



Charm School for Product Managers

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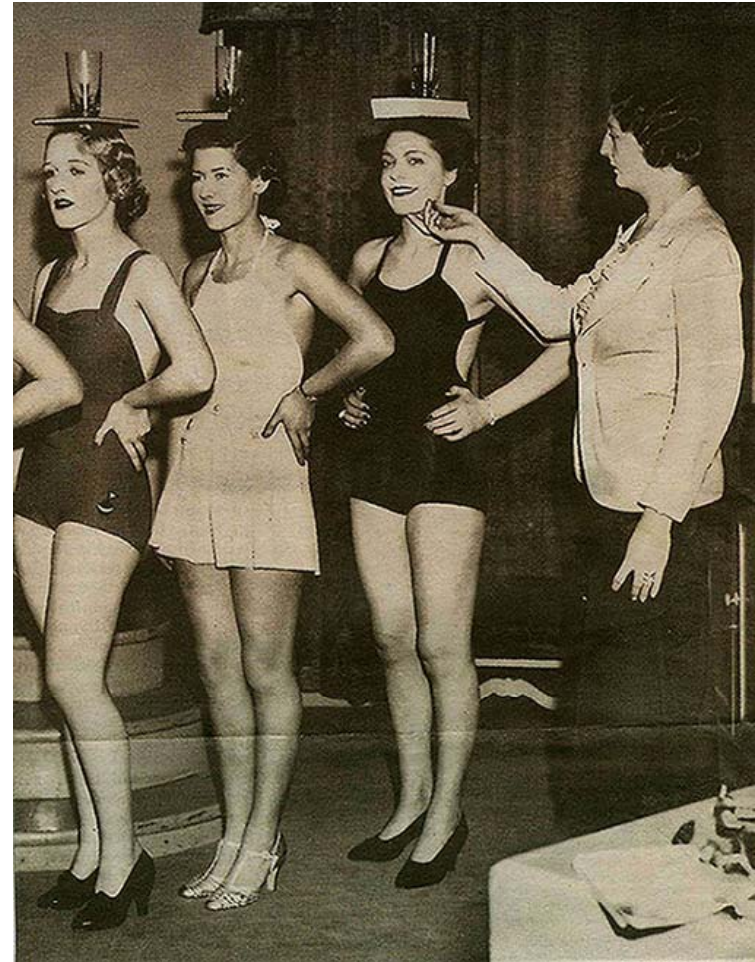
P-Camp Silicon Valley

March 14, 2009

Why Charm School?

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- Product Managers tend to have good interpersonal skills...
- ...but it helps to have responses ready for common sticky situations
- Charming PMs have easier lives!



Ever Been Tongue-Tied in These Situations?

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- ❑ Customer angry about poor quality or missing functionality
- ❑ Customer demands feature X or release date Y
- ❑ Sales blames all losses on the product or price
- ❑ Sales makes unrealistic/false product claims
- ❑ Development violently disagrees with your product plans.
- ❑ Sales/Marketing/anyone makes a request you can't/won't do



Basic Principles

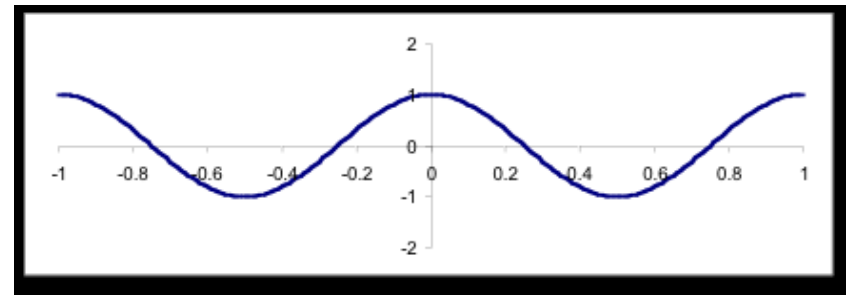
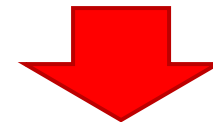
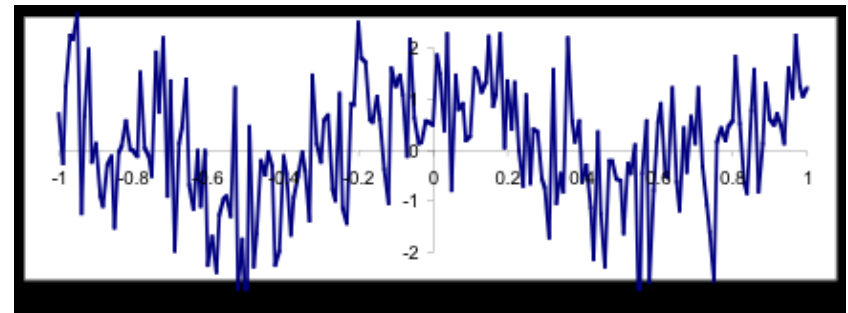
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- Set expectations correctly
 - ▣
$$\text{CustomerSatisfaction} = \frac{\text{CustomerPerception}}{\text{CustomerExpectations}}$$
- Assume the other person is smart & has legitimate feedback
- Be empathetic
- Don't be too blunt
- Listen!
- Don't take it personally
- Use "WE" not "I"

Basic Technique #1

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- *Separate Signal from Noise*
 - ▣ Separate the core complaint from the personal attack
 - ▣ Address only the core complaint



Basic Technique #2

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- “The Sandwich”
 - ▣ Use to deliver bad news
 - ▣ Use to criticize or provide feedback

 - ▣ 1. Start with something positive...
 - ▣ 2. Then deliver the negative...
 - ▣ 3. Wrap up with another positive

 - ▣ Don't use if you can't be sincere!
 - ▣ Don't have this be the only time you praise / say something nice!



Basic Technique #3

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“Frankly, my dear, I DO give a damn.”



1. LACE

1. **L**isten to their issues! (don't respond!)
 2. **A**sk if there are any OTHER issues
 3. **C**onfirm you understand – restate & repeat 1-3 until they are satisfied
 4. **E**xplore – in theory, if there was a way to handle all of these issues, would they be happy & proceed?
2. Explain you want to help, but you face the following obstacles: <list>
 3. (Suggest some possible alternatives)
 4. Assure them you will keep looking for a way to address their core concerns.

NOW.... Let's Practice!

Challenge 1: Customer Demands

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- “When is the next big release coming out? I need to tell my manager a date. Our business depends on it.”
- “Don’t give me the run-around. Is feature X in the next release or not?”

Challenge 2: Customer Fury

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- “We told you we **NEED** feature X to work – our business depends on it! But it just **DOESN’T** work!”

“You guys don’t know what the @#\$% you’re doing!”



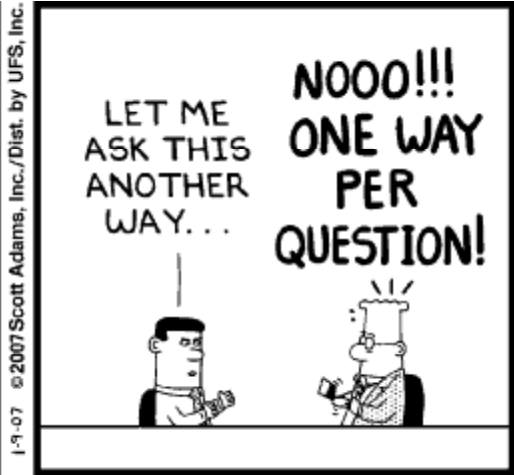
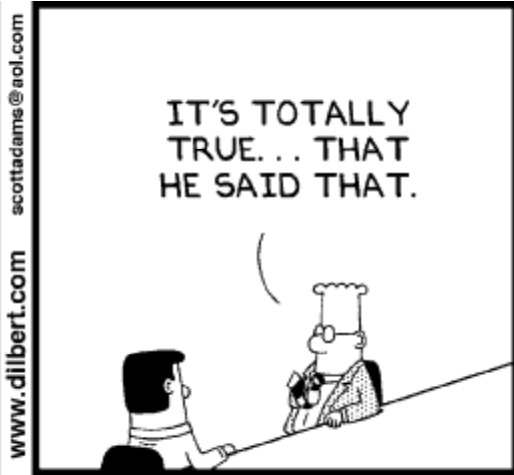
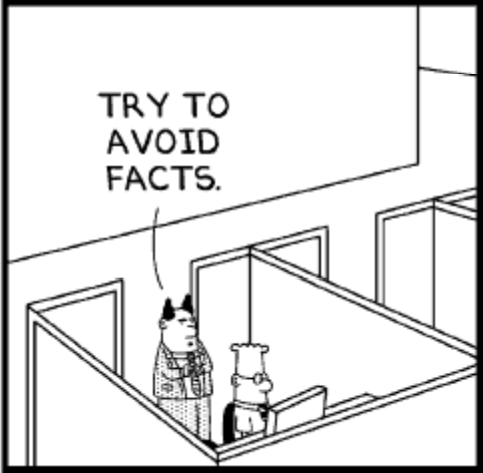
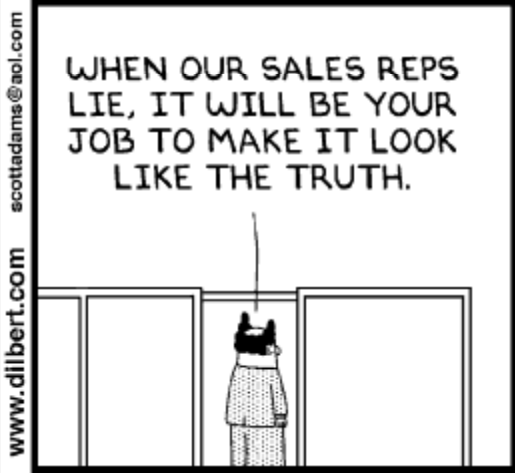
Challenge 3: Sales Overpromises

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- ***Salesperson:***
“Yes, our product can do everything you’re asking for, plus fix the global financial meltdown. Just sign this contract.”
- ***Customer (to PM):***
“Is everything he said TRUE?”

Challenge 3 (addendum)



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Challenge 4: Sales Blames the Product (or the Price)

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- “We lost this HUGE deal because our product is missing BASIC features that all our competitors have.”
- “The price is way too high. Who came up with our pricing anyway?”

Challenge 5: Unpleasant Developers

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- “Your product strategy is completely stupid.”
- “It’s not a bug, it’s an enhancement.”
- “You didn’t specify it the requirements/stand-up, so it’s not gonna happen.”
- <sneer>“You have no clue, *product manager* . What do you do all day anyway? I’m way smarter than you. Get on the phone and sell the product, will you?”</sneer>



Other Sticky Situations

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- Announcing to customers / the field:
 - ▣ price increases
 - ▣ release schedule slips
 - ▣ dropped functionality
- ~~Pestering~~ Reminding customers to make good on a promise: beta testing, being a case study subject, ...
- Responding to Sales “This is a small deal now, but if we add huge feature X it could lead to 10s of millions next year.”
- “We need you to give a demo in Paris, tomorrow!”
- ...Others?

Words / Phrases To Use

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- “We’re letting you know as soon as possible, because we don’t want you to be unexpectedly surprised later.”
- “Can you explain more about why that is important to you? Sometimes we can find a different way that still meets your needs.”
- “We appreciate your willingness to give us feedback”
- “I understand your feelings and would be similarly frustrated in your position, but...”
- “We always do our very best to meet our stated release plans. But there’s always an element of unpredictability in software development, so we can’t put forth a definitive list of features or definitive release date for some time.”
- “I apologize for the inconvenience and thank you for your patience and understanding”

About Sure Product Consulting, Inc.

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- Services
 - Product management
 - Product marketing
 - Coaching & mentoring for product management teams
- Expertise
 - Enterprise software, software-as-a-service, virtualization, business intelligence, retail, financial institutions, highly available & scalable software, social networking
- Principal: Sue Raisty-Egami
 - 10 years of experience in Product Management and Product Marketing
 - 5 years as software developer and business strategy consultant
 - Former Director of Product Management and former startup entrepreneur
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