

This article from Chris is worth tucking away for the next time you have to write a credentials presentation, put together a sales proposal or prepare a persuasive speech.

## **Wen Tong wins gong**

*Gold medal advice when you are pitching for business*

Next time you want to win someone over:

- prospective client
- a potential sponsor
- a major tender

...remember Wen Tong.

Three times women's heavyweight judo world champion, she is now an Olympic champion.



*Wen Tong wins the women's heavyweight Judo gold medal in Beijing*

Her finals bout was against a familiar rival, the gold medal winner in Athens, Maki Tsukada of Japan. Tsukada also weighs over 125kg, so Tong had no physical advantage and with time running out she was behind on points. From the sidelines, her coach was screaming at her, "calm down and use your mind!" With seconds remaining, Tong scored the winning point.

Because Judo is as much a mental activity as a physical one, the coach's advice was sound. And it applies just as much to the commercial contests we find ourselves in. There's no need to panic, just think.

The word "judo" means "gentle way". As Kyuzo Mifune, one of the sports' great masters explains it, the true spirit of Judo "is nothing but the gentle and diligent free spirit. Judo rests on flexible action of mind and body. The word flexible however never means weakness but something more like adaptability and open-mindedness. Gentleness always overcomes strength."

Which is all very interesting perhaps, but exactly how is it relevant to business?

When you want to sell something, use the customer's weight to your advantage. Many sales people are so focussed on the outcome they want that they make no effort to understand what their customer wants. Success is much more likely if you worry less about what you have to sell and think more about what it is the customer wants to buy....

Sometimes, of course, customers can't express what they want to buy: they don't know enough about your business to say. Even when they are specific—as in a formal tender process—they don't necessarily ask the right questions. This means that when you are tendering it is very important not to assume that ticking all the boxes will be enough. Often what happens is that the detailed information they asked for doesn't actually help them make a choice: all the contestants are still in the ring, with great credentials, able to meet the specification. Filling in the form correctly is essential, but it won't necessarily win the prize.

In her book, *Visionary Selling*, Barbara Geraghty talks about connecting with the customer's vision. As she explains, by reading their own material—what they say on their website, in their annual report, or in their strategic plan if it is available—you are able to understand what it is as an organisation they are trying to achieve. When you know where they are going, you are able to demonstrate how what you have to offer will help get them there. You might only be selling a photocopier, but you are more likely to make an impression if you can talk about not your revolutionary new ABC 451 central processor, but about how your photocopier will help make their boat go faster.

A key teaching in the art of judo is what they call “happo no kuzushi”. It is physics, really; Isaac Newton would say “an object in motion tends to stay in motion.” The Japanese, however, would write a little poem about a leaf bending to let the snow drop away. Either way, the principle is the same. Use the momentum of your prospective customer to your own advantage.

Next time you are going for gold, calm down and use your mind. Devote rather less time to thinking about your stuff, and much more time to analysing your prospect and figuring out what they are trying to achieve. Then repeat “gentleness always overcomes strength” and magically, everything you wish for will come to pass. If, however, that doesn't quite do it for you, then don't panic, just think about this:

**“Sales is the process of getting what we want  
by helping others get what they want.”**