

During my years at this university, I have had the opportunity to explore many new and exciting experiences. None, more so, than my current endeavor, the design and construction of a formula style racecar. This project involves not only designing the car, but also acquiring the items to build it, such as an engine, tubing for the frame, etc. To acquire these items, money or materials must be obtained through sponsorships. These sponsorships are achieved by approaching area businesses, and asking for money. The key to getting funds from a business is to convince its representatives that it is in their best interest to become a sponsor.

There are few things more intimidating to young, inexperienced engineers than to approach a group of established engineers and ask them for a piece of one of the most closely guarded commodities available, their budget. Before walking into the meeting, I had planned what slides I would show, what I would say. I needed to sound competent, but did not want to sound arrogant. These were respected members of the engineering community. Men and women who had been in my position. I rehearsed my presentation, timed it, practiced it in front of my peers until I felt comfortable with it. It had all the information necessary: sponsorship levels and benefits, along with some slides showing preliminary designs.

Regardless of my planning, nothing prepared me for the anxiety I felt when I walked into the conference room. The room was simply decorated, with an elliptical conference table, a dozen or so chairs, and a few abstract works of art on the wall. The room conveyed the essence of frugality, and that was a characteristic I did not want to see. In front of one wall was a projector screen. An overhead projector sat on a cart at one end of the table. Around the table sat six gentlemen, all dressed in suits, and there I stood, feeling underdressed, in a pair of slacks, shirt, and tie.

My first objective was to establish the credibility of the design team. Without establishing the idea that we were capable designers, it would have been futile to continue on with my presentation. If the gentlemen felt that we either weren't being realistic, or not using sound engineering principles, it would have been impossible to persuade them to donate any money. Therefore I had to convince the audience, that we, as a design team, had used our collective skills and judgments to create a competitive, yet cost efficient, car. To achieve this, I presented them with some of our technical drawings, formulas, and analyses. I also had to prove to them that we were also trying to utilize all present resources. So I showed how we had taken into account all possibilities and chose the ones which made best use of our current materials. This gained credibility because it showed that we were attempting to create the best possible racecar, but, at the same time, keep an eye on costs.

My next strategy was to convince them of what the car meant to the students who were designing, and building, it. It is well known that if you have no interest in your work, or do not take pride in it, you are not going to develop a quality product. So, during the presentation, I made sure to emphasize the amount of time and effort each team member had spent in developing the car. How each person had undertaken the design and analysis of individual pieces of the car. For example, I designed and analyzed how the seat would be integrated into the car. I had to create a design that followed the principle of racecar design, which is low weight and high strength, while remaining within the boundaries of the rules set forth by the competition coordinators.

I was also able to use this point to also develop one of my other strategies. Since everyone had their own individual projects, as well as aiding in the development of the major components, there was a great deal of communication within the team. My objective here was to show that, by supporting our car, the sponsors were aiding the education of the students by reinforcing the idea of teamwork and the communication required to be part of a team. By donating money, the sponsors were promoting the gain of valuable experience in teamwork, and, in engineering, almost all projects are done in teams.

My final, and most important, objective was to sell my audience on the

benefits sponsorship would have for them. Some of the tangible benefits were things such as: the ability to have their company name and logo prominently displayed on the car and driver's suit, access to the car for purposes of display at their regional or main location, display of company name and logo on all team promotional materials, including T-shirts, and a copy of the monthly progress report. However, it is the intangible benefits that are most rewarding. By sponsoring the team, the company would get its name spread around the department in favorable terms. They would gain credibility with students in the department, as a company that takes an interest in the university. Students are, also, more interested in pursuing a career at a company with whom they are familiar. This translates into a better, and larger, pool of candidates for post-graduate positions.

Through my presentation, I was able to persuade the representatives of the company to sponsor the team. In the short term, we benefited by gaining \$1000 towards our budget. When it comes to the long term benefits, we gained a valuable ally and a company that would be more likely to sponsor the team in future years. This is favorable, because the longer a company is a sponsor, the amount of money they donate tends to increase. While this may not benefit this year's design team, it does alleviate some of the pressure from successive teams. Finally, the most valuable thing I learned, which will help me in future persuasive situations, was confidence. I learned that there is no real reason to fear having to give a presentation, or speak to others.
