

16 Questions Sales Managers Must Ask

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

Here are 16 critical questions sales managers should learn to ask their salespeople about any “pending” sale. If managers make a habit of asking these questions during each and every sales meeting... salespeople will make a habit of finding out the answers before the next meeting.

1. When are you going back?
 2. What does the company do, and who are its customers?
 3. Who are you talking to?
 4. Why that person?
 5. How long has your contact been there for?
 6. What is this company doing now in an area where we can add value? (And why aren't they using us already?)
 7. When was the first meeting?
 8. Did you call them or did they call you?
 9. How much is the deal worth?
 10. In your view, what is the very next thing that has to happen for you to eventually close this sale?
 11. When and how will you make that happen?
 12. Who else are they looking at?
 13. Why them?
 14. What does your contact think is going to happen next?
 15. When is that going to happen?
 16. Do they want this deal to happen as much as you do?
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Urgency in the Sales Cycle

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

As a professional salesperson, you have to instill a sense of urgency in your prospects; you have to "train" them to understand that if you are to work with them, it must be within the context of a specific timetable.

Some salespeople say: "We can't 'train' a prospect to understand anything! That would be showing disrespect!" The truth is, though, that it is your actions and your choices that show the other person what you expect from a business relationship.

Think of it this way: Your garbage man has you trained. Let's say he comes by once a week, on Monday morning. He has "trained" you to take the garbage out every Sunday night ... because he always picks it up on Monday. That's his action; that's what he does.

He doesn't pick the garbage up on Tuesday or Wednesday; he picks it up on Monday. If the garbage isn't out on Monday morning -- he doesn't care, he skips it. He has trained you to respond in a certain way if you want to pursue a relationship with him, and he's done it without showing any disrespect to you.

Make sure the actions you take "train" your prospects to understand that time is crucial in your sales process. When you start to see the sale lingering, move quickly: either win some kind of commitment for action, or move on to someone else.

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Salespeople: Leave a Message!

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

Prospecting by phone? Always leave a message, either with a human being or on a voice-mail system. Consider using a message like the one below for voice mail systems. (Assume ABC Company is a company you currently do business with that the contact will recognize.)

“Hi, Ms. Smith. This is Randi Jones from Acme Widget. I’m calling you regarding ABC Company. Please give me a call back at 212-555-1212. That’s 212-555-1212.”

Keep your messages short!

If you leave a message like the one above, you’ll elicit curiosity, and you’ll be in a good position to have a brief phone discussion about the plan you put together for ABC Company. That’s what you really want to show the other person in a face-to-face meeting, so mention the plan briefly and then ask for a face-to-face meeting to go over the plan in person.

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Keep Prospecting Calls Short

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International
Web: www.dei-sales.com
E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

How do you handle situations in prospecting phone calls when the other person says, "That sounds great -- tell me all about it!"?

Here's my advice: Don't get drawn into a long conversation. Respond briefly to the person's query or issue, and then immediately find a way return to your request for an appointment. Don't get drawn into long calls.

We have monitored thousands of cold calls over the years. A cold call that exceeds a few minutes in length is highly unlikely to result in an appointment.

Long calls mean one of two things: either the call turned negative, or the person decided to try to throw "knockout" questions in order to screen you out and try to avoid scheduling a face-to-face meeting. Don't waste your time on either process. Ask directly for a date and time, and if you don't get one, move on to the next call.

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Twelve Proven Rules for Sales Success

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

Here are twelve simple, career-changing pieces of advice I have been sharing for years with salespeople. The list, which is the culmination of over a quarter of a century of experience, may be brief ... but I've noticed that those who follow all twelve rules always seem to out-earn those who don't.

1. Always respond to customers and prospects within 48 hours. Why on earth wouldn't you?
2. Schedule sales appointments for early (8AM) or late (4PM). This is the single best time management strategy for salespeople.
3. Follow through immediately on thank-you letters, letters of agreement, and internal paperwork. What message do you send to customers, prospects, and superiors if you are habitually late in these areas?
4. Set two new appointments every day. If you do, you will not lack for prospects. Guaranteed.
5. Strategize with your sales manager on a regular basis. Ask for help – and be ready to use your boss as an advocate within the target organization.
6. Don't kid yourself. I have never met a superior salesperson who made a habit of self-deception about prospects and customers.
7. Create a sense of urgency in all your communications. This is your job, and no one else's.
8. Be honest. People won't give you repeat business if they don't trust you.
9. Know ten client success stories. Be ready to share them at the drop of a hat.
10. Decide on your opening question for the meeting. Don't walk into the meeting without a plan!
11. Decide on the Next Step you want and ask for it directly. This, too, is your job, and no one else's.
12. Always get the prospect to do something. Another meeting. A visit to a facility. A conference call. Something has to land on the other person's calendar, preferably for a slot within the next ten business days.

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Thirteen Proven Selling Principles

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

1. THE OBJECTIVE of each step is to get to the next step.
 2. THE DEFINITION of selling is helping people do what they do better.
 3. NO ONE “NEEDS” US or what we have to offer; if anyone did “need” us, they would have already called us.
 4. OUR NUMBER ONE COMPETITOR is the status quo—what the person or organization is already doing.
 5. SELL TO THE OBVIOUS. . . by asking how and why the person is already doing what he or she is doing.
 6. THE SALES PROCESS is an extended conversation; we can control the flow of that conversation.
 7. THE LONGER A SALE TAKES out of its normal sales cycle, the less likely it is to happen.
 8. THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE SALES is ratios, not numbers.
 9. ALL RESPONSES we hear are in kind; all can be anticipated; all are likely to be told in stories.
 10. 75% OF THE WORK in the ideal sales process occurs prior to the proposal, or presentation, of your plan.
 11. OUR CLOSE should be a natural outgrowth of the sales process that sounds like this: "Makes sense to me—what do you think?"
 12. WE WANT THE PROSPECT TO DECIDE TO BUY; we don't want to have to sell to the prospect.
 13. WE CAN PREDICT FUTURE INCOME based on current activity.
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Selling? Know When Move On

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

Don't obsess on a single opportunity.

Don't call the same person to try to set a face-to-face meeting more than once a week. Don't invest a lot of time and energy in a relationship where the other person has invested little or nothing.

I worked with one woman who boasted that she had visited a single account 33 times before closing. That may sound impressive. But what if the time she spent on that call could have been devoted to prospecting efforts? Those prospecting calls would probably have led to two sales - or perhaps considerably more.

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Salespeople: Ask "How" and "Why"

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

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Stop asking "Are you in charge of this decision?"

Instead, ask how and why decisions relating to purchasing your product or service have been made -- or how and why decisions relating to similar purchases have been made. Odds are that the decision about your product or service will be made in essentially the same way. If the individual you're talking to has no idea how the decision was made last time, you are talking to the wrong person.

We have a saying at D.E.I.: "Ask about the 'how' and the 'why,' and the 'who' will emerge.

If you learn that the decision has in the past always been made by a committee, try to find a way to make your presentation directly to that committee. Don't waste your time with a single member of the committee if you can possibly avoid it.

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Salespeople: Raise the Tough Issues Yourself

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

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Address potential problem areas directly, and do it early in the relationship.

For instance, during a second meeting with a prospect, you might slide a one-page summary of your pricing across the desk, leave it there, face-down, and say, "I put together some notes about how we might be able to work together ... but I'm not sure the pricing is right. What do you think?" Then stop talking and see what happens!

Bear in mind that by raising the issue of price (or any other "tough issue") early in the interviewing stage, you are relieving much of the pressure from the prospect. Not only that, you're finding out exactly where you stand with this decision maker. If there's a huge problem with the price, isn't it better to identify its dimensions now ... and find out whether the person is willing to work with you to resolve the problem?

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Salespeople: Get the Right Information

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

When you take notes, take notes!

Don't take notes so the prospect will think you're taking notes! I once met with a telephone system salesperson who asked whether I'd mind if he took notes during our meeting. Of course, I said I had no problem. He pulled out a single crumpled piece of paper and a ragged, chewed-on ballpoint pen. As I told him what we were looking for in our next system, he smiled and nodded and, over the course of the next half hour, wrote down one thing on that piece of paper. He wrote the number eight. That was how many lines there were in our office.

What kind of impression do you think he made on me? What kind of proposal do you think he was able to put together based on notes like that?

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Three Strategies for Improving Your Closing Ratio

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

1. Don't try to present during the interview stage. If you haven't gathered and verified your information, you're not ready to deliver a proposal.
 2. Never make a presentation you don't think will close.
 3. Get help from inside. If you're finding that, over and over again, you're losing sales because of the same objection--say, that your price is too high--you are probably facing some problem on an organizational level. Take the time to talk to your sales manager about your company's strategies and market position.
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Ask Directly for the Appointment

From: Michael J McGowan CEO, DEI International

Web: www.dei-sales.com

E-mail: info@dei-sales.com

Build your prospecting call around **when** the appointment will take place, not whether it will take place.

- Don't ask, "What's a better time for you, Tuesday morning or Wednesday afternoon?"
- Instead, ask, "Can we get together Tuesday morning at 11:00?"

Your calling script must feature a concise reason for the call and a benefit statement that will capture the listener's attention. Once you have delivered these—and turned around any initial negative response that arises—ask directly for the appointment by specifying a single date and time.

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