



How To Avoid "No Decisions"

We've all had it drilled into us since day one of our selling careers - qualify your prospects! And for good reason - why invest time on prospects who won't or can't buy? And so we qualify. Yet despite doing so, we still end up with far too many "no decisions" than we should. So what's the salesperson who gets fewer no- decisions doing that you're not? He's turning the tables on his prospects. He's making them convince him that he should invest time helping them solve their problem. Let's explain the concept and then illustrate it with a real-life example.

What does the average salesperson do in the qualifying stage of the sales process? He does a "needs analysis." He asks questions to determine the prospect's "needs" and to uncover "pain". If he's really thinking, he'll also toss in a couple of questions about whether there's a budget and who will write the check. So what's wrong with that? Nothing - except that it's not sufficient. What's missing are the few questions that will help him gauge the likelihood that this is a deal that will close with a purchase - by you or a competitor. These questions are: Why do you need this? Can't you do without it? Why do you need this now? Why not six months or a year from now? Why not six months or a year ago? What priority is this for the decision-maker? Is there any reason you would decide to do nothing? Do you see how these questions drive out the tire kickers and window shoppers?

I recently saw an ad on a web site about postal meters. I wasn't looking to buy a postal meter, but since I might be doing some large mailings some day, I figured I'd educate myself. So I filled out a form and within a week I had half a dozen sales reps calling me. Each and every one of them dutifully explained the features and benefits of their products, and some questions about my usage. Not one asked any of the above questions. Not surprisingly, every one of them who called back (four of the six) was surprised that I wasn't going to make a purchase from someone. But they shouldn't have been, should they? I never told them I needed to buy one, I certainly didn't need one at the time, and it wasn't a priority for me. And these were all reasons that, yes, I would decide to do nothing. Yet not one of them uncovered this in any of my discussions with them. It's all well and good that a prospect tells you he needs something, but if he or she can't answer these questions to your satisfaction, you ought to think hard about passing "GO" and collecting your two hundred. It might cost you a lot more than that in opportunity cost in the long run.

ACTION ITEM Print out two copies of the questions in the proceeding paragraph. Keep one by your phone, and one in your wallet or purse. Next time you sit down to prospect for business, or prepare for a prospect meeting, review these questions and make sure you ask them at some point in your conversation. There will be times when you'll hear something you don't want to, but isn't it better to hear it now, rather than 3 months and countless wasted hours later?

Good selling!

Craig