

IT'S 10:00 PM – DO YOU KNOW WHERE

YOUR DEAL IS?

Steve Weinberg

www.steveweinbergsales.com

“If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do, and how to do it.” Abraham Lincoln, 1858.

Ideally, you know exactly where your opportunity is in your sales cycle – the beginning, middle, or end, and where it stands relative to the other choices the buyer can make? But sometimes that is not the case. Or, you think you know the status of your proposal, but you are mistaken. As Lincoln noted, we need to know where we are to decide what actions we need to take to close the sale.

Some salespeople have told me that the prospect will not provide them with adequate information. Sometimes prospects are reluctant to share information because they want to better manage the buying process and not let it get out of control.

When the salesperson establishes excellent communication and trust, early in the process, the buyer is usually more forthcoming and provides information regularly. That allows the salesperson to do their job as they have been trained to do.

I have found that most buyers are not deliberately misleading. They want to work with you so that they can make the best-informed decision for their company. They do not want to avoid, mislead, or play games with you. They also do not want to obfuscate or lie to you. That makes it more difficult for them as well. You can make it easier for them by asking better discovery questions and providing them with timely information to assist them with their decision.

Some salespeople ask mostly product-oriented questions, like “will this product work in your company?” and “do you think it will be an improvement over your current situation.” They do not probe further into the decision-making process, drill-down into your product’s perceived strengths or weaknesses, or work on building a strong value proposition with the buyer. As a result, they do not are not informed about the decision process and where they stand. They are working the top of the iceberg while ignoring the remainder and often get blind-sided.

You can prevent this from happening by employing these three simple tactics:

1. Call contacts at multiple levels throughout the buyer’s organization to obtain information. Do not assume that what one person told you is completely accurate, even if they believe it is so. It may contain their personal bias or be affected by internal politics. Or, they may not be up-to-date. Contact the business executives; do not be intimidated by titles.
2. Ask open-ended questions. Some suggested ones are “Where are you now in your selection process?”, “When do you expect to make your selection?”, “Have you seen anything in the marketplace that you like, will solve your problem, or think will work well in your company? And

“What challenges have you encountered so far in your evaluation process?” “What does (decision maker’s name) think of the solutions that have been presented so far?”

3. Use trial closes. They do not need to be “hard closes”, but they can be something like “Our training classes tend to fill up quickly, shall I put your name down as an attendee for next month?” or “Does our financial proposal provide enough of an incentive for you to move forward on it this year?” I have even stated something like “Marianne, I am having difficulty understanding where our proposal stands with (several key people) in your organization. Can you please educate me?” I have found most buyers to be forthcoming, once I have established a trusted relationship with them if they are not threatened by your question or actions. I say “what do you have to lose?” They are not going to hang up on you and you will not lose the sale because you asked. You might find some information that you are not prepared to hear, such as “Sorry, it looks like we are choosing another supplier.” But isn’t it better to learn this now?

Some salespeople are reluctant to ask what they perceive as difficult or intrusive questions, even after calling on the prospect for months. They are worried about offending their contact and impairing their relationship. But I assure you the questions will be less difficult or intrusive if you have done a good job of earning their trust from the beginning. And your questions can be asked in a friendly, non-aggressive, or non-hostile manner. If you are still reluctant to do so you can blame them on your sales manager. You can say “My manager Terry has asked me to update my forecast and I need more information from you.”

I also believe that since you have invested a lot of your time (and perhaps resources) into the opportunity **you have earned the right** to receive more information on where your deal stands so that you can assess what to do next to win the account, whether to move forward or should go on to a different opportunity. Your assertiveness will not be unwarranted.

Like many things in life, greater and current information will lead to better outcomes for you in sales.

Download my free Guide to Overcoming Objections at
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