

12 ways advisors screw up sales meetings — and what to do about it

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AboutPeople

This article includes descriptions of the most common problems made in selling situations. The good news is, the solutions are simple, and when you implement them, you improve your credibility, and attract higher quality clients.

Can you relate to this? You're looking across the desk into the face of a **prospect** who would be a perfect client for you. And, you're 99 percent sure they will accept your proposal. Then something goes wrong. They turn you down, but you have no idea why. Sound familiar?

Many sales people will continue to face that situation, and not understand what continues to go wrong. As uncomfortable as those situations are, they serve as learning experiences. Over the past 10 years, my firm has analyzed this exact, specific point in the sales process. We now understand how professionals screw up sales meetings — and how to fix it.

Here is the list:

1. Focusing on yourself

You, your product and your company are only valuable to the client to the extent you can solve his problem or give him what he wants in a way that's distinctive or better than anyone else. What do many advisors do instead? They talk about themselves. "Mike, I got started in this business in '97 after working in the ?? industry, blah blah." Come on. Who cares?

Key guidelines in any business presentation are: **credibility**, attention, connection and engagement. The key to taking each of those steps is relevance. It's never about you — **it's always about the client!**

2. Talking too much

Nearly every sales professional falls into this trap. You'll be on a roll and realize that you've been talking for a long time. Unfortunately, when you're talking, you're not focusing on the client, which means you are delivering a one-way transmission. When you find yourself talking too much, just switch to a question and be quiet.

3. Not asking questions

Questions are the heart of an effective selling situation. Why? Because that's the only way you can discover why the prospect will buy from you. If you open up with a presentation, you have limited your chance of success to the greatest degree. They serve another purpose — to **involve the prospect** and help him come to his own conclusion. That should be the conclusion you believe is best for him. If you're effective at asking questions, you'll learn how to do that consistently. The difference is, if the client comes up with it, he believes it, but if you present it, the client doesn't necessarily believe it.

4. Asking the wrong questions

Ineffective sales people tend to ask two types of questions: irrelevant ones and manipulative ones. The prospect needs to perceive your questions as valuable and relevant. He must believe that your questions are important, and that his answers will enable you to create a better result for him. 5. Confusing them

Our research indicates that the most common way for sales people to **screw up new business conversations** is by creating confusion. Here's how this happens: you deliver too much information, use terms and references that aren't familiar to the prospect, or you do a "data dive." Remember this: A confused mind will always say no. Confusion is uncomfortable and people don't say yes when they're uncomfortable. Further, most people go into an analytical mindset when they're talking with someone who is a professional in something they're unfamiliar with. The analytical mind set always says no until it has gathered enough information to make an informed decision. Bottom line — clarity invites yes, where confusion invites no.

6. Excluding the real decision maker

When you see more than one person across the desk from you, it is your responsibility to connect with each one. At the very least, you must identify the primary decision maker and address that person. Never assume you know who the primary decision maker is. Too often in a situation with a husband and wife, the sales person will assume that the husband is the primary decision maker. Big mistake.

In a boardroom setting, you're likely to encounter several decision **influencers** who are competing for greater influence. If you ignore them, or fail to

connect with them, you'll have burned important bridges. Pay attention to each person.

7. Claiming credibility rather than demonstrating it

Claiming expertise or knowledge isn't relevant to the prospect, unless you are able to show how you can help that prospect. If the client hires you to fix his Lexus, your degree from Auto Shop Academy is only of minimal importance. If your background is in asset accumulation, but not distribution, you have zero credibility with most retirees. The best thing you can do is provide proof and demonstrate, rather than make claims.

8. Not speaking the "language"

We honor our prospects and clients by presenting information in a way that matches their mental preferences and personality. If I am a visual person, it is your responsibility to recognize that and explain your product or service in visual language. If I prefer structure and a process, then it is your responsibility to provide the structure or step-by-step process. To be successful at this, it is vital for you to become proficient at reading other people. 9. Making it difficult to work with you

Companies and individuals lose sales because the process of doing business is too difficult. If you ask me to fill out forms, provide scads of data or answer lots of questions, the value of the end result will be reduced proportionately by the hassle of my involvement. And, if you collect lots of information, you darn well better use it. Recognize that my time and energy are valuable to me. Anything you can do to make the process easy and painless increases your chances that I will initiate and complete the process.

For example, life insurance firms often deliver applications that are already filled out. Simply sign here, please. One of our clients was asking their new clients for the same information on multiple forms — then not referring to it. Not good.

10. Not recognizing "hot buttons"

People give you clues as to what excites them or angers them. Good salespeople recognize both the negative and the positive "hot buttons" and respond accordingly. For example, if you're paying attention to me, you will quickly see that one of my hot buttons is someone telling me they know what's best for me. If you do this before asking appropriate questions or getting to know me, I'll walk away and you'll have an adversary. The key is simply to read the other person and pay attention.

11. Not showing respect

It's never about you — it's always about the client! You may assume I don't know beans about cars or sound cards or retirement planning, and that may well be true. But, if you act as though I'm an idiot, you'll lose me as a client and gain me as an adversary.

12. Being needy

We've all been needy at some point in our lives. We know what it feels like, and we've seen how other people retreat from us. When you're needy, you push too hard for a contract. My firm has done some fascinating research in the area of reading another person's emotional state. Neediness is a powerful emotional state that is easily and quickly perceived by other people. When your prospects feel it, they get suspicious of your intentions. Needy people do not focus on the best interests of the client. They focus on themselves and satisfying their own needs. Would you do business with someone like that?

In conclusion

You can't fix a problem until you know what it is. What you've just read are the descriptions of the most common problems made in selling situations. The good news is, the solutions are simple, and when you implement them, you improve your credibility, and attract higher quality clients.

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