

The Art of the Steal

By T. Scott Gross

I'd like you to plant the next two Thinking Points into your brain before you read the next story.

Thinking Point

The longer a customer lingers, the more likely they are to buy.

Thinking Point

Possession begins when you get the product into their hands.

The purpose of a store is to transfer possession. Get them touching and therefore owning! One boring afternoon at the Los Angeles Airport I decided to watch a Moonie as he accosted one weary, wary traveler after another, attempting to shake them down for cash. It was a study in applied psychology.

"Hi! Where're you from?" (Moonies knew the universal disarmament phrase as, who can resist such a simple question?)

"Topeka."

"Great town!" said the Moonie sounding for all the world like he had been to Topeka, loved it, and perhaps knew folks from the old neighborhood.

Guard down but hands occupied with a carry-on and a briefcase, the mark was helpless as the Moonie reached into his personal space with a small American flag intending to attach it to the traveler with a straight pin. Who could refuse an American flag from one of the home boys?

"Can you hold this for me?" The Moonie thrust an expensive looking book into the traveler's hand. This move often forced the mark to set down his baggage, which served to thoroughly arrest any chance of forward movement. Now the mark had received a small gift and in his mind's eye a large obligation. At the very least

the traveler was bound to be friendly. And he could not walk away with a book that belonged to a stranger.

The usual next move was an attempt by the traveler to return the book, a move always rebuffed by the Moonie who would say, "I want you to have this as a gift from me."

"Well, thanks. I'll read it on the plane," followed by an attempt to gather up his belongings.

"In case you don't know, we're working to help mothers and children who are down on their luck. Do you think you could spare a few bucks to help them?"

Now the mark is holding what appears to be an expensive book and is balancing this against his potential contribution which he has already been told should be a few bucks.

The mark fishes in his wallet and the most remarkable thing happens. The Moonie steps closer and peers into the wallet as well! As the mark starts to remove a couple of bucks, the disappointed Moonie says in a pitiful voice, "Do you have anything larger? We have lots of women and children who are in desperate need of your help. Can't you do just a little bit better?" And reaching toward the wallet, he points to a twenty and pleads, "How about this one? You know these books are really expensive."

Guess who has taken possession of the book? Never mind that he didn't want it, didn't ask for it, and most likely will never, ever read it!

I give them high marks for style even though it is manipulation at its sleeziest.

Hang in There, Fred!

My friend Fred Vang e-mailed a photo of a Toyota he had taken on a factory sponsored new car introduction. This was no ordinary test drive; a good thing as Fred, a real car guy, is not an ordinary driver. Fred is a car consultant and makes it his business to know what he arranges for you to buy. I hate to even buy gas without consulting Fred!

Somehow Fred had managed to get this 4Runner hung over a rock (he says on purpose!) so that the vehicle was teetering on its right front and left rear wheels. The other two wheels were so high above the ground that Fred had to jump nearly five feet to exit the vehicle and survey his vehicle's condition.

"Fred! How in the world did you get that thing out of there?" We were on the phone and staring at the e-mailed photo, each in our respective offices.

"I just drove it right out! It has 4 x 4 drive and the computer knew which of the wheels had traction! Now that's the way to test a vehicle!"

Could you have told Fred about the 4 x 4 drive system? Probably, but showing it off under real and extreme conditions turned Fred from a believer to a proselyte!

Thinking Point

Showing your products or service under real-world conditions greatly increases the chance that your customers will turn into buyers.

Now put all three concepts together into a single sale: Encourage your customers to linger—Help your customer take mental possession—Make trial as realistic as possible.

Watch how this next salesperson used these techniques to win a customer.

Work on Customer Time

Buns had decided that we needed a large rug to cozy-up the large carpeted area that is both our living room and impromptu stage for our grandkids' performances. So we stopped at a large carpet store just before closing. We were immediately stymied by a dizzying array of choices and there was no way we could make our decision before the store closed.

"We'll come back when we have more time to browse," I told the owner.

"Take your time. I usually do paperwork after hours so look as long as you want." (Encourage customers to linger.)

The employees exited, and the owner locked the door behind them. We had the store to ourselves! We eventually narrowed the choice to two: mine and Buns. My carpet was gorgeous. Buns' carpet was okay. As we debated who had the superior taste the store owner said, "Take them both home and try them out. You can bring back the one you don't choose."

"We'd better not. We live sixty or so miles from here and it's not likely we could be back for a while," I said. "Please. Take both carpets and take your time bringing the other back. We're going to be here and besides, you need the carpet." (Help the customer take possession.)

Placing that carpet required moving half the furniture in the house. First we tried my choice. Gorgeous! Then we moved and

removed furniture a second time to roll Buns' selection into place. Gorgeouser!

We bought the carpet.