Develop Your Pitch

No, my SCORE column hasn’t changed to thinking about baseball today. I want to share with you a business planning concept that I will be using in the next few weeks with a local community organization. The ultimate goal of this group is to have a business plan that will include strategies for their future. You see, they have been so busy dealing with the day to day issues and concerns (that are always important) and haven’t spent time on looking at the future and developing strategies to help them go where they want to be five years from now. One of the first steps in this process that I will share with them is to start with what they want for the future and develop a “pitch” about those dreams so that they can start to have discussions internally and start to look at potential community partners for getting where they want to be.

I remember something that Erika Napoletano said about a pitch. (she is a business columnist that heads a brand strategy and entrepreneurial coaching firm.) She put it very simply. “Pitches—they’re inroads to cash or key partnerships. And you need to build a killer pitch to get your message heard. But what makes for a killer pitch? It comes down to storytelling.”

At the core, great pitches tell stories. They put the right people on the edge of their seats, so they're asking for more and hungry to be characters in your story’s next chapter. Great pitches, like great stories, get people to ask what’s next, to invest, to sign up for your mailing list, to buy the next three services that you will be rolling out.

Amazing pitches inspire action. To help you craft a great pitch, I will share with you what Napoletano learned when she interviewed professionals who are in the business of helping people and their ideas to thrive in the right environments:

**Be Clear**

Have you noticed how great speakers deliver an hour-long talk with a *single* overall theme? Talented storytellers know the importance of a clear theme, capturing the audience's attention from the get-go and a concise through-line. Establish that through-line on your pitch's page one. Ask yourself, “How do I want people to feel when the last word of my pitch comes out of my mouth?” and build your pitch around creating that feeling. Be clear about why you’re here, why your audience is here and hint at what they can expect around the bend (surprises welcome).
If you want to do a great pitch, make sure you are showing and not telling. You want your audience to form the conclusion just before you give the punch line rather than have them read the punch line on the screen and then watch you try to support it. So show them the magic, rather than simply tell them what you want them to think.

**Be Vulnerable**

Great storytellers create characters we fall in love with. They have problems (and we relate). Pitches solve problems. So go ahead and be human—be that character we want to fall in love with. People buy you before they buy anything from you, so don’t be afraid to let your you shine through. Don’t be the guy who edits all of the human out of his pitch until it’s all business. That just makes an exceptionally boring pitch.

Once the audience understands who you are, why you’re different and why they should pay attention to what you’re doing, it's time to open up. Help them see you. Get personal. Be real. When the ego tells you something’s too revealing, too raw—it means you just said something interesting. People fall in love with interesting.”

**Be Necessary**

There’s no story that hasn’t been told before—just new variations with unexpected twists and turns. A great pitch must establish your inarguable difference. Here’s the place to talk about your team, your experiences, your networks, and your talents—all the reasons someone would be an idiot to not want to be a character in your next chapter. You’ve already been clear (they know what you’re pitching), you’ve opened up and shown why you matter. Now, you’re sealing the deal with the change you, your team and your audience’s support can create.

Answer questions like, how does my idea make life better for people or businesses? Why will this matter in 10 years? Why me, when there is surely already someone else playing in this sandbox?

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Dean L. Swanson  
Southeast Minnesota SCORE  
c/o Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce  
220 South Broadway, Suite 100  
Rochester, MN 55904  
www.seminnesota.score.org/  
*Dean is a volunteer SCORE Mentor and District Director of SCORE Minnesota*