GOOD INTENTIONS, WRONG INSTINCTS:

Seven sales and marketing areas where you might have good intentions, but where the wrong instincts are leading you astray. Read on to discover how to align your good intentions with the right research-backed techniques.
In 1918, George Herman “Babe” Ruth led Major League Baseball in home runs, belting 11 of them in 95 games. Nicknamed the “Sultan of Swat,” he was by any measure a large man, standing 6’2” and weighing no less than 215 pounds (for much of his career, he likely weighed much more).

At the time, Ruth was using a 54-ounce bat. By today’s standards, that would be far and away the heaviest bat used by any professional player (for reference, current Detroit Tigers slugger Miguel Cabrera swings a 32-ounce bat).

Ruth’s reasoning for using the heavy bat seemed sensible enough: A big batter should swing a big bat. But while Ruth may have had good intentions, he had the wrong instincts.

Fast-forward nine years to 1927, and Ruth was still leading the majors in homers. The difference? He switched to a much smaller 40-ounce bat and hit a whopping 60 of them—a 5-6x improvement from his 1918 output.

SO, WHAT HAPPENED?
ART MEETS SCIENCE

What happened is that someone injected a little science and rigor into the art of hitting and determined that bat size wasn’t the greatest predictor of power—bat speed was. That a bigger guy with a smaller bat could hit more home runs was a classic counterintuitive insight—and a correct one that forever changed the game.

Keep in mind that Ruth was already relatively successful before switching to the lighter bat. But only after applying a research-backed principle to his game did he achieve his biggest breakthrough—and show what’s possible when good intentions are matched by the right actions. It’s not that you’re failing in your marketing and sales activities. It’s that you’re looking for breakthroughs. You can realize them by bucking tradition and applying research-backed concepts to your customer conversations.

On the next few pages, we’ll cover seven areas where you might have good intentions, but where the wrong instincts are leading you astray in your messaging, content and delivery skills. You’ll discover how to align good intentions with the right techniques.
THE FIX:

Diagnostic questions have been a mainstay of sales conversations for years, having long been regarded as the best way to uncover how and why your prospects are struggling. But new research shows that the most powerful way to get prospects to admit to pain and pursue a pathway to change is to lead with a compelling insight before asking discovery questions.

A Corporate Visions experiment, conducted with Dr. Zakary Tormala, a leading social psychologist with expertise in persuasion, found that leading with a great insight gives you a statistically significant edge in persuasiveness, compared to the traditional approach of leading with discovery questions. This is consistent with a decision-making science principle known as the “anchoring effect,” in which an insight serves to “anchor” your audience to a position more favorable to you. Interestingly, the results of the study show that asking diagnostic questions before delivering an insight produces no more persuasive power than skipping those questions altogether.
THE FIX:

By responding to your prospect’s stated needs—the standard “voice of the customer” approach—you’re not going to create real message differentiation. That’s because, like you, your competitors will be relying on, and responding to, the exact same customer inputs. The result is that your message won’t stand out or give prospects a compelling reason to do something different, because you haven’t shown them how you’re distinct from their status quo situation (or from your competitors, for that matter).

A better approach? Build a truly differentiated message by identifying and introducing your prospects to “unconsidered needs,” (i.e. challenges or missed opportunities they didn’t even know they had). Then, connect those needs you’ve identified to your unique strengths and capabilities to establish differentiation and create the urgency to change. A Corporate Visions study found that a message based on unconsidered needs, versus the traditional “voice of the customer” approach, is perceived by prospects as 40 percent more unique. It also creates a 10 percent greater impact in terms of persuading prospects to change.
THE FIX:

This isn’t a totally wrong instinct—it’s just an incomplete one. You do need to create excitement and urgency with a compelling insight. But you can’t stop there. To deliver a message that incites buying intent—rather than just exciting prospects for a passing moment—you need to do more than create risk. Your message must also show how your solutions can resolve the business risks you’ve identified and lead your prospects to a better and safer alternative.

In a study with Dr. Zakary Tormala, Corporate Visions found that creating risk and linking that risk to an alternative “resolution” scenario gives you a statistically significant edge in terms of creating buying intent, versus simply presenting risk alone. While delivering an insight-based message with surprising stats and data points might have some utility in terms of creating risk, that message won’t have the positive impact on behaviors and emotions. And it won’t convince prospects to change if it’s not paired with specific strategies for resolving that risk.

Watch a quick video summarizing the research.
THE FIX:

This is exactly the kind of commodity messaging that leads to buyer inaction and actually reinforces your prospect’s status quo situation. To make a compelling case for change, you can’t just enumerate your features and benefits—which may not be much different from your competitors. Instead, create contrast between the pain and struggle your prospect feels in her status quo and the performance improvements and upside she can gain from switching to your solution.

Without painting a picture of contrast between your prospect’s current state and the new and better future state you’re proposing, you’ll struggle to create the context for change.

GOOD INTENTION:
Convince your prospect to leave their current situation.

WRONG INSTINCT:
Tout the features and benefits of your solution.

Research from Corporate Visions, conducted with Dr. Zakary Tormala, validates the idea that contrast is essential to driving persuasion and delivering a powerful “why change” story. The experiment found that a message that contrasts a current and future state—versus one that only focuses on the features and benefits of your solution—gives you a statistically significant edge in some of the most important areas of persuasion. Participants in the study who saw a contrast presentation, compared to those who only heard about the future state, reported a:

- 15 percent lift in purchase intent.
- 14 percent boost in willingness to switch brands
- 12 percent boost in buyer advocacy
- 13 percent increase in perceiving the vendor as innovative
THE FIX:
The Picture Superiority Effect says that humans only remember 10 percent of what they learn just two days after hearing it. But add a visual and that figure jumps to 65 percent. It’s no secret that great visual storytelling makes a difference in your customer conversations. The question is, what *kinds* of visuals actually have the biggest impact?

Corporate Visions put that question to the test in a recent study, which looked at the relative impacts of three types of visual storytelling presentations: a whiteboard-style presentation featuring simple, concrete visuals, a traditional PowerPoint presentation, and a “Zen” PowerPoint study using metaphorical images. The study revealed that whiteboard-style visuals outperform PowerPoint by statistically significant margins across some of the most important areas of persuasion, including recall, engagement, credibility and perceptions of quality.

To see the full results of the study, check out this [research brief](#).
GOOD INTENTION:
Convince executive buyers to take business risks, like changing solutions.

WRONG INSTINCT:
Message only to their mathematical, analytical side, ignoring emotions.

THE FIX:
There’s a long-held and broadly promoted belief among marketers and salespeople that executive buyers are hyper-rational, relying strictly on reason and math to reach decisions. That’s a nice enough theory. It just happens to be a false one.

As it turns out, executives are no more swayed by emotions than the rest of us. Corporate Visions research revealed that executives are more willing to make a risky business decision when the alternative, including the current status quo, is framed in terms of loss instead of gain. In fact, even though the “math” was exactly the same in both options, the words used to present the choices affected executives’ willingness to make a different choice by more than 70 percent.

Learn more about the research here.
THE FIX:

When you’re the outsider trying to disrupt your prospect’s status quo, challenging them can work wonders. But when you are the status quo and you’re trying to win renewals, that same provocative approach can backfire.

A Corporate Visions study found that using a provocative message in a renewal context—versus using a message that reinforces the status quo—makes customers 10 percent more likely to shop around and even switch providers. On the other hand, by reinforcing the causes of the status quo bias in your message, you can generate significant boosts in intentions to renew, positive attitudes and credibility.

GOOD INTENTION:
Tell a great “why stay” story to convince customers to renew with you.

WRONG INSTINCT:
Apply a provocative messaging approach to the conversation.
BRINGING IT HOME

Good intentions, without the right instincts, have the potential to hold you back from Babe Ruth-like breakthroughs in your customer conversations. Ruth didn’t hit 60 home runs by accident—he did it because he applied deeper rigor and insight to his craft. Marketers and sales pros need to do the same. The only way to continually improve your customer conversations is to continually question the supposed “best practices” and conventional wisdom of the day. That will ensure your messages, content and skills aren’t hijacked by myths and unexamined folklore, but informed by tested and proven principles that reflect how buyers actually make decisions.

Corporate Visions helps global B2B companies:

- Develop compelling messages to break the status quo and differentiate their solution;
- Deploy those messages in the field through demand generation and sales enablement content; and
- Deliver sales skills that help salespeople confidently use the messages and content to create, elevate and capture more value in their customer conversations.