



From Chapter 4: *The Demo Crime Files*

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Please forgive me. I'm normally optimistic and maintain a positive outlook. This chapter, however, is devoted to the negative aspects of demonstrations and sales presentations. It's important to point out the common "crimes" made in demonstrations because most people don't recognize them.

Just like in real life, some crimes are minor offenses while others carry the death penalty. I'm not suggesting *any* demo crime is acceptable. Crimes aren't acceptable in society, nor should they be when presenting or demonstrating software. However, unlike in society, there are no pre-established right and wrong demonstration crimes.

Don't be intimidated by the number of times you catch yourself committing demonstration crimes. They can be corrected with just a small dose of preparation, focus and practice. So, go easy on yourself. Most software professionals (myself included) have committed every one of these crimes and never even realized it. That is, until now!

I used to end my demonstrations by asking my audience, "How do you think it went today?" Early in my career, they'd typically respond, "You did a good job in describing what your software does." For years, I thought they were giving me a compliment. In some ways they were. After all, I taught them a great deal about my software. They understood how it worked. However, when I found out a few weeks later that I didn't even make the short list

of finalists, I was always stunned. When I'd ask why, a typical reply went something like, "Well, no specific reason. We liked you and your company. Your product was good but the other products just seemed to fit us better." This is hardly a satisfying answer! Where do you begin to improve your product, services, company or approach based upon a politically safe comment like that?

Can you relate to this story? If you can, your prospect is telling you that you're a good teacher, but someone else made a connection. Your competitor got them excited. They helped them cross the Bridge to their system. Your software was in standard definition while your competitor's was in HD! But be aware that most prospects won't point out your crimes. You have to be lucky enough to have a prospect like Al Jones. Al was a prospect of mine in Atlanta, Georgia. His company was on a system search, and he knew the potential our software offered compared to my competitors. Unfortunately, my competitor won the demonstration. Al was kind enough to point out to me why I almost lost the sale. I've never forgotten the lesson. Here's what he told me. "Bob, you have a much better product than your competitor, and I think it would serve us much better. However, the users think the competitor is amazing because he really understands our business. He provided specific solutions to our everyday struggles." Al went on to give me an example of a situation my competitor used in a demonstration. They asked the users, "Have



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you ever cut a 12 foot copper pipe and wondered what you were going to do with the remnant? Well, with our product you simply..." Al explained, "Bob, you guys are demonstrating widgets and ABC companies, while the competition is talking in our lingo. The users simply can't relate to your software." Of course! That was a turning point for me. From that moment on, I've always focused on bringing each prospect's business, products and situations into my demonstrations!

If You Think That's Cool, Wait Till You See...

Imagine you're demonstrating to a sports apparel company that sells clothing to hiking enthusiasts. In the room are Lisa, the Chief Executive Officer, Mark, the Chief Financial Officer, Andy, the Director of Information Systems and Sheila, the Vice President of Sales. They sell primarily through catalogs and the web to a regular group of specialty sports stores. You complete a demonstration of how you can target coupons, specials, and new product introductions to existing customers based on their buying patterns and demographic information. The demonstration went very well. In fact, Sheila, the Vice President of Sales says, "That's fantastic. We can increase our sales 30 percent if we implement this feature!" What a great reaction! You have them just where you want them. Unfortunately, rather than summarizing your capabilities in this area, you feel compelled to continue selling. "If you think that's hot, I can reduce your credit card fees by 20 percent because now your customers can pay for the material using alternatives to traditional credit cards or in-house accounts!" Lisa, the CEO, jumps in, "Really? I just read an article about a catalog house being sued for \$300,000 by a customer whose system was infected by a

virus based on an alternative payment system. Can you imagine? There's a whole website dedicated to such horror stories!" Mark, the Chief Financial Officer, says, "Lisa, I also read in *Credit and Collections Monthly* about the battle going on between bank merchant accounts and these newer alternatives. It looks like there will be a lot of changes coming over the next few years." Andy, the Director of Information Systems, adds, "Hey, I read in *Internet Retailing Quarterly* that virtually everyone who currently accepts alternative payment systems over the Internet is dropping the capability due to the massive losses from fraud and complaints."

Congratulations, you've just placed your victory in the jaws of defeat! You now have two choices. You can begin defending alternative payment systems for the next 10 minutes or agree with them, explain that alternative payment systems are not a good idea for them and move forward. I would highly recommend the latter.

This scenario reminds me of the "Largest Cocktail Party In The World." This event took place the night before the annual Florida-Georgia football game in the minor league baseball stadium in Jacksonville, Florida. As was the tradition, the stadium was mobbed with hard-partying students. At the end of the evening there was an incredible fireworks display and this particular year, one of the fireworks went sideways instead of up. It smashed through the window of a student's unoccupied, parked car and it exploded! Afterward, a reporter asked the student, "How did you feel when you walked out of the stadium and learned your car was blown up?" The student replied, "Man, talk about coming down in a hurry..." That's something to



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remember the next time you feel compelled to extend your party with fireworks without knowing ahead of time where they're heading!

The Blind Leading the Blind

Assume you are giving your demonstration and things are rolling along. You've gained the executive's trust because you've built a case for the value of your software during your presentation. The executive has stayed in the room for more than 30 minutes. You've got momentum. Then someone from the audience asks you a question, but you don't have an immediate answer. Consequently, you jump to a screen you *think* contains the answer but it doesn't. The executive says, "Mary, don't worry about it. I believe you when you say you can do this. I don't really need to see it right now." Wow! What a great endorsement, and from the executive no less! However, you won't be denied, saying, "Hang on, I think I can find an answer to that. It will just take a second for me to find it." The search begins. You start popping up screen after screen. Menu after menu. Inquiry after inquiry. Five minutes later the executive has left the room. Someone reiterates, "Mary, really, don't worry about it. Perhaps you can take it down as a follow-up item and get back to us on it." To this you reply, "Oh, I know the information is here somewhere. Hang on for just a moment." More screens and, finally, you give up. Your momentum is destroyed, the president is gone, and you just eroded some of your credibility. You find yourself slugging it out again in an attempt to gain back their enthusiasm. The path across the Bridge has become cluttered with confusion.

Here's the rule of thumb I use in this situation: if I can't find the information in three clicks or less, I write down the question in my demonstration notes. I let them know I'll research the situation and get back to them. Then I move on.

To illustrate this point, think of a time when a friend told you about a great movie she saw. She starts by describing a great scene. This gets you interested. The conversation goes something like, "And right when the lion is about to jump on... Oh, who's that guy? Wait, it's on the tip of my tongue. I think it's Mark something-or-other. No, the actor's name is Mel something. Yes. No. I know it's... oh, it's right on the tip of my tongue." Doesn't it drive you crazy when you're on the receiving end of this type of conversation? Likewise, it's incredibly disruptive in a demonstration when you flash through screen after screen after screen searching for an answer.

The only exception to this rule is a prospect that, for some unknown reason, insists on an immediate answer. If that's your situation, you'll have to perform some research. Here are some suggestions:

1. After three clicks, always ask for permission to write down the request and provide an answer later. If that doesn't work,
2. Freeze the projector screen or cover the lens while you search for the answer. If after a couple minutes you still can't find the answer,
3. Ask permission to have one of your teammates research the issue while you continue the demo. They can sit in the back of the room and perform their research without disrupting the



demonstration. At a logical breaking point, have your teammate *circle back* and provide the answer.

Don't meander through the software in search of answers to tough questions. It will break your momentum and continuity. Either write down the question so you can follow-up with them later or have a team member research the question while you march forward.

The Field by Fielder

The teacher in us wants our prospects to learn all there is to know about our software. After all, the more they know, the more they'll like you and your product. Right? Demonstrating static information files, configuration options, and administration settings is about as exciting as watching your email synchronize. Imagine the following demonstration of a hospital information system. "This is our patient demographics file. By simply entering a number in the patient number field, which by the way is 18 characters long, you can set up a new patient. From here we enter the patient's name. The patient name field is 48 characters. That should be plenty big enough to handle even your biggest patient names. There are multiple address fields that should help with those lengthy addresses." Blah, blah, blah.

"But wait a minute," you say, "if my prospect doesn't know where their demographic files are located in the system and with what those files contain, how can they possibly understand how the rest of the system works?" Simple. Most people assume you store basic information and have basic administration capabilities, just as they have in their current solutions. Demonstrating or explaining such capabilities does nothing to help your prospect.

What will help them is an understanding of how they'll use the system on a day-to-day basis and how streamlining existing tasks will help them get their jobs done. They want to understand how software features *they can relate to* can add to their company's bottom line. They want to hear how you can solve some of the problems and aggravations they face today. They want to know if you can take them forward. They don't want to hear about file maintenance and administrative capabilities!

There are two common causes behind the "Field by Fielder" crime. The first is simply a lack of comfort. The act of reading screens (or slides) is a very common error when you feel uncomfortable with your material. You may be thinking, "How much trouble can you get into when you're discussing the fields in the master files or administrative settings?" The truth is, plenty! Not only will you put your prospects to sleep, but you also run the risk of hitting a roadblock that's impossible to overcome. For example, what if your patient name field is limited to 40 characters as compared to their existing name field of 50 characters, and they think they need all 50? How do you dig out of that hole? What if you can't find, or worse, don't have that key setting that they think they need? How will you answer the question? The second common cause behind the crime is demonstrating without a plan. Your goal is to show prospects how the software will benefit them by smoothing process flows, automating manual processes, reducing the possibility of errors. If you have no plan as to how to show this, it becomes easy to fall back to a field by field method of demonstrating or presenting.

If I'm unfamiliar with my software or presentation, I still catch myself reading





screens. Even after 20 years of demonstrating. I'm like an insecure child clinging to his stuffed animal. When you're on new or uncomfortable turf with no definitive demonstration plan, it's easy to explain fields instead of showing process advantages and software flow. A lack of knowledge, whether industry, software, prospect or process flow related, is typically the major reason demonstrators commit the "Field by Fielder" crime. Other times, it's just a bad habit.

Chapter Summary

Respected professionals like doctors, lawyers and accountants are required to participate in continuing education every year. Every professional sport has a training camp where players practice fundamental skills before the season begins. Teams and individuals practice throughout a season to ensure their fundamentals remain sharp. Why expect anything less from our profession? Commit yourself to continuing education and practice. Constantly drill yourself on demo crimes. Look for outside help and expertise to improve your demonstration techniques and processes. It's only through a constant personal commitment to continuing education that you will remain crime-free.

About the Author

Bob Riefstahl has spent over 20 years selling and demonstrating software to all sizes of companies and audiences. His firm 2WIN! Global provides sales *and* demonstration training for companies with complex product offerings. The training focuses on winning tactics that compliment your existing sales strategy (e.g. Solution Selling™, Strategic

Selling™, etc.) in customer facing events. Sessions have a 1-2 day duration and are delivered on a global basis in a variety of languages. His book "Demonstrating To WIN!" has been enjoyed and delivered in over 30 countries. It is available at www.2WinGlobal.com and all major on-line book sellers.



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