

“How do you develop a SOLUTION with your prospect”?

by Philippe Lavie

Decide which of the following people loves you the most: your spouse, your mother, or a significant other. Then, the next time you see her, tell her within a few minutes: “You need to do this. You also need to do that. And finally, you need to do this third thing”. To ensure you really drive the point home, make sure to point your finger at her when telling her what she really needs to do. I wonder how long it will take before (s)he tells you what YOU need to do, and I am sure it will not be in such polite language.

What I find fascinating, is that this is the most common behavior I have seen with sales people when talking to their prospects. Let me see if you can relate. How often have you heard a sales rep say: “You need to have a look at my product”. If the person that loves you the most won’t take this kind of talk, why do you think your prospect who knows very little if anything about you would?

There are two classes of sales people:

The first category will:

- Offer you opinions.
- Present all the features of his product with the hope that one or more would stick (like spaghetti when cooked).
- Assume he knows what your situation is and make statements to that effect.
- Make presentations and standard demos at the first call.

You hear this behavior often labeled as “*show up and throw up*” or “*spray and pray*”. Unfortunately, the buyer’s opinion of the sales person resides somewhere between swimming among sharks and swallowing flaming swords. In simple terms, they don’t trust these opinions.

The second category will:

- Ask questions to understand the prospect situation.
- Ask questions about how they do business today and why they want to change.
- Ask questions to identify a problem to solve, a need to satisfy, or a goal to achieve with a bias towards his offering.
- Identify the cost of doing business the way the prospect is doing it today.
- Withhold his opinions and judgments to fully understand from the prospect’s lips what the situation is really about.

In this instance, through the conversation that these questions initiate, the seller will be able to align with the buyer. Doing so will allow a more meaningful, competent, and sincere conversation that will benefit both parties.

How to develop a vision in the mind of your prospect with a bias towards your offering?

Marketing is responsible for delivering the messages, content, and collateral sales people use in their interactions with customers. One of the marketing groups, product marketing, is very product focused and fairly technical in the way it describes your offering. Most “sales training” is really product training delivered by the product (marketing) managers. Does it come as a great surprise then if the first words out of sales people’s mouths are feature function descriptions of what they sell? An easy test is to look at your web site and your marketing collateral and evaluate if it includes phrases such as: fully integrated, cutting edge, leading provider, and state of the art, or words like seamless, fastest robust, elegant, and dynamic. If they do, are you presenting self-serving opinions about your products? Can a prospect understand how to use your product to help her address her needs? Can she relate her situation with others that may face similar challenges? How different are your descriptions compared to your competitors?

Instead of leading with these words and self-serving opinions, what if you were to present HOW your products can help a prospect achieve his goal, solve a problem, or satisfy a need? Would it help your prospect build a vision of what he can do with your offering? Would you be setting the stage for the prospect to identify what great results they could accomplish by implementing your capabilities?



Remember, *“People are better convinced by reasons they themselves discover,”* said Benjamin Franklin. What a salesman he was!

Preparing to have such conversations

When someone buys something, often they buy it on a visceral level. Later, they need to justify the purchase with logic and reason. Why is this important? Because the seller is the first person who can help the buyer achieve the “emotional connection” to your offering. If this is accomplished, you significantly increase your probability to win the deal over your competition. How can you create such emotional connections?

Use the old adage: Hurt and Rescue. The more a prospect hurts the more eager and willing he will be to be rescued. The result: a strong emotional bond to the rescue and the rescuer. Pertinent questions during the diagnosis stage of prospecting will reveal a need in your prospect. Questions are intended to discover how they do business as well as measure the impact of their present ways. If you can identify a \$10 million problem across the company and have them discover a rescue that would cost them \$1 million, how strong are your chances to close the deal? Only after you have identified a significant financial impact they would want to solve, can you afford to propose a rescue.

Here is a simple example to illustrate. You have a sore throat. You visit a doctor, and after 30 seconds he prescribes a certain antibiotic, rest, and gives you a \$100 invoice. To confirm your situation you go and see another doctor. When this doctor comes in, he asks a series of pointed questions about your condition, how long it has been, is anyone else in your family suffering from similar symptoms, have you taken any other medications, are you allergic to any medications, and so on. After 30 minutes of diagnosing your situation, he prescribes an antibiotic, plenty of rest, offers to call you in a few days to check up on you, and gives you a \$100 bill. Which doctor do you trust the most? Which one will you go see again? Which one do you think has earned his \$100? By the way, is it possible that both antibiotics are exactly the same?

Here is a questioning technique for your consideration once you have identified a goal to achieve:

- How are you doing it today? What is stopping you from achieving this goal? Offer more open questions about their present situation. Then measure the impact.
- How much time does it take? How much does it cost you to do it that way? What is the impact to your company, organization, and to you personally? What is the cost of doing nothing?
- Recap what you heard by emphasizing the measured “hurt” you collected. Then it is time for the rescue.
- What capabilities have you looked at to address these challenges?
- For each “hurt” area you identified, present a rescue question that describe how your unique capability can help them address the identified pain. To create such Usage Scenarios, you can use the following sequence: Event, Question, Player, Action. Below is a description of each of these elements.
- Measure what the rescue could bring to her/his organization – this information can then be used to develop a cost benefit analysis with numbers the buyer can trust and own.
- Summarize what you heard and bring it back to the original goal you have identified. At that point, if your buyer agrees that these capabilities can help him achieve his goals, you have developed a SOLUTION in the mind of your prospect.

Here is an explanation of the EQPA I spoke of earlier.

- Event: The circumstance causing the buyer to need the capability that you can provide
- Question: Setting up a query
- Player: Who or what will take the action
- Action: Describe how the feature will be used in words that a non-technical user would understand

Here is a concrete example of such a usage scenario: (capability is: electronic coaching)

- Event: When reviewing a salesperson’s pipeline
- Question: would it help if



Player: your sales operations manager and sales managers
Action: could access from any location a central database, evaluate the status of opportunities, and email suggestions to reps on how to improve their chances of winning the business?

Remember: Only when the buyer says yes to your summary of the overall conversation that has been brought back to the original goal you discovered, can you say you have developed a SOLUTION in the mind of the prospect.

Wouldn't you find this approach more effective than leading with product demos and technical blah blah blah? Lastly, keep in mind that the conversation you are having is all about the prospect, her situation, the impact to her organization for doing it that way, and how she sees your capabilities as being able to help her address her challenges. It is not about you.

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