

# Ouch!

What can you do when your pitch goes wrong?

By

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*I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games.*

*26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed.*

*I've failed over and over and over again in my life.*

*And that is why I succeed.*

- Michael Jordan

A few months ago I received a call from a commercial director in L.A. One of the top guys in the world in his field, he was not satisfied with his pitch-to-purchase conversion ratio. In fact, his pitching wasn't scoring the business he wanted more often than not and his self-confidence was taking a serious blow. Whatever the problem was, it certainly wasn't his skill as a director. His reputation for delivering his client's vision was stellar. So what was keeping him from turning every pitch into a winner? The same thing that may be keeping you from achieving the results you want--preparation!

## **Preparation is the secret to perfecting your pitch!**

Even major league pitchers like my client get off their game at times. Getting his edge back meant doing the right things to prepare. You can too.

- **Do your homework.** Learn as much as you can about your target market and the players you will be pitching to. What are they looking for and what are they buying? How do they take pitches—telephone, email, in person? Look for others who have pitched these same markets and buyers. What did they learn from their experience? What would they have done differently?
- **Set an intention.** What is your pitch intended to do? Be clear about that to stay on track.
- **Flesh out your ideas.** Ideas, even great ones, are not enough. You must develop your ideas so you can talk about them with confidence and a deep understanding of how they will serve your buyer, advertiser or audience. Outline the project, step-by-step, point-by-point, episode-by-episode or scene-by-scene. Be prepared to talk about the price tag or budget. If it's an idea for television, beware of only one good idea, however. A client who is CEO of her own television production company told me recently that she has observed people pitching that are so caught up in their one idea that they fail to read their audience. “It's more like an obsession than a pitch” she says, “and that can be a little scary. I believe network execs appreciate enthusiasm, but fear obsession.” I'd say that is universally true so ask yourself if you fit that description and what you will do to correct it.
- **Test your concept.** If you are pitching an idea, try it out on a few discerning professionals in your industry. Encourage tough questions. Be prepared to adjust your concept to make it more pitch-able.

- **Craft good questions.** Questions are a subtle yet powerful way to set yourself apart. An on-line advertising CEO was pitching a client prospect recently. We choreographed the pitch to focus on the client at a specific moment by asking a question that engaged him in a conversation and made the pitch relevant to his specific goals.
- **Tell compelling stories.** Stories connect. Build short stories (three sentences or less) to communicate your results. (For more on how to tell your story, download my article, "Sell Results to Sell Yourself" in the Free Resources section on my web site.)
- **Focus on your audience.** It's natural to want to talk about yourself but it is more attractive to show interest in your audience. Make your stories, examples, case studies or experience relevant to what your target wants to accomplish.
- **Don't assume people know how valuable you are.** You may be the best IT person on the planet, but unless you learn how to communicate that, your interview results may be disappointing.
- **Polish your presentation skills.** The fear of public speaking stops many people from becoming more effective not only in formal presentation settings but in their daily communications as well. Doing is the only antidote for overcoming fear.
- **Exercise flexibility.** Be prepared to move with vs. against whatever the pitch situation calls for.
- **Practice. Practice. Practice.** Practice your pitch out loud. That was something my director client avoided. He thought he could handle the pitch just by thinking about it. Once he started practicing out loud, he could hear where the holes were and fill them in. It was one of the most important things he did to change his results. Try your pitch out on colleagues and friends. Dig up the dirt on pitch horror stories. Be prepared to pitch under adverse conditions to people who may be distracted, disinterested or hostile. Make your hypothetical scenarios range from very, very good to the worst you can imagine. Role-play until you can handle yourself in tough situations.

Bottom line? Plan for success by preparing for it and pretty soon you will be pitching like they do in the big leagues.

**Knowledge is power!** Learning from your mistakes is the best education you can get.

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