

November 3, 2003

STALLED SALES

Diagnosing Stalled Sales

When a salesperson comes to you and says a sure thing is now dead in the water, it's time for some detective work, says Kevin Temple, founder of the consulting and training firm, Dialogue Management. Temple's identified six questions for managers to ask to diagnose a stalled sale.

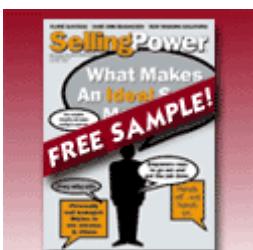
Have you clearly connected to the business issue? "First, I ask the salesperson: What is the business issue?" says Temple. "Nine times out of 10 they'll respond very confidently with something that is not a business issue, such as they're scheduled for an upgrade or they put out an RFQ."



Instead, salespeople should be looking at time-to-market, cost management, quality and other business issues, says Temple. If the salesperson does come up with a viable answer, the business issue has to be directly connected to the customer, and your company's product or service must be connected to that issue. If it's not, the process will stall.

Would the customer say you've clearly differentiated your solution? "If customers don't see enough of a difference over their existing solution or your competitor's, they can't make a decision," says Temple. And just repeating those differences over and over in a loud voice won't do the trick. "Salespeople have to connect their differentiator to a problem their customer is experiencing," he says.

What is the value? If customers don't see the value or the value isn't great enough, they cannot prioritize the expenditure for your product over others, and the decision will stall.



Does that value match the original business issue? If value exists only in salespeople's minds, they're solving the wrong problem, says Temple. For example, if a company's product can result in lower costs, but the customer's business issue is market share, the salesperson has missed the mark.

On what level are you connected? The current customer contact might not have the authority to say yes, no matter how much he or she likes the product. Reps should confirm early in the process who the real decision-maker is by asking: Once the decision is made, who has to sign off on this?

Is there a plan in writing? Salespeople should ask up front: What activities will you need to see to make a decision? Demos, presentations, beta tests, benchmarks or the like need to be confirmed with the customer in writing. "If you never nail it down, the customer will continue to add hoops for you to jump through," says Temple. While Temple says the customer definitely will not adhere to that plan, "That's a good thing," he says. Why? Because for each step they'd like to add, you've got a bargaining chip – an introduction, a reference, a larger order.

The process of reviewing and confirming these six issues with your team is so powerful, says Temple, "that if all these things are in place, I guarantee you'll get a purchase."

For more information, please click on www.salestraining.bz.