

CATCH



**BOND IN
MEANINGFUL
WAYS**

ERIC S. TOWNSEND

CATCH

BOND IN MEANINGFUL WAYS

Abridged from

TELLING AIN'T SELLING™

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*“Baseball is too much of a sport to be called business,
and too much of a business to be called a sport.”*

— Philip Wrigley

*“Baseball is an allegorical play about America
— a poetic, complex and subtle play of courage, fear,
good luck, mistakes, patience about fate, and sober self-esteem.”*

— Saul Steinberg

DEDICATION

This resource is dedicated to my late grandma, Antoinette Capobianco.

FOREWORD

I grew up in a household that loved baseball.

Grandpa and I would play catch in the yard each day. The exchanges were more meaningful than I could've imagined. That's the power of the ritual. Tossing a ball back and forth, sharing a conversation — it's bonding.

At the time, I was an unraveling bundle of nervous energy. Sitting still was a real test. The only activities that focused me were ones that I adored. The simplest of these could be repeated over and over again.

Catch never got boring.

As the sun set behind our neighbor's house, my mom would return home from work. The family would retire to the kitchen. There, grandma would prepare and serve an Italian specialty for dinner. We didn't switch things up all that often. Grandpa and I would sit down at the table, and my mom would join us soon after that.

Grandpa would dial up the Yankees pre-game on radio. Over dinner, the family would listen as Phil Rizzuto and Bill White called the action. Grandma would release us to the living room to watch the late innings on TV. This cycle repeated daily, spring through fall.

Why am I strolling down memory lane? This sales program leverages the wisdom of baseball pitchers, catchers, coaches and others to prove definitively why Telling Ain't Selling.™ Playing catch with customers, albeit figuratively, forges a bond that leads to convincing.

How I came to be passionate about catch is the type of story you'll share to great effect with customers. Retire canned presentations. Today's pitches call for a truly interactive approach.

Eric S. Townsend continues to play catch today — both on the baseball diamond and in consultation with customers. He pitches for amateur baseball teams along the southeastern corridor of the United States. His fastball still clocks as high as 80 mph. His slider breaks wickedly. Ideally, he'd play catch at the ocean's edge with his wife.

WHY THIS RESOURCE WAS WRITTEN

In late 2010, my marketing firm signed up a talented home improvement contractor. The owner was passionate about his trade and ran a unique business. His average sale was an unusual \$100,000. His charge: I need to reach more of my ideal customers.

The contractor was licensed to do business in the most affluent zip codes in the United States. His company's portfolio was exceptional. Their skillset and approach were big on vision. They didn't remodel basements, they designed lower levels. They didn't renovate backyards, they designed resorts. Capacity, check. The sky was the limit.

My firm began to reshape their brand and website to be a world-class platform. The goal was to impress any savvy, luxury consumer. Positioning, check.

We initially generated 38 “premium” leads. Not included here were many less-qualified leads. Visibility, check. The criteria for “premium” leads included: property location (some were second homes), homeowner income/education, timing, fit between stated needs and contractor's offering and all decision-makers would need be present for an estimate.

Here's where the events turned shocking.

Of the combined \$3.8M in “premium” leads we generated (a small slice of the pie), the contractor sold one deal for \$253K. Closing rate: 2.7%. When you project for average performance (e.g., 25% close), \$697K was left on the table. Ideal performance (e.g., 33% to 40% close) would have produced an additional \$1.01M to \$1.27M in sales.

The contractor's inability to convert sales opportunities to revenue had a profound impact on his life. His health declined. Bills began to pile up (yes, including my retainer with him). He even mentioned the possibility of removing his daughter from college.

I tried emergency actions, but it was too late. I expanded the scope of our retainer “on speculation” so I could rewrite his pitch. I brought in a sales trainer who owed a favor to me. The contractor pointed the blame for his misfortune at everyone but himself.

This resource had to be written.

III. CATCH

Bond in Meaningful Ways

ORIENTATION

“SHOW ME”

INQUIRY

ACTIVE LISTENING

CHECK

RESONANCE

REVELATIONS

CONSENSUS

EXIT STRATEGY

*“When they start the game,
they don’t yell ‘work’ ball
— they say ‘play’ ball.”*

— Willie Stargell

*“I became a good pitcher when I stopped trying to make them miss the ball,
and started to make them hit it.”*

— Sandy Koufax

ORIENTATION

School, work, and play have each introduced us to some form of orientation. It's not wise to jump into things. We won't make the most of experiences without it. Stretching leads to soft toss, which leads to catch, which leads to pitching — there's a progression.

"I never rush myself. They can't start the game without me."

— Satchel Paige

The first matter of business is to set expectations. Slow down the pace. Set the tone. Orientation should feel inviting.

Orientation isn't a detail of each step, like a bad Powerpoint show. You're not a robot.

Your customer wants to pull you toward the problem, or to something that excites her. Acknowledge that you're there to address concerns and what you can do to help, but then transition to finding a place where you can both sit down to get started.

It's symbolic to sit down. We're in no rush. We're pausing to make the most of this together.

There are four important points with orientation:

- (i) Verify why you're there, recalling the initial request to meet.
- (ii) Estimate the time it normally takes for an appointment.
- (iii) Outline the 3-5 areas that are generally covered.
- (iv) Remove the pressure!

The most critical aspect of orientation is to remove the pressure. That's the 800-pound gorilla in the room.

Orientation should relax customers. You don't want the kind of relaxation that leads to nodding off to sleep. If that happens, then reschedule. Don't be afraid of a second, shorter meeting when the agreement is handled. For now, establish a meaningful connection. This is a fact-finding session. You should take the time to know what this can be.

“SHOW ME”

I had a coach in high school who was fond of saying, “This is Missouri, son ... you’ve got to SHOW ME!” He wasn’t looking to lead a history lesson on the Show Me state. Coach was pushing me take things to the next level. It was time for something more.

Once you’ve met with the customer, the next step is to learn where this can go. When a baseball pitcher joins a new team, the catcher starts by learning the repertoire he throws. During the game, he’ll visit the mound to discuss situations.

Walking can be a powerful metaphor. Walk me over to the problem. Walk me through what you’ve been thinking. It implies that she has the lead for now.

Listen carefully to what the customer offers. Show you’re listening by taking notes. Assume the role of a sleuth and inspect and seriously consider what she references. Test the viability.

Begin to study mannerisms. Start to make her comfortable. Note any hesitations for later.

SHOW ME, SON! Let’s take a walk. Whichever end of the tone spectrum you prefer, this is your first substantial investment of time and attention in the appointment. Prior to this program, you may have relied on what’s known as a “canned presentation.”

Think about walking along the beach, picking up seashells and enjoying the waves. It’s the little things that matter. Your passion for the walk will begin to show the customer that you’re capable of doing a good job by her standards.

**“Show me” isn’t listening to the sound of your voice.
It’s listening to her voice.**

Make no mistake — the walk is far from fluff. If you’re a results-driven individual, this is how you make your way to the strongest pitch. “Show me” leads into a number of mission-critical moments: inquiry, active listening, check, resonance, revelations, consensus.

INQUIRY

There's one oversight central to every average, struggling or soon-to-be failing sales approach. It's so fundamentally crippling in today's marketplace that I was compelled to make it the title of the primer.

Telling Ain't Selling™

"A man should look for what is, and not for what he thinks should be."

— Albert Einstein

There's a fundamental swing and miss that's made by home-run seeking businesspeople. The assumption (and resulting projection) is that you probably know what the consumer wants and needs. You convince yourself of this position because of past experiences, at the same time that your success relies on how much you can seize the moments.

Sales managers love to talk about urgency. You have to create an urgency. You're probably sensing a pattern here: nerves, pressure, traditional attempts at taking control and forcing urgency — again, none of these energies are conducive to buying!

I don't deny the power of urgency in any situation. I just prefer a quieter version of it. She wants to find a solution. You want to find a solution. Pursuits are aligned. Care to learn about her needs. Bonding leads to trust, which speeds a consumer toward being a customer.

Inquiry is urgency. Asking questions draws her closer. Don't assume the answers are already known. Why risk making a real connection on things you can't yet know?

I'm not suggesting that you bombard consumers with questions in an invasive manner. This shouldn't feel anything like an interrogation. It's more like playing catch.

You toss the ball. She catches it. Sometimes, it's not thrown immediately back. When she's ready, she returns it to you. The pattern repeats at a relaxed and comfortable pace.

ACTIVE LISTENING

If asking questions is how you begin a conversation, then listening is how you create momentum. Intensifying an exchange shouldn't feel intense. Conversations advance steadily. Avoid racing. In baseball, playing catch builds arm strength and lowers the risk of injury.

Research shows that, on average, we can hear four times faster than we can talk. The more intently both parties listen, the sooner they'll come to an understanding.

You and your customer want smooth progress and a productive end. Don't confuse progress with speed. Focus instead on ease and enjoyability. There are three types of listening: active listening, passive listening and NOT listening. Only one leads to a productive conversation.

Active listening has the curious effect of convincing the customer to consider what you're pitching more easily. Like slowing down the action upfront, it's an efficient means of control. You're practicing the thing you most need from her. Guess who will follow whom next?

Take a look at what you're now projecting. You're showing respect. You're conveying that you won't accept misunderstanding. You're entering the realm of what some call "customer intimacy" — where you become worthy of the answers you seek.

Active listening looks like this:

- (i) How can we reduce or eliminate distractions in the room?
- (ii) Imagine the type of listening you appreciate.
- (iii) Be sure to face the customer — don't glare or lock eyes for long stretches.
- (iv) Lean forward for emphasis — don't slouch or invade space.
- (v) Respond slightly — though too much silence communicates that you're not listening.
- (vi) Stay in the present — don't jump to similar past experiences, and don't anticipate.
- (vii) Release inner distractions — the "Lizard Brain" that's pulling you from your work.
- (viii) Keep an open mind — ignore "aha!" or any tendency to box things up.
- (ix) Don't cut off the customer, no matter what — she stops, then you continue.
- (x) Clarify what she's said to provide proof that you've been listening.

CHECK

During the course of playing catch, your teammate will let loose with a fastball or snap off a curveball. Check is any challenge to the conversation's momentum, as presented by your customer. It represents her first line of defense.

**In chess, check is forcing the opposing king to a safer place.
During your appointment, check can feel like this.**

The most common form will be some version of the question “what’s this going to cost me?” She seeks the safety of collecting an estimate (as opposed to being sold something).

You can’t blame a customer from wanting to know this information, and you can’t punish her for asking. You can’t generate the kind of check that happens on a bad first date. What did he just say to me? Maybe he’s not the guy for me.

When your customer tests you, remember that it’s just a defense mechanism. You’re creating comfort. While she seeks a solution from you, she’s not quite at the stage where she’s comfortable to trust you, or to spend significant money with you.

The fact that you’re not asking for the sale, and you’re taking the time to get to know your customer — both will be disconcerting. Others didn’t invest in doing so, or didn’t show the same finesse you’re showing. Check is a compliment — not an affront.

The best response to check is to question why you should rush ahead. Do you need to be somewhere else? I’d like to ensure we’re both thorough here. I know from experience how this can lead to an equally thorough solution later. Is that fair?

She wants to know with certainty that she’s found someone who can help her, right?

Responding to check in this manner is balanced. It shows patience and emphasizes the importance of details. It communicates that this isn’t salesmanship — you genuinely care.

You absolutely should care. Playing catch is a form of bonding.

RESONANCE

In music, resonance is a supplemental vibration that intensifies and enriches the overall tone. That's a powerful metaphor. In baseball, resonance is the pitcher who finds a rhythm with his catcher. It's difficult for opponents to disrupt.

Resonance is a key reverberation. It's not the product of manipulation. It's a natural, absolute connection.

Your teammate wants this. She knows it leads to success. She may have “checked” you, but now she's finding an ease with you.

Your commitment to active listening led you and your new teammate to resonate with each other. At first, conversation will shift subtly. There will be slight tone changes, repositioning — perhaps even a verbal recommitment to keep this rolling longer.

It's not a bad idea to suggest that while you're perfectly happy to be here, and that real progress is being made, that you don't want to wear out your welcome. You want to hear your customer invite you to stay — or even insist upon it.

Here are some of the things your new teammate might say that indicate resonance:

- (i) “Can I get you a drink of water?”
- (ii) “I'm so glad we're working through this.”
- (iii) “When did you first decide on this line of work?”
- (iv) “Is it OK that we're going into so much depth with this?”
- (v) “Do you have another appointment after this?”
- (vi) “You should meet so and so — she would also benefit from this.”

All of this is happening without a “canned presentation” — your founding story, resources, awards, portfolio, approach, people, etc. Some of that structure is ahead, so not to worry.

This is how you should want things to unfold. Your customer is selling you on why she's worthy of you. She's concerned *for* you. She's thinking of referring you, at a time when you haven't done any work for her yet. It's a remarkable series of developments.

REVELATIONS

We won't be ending the world with these revelations. For the sensible salesperson, life has just begun. After resonance, revelations is the most exciting moment in a conversation.

When two or more people are actively listening and resonating, a wonderful chain of events begins. The customer lets down her guard. She speaks with you openly. It's your job to follow her lead. Let down your guard. Open up as well.

Following, in this instance, is a form of control and leadership. I know, this seems counter-intuitive. Think of it like this — you built the trust and comfort level in your customer, so that she began to look at you differently.

When your customer chooses to reveal something to you, don't jump on it like an Amazon box dropped on your doorstep. Step back. Acknowledge it. Thank your customer. Smile! Reward the behavior you most needed from the conversation.

Without revelations, conversation sits at an uncomfortable distance. Nothing of real significance is shared. Objections remain withheld.

Compare this to playing catch. A ball is tossed back and forth. At some point, someone does something out of rhythm. Maybe it's a wild throw. Maybe it's a curveball. Perhaps a joke is made, or a "do it again" is offered. Catch goes up a notch.

Confidence is critical in the midst of revelations. There's great benefit to showing your customer that this is a normal occurrence with you. People trust you. People reveal things. You connect. Acknowledging is brief, but poignant — then toss the ball back.

There's a limit to how far you should let this momentum roll. Often, the customer will signal when she's ready to talk business. OK, I think I get what you're saying. What would it look like if we...? What would it take to...? What's the next step?

You follow her decision. You pause the conversation to pivot for the next step.

CONSENSUS

You can't afford to get excited when customers reveal things, or when they indicate it's time to get down to business. If you're not careful, this communicates that the conversation has been an insincere exchange. If it's a pitch, then you appear to be focused only on the money.

Don't offer options or pricing without a soft sell first. Be certain before relinquishing the control you earned by walking, asking questions, listening actively, resonating.

Allowing customers to dictate when the appointment proceeds to a pitch is not a form of leadership. There's one last bit of due diligence — to insist upon consensus.

Customers will say they're ready for the finale. Like orientation, when you pause to sit with those who are trying to take the lead, it's again time for a brief but vital breather.

The reality is that you're both getting tired. She could be thinking about what needs to be done next in her day. It's not a slight to you. It takes energy to have a meaningful conversation. Regardless of circumstances, you require consensus.

The catcher will talk to a pitcher during warmups, as they sit in the dugout and mid-game. Rapport is constant. The purpose is to manage the pitcher's mindset and performance.

Affirm these important items for consensus:

- (i) The customer had specific reasons or an urgency for setting the appointment.
- (ii) Those reasons are aligned or complementary between the decision makers.
- (iii) All have invested in understanding and addressing the challenges.
- (iv) There isn't a significant divide that can't now be crossed together.
- (v) Verify there's comfort and trust in you doing a thorough job. Emphasize thorough.
- (vi) Repeat key questions and confusions that arose earlier, while playfully testing answers.
- (vii) If there's any hesitation, or glances at each other (given a group), then address it.
- (viii) Do other influencers think the customer should do x, y or z instead? Address that.
- (ix) If addressing seems to cause frustration you can't manage, then reschedule the pitch.
- (x) If they seem incredulous, then try to schedule with the missing influencers present.

EXIT STRATEGY

If asking questions and listening actively is how you build a conversation, then resonance, revelations and consensus are how you transition into your pitch.

It's paramount that you value your customer's time and intelligence. Every conversation must come to an end. Your exit strategy is an important sign of respect.

I'm pausing here to make sure your exit strategy isn't a form of concession. When it is, you've conceded control. Be cautious about this!

Reasons why the customer may compel you to pitch sooner than you should:

- (i) Fatigue.
- (ii) Confusion.
- (iii) Plans after the appointment.
- (iv) Heard this before from someone else.
- (v) Works in a related field.
- (vi) Sounds expensive.
- (vii) Can't wait for the price and/or the solution — she's excited, or nervous.

The transition from catch into pitch shouldn't be difficult. Once resonance and revelations occur, move briefly to consensus — but then enable your first exit strategy.

Exiting through consensus is summarizing where you've been together. It's a bookend to the initial orientation. You're acclimating the customer to the solution that she's hoping you'll deliver. In baseball, catchers and coaches like confident pitchers who remain in control.

There's one slope that'll prove especially slippery — a customer who's hot for pricing. If you allow the customer to receive pricing before you've built trust and value, then control would be squandered. Don't accept this fate. Your best customers want you to be thorough.

The French call it dénouement — falling action. Economists call it the law of diminishing returns. Your job is to guide the tail end of momentum toward a solution (not stagnation).

TO BE CONTINUED

This concludes *CATCH: Bond in Meaningful Ways*, an abridged and free resource of the complete primer *Telling Ain't Selling*™ — *Play Catch with Customers*. Continue and complete your training by purchasing the paperback or an audio book.

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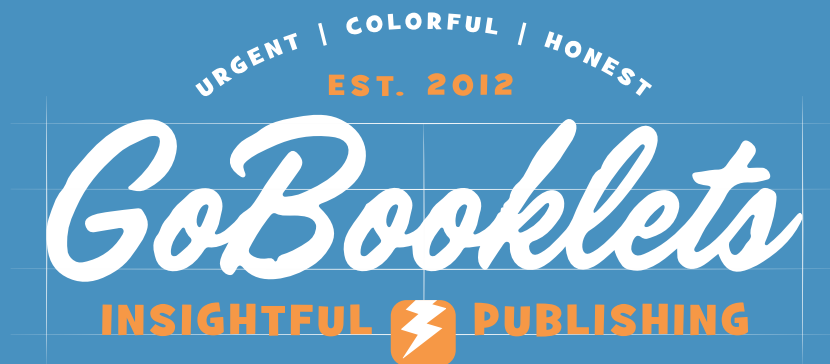
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