

New Reality

By Mike Schultz

Editor's Note: *In this article, Author Mike Schultz raises the importance of asking prospects key insightful questions that help to build trust, encourage interaction, and lead both your prospects and you to a deeper understanding of their needs and goals.*

Until they experience it, clients often have a difficult time knowing exactly what they are buying and what value they will receive. One of the most important skills in selling is helping potential clients understand the outcomes they get when they work with you.

At the end of a well-managed sales process, your job is to create a new reality that is best for your customers, taking into account their specific aspirations and afflictions and the impact of doing something about them. The new reality process should start before you craft the solution. A good way to get the creative juices flowing is to ask broad questions that encourage envisioning the future:

- In six months, when the products are fully installed, what would need to happen for you to consider it a success?
- What isn't your current provider delivering that you need?
- What do you want to have happen as a result of our work together?
- How do you see the implementation of this technology solution improving your data maintenance?

Don't be surprised if the prospect's first answer to these questions is, "I don't know." Sometimes the prospect will say, "That's a good question," and then pause. If this happens, do not jump right in. Silence will indicate you expect an answer, and with some thought the prospect will start talking. If you need to prompt him, you can say things like:

- Tell me what's coming to mind.
- Forget the big picture for a minute. You mentioned you hoped that X, Y, and Z would be better. Let's say they were better, much better, how would you describe this to a colleague if they asked you how it's going?
- Can you think of a competitor or another company that's more like what you want to be like in this area? Tell me about them.

One question you need to answer for yourself is when to establish a new reality benchmark. Sometimes, if you ask about the prospect's desired new reality and he doesn't have a context for what's possible, he can get frustrated or establish something completely unrealistic. If you find this happening to you, you should not dig in too deeply here until you give the buyer a sense of what you can do.

For example, instead of probing up front to establish a new reality benchmark, lead the RAIN discussion in order, leaving new reality last. Along the way, you can share results you've helped others achieve. That way, when you

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ask the buyer what he would like to see, you have already established a benchmark that you are confident you can deliver. The buyer's responses now are more likely to be realistic.

Armed with your client's answers and the steps you have already taken during the RAIN process you can now craft a solution. With this much customer knowledge, most salespeople believe that they can make a huge positive impact. They then write out (or simply tell the potential customer) a list of their offerings that will make the prospect's world a better place. However, the prospect doesn't yet see how you can help because you haven't connected the dots for them. All the good work the provider did in the sales conversations has yet to come into focus.

You as the seller must translate the new reality into dollars and cents, help buyers understand how their lives will be better if they purchase, and then, as compellingly as you can, paint the picture in which they see the difference between their undesirable current state and much improved new reality.

Whatever the new reality is, you need to describe it to the customer. For example, you might tell the customer that he will:

- Save 22 percent, or \$120 thousand on the cost of XYZ Widgets.
- Save \$170 a month in bank fees and broker commissions.
- Improve the cycle times by 13 days by cutting out major inefficiencies in the operational process, which translates to \$225,000 per month of costs saved.
- Improve quality levels by 17 percent and reduce defects by 22 percent.
- Improve revenue by \$600,000 a month by increasing the effectiveness of lead generation programs.
- Eliminate the headaches of working with the current provider who is always late and difficult to reach.

As you present the new reality, buyers will be asking themselves three questions:

1. Is it worth it to do this?
2. Are they the best option to help us get it done?
3. Do I believe they can produce what they say they can produce?

The answer to the first question will result in a go/no-go decision. To get a go decision, you must make sure you communicate the impact as clearly and compellingly as possible. Let's assume that they've made the decision to go. If you're the only provider they're considering, the deal is yours unless you blow it. If, however, you have to compete with other providers, the balance of what you need to communicate will shift from impact of doing it at all to differentiating yourself from the other options the prospect has to help them address the issue.

As you present your new reality, you must communicate to the prospect why you're the best available option. At the same time, you need to get the prospect to believe that you'll do what you say you're going to do, and that working with you will be a good experience.

When you attend to the various components that people need to see to get a sense of what it's going to be like to work with you, and when you present your solutions graphically you help your situation in several ways:

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- You'll reinforce that you understand their business.
- You'll reinforce that you understand their needs and that you listened.
- You'll be setting the agenda as a full partner in their success.
- The quality of your proposal will give them a sense of the quality of your products, your services, and your company.
- You'll differentiate yourself from the competition through the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of your process (many salespeople lose based on lack of effort—they just don't work hard enough in the sales process to prove their worth).
- When you deliver a “WOW” new reality picture, you endear yourself to clients that much more. They'll want to work with you versus other options.
- When you deliver a WOW new reality picture, you'll give the prospect the sense that you can deliver on your lofty promises. If you do it so well in the sales process, you can do it in product delivery.

Buying can be as difficult as selling. It's tough to get a handle on what to buy because it's difficult to visualize the impact, difficult to differentiate between competing products, services, and providers, and difficult to know who can actually deliver on what they say they will deliver. It's challenging for buyers to understand these factors themselves and communicate them to their colleagues.

If, however, you follow RAIN Selling and paint the picture of a compelling new reality, your prospects will want the solution, know the best provider is you, and believe that you can get the job done . . . because they will know it when they see it.

About the Author

Mike Schultz is President of RAIN Group, a [sales training](#), assessment, and sales performance improvement company that helps leading organizations improve sales results. Mike is author of [Rainmaking Conversations: Influence, Persuade and Sell in Any Situation](#) (Wiley, 2011) and publisher of [RainToday.com](#). He also writes for the [RAIN Selling Blog](#). Mike can be reached at mschultz@raingroup.com or follow him on Twitter @ Mike_Schultz.

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