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## Asking—The Most Important Discipline in Sales

*Go for no.*

—Andrea Waltz

Richard left 71 voice mail messages asking for an appointment. He sent 18 emails. He stalked me on LinkedIn.

He managed to get me to answer the phone on at least three occasions, but I brushed him off each time. He also called, and wrote, and connected on social media with each of the key stakeholders in my organization.

For five months Richard asked and asked and asked for an opportunity to demonstrate his software solution. And for five months, he got nowhere—until he finally caught me at the right time. It was in May, five months after his first attempt to set an appointment.

When I answered the phone, I recognized his voice. I almost brushed him off again, but since I didn't have anything else scheduled and he'd been so persistent, I felt a subconscious obligation to give him a chance.

Richard wasted no time getting me to agree to a demo. His software as a service (SaaS) solution was impressive, and it did solve one of our training delivery problems. I was transparent about how much I liked what he'd shown me. Less than an hour later, he asked for my commitment to buy.

Without thinking, I threw out an objection:

*"Richard, it looks like a great program and I like it. But I'm going to need to discuss it with my team before we commit to anything. I know some of them have advocated for your platform, but my schedule is packed, and getting everyone up to speed and using it is going to be a distraction in the short term. I want to be sure we are all aligned before making this investment, because I don't want to buy yet another software program that everyone is excited about but never uses."*

Richard responded by relating to my situation and clarifying my concern:

*"Jeb, it sounds like you've been burned in the past with SaaS subscriptions that go unused. I get it! It feels like you're just pouring money down the drain."*

*"If I understand you correctly, it seems like your top concerns are: a) it's going to be a distraction training everyone, and b) if we don't get your team up to speed fast, they won't use it and it will be a wasted investment."*

*"Did I get that right?"*

I agreed that those were my biggest concerns. It felt good that he really seemed to understand where I was coming from.

*"Other than these two concerns, what else do we need to address?"*

I responded that there was nothing else holding me back. Then he *minimized* my concern:

*"The best way for your team to experience the power of our platform is to get their hands on it. What if I take the burden off you and take full responsibility for getting your team trained and making sure they are using it?"*

*“With your blessing, I’ll schedule a training call with your trainers and coaches to show them how to use the platform. I’ll then monitor their usage and report back to you each week until we’ve integrated usage into their daily routine. That way it doesn’t take any time out of your busy schedule, and you have the peace of mind that your money is well spent.*

*“Since this isn’t a long-term commitment and you can quit anytime, if your team doesn’t use the program we can shake hands and part ways. There isn’t much to lose here and there’s a lot to gain, so why don’t we get your account set up, and let me make this easy for you?”*

Before I knew it, he had my corporate AMEX card number and Sales Gravy was his newest customer.

## **The Discipline to Ask**

*Asking* is the most important discipline in sales. You must ask for what you want, directly, assumptively, assertively, and repeatedly. Asking is the key that unlocks:

- Qualifying information
- Appointments
- Demos
- Leveling up to decision makers or down to influencers
- Information and data for building your business case
- Next steps
- Micro-commitments
- Buying commitments

In sales, asking is everything. If you fail to ask, you’ll end up carrying a box full of the stuff from your desk to your car on the way to the unemployment line. Your income will suffer. Your career will suffer. Your family will suffer. You will suffer.

*When you fail to ask, you fail.*

It’s the truth and this truth will not change. But as my favorite line from the movie *The Big Short* goes, “The truth is like poetry. And most people fucking hate poetry.”

## **You Are Not Getting What You Want Because You Are Not Asking for What You Want**

If you are having a hard time getting the next appointment, getting to decision makers, getting information from stakeholders, leveling up higher in the organization, or closing the deal, it's not because you lack prospecting skills, closing skills, the right words to say, or tactics for getting past the inevitable objections.

Nope, you are not getting what you want because you are not asking for what you want. Why? Nine times out of ten you are insecurely and passively beating around the bush because you are afraid to hear the word *no*.

In this state, confident and assumptive asking gets replaced with wishing, hoping, and wanting. You hesitate and use weak, passive words. Your tone of voice and body language exude insecurity and desperation. You wait for your prospect to do your job for you and set the appointment, set the next step, or close the deal themselves.

But they don't.

Instead, they resist and push back with objections. They put you off, brush you off, turn you off, and sometimes steamroll right over you. Your passive, insecure, fearful behavior only serves to encourage more resistance and rejection.

In sales, passive doesn't work. Insecurity won't play. Wishing and hoping is not a viable strategy.

Only direct, confident, assumptive asking gets you what you want.

## **Conjuring the Deepest, Darkest Human Fear**

Asking with confidence is one of the most difficult things for humans to do. The assumptive ask requires you to put it all out there and take an emotional risk, with no guarantees. When you ask with

confidence, you make yourself instantly vulnerable, with no place to take cover. Vulnerability, according to Dr. Brene Brown, author of the *Power of Vulnerability*, is created in the presence of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. This vulnerability conjures up the deepest and darkest of human fears: *Rejection*.

Leading up to your *ask*, everything in your body and mind are screaming at you to *stop* as the anticipation of being rejected generates this deep sense of vulnerability. Rejection is a painful demotivator and the genesis of deep-rooted fear.

The fear and avoidance of the emotional pain caused by rejection is why most people seek the easy way out. It's the top reason why sales professionals fail to reach their true potential and income. The fear of rejection is the most treacherous disruptive emotion for salespeople.

## **There Is No Silver-Bullet Objection Slayer**

For as long as salespeople have been asking buyers to make commitments, buyers have been throwing out objections; and, as long as buyers have been saying no, salespeople have yearned for the secrets to getting past *no*.

Salespeople are obsessed with shortcuts and silver bullets that will miraculously deliver *yeses* without the risk of rejection. This is exactly why so many of the questions I get about dealing with objections begin with: “What’s the trick for . . . ,” or “Can you tell me the secret to . . . ,” or “What words can I say that will get them to say *yes*?”

Salespeople seek techniques for avoiding *no* in the same vein that golfers pursue the perfect putter. And there is an endless line of pseudo-experts, gurus, and artificial-intelligence witch doctors who pander to the deep insecurities of vulnerable salespeople with false and dangerous claims that they have the secret to the ever-present mystery of how to eliminate rejection.

Let's get this straight from the get-go: These charlatans, most of whom couldn't sell their way out of a paper bag, are just dead wrong.

- There is no perfect putter that will take 20 strokes off your game overnight.
- There is no easy button that will close the deal every time.
- There is no magic fairy dust that will take the sting out of rejection.
- There are no silver-bullet words that will slay objections and stun prospects into submission.
- There are no perfect scripts that will turn *no* into *yes*, every time.
- Artificial intelligence and software programs will not close the deal for you.
- There are no unicorns.

**Here are two brutal, and undeniable, truths** (and we already know how people feel about the truth):

1. The *only* way to eliminate rejection is to *never ask for anything again. Ever!*
2. To be *successful* in sales, you must ditch your wishbone and grow a backbone.

Everything in sales begins with and depends on the discipline to *ask*.

### **Author's Note**

Throughout the book I use the terms “stakeholder,” “prospect,” “decision maker,” and “buyer” interchangeably to describe the various people you meet during the sales process. These are the people who give you sales objections. I did this for several reasons. First, it makes the writing easier to consume—it becomes boring and repetitive to use the same descriptors time and again. Second, salespeople and sales organizations don't all use the same terms. Finally, I want to make the point that objections don't always come from the direct decision maker.