

# Notes on

## *Metaphorically Selling*

*How to Use the Magic of Metaphors to Sell, Persuade  
& Explain Anything to Anyone*

By Anne Miller

(Notes by Gary Tomlinson)

**Preface:** It's easy to confuse information with communication. People tend to make two mistakes. The first is that, rather than choose their words carefully, they inundate their listener with everything they know – often speaking more from their point of view rather than from their client's vantage point and doing it far too casually. They put their buyers to sleep. The bet these salespeople make is that something will stick. In fact, just the opposite happens: listeners double their resistance to the message. They cut short the salesperson who is not concise; they tune out the presenter who shovels on the details. The window of opportunity in terms of getting their attention, opening up their minds and teaching them something they didn't know has never been great, and given the dire state of communication today it is narrowing all the time.

Which brings us to the second mistake: Too much other information competes for their listeners' attention. Listeners, already drowning in a tidal wave of information, simply can't respond to another similar sounding bucketful thrown in their faces.

We live in an information age. Presumably that means each of us can arm ourselves with whatever information we need, when we need it, to make a sound decision or judgment. But, in fact, we are so awash in info-bits that, instead of feeling better able to discern differences and make decisions, we're drowning in choices. We shut out more stimuli in self-defense.

Saying more or speaking loudly won't get you heard amidst this terrific static. In fact, to get through to your client, you don't want your words heard so much as you want them seen.

*He is the best speaker (salesperson) who can turn men's ears into eyes!*

*Arabic Proverb*

**Visual Words Matter Most:** When Steve Jobs was courting a wavering John Sculley from Pepsi to become CEO of Apple, his winning argument was not a list of facts and benefits. It was the choice of images he famously painted in Sculley's mind when he asked: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?"

Imagery, the core of metaphoric language, will surprise, grab, inform and persuade your listeners as mere explanation will not. Vivid language will distinguish you from the swarm, will make

you heard above the drone, will make you that rare person: a communicator that gets results. And in our world of information overload, that gives you a tremendous competitive advantage.

*The difference between the right word and the almost right word  
is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.*

*Mark Twain*

**What are Metaphors?** A Metaphor is simply a way of communicating. It's a shortcut to instant understanding. Think of it as a mental equation in which something is compared to something else. Metaphors make complex and unfamiliar things or ideas simple and familiar to the listener because they compare the unknown to what the listener already knows and accepts.

Metaphors are visual in nature and literally help your client or audience “see in a flash” in a vivid, emotional way what you mean. If you were to create an equation for the power of metaphors, it would be:

**Information + Metaphor = “I see what you mean!”**

**Four Steps to a Winning Metaphor:** Here is the model to use for creating metaphors:

### **1. Determine the Client’s Blindspot:**

The first step in overcoming client resistance, his blindspot, is to identify what lies behind it. What you may hear a client tell you is one thing; what you must understand to be his true blindspot is quite another. Here are a few examples of blindspots masquerading as objections:

#### **Objections:**

“You are too expensive.”

“We’ve always done it this way.”

“We’ll just start with a test.”

“We’re happy with who we have now.”

“Yes – but not now.”

“We’ve been down that road before.”

#### **Likely Blindspot:**

*Confusing value with price*

*Fear of change*

*Fear of large commitment*

*No perceived value-added*

*No sense of urgency*

*Fear of getting burned again*

### **2. Snapshot Client:**

The number one rule in selling is to put your client in the center of any communication. What you know about your client is as important, if not more so, than what it is you want

to say. The same principle holds true in the creation of a winning metaphor: for it to work, it must draw on images and emotions from your client's world. It's critical that you take a snapshot of your clients before groping for the right metaphor to sway them. What visual images and reference points are in their mental album that you can seize on?

Snapshot prospects by drawing on their:

1. *Personal Background:*
  - a. Male/female?
  - b. GenX, Boomer, Mature, Millennial?
  - c. Married/Single?
  - d. Hobbies/Passions?
2. *Industry or Business:*
  - a. Position?
  - b. Industry?
  - c. Achievements?
  - d. Industry leader or startup?
3. *Common Knowledge:*
  - a. Events in the news today affecting your client?
  - b. Current events – sports/economy/world?
  - c. Cultural news – entertainment/television/movies?
4. *General Life Experience:*
  - a. The weather?
  - b. Rush-hour traffic?
  - c. Computer problems?
  - d. Vacation experiences?

### **3. Create Comparison:**

Create a metaphor based on a detail from your snapshot that will *change the lens* through which your client is seeing your pitch. Ask yourself what is this like in my client's life? What else? What else? And, still, what else?

### **4. Relate Back to Situation:**

Relating your metaphor or analogy to the topic at hand drives home your point and spares your listener any confusion which might derail the deal.

**In Summary:** To be successful in removing a client's blindspot you need to determine the nature of the resistance, take a snapshot of the client, create a metaphor based on that snapshot and then relate that metaphor or analogy back to the client.

(For more information or to buy a copy of *Metaphorically Selling* go to [www.annemiller.com](http://www.annemiller.com))

# *Welcome to the Land of Metaphoria*

Anne Miller, “Author Metaphorically Selling”

When Fortune magazine did a story on charisma a few years ago they said that charismatic communicators were able to make the abstract simple and the simple meaningful. These successful people achieve that effect with metaphors and stories. In selling anything today, it’s critical to make the complexities of your products, services and ideas simple and the simplicity of your points meaningful to your clients/listeners.

In our information overload society, metaphors are your best persuasion tool to rise above the noise, drive home your points, be remembered and gain commitment to a deal, a cause or a point of view. Metaphors are the imaginative tools of poets (Juliet is the sun), but they are also the sharpest strategic tools used by persuaders everywhere from presidents to savvy salespeople. Why? Because we remember what we “see” more than what we just hear and we have a raft of associations with what we have seen and experienced. Those emotions move us to act. Even Einstein said, “If I can’t see it, I don’t understand it.”

Compare the following information with the *image* that follows it and you’ll see why metaphors are powerful “weapons of mass understanding.”

An advertising sales rep for a women’s magazine scored with a media buyer with this imagery: “Our reader has a household income of \$63,000, has 3.4 years of college education, 2.1 children, a median house worth \$267,000, and owns 2.2 cars. *In short, we are talking about the Bloomingdale’s shopper and not the K-Mart lady.*”

What an impact that last sentence has on us! We “see” the two shoppers. We have associations with each of these stores that speak volumes about the likely buying habits of each shopper. We “get” the stronger buying power of this magazine’s reader because of the *image* that passes through our right brain rather than through the cold numerical facts which our left brain processes.

Most people use examples to help illustrate their points. However, the *most* skilled persuaders consciously use distinctive and meaningful metaphors, analogies and comparisons (imagery) to really dazzle and drive those points home.

*For it is with words as with sunbeams -- the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn!*

## **More Words, More Confusion**

In any pitch or presentation, no matter what you're selling or advocating, explanations are inevitable. Perhaps you must explain how you differ from the competition; perhaps not everyone is familiar with the service or product you provide. Or perhaps you've got a breakthrough process or technology that's quite complex. Conversely, maybe the action you're suggestion to your audience is so obvious and straightforward you need to explain why they haven't thought of it before. Sometimes, you need to explain a fine difference between two apparently similar things.

So you explain. You go into great detail. You offer up everything you know, you use the right terminology, you explain the terminology, you leave no stone unturned. It takes time, but you're in earnest. Any yet, it seems, the more you talk, the less people listen. Or they listen but they don't understand. Or they understand so completely they tune you out. The more they drift, the more earnestly you explain... and the further they drift.

Explanations needn't involve a lot of words. Explanations that simply train-car adjectives or string together descriptions, (...its back-loaded collateralized emerging-market structured debt) compound the listener's confusion or boredom. Explanations that go on and on about how a screw-up occurred don't minimize the mistake; they draw attention to it. The less said the better, provided each word you choose triggers in your listener's mind a host of relevant and revelatory associations.

*He who speaks well fights well. --proverb*

That's where metaphor and analogy come in: With an apt comparison, you can familiarize the unknown, simplify the complex, reveal new twists in the straightforward, and refine hard-to-see differences. You can dig yourself out of a hole; you can mold perception before it sets against you. The well-chosen metaphor focuses understanding instead of allowing it to diffuse. The perfect analogy crystallizes meaning in a visual, intuitive, emotionally poignant way that pierces through resistance to lodge permanently in your listener's brain.

## Imagery Colors our Conversations

Creating imagery is not unnatural. You use it every day. For example:

1. *Bricks and mortar* companies need to become *clicks and mortar* businesses to survive in the millennium.
2. *Bulls and bears* invest in stock markets that *crash, tank, take-off*.
3. We *avoid putting all our eggs in one basket, build a nest egg, save for a rainy day*.
4. Some of us are *road warriors* working in a *dog-eat-dog world*.
5. Is your company the *800 pound gorilla* of its category or is it only a *blip on your customer's radar screen*?

Analogies are extended metaphors that drive points home:

1. Minds are like parachutes. *They work best, when open.*
2. Reagan was the Teflon president. *Nothing ever stuck to him.*
3. Information is coming at us very quickly. It's like drinking water from a fire hose. *If we're not careful, we could drown.*
4. "A woman is like a tea bag. *You never know how strong she is, until she gets into hot water.*" (Eleanor Roosevelt)

## When Do You Need a Metaphor?

Do you encounter any of the following when you're trying to present your case: Resistance? Negativity? Indifference? Confusion? Hostility? Skepticism? Fear? Controversy? That's when you need a winning metaphor!

An investment banker was talking to the CEO of a willing take-over target company by the biggest company in their industry. The CEO was stuck on the fear that once word got out, his company would be put "in play" and that would trigger hostile take-over activity. The investment banker won over this CEO when he said, "*Bill, think back to high school. Remember when the star football player, let's call him Big Joe, had a girlfriend? Remember how no one else would dare to date Joe's girlfriend? Don't worry. This company is 'Big Joe'. If they want you, no one else is going to step in and go against 'Joe.'*"

## Become a Metaphorian!

Outstanding salespeople and communicators from Aristotle to Lincoln to leading business executives like Steve Jobs use carefully thought out, hard-hitting imagery to achieve emotional, visceral, gut understanding. I call this imagery *Metaphoria*, the visual language of persuasion, and people who use *Metaphoria*, are (what else?) *Metaphorians*.

Use *Metaphoria*:

- To position your products and services vs. the competition.
- To neutralize objections, resistance, fears, skepticism, negativity.
- To help buyers "get" your story.

## Summary

- When it comes to explanations, quality of expression beats quantity of words.
- Comparisons to the known and loved make the unknown familiar and desirable.
- Simple analogy can make the highly technical easy to grasp.
- The obvious can be made memorable; subtle distinctions can be made obvious.

*The toughest sale is frequently won, not only with the tools of a logician, but with the techniques of a poet. Welcome to the land of Metaphoria!*