



What Procurement Should Learn from M&S

NANCY CLINTON - June 16, 2015 12:30 AM |

Categories: Procurement Commentary | **Tags:** Communication, M&S, Sigi Osagie, understanding procurement



We're delighted that Sigi Osagie, expert on effectiveness in Procurement & Supply Chain Management, is going to be writing for us regularly. He helps organisations and individuals achieve enhanced performance growth to accomplish their business and

*career goals and is author of the highly-acclaimed book **Procurement Mojo – Strengthening the Function and Raising Its Profile.***

I've always admired Marks & Spencer's "Dine in for Two" TV advert. The savvy marketing inherent in the ad is nicely and smoothly underplayed by the benefits offered: a cosy, romantic dinner indoors with your loved one for a very reasonable £10.

Whether your loved one is a husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, cat, dog, or even an orang-utan, it's an enticing notion to eat in and enjoy a romantic evening so cheaply, at a time when the aftershocks of the recession still reverberate in our wallets.

Most ordinary folks I know who saw the M&S TV advert when it was first launched were indeed titillated, if not by the allure of the meals then certainly by other perceived delights.

Despite getting a 'bit of stick' later on over this ad campaign, M&S pulled off a real coup by launching it. They succeeded in exploiting two of the most critical and universal principles in productive human interactions – empathetic listening and persuasive communication.

M&S had listened, and understood that their customers' finances had been somewhat depleted by the recession. Enjoying regular meals out is nigh-on impossible with a lean purse. M&S leveraged this empathetic listening and understanding to 'connect' with customers effectively, by tailoring their message persuasively – they successfully incorporated Aristotle's *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, which I wrote about in a previous article.

In a nutshell, M&S's core offering (as regards this ad) is really a ready meal and a bottle of wine. But they packaged the communication of that proposition persuasively, in a way that:

- Offers perceived good value – a dinner for two for £10 is cheap compared to going out to a restaurant, hence quite relevant for someone with a lean purse.
- Offers perceived benefits beyond the core product which appeals to the target audience, i.e., the idea of a romantic evening in with your loved one.

In truth, if your relationship has lost its spark or you're both simply jaded by life, then I suspect M&S may be unlikely to help.

Nonetheless, these two points and the underlying principles intrinsic in M&S's approach hold vital lessons for us in the Procurement profession. They replicate a rubric we must incorporate to one of the most common and arduous problems purchasing people complain about repeatedly: stakeholder management.

Procurement stakeholders are really 'internal customers.' (Everybody in the enterprise who uses externally sourced products or services is a customer of Procurement.) Like M&S customers, our stakeholders or internal customers are facing their own challenges in their organisational existence. Before we start trying to push the Procurement agenda or expend energy fighting for our right to a seat at the table, it'd be more effective to understand these folks and their worldviews first.

St. Francis of Assisi indicated the wisdom of this approach eons ago, and Stephen R. Covey reminded us more recently: "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

If you understand stakeholders' perspectives, drives and motivations first, you will be much more able to shape the Procurement agenda to address their needs, and, thus, make Procurement more meaningful and relevant to them.

You will also be able to connect with individual stakeholders better on a personal level, and use your understanding to tailor the content, language and packaging of your communications.

Empathetic listening and persuasive communication are vital requirements to build rapport and win people over. In conjunction, they form one of the most powerful conduits to cultivating productive stakeholder relationships. Engagement like this inherently creates positive perceptions of you as an individual. When you combine this successfully with a Procurement agenda that helps stakeholders address their challenges and achieve the broader enterprise goals, you create positive functional perceptions. This nurtures the 'Procurement brand' across the wider organisation and helps position Procurement in the fabric of the enterprise.

