

Find the need, not the want--The prospect's, not yours

"If a salesperson expresses a view to a prospect, it's a pitch. If a prospect expresses it--out loud -- it's true."

Probing is about uncovering prospects wants, desires and needs --and differentiating the three to provide a solution that will enable them to accomplish their goals.

There's an old rule in sales known as the 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 rule. The rule says that in any true funnel, where effective sales appointments are run- not blind cold calls in contrast- the top salesperson will do this:

Sell 1/3 of the opportunities regardless of skillset and effort and lose 1/3 of the opportunities regardless of skillset and effort. It's the middle 1/3 we call sales.

Effective probing determines which is the bottom 1/3 and which is the middle third. But the key is to recognize that you must find that bottom 1/3 to discover the middle 1/3. Likewise, until you find that middle 1/3, you will never find that top 1/3.

To effectively probe, understand why we probe. Yes, as we said, it's about "uncovering needs," but it's uncovering needs systematically.

We probe to:

1. Build alliances to tie back during the presentation
2. Reveal the buying criteria prospects will use
3. Understand the prospect's buying process
4. Discover the pain in prospects that call them to action -before the solution is presented
5. Uncover the individual hot buttons of the prospect

So how do we do this? We do this by recognizing that probing is like a flow chart: If a =b, then b=c, and c=d, and then a=d.

Build from non-threatening, rapport building questions, to more challenging questions, and then the most challenging.

Think of a detective or prosecutor. They don't just come right at the suspect. They don't say, "You did it! You did it! Admit it!" No, they take it slow and then when they have their necessary rapport, they come at them hard. They "earn the

right to sell," in essence. Don't they?

Probing in selling is the same way.

In addition, as stated above--prospects must verbalize these premises out loud, both for themselves and for you. Only then can you offer the solution- based on what they said.

To get you going, here are the top 8 questions to ask on a sales call:

"Thanks for meeting with me. I'm glad our schedules could match up. I don't want to waste your time or my time. They are equally valuable. Every customer of mine is different with different needs. In order to determine how- and if- we can help you. I need to ask you a few questions. Is that all right?"

This question puts you on the same playing field as your prospect. Remember, you are a consultant, not a salesperson. This establishes that from the onset.

2. "I know a little bit about your company from your website, but in your own words, please tell me about your business."

They say this is an outdated question? Not at all. It still comes down to what do people like to talk about most? Themselves. Besides, you'd be amazed how often prospects are still not asked this question.

3. "Why do you think you have been so successful?"

This is both to find the commonality to use later and to see how prospects view themselves. Later on, when you present, you will say, "Much like your business, Mr. Customer, which has been successful due to customer service, ours has, too."

4. "Please walk me through the buying process. Who signs on the dotted line? Is that you?"

Don't ask, "Who makes the decisions?" That can be misconstrued. A prospect may say they do, but then they have to "run it by" so and so. They didn't lie to you. You didn't ask the right question.

But nobody will ever say they sign on the dotted line if they don't.

5. "What is the biggest challenge from a (whatever your industry is) perspective?"

This tells you their need. If they don't have a challenge or they don't have an

answer, this is a big red flag you may not be able to help.

6. "How will you measure the success of the project?"

Everybody judges success differently. How do they judge it? This also will tell you whether they are price shopping, quality shopping, customer service, etc. In addition, it will confirm whether they truly are the one who signs on the dotted line.

7. "I only have one other question, John, (say their name) for us to earn your business, what is important to you and your company?"

Don't mince words here. Don't say, "What are you looking for?" The word "important" is a very powerful word. That combined with the person's name truly shows how much you care.

8. "Let me summarize what you said. (then say it).

Did I miss anything or is that a good summary? Let me show you how we can help. "

Todd Natenberg, President, TBN Sales Solutions, is the author of the book, "I just got a job in sales. Now what?" A Playbook for Skyrocketing Your Commissions.

He also is the producer of the new home study course: "How to Double Your Sales in 1/2 the Time: Sell How You Want to Buy." This 10-hour interactive cd series can be listened to in the car or on the computer.

TBN Sales Solutions increases commissions for salespeople and prosperity for businesses through customized training and consulting. They establish structures and procedures in all facets of the sales process, through workshops and individual one on one sales education, to teach clients to control their own destiny, to impact the bottom line.

Visit www.IJustGotAJobInSales.com for more information. Todd can be reached at 866-464-0339 or e-mail Todd@ToddNatenberg.com.