

Sales Solutions

Have questions and answers ready for prospects

Puget Sound Business Journal (Seattle) - May 26, 2006

by [Andrea Sittig-Rolf](#)

Question: I am a veteran salesperson and have always relied on my outgoing personality to get me through the first appointment with a new prospect. I know other salespeople go in with a plan, but I'm not that formal in my sales approach. Is there a happy medium between "winging it" and being overly prepared for the first meeting with a new prospect?

Answer: There is an old saying, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." And that's essentially what you're doing if you go into any meeting cold without properly preparing. You don't have to be the formal type to have a plan. Every salesperson should have a plan going into any meeting with a new prospect, longtime customer or anyone in between. The plan doesn't have to be complicated but should include a few key points.

First, start with the big picture, also known as the 50,000-foot view. Consider the following questions and write down the answers to each to help you gather your thoughts before your meeting. What is the purpose of your meeting? What do you want to accomplish? What is your goal? What do you know about the prospect specifically? What do you know about their industry? What do you know about the company? What is left to learn about the prospect? What is the prospect's expectation of your meeting? What does the prospect want to accomplish? What is the next step after your meeting?

While I don't recommend going into the meeting with this list of questions in front of you, if you write them down and provide the answers before your meeting, they will stay fresh in your mind so you are fully prepared. In doing so it will be obvious to your prospects and they most likely will appreciate that you took the time to prepare for your meeting.

Next, after determining the big picture of your meeting, or the general scope of what you want to accomplish, be prepared to ask the following questions of your prospect, keeping in mind the open-ended nature of each:

- Tell me about your company.
- Help me understand your personal goals regarding your role at the company.
- Tell me about your plans (regarding the area where your solution may be of benefit).

- Are you working with another provider regarding a solution similar to the one we might provide? If so, who? What do you like about them? What areas of their product/service/solution could be improved?
- Give me an idea of what would be ideal in terms of working with a provider of the solution we're here to discuss.
- Tell me a little bit about your decision-making process. Who is involved in making the decision?
- Do you have information regarding your current solution I could take a look at?
- How do you envision us working together?

In addition to knowing what questions to ask, it is important you know what questions may be asked that you will answer, such as:

- What are your rates? (Or, how much is it?) Answer: We have lots of programs and/or packages. Tell me a little more about your strategy and plans for ...
- Who else have you done business with in our industry? What were the results your solution created for them? Answer: I'd be happy to share several case studies that speak to the results we've created for our other clients. (Be prepared to share them.)
- What is your process for delivery? Answer: Share your process.
- What can I expect in terms of service? Answer: Elaborate on the service your company provides and give examples of your level of service.
- Who else on your team might I be working with if I choose to buy from you? Answer: Share the names and roles of others on your team who would be involved in the project.
- What is my recourse if I am unsatisfied with the solution you provide? Let them know your return, exchange, or guarantee policy.
- Tell me what you know about our company. Answer: Share what you know based on the research you did in preparation for the meeting.
- Why should I choose to work with you instead of your competition? Answer: Explain the benefits provided by you and your solution without bashing the competition. Focus on your strengths, not the competition's weaknesses.

These questions will give you an idea of how to approach your first meeting. Keep the dialogue going by asking open-ended questions, encouraging your prospect to do most of the talking. Answer questions thoroughly and if you're not sure why the person is asking a particular question, don't be afraid to ask why so you know how to better answer it.

One final thought is to remember that the purpose of a meeting is to schedule another meeting. Doing so will help you move your prospect through the sales process until it just makes sense to do business together.

ANDREA SITTIG-ROLF is a public speaker, author, and president of Sittig Inc., a sales training and consulting firm. Her new book, "Business-to-Business Prospecting: Innovative Techniques to Get Your Foot in the Door with Any Prospect" (Aspatore Books) is available on Amazon.com. Reach her at 206-769-4886 or www.sittiginc.com, and send your "Sales Solutions" questions to info@sittiginc.com.