



SMART MANAGEMENT

BY MARY DONATO

Getting clients to open up

Three proven steps to winning more business

Wouldn't it be great if you could find a proven process that teaches you how to get clients to open up, and which does so by engaging them in structured business conversation instead of mere sales-speak? Here are three important steps that, with practice, can help you achieve just that.

1. Move off the solution. It's tempting to hear a few "buying signals" from a prospect or client and then immediately begin talking about your solutions. "Solutions have no inherent value," says Mahan Khalsa, founder of the FranklinCovey Sales Performance Group (as well as this issue's cover subject). "Solutions only derive value from the problems they solve and/or the results they produce."

Sales has two major skills: inquiry and advocacy. The goal of inquiry is to get the client to intellectually invest



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in the conversation. You really want to understand what their underlying problems and desired results are.

For example, let's say a client tells you, "I need cutting-edge, value-added ideas to strategically link our back-office operation with key organizational objectives. What new ideas do you have in this area?" Instead of jumping right in with the solution, try the following:

- Clarify the issues. "When you say 'cutting-edge,' what does that mean in the context of your situation?"
- Move to the underlying problems. "What kinds of problems have you been experiencing by not having this link of your back-office operation with key organizational objectives?"

Next, move to the desired results. "Let's say you put in a world-class system. What would that allow you to do that you can't do today?"

2. Ask effective questions. Doing so gives us insight into the client's specific motivations. Our ability to ask effective questions directly corresponds to our ability to win. As you're working with a client, it is important to uncover evidence that the problem exists and the impact the problem is having on the client's business.

3. Drive for hard evidence. Most salespeople wait for a relationship in order to ask hard questions. Yet, asking the hard questions is often what builds the relationship! What we want to do is "peel the onion" and find measurable impacts that the problem is creating within the client's business. Many times, clients will give us "soft evidence" that is hard to measure. That's when we want to ask questions that will take us down to the core toward the hard evidence.

Say, for example, the client says, "We feel there's an opportunity to improve communication among our people." In response, we can ask evidence questions that take us around the onion: "Which employees specifically?" "Which communication?" "Improve how?"

We also want to ask impact questions that take us into the core, such as, "If you improved your communication, what would that allow you to do that you can't do today?"

The client responds: "We would get the right information to the right people at the right time."

"And what would that enable you to do?"

"We would make better business decisions."

You still don't have anything tangible you can measure, so peel the onion some more:

"Making better business decisions is important. What specifically would that mean to your organization?"

"We could get closer to achieving our revenue targets, profits, bonuses, stock prices, customer satisfaction, etc."

Bingo! Now you can get hard metrics: "What is your revenue now, what would you like it to be, and what is the value of that difference in the next year or two?"

Try these three steps to winning more business. As with anything, it takes practice ... but the results will be well worth the effort.

IF YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS ON WHAT HAS WORKED FOR YOU IN LEVERAGING YOUR MARKETING DOLLARS, VISIT www.smmsoff.com TO SHARE YOUR IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES.