

Avoid the What If Approach

By [Kelley Robertson](#)

“What if I could show you how you could save money, would that be of interest to you?” “What if I told you that you could capture more market share, would you like to hear how we can help you do this?” “What if our system saved you time, would that be of value to you?” “What if I matched our competitor’s price, would you buy it?”

What if you were a buyer who heard one of these lines? Would you feel compelled to buy from that person? I highly doubt it.

Manipulative selling techniques are seldom effective when it comes to dealing with customer objections and they really have no place in the world of professional selling. Even though it’s an old and tired approach, I encounter sales people who think that the “What if” method of overcoming objections is still effective.

The real key is to address your prospect’s objections during the sales process. This means asking the right questions early in the sales process and positioning your product, service, or solution so that you answer their objections before they express them.

It’s fair to say that many people will have objections about buying your product and the most effective way to get past this is to uncover what their true concerns are before you start talking about your solution. This means that you need to invest time asking questions to learn more about their particular situation. It really doesn’t matter what you sell; this is a critical aspect of successful selling.

You need to ask high-quality questions that make your customer or prospect think. This may sound easy but in reality, it is actually very difficult because thought-provoking questions are tough to ask. Many sales people perceive these types of questions as personal and often think that their customers and prospects will not be willing to respond to them. What’s important to remember is that most business people, especially senior executives ask tough questions, and as a result, have little or no hesitation in responding to them. In fact, their level of respect for you will increase when you pose challenging questions. I’m not suggesting that you challenge your prospect; I’m simply recommending that you learn to ask high-level questions.

Here are some examples of thought-provoking, high-level questions:

? What are your goals in the next 6-12 months?

? How do you plan to achieve these goals?

? What challenges are you experiencing in reaching these goals?

One of the challenges sales people have in asking these types of questions is that they can’t always anticipate the answer which means they don’t have an immediate response available. But that’s not the objective. Your goal is to find out what problems your prospect is facing. Then, assuming your product or service can help them, you can position solution more effectively.

You need to develop the courage to ask difficult questions; questions that you may not feel comfortable posing. This means that you should practice asking these questions before you actually meet with your prospect. I remember a sales meeting with a new prospect and as the meeting drew to a close, I had one question that I was very uncomfortable asking. Fortunately, I had rehearsed this question before the meeting so I took the leap and presented it to my prospect. There was a long silence afterwards but I remained silent and after a few moments, my prospect responded and gave me the additional information I needed to move the sale forward. Had I not asked that particular question, I would have developed a proposal that would not have addressed their specific needs and situation. And I probably would have lost the sale.

That was a huge learning experience and it taught me the importance of rehearsing and verbally stating the questions I wanted to ask. As I reflected on this conversation, I realized that I could have posed this same question with other prospects in the past and achieved different results.

Let's face it. Your customers and buyers are much more sophisticated than ever before and in all likelihood they have heard every line similar to this. And they despise people who use tired and traditional lines or manipulative approaches. If you have been selling for any period of time, you know that most people express certain objections about making a buying decision. In fact, you probably hear similar objections on a regular basis. Most sales are closed because your customer sees the value in your product or service or because you have established yourself as an expert who can help them solve a problem.

Asking, "What if I could" is not an effective approach. It's old. It's tired. And it seldom works. © 2006 Kelley Robertson, All rights reserved.

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