“Knowing how to learn fast is the key to rapid personal growth and quick sales success.”

-Tom Roberts

If you examine the day-to-day conversations that take place in the business arena (or almost any setting), you’ll discover examples of miscommunication and non-communication occurring in varying degrees.  Conversations will contain distortions, deletions, and generalizations.  They are part of the fabric of interpersonal communication.  And, it’s the distortions, deletions, and generalizations that get in the way of closing more sales…and closing them more quickly.

When a customer says, “This happens every time I place an order with you,” does he really mean that the situation to which he is referring occurs each and every time an order is placed?  Or, is “every time” somewhat of a distortion—an exaggeration, perhaps to emphasize his point?

When you ask a prospect how buying decisions are made regarding the service you have to offer, and he says, “I make those decisions,” is that an accurate reflection of the decision process and his decision-making authority?  Or, did he perhaps delete the part of the process that requires him to get the CFO to first approve the allocation of funds and then sign-off on the purchase?

# Can Asking Questions Be the Answer to Closing More Sales?

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Can Asking Questions Be the Answer to Closing

More Sales? 1-3

The Harvard Business School conducted an in-depth study in this area. It found that top sellers possessed the following character traits:

1. 100 percent acceptance of responsibility for results.
2. Above-average ambition and desire to succeed.
3. Above-average willpower and determination; self-discipline is a key.
4. Intensely goal-oriented.
5. High level of customer empathy.
6. Impeccably honest.
7. Does not take “no” personally.
8. Has the ability to approach strangers, even when it’s uncomfortable to them.

While these traits are difficult to determine in a job interview, the true nature of a person comes through quite quickly. Motivation, honesty, empathy, willpower and determination and self-discipline come from the heart. Honesty, and integrity, is integral and those qualities are of tremendous value-to you, to those who work with you, your customers and to potential customers.

I challenge you to see if you possess the traits of a High Achiever.

# 8 Traits that Separate High Achievers from the Mediocrity



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Notes from the Chair

When a prospect says, “We’re very happy with our current supplier,” does she mean that she is 100% happy, 100% of the time, with every aspect of the service provided?  Or, does she mean that she is generally happy… that there might be an area or two that could stand improvement?    
  
David Sandler suggested that when you interact with your prospects and clients you do so with the mindset that they all lie…all the time.  His suggestion isn’t an indictment of their honesty.  Rather, it’s a reminder to be on the lookout for the distortions, deletions, and generalizations… and when you encounter them, to challenge the distortions, recover the deleted information, and specify the generalizations.  To help you with those tasks, he developed a questioning strategy patterned after the approach psychologists use to “decode” their patient’s declarations and explanations.

Why pattern a questioning strategy for the sales arena after the psychologist’s approach?

Psychologists don’t “tell” their patients very much.  Instead, they ask a lot of questions, not only to obtain information, but also to help their patients focus on the underlying issues contributing to their perceived problems.  Also through the questioning process, psychologists help their patients make discoveries and view their problems more clearly.  Isn’t that exactly what a salesperson should be doing with prospects, especially during the early stages of qualifying and developing an opportunity?

The questions the psychologist asks generally fall into two broad categories.  One category of questions is designed to explore the underlying issues that precipitate the distortions, deletions, and generalizations contained in the patient’s statements and explanations.  The second category is designed to guide the patient in a particular direction of exploration.  Aren’t those ideal strategies for salespeople?

Let’s eavesdrop on a therapy session and take note of the therapist’s questions and comments.

***Patient***: I just feel terrible.

***Therapist***: What specifically do you feel terrible about?  
  
***Patient***: My work.  
  
***Therapist***: Your work in general… or a specific aspect of your work?  
  
***Patient***: Actually, an encounter I had with my boss.  
  
***Therapist***: I see.  And, how did the encounter with your boss contribute to you feeling terrible?

***Patient***: During a discussion about project deadlines, it became clear that he didn’t appreciate how hard I work or the significance of the work my department performs.

***Therapist***: Is his recognition of your hard work and its significance important to you?  
  
***Patient***: I suppose it is.  
  
***Therapist***: Why, specifically, is it important to you that your boss recognizes your efforts and the significance of your work?  
  
***Patient***: I suppose it’s important because…

OK, we’ve eavesdropped enough.  Let’s examine what we heard.



OK, let’s look at another example.  This time, let’s use the same questioning strategy to clarify a prospect’s question.

***Prospect***: How many clients do you have?  
  
***Account Exec***: I’m glad you asked.  However, I’m curious *why* you asked. (The implied question being, “Why did you ask?”)  
  
***Prospect***:  We’ve worked with other advertising firms where the account reps were juggling several accounts at once.    
  
***Account Exec***: And…?  
  
***Prospect***: And I never felt like I had their full attention.  
  
***Account Exec***: Which means…?  
  
***Prospect***: Which means if I decide to work with your firm, I want to be sure that I’ll be getting *your* full attention.  
  
***Account Exec***: That’s understandable.  Would it make sense to talk about what an ideal working relationship would look like to you?  
  
***Prospect***: Certainly.  
  
***Account Exec***:  Would you like to start?  
  
***Prospect***: OK.  First, I would expect…

By “questioning” the prospect’s question, the account exec discovered the real intent behind it.  The prospect really didn’t want to know how many clients the account exec had.  His *real* concern was about the amount of attention he would receive if he became a client.  Had the account exec answered the first question, the prospect’s conclusion regarding that concern might have been inaccurate.

So, can asking questions be the answer to closing more sales?  
  
What do you think?

There are two important “takeaways” from our eavesdropping adventure.  The first is how the therapist used questions to clarify the patient’s statements and reveal the underlying issue—the real problem to be addressed—the patient’s need for recognition.  
  
The second is how the therapist kept his questions focused on the topic—the patient’s feelings.  He didn’t become sidetracked exploring, for instance, the reasons for or topic surrounding the patient’s encounter with his boss—which could have led to a lengthy off-topic conversation.     
  
Now, let’s see how this line of questioning can be used in the sales arena to clarify prospects’ and clients’ statements and answers.

***Prospect***: Thank you for calling, but we’re very happy with our current supplier.  
  
***Salesperson***: I understand.  Does “very happy” mean that you’re 100% happy, 100% of the time?  
  
***Prospect***: Pretty much so.  
  
***Salesperson***: Hmm.  “Pretty much so” doesn’t sound like “100%.”  Is there something… even something small… you’d like your current supplier to do differently?  
  
***Prospect***: Well, I suppose there is one thing.  It’s not a regular issue, but it’s a problem from time to time.  
  
***Salesperson***: What might that be?  
  
***Prospect***: There are times when we need to split a shipment and stagger the delivery dates and…

“We’re very happy” was a reflexive response—a slight distortion of the real situation revealed after a few additional questions. 



“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does. . .”

-William James

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