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Bolotin Points

Newsletter

Providing Actionable Ideas to Increase Your Profit

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Demonstrations -- The Last Thing You'll Do When To Give Them; How To Set Them Up

I'm always amazed when I get a demonstration before the salesperson asks me any meaningful questions. Aren't you? Here's an example from my own life, from several years ago.

example

I went into a local Infiniti car dealership with my two year old daughter. The salesperson with the next "up" greeted me. I told him I was interested in the Q45 and he immediately offered to take me on a test drive. I retrieved the car seat from my old car, strapped my daughter into the back seat of the test drive car, and, with the salesperson at the wheel, we drove off. Without asking me a single question, the salesperson launched into a monologue, providing all sorts of technical details, including how quickly the car could go from zero to sixty and then come to a complete stop. (Big engine; huge brakes.) In anticipation of what we might be experiencing in the next 6.1 + 2.5 seconds, I told him my daughter was afraid of quick movements.

What he did next indicated that he wasn't listening.

My daughter burst out crying.

I purchased my car elsewhere.

What were the mistakes made by the salesperson? The most important one was that he didn't try to uncover my buying criteria. He just assumed that, because I wanted a Q45, I was interested in how fast it could go. I wasn't. He didn't know that. The reason he didn't know is because he didn't ask. Imagine how the test drive (demo) could have gone differently for him if he had known what would cause me to buy.

Let's explore two alternative definitions of "demonstration", which can include anything from showing a product to what happens when a prospect conducts a site visit.



definition

Demonstration *n.* (also known as “demo”) **1.** A canned, un-customized recitation of the features and sometimes the generalized benefits of a product without regard to the prospect’s objectives and pains, in the hope that the salesperson will be lucky enough to have one or more of the features he or she describes be understood by the prospect and compelling enough that the prospect buys the product. **2.** The final stage in the sales process wherein the salesperson provides proof that the product satisfies the prospect’s agreed to and final list of buying criteria.

Definition 1 is what I was subjected to at the car dealership. Definition 2 is the one that should guide your actions. In operation, which definition do you use?

Definition 2 says that the demonstration is the final stage in the sales process. Let’s discuss what should happen before that final stage. In order to do that, we’ll have to address “How do we know the prospect’s buying criteria?”

The short answer is “Ask.”

As a salesperson (and we are all salespeople at various times in each day), we need to show that we respect the prospect’s time and we need to show that our objective is to provide a solution to our prospect’s pains. Part of the way we do this is to decide what features and benefits to highlight and which to leave out. The way not to do this is to subject your prospect to a monologue.

How do you react when you’re the prospect and you’re subjected to a monologue? When the salesperson goes into detail about things you’re not interested in, are you happy or annoyed that your time is being wasted? Are you pleased or insulted you’re your needs are not being addressed? If you answered “annoyed” and “insulted”, you’re not unusual. In fact, you’re just like your prospects.



example

How do you choose the features and benefits that are the best match to the buying criteria of your prospect? In the example at the car dealership, the salesperson could have very well asked me something as simple as “What features and benefits are most important to you?” before we got in the car. Simple enough advice, but not often followed.

Why are these types of questions not asked as often as they should be and why are demonstrations so often made before the prospect’s buying criteria are known and agreed to? The overall reason is that the salesperson doesn’t understand his or her function. Is the salesperson’s function to be the best demo person? No. The function of the salesperson is to satisfy the prospect’s needs. In order to do this, the salesperson has to ask questions to uncover those needs.

This sounds so simple. Why, then, do so few salespeople do it? The overall reason, as stated above, is that many salespeople don’t really care about satisfying their prospects’ needs, and their approach is consistent with this. Here are two follow-on reasons:

1. Many inexperienced salespeople (who many times are also the founders of the company and / or inventors of the product) are so excited about the product’s features that they are impatient to show them. They are so certain that, as soon as the prospect is shown the wonderful features of their product that the prospect will immediately understand and want to buy the product that the salesperson doesn’t have the patience to uncover the prospect’s buying criteria.
2. The prospect asks for a demo before the salesperson gets around to discovering

the buying criteria.

In addition to uncovering what the prospect believes are his or her buying criteria, there is a second reason to engage in a dialogue before any demo: to probe to see if the prospect is open to learning more about the product so that additional buying criteria can be developed or existing ones can be modified or even eliminated. The reason for this is that your prospect may genuinely not know enough about the product to know what is in his or her best interest. If this is the case, you are not doing a good job if you don't educate your prospect, and you can't do this if you don't ask any questions.

Doesn't it make sense to you that the more you know about your prospect's needs, the more likely you will be successful in providing a solution to those needs? The less you know, the less likely it is that you'll make a sale.

Once you've satisfied these two objectives, you've done a service for your

prospect and made it more likely that you're in a position to do a good demo and make a sale.

Now that you've worked with the prospect to arrive at a set of buying criteria, it's time to judge these criteria against the second part of Definition 2: is what you've agreed to the final list of buying criteria? If what you've agreed to is not final, it's not time for the demo.

How do you find out if the buying criteria are final, comprehensive and sufficient? You guessed it: ask. Below are two examples of using the same technique to find this out by re-stating the premise of the demonstration and gaining agreement. Each example has a different outcome, which would necessitate a different response. (In these examples, "X", "Y", "Z" and "A" are features).



example **You:** "I understand that your needs are that our product has to do 'X', 'Y' and 'Z' to your complete satisfaction. Do I have this right?"

Prospect: "Yes."

You: "Is there anything else you need the product to do in order to make the purchase?"

Prospect: "Well, yes. I need it to do 'A'."

prospect's time and don't waste your time by going ahead with a demonstration.

What if you didn't even think to ask the "Is there anything else" question in the example



example

Car Dealer: "What car are you most interested in?"

Me: "The Q45."

Car Dealer: "Great. What features are the most important to you?"

Me: "Nothing is more important to me than safety. That's why I want a big car."

Car Dealer: "If safety's your most important issue, would you like to talk about crash test results and driver side visibility?"

Me: "Yes."

Car Dealer: "You know, there are other cars that get a better crash test rating and have better driver side visibility than the Q45. Would you be willing to consider these?"

Me: "Of course, that's what I'm looking for. Thanks for mentioning it."

If your product doesn't do "A" in this example, do you go ahead and give the demonstration anyway, without any further discussion? If you do, you'll almost certainly fail. At the risk of stating the obvious, if your product doesn't do all that the prospect needs it to do, there's no point in doing the demonstration. Instead, you need to have additional discussion with your prospect to see if you can reduce or eliminate the need for "A". If you cannot, don't waste your

above? If, in this example, you made this mistake, you would not know a very important piece of information. What would happen then? Most likely scenario: you do the demo, showing your product can do "X", "Y" and "Z", and then ask for the order. Your prospect then tells you about his need for the product to do "A". Needless to say, the dynamic of dealing with "A" at that point, after the demo, would be very difficult.

Here's an example where you've done a good job understanding the prospect's buying criteria, and you're well set up for the demo:



example **You:** "I understand that your needs are that our product has to do 'X', 'Y' and 'Z' to your complete satisfaction. Do I have this right?"

Prospect: "Yes."

You: "Is there anything else you need the product to do in order to make the purchase".

Prospect: "No, that's it."

In this example, everything is great, all systems are "go", and you're ready for the demonstration.

What if, however, for some reason, you can't uncover your prospect's buying criteria? Here are some examples of when this might happen, and recommendations for what to do in each problem scenario:

➤➤➤ **Problem:** You've been asked to participate in a demo "bake off".

Solution: find out as much about the buying criteria as you can. Your competitors probably won't do this, because the format of the bake off discourages it. Within the bounds of good manners, however, the format shouldn't deter you. After finding out as much as you can, if you feel your product is enough of a match for you to have a good

chance at winning, do the demo. If you don't, don't. Remember, your time is valuable and you have to decide where best to deploy it. You don't want to bore prospects with demonstrations that have little or nothing to do with what they're interested in (even if they've asked for it), and you don't want to invest time in a losing endeavor doing so.



definition

Bake off *n.* when you're asked to demonstrate as part of a process where the prospect (generally a buying committee) wants to see a series of demonstrations from competing vendors before you're allowed to find out much about the prospect's buying criteria and be allowed to engage in the sales process.

➤➤➤ **Problem:** No discovery is allowed. This is when you're asked to demonstrate but are actually prohibited from discovering your prospect's needs. If you're in this situation, you're probably "column fodder".

Solution: Ask again politely to understand their needs. If they won't tell you, don't demo.



definition

Column fodder *n.* a vendor who has no chance of actually winning the contract, but is asked to participate in order for the purchaser to show his or her management that he or she brought in and considered competing vendors, when, in reality, the purchaser has already made up his or her mind before any demos take place.

➤➤➤ **Problem:** You're told by your prospect that, irrespective of what happens in the demo, they won't make a decision until they've "thought about it", perhaps seen other demonstrations or done other things.

Solution: You'll have to make the judgment call on whether or not to demo, depending on your assessment of your chances to win, the importance of the account, other things you could be doing with your time, etc. Perhaps your prospect doesn't yet fully understand his or her needs, which means that any demonstration beforehand is not likely to be successful, perhaps for anybody. If this is the case, explain to your prospect why it is in their interest to go through the process of uncovering needs first, before a demo. If they disagree, you have a choice to make. If you do decide to demo and accept the structure, about the best you can do is to ask your prospect if, instead of you automatically getting the sale at the end of the demo, they would at least tell you if you've satisfied their buying criteria.

Let's talk next about the demonstration itself, assuming that, to your knowledge, you've already successfully uncovered and agreed with your prospect on their complete and final set of buying criteria and that, if you demonstrate how your product satisfies those criteria to the satisfaction of the prospect, you'll have a sale. Here's the steps, with examples assuming you're selling enterprise level software to a group:

Step [1] Explicitly ask for and gain agreement on the buying criteria and that if you demonstrate how your product satisfies those criteria to the satisfaction of the prospect, you'll have a sale.



example

You: "The last time we talked, we all agreed that, in order for Widget International to buy our software, you needed the product to do 'X', 'Y' and 'Z'. Is this still correct?"

Them: "Yes".

You: "Is there anything else I need to show you in this demo in order for you to buy?"

Them: "No."

Note: The reason for you to ask these two questions before doing the demonstration is that your prospects may have additional buying criteria they came up with since the last meeting, or perhaps an additional person was added to the team who has additional buying criteria. In any event, if they don't answer "Yes" to the first question and "No" to the second, you need to find out what the additional criteria are. If you can satisfy them "on the fly", go ahead with the demonstration. If you cannot, you'll have to go back to setting up the basis for a successful demo. In order to do this, you may have to re-schedule. For simplicity, I assumed above that you got the right answers.

Step [2] Provide proof of the first agreed to buying criterion.



example

You: "Great. Let's get started then. The first thing you said that you needed to see is 'X'."

[You then demonstrate 'X', providing proof that it satisfies their first buying criterion.]

Step [3] Ask your prospect if, in his or her opinion, you've satisfied the first buying criterion.



example

You: "Does everyone agree that our product satisfies your buying criteria of 'X'?"

Them: "Yes".

If the answer was "No", you've got to do a better job in the demo and not move on until the buying criterion is satisfied. For simplicity, we'll assume above that the answer was "Yes".

Step [4] Move on to the second criterion (in this case, "Y"), demonstrate proof that your product satisfies Criterion Y and ask for and gain agreement.

Step [5] Repeat the process for all agreed to buying criteria until you're done with the list.

Step [6] Re-state the agreed to premise of the demonstration, ask again if you've sufficiently satisfied all the buying criteria, gain agreement, and make the sale.



example

You: "When we began the demo, we all agreed that, in order for you to buy, I would have to show you, to your satisfaction, that our product did 'X', 'Y' and 'Z'. Have I done this to your satisfaction?"

Them: Yes.

You: Great. Can I give the contract to your purchasing department, as we agreed before?

In Step 6 in the example, all you're doing is summarizing what's been agreed to earlier. You should have easy re-agreement, and a sale. Congratulations. You've done your job of understanding what your prospect wants, and showing him or her that your product fulfills his or her buying criteria in a way that your prospect understands. You've done a service to both your new customer, and you.

To summarize, when do you do a demo? Only after you know what you need to do to gain the order. Find this out first, then demo last. Make the demo the last thing you'll do. If you're not doing your demo "last", you're probably making a big mistake. Do everyone, including your prospect a favor: do the demo last, and win for everybody.

In the next issue, we'll return to our "Common Mistakes" series with #3: Mismatching who receives value with who you're asking to pay for it.

About Chuck Bolotin

Chuck founded, funded, operated and sold two companies. The On Target Consultants Process™ he developed, and the success he has achieved applying it has made him an expert in bringing products to market in virtually any vertical, many times when the target market is not known in advance.

Chuck is available for talks to your organization as well as personalized consulting assignments.

