

Securing sales by pitching to win with Justin Cohen

 By Leigh Andrews

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Business strategist Justin Cohen has coached global entrepreneurs, small businesses and major corporates on how to win some of the toughest multimillion-dollar pitches. To kick off our #EntrepreneurMonth coverage, he shares that business pitching in SA is no different than it is anywhere else.



Justin Cohen, author of *Pitch to Win*.

Justin Cohen's business book *Pitch to Win* has just hit the second spot on the Exclusive Books Business list. That's because the book exposes the secret to career success, no matter the field. Cohen says he learnt the hard way that it wasn't good enough to be great at what he does, he also has to be great at pitching what he does.

Here, Cohen shares the basics of how to present, persuade and close the deal, even if you 'hate selling', based on his six-step formula, which has been credited with winning some of the toughest deals and exponentially increasing sales.

■ ***Let us in on the specific experience that led you to write your book, *Pitch to Win*.***

Have you ever been convinced that you had the best offering, yet lost the deal to a competitor offering less value at a higher price? That's happened to me a lot. I struggled for years to close deals.

I remember the day I finally got my wake-up call: I'd just lost a five-figure deal, to someone offering less value at a higher

price! Working out my frustration at the gym, it hit me: if I was convinced my offering was the best and I didn't get the deal, then clearly offering great value is not enough.

“ *It's not enough to have the best product, you've got to have the best pitch.* ”

Imagine bringing a life-saving drug into the world. A drug that cures a form of cancer. Surely you wouldn't have to market that? News would spread like wildfire. Sick people would be beating your door down.

But you'd be wrong, as pharmaceutical companies spend more on pitching their drugs than they do on research and development. If it's like that for a cure for cancer, why should it be any different for what you and I have to offer? When I faced that reality, I decided to master this field.

■ ***Drilling down locally, talk us through the current context of pitching for business in SA.***

It's really no different to anywhere else. International research shows there are ten top reasons why one pitch is chosen over another. The paper proposal is tenth on the list, but energy and enthusiasm rank in the top spot. That largely comes through not in what we say, but how we say it.

Of course, the message is important but people don't remember what you say, they remember how you say it!

❖ ***And how you make them feel, of course. Do you think the rise of the Fourth Industrial Revolution serves as a help or hindrance to this process?***

Until machines take over procurement and recruitment, we need to understand human psychology if we are to win over humans.

❖ ***Nice. Looking at a personal level then, you note that we all sell all day, and those of us who 'hate selling', really hate rejection – how can we work on that and learn to do so without being too 'sales-y'?***

I want to give you a 'rejection vaccine', as a vaccine is like karate training for the immune system. By implanting a tiny amount of the disease, the body learns to defend itself against it. If rejection is the disease or dis-ease, as in, it makes us feel uneasy, the best way to defend ourselves against it is to expose ourselves to it.

If you avoid it, you build up even more fear toward it. The more you experience it, the more immune you become to it. So by regularly offering your services through big pitches or small – experiencing the inevitable rejection that will come, you will find it less and less scary. The key is to feel the fear and do it anyway.

“ *The more you pitch, the less fear you feel. And the more you pitch, the more likely you are to eventually win.* ”

So whenever you can, grab opportunities to pitch your ideas, products or services.

And know that God's delays are not God's denials. As long as you're offering great value, success is around the corner, but you won't get there if you don't get out there and ask for the business.

❖ ***A clarion call to get ourselves out there! Share some tips on the 'pitch to win' process in a nutshell... without revealing any spoilers to those who haven't yet read the book.***

The 'Pitch to win' 6-step 'TTOPPS' model is:

- 1) **Tune in.** She who listens best, wins. The pitch is won in your understanding of what they need and want.
- 2) **Team.** A pitch is not won by one! The relationships with your team is critical to your success.
- 3) **Optimism.** When you pitch a lot, you get rejected a lot, which is why a positive expectation that you will eventually win is key to success.
- 4) **Presence.** How you say it is more important than what you say.
- 5) **Purpose.** We all want to buy from people who truly want to serve us more than themselves.
- 6) **Story.** Emotional stories win over dry facts.



"We regret to inform you"

Justin Cohen 11 Sep 2019



Simple as that. For more information on Justin Cohen, his book *Pitch To Win* and upcoming speaking events, keep an eye on his [website](#) as well as his [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) profiles.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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