



Good in a Room: How to Sell Yourself (and Your Ideas) and Win Over Any Audience

By Stephanie Palmer

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"Stephanie Palmer delivers clear, useful advice on how to successfully move the good idea in your head into the other heads in the room. It is hard to think of a more valuable skill."

--Peter Kaufman, CEO, Glenair Inc.

Former MGM Director of Creative Affairs Stephanie Palmer reveals the techniques used by Hollywood's top writers, directors and producers to get financing for their projects and explains how you can apply these techniques to be more successful in your own high-stakes meetings. Because, as Palmer as found, the strategies used to sell yourself and your ideas in Hollywood Hollywood not only work in other businesses, they often work *better*.

After taking over three thousand pitch meetings, Stephanie Palmer has seen what works, what doesn't, and has developed a system for helping people with good ideas get the attention and financing they deserve. This is important because of how technology and globalization have created exponential growth in the marketplace for ideas. If you can communicate your ideas concisely and effectively, you will have the edge no matter what industry you are in.

Whether you intend to ask for a raise, sign a potential client, promote a new business, secure financing for a creative project, get sponsors for your charity walk or even ask someone on a date, GOOD IN A ROOM shows you how to:

- Master the five stages of the face-to-face meeting
- Avoid the secret dealbreakers of the first ninety seconds
- Be confident in high-pressure situations
- Present yourself better and more effectively than you ever have before

GOOD IN A ROOM is a step-by-step guide to improving your performance in high-stakes meetings as well as in other areas of your professional life. You'll learn insider secrets, cutting-edge techniques, and how to construct winning presentations that persuade decision-makers. That's what being good in a room is

all about.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Stephanie Palmer coaches business leaders and creative professionals in a wide range of industries to help them get their ideas the attention and financing they deserve. As part of MGM's executive team for six years, she supervised twenty films with multimillion dollar budgets, including the international screen hit, *Legally Blonde*. She has been featured on NBC's *Today*, CBS's *Early Show*, The Los Angeles Times, Variety and NPR.

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CHAPTER 1

Why You Should Read This Book

The reason you should read this book is because the strategies and tactics that people use to sell ideas in Hollywood work in the rest of the business world. I have worked with entrepreneurs, executives, and professionals in industries such as real estate, financial services, retail sales, law, advertising, marketing, video games, and more. The techniques used to sell ideas in Hollywood not only work in other industries, they often work *better*.

As you already know, “good in a room” is a Hollywood term referring to creative people who excel at pitching in high-stakes meetings. I’ve had—literally—thousands of these meetings. During my time as a studio executive at MGM, I had over three thousand pitch meetings where writers, directors, stars, and producers would try to persuade me to buy their ideas.

Most of the time, ideas are pitched poorly. However, there are some people who succeed all the time. Over a period of years, I paid attention to what worked and what didn’t. I identified the techniques that were being used in all of the successful meetings—regardless of who was pitching. I also found a considerable number of ways that the person pitching could break the deal, often without knowing it.

Many studio executives, or “suits,” have backgrounds in sales, marketing, or finance. My degree is in theatrical directing from Carnegie Mellon. So when I started hearing pitches, I wasn’t just thinking about whether to say yes or no. I was seeing the meeting as a theatrical performance.

Unfortunately, most writers, like most people, do not have a comprehensive strategy to deliver a great performance. When the time comes to pitch in a high-stakes situation, even someone experienced can stumble and ruin a golden opportunity without a solid meeting technique.

When someone with a great idea doesn’t present it effectively, it not only hurts them, but all of us as well. Why? Because mediocre ideas will get purchased and produced if superior ideas aren’t pitched well enough.

The fact is that when it comes to making a buying decision, buyers can more easily evaluate the information on the surface, i.e., the pitch. It’s harder to evaluate what’s inside. As you know, this is true beyond Hollywood. In a grocery aisle, success is determined more by the design and copywriting on the packaging than by the quality of the product. In job interviews, hiring decisions tend to look past differences in work

experience and focus on how the candidates perform in the room. My point is not that pitching is everything. Rather, it's that good products deserve good packaging and great ideas deserve a great pitch.

Even shy, awkward, introverted people can learn to pitch well. One of my highlights from MGM was when I found a new writer named Mike who was pitching a high school comedy with a unique angle. His script was great, but his pitch was a disaster. He didn't know how to handle the small talk, he pitched too soon and with way too much detail—he broke the deal in a dozen different ways. Ordinarily I would just pass on his project, but I was frustrated with the quality of the movies we were making and I didn't want to send this great script back to the slush pile. So I coached Mike on how to perform in each stage of the meeting and told him exactly what to say when my boss asked, "So, what's your project about?"

The next day, Mike pitched his idea beautifully to my boss, and it sold right there in the meeting. Afterward, he told me that he'd been staying on his brother's couch for the last three months and was preparing to move back in with his parents. With this one sale, his career was on an entirely new trajectory. And for me, in a job where so much of my time was spent surviving cutthroat politics and producing mediocre ideas, helping Mike succeed was really gratifying. I realized then that I wanted to focus on pitching, not production.

A year later, I left my executive job and started my own company, also called Good in a Room, to help writers and directors with quality ideas get the attention and financing they deserve. Then I did an interview with National Public Radio and I started getting some remarkable calls. A fashion designer wanted help bringing out his summer collection. A marketing exec wanted to get promoted to VP. A financial advisor wanted to find new clients and expand her business.

Soon enough, my non-Hollywood clients were landing million-dollar accounts, doubling their client rosters, launching successful small businesses, increasing their revenue, and getting promoted. Sure, some of my clients were skeptical at first. William, for example, was a sixty-something financial advisor from Texas. We met at the Merrill Lynch campus in New Jersey. I was there to give the concluding presentation at the annual conference for top producers.

William was already quite successful. He didn't need to change how he was doing business. As well, he was in a conservative business in a conservative part of the country, so anything that came out of a liberal place such as Hollywood was immediately suspect.

Still, he wanted to take his business to the next level, and he was smart enough to realize that unless he wanted to simply put in more hours and work harder, he was going to have to try something new. I consulted with him the next morning before we went to the airport and suggested that he modify his standard approach in a few significant ways. He was doubtful, but he said he'd give it a shot when he got back to Texas.

When I landed in LA, William had already left me a message. Turns out the guy sitting next to him on the plane had just sold his business and needed a financial advisor he could trust. Rather than trying to "sell" him, as so many financial advisors do, my client practiced the Good in a Room techniques and signed him rather effortlessly.

Meeting a client on a plane is practically a cliché (though in reality, it doesn't happen very often), and all of the credit belongs to William. Still, the idea that a sixty-something financial advisor in conservative Texas could, with one consultation, master and successfully apply what works for thirty-something writers in liberal Los Angeles? Very cool.

Whether you work in Hollywood or not, the fact is that selling ideas is really difficult to do. The reason the

pitching secrets of the most successful writers and directors are relevant is that these people have evolved an advanced method for selling ideas.

Whether you're a screenwriter, a journalist with an idea for a story, an entrepreneur with a business plan, an inventor with a blueprint, or a manager with an innovative solution, if you want other people to invest their time, energy, and money in your idea, you face an uphill battle.

First, ideas aren't tangible—no one can kick the tires of your idea. Second, ideas aren't quantifiable—the decision maker can't reliably estimate the value of your idea in monetary terms. As my boss at MGM used to say, "If we knew which ideas would be hits, we would only make hits." Third, ideas are risky—there can be millions of dollars on the line and reputations at stake when a buyer says yes to an idea. Fourth, people who buy ideas hear so many pitches that getting their attention and actually convincing them is exceptionally difficult. Finally, the more original your idea is, the tougher it is to pitch effectively. Any groundbreaking idea will be harder to sell simply because there isn't a precedent to show it will work.

As risks increase and buyers become more difficult to persuade, people who sell ideas must clear an even higher bar. We must get in the right rooms with the right people. We need a comprehensive strategy and the most advanced tactics. Then we can present ourselves and our ideas with confidence.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Willie Blackburn:

The book *Good in a Room: How to Sell Yourself (and Your Ideas) and Win Over Any Audience* can give more knowledge and also the precise product information about everything you want. Why then must we leave the great thing like a book *Good in a Room: How to Sell Yourself (and Your Ideas) and Win Over Any Audience*? A few of you have a different opinion about guide. But one aim in which book can give many facts for us. It is absolutely appropriate. Right now, try to closer using your book. Knowledge or details that you take for that, you are able to give for each other; you can share all of these. Book *Good in a Room: How to Sell Yourself (and Your Ideas) and Win Over Any Audience* has simple shape but the truth is know: it has great and massive function for you. You can appear the enormous world by wide open and read a publication. So it is very wonderful.

Jean Parks:

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