

In Sales and Business You Do Whatever You Have to Do to Win

Recently Shauna Miller of the Bahamas won the women's 400 meters at the Rio Olympics by diving over the finish line. Some say she fell, others say she dove, but either way, she won, as it is legal to fall, dive, or do whatever you have to in order to get over the finish line first. Still, some people cried "foul" because, to them, this didn't seem fair. This situation, Deflategate, and other examples raise the question of right and wrong, and fair and unfair when it comes to winning in sports. What about when it comes to winning in sales and business? Is there a gray area? Is there a line somewhere that we don't cross? Or is selling in the same category as love and war where "all's fair"?

The Rules for Pushing the Envelope when Competing

Rule 1: Know the Rules and Laws Intimately

You do whatever you need to do to win as long as it is legal and ethical. Because of this it is very important to have a complete understanding of the rules and laws. I find that people who say "that's not fair" when a competitor uses a creative but legal tactic against them to win, simply weren't aware of the tactic and would have been the first to use it had they known. I also find that many people incorrectly interpret rules and laws as an excuse for not stepping out of their comfort zone or going above and beyond. You must use all rules and laws at your disposal to win. Shauna knew it was legal to dive, so she did, and she won.

You also need to know what isn't in the rule book that you might be able to use to your advantage. For example, when I was eight years old, my best friend David and I played minor-league baseball. One day, when I was the pitcher and he was the catcher, David, who is now a sports announcer, and even at 8 knew more about sports than most adults, had the bright idea to intentionally walk the other team's super-star player. He called for time-out, marched out to the mound and said to me, "John, let's walk this guy. When I stand up and step off to the side, just throw the ball to me." He did, and I did, and after the first pitch the coach from the opposing team erupted and came flying out of the dugout screaming and yelling that "we couldn't do that." The coaches and umpires, unable to find any rule against it in the rule book, allowed us to intentionally walk the batter, but just this one time.

Another example came when I was in Cub Scouts. The highlight of that experience was winning the Pinewood Derby. I won by knowing the maximum weight for a car was 5 ounces, a little something about aerodynamics, and the fact that graphite would help my wheels turn with the least friction. Okay, correction, my dad knew all that. In any case, we crafted the car for aerodynamics, my dad filled the cockpit with clay, bolts, and nuts until we were at the maximum weight, and I put graphite on the nails holding the wheels... and WE won. I remember looking up the rules to identify the maximum weight and whether or not it said anything about graphite: 5 ounces, and nothing on graphite, so we used it. Know the rules and the laws and be resourceful

without crossing ethical or legal lines. Oh, and surround yourself with smart people like David and my dad.

Rule 2: Tell Horror Stories Related to the Competition

One of the first rules of sales is that you NEVER bad mouth the competition. I agree. This is not the same as bad-mouthing the competition. You're going to tell stories about bad results of some of their common practices, not attack them personally. You're going to use these stories when a customer is in danger, or you are about to lose a major account and you are trying to save it. In these situations, the gloves come off and everything is legal. You're looking for situations in which customers have been hurt by something the competition did or overlooked. For example, three years ago a friend switched his insurance and saved \$300. He was told it was exactly the same policy, the new company was simply less money. After he had a serious motorcycle accident, he found out it *wasn't* the same. The new company had an exclusion so he wasn't covered under his umbrella policy when he was on his motorcycle.

The key here is to raise a reasonable doubt. You have to show the prospect the potential pain to going with the competition. Is there something that can hurt them like in the story above? If so, tell a story of someone who got bit by their mistake. If you've been in your business for any length of time, you have some solid stories of people who got hurt by the competition in one way or another. If you don't personally have stories, go to others who have been in your business a while that have good stories. Oh, and if you catch the competition outright lying, let the prospect know and have them get the lie in writing to cover their butt.

Rule 3: Sell on Price

The last thing you want to do is outright cut your price. Typically if you are dropping price you are also reducing services or removing options or extras. That said, as an exception, you can drop price as a "last" resort. I remember presenting a new bank branch proposal to a Senior V.P. and he said, "If you can knock \$1500 dollars off, I'll do it." Considering it was a \$165,000 order, I said, "Done. I just need your approval right here."

Rule 4: Leave No Stone Unturned

You have to go to bed at night knowing you did everything you could to get the sale. If there was something else you could have done, but you didn't, you're always going to wonder if that would have made the difference. So make one more call, spend a little more money making something look better, and put in a little more effort and energy to make sure you do all you can to win.

NOTE: Never outright break a rule or law, get caught in a lie, or otherwise sacrifice your ethics. Also, always err on the side of caution. At the end of the day, all you have is your reputation and character.

John Chapin