

Chapter Six

The Four Keys of Objective Based Selling

The essentials of this sales model are embodied in the **four keys** of **Objective Based Selling**, which are:

- **Open-ended questions**
- **Personal, professional relationships**
- **Customer-focused proposals**
- **the Objective Based Selling diagram**

Key number one: Open-ended questions

Objective Based Selling provides over 100 specific open-ended questions to help the salesperson:

- prospect, and qualify prospects
- encourage the customer to talk about their company's objectives, operational situation, purchasing procedures and criteria, decision influencers, and personal objectives

- understand the customer's situation in order to make responsive recommendations
- create forward motion in the sales process
- build trust with the customer
- perform critical sales functions for the customer
- build rapport with customer decision influencers

Key number two: Personal, professional relationships

While many forces in today's material handling sales and purchasing environment are pushing toward depersonalization, in the end all purchasing decisions are made by people. People still buy from people, even if they use computers and national contracts to do it.

The larger the project, the more critical the purchase is to the customer, the more important it is for the material handling salesperson to establish a personal, professional relationship with key decision influencers. These relationships will provide:

- access to other decision influencers
- information leading to responsive recommendations which are customized to the customer's objectives and parameters
- opportunities to build trust
- better understanding of the customer's decision-making criteria and process
- coaching for the salesperson in how to deal with the customer organization
- advocacy for the salesperson's proposal
- the opportunity to provide a modified, more targeted proposal at the time the customer is really ready to act. Sometimes called the "second chance," this will be discussed in more depth in chapter twenty, "Modify Proposal," an element of the **Objective Based Selling** diagram
- early warning (and opportunity) of the need to react, adjust, recover during the implementation phase of a project, when things are not going exactly as planned

Personal, professional relationships are so important that a

corollary to the **Objective Based Selling** concept mentioned earlier in this chapter is: **When business and personal objectives conflict, personal always wins.** No matter how responsive the salesperson's proposal is to customer objectives; no matter how attractive the price; no matter how strong the salesperson's proposal; if, in the end, the customer does not like, believe, understand, and trust the salesperson and his company, the customer will find a way to purchase elsewhere.

Key number three: Customer-focused proposals

All material handling purchases (sales) of consequence involve a written proposal (paper or electronic or both) before the customer makes a commitment.

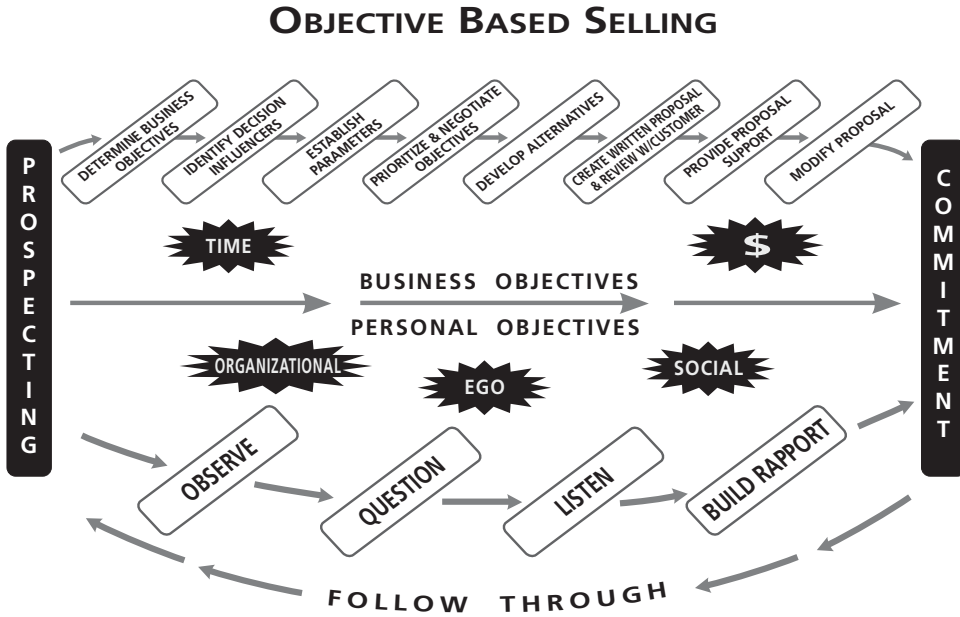
Most proposals by material handling salespeople have two critical flaws:

- Material handling proposals usually focus primarily on the equipment, service, methods, or software being proposed. In the extreme, many material handling proposals are simply a listing of equipment specifications with a price quote and delivery statement. No selling, just quoting.
- Material handling proposals often contain no reference to customer objectives and parameters. Without this information there is no indication the salesperson understands the customer's objectives and parameters, or took them into consideration when creating the proposal. Without this information, there is no indication that acting on this proposal will enable the customer to achieve their objectives. Without this information, it's just another equipment quote. Lowest quote gets the order. Or, the project dies due to not competing effectively for funds.

In other words, most material handling equipment and service proposals quote rather than sell.

This book will present the concept of effective, customer-focused sales proposals. It will examine the audience for sales proposals (those multiple and hidden decision influencers), and give specifics about the essential elements of customer-focused, objective-based

proposals. Templates for customer-focused, objective-based proposals will be provided. Templates that sell in the meetings which the salesperson cannot attend, speaking to decision influencers the salesperson never meets.



Key number four: the Objective Based Selling diagram

This diagram is a visual representation of the **Objective Based Selling** model.

The basic idea of **Objective Based Selling**, reflected in the diagram, is that:

Customers make material handling purchase decisions for business and personal reasons—to accomplish business and personal objectives. The job of the material handling salesperson is to determine the customer's business and personal objectives, and convince the customer they can accomplish these objectives by acting on the salesperson's written, customer-focused proposal.

Small, medium, and large projects

Material handling sales involves purchases and projects of varying sizes. On the small end of the continuum, the purchase may be for a simple pallet jack, set of wheel chocks, conveyor stands, or hand chain hoist.

At the high end, a material handling project involving a fleet of forklifts, yearly maintenance contract, automation with palletizers and unit load cranes, may involve hundreds of thousands—even millions of dollars.

There are projects of size, complexity, and dollar levels everywhere between these extremes.

The principles and four keys of **Objective Based Selling** are effective at all levels of projects and purchases for material handling equipment and services.

The difference is in the emphasis, and time line, of the different elements and stages of the process.

If the project or purchase is small, the customer will normally not want to devote as much time to getting it done. The salesperson must therefore be ready with questions to move quickly through the process. In a few cases, written proposals will not be asked for, or actually may be asked for after the purchase, to confirm details.

Scrum meetings are not as likely with smaller projects—or may take place spontaneously, standing up in a customer facility. And, of course, there may be fewer decision influencers involved, and less time to build rapport.

Salespeople should always be looking for the opportunities of a small project being the “foot in the door” for future, larger projects. They should not be taken lightly. A well done, customer-focused one-page proposal for a small project may be noticed by the customer and trigger a call back for larger projects. Doing a professional job on a small project is a way to build trust. And, what is small for one salesperson may be large for another.

So, in smaller projects, the emphasis is on the questions and on using the opportunity to build personal, professional relationships.

In larger projects, the elements of the **Objective Based Selling** process are usually more distinct, taking place over a larger period

of time. There are likely more decision influencers, opportunities (and necessities) for scrum meetings, reviews of the proposal by hidden decision influencers, and changes over time.

In larger projects, there is more emphasis on the proposal and the personal, professional relationships which allow for opportunities for proposal support and modifying the proposal. Of course, an effective proposal cannot be prepared without those open-ended questions early in the process.

In summary, the four keys of **Objective Based Selling** are:

- **Open-ended questions**
- **Personal, professional relationships**
- **Customer-focused proposals**
- **the Objective Based Selling diagram**

These four keys to **Objective Based Selling** will now be examined in detail.