

in this issue >>>

Gaining Understanding

Applying Great Structure

Using the PQ Worksheet

Effective Questioning

Active Listening

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Module 5

Another Chapter in the Journey to becoming a Sales Pro!

*On*SELLING

current topics >>>

Need or Challenge?

When this stage of selling is discussed sometimes it is referred to "Needs ID" and other times you will hear "Understand Challenges." So, which is it? BOTH!

In some situations, there is more a focus on needs / requirements / wants. And other times the focus is on a challenge: a difficulty or problem faced.

The reality is that in most situations there will be a combination of needs and challenges and in either case your task is to isolate these elements and take the time to apply your questioning and listening skills to dig into these elements and gain the needed insight and understanding. Either name, same process!

Always Remember Your Task...

TO GAIN UNDERSTANDING

Don't confuse your tools, like questioning and listening, with the actual goal of understanding

The most critical skill you can have as a salesperson is the ability to discover and understand the challenges, needs, desires, and wants of your customers. It is from this understanding that selling flows. Our ultimate job is to play matchmaker between that understanding and our organization's capabilities.

So traditionally this stage of selling has focused on questioning and listening to uncover those needs and challenges. However, so much focus has been on these tools that at times we lose sight of the ultimate goal of understanding. Being an effective question asker is good, and being an effective listener is critical, but both of these skills / activities are designed to gain understanding.

Besides the traditional one-two of questioning and listening, we also want to be structured sellers that effectively facilitate. Those end up being the four key tools.

Structure – Questions – Listening - Facilitation

Mark your calendars...
**Great Lakes High
School Sales Challenge**

Two Events: Speed Selling & Role Play
Two Rounds: e-Round and
On-Campus. Dates & details can be
found on the GLHSSC web site:

www.wmusaleschallenge.com

Great selling starts with deep understanding...

**Discover a Need or
Challenge**

Research and good
opening questions
make this happen

**Dig to Gain a Full
Understanding**

Continued follow-up
questions and effective
facilitation guide this process

**Connect to Firm's
Capabilities**

Eventually you play
match maker.
Just don't rush this!

Prepare and Execute with Great Structure >>> The Purposeful Questioning Worksheet

Use the PQ Worksheet as an actual worksheet! It allows you to start from an organized point and manage and direct the questioning (and listening!) because you have ready-to-go boxes that you can capture the needed information within. It also allows you to be more adaptive and thorough.

CORE NEED Apart from all the specific details that might go into a purchase decision, there is often a big picture reason why this person / organization is looking to make a purchase. Identify and dig into this as it will influence every other aspect of the purchase decision

NUTS AND BOLTS

DEAL LOGISTICS: The basics of the possible deal: what, where, how many, when, etc.

DECISION LOGISTICS: Who is making the decision? Is a team involved? What time frame?

COMPETITORS: Who else are they considering? How likely is the “do nothing” option?

OBSTACLES: Are there any BIG concerns we should know about from the beginning (so we can deal with them)

PURCHASE CRITERIA

PRODUCT CRITERIA: What do they need the product to do for them? How do they define the right product-based solution? What features / benefits matter? Ultimately you are asking what value they want to get out of the product.

SERVICE CRITERIA: How do they define great service? What are the most critical service & logistical issues for this buyer? What do they want from you? Service is one element you can customize, so understanding this is key!

MONEY / BUDGET: What money issues govern their decision? What budget do they have? What tradeoffs would they make to meet budget? What financial impacts might this decision have: Cost savings? Money making? Know this!

Why use the PQ Worksheet?

Stay Organized

By having a logical set of categories ready to go it allows you to be more organized. Easy to jump to new topic.

Note Taking Tool

As the answers you need are given you have ready to go places to write down the keys. Empty boxes mean keep going!

Summary Cheat Sheet

When it is time to confirm your understanding via a summary, your worksheet becomes your cheat sheet

The keys to DIGGING >>> Focus & Patience

WAIT FOR IT....

Patience is key to be effective. Your product knowledge and good ideas will not vanish because you were patient in the understanding process. So, hold off on presenting (don't Sell Blind!) and take the time to ask the necessary follow-up questions to truly gain the understanding necessary to then present fully targeted solutions!

SQUIRREL ...

To be good at digging we need to be focused! Our goal is to stay zeroed in on the current issue and block out the distractions. If something is said that triggers a side-thought, write a quick note (so you can get back to it) and get back to the real task: facilitating and staying fully engaged in the conversation so you dig down to the full understanding level.

Questions by the BOX

Using this box method is a combination of a facilitation statement that sets the box, followed by an actual question, which can be either open or closed. In any case the next move is to **DIG WITH FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS.**

DIG, DIG, DIG...

Don't overthink it, just ask the relatively obvious next question.

EXAMPLE: If the buyer says, “I need convenience.” Simply follow-up with some form of

“Tell me more...”

“Can you elaborate?”

“Help me understand that?”

“Can you give me an example?”

“Walk me through that...”

It is often necessary to ask 3-4 digging questions to gain real understanding

RULE

When in doubt, ask another question!

BIG Box

Set a big boundary and ask an open-ended question.

“As you look at your meeting as a whole, what is your biggest concern?”

Middle Box

Set a “category” sized boundary and still ask an open-ended question.

“When it comes to meeting space, what is your most critical need?”

small Box

Aim at a specific target and often ask a closed question.

“In terms of technology, will you be needing a presentation projector?”

Be an ENGAGED Listener

To be effective at gaining understanding you must be good at asking smart questions, but even more important you must be an engaged listener. What does it take to be such a listener.....

FACILITATION

Use transitions, confirmations and summaries to ensure you and the buyer stay on the same page throughout the process

Content vs. Process of the Meeting: You MUST Facilitate!

The key to a successful “gain understanding” interaction is that it is the buyer that should be providing the content of the meeting (e.g. the answer to the “what is your key challenge” question). The goal is understanding and thus the buyer is the key source of information in the interaction. However, it is the salesperson’s job to manage the process of this meeting and they do so in this case by enhancing the listening process through facilitation. Taking the time to transition to a sub-topic to gain a broader understanding, stopping to confirm understanding before moving to the next topic, or taking the time to summarize everything and then asking a “catch-all” question are all UNDERSTANDING ENHANCING facilitation actions! So technically you might be speaking as you facilitate, but if you do it well, it will actually improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your listening and enhance the mutual understanding that can be created through the interaction.

FOCUS

It is hard and mentally tiring to concentrate and listen, but that is what you must do to be effective at gaining understanding

A Focused Brain and a Quiet Mouth is Key to Listening!

To listen well requires strong mental focus. And to be quite honest this is not always a strength of salespeople. All too often the person attracted to selling is a person who likes to talk, who likes to engage, who likes high energy interactions with people. And all of those things will be great when that person is in another stage of the selling process. But when it comes to gaining understanding the key is to have the discipline to keep your brain calm and focused, to fight off tendencies to want to jump in and talk, and to learn to be better than yourself as a listener. Even for people who listen naturally, listening is mentally exhausting. It requires serious brain effort and brain effort is draining. We often talk of having your radar on in a conversation and being in tune to what the other person is saying, not just waiting for your turn to talk. It is staying committed to this type of focus that is a critical element of effective listening and a fundamental part of gaining understanding.

ask the alumni >>>

Q: Why is Digging So Key?

A: “Gaining understanding of your customers true needs, or pain points, will allow you to target your solution to their needs. Good salespeople will spend a little longer digging on the front end because we know that it leads to higher overall sales and more repeat customers later”



Ivy DeWitt
Account Manager at
Kendall Electric
SBM Graduate 2008

Keys to Listening

TAKE NOTES!

You are not listening if you are not taking notes!

Your memory is not as good as you think it is and it gets much worse over time, even short times. In the moment understanding is only the first step. I need to maintain that understanding as the sales process moves on and this is when notes become even more critical.

If I meet a client today, and then have three more meetings, and then 3 days later I finally have time to get back to the situation, without notes, the suggested solutions and the presentation I create are going to be a guess!

Good note taking starts with capturing key words in the moment and then after the interaction, but before whatever is next, taking the time to write out the rest of the story so later those key words will still make sense!

USE SILENCE

You Talk Too Much!

When your job is to listen, the first key is to STOP TALKING. And that means stop talking to everyone...

Stop talking to the buyer: Ask a question and then REMAIN QUIET and wait for an answer. Give the person time to think and time to respond. Only then should you jump back in, and in most cases that is to ask a digging question.

Stop talking to yourself: We often have raging conversations in our own head. Try to quiet that and be in the listening moment! If something is said that triggers a good thought, quickly write down a key word and get back to real listening. If I am talking to myself, I am not listening!

final thought...

WHY ASK A GOOD QUESTION IF YOU ARE TOO IMPATIENT TO WAIT FOR A GOOD ANSWER!