the door in your face”). Then you immediately back down to a much more modest suggestion. Your second request looks so reasonable by comparison with the first one that people are more inclined to say “OK.” Research on the “Door in the Face” technique has shown that people raising money for charities can get more ten-dollar donations if they start by asking for fifty dollars and shifting quickly down to ten dollars (after the target donor says “no”) than they can by asking for ten dollars in the first place.

Our friend decided he would try this with his boss. He asked for a raise that was three times what anyone in their right mind would have requested. When the boss looked at him in shock, he backed down to the regular raise he had planned to ask for.

The boss was still in shock. “You are being completely unreasonable,” he said. Our friend tried to recover by making a joke of it, but nobody was laughing. Our friend got no raise because he had, temporarily at least, lost his credibility.

An important part of credibility is character, a point emphasized by the ancients who studied rhetoric and persuasion. Aristotle, in particular, underlined character—one’s *ethos*—as the antidote to becoming overly focused (as the Greek “sophists” eventually became) on pandering to particular audiences. He argued that character was the most important persuasion tool of them all.

So will we. If you want to be truly persuasive within your organization, you must develop your own ethos and endorse character as a value. This attitude was summed up well by the banking mogul J. P. Morgan in a short interchange he had with a congressional committee in the early 1900s. The committee was investigating possible financial manipulations in a deal Morgan was associated with (the committee eventually exonerated him). In the course of the hearings, the following exchange took place:

Committee Member: Is not commercial credit based primarily on money or property?

J. P. Morgan: No, sir. The first thing is character.

Committee Member: Before money or property?

J. P. Morgan: Before money or anything else. Money cannot buy it.

Chapter 10 will investigate the issue of character in more detail.

Potential Barrier #3: Communication Mismatches. With both the relationship and credibility issues addressed, you are ready to encounter the third barrier: your audience’s preferred style or channel of communication. Your natural enthusiasm and humor may be effective for selling an idea to your marketing group. But the company’s straitlaced executive committee may not appreciate that style. You may need to adjust. Chapter 5 explores this critical variable.

For example, Jeffrey Katzenberg, the legendary media mogul who founded the studio DreamWorks and then took it public, once made this sort of mistake. Like many in Hollywood, he is a natural-born user of visionary influence, wooing audiences with enthusiasm, snap, and passion. But on this occasion, he got carried away with his own message and forgot to see it from his audience’s point of view. It was a costly lesson.

One of the first movies DreamWorks launched after going public was a cartoon feature called *Madagascar*. Following his usual style, Katzenberg aggressively hyped the film in the media. When the production met DreamWorks' projections by pulling in \$47 million at domestic theaters over its opening weekend, everyone inside the company was pleased. But DreamWorks' stock price took a dive. Why? Katzenberg had failed to recognize that, as CEO of a public company, he was now speaking to an audience of stock analysts. Addressing these number-crunchers required a prudent rather than a passionate approach. They read Katzenberg's prelaunch hype as a signal that the movie would hit a much higher number. As one analyst explained the stock-price dip, "Credibility has not been helped by 'talking up' *Madagascar* only to have the film [merely] meet expectations." Katzenberg's blunder was costly for his stockholders, and he quickly learned to adopt a more audience-sensitive persuasion style (in this case a data-driven, reason-and-logic mode) in public statements about future films.

Potential Barrier #4: Belief Systems. If your organization is committed to diversity in hiring, a proposal to save money by focusing only on Ivy League universities during recruiting season will be a tough sale. Asking people to buy an idea that violates one of their basic values or beliefs—or the written standards and policies that sometimes give concrete expression to these beliefs—puts people in an uncomfortable position: either they buy your idea and give up the core value or reject your idea and keep their value.

They will usually find it easier to reject your idea. Effective idea selling, therefore, requires you to position your idea as consistent with (or better yet, furthering) your audience's important beliefs and values. Bogle's pitch for "Walmart" saluted his company's core mission of "low cost." Chapter 5 takes up this subject.

Potential Barrier #5: Interests and Needs. Fifth and finally, effective idea sellers focus on the other party's interests. For example, when Napoleon was a young officer in the French army, he established an artillery battery at the siege of Toulon in such an exposed position that his superiors told him he would never get soldiers to man it. Had he ordered his men to take on this duty, his superiors would probably have been right. It was close to being a suicide

mission. But Napoleon showed his skill as a persuader by finding and appealing to a fundamental interest—his soldiers’ pride and their desire to be seen as men of courage.

He created a large placard to put on the battery. On it, the following words were printed in bold letters: **THE BATTERY OF THE MEN WITHOUT FEAR**. Instead of shying from a life-threatening assignment, Napoleon’s men competed for the honor of being known as the members of this fearless band. The position was manned day and night.

As this story shows, understanding what is really motivating other people opens up a host of options for influencing them. It is also important to pay attention to interests because conflicts related to control over resources, credit for initiatives, and career advancement can be the source of political disputes. The more people who have interests that conflict with your idea, the more potential enemies you have.

Step 3: Make Your Pitch (Chapters 7 and 8)

Your insights into the five potential barriers discussed above will give you valuable information, helping you gain the perspective you need to frame your ideas in the most effective way. This sets the stage for the third step in the Woo process—making your pitch.

The pitch is an especially important part of selling ideas because there are few “impulse buys” in the market for ideas. Careful deliberation—or at least the appearance of careful deliberation—is the norm. This raises a question: How do rationality, emotion, and intuition balance out when people buy an idea? What exactly went through Sam Walton’s mind when he decided to take Bogle’s advice and name his store Walmart? Which factor dominated: his thrift or his ego?

Research confirms that rationality is critical in the idea-buying process, but not in the way you would expect. For important, complex decisions, such as whether to take a new job, hire a new employee, or select one of several competing business strategies, people arrive at better decisions when they load up on as much data and reflection as possible, and then set all that aside and decide with their gut feelings.

Some great decision makers have confirmed this.

Andy Grove, former CEO of Intel: “Drive deep into the data, then trust your gut.”

Alfred Sloan, CEO of General Motors in the 1920s and founder of the modern corporation: “The final act of business judgment is . . . intuitive.”

Akio Morita, cofounder and former CEO of Sony Corporation: “[I]nstead of putting one fact together with another, [the best managers] grasp a general idea as a whole . . . in making decisions. This [is better] than one can get only through careful reasoning.”

Malcolm Gladwell’s book *Blink* summarizes the research on how this process works. The unconscious, which is the source of most new, creative ideas, also seems to do a better job than the conscious mind of processing lots of data, finding the patterns in the data, and folding all those patterns into our underlying preferences and experience to come up with a wise decision. Thus, however long and involved the process of thinking about a problem may be, the final act of deciding seems to reside in the realm of intuition.

But that is not the end of the story. Once they make their decision, people have to explain it to themselves and, more important, to others. And it may not be good enough to say “because that is what felt right, all things considered.” People need good, solid reasons to justify important decisions, even if, truth be told, they are not sure exactly why they shifted from “no” to “yes.”

In other words, people are not just “reasonable,” they are also “rationalizing.” As Benjamin Franklin once said (after deciding as a young man to call off his vegetarian diet), “So convenient a thing it is to be a Reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a Reason for everything one has a mind to do.”

J. P. Morgan once noted that people generally have two reasons for everything they do, “a good reason and the real reason.” A very important part of selling ideas, therefore, is providing your audience with good reasons—both because they *are* good and truly justify what you propose, and because they give your audience ways to explain their decision when their real motives may be either self-serving or hard to articulate. As a part of our treatment of what evidence and

arguments to use in your sales pitch, we will examine how one of the most innovative companies in the world—Google—vets ideas.

We will also give you eight specific techniques you can use to grab and hold your audience's attention in presentating your idea—none of which involve the use of PowerPoint or similar software. The unconscious mind of your audience—which will be making the final decision on your idea—likes things to be clear, memorable, and personal. Thus, how you state your case can be as important as the idea you are selling. Timing matters. Sequencing matters. Stories and metaphors can help. Any device that makes your idea vivid and easy to recall, provided it is acceptable within the corporate culture, facilitates persuasion.

Consider a document called “The Peanut Butter Manifesto,” which showed up recently on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*. The Peanut Butter Manifesto was written by a senior vice president of Yahoo Inc. named Brad Garlinghouse. In it, he pitched his ideas for changing his company's business strategy.

Garlinghouse was in charge of Yahoo's e-mail service and the Yahoo.com home page. At the time he wrote his memo, the company had the most visited Web site in America. But rival Google was catching up fast in terms of Web traffic. Google had also demonstrated more imagination in its Web offerings, better focus in its strategy, and a much better way of making money from online advertising. Meanwhile, Yahoo's share price was down, its revenue growth was slowing, staff members were defecting, and a high-priority project designed to boost online advertising sales was behind schedule. Yet nobody in the top executive suite seemed to be aware that there was a crisis. Garlinghouse had specific ideas for turning the situation at Yahoo around, including a radical restructuring. But he needed to get people's attention.

To sell his ideas, he drafted a four-page memo, gave it the catchy “Peanut Butter Manifesto” title, circulated it to his internal network of contacts, and got his network to bring it to the attention of Yahoo's top decision maker, CEO Terry Semel. The memo is not exactly Shakespeare, but it grabbed attention within the world of Yahoo because it spoke in “Yahoo-ese” and presented its thesis in a compelling way.

The memo is too long to reprint here. But we'll break down the parts in terms of Woo.

First, Garlinghouse, like Bob Bogle, had a clear goal. He wanted to light a fire under senior management so they would see Yahoo's business situation in a new light and start taking action to fix its many urgent problems. Everything about the Peanut Butter Manifesto focused on this goal.

Second, he took pains in the Manifesto to establish his credibility within the Yahoo culture. When you don't have a personal relationship with the decision maker, you need to establish credibility in other ways. One good way is to demonstrate your loyalty to the organization and its goals.

The opening lines of Garlinghouse's memo positioned him as a Yahoo Guy, through and through. "Three and a half years ago, I enthusiastically joined Yahoo," he wrote. "It has been a profound experience . . . I proudly bleed purple and yellow [Yahoo's corporate colors] every day! And like so many people, I love this company." His loyalty ran even deeper than most: "I'm proud to admit that I shaved a Y [on] the back of my head," he went on. "I want to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem."

Next, he engaged his audience with a crisp summary of the problem as he saw it using an easy-to-grasp metaphor—peanut butter. "All is not well," he wrote. "We lack a focused, cohesive vision for our company. We want to do everything and be everything—to everyone. . . . We are scared to be left out. . . . We are separated into silos that far too frequently don't talk to each other. And when we do talk, it isn't to collaborate on a clearly focused strategy, but rather to argue and fight about ownership, strategies, and tactics."

The company's current strategy, he lamented, amounted to "spreading peanut butter across the myriad opportunities that continue to evolve in the online world. The result: a thin layer of investment spread across everything we do and thus we focus on nothing in particular."

"I hate peanut butter," he went on. "We all should."

After presenting this and several other, related problems, Garlinghouse's Manifesto proposed three specific solutions: focusing the strategy by selling or closing some noncore business units (getting rid of the "peanut butter"), restoring accountability in leadership positions (re-

quiring that “heads must roll”), and radically reorganizing the firm (meaning that Yahoo had to “blow up the matrix” and “reduce headcount by 15–20%”). He included details for each of his proposals.

Finally, he acknowledged that he did not have all the answers—another way to gain credibility when you are not known as an expert—but asserted that doing anything at this point was better than continuing with the status quo. “The plan here is not perfect,” he concluded. “It is, however, FAR better than no action at all.” He invited others to come up with better ideas if they agreed with his peanut butter thesis.

We do not know anything about Yahoo’s strategy problems. But we like Garlinghouse’s way of selling his change initiative to the company. He made his ideas memorable. The image of peanut butter spreading thin is something anyone can visualize. And his care in getting the memo to the right people, establishing his credibility, embracing the Yahoo culture, explaining the problem, identifying its causes, and arguing vigorously (but modestly) is a model of Woo in action.

Moreover, the memo had its desired effect. Semel appointed Garlinghouse to a major task force to review Yahoo’s strategy and make recommendations on what to do. And a few months later, Yahoo announced major changes—including the departure of its chief operating officer and the reorganization of the company into three operating units. Announcing the changes, Semel said he hoped the new structure would “increase accountability, . . . reduce bottlenecks, and speed decision-making.” Not long after that, Semel himself departed and was replaced by one of Yahoo’s founders, Jerry Yang.

Step 4: Secure Your Commitments (Chapter 9)

The final step in the Woo process completes the cycle by taking you from the agreement stage to the concrete commitments you need to turn your ideas into action. Just because a decision maker says yes does not mean your job is over. Perhaps your initiative challenges one of the organization’s core values. If so, your proposal may arouse political opposition. Perhaps your ideas run counter to an important constituency’s interests. Members of that group may try to protect their turf.

Consider the Peanut Butter Manifesto. Why do you think this document was leaked to the *Wall Street Journal*? The circumstances suggest it may have been a political move by Brad's supporters (or Brad himself) because it brought millions of stock analysts, consultants, and Yahoo investors into this idea sale. Public companies do not like having their internal deliberations aired to the general public, so this was risky. But publication of the Manifesto gave momentum to Garlinghouse's ideas within the company and political protection to its author. When you are advocating that 15 to 20 percent of your fellow employees be laid off and that the heads of other senior managers "roll," you are sure to make some powerful enemies. The publicity in the *Wall Street Journal* assured that Brad's opponents within Yahoo would have a very difficult time launching a secret purge to get rid of him. And the investment community was now watching to see what would come out of Garlinghouse's task force—whether, in effect, Yahoo would stop eating peanut butter. The leaking of this memo to the press could have been the final step in this idea sale.

A Word on Authority

Authority plays an important background role in almost every story you will read in this book. But there is no separate chapter that deals with it. We thought we should explain why.

A Nobel Prize-winning expert on business organizations, Herbert A. Simon, once explained that "of all the modes of influence, authority is the one that chiefly distinguishes the behavior of individuals as participants in organizations, from their behavior outside such organizations. It is authority that gives an organization its formal structure." Research confirms Simon's insight. Even in an era of "flat" organizations and collaborative teamwork, formal authority serves as the basis for more influence moves at work than any other influence foundation. People in higher positions tell people in lower positions to "just do it." And they do. So isn't this the real secret of success at work: get authority, then give orders?

Authority is good. Authority gives you credibility. But authority alone isn't enough to sell important ideas because big ideas always have

multiple stakeholders. And those stakeholders also have authority. Think of a chessboard. Each piece has a unique position on the board and special moves it can make; you need them all to win the game.

The formal roles people occupy are the starting positions for a complex dance of organizational influence. Each role offers influence options, constraints, opportunities, and risks. Research shows that an average of twenty people inside an organization are involved in the approval of most important new ideas. And each of those twenty people will likely have some effect on the final outcome. Even relatively simple ideas require input and approval from an average of eight people. Thus, although someone in a high position may eventually be called upon to make the “go–no go” decision on a new idea, it is rare that authority alone dictates the shape, size, and scope of a new initiative.

Some people may think of their authority as a kind of club that they swing, driving people toward the solutions they prefer. We all know the office bullies. And they get away with that attitude some of the time, with some of their staff. But the truth is usually more complex. People in high positions “possess” authority *if and only if* the people in the lower positions cede it (implicitly or explicitly) to them. In general, the people who forget that they have only as much authority as others are willing to give them are the ones who make the most mistakes in selling ideas.

Remember what the bank president said about his job: “I am a salesman.” Of course, he can force his ideas down people’s throats and sometimes he probably has to do that. But that’s a failure story, not a success story. He succeeds by selling his ideas.

In fact, the higher you go in a corporate hierarchy, the less position alone determines what ideas get adopted and the more relationship and persuasion skills determine what gets done.

The Ideal: A Culture of Selling Ideas

A large body of evidence suggests that creating a culture built on the foundation of selling ideas—rather than authority—is a competitive advantage for firms that can do it. In one of the most influential management books ever written, *My Years with General Motors*, GM leader Alfred Sloan described his dedication to selling ideas (and the birth of the modern corporation) this way:

The practice of selling major proposals is an important feature of General Motors' management. Any proposal must be sold to central management and if it affects other divisions it must be sold to them as well. Sound management also requires that the central office should in most cases sell its proposals to the divisions, which it does through the policy groups and group executives. The selling approach provides an important safeguard . . . against ill-considered decisions. It assures that any basic decision is made only after thorough consideration by all parties concerned. . . . The manager who would like to operate on a hunch will usually find it hard to sell his ideas to others on this basis. But, in general, whatever sacrifice might be entailed in ruling out a possibly brilliant hunch is compensated for by the better-than-average results which can be expected from a policy that can be strongly defended against well-informed and sympathetic criticism.

A final example from Wal-Mart's early history provides a glimpse of what a corporate culture committed to selling ideas looks like. Wal-Mart has always been known for its cutting-edge use of technology to track inventory and manage supplier relations. But for years, people at the company thought Sam was opposed to these high-tech solutions. "All these guys [at Wal-Mart] loved to talk about how I never wanted any of this technology, and how they had to lay down their life to get it," Walton later wrote. But the truth was otherwise. "I did want it, I knew we needed it . . . but I always questioned everything. It was important to me to make them think that maybe the technology wasn't as good as they thought it was, or maybe it really wasn't the end-all they promised it would be. It seems to me they try just a little harder to check into things a little bit closer if they think they might have a chance to prove me wrong. If I hadn't wanted the technology, I wouldn't have sprung the money loose to pay for it."

Contrast this with one of the most famous—or infamous—missteps in marketing history: the introduction of New Coke in 1985. Its champion, CEO Roberto Goizueta, might have saved the Coca-Cola Company a lot of money and embarrassment if he had encouraged an open debate about replacing the one-hundred-year-old formula for the carbonated brown drink that consumers had grown to love with an almost religious fervor.

Instead, Goizueta, alarmed that Coke appeared to be losing the high-profile “Cola Wars” to arch-rival Pepsi, made a virtually unilateral decision to retire the old formula for a new concoction that was sweeter and less fizzy. “The best just got better,” he declared at a news conference in New York. Others begged to differ—at first in secret, and then later in a torrent of angry letters and enraged phone messages. At an early tasting, a bottler’s wife took a sip and exclaimed: “Goddamn! This’ll *never* sell!”

Pepsi CEO Roger Enrico recalls first sipping New Coke with a bunch of his senior executives: “God knows how they did it, but they had blown it.”

Consumer reactions were almost universally negative. Seventy-eight days after the introduction of New Coke, the old version, under the name Coca-Cola Classic, came roaring back. New Coke disappeared into oblivion, becoming a novelty offering that only one or two bottlers continued to carry.

Goizueta had violated a basic law of business: listen to the customer. Because Coke lacked a culture of selling ideas, the boss was free to dictate this decision without the benefit of an open debate where people could set aside job titles and speak their minds. This enabled Goizueta to make one of the most spectacular mistakes in business history.

Conclusion

The Art of Woo provides tools for a critically important activity in professional life: selling your ideas to people within the context of ongoing, important relationships. If you want to be a player in your organization, a successful partner with your customers or suppliers, a leader in your community, or even a good parent, you need to woo people to your point of view by putting your ideas across in convincing, relationship-friendly ways.

This chapter introduced the basic concept of selling ideas. You saw how this skill can advance your goals in both simple and complex situations. At one end of the scale, Bob Bogle used a direct approach to pitch his boss, Sam Walton, on his idea for naming Sam’s new store “Walmart.” At the other end, Brad Garlinghouse at Yahoo wrote a carefully structured, politically sophisticated memo, the Peanut Butter Manifesto, to sell his agenda for changing Yahoo’s corporate strategy.

Regardless of the context for your idea sale, the four-step Woo process, which we will elaborate in the chapters to come, constitutes the best practice for this art.

These steps are:

Step 1: *Survey Your Situation*, that is

- Forge and polish your idea,
- Map the decision process you face by understanding the social networks within the organization,
- Assess your persuasion styles, and
- Confirm your own level of passion for the proposal.

Step 2: *Confront the Five Barriers*, including

- Negative relationships,
- Poor credibility,
- Communication mismatches,
- Contrary belief systems, and
- Conflicting interests.

Then transform these five barriers into assets.

Step 3: *Make Your Pitch* by

- Presenting solid evidence and arguments and
- Using devices to give your idea a personal touch.

Step 4: *Secure Your Commitments* by dealing with politics at both

- The individual level and
- Within the organization.

To start using this process, you must master the main influence channels people use at work—and gain a sense of your own biases in communicating on these channels. Are you a soft-spoken relationship manager or a hard-driving task master?

Woo starts with a look in the mirror. You'll find one in the next chapter.