

Avoid The Two Biggest Mistakes in Discovery

By Mike Stewart, CSP



Salespeople just naturally seem to love to talk!

That's good because they need to be able to present their offerings with conviction and credibility. Unfortunately, their tendencies to talk often lose them more sales than they win.

Even more than the ability to talk, they need the ability to ask good questions and listen. They need to drill deep in order to learn what customers need and want to solve their problems.

This is the fundamental principle driving today's most cutting edge sales models based on providing solutions through consultative selling. In our Break-Away Selling^(tm) System I express it this way, "the best salesperson at the table is the customer."

What makes customers "the best salesperson at the table" is they believe their own conclusions more than they believe what a salesperson says.

To capitalize on this principle the salesperson must avoid the two biggest mistakes in Discovery and keep the customer involved in the sales process by:

1. **Using open-end questions** that get and keep the customer thinking and talking about his problems and how he sees the solution to these problems, and
2. **Staying in discovery long enough** to enable the customer to find the answers he's looking for and sell himself.

Once this is accomplished, the salesperson ideally has only to present the solutions the customer has already identified in a confident and credible way in order to close the sale.

Don't we wish it worked this way and the customer would actually sell himself every time? But, nothing works every time! However, the sales process works this way lots more often than not.

One thing is almost always for certain. The sales process fails to work far more often than not when this fundamental process of doing detailed, deep Discovery is violated.

"Prescription without diagnosis is malpractice."

One of the oldest sales adages says, "Never ask a question you don't know the answer to." In today's solution-selling environment, that is virtually impossible, but many salespeople are so conditioned to this idea that they can't open up and allow the customer the freedom to explore his problems.

These salespeople are afraid they will lose control of the sale if they do this. What they must realize is the person asking the questions is the one in control.

In order to get to the solution, the salesperson - and the customer - must know and understand the problem.

They must also know how much this problem is costing the customer. Only then, can the salesperson help the customer realize the value of the solution he is offering.

"Most customers today would rather buy than be sold."

To avoid the two biggest mistakes in Discovery, (1) failing to use open-end questions and (2) not staying in Discovery long enough, the salesperson must be:

- Disciplined enough to resist interrupting the Discovery process with his "presentation" when the customer mentions a problem the salesperson's offering has the potential to solve, and
- Skilled and patient enough to facilitate the Discovery part of the sales process using open end and good follow up questions that allow the customer the freedom and time to consider the solution and be closed.

"Nobody ever lost a sale by listening."

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