Ten Reasons Why Discovery Questioning is the Key to Closing Business

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Selling is a complicated skill and sales managers are always trying to find the key skills to focus on when managing their teams for success. Every aspect of your particular selling process is important and weakness in one area will naturally reduce your closing percentage, But the most important step in the selling process is discovery questioning. Many call this the needs analysis step, but just determining the need is not enough. As a sales manager if you want to improve your service/product presentation, build deeper relationships with prospects or clients and close more business, then focus the lion’s share of your energy into building the discovery questioning skills of your sales team. Here are ten reasons why becoming a super star at discovery is worth the time and effort. Great discovery questions:

1. Help the prospect see problems or challenges they didn’t realize existed – broadening your possible solution
2. Frames the conversation around solutions and creates the image that your company solves problems not just pushes product/services
3. Determines how to customize your service/product presentation – focusing on the benefits and solutions that are the most relevant and most important to the customer
4. Establishes the salesperson’s credibility by demonstrating their understanding of the prospect’s industry or market
5. Provides an opportunity to assess the prospect’s buying and communication style so presentations and proposals are targeted to how they wish to receive and process information
6. Uncovers the decision criteria and decision makers
7. Establishes the consequences for the prospect of not acting
8. Gives you a glimpse of the potential objections and gives you the opportunity to answer them early in the conversation
9. Explores the value and/or importance of solving the problem
10. Begins the closing process very early in the conversation – closing becomes a foregone conclusion

Really deep and effective discovery does all of the above and more IF your sales team asks before they tell. Any sales conversation, I repeat, any sales conversation should focus on the prospect or client first. You can’t customize your presentation to their specific needs if you don’t ask first. You can’t tailor your value proposition to match their value definition if you tell first and then ask. If your sales people are giving your product or service spiel first, your chances of closing just dropped dramatically. Don’t be fooled when your sales people tell you they always ask first and that they are
good at uncovering needs. Find out if they’re right – ride with them and listen to how the discovery goes. Be sure they are asking “comparison questions”. Comparison questions dig deeper than the typical “what kinds of insurance have you had in the past?”. Your team should be asking, “what has changed since you last purchased insurance?” “Would you compare your risk tolerance today to what it may have been five years ago? Why do you think it has or has not changed?”

Coach your sales team to move beyond the superficial discovery questions. Coach them in your sales meetings and on the road. Sales meetings should always have an educational component. For your next sales meeting create prospect scenarios and have the team role play asking discovery questions. Or as a team, ask them to list the discovery questions they would ask the specific prospect. Create a prospect scenario including the discovery questions that should be asked and the answers the prospect might give. Then ask a sales person to customize their sales presentation based on the prospect’s answers. As sales manager, teach them the importance of discovery with consistent education and focus.

Great discovery questions fall into four categories:

- **Circumstance** questions collect data and facts
- **Challenge** questions reveal problems, challenges and dissatisfactions
- **Consequence** questions explore the consequences or implications of a problem
- **Value - Benefit** questions uncover the value of solving the problem and the urgency to do so

A good sales person will create a list of discovery questions before they leave the office for an appointment and ensure they include questions under each of the discovery categories above. Developing the list in advance ensures the sales person is focusing on the answers during the meeting and not thinking about what they should ask next. When you ride with your sales people, ask to see their discovery questions. Work with them on including questions under each category and coach them through a custom presentation based on potential answers. As sales manager the best use of your time is in coaching your team for excellence and by improving the team’s discovery skills you’ll increase your closing percentage and increase revenue – the ultimate goal of any sales manager.