



Are You Ready to Move From Talking to Acting?

It's Time to Engage or End the Chatter

Shaquille O'Neal has a unique investment philosophy. First, he is meticulous about doing his due diligence. Early in his investment career, he learned this by studying other successful businesspeople and emulating their business moves. You can't argue that this strategy certainly worked for him as an early investor in Google and others.

His second investment rule is to choose products that help people or where he sees personal value. The Ring system is a perfect example of this philosophy. When he moved to Atlanta, O'Neal installed a Ring system in his home. "It works like a charm. If a fly flies by my camera, it will contact me anywhere in the world," O'Neal said. Another early investment that paid off handsomely when Amazon acquired Ring.

What you do is what you believe. Everything else is just conversation.

In today's business environment, it seems as though a lot of conversation surrounds us. This is perfectly fine, except that all too frequently, it's just that conversation, without intention or action. Are we only poised to act when the chatter is based in a core belief? I think the bigger question is, what impression are we leaving on others in the conversation? Do they believe that we plan to act, when in our mind it was just conversation?

Volume is a big part of the struggle. Aside from the regular, low-grade chatter that is constantly happening all around, there is a lot of other "noise." As a financial or insurance professional, think of everything that is on your plate that isn't financial planning:

- Marketing
- Operations
- Human Capital
- Social Media
- and about a million other things

We can always find something to blame for not moving from conversation to action. The pandemic is one excuse that will plague us for years to come. But when it comes down to it, there are plenty of reasons and excuses we use that keep us talking in circles instead of putting a plan in place.

Take a closer look at your world. It's ok not to do things if they don't fit, but it is time to stop talking about them. At the same time, it's necessary to evaluate if you are leaving people with the impression that you are moving forward. We all have those around us that we've spoken with many times, over many years and were often left with the impression "maybe this will be the time they finally engage." Being direct and saying no when an idea doesn't make sense is actually being very kind to those around you.

What holds you back from doing the things you are always talking about?

- Fear it won't work?
- Is it too expensive? Can you write the check?
- As hard as it can be to admit this, is it your ego? I get it; no one likes failure or to be told no.
- Maybe you don't actually believe in the idea, but you really want to be part of the conversation.
- If you are like me, you may need to talk through the subject with others. I often find that other perspectives can help determine if I really believe, or if I'm still skeptical.

In our world, PT doesn't use Facebook ads to find advisors for our services, thus we don't promote them, nor talk with Facebook reps about using them. However, we regularly employ targeted use of LinkedIn and promote webinars as a successful sales growth technique. This is a small but meaningful example.

Now, the question comes back to your business. Show prospects and, frankly, the rest of the world what you believe through your actions.

I'm not telling you anything that you don't already know when **I assert that the best salespeople sell products and services that they genuinely believe in. It is challenging to sell things you don't like, don't care about, or use.** I believe doing so also chips away at your soul over time. Being disingenuous about what you are promoting and selling can undermine your confidence and ultimately your bottom line.

Value of Honest Conversations

The erosion of honest conversations with prospects and clients can add to the "noise" that drowns out good ideas.

It's become so easy to get lost in the salesperson persona and the end goal of financial gain that it can be challenging to develop honest relationships that lead to genuine, fruitful conversations. Let me be very clear here, this doesn't mean that any of us are lying as we engage potential clients. The idea is more about how open and genuine our interactions are; how we go about showing our human side.

I recently had several conversations with a prospect that looked great on paper. Through a series of meetings, uncovering the potential client's needs and expectations, it became increasingly clear that PT was not a good fit. After thinking through a variety of possibilities, I knew we could not meet this client's needs. I had an open and honest conversation with the company president where I explained how and why PT wasn't right for them now. I was certain that PT could deliver for them, as we do for many others. The reality was the prospect would struggle to convert and succeed with our services.

Several days later, I received a very thoughtful and appreciative email from the company president. He thanked me for my candor and was emphatic that we keep in touch. I feel certain that while PT wasn't right for them now, we will very likely find a way to work together in the future. I can confidently say this because they immediately started working on changing the behaviors needed to not only utilize our services but to start working with business owners on a high level in a few years.

These types of honest conversations rarely happen in sales, and it's unfortunate because they can serve to keep relationships open. Because honesty and genuine relationship building are unusual, the other side of the coin is clients who don't buy because they either don't believe or trust the salesperson, or they are left with a feeling of uncertainty.

Why honesty is good for sales

- Today's prospective clients are savvy. They have a myriad of resources at their fingertips to conduct their own research and analysis. Most of all, they can tell when a salesperson is just telling them something they want to hear versus sharing transparent information. Prospects also aren't typically interested in the features and benefits conversation – they are just as happy to research that piece online.
- When you set accurate expectations, your clients will be much happier with the end product.
- As mentioned in our example above, honesty can open the door to future sales through referrals and satisfied customers looking to you for additional products or services.
- When a salesperson encourages someone not to buy a product or service and explains why, it transforms the dynamic. Frequently the salesperson becomes a trusted consultant or sounding board. Sometimes salespeople don't stop someone from buying or are selective in the information they choose to share.
- Genuineness makes you a better salesperson. You present a more confident, trustworthy salesperson when you believe in the product or service and aren't relying on hyperbole.

None of these ideas are crazy. So why don't salespeople act this way 100% of the time? There are plenty of reasons: pressure, ego, money, sales goals, etc. But the reality is that honest business dealings will be profitable. It may take more time, but it will be time well spent.

Setting aside the status quo to get things done

Perhaps point one – cutting through the conversation and leading to action has you thinking about point two – if you believe in this big idea, the honest conversations with prospects will flow much more easily.

Maybe you've had a hundred great ideas that you've been talking about for a few years. On the other hand, perhaps you've got just a kernel of an idea. Or even further, maybe you've identified a problem but can't find a way to the solution.

Frequently one of the giant walls that stands in our way of taking that idea from talk to implementation is that we are hindered by the age-old “it’s always been done this way” or “this is the only way we know how to do this.”

Recently, I read Malcolm Gladwell’s latest book, *The Bomber Mafia*. Described as “an exploration of how technology and best intentions collide in the heat of war,” the book examines, among other things, the dawn of the United States Air Force.

Following WWI, the United States had the air corps under the umbrella of the Army. On a base in central Alabama, generally unhindered and given free reign, a group of men worked together to develop the Air Force. Their motto was **“We make progress unhindered by custom.”**

Everything they were doing was about being modern and futuristic. They managed to set aside any preconceived notions and rigid structured process. This enabled them to change the entire approach to building airplanes and deciding how, where, and when to use them. Modern airplanes developed very quickly. In WWI, planes didn’t look all that different from the days of the Wright Brothers. By WWII, the US Air Force had modern, to the era, bomber planes.

According to Harold George, one of the originators of the modern Air Force, “no one seemed to understand what we were doing and therefore we got no directives that we were to stop the kind of instruction that we were giving.”

If we look at modern innovators like Elon Musk or Bill Gates, we see the same mindset. They got out of the way of everything that had already come before. They created something new and modern. This is the hallmark of modern, future mentality.

Ideas for developing a new mindset

- Change your environment. This could be anything from taking your laptop to a busy coffee shop to re-engineering your space to allow comfort and creativity. Some of the best and most prolific writers “trick” themselves when writing. They use a computer without an internet connection to limit distractions. Some even go so far as using a typewriter or old-fashioned pen and paper. It can be a mind game to result in outcomes.
- Seek Input. This is NOT about more conversation; it’s about seeking new perspectives. One of the most creative people I know dedicates every Sunday morning to input. They read about other creative people. They watch documentaries that are educational and mind-expanding. Their philosophy is that they expend so much energy putting ideas into the world throughout the week that they can’t be creative without new inputs. Making this time is a priority in their life.
- Daydream. When was the last time you let your mind run wild and free with possibilities? Research has proven that daydreaming regularly leads to creative problem-solving.
- Take that daydreaming one step further. If you aren’t familiar with the idea of Blue Sky Thinking, it’s the idea of brainstorming with no limits. If your thoughts can go anywhere, without the constraints of reality or budget, where would they go? The overall goal is to develop an unexpected connection that could become a real-world implementable idea.

How can you rock the foundation, particularly when the foundation is the status quo? If where you go is where you've always been, it's not necessarily new territory. It might be shinier or incrementally larger, but in the end it's the same.

Is what's holding you back from a new approach because you don't believe in it? Or is it because you are too encumbered by how it's always been done. It's an important question to answer and certainly one that can be the tipping point between success and failure.



About the Author

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