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Can You Be FLEXIBLY RIGID?

Most salespeople follow some system or strategy for developing selling opportunities. These approaches dictate that you perform one function before moving on to another function; that you cover one topic before discussing another topic; that you obtain certain information before revealing information. There's rigidity to the process.


In a perfect world, moving from step one to step two, from step two to step three, and so on through the process makes sense and is repeatedly possible. But, the sales arena is not perfect. It is made up of people who are not perfect—when measured by the yardstick of your selling process. That is, different prospects have different perceptions about interacting with salespeople. And, they have different priorities and different amounts of time available. Trying to force them into your linear development model can be uncomfortable—for you and for them.

It doesn't have to be that way.

While there are undoubtedly some strategies that must be followed—thoroughly qualifying an opportunity before presenting solutions, for example—the process for implementing the strategy will usually allow some flexibility. Three criteria for qualifying an opportunity are defining the prospect's pain (problems, challenges, concerns, or goals); uncovering the prospect's financial expectations or limitation for the purchase; and identifying the people involved in and the process for making a buying decision. While there is some logic to dealing with those elements in the order

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presented, it's ok to deviate from that order if the prospect chooses to do so. For example, while you are discussing the prospect's needs, he begins to tell you about the people who will be involved in the ultimate decision. Can you imagine saying to him, "I appreciate your willingness to share that information with me now, but that will be covered in step three, and we're still in step one. Let's not get ahead of ourselves"? Of course you can't.

You have to develop the relationship before you can develop the opportunity. That means allowing the prospect to become comfortable with you. If he wants to reveal some information that is relevant to the process before your system specifies a discussion of the topic, let him talk—listen carefully, take notes—it's ok. Notice I said, "relevant to the process." Being flexible doesn't mean allowing the prospect to wander off into left field and ramble on. If that should happen, you will have to gently nudge the prospect back on topic. Being flexible also doesn't mean leaving out steps of the process. You'll still have to cover them, but you can do so in a sequence that allows your prospect to feel comfortable. 



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