



Controlling the Sales Interaction with Transitions

One of the critical subjects we discuss in our Consultative Selling Skills program is controlling the sales call. We all agree that salespeople need to control the call, but we never want the client to feel like they are being controlled. Here are some suggestions on how to do that.

When talk about the sales process and the importance of transitions, we use the analogy of the five speed transmission in a standard shift automobile. With that kind of transmission, you need to use a clutch. So we suggest that transition statements are analogous to the clutch. They make it easier to move from one phase to the next. These transitions enable you to facilitate the meeting and control the call more effectively.

Transition One: Prepare the Client for Questions

Once your positioning is done and everyone is comfortable, the agenda and timeframes are established, and you know who's who, it's time to start asking questions. Whether it's the first call or the twentieth, you are always asking questions. So the way to segue from positioning the meeting to asking questions is to prepare the client for what's coming.

By letting the client know you will be asking questions you avoid turning the sales call into an interrogation. And it also helps you avoid the pitfall of presenting prematurely.

Transition Two: Review your Understanding of the Needs

Once you have thoroughly identified the needs, this transition may be the most important step in the entire process. Reviewing your understanding of the needs is a great way to conclude what we call the situation analysis phase and a wonderful way to start your presentation. In many cases, particularly early in the relationship, it is a great way to conclude your meetings.

Let the client know you heard them. Use "I" messages – say "As I understand it", rather than "What you said is". Start with the obvious needs and move to the less obvious. Check for understanding. Get them prioritized, if appropriate.

By reviewing the needs you show that you have been listening, you make sure you've got it right, you demonstrate your professionalism, and you set the stage to present to a friendlier audience, one that is predisposed to respond positively to your recommendation because they feel that you understand their particular situation and needs.

Transition Three: Asking for Feedback

Once you have completed making your recommendations, it is time to hear from the client. You have been doing lots of talking, which is expected when you make your recommendation. But now you need to learn the client's reaction. That is why you ask for feedback.

When you do this, the client will often object. We know that. And that is OK because once the client objects, you are in the closing process.

When asking for feedback, make sure that your questions are not manipulative. Ideally, they are open-ended. Keep them simple and direct. Give the impression you want to hear from them. Phrases such as “what do you think?” or “how does that sound?” are more than adequate. And if the client objects you have an opportunity to resolve the objection in a way that helps you maintain forward momentum and eventually reach closure.

Transition Four: Inviting other Objections

Once you resolve the client’s objection(s) it is time to move towards closure. We believe that if the client doesn’t have a reason not to buy, then they are ready to buy. Some people call this the assumptive close.

So after you resolve each objection, ask the client for others. It sounds like you are asking for trouble, but if the client has an objection, it is better to hear it when you are there and can address it.

If the client has another objection then you repeat the objection resolution process. But if they don’t it is a great time to ask for the business.

When you invite others you typically ask neutral questions so as not to conjure up suspicious thoughts. “Is there anything else to discuss?” “Do you have any questions?” Or, “is there anything else on your mind?” If there are other objections, you start over. If there aren’t, you ask for the business.

So there they are—the four transitions that keep the sales interaction moving. We hope you are using them and that they help you better manage your client meetings.