



Learning from Lionel Logue

SPOILER ALERT:

If you haven't seen the Geoffrey Rush/Colin Firth movie *The King's Speech* yet, then I recommend you go and see it and be aware that this article will disclose its characters and plots.

The King's Speech has some great lessons for us in how to sell as well as consult and advise senior level clients.

This true story revolves around two key characters, King George VI and Lionel Logue, an unorthodox Australian Speech Therapist.

The King reluctantly ascends the throne after his brother runs away with Mrs. Simpson (you remember the story or were you staring at that cute girl/boy in class when this piece of history was being taught)

The King has an awful stammer which is not a great presentation technique when you're about to galvanise the nation with your words to face the onslaught of World War 2.

After feeble and failed attempts by so called 'experts' to remedy the King's stammer, he is dragged by his wife (the late Queen Mother) to see the odd Antipodean, Lionel Logue.

Does any of this sound familiar so far? Companies that have tried in vain to solve important problems despite numerous attempts with four or five suppliers, suddenly arrive at your office. Now what do you do?

Here's what Lionel Logue does

1. He insists on a peer to peer relationship

Despite the obvious disparity in their status, Lionel insists on meeting at his office, not the King's, establishes equality including using King George's nickname 'Bertie' and sets the rules for the speech therapy engagement. He sets the rules because he is trying to solve a problem, not acquiesce to a master/slave relationship.

When you have C Level clients, they want assuredness, not fake rapport, or toadying. Paradoxically they want someone who clearly knows what they're doing, is confident in their company's ability and avoids vagueness and mitigated language.

2. He delves deeper than anyone might ordinarily dare with a King.

Lionel needs to understand the source of the stammer before he can address it and starts asking the King about his relationships with his family when he was teased and how he felt growing up with a stammer.

C Level clients have an enormous history behind them before they reach that level. They have succeeded and failed in projects. They have been promoted and discarded, worked in good cultures and bad and have built an entire bank of prejudice and favoritism accordingly. A professional sales/consulting person would benefit greatly from understanding this at a deeper level before pitching ideas based on guesses or cursory information in a CRM such as: 'Detail guy/loves big brands'. You can ask more questions in more depth than you think.

3. He allows the King to vent and to start changing when he is ready.

At one of their sessions, Lionel encourages the King to swear out loud.' Buggers and F-Bombs' fly around the room and it gives the King a chance to release as he could never do in royal circles. It is also an important part of the treatment.

Many of our senior clients have a 'royal' existence. Their bosses want results, their staff want resources, appreciation and recognition and there are always one or two others looking to overthrow the king and ascend the throne.

This may be contrary to much of the earlier sales doctrines, but if you provide clients with a sounding board and allow your senior clients a chance to vent, however irrelevant or tangential it is to your product or service, it will pay back in spades in terms of insights and rapport.

In addition, senior clients will change when they're ready. Old closing techniques are often passé, (except in transactional selling) and you may have to leave them alone or just be there when they're ready and trust that your expertise and advice will be sought after at the right time. Too many sales people still struggle with pursuing the unpursuable, simply because their pipeline is too short. Letting go is often a real sign of sales maturity.

In the end, the King delivers a speech which is unhesitating and befitting a leader. Lionel, a commoner, becomes a loyal friend of the King and is awarded the Commander of the Victorian Order (CVO).

Now, which of your royal clients will give you a CBE for (Consulting Behaviour Excellence)

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