

Confident or Arrogant?

How to Tell if You're Rubbing People the Wrong Way



The line between confidence and arrogance is extremely thin -- and extremely dangerous. Confident people are respected, well-liked, and successful. Arrogant people, on the other hand, are tolerated, mocked, and ultimately, ineffective.

This distinction is especially important in sales: As you've probably noticed, reps who consistently meet or exceed their quota exude confidence while remaining humble. They've mastered the delicate balance.

But even the experts slip occasionally -- meaning the rest of us slip pretty regularly. To make sure your confidence isn't coming across as arrogance, avoid these five bad habits that rub people the wrong way.

1) Never being vulnerable.

Some reps think confidence equals never showing your weaknesses. But it's the opposite: Being open actually demonstrates greater confidence, since you're owning your weaknesses rather than hiding them. There's even proof that people trust you more when you freely admit your mistakes.

To see what vulnerability looks like in action, here's some sample dialogue:

You: "Is there any reason, if we gave you the product at this price, that you wouldn't do business with our company?"

Prospect: "You know, I'm still not convinced all of our technicians will really benefit from it."

You: "Ah, I see. I apologize -- I could've done a better job explaining how we've seen other teams adopt it. Mind if I give it another go?"

You should also be transparent about your company's shortcomings. For instance, let's say the prospect asks, "I've heard your app's been having a lot of connection issues recently. Is that true?"

Rather than dodging the question, be up-front and respond, "Yep, that's true -- we've been having trouble with our memory caching system. Fortunately, our ops team is pretty close to developing a permanent fix. We're paying close attention to the system in the meantime so we can resolve any spottiness ASAP."

2) Spending too much time on testimonials.

Providing concrete examples of customers you've helped in the past tells your prospect you're not just blowing smoke: Your product has a real, verifiable impact.

However, it's easy to go overboard. If your testimonials dominate the conversation, you'll seem egotistical -- and worse, like you're more interested in reliving your past success than helping the prospect in front of you today.

To avoid this, make sure your testimonials are relevant to both the prospect and what you're discussing. If you're talking about cutting administrative costs, don't jump in with an example of a client who expanded their recruiting pipeline. You should, however, tell the prospect about a similar company that used your product to slash their admin budget by 30%.

Connecting the dots for the prospect is also important: You want them to understand why you're providing this specific testimonial, and how it relates to their situation. Try using phrases like, "I bring this up because ...", "This company is similar to yours in that ...", and "Just like your business ..."

3) Interrupting the prospect.

In conversation, timing is everything. There's nothing wrong with speaking your mind -- but wait until the prospect has finished speaking theirs, as interrupting someone screams arrogance.

People don't generally talk over someone unless they know (or you think they know) what's coming next. Although sometimes you'll be right, prospects often go in unexpected

directions, and you'll miss these insightful detours if you interrupt. To add insult to injury? By butting in, you're basically saying it's not worth your time to let the buyer finish.

To kick this habit, you'll need to be ultra-conscious when you speak. Every time you pick up the phone or walk into a meeting, remind yourself not to interrupt. When you *do* catch yourself cutting people off, immediately apologize and ask them to continue.

You should also write down your thoughts as they arrive. Once you know you won't forget a thought, it's easy to re-focus on what the other person is saying.

4) Not showing respect for the prospect's time.

Celebrities are the only people who can show up late -- at least, without any negative career repercussions. Those of us without an entourage need to be on time or early for every single appointment. Every minute you force the prospect to wait for you, you lose some of their respect and patience ... which, for obvious reasons, makes closing far less likely.

Watching the clock once your phone call or meeting has actually begun is also crucial. Everyone's busy, so if your prospect agreed to an hour-long meeting, she probably set aside exactly 60 minutes. Going over the one hour mark (while hoping she doesn't look at the clock) isn't just sneaky, it's disrespectful.

Of course, it's a different story when your allotted time is up and the prospect still wants to talk. Say something along the lines of, "It's 4 P.M., but I'm happy to keep going if you have more questions or thoughts. Or if you've got to run, we can talk again next week."

5) Criticizing your competitors.

Mud-slinging definitely requires some confidence -- but not the kind that'll appeal to prospects. In fact, bashing your competitors can make you seem insecure, like you don't believe your product is good enough to stand on its own.

That doesn't mean you have to pretend the other companies in your space don't exist.

"Prospects don't want to sit there and listen to how much you hate X Company, but they do want to hear your honest thoughts on the differences between products,"

"It's okay to talk about your competition, but make sure you do it in a factual way."

To show you ,here's some sample dialogue:

Prospect: “What do you think of Vendor? We’re also considering them.”

You: “Oh, those guys are great! Their POS system is ideal for one or two-location businesses, since it’s really easy to use. Once retailers start to expand, they usually come to us for a more robust tool. I believe we’ve helped four of their former customer’s transition in the past two months.”

This response shifts the focus back toward your product and differentiates it from the competitors'. But because you complimented theirs, you don't seem desperate or overly aggressive.

Best of all?

You get to point out how many companies have switched over to your offering.

Once you’ve kicked these five habits, walking the line between confidence and arrogance gets far easier. Your prospects (and your numbers) will thank you.